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SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2013

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CONWAY, N.H.

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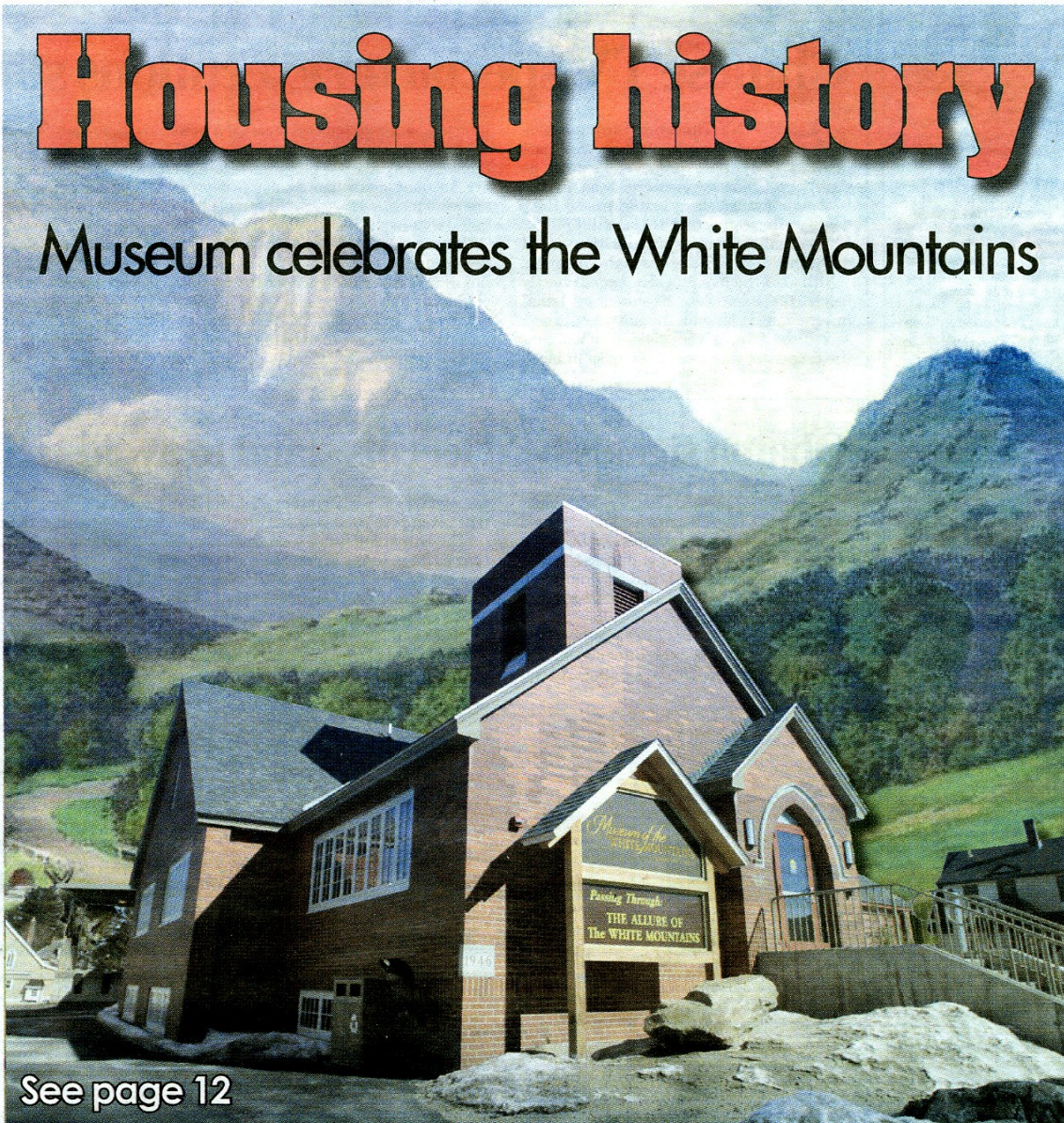
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(ON THE COVER) Plymouth State University on Feb. 23 opened the long-awaited Museum of the White Mountains on its campus, thus fulfilling a dream of White Mountain history enthusiasts. The museum is housed in a renovated Methodist Church that was acquired by the university a few years ago. (ABOVE) Serving as director of the new museum is Dr. Catherine Amidon. (BELOW) The museum was partly launched through a donation by late North Conway resident, lifelong collector and photographer Dan Noel. Prior to his death from cancer in February 2010, Noel' donated his 9,000-item collection which helped lead others to contribute their collections. (PSU NEWS SERVICES)

# Museum showcases White Mountains history

By TOM EASTMAN  
THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

PLYMOUTH — Longtime followers of local history at long last have a museum devoted to the rich and colorful history of the White Mountains — and among many contributors, there is a local late benefactor to thank for it.

Three years in the making, and located 52 miles from Conway, the Museum of the White Mountains opened to the public in a renovated former 1946-built Methodist Church on the campus of Plymouth State University Feb. 23, thus fulfilling a long-held dream of having a facility housing art, photographs and artifacts pertaining to the region's history.

Although located on the western side of the mountains, the museum's genesis has many local ties here on the eastern side of the Whites.

"This [museum] was my father's dying wish," notes Victoria Noel of North Conway. Her father, late local history collector, Dan Noel of Intervale, played a pivotal role in the museum's development by donating 9,000 items

from his extensive White Mountains history collection in his last days before dying from cancer in 2010 at age 68.

"He had a deep lifelong passion for the history of the White Mountains," said Noel, who is the director of sales and marketing for Tuckerman Brewing Company. "He had accumulated his collection through a lifetime of going to yard sales and auctions. Having a museum to showcase the history of the White Mountains was a huge dream of his. This all came to fruition on Jan. 27, 2010 — less than a month before he died on Feb. 14."

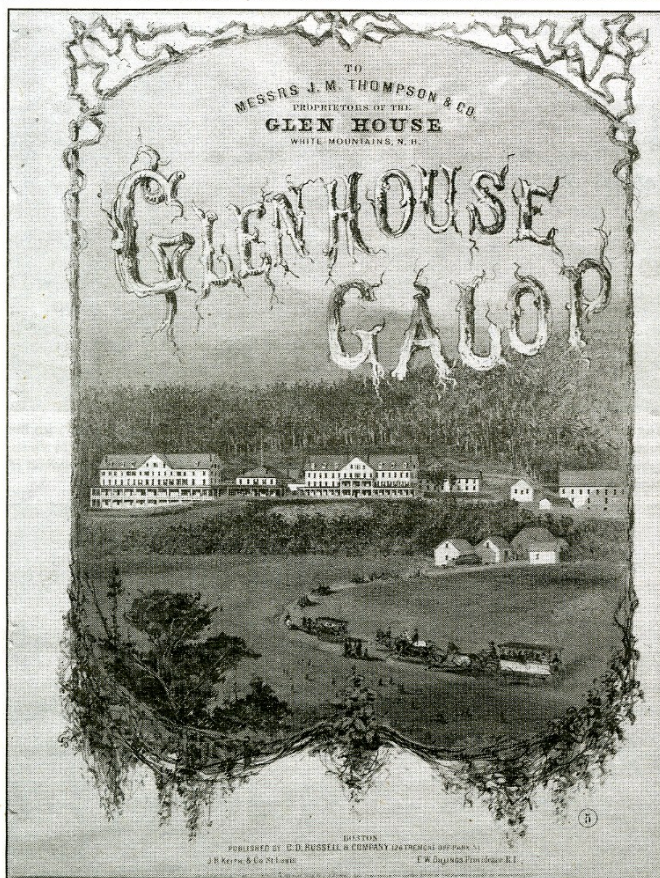
A lifelong resident, Dan Noel grew up in North Conway. His parents operated the Clarendon Hotel, which reopened after a fire as the Clarendon Motel. He attended Kennett High, and graduated from North Yarmouth Academy, after which he studied photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He devoted his life to photography, working for Cranmore Mountain, Yield House and other businesses as well as working as a photo stringer for newspapers, including for the Associated Press.

**"There's no question that Dan[Noel]'s gift was what put what had been an idea into action and brought it over the top. Many of us had dreamed of a White Mountain history museum for years."**

see next page







Among the historical items shown in the Museum of the White Mountains' first exhibit, "Passing Through: The Allure of the White Mountains," is this "Glen House Gallop" poster from the 19th century at the base of the Mount Washington Carriage Road. (PSU NEWS SERVICES)

from preceding page

Dan Noel's donation led others to follow suit, according to his daughter; lifelong friend and fellow collector Dick Hamilton, 77, former president of the White Mountains Attractions Association, who, like Victoria, is a member of the museum's 10-member advisory committee; and museum director Catherine Amidon.

"It snowballed from there," said Victoria Noel, "as other collectors saw it as a solid place to put their collections either on loan or to donate them. It's turned out to be great for people like me who have received items from their parents but do not have the knowledge of their worth or significance."

"There's no question that Dan's gift was what put what had been an idea into action and brought it over the top. Many of us had dreamed of a White Mountain history museum for years," said Hamilton, a North Conway native who lives in Littleton, "but it had only been talked about, whether in Conway with the late Bob Goldberg and his White Mountain School of Art Collection, which eventually went to Dartmouth, or in Littleton. In Dan's last days, he was talking about perhaps giving it to the Conway Historical Society or the Conway Library, but I told him he ought to give some consideration to the idea of giving it to the university. His donation was the first collection that went to the museum. The idea of a museum being at the university was a plan that took off," said Hamilton, who has also donated much of his collection to Plymouth.

In addition to Victoria Noel and Hamilton, the advisory committee also includes such other history enthusiasts as former U.S. Forest Service historian David Govatski, Leslie Schomaker of the Jackson Historical Society, and White Mountain historian and author Bryant F. Tolles Jr.

Amidon agreed that the project blossomed quickly after Noel's contribution.

"The project really took shape three years ago, but in some ways it started a few months before that, when we met with Dan Noel who was at that point terminally ill with cancer," noted the museum's Amidon in an interview days after the museum's opening. "He was looking for a good home for his collection. It coincided with changes taking place at Plymouth, which was changing its status from Plymouth State College to Plymouth State University to have a more comprehensive regional focus."

"So," said Amidon, "it all seemed like the right thing to do, and it all came together. From three years ago to now, it has been fast forward to pull together all the funding, find the architects, work on the plan, renovate the church as part of the first of two phases, and do the first show. It's all been done fairly quickly, and we are blessed to have some incredible collections donated."

According to Amidon, among the other driving forces leading to the creation of the museum is Steve Barba, former operator/co-owner of the Balsams Grand Resort of Dixville Notch, and now director of community relations for PSU, and PSU president Sara Jayne Steen.

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