



Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

Library Spotlight: The Westfield Athenaeum

by Joanne Mason

(Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles to highlight the rich genealogical resources in our local area. If you'd like to share information about a particular library, archive, or resource, please contact us at westmassgen@gmail.com.)

Sometimes, in our quest for ancestors, we focus on the giant online databases and websites. And while these resources are helpful, there's much to be learned at our local libraries. If you have ancestors from Westfield in your tree, you'll want to check out the offerings at the Westfield Athenaeum.



The Westfield Athenaeum
6 Elm Street
Westfield, Massachusetts

www.westath.org

Hours:

Monday - Thursday: 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Friday & Saturday: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Note: Masks are required for all visitors.

The Westfield Athenaeum houses a vast variety of genealogical and local history resources. During my visit, I browsed city directories from the 1940s and 1950s, a multivolume history of Western Massachusetts, Westfield family histories, and cemetery records.

One particularly interesting find was a 1939 book listing the gravestones found at the Mechanic Street Cemetery (also called the [Old Burying Ground](#)), along with gravestone transcriptions and maps.

The Mechanic Street Cemetery dates back to the Revolutionary War era, and the oldest stone is from 1683. Patrons who wish to explore it in person are welcome to borrow the key from the library, as long as they present a photo ID and return the key the same day.

I asked the Westfield Athenaeum's Local History Librarian Kat Good-Schiff to tell us more about the library's holdings.



Researchers can find “[t]yped copies of town and church records of marriages, baptisms, births and deaths in the 1600-1700s; an index of Westfield obituaries, 1977-present; many decades of high school yearbooks; and Westfield town/city directories dating from 1871,” she said by email.

“We have many unique items in the archives, like diaries, journals and ledgers from people who have lived and done business in Westfield. A sample list of notable items is at: <https://www.westath.org/archives-a-z/>,” she added.

What else is available?

[The Westfield History Room](#)

Here's a sampling of what you'll find in the Westfield History Room:

- Westfield newspapers on microfilm, from 1782 to the present.
- Miscellaneous Westfield records on microfilm, from 1658 to 1850.
- Vital records, family histories, cemetery records.
- Historic Westfield photographs.
- Diaries and journals.
- Church records.

Researchers can access the Westfield history collection at any time when the library is open, and no appointment is necessary. Just see the reference librarian, who will retrieve items for you to use in the Reference Room.

[Westfield Athenaeum Archives](#)

The Westfield Athenaeum Archives holds a wealth of additional information on town businesses, such as Columbia Bicycle, Johnson Organ Co, and the Stanley Corporation. You'll also find records, scrapbooks, diaries, tax returns, and other items for individual families who lived in Westfield.

Access to the archives is by appointment only. To schedule an appointment, call the reference desk at (413) 568-7833 ext. 4 or email reference@westath.org.

[The Edwin Smith Historical Museum](#)



Take a step back in time and see artifacts reflecting Westfield’s history, including Native American arrowheads and carvings, an American militia uniform from the late 1700s, and buggy whips that were made in Westfield. (Did you know that at one time Westfield companies produced over one million whips each year? This is how Westfield got its nickname: The Whip City.)

Because of the pandemic, the museum is not open to the public at this time. However, you can take [an interactive tour](#) to see some of the highlights of its impressive collection.

What’s Next?

Kat told me that the library hopes to start a monthly genealogy and family history writing group called Your Family, Your Story early next year.

In the meantime, the Westfield Athenaeum staff is ready to help genealogical researchers! “In addition to print, online, and photographic resources, we have great staff who are happy to help people with their research and answer any questions that come our way in person, online, or over the phone,” Kat said.