

Report of the Swampscott Historical Commission

2020-2021


Submitted by Justina Oliver, Chair

Historic Interpretive Signage

The Swampscott Historical Commission engaged with the Community Development Department to design historic interpretive signage at historic sites in town. The Commission chose 4 locations for the first phase of this project: Swampscott Fish House, Elihu Thomson Administration Building, Olmsted Historic District, and the Swampscott Cemetery with Andrews Chapel. Each sign will contain a QR code that when scanned with a mobile device, will lead to a website with more historical narrative of that site. The Commission will continue to expand the historic signage project at more locations. The 4 signs will be unveiled in summer/fall 2021.

Elihu Thomson House

Want to learn more? Scan the QR code!




SCAN ME

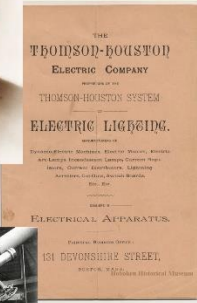
This Georgian Revival house was designed by architect James Templeton Kelly for Professor Elihu Thomson, and constructed in 1889. Thompson lived in the house with his wife, Mary Louise (Peck), and their four sons. He resided there until his death in 1937.

Thomson was a respected scientist, inventor, and a founder of The Thomson-Houston Electric Company, predecessor to the General Electric Company. Thomson conducted experiments with x-rays, refrigeration, high-powered lenses, and turbines in the carriage house on the property. He holds the third-highest number of patents in the United States.


The house is situated on a parcel of land that is part of the Frederick Law Olmsted district. In 1944, the Thomson family sold the house to the town for \$30,000, at about a third of its assessed value. J. William Beal & Sons were engaged as architects to oversee the conversion of the house into a workable town hall. A bridge which had connected the main house to the carriage house was removed, and replaced by a one-story annex. The red slate roof and interior embellishments of mahogany, oak and cherry wood were retained. Every effort was made to maintain the building's interior design, including eight fireplaces and original bathrooms. The house was designated a historic landmark in 1976. In 2007, a renovation provided accessibility and additional space.




Left: Professor Elihu Thomson. Below: Catalog for The Thomson-Houston Electric Company, circa 1885.




THE THOMSON-HOUSTON ELECTRIC COMPANY
THOMSON-HOUSTON SYSTEM
ELECTRIC LIGHTING.
ELECTRICAL APPARATUS.
151 DEVONSHIRE STREET,
PROF. E. THOMSON, Electrical Engineer



Above: Elihu Thomson House during Swampscott's Centennial Celebration in 1932.
Below: Interior entranceway and main stairway of Elihu Thomson House.



Left: Professor Thomson in his observatory once located on the property. The observatory has since been removed.



Funded by the Swampscott Historical Commission and a grant from the Essex National Heritage Commission

Town Wide Archives Assessment

In 1984, the Swampscott Historical Commission was established by Town Meeting, by Massachusetts law, and is charged with protecting the historic resources of Swampscott. These resources include many town records that the Commission took stewardship of such as: photographs, street directories, atlases, Elihu Thomson inventions, artifacts from the town anniversary celebrations, old hotels, and more. A portion of the town records are retained at the Library. In 2014, the Historical Commission office was relocated to 86 Burrill Street 'the Old Police Station', splitting the town records between 2 locations. In 2020, the Commission collaborated with the Library to apply for a Town Wide Archives Assessment grant to assess the condition of the records and the buildings they are

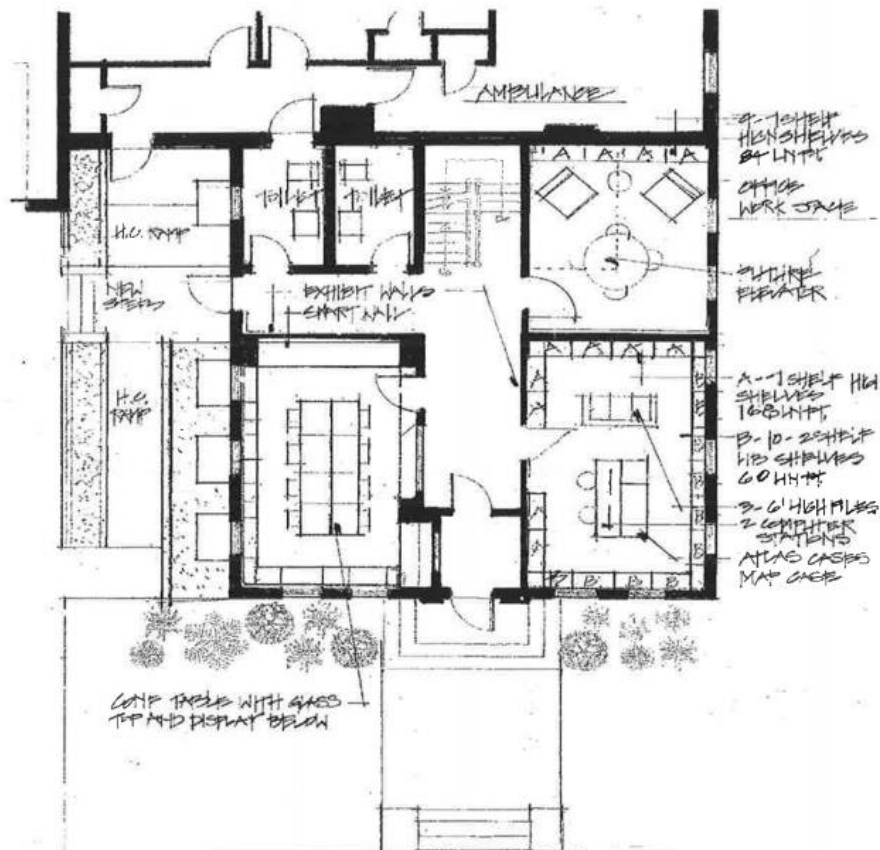


located in. We received the grant of \$26,500 to assess 4 locations: Town Hall, the Library, and 86 Burrill St; and included the private Humphrey House owned by the Swampscott Historical Society. The assessment just finalized, and the Commission is now applying for a Collaborative Implementation Grant through the National Archives to organize, inventory, and digitize the town's historic records. The records have been moved to the 2nd floor space at 86 Burrill St to begin this project.



The Commission is working to make the records accessible to the public. The Commission, with the Library, responded to the RFP for use and occupancy of the original police station building. Our proposal offered the space as a centralized archives, museum, and research center named the 'Elihu Thomson Innovation Center'. The building, across from ReachArts, and close to the Library, could create a cultural and arts center for Swampscott. As a proposed annex of the Library, the building would operate with PT staff and volunteers trained in handling of archives and offer space for the public to do research, with laptop and computer stations, a meeting space, and a museum with rotating exhibits. The Commission and

- Library would continue to source grant opportunities through the National Archives, Massachusetts Historical Commission, Library Board of Commissioners, and more to fund these projects. Commission members and Preservation Architects, Dana Anderson and Richard Smith, worked together on the proposals' floor plan designs, projected construction costs, and phased approach to align with funding sources.



Virtual Workshops

Commission Member Ryan Judkins offered a virtual workshop on how to research your historic home via the Zoom platform. The workshop was received well and the Commission is working on a follow up series. You can access the research guide presented by Ryan here: <https://www.swampscottma.gov/historical-commission/pages/researching-your-historic-swampscott-home>

Preservation Awards

The Commission continued with the annual preservation awards and announced the winners for 2019; Church of the Holy Name, 22 Banks Terr, and 59 Winshaw Road. Due to COVID, the Commission was unable to host the ceremony but look forward to doing so for our award recipients soon. The Commission just closed the nominations for 2020 Preservation Awards, the winners will be announced to the public shortly!



Historic House Plaque Program

The Commission is working on a historic house plaque program. This program would allow Swampscott homeowners to apply for research of their historic home, providing a report and a house plaque. Applications will be made available on the Commission's page. <https://swampscottma.gov/historical-commission>

Swampscott History Festival 2022

The Swampscott Historical Commission in collaboration with the Recreation Department are in the beginning planning stages for a History Festival in the summer of 2022. The town of Swampscott will be celebrating it's 170th anniversary of the incorporation with a 2-3 day festival of activities for all ages. The Commission will be putting out a call for sponsors and event participants to assist in the planning and hosting of events!

Swampscott Keepsakes

In December 2020, Commission Chair Justina Oliver offered Swampscott ornaments for sale, designed by Hestia Creations, to raise funds for the archives project. The Commission is excited to announce we raised close to \$1500! We are working on providing more Swampscott items for sale and an online shop. The Commission also welcomes donations to support our initiatives through the Town Hall. Thank you for your support!