



BOSTON ATHENÆUM

ACCESSIBILITY GUIDE

The Boston Athenæum welcomes people of all abilities as visitors and members. Please contact Visitor Services Coordinator Arin Lustberg at lustberg@bostonathenaeum.org or 617-720-7612 if you need accommodations or are seeking information beyond the scope of this guide.

As part of its historic character, the Boston Athenæum has various types of flooring, rooms with narrow passageways, low ceilings, and areas that are not wheelchair accessible. Books are shelved in various ways throughout the building to maximize storage space including on movable shelves, areas only accessible via step ladder, areas with low ceilings, and in a ten-story, semi-circular space called the Drum. The Athenæum also stores books on its open “gallery” levels, located on floors 1-5. These levels have narrow walkways and low railings.

Floors are linoleum with area rugs, unless otherwise specified. Gallery levels have glass-tile floors. All doorways are at least 36” wide, unless otherwise noted. The Athenæum does not have any power-assisted doors or automatic door openers. All restrooms have accessible stalls, though some restrooms have a raised marble threshold with a beveled edge. The Drum and outdoor terraces are not wheelchair accessible. Books are shelved floor to ceiling, and in some cases require a step ladder to access. Please ask staff at the Circulation or Reference Desk if you need help retrieving books.

The Athenæum has two elevators. The elevator located closest to the Circulation Desk on the first floor goes between the basement and the fifth floor, including all the gallery levels in between. The elevator door opens to 42”. The second elevator, located near the Membership Office on the first floor, goes between Lower Pilgrim (SR) and the second floor. The door opens to 35”. Both elevators are wheelchair accessible and have buttons in Braille. There is a marble staircase located between the two elevators. The doorways from the staircase are 34” wide and the doors open outwards from the staircase on all levels except 2G, which opens into the stairwell. Please note that public visitors must remain on the first floor unless accompanied by an Athenæum member or participating in a guided tour.

The Drum has glass walkways, 21” wide at the narrowest, and a 3” gap between the walkways and the bookshelves. Doors into the Drum range in width from 32” wide to 35” wide and doors open into the Drum. Entrances into the Drum are located on levels 1 (from the Newspaper Reading Room), 2, 3, and basement. Every numbered floor has three levels, except for the basement. These in-between Drum levels are referred to as “down” or “up,” and can only be accessed via stairs from inside the Drum. The ceilings in this space have inconsistent heights, and are very low in various places. Please ask staff at the Circulation or Reference Desk if you need help locating a book or retrieving a book in the Drum.

Programs

Listening devices are available for lectures and book talks. FM assistive listening devices (neck loops) are available for hearing-aid wearers with a “T” (telecoil) setting.

Wheelchair accessible seating is available for all events at the Athenæum. Please contact the Events Department at 617-720-7600 or events@bostonathenaeum.org if wheelchair accessible seating is required.

Patrons who need ASL interpretation services for any program should request them as early as possible by contacting the Events Department at 617-720-7600 or events@bostonathenaeum.org.

Resources

The Athenæum offers electronic resources, a book mailing service, Interlibrary Loan, and one-on-one assistance by email, over the phone, or in person.

A book mailing service is available for residents who are homebound. Book requests may be placed with the Circulation or Reference Department by phone, by email, or by using the “Request” function in *Athena*. Any book that can be checked out at the Circulation Desk can also be mailed, with the exception that oversized books and books in fragile condition are not mailed. Interlibrary loan books cannot be mailed to members. Materials from the Special Collections do not circulate and are never mailed. Books sent by mail are wrapped in corrugated cardboard and brown paper, then sealed with adhesive tape. Return labels are provided. When returning books, readers are requested to use the same or equivalent packaging material. Please note that padded envelopes (jiffy bags) are not considered sufficient protection in returning books.

Service Animals

Service animals are always welcome at the Athenæum.

The Athenæum’s Building

Most of the first floor of the Athenæum is open to the public. Other floors are reserved for the use of Athenæum members.

The Athenæum’s building does not have a consistent layout, so please consult the floor plan to understand the layout of each floor.

<http://www.bostonathenaeum.org/sites/default/files/pdf/floorplans.pdf>

Front Entrance

- Ramp from sidewalk is located on the right (west) side of the entrance (2% grade).
- This area has large concrete paving stone.
- Double doors open in, and each door is 34” wide.
- Doors do not open automatically and do not have power assist.

Entrance Vestibule

- Wheelchair lift is located on the left just inside the front doors. Please ring the bell for assistance.
- Double doors open in, and each door is 34” wide.
- Five marble steps up, 5” high and 15” deep.
- Door into welcome area is 65” wide.
- This area has marble flooring.

First Floor, Norma Jean Calderwood Gallery

- Public space.
- The emergency exit door pushes outwards from the gallery.

First Floor, Bow Room

- Public space.
- This space has two movable bookshelves that are subject to change location for events.

First Floor, Deborah Hill Bornheimer Room

- Public space.
- Doorless entryway is 32” wide.

First Floor, Albert Gordon Newspaper Reading Room

- Reserved for Athenæum members except during special events.
- Double doors are kept closed at all times, and open into the Newspaper Reading Room from the Long Room.
- Emergency exit from the room leads to four outdoor steps, 27” wide at the narrowest point, which lead to the front patio.

First Floor, Membership Office

- Public space.
- Doorless entryway is 35” wide.

First Floor, Children’s Library

- Reserved for Athenæum members except during special events.
- Door is 33” wide.
- The Chris Library (preschool room) is carpeted and has stepped seating along the back wall.
- The C.A. Coolidge Room (independent readers room) has linoleum floors with area rugs.

1G

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Narrowest point of the gallery is 19” wide.
- Railing is 32” high.
- Doorway leading into the Long Room has a raised threshold.
- Gallery space above Newspaper Reading Room is 32” wide.
- To access the **Seminar Room**, please take the elevator closest to the Circulation Desk which has the wider of the two passageways from the elevator. The Seminar Room has large chairs which can be pushed under the table to create at least 38”-wide passageway around the central table.

Second Floor

- Reserved for Athenæum members and researchers with appointments in special collections.
- Doors into the **Arthur & Charlotte Vershbow Special Collections Reading Room** and **Prints & Photographs Department** have double doors which can be opened if a wider doorway is required.
- The **terrace** door has a 3"-high, raised threshold and three steps down. The door opens outwards from the Long Room.

2G

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Narrowest point of the gallery is 22" wide.
- Railing is 32" high.

Third Floor

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Narrowest point is 33" wide in between bookshelves.

3G

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Narrowest point of the gallery is 20" wide.
- Railing is 30" high.

Fourth Floor

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Narrowest point is 31" wide in between bookshelves.
- Doorway into **Trustee's Room** is 27" wide with a raised marble threshold. Double doors can be opened if a wider doorway is required.

4G

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Narrowest point of the gallery is 21" wide
- Railing is 30" high

Fifth Floor

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Door into the **Members' Lounge** is 32" wide.
- Door onto the **terrace** is 24" wide with one step up (8" high) and 3"-high threshold. The height of the door is very low.
- Restroom on the fifth floor is located in the **Jackson Room** on the east side of the reading room.

5G

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Narrowest point of the gallery is 21" wide.
- Railing is 35" high.
- There is no elevator access to 5G. This gallery level is only accessible via staircases.

Lower Pilgrim (SR)

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Door from the elevator vestibule opens inwards.
- This floor has movable, compact shelving. There is a phone if assistance is needed.

Upper Pilgrim (BR)

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Door from the elevator vestibule opens into the reading room.

Basement (B)

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- Floor into the stacks is ramped upwards from elevator. This floor has movable, compact shelving as well as fixed bookshelves. The floor is uneven and in some areas between the stacks there are small steps.

Basement Drum

- Reserved for Athenæum members.
- There is one step down (4" high) from basement level to enter the Drum.
- This area has uneven, brick flooring and the ceiling is low.