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From the Director - Our "Open Door" Policy

The Westfield Athenaeum is like no other cultural institution in Western Massachusetts. Westfield's fore-fathers certainly were ahead of their time when they brought together three distinct cultural resources, **The Milton B. Whitney Library**, the **Edwin Smith Historical Museum** and the **Jasper Rand Art Museum**, and incorporated them into the Athenaeum. These wonderful assets are part of the reason I was attracted to Westfield and accepted the job as Athenaeum Director this past March. The best part about working at the Athenaeum is sharing these treasures with residents and visitors, helping to open doors for those seeking to learn about themselves and the world in which we live.

Many towns began to develop free public libraries in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as the country began to heal following the Civil War, and Westfield was no exception. The Athenaeum was incorporated in 1864 and its doors were opened to the public on January 1, 1868. **The Jasper Rand Art Museum**, the gift of Mrs. Florence Rand Lang, in honor of her father and grandfather, Jasper Rand Junior and Senior, opened in 1927. The art museum showcases the works of artists, sculptors, photographers, collectors, crafts-people, embroiderers, quilters and others, both professional and amateur, who enjoy creative outlets. The **Edwin Smith Historical Museum**, which recently re-opened after a 13-year closure, was established in 1928. The Smith Museum is now open Tuesday evenings 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. and Thursdays 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Milton B. Whitney, one of the Athenaeum's main benefactors and its president from 1893 - 1915, envisioned the Athenaeum as "Westfield's university." "Its doors open freely to all her citizens," he remarked, "wise and simple, rich and poor alike. It knows no social distinctions, no party, caste or sect." Whitney could not have envisioned the technological leaps forward libraries have made in the past two decades, as computers replaced card catalogs and electronic media replaced traditional printed text. Nor could he have envisioned "electronic billboards" called websites (ours is at www.westath.org) that allow people to connect up with this new global village.

While the Athenaeum has evolved over the past 135 years to meet the changing informational and technological needs of our residents, our mission to serve all of our citizens, regardless of affiliation, taste or interest has not changed. We are working hard to keep you informed about our world, to bring you the latest books and materials in a wide variety of formats to suit an even wider variety of tastes, and we continue to strive to be a unique place of learning. Supporting places like the Athenaeum helps ensure these cultural assets will be around for another 135 years or more, opening doors of opportunity for untold others.

Christopher J. Lindquist

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