



BOSTON ATHENÆUM

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Boston Athenæum Makes Historic Harriet Hayden Albums Available to the Community of Boston and Beyond

Dozens of historic portraits that belonged to a Beacon Hill survivor of slavery, abolitionist, and Underground Railroad conductor now available to browse and study

Boston, MA—February 6, 2020—The Boston Athenæum is delighted to announce that the Harriet Hayden Albums, two bound volumes of portrait photographs from the mid-19th century, have been digitized and cataloged by library staff and are now fully accessible to the public.

As of today they are available to anyone curious to see them, both online via the BA website (bostonathenaeum.org/harriet-hayden-albums) and in person, via research appointments in the library's Vershbow Special Collections Reading Room. The digital collection offers high-resolution images that show details including both sides of each portrait and the many written annotations in the albums.

The two volumes, nationally significant resources for African American and abolitionist history, preserve 87 photographic images of Black Bostonians and their circles, including children, men, and women, some of them well-known abolitionists of the Civil War era. The albums' owner, Harriet Hayden, escaped slavery in Kentucky with her husband Lewis in 1844. Their Beacon Hill home at 66 Phillips Street—now a stop on the National Park Service's Black Heritage Trail—served as an essential hub on the Underground Railroad and for critical anti-slavery work.

Curator of Rare Books and Special Collections John Buchtel said, "The albums are a landmark acquisition for the Athenæum and for understanding American history. When they became available in late 2018 we acted immediately. Over the past year, we've focused on rapidly preparing them for public viewing, thanks to generous donors Timothy and Ruth Carey who supported their conservation, and now we intend to share them as widely as possible. They hold tremendous potential to tell new histories and deepen our knowledge."

Some of the well-known African American individuals depicted in the albums include Civil War surgeon John van Surly De Grasse; famed Boston attorney Robert Morris; poet, public speaker, and suffragist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper; and George Lewis Ruffin, the first African American man to earn a Harvard law degree and become a judge in the United States. Dozens of the portraits depict unidentified people whose stories remain to be discovered and told.

"We're just at the beginning of the research necessary to fully understand this collection: the multicultural community of abolitionists, activists, and allies portrayed, their relationships, their lives, and their accomplishments," said Theo Tyson, Polly Thayer Starr Fellow in American Art and Culture at the Boston Athenæum. "When I think of Harriet Hayden poring over each image in the albums, I imagine a woman intent on and invested in preserving her history and that of her community with a sense of pride. The Athenæum is issuing a warm and open invitation to

members of the present-day community—those interested in Boston history and ancestry, archivists, scholars, artists, photographers, professors, classrooms of students, lifelong learners, and anyone else with a curious mind—to come explore and engage with the albums to learn as much as we can about the people in them.”

The albums complement the library’s extensive resources for the study of US history, civics, and fine arts. Tyson is currently at work on an Athenæum exhibition featuring the albums and curriculum guides to be published online in winter 2021. In the meantime, she will continue to highlight the collection during special events and presentations open to the public. Upcoming are:

Talk: The Harriet Hayden Albums: Power, Politics & Portraiture

Sunday, February 9, 2020, 2 pm

In connection with the exhibition: *Lewis Hayden and the Underground Railroad*
Dillaway-Thomas House, Roxbury Heritage State Park
Free admission; reception to follow

Up Close Presentations: The Harriet Hayden Albums

Saturday, May 16, 2020, 11 am, 1 pm, and 3 pm

Sixth Annual Open House, Boston Athenæum
Free admission

Photos (Credit: Boston Athenæum)

- **Photo 1: Virginia L. Molyneaux Hewlett Douglass**
Wife of Frederick Douglass, Jr., son of the great orator and abolitionist, and daughter of Aaron Molyneaux Hewlett, director of the Harvard gymnasium and the university’s first African American staff member
- **Photo 2: Robert Morris**
The first Black lawyer to represent a client in an American court
- **Photo 3:** An inscription by Robert Morris in the albums
- **Photo 4: Frances Clayton**
Fought alongside her husband after enlisting in the Union Army as a man under the alias “Jack Williams.”
- **Photo 5:** Theo Tyson of the Athenæum and Rev. Jeffrey Brown of Twelfth Baptist Church looking at the Harriet Hayden Albums
- **Photo 6: Exterior** of the album given to Harriet Hayden by Robert Morris (shown prior to conservation)

ABOUT THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM

Founded in 1807, the Boston Athenæum is located at 10½ Beacon Street on Beacon Hill. A distinguished membership library and cultural institution with a long history at the center of intellectual life in Boston, the Athenæum hosts events nearly every week of the year and supports

a dynamic exhibition program. It desires to be a place that is welcoming to all, a place that nurtures a sense of wonder and delight in sharing the joy of physical books, maps, prints, and other works of art, and a place that fosters community and civil discourse as members and guests engage in face-to-face interactions.

The Athenæum's collections are housed within a National Historic Landmark that is widely regarded as one of the most beautiful libraries in the world. The reading rooms—crowned by the silent, barrel-vaulted fifth floor—have served as a haven and inspiration to countless writers and researchers. The library maintains over 600,000 volumes with strengths in history, biography, and literature, as well as fine and decorative arts. Notable holdings include primary materials on the American Civil War; the largest portion of President George Washington's library from Mount Vernon; a first edition copy of Audubon's *The Birds of America*; a 1799 set of Goya's *Los caprichos*; one of the most extensive collections of contemporary artists' books in the United States; and numerous artworks, including portraits of notable Americans such as Hannah Adams, John Marshall, and Alexander Hamilton, and by artists such as Gilbert Stuart, John Singer Sargent, Allan Rohan Crite, and Polly Thayer Starr. Membership is open to all, and visitors are warmly welcomed Tuesdays through Saturdays. Learn more at bostonathenaeum.org.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Tuesday 12noon-8pm
Wednesday-Saturday 10am-4pm

GENERAL ADMISSION

Adults (ages 13 and up) \$10
Students and Military \$8
EBT Card to Culture \$2
Children (ages 12 and under) Free
Boston Athenæum Members Free

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