

Chebacco

A stained glass artwork featuring a pine branch with two cones and several needles. The background is a deep blue, and the pine needles and cones are rendered in shades of green and yellow. The artwork is set within a grid of dark lines, characteristic of stained glass.

The Magazine of
the Mount Desert Island Historical Society

HARBORING RELIGION: MISSIONARIES,
CONVERTS, AND SOJOURNERS

Volume XX 2019

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Volume XX
HARBORING RELIGION:
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We would also like to acknowledge the Southwest Harbor Public Library Digital Archive and the assistance of Charlotte Morrill and George Soules in obtaining many of the historical photographs that illustrate this issue.



Detail of south
wall window,
ca. 1916, artist
unknown. *Sz.
Edward's Convent,
Bar Harbor (currently
the Bar Harbor
Historical Society)*

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Detail of "Chanukah," 1986,
Nancy O'Neal. *Beth Abraham
Orthodox Synagogue, Bangor*

From Harvard's Semitic Museum to Mount Desert Island and Back

By Mikeal C. Parsons

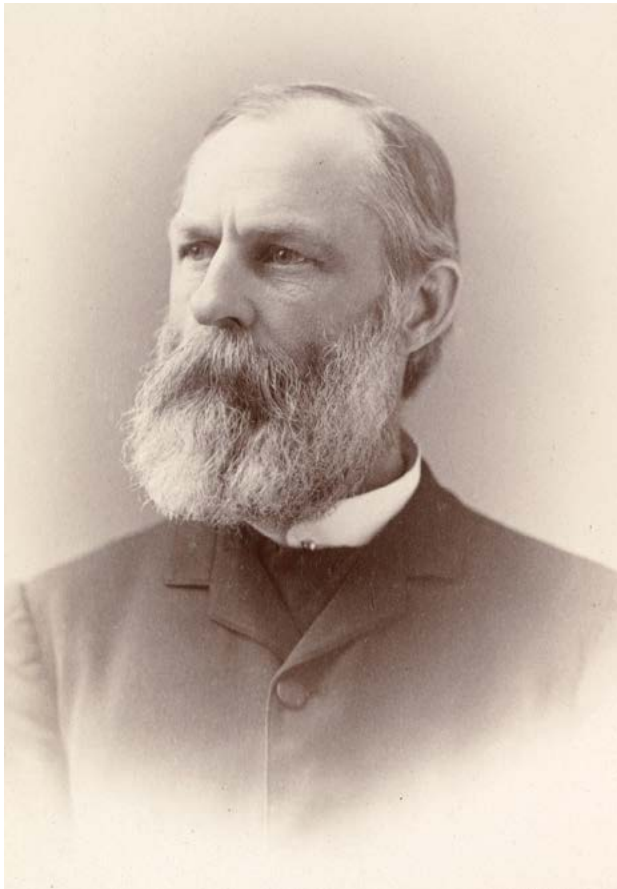
"Kind Lord, we thank
thee for the Grace
Which brought us to
this pleasant place.
And now, O Lord, we humbly pray
Thou'lt keep all other folk away."
Nancy Saunders Toy to
Woodrow Wilson

In a letter to her longtime friend, President Woodrow Wilson, Nancy Toy attributed this "ditty" about Mount Desert Island, and more specifically Seal Harbor, to a "Miss Wooten."¹ In the late nineteenth century, Nancy Saunders Toy had become a regular summer resident of Seal Harbor along with her husband, Crawford Howell Toy, Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages at Harvard University. The Toys were part of a steady stream of Harvard dons and their families who populated Mount Desert Island during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Toys' story is intertwined with the stories of Jacob Schiff, Charles Eliot, and David Lyon, each of whom also played a central role in the founding and establishment of the Semitic Museum at Harvard University.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, financier and philanthropist Jacob Schiff was one of the most prominent summer residents of Mount Desert Island, and, along with

his family, one of its few practicing Jews.² Schiff's presence there was encouraged by Harvard President Charles W. Eliot. The friendship between these two is well-documented. As Judith Goldstein has pointed out: "Theirs was a unique friendship — one that flourished on Mount Desert — between the liberal educator and the philanthropist, the Brahmin and the German immigrant, the Unitarian and the Jew. It was one of the very few of its kind in the social history of Mount Desert."³ But what was the origin of this friendship? This essay traces the development of that friendship and then focuses on the lives on Mount Desert Island of those two Harvard professors, Crawford Howell Toy and David Lyon, who facilitated that relationship.

The story begins in May 1879, when the Board of Trustees of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary voted to accept the letter of resignation of C. H. Toy, then professor of Old Testament and Hebrew. Toy's embrace of historical criticism and Darwinism caused friction with some of the Southern Baptist constituency of the Seminary. Toy left Louisville and was doing menial editorial work in New York City (despite having been elected President of the American Philological Society) when he came to the attention of President Eliot.⁴ Eliot learned about Toy's situation at Southern and went to New York to interview Toy.⁵ Apparently, Eliot was determined to hire a non-Unitarian in the Hancock Chair of Hebrew and Oriental Languages in his effort to expand the Divinity School beyond its current vision as a training ground for regional Unitarian ministers. Toy was hired and began teaching at Harvard in October 1880.



Crawford Howell Toy (left) and David Gordon Lyon (right). Along with Jacob Schiff and Charles W. Eliot, they played a central role in the founding and establishment of the Semitic Museum at Harvard University. *Photographs courtesy of Harvard Divinity School*

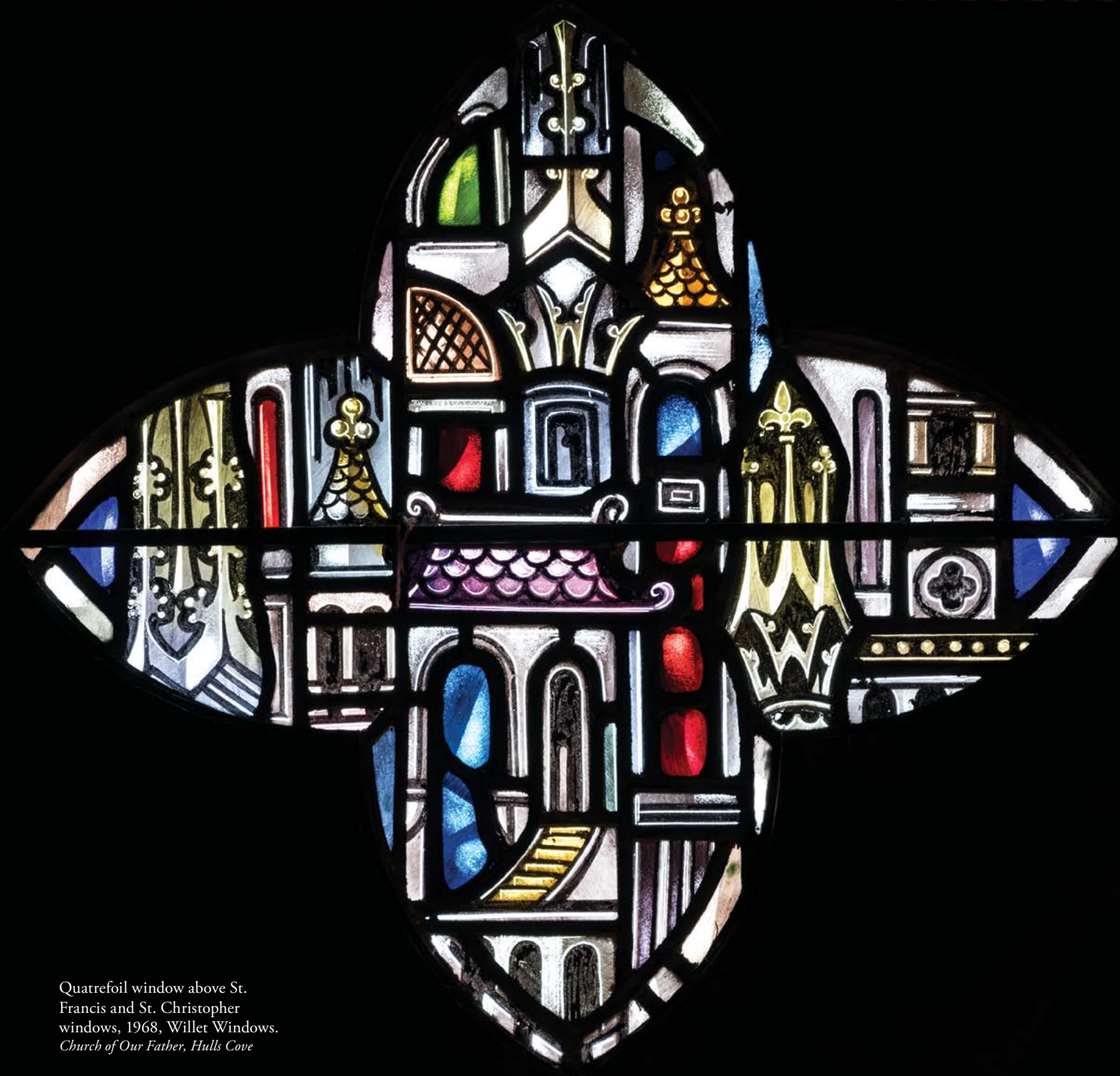
Two years later, Harvard hired Toy's former student at Southern Seminary, David Lyon, who upon Toy's advice had pursued graduate studies at the University of Leipzig. Eliot, presumably acting on Toy's recommendation, offered Lyon the prestigious Hollis Chair. Whether because he was an untested thirty year-old or because he was another Baptist (or perhaps both), the appointment was approved by the Corporation, but not unanimously (as was usually the case with Eliot recommendations).⁶ In part, Eliot justified the appointment of Lyon to

the Hollis Chair, the oldest Chair at the university, by noting that the benefactor of the chair, Thomas Hollis, had been a Baptist: "One hundred and sixty-one years after the establishment of the professorship, a member of the Baptist communion is at last elected to it."⁷

After a couple of years on the faculty, Toy and Lyon made known their interest in "the exploration of the ancient Semites in Western Asia."⁸ To that end,



The Semitic Museum housed thousands of artifacts collected from Near Eastern countries, including these Palestinian costumes (left) and Palmyrene busts and musical instruments (right). These were photographed in 1903.
Courtesy Harvard Semitic Museum



Quatrefoil window above St.
Francis and St. Christopher
windows, 1968, Willet Windows.
Church of Our Father, Hulls Cove

the university purchased a few Assyrian inscriptions and bas-reliefs. In 1887–88, three small collections of Babylonian tablets were purchased. Toy and Lyon hoped these purchases might lead to the establishment of a Semitic Museum on the Harvard campus. Lyon shared this hope in 1888 with recent Harvard graduate James Loeb, who told Lyon that his brother-in-law, Jacob H. Schiff, might be interested in such an endeavor. Loeb arranged a meeting between Lyon and Schiff in January 1889 in the home of Loeb's parents in New York.⁹ Lyon also met with President Eliot about the possibility of raising funds for a Semitic Museum.¹⁰ Both meetings proved momentous.

Jacob Schiff suggested the possibility of establishing a "great Semitic Museum in 1892 in connection with the observance of the four hundredth anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain."¹¹ Though the museum would take a much different shape, its idea was born.¹²

Following the first meeting of a newly formed Semitic Museum Committee (which Schiff chaired for twenty-five years), Lyon reported that "Mr. Schiff was President Eliot's guest at luncheon and there began a beautiful friendship which gave great pleasure to each of these strong and far-sighted [men]." This "interest in the affairs of the Semitic Department" forged "a special bond" between the two men.¹³ All told, Schiff contributed more than \$300,000 to the building of the Harvard Semitic Museum and its related activities.¹⁴

The professional alliance soon blossomed into a personal friendship that included proximity in their summer



The Semitic Museum at Harvard University was founded in 1889. A permanent building, illustrated here, was dedicated in 1903 and today holds more than 40,000 Near Eastern artifacts. *Courtesy Harvard Semitic Museum*

homes. "Whatever other reasons may have led Mr. Schiff to select Bar Harbor as one of his summer houses, the nearness of President Eliot, only a few miles away, must have been a strong additional attraction."¹⁵ From at least 1903 until his death in 1920, Schiff and his family lodged each August at Bar Harbor. In recognition of his donations to the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association, a mountain trail was named for Schiff.¹⁶

Schiff and Eliot were not the only two persons associated with the Semitic Museum who spent parts of their summers on Mount Desert Island. Both Toy and Lyon vacationed there at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, though neither was wealthy enough to own or rent a summer home. In 1888, Crawford

Toy married Nancy Saunders, of Norfolk, Virginia, and they soon began spending summer weeks at Glencove Hotel in Seal Harbor. In one of their earliest visits to Glencove, Toy reports to Lyon that "the weather is delightful, fair, and the company at the hotel good."¹⁷ Toy also related a story at a dinner party about Harvard Law Professor James Thayer that (unconsciously) reveals a bit of the class tension between year-round residents and summer occupants: "the man who takes care of his house at Bar Harbor; being askt of what Mr. Thayer was professor, he replied, 'oh, he's professor of the whole damn thing'."¹⁸ We know little about Toy's daily life on Mount Desert Island beyond his presence there, but we know of his great affection for the place. Mrs. Toy had his cremated ashes spread over the shoreline of his beloved summer home, another sign of his (and their) love of the place.

From his diary, we know a good deal more about David Lyon's time on Mount Desert Island. For example, just months after the fateful meeting with Jacob Schiff in New York in May, David Lyon and his wife, Tosca, spent August 24–September 9, 1889, on the island.¹⁹ The Lyons' activities were varied and many. They took a buckboard ride on August 24 and that evening attended a singing service (a regular event on Sunday nights). On August 26, he had a "most lovely walk with Tosca and Mrs. Toy," and later in the week took a row with Toy (Aug 30). But it was not all play; Lyon read part of a manuscript by Toy, which would later be published as *Quotations in the New Testament* (Aug 28). The Lyons were invited to spend a few days at President and Mrs. Eliot's summer home, where they played games in the evening (Sept 5). Lyon observed that President Eliot showed much interest in "the natives," inquiring about their activities and evincing a familiarity with several individuals (Sept 5). After their four days with the Eliots, Lyon remarks that he had learned of the "gentler side" of "Eliot's character" (Sept 9).

The Lyons returned to Seal Harbor July 21–August 24, 1891, and took a room at the Glencove, where the Toys typically resided (July 21).²⁰ That year the Toys did not arrive until August 12, and Lyon and Toy attended a baseball game at Northeast Harbor the next day. On August 16, Lyon preached a sermon on Jeremiah in the chapel, presumably at the invitation of President Eliot. Apparently, preaching on Mount Desert Island was "high stakes"; Lyon spent the better part of a month working on this sermon.²¹ He and Toy again rowed to Northeast Harbor to watch another baseball game (August 20). They played a card game, popular at the time, known as Casino. He and Tosca also participated in a Soap Bubble Party. He spent a good deal of this vacation reading Walter Scott's recently published journal (Aug 20).

After a summer on Martha's Vineyard in 1892, the Lyons returned to Bar Harbor in 1893, even though they were in the midst of building a new home in Cambridge.²² He gave a lecture on some of the Assyrian finds housed in the Semitic Museum, sponsored by the Jesup Memorial Library (Aug 1).²³ Once again, Lyon records his impressions of Eliot: "C.W. Eliot the man in his summer home is very different from C.W.E. the official in Cambridge" (July 19).

In 1909, we have the first report of the Lyons visiting with the Schiffs on Mount Desert Island (Aug 16), but it was by no means the last. Whether at Seabright, NJ, or Bar Harbor, Lyon reports, "it was always a joy to be a guest in the refined and hospitable home of Mr. and

Mrs. Schiff. There was daily something of interest going on, a drive, a stroll, a short walk, a call, or receiving visitors. In the guest book one read the names of generals, statesmen, ambassadors, scholars, financiers, philanthropists, editors, men eminent in the business world. ... In the country Mr. Schiff was a great walker. He patronized the bicycle also, and though fond of the wheel myself, I can never forget my rashness in venturing to go out with him on one of his rides."²⁴

Lyon provides a rare and intimate glimpse in the private practice of Jewish faith on Mount Desert Island: "The prayer at table before eating, spoken by the father or one of the children or grand-children, was a beautiful feature at mealtime, always ending: 'Continue to bless us with thy favor, that we may share our plenty with others less fortunate than ourselves. Blessed be thy name forever.'"²⁵ Lyon's experience with Schiff's family, along with his commitment to championing the rights of religious minorities — a conviction rooted in his Baptist faith — served him well. In 1922, near the end of Lyon's career at Harvard, President Lawrence Lowell (who succeeded Eliot in 1909) tried to place a limit on the number of Jews admitted to Harvard College.²⁶ Lyon led the faculty opposition and, after several rancorous encounters, successfully forced Lowell and his supporters to withdraw the proposal.²⁷

Nancy Toy, whose "ditty" is cited at the beginning of this essay, provides another dimension of insight into life on Mount Desert Island.²⁸ The Toys and Woodrow Wilson, then a professor at



David Gordon and Tosca Lyon traveled to the Near East in 1902. Here they are shown in Luxor, Egypt in January 1902.
Courtesy Harvard Semitic Museum

Princeton University, met at a summer institute in 1894 on the Massachusetts coast, where both Toy and Wilson were lecturing on ethics. All native Virginians, they were drawn to each other, especially Nancy and Woodrow. Wilson described Nancy to his wife as an "altogether delightful" young woman.²⁹ Wilson and Mrs. Toy exchanged correspondence over the ensuing years, discoursing on matters that ranged from personal to professional. Wilson even invited Mrs. Toy to visit the White House in January 1915, during which time she kept a diary of her visit.³⁰ In



Detail of Whiting memorial window, ca. 1967, artist unknown. *Church of Our Father, Hall's Cove*

her correspondence with Woodrow Wilson, Nancy Toy made frequent reference to her summer routine, often in terms of what the residents were saying about the President. One particularly revealing episode comes from a letter from Toy to Wilson, in which she shares what she had heard on her stroll around the island regarding whether or not the United States should enter the conflict beginning to emerge in Europe (WWI). Wilson, of course, had adopted a position of neutrality at the beginning of the war, a policy he would eventually abandon. In a revealing throwaway line, she refers to the various walking paths as the "real Seal Harbor salon."³¹ Some years later in 1922, after Wilson had left office and her husband had died, Nancy Toy returned to Seal Harbor and wrote Wilson from the Seaside Inn, providing a glimpse of the living quarters of one occasional and wealthy summer resident:

I have had a bit of Paradise here for a week — sea, woods, mountains and trails, huge log hotel fires all my own with a few old acquaintances. With one difference, however, from the dwellers in the real Paradise. I fancy: my heart is aching to have somebody I love to enjoy it with me — notably, you and Mrs. Wilson. I wish you would come and take possession of Mr. Rhodes'³² jewel of a house; it is renting for a song, I hear — can't you sing it? Such a wonderful "flying verandah," glassed in on three sides and nothing between you and the south of France but the ocean

and the fragrance of fir trees accompanying the rocks to the water's edge. Inside central heating, open wood fires, bathrooms galore furnish the physical comfort, and Mr. Rhodes' bed-room is the most beautiful I have ever seen. I walked over the rocks yesterday, amazed and sorrowful that anybody with such a house at such a place could leave it for Switzerland. Two of my best-summer friends have died during the winter and the very best is too ill to come — "For when we're there, although 'tis fair, 'Twill be another Yarrow!"³³

Much of the planning and implementation for the Semitic Museum by Lyon, Schiff, Eliot, and Toy occurred during the summers, when several and sometimes all of them were conducting working vacations on Mount Desert Island.³⁴ Harvard's Semitic Museum was both a cause and a result of those relationships. Professional alliances developed and personal friendships deepened, and an accidental kind of symbiosis emerged between Mount Desert Island and the Semitic Museum. The diaries and correspondences between these four individuals, along with Nancy Toy, provide, for those with eyes open and ears attuned, an intimate, if inadvertent, glimpse into life on Mount Desert Island among four liberal Protestants and a Jewish benefactor who were, or became, summer residents of "Paradise" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Mikeal Parsons is the Kidd L. and Buna Hitchcock Macon Chair in Religion at Baylor University, where he has taught since 1986. He is the author or editor of some two dozen books. Along with art historian Heidi J. Hornik, Parsons co-authored The Acts of the Apostles Through the Centuries (2008) and the trilogy, Illuminating Luke (2003). His current project, A "Frank and Somewhat Full" Account of Crawford Howell Toy: The Man, the Scholar, and the Teacher looks at the career of C.H. Toy, Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages at Harvard University.

Acknowledgments:

Appreciation is expressed to the Harvard University Archives for permission to publish from their rich collections of historical materials. In addition, Dr. Joseph Greene, Deputy Director and Curator of the Harvard Semitic Museum, provided images of the Semitic Museum and its holdings and David and Tosca Lyon. Maureen Jennings, Head of the Special Collections, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, supplied pictures of Toy and Lyon. Finally, I am grateful to Leigh Schmidt and Marie Griffith for the invitation to contribute to this special issue and to Tim Garrity for his guidance in preparing the essay for publication.

1. Nancy Toy to Woodrow Wilson, February 6, 1915, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, microfilm reel 535, series 2.
2. Judith S. Goldstein, "Making America Work: A Look at Christians and Jews on Mount Desert Island," *The History Journal of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society* 3 (2000): 37.
3. Ibid.
4. See Mikeal C. Parsons, *A "Frank and Somewhat Full" Account of Crawford Howell Toy: The Man, the Scholar, and the Teacher* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, forthcoming).
5. Charles W. Eliot to Mr. Hulburt, November 23, 1920, Papers of Charles W. Eliot, UAI 5.150, box 231, Harvard University Archives.
6. Minutes for September 13, 1882," *Overseer's Records*, 1871–1882, vol. XI, Harvard University Archives; David G. Lyon to Charles W. Eliot, September 2, 1901, Papers of Charles W. Eliot, UAI 5.150, box 52.
7. Harvard University, President's Report for 1881–82, *Annual reports of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College, 1881–1882*, 27–28. Elsewhere, Eliot explained that the responsibilities of the Hollis Chair had been distributed among five different professorships.
8. David G. Lyon, "Relations of Jacob H. Schiff to Harvard University," 1, Lyon Papers, box 16, Harvard University Archives.
9. Ibid.
10. Lyon Papers, Diary, January 10, 1889, box 6.
11. Lyon, "Relations of Jacob H. Schiff to Harvard University," 2.

12. The museum opened in 1891 as a new section of the Peabody Museum. The building itself on Divinity Avenue was open to the public in 1903. "Semitic" may have meant different things to Schiff and Lyon. For Schiff, it may have been a code word for "Jewish"; for Lyon the term functioned as a socio-linguistic descriptor. See Joseph A. Green, "A Complicated Legacy: The Original Collections of the Semitic Museum," *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 5 (2017): 60. At the museum's opening, Crawford Toy explained the expansive mission of the enterprise, which included but went beyond Schiff's vision of combating rampant antisemitism in America and especially Europe. Toy said:

The title "Semitic Museum" is justified by the unity of the material. The Semitic languages, though distinct dialects, are very closely related to one another, the various Semitic civilizations are in important respects identical. The field, however, is large in space and time. It embraces eight nations; it includes almost all of Western Asia and a part of Africa and the Mediterranean Islands and coasts; it goes back four millenniums before the beginning of our era. ("Opening of the Harvard Semitic Museum: Addresses by Pres. Eliot, Prof Toy, Curator Lyon and Mr. Jacob H. Schiff," *The American Hebrew* [May 1892]: 67–70; here 67 in UAI 5.150, box 217, folder 47.2, Records of the President of Harvard University Charles William Eliot.)

Harvard's Semitic Museum provided a stimulus for Harvard to join Johns Hopkins University in pioneering the study of Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Culture in North America.

13. Lyon, "Relations of Jacob H. Schiff to Harvard University," 3.
14. Naomi Wiener Cohen, *Jacob A. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 76–78; Lyon, "Relations of Jacob H. Schiff to Harvard University," 65–66.

15. Lyon, "Relations of Jacob H. Schiff to Harvard University," 3.
16. "Mount Desert Island," *Crossing Lines* (Sept/Oct 1992): 33.
17. Toy to Lyon, 28 July 1890, David Lyon Papers, Semitic Museum Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
18. Toy, March 8, 1900, 900.11, box 4, Harvard University Archives.
19. Lyon Papers, Diary 1889, 1872–1935, HUG 1541, box 6, vol. 6.
20. Lyon Papers, Diary 1891, 1872–1935, HUG 1541, box 6, vol. 7.
21. Elsewhere in the diary, Lyon reports on preaching at his home church, The Old Cambridge Baptist Church, but does not indicate he spent nearly the time on that sermon preparation as he did on this sermon.
22. Lyon does make a quick trip to Northeast Harbor (Aug 25–27) to report to Eliot on his excavation findings.
23. Lyon Papers, Diary, 1893, HUG 154, box 6, vol. 9.
24. Lyon, "Relations of Jacob H. Schiff to Harvard University," 11, 12.
25. Lyon, "Relations of Jacob H. Schiff to Harvard University," 12.
26. Lyon Papers, Diary, May 9, 1922, box 9.
27. Lyon Papers, box 16, folder [Admission of Jews to Harvard, 1922–1923], 1.
28. Although I have yet to find any supporting evidence, it is tempting, given their long-standing relationship, to think that Nancy Saunders Toy may have had some role to play in Woodrow Wilson's approval of Eliot's proposal to create Acadia National Park.
29. Woodrow Wilson to Ellen Axson Wilson, July 16, 1894, Arthur Link, ed., *Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 8:610.
30. *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 32: 7–10, 21–22.
31. Nancy Toy to Woodrow Wilson. Seal Harbor, ME. July 17, 1915. *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 33: 517–18. The writer of "international law" was most likely E.H. Strobel, Bemis Professor of International Law at Harvard.
32. James Ford Rhodes was a successful American industrialist who retired before the age of forty, moved from Cleveland, OH, to Cambridge, MA, and became a devoted historian, publishing multiple volumes on U.S. history.
33. Nancy Toy to Woodrow Wilson, July 2, 1922, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Microfilm Series 535. Toy's quote is from William Wordsworth's poem, "Yarrow Unvisited."
34. For example, President Eliot wrote Lyon from Northeast Harbor on numerous occasions about various details regarding the Semitic Museum. See e.g., Charles W. Eliot to David G. Lyon, August 5, 1898; September 11, 1900; August 17, 1902. Eliot's interest in the Museum continued even after his retirement; see Charles W. Eliot to Julius Rosenwald, September 15, 1913. The preceding correspondence is located in the Lyon Papers, HUG 1541, box 12. After a period of neglect, especially during and following WWII, Harvard's Semitic Museum today is a flourishing university museum that, under the directorship of Dr. Peter Der Manuelian, has continued to fulfill and expand the original vision proposed by Lyon and Toy. See <https://semiticmuseum.fas.harvard.edu/>.



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Chebacco silhouette adapted from a photograph by Len Burgess for the Essex Shipbuilding Museum.

Our magazine, *Chebacco*, is named for a type of boat built in the eighteenth century in Gloucester, Massachusetts and nearby towns. In 1762, Abraham Somes, his wife, and four young daughters sailed in a Chebacco boat to make their home in Somesville and become Mount Desert Island's first permanent Euro-American settlers.

We invite you to voyage through the histories of Mount Desert Island in this contemporary Chebacco.



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