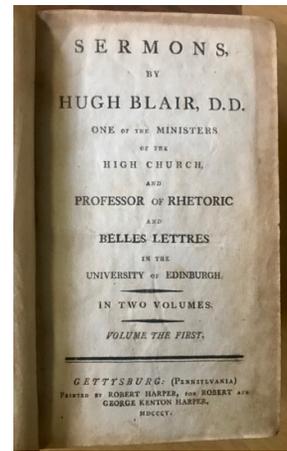
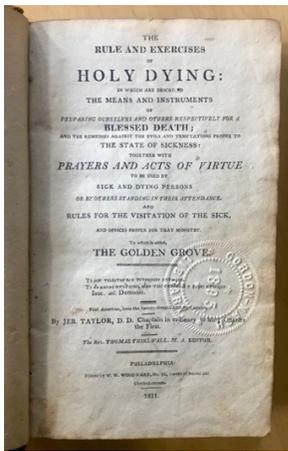


The History Corner
New Hampton's First Library Was Not Named Gordon-Nash!

Many of us grew up benefitting from the foresight of our townsman, Judge Stephen G. Nash (1822-1894), who formed a private non-profit corporation that became the Gordon-Nash Library. Supported by large gifts from his estate, land was purchased, a beautiful building built, thousands of his books donated, and an endowment created to support future operations. The library opened in 1896 and today continues to serve “residents, students, and sojourners,” exactly as he envisioned.

Before Judge Nash was born, however, an industrious group of our town's leading citizens banded together to form, “The New-Hampton Social Library.” With the blessings of the State of New Hampshire, on June 14, 1813 a charter was granted to William B. Kelley, Samuel Kelley 3rd, Thomas Simpson, Joseph R Kelley, Nicholas M Taylor, Ebenezer Sandborn, Joseph Robinson and Daniel Smith to form a library. Unlike the funding for most town libraries (taxes) or the Gordon-Nash (a private endowment), the New-Hampton Social Library was supported through subscriptions – fees paid by the users – and thus not really open to everyone.

While the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord, NH now holds the early records of the New-Hampton Social Library, the Fire Vault in the Gordon-Nash Library has two titles from this early cultural landmark. Both titles are religious, and both, according to their bookplates (below), could be checked-out for ten weeks at a time. Although the content was ponderous, and the time and the evening light scarce in the early 1800s, one would hope that patrons were able to read a book from cover-to-cover in less than two-and-a-half months!



***THE PROPERTY OF
New-Hampton Social Library
Annual Meeting fourth Monday in September
To be returned in ten weeks.***

At a later date the books were kept in the house of John and Abigail Nash, parents of Judge Nash, and one wonders if this early exposure might be where the Judge, to our great fortune, developed the traits of a “19th century bookworm!” With any luck, another volume, or two (or three) from our first library will surface in a bookshelf in someone's home, or a trunk in the attic. Don't worry, we won't collect any overdue notices if you have gone beyond those original ten weeks!

For more information on the history of the town, please visit the New Hampton Historical Society website at <https://www.newhamptonhistory.org/>

Kent Bicknell
Historian, NHHS
October 13, 2019