

# Annisquam, Mass.

## August 1893

Annisquam is a seaside village located on Cape Ann, 42 miles northeast of Boston. The first Europeans arrived there in 1631, but Annisquam had to wait until 1893 for a visit from a Hindu monk. In the 1890's, Annisquam was a popular summer vacation destination but today it is primarily residential.

Annisquam is distinguished as the location of Swami Vivekananda's first public talk. He spent four days in Annisquam, 25<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1893 with Professor Wright of Harvard University. Professor Wright was to remain a good friend and supporter of the Swami throughout his career. In fact, it was he who wrote the letter of recommendation, which gained entry for Swami Vivekananda to the Parliament of Religions.

On the evening of 27<sup>th</sup> August, a talk was given at the [Annisquam Village Church](#). Local papers did not report any details of his lecture, but described his subject as "...manners and customs in his far away land..."<sup>1</sup> The church is still in operation at 820 Washington Street Gloucester, MA 01930. It sponsors nondenominational services with a Protestant orientation. Sunday services are at 10:00 am.



Annisquam Village Church interior (2013).

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, vol. 1, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1992, 40.



Annisquam Village Church exterior (2013).

While visiting Annisquam, Swami Vivekananda stayed in a boarding house run by a Miss Lane at 8 Arlington St. The house is now a private residence.



Historical photo of Miss Lane's boarding house (ND 1:31).



Miss Lane's boarding house (2013).

## August 1894

Swami Vivekananda visited Annisquam for the second time about one year later as the guest of Mrs. Bagley, his supporter from Detroit. By the standards of the cyclonic monk, this was a protracted vacation: 17<sup>th</sup> August to 5<sup>th</sup> September. Mrs. Bagley had rented the house of Alpheus Hyatt at 704 Washington Street for the summer.

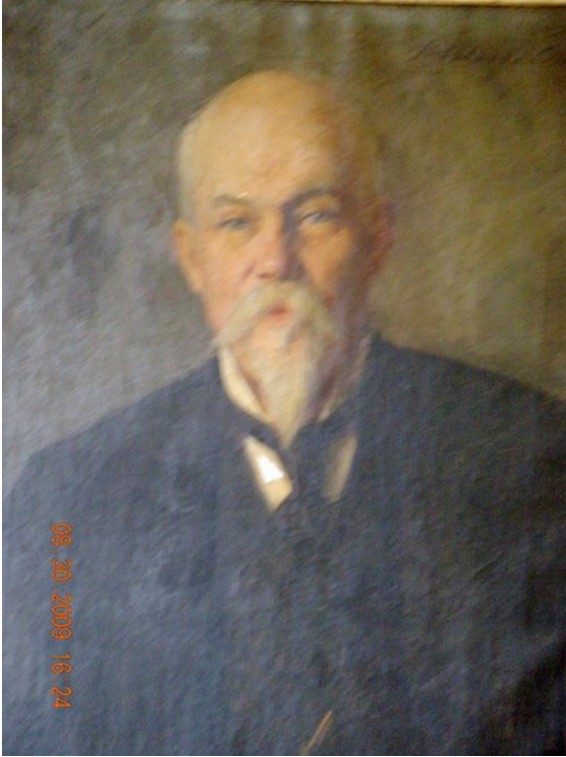
[Alpheus Hyatt](#) was a Professor of Zoology at Boston University. Swami Vivekananda met Professor Hyatt during his visit in 1893. Professor Hyatt's zoological laboratory in his house overlooking the Annisquam River was later transferred to Woods Hole, Massachusetts and became the [Marine Biological Laboratory](#).



Hyatt house (2013).



Hyatt house (2009).



Portrait of Alpheus Hyatt (photographed 2009).

## Magnolia

Friends from Chicago invited Swami Vivekananda to spend a few days with them in Magnolia, another fashionable summer destination on the ocean, eight miles south of Annisquam. He addressed a local audience on the evening of August 24<sup>th</sup> on the subject “Life in India” in the town hall located at 1 Lexington Avenue, on the second floor above the library.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Asim Chaudhuri, *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Findings*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 2008, 72 – 73.



Magnolia Library (2013).

At the end of his vacation, Swami Vivekananda gave a lecture for the people of Annisquam. This talk took place in the community hall in the center of the village. A local newspaper reported:

Mechanics Hall was well filled on Tuesday [4<sup>th</sup> September 1894] evening to hear the lecture given by our visiting friend, the Hindoo monk. He was introduced to the audience by Prof. Wright, who also made some preliminary remarks befitting the occasion. The Lecturer alluded to the visit he made to this village last year, and stated that the address he gave here at that time in the church was the first public discourse that he ever gave in English or in his native language; and kindly thanked his friends present who induced him to attempt the same. The religion of India was explained at some length by the speaker from a metaphysical standpoint, showing the working of his mind and the thought following, yet his ideas were broad and liberal, when practically applied.<sup>3</sup>

During the Victorian era, there was a great emphasis on education. Not simply in schools, but also what we now call “continuing education.” Communities built lecture hall where the general public were welcome for educational and cultural functions. Many of these halls were named “Mechanics Hall” to emphasize that blue collar workers, such as mechanics, were welcome. Swami Vivekananda’s talk took place in such a hall in Annisquam. Today, businesses and the library occupy the ground floor; the community hall is on the second level at 34 Leonard St. The archivist of the Annisquam Historical Society next door (open Mondays) can be prevailed upon to open the hall for pilgrims.

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<sup>3</sup> ND 2:172.



Historical photo of Mechanics Hall (ND 2:170).



Site of Mechanics Hall (2007).

Before leaving Annisquam, Swami Vivekananda wrote a long letter in Bengali in which he described his cutting observations of American culture:

...These seaside places are filled with people during the summer; some come to bathe in the sea, some to take rest, and some to catch husbands. ... Now, just as in our country the parents suffer a lot to have their daughters married, here in the same way the girls suffer – the parents only a little – it is the job of the girls to capture husbands. I am now closely associated with them in all their affairs; I am, as it were, a girl amongst girls. ...

I am, however, a strange sort of animal who hasn't any romantic feeling, and therefore they could not sustain any such feeling toward me, and they show me great respect. I make all of them call me "father" or "brother." I don't allow them to come near me with any other feeling, and gradually they have all been straightened out....

Again, a phonograph was sent to the Maharajah of Khetri: the girls managed the whole affair very well. ... “They are the goddess Lakshmi in beauty and the goddess Saraswati in talents and accomplishments.” This cannot be achieved through the study of books. I say, can you send out some men and women to see the world? Only then will the country wake up....<sup>4</sup>

## Visiting Annisquam

The village of Annisquam itself has few services, but the nearby towns of Rockport and Gloucester provide many choices for meals and lodging. Nature lovers can find access to rocky ocean beaches at [Halibut Point State Park](#) situated at the northern end of Cape Ann. This region supplied much of the granite that was used to build Boston. The park surrounds an abandoned quarry.

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<sup>4</sup> *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 7, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1992, 470 – 75.