

DUNHAM HALL LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

On the third floor of the Museum's main building, visitors will find the Austin Dunham Hall Library. The library was founded in 1877 by William E. Barrows, the President and General Manager of the Willimantic Linen Company, who named after his boss, one of the Company's owners. Barrows followed a philosophy that historians call industrial benevolence, or industrial paternalism. In his view, the Company and its executives were like parents, and the workers were like children. The Company would provide its workers with decent housing, a school, a library, a bank, and a park for recreation. In return, the workers would accept low wages and unsafe working conditions. They would not join unions nor go on strike. Of course, most workers resented the philosophy of industrial paternalism. Ironically, there was also resentment among the Company's investors, who thought that Barrows spent too much money on libraries, banks, and parks, along with his other improvements, like switching from waterpower to steam power and installing electric lights. Eventually, Barrows would be fired.

The Library is a prime example of industrial paternalism. Barrows believed in education. He also believed that reading promoted cultural refinement and middle class values of thrift and sobriety. To create a refined atmosphere, Barrows made the Library elegant. It had two fireplaces, polished oak floors, and vaulted timbered ceilings made of cypress, the latest style in 1877. Barrows hired a professional librarian, and the Library was open to workers, their families, and other townspeople. There was a large collection of books, including books on self-improvement, learning the technical skills needed to become one of the Company's skilled workers, literary classics, newspapers, histories, adventure stories, and romances — but not, unsurprisingly, any literature associated with socialism, anarchism, or labor unions. Today, the Library houses a unique research collection that includes children's titles, craft books, local histories, and much more in a reading room setting. There are materials on mills, immigration, textiles, and labor and Connecticut history. The Library also houses the Museum's historical archive of more than 20,000 artifacts, objects, publications, and papers. It is open to the public.





At right, the fireplaces and vaulted ceiling are visible in this photo of the Dunham Hall Library. Tables are set up for researchers. Above, one of the Museum's interesting artifacts, an early 20th-century radio. In the background on the right can be seen the Library genealogy research section. The shelves on the left house special collections. Below, the Museum's archival staff use a mannequin to photograph a vintage garment in the Museum's collection.



