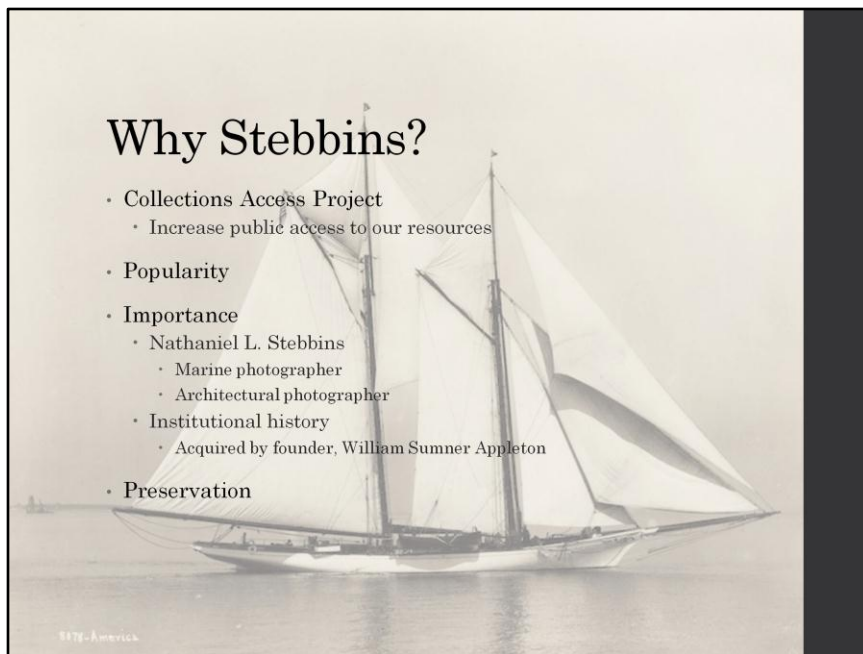# Nathaniel L. Stebbins photographic collection

Historic New England

Historic New England has an ongoing initiative, called the Collections Access Project, which is an effort to increase public accessibility to our collections. As part of that project, Historic New England has created an online portal to our collections and has digitized and catalogued many collections and items.

The Nathaniel L. Stebbins collection was chosen to be digitized for this initiative largely because of its popularity; it's used very regularly.

It is also an important collection. Stebbins was a noted marine photographer and architectural photographer active from the 1880s to his death in 1922. Stebbins is important to the study of the history of New England photography and the study of the history of marine photography.

The collection is also important to us institutionally. Our founder, William Sumner Appleton, recognized Stebbins importance and sought out the collection and acquired it in 1929.

We also wanted to digitize the Stebbins collection to help preserve it. Accessing it puts stress on the materials and takes a great deal of staff and researcher time.

The Collection

- 2,500 negatives
- 6,000 prints
- 1880s to ca. 1922

- Images document:
  - Sailing vessels
  - Steamships
  - Ferries
  - Naval vessels
  - Tugboats
  - Fire and police boats
  - Races
  - Boatyards
  - Dockside facilities
  - Yacht clubs
  - Architecture

The Stebbins collection consists of 2,500 glass plate negatives and 6,000 prints, as well as a small collection of other materials such as daybooks with records of the photographs Stebbins took. The materials date from the 1880s to ca. 1922, the time of Stebbins' death.

For this project, only the prints were digitized.

The collection documents: (see following slides)

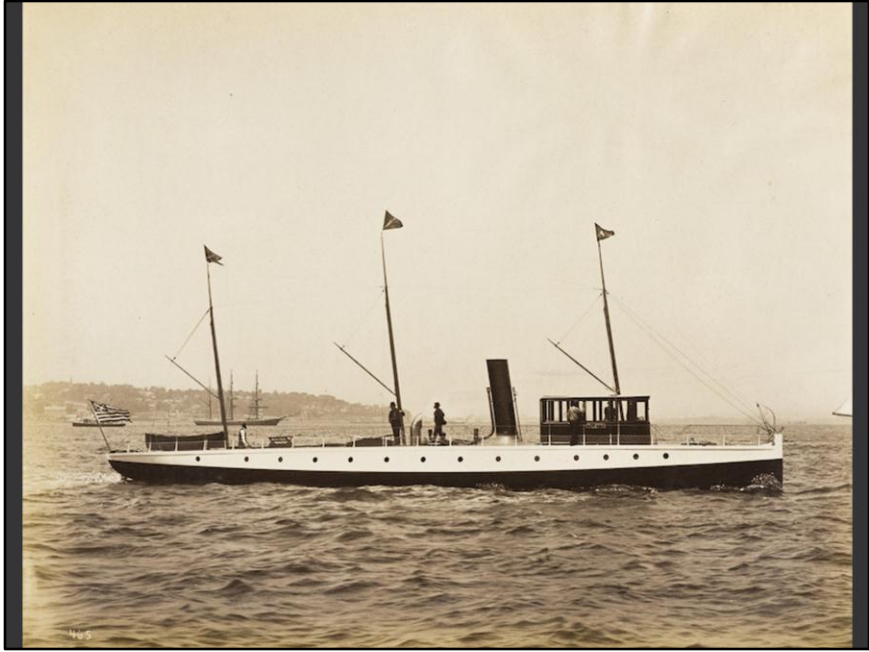Recreational sailing vessels

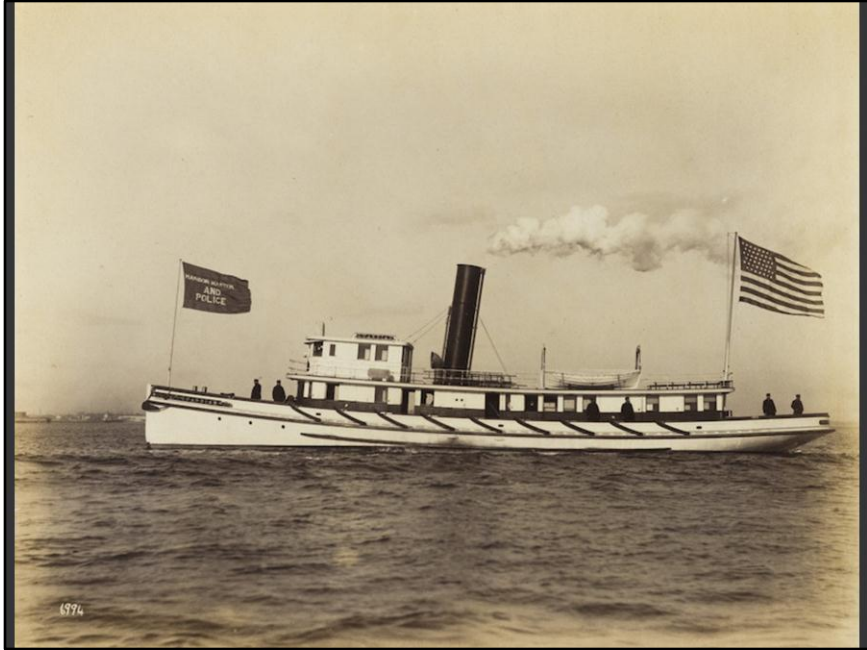Commercial sailing vessels
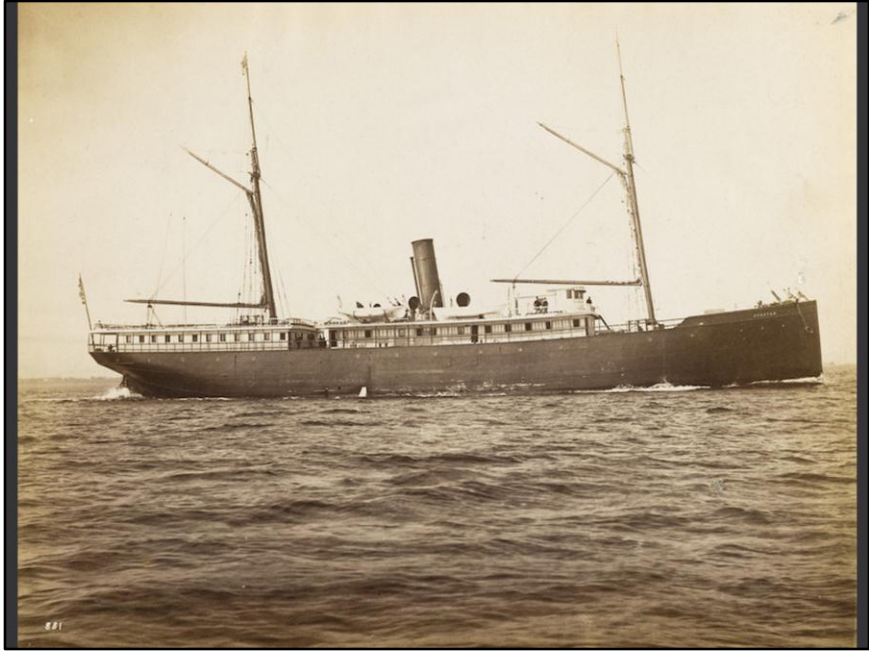
Steamships

Ferries

Naval vessels

Tugboats

Fire boats

Police boats

Races

Boatyards

Dockside facilities

Yacht clubs

And architecture, mostly from within Boston, Mass.

www.HistoricNewEngland.org/Stebbins

Historic New England initially had a portion of the collection digitized by the Northeast Document Conservation Center, and we had the remainder of the collection digitized by the Boston Public Library in association with the Digital Commonwealth.

Once we had the 6,000 digital files, we linked those files to the individual cataloguing records for each print in our content management system, M2A by MINISIS, Inc., which ingested them into our online portal.

We also created a landing page for the collection: www.HistoricNewEngland.org/Stebbins. The landing page includes information about the collection as well as browse categories through which visitors can explore the collection. The landing page also includes a link to the online finding aid… (see next slide)

The online finding aid includes an inventory of the collection, which is another way for visitors to our website to explore the collection.

Benefits and Next Steps

- Exceeded our expectations
  - Limited handling of materials
  - Staff and research time reduced
  - Researcher interest increased
  - Prints requested
  - Individual stories

- OAI-PMH by end of FY15
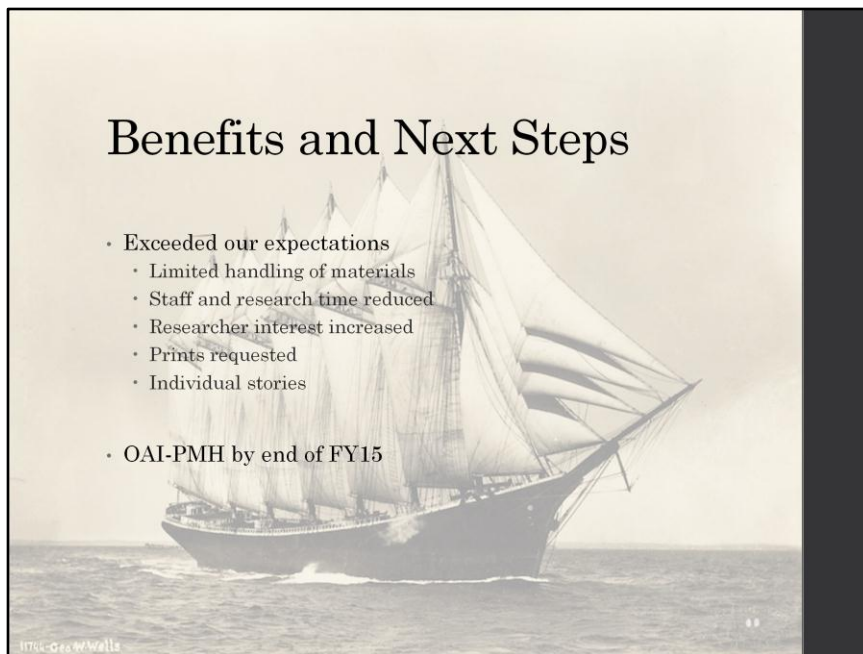
We anticipated that making this collection available online would have benefits such as reducing the wear and tear on the materials and reducing staff and research time; it has done both.

We also correctly anticipated that it would result in an increase in research interest in the collection.

We marketed the collection in the hope of increasing sales of prints of the images, which it did.

We also received many stories of individuals researching their ancestors who discovered that their ancestor owned a vessel. They Google the name of the vessel, and they manage to find the one item out of our 6,000 which is relevant to them, something they never could have done before. This in particular has been rewarding to see.

The final step in this process is for us to implement OAI-PMH, which we have promised to do by the end of Fiscal Year 2015. Once we do, all of the images will be ingested into the Digital Commonwealth portal. This will increase the visibility of the collection, and we imagine that it will only magnify the benefits we've already seen.

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