



## THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM *News Release*

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For Immediate Release

BOSTON ATHENÆUM RELEASES THOUSANDS OF IMAGES THROUGH NEW  
DIGITAL COLLECTIONS HOME PAGE

*(Boston, Massachusetts, July 29, 2011):* The Boston Athenæum has released over 4,000 digitized images of its important historical collections to the general public, the Athenæum has announced. The images include digitized rare books, archival documents, photographs, maps, and works of art on paper, many of them related to the history of Boston, and related data about them.

The Athenæum has set up a new webpage, “Digital Collections at the Boston Athenæum,” <http://cdm.bostonathenaeum.org/cdm>, as a public access point for these digital collections via the internet. Developed over nine months, the project is part of the Athenæum’s “seamless method” approach to cataloguing and digitization.

The Digital Collections page currently lists sections for Rare Books; the Cartographic Collection; Drawings and Watercolors; Prints; Photographs; Daguerreotypes, many by prominent Boston photographers; and Artists’ Books. Additional sections include images and documents from the Athenæum’s Conservation Laboratory, one of the first conservation facilities in any library in the United States; a section devoted to watercolor paintings of birds, created between 1839 and 1842 by the leading Massachusetts natural history painter, Isaac Sprague; and a section documenting

sketchbooks kept by Boston architect James V. Righter between 1974 and 2004.

Created since 2003 for a variety of special projects, the digitized images were previously available only to Athenæum members, scholars, and, for a few images, users of specialized websites. The images have been organized with detailed descriptions to allow them to be easily searched and accessed via the internet and internet search engines. The digital images and related data are also linked with the Athenæum's on-line catalogue, "Athena," to make them easier to access.

The Digital Collection pages were set up by the Athenæum's Digital Resource Manager Pat Boulos using ContentDM, a software package developed by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) of Dublin, OH, specifically for library and archive use.

"These new digital collections are an important step in making our outstanding collections better known and more accessible to the world at large," said Paula D. Mathews, Stanford Calderwood Director and Librarian.

"The project is also part of our 'seamless' method of uniting conservation, cataloguing, digitization, and distribution in a single, integrated process rather than keeping these functions separated, as they have traditionally been at many institutions. The unusual range of media and historical significance of the Athenæum collections makes them uniquely suited to a pioneering initiative of this kind," Matthews added.

"Scholars have always had access to this material," explained James Reid-Cunningham, Associate Director for Digital Programs and Preservation, who oversees digital projects at the Athenæum. "With digitization, ordinary citizens find things they might otherwise never have known about. This is really a huge change from 30 years ago, when the range of people who looked at our things was very narrow. Digitization allows people to access things you, as an institution, might not have thought all that important."

As an independent library, not a government agency or part of a university or

college, the Boston Athenæum developed its collections to suit the needs and interests of its own members, often acquiring items long before their significance became clear to others.

During and after the Civil War, for example, the Athenæum collected a wide variety of documents and publications from the American south, including Confederate currency and financial records, when no other library showed interest in them. The Athenæum's Civil War collections are today a major resource for American historians and are consulted by scholars from around the world.

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Founded in 1807, the Boston Athenæum is Boston's first cultural institution. It combines an art museum, with a public exhibition gallery and collections of paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, photographs, and decorative arts; a leading research and membership library; and a civic forum including lectures, readings, panel discussions, and other events. An innovator and catalyst for more than two centuries, the Athenæum was one of the three founders of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the inspiration for the Boston Public Library, the first municipally supported library in North America.

The Athenæum's Proprietors and Members have included some of America's greatest literary figures, among them Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, Amy Lowell, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and such leading politicians as Presidents John Quincy Adams and John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Senator Edward M. Kennedy. The Athenæum houses collections of international importance, among them about a third of the library of President George Washington, the largest portion in any library.

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