

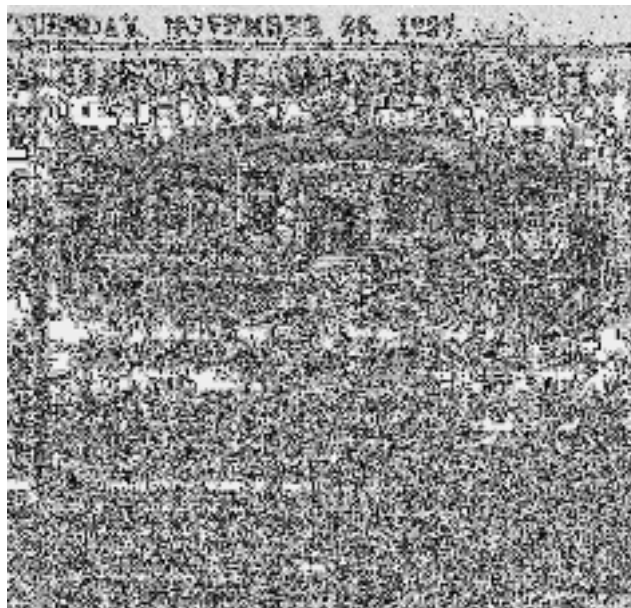
The History Corner

Etched in Stone: 1895... Yet the Sign Says: 1896 Which Is the Correct Year for the Opening of the Gordon-Nash Library?

Library Director, Jerrica Blackey and I are sometimes asked why the sign on the lawn indicates the library was founded in 1896 while the stone numerals etched above the door state boldly: **1895**. Though we cannot provide a definitive answer, research in library records and the wonderful online archives of *The Bristol Enterprise* and *The Boston Globe* suggest the following.

Upon retirement, Judge Stephen Gordon Nash and his wife, Mary Upton Nash, were determined to give back to the town and school that built the foundation for a successful life. In 1887 the Judge petitioned the State Legislature to incorporate a library, using the surname of both his parents: the Gordon-Nash Library. When Judge Nash died in May of 1894, his widow and other long-time friends (many, like him, associated with New Hampton School) worked tirelessly to ensure the beautiful library was built, endowed, and populated with 6000 books from his library and 4000 books from New Hampton School's Literary Societies. Most of the Judge's estate was dedicated to establishing, "a public library and reading room in 'Smith's Village' in New Hampton, New Hampshire, my native place, for the free use of said town, whether residents, students or sojourners."

In March of 1895, *The Bristol Enterprise* announced plans for the structure in an article titled: **Gordon Nash Library. Imposing Structure to be Built at New Hampton**. As plans progressed, it may be that the incorporators and others involved optimistically had "1895" carved in the headpiece over the door. By late November of 1895, however, *The Boston Globe* published a sketch of the library with an update on construction:



"GIFT OF JUDGE NASH. New Library Building at New Hampton, N.H."

“The Gordon-Nash library building is about ready for occupancy. Five tons of books have arrived, and as many more will follow... The library building... is 65 feet long and 45 feet wide, built of brick and trimmed with granite. Its capacity is 20,000 volumes. It is very attractive and a finely equipped library building, and cost upwards of \$20,000. Judge Nash was a native of New Hampton, was graduated from the New Hampton Literary Institution, and was once a teacher in it, and it is to benefit the town and the school and to perpetuate the memory of his parents that this library is established. Besides giving the building and his private library he has provided for its future, and \$28,000 is now available, the income to be used for the purchase of books and the running expenses of the library, and to this will be added \$20,000 at the termination of a life estate.”

In June of 1896, both *The Enterprise* and *The Globe* featured articles on the dedication of Gordon-Nash Library making clear the ceremony was planned to coincide with the 75th anniversary celebrations of New Hampton School (founded in 1821). *The Globe* titled their article, **Gift of a Noble Man – Dedication of the Pretty Gordon Nash Library by the Citizens of New Hampton, N.H.** and accompanied it with sketches of the library, school buildings on campus, Judge Nash and Dr. Atwood Bond Meservey, Head of NHS. And from *The Enterprise*: **New Hampton Institution. 75th Anniversary of this Honored and Renowned School. Historical Sketch of the School – Program of Anniversary Week – Dedication of the Gordon-Nash Library** – also with sketches of school buildings and Dr. Meservey.

As *The Enterprise* noted, “To accommodate the throngs expected an immense tent used on Boston Common was secured and pitched on the school grounds. The tent is 115 by 55 feet and will seat about 2000 people. Although every house is thrown open to guests, the village cannot lodge the large number who are in attendance for the week, and many have sought lodgings in Bristol.”

In the archives of the Gordon-Nash Library we still have several copies of the thick book that was published in 1896 to commemorate the event – with many speeches from political and historical figures connected to the library and the school. We invite you to come by and see first-hand this memento from 128 years ago.

For more information on the history of the town, please visit the newly updated New Hampton Historical Society website at <https://www.newhamptonhistory.org/> as well as the Gordon-Nash Library archive page at <https://gordonnashlibrary.org/archives/>.

Kent Bicknell
Historian, NHHS
Curator of Special Collections
The Gordon-Nash Library at New Hampton School
July 30th, 2024