Home for the Holidays!

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS, the 2014 Holiday House Tour, sponsored by the Fitchburg Historical Society will be held on Saturday December 6, 2014 from 11:00am-4:00pm. The Tour Committee has selected six beautiful and historic private homes and four public places that will make for an outstanding and enjoyable event. Among them are the homes of Liz & David Megowan, Joan & Rod Gaudreau, Vi Morin, Pat & Mike Joubert, Nadine & Gerry Martel and the Fitchburg State University President’s Residence. The public spots on the tour include the Isabelle & Anderson Funeral Home, the Fay Club, the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church and the Fitchburg Historical Society.

The Megowan home is at 111 Ross St. In the spring of 1911, Harry G. Townsend, president of Fitchburg Federal Bank commissioned H. M. Francis and Sons, architects of Fitchburg, to design this beautiful home which highlights different styles that include Craftsman and Colonial Revival. Some features include original board and batten wainscoting, a coffered ceiling in the entry, crown molding, slate baseboards, a canvas ceiling, and a mural painted by Victorian Impressionist W. S. Bucklin.

The Gaudreau home is at 436 Fifth Mass Turnpike. Known as the Daniel Harris House, this home was built in 1780. Daniel Harris fought in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. He built this cape-style home after marrying Judith Goodale in 1780. The home features hand-pegged beams and wide-planked floors in the front two rooms. The fireplace bricks were made across the pike from the house. Their son John Harris built his homestead across the road.

Vi Morin’s home is at 434 Fifth Mass Turnpike, just next door to the Gaudreau’s. For nearly two centuries, this house has stood watch over Fifth Mass Turnpike. Its original features still included in the circa 1825 post and beam construction are its twelve over twelve windows with wavy glass, the front door, and three working fireplaces. Hearth cooked meals are still prepared using...

(continued on page 2)
Jim Reynolds joins the Board

Jim Reynolds is a finance executive and active citizen for the city of Fitchburg. He holds an undergraduate degree from Assumption College (1986), an MBA from Fitchburg State College (2003) and is currently taking graduate classes at Worcester State University. For the past 18 years Jim has worked at SimplexGrinnell in Westminster, MA, progressing from Analyst to Director roles. Jim most recently served on the Fitchburg School Committee and was on the city’s Zoning Board of Appeals. He resides in Fitchburg with his wife Ann and four children and is the "care taker" for the historic Vickery House (built in 1853) where his family has lived since 1996.

Annual Meeting 2014

The Fitchburg Historical Society held its annual meeting on Thursday September 24 in the George and Alice G. Wallace Exhibit Hall on the first floor of the Phoenix building. During the business portion of the meeting the Annual Report for 2013 – 2014 was distributed. The slate of officers for 2014-2015 recommended by the Nominating Committee was accepted: Bill McSheehy, President; Jay Bry, Vice President; Michelle Shepard, Treasurer and Cindy Jones, Clerk. James Reynolds and Kay Alverson-Hillman were elected to serve their first three year terms on the board of the Society.

The President, Dr. Quintino Rollo and his family. This year, it was restored and renovated by Elite Design and Construction to serve as the presidential residence for the college. Featuring a three-story turret with a spectacular staircase and several original bull’s-eye windows, this home is a unique blend of modern functionality and historic Victorian workmanship.

Our public venues begin with the Isabelle & Anderson Funeral Home. Located at 316 Clarendon Street in the heart of Cleghorn, it has been serving the community for almost ninety years. Joseph Isabelle established the firm in 1928.

His the old kitchen fireplace with its beehive ovens. Every flawless detail complements the integrity of the home’s design in its stunning simplicity.

Pat and Mike Joubert’s home sits at 931 Westminster Hill Rd. Today, this late 1800s farm house functions as a warm and inviting family home but it was once a stage coach stop for travelers going from Boston to Keene. The original wooden floors and woodwork provide the perfect backdrop for the creative interior displays of primitives, pottery, antiques and collectables. Each room in this three-story home is a visual adventure.

Nadine and Gerry Martel live at 580 Blossom Street. This stately and elegant home was designed and built by Robert Purdom, a Boston architect in 1913-1914 for Gifford Kingsley Simonds of the Simonds Saw and Steel family. In 1934 the Cookman family purchased this exceptional gem and, it has been in Nadine’s family ever since. The architectural style is classified as colonial but has interesting pagoda-style elements. There are five working fireplaces, leaded glass windows and a stunning winding staircase in the entry hall.

The President’s Residence, a recently completed project at Fitchburg State University, is located at 131 Highland Avenue. Built about 1890, this structure is the best and most interesting example of a Queen Anne Victorian home here in Fitchburg. From 1893-1895, it was the home of Iver Johnson and his wife Mary. More recently, it was the home of Dr. Quintino Rollo and his family. This year, it was restored and renovated by Elite Design and Construction to serve as the presidential residence for the college. Featuring a three-story turret with a spectacular staircase and several original bull’s-eye windows, this home is a unique blend of modern functionality and historic Victorian workmanship.

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Message from the Director

This Summer and Fall have been so busy that I can’t imagine where to begin my letter to our members. With the pink-clad crowds who came to admire Don Featherstone’s iconic pink flamingo in Judith Lindstedt’s movie, The Masquerade Ball and Fashion Show that celebrated Fitchburg’s 250 years with such elegance! The many community meetings hosted in the Phoenix Building? The warm welcome I received when serenading at First Parish Church? Or the many new donations to our collection that make it an even more valuable historical resource? These are all very close to my heart, and I am happy to be able to throw myself into learning Fitchburg’s history side by side with our members, volunteers and educators at all these events.

But it may be our new exhibition “Distinguished Service” that has touched me the most. I first conceived of this exhibition as a small show to feature a new gift honoring Antoinette Brunetti, who served in the Pacific theatre and, on August 10, 1943, had been the first Fitchburg woman to join the Marines. We also wanted to show Isabel Dennison’s and Bigelow Crocker’s uniforms, and examples of soldiers’ gear from World War I and Vietnam that are in our collection.

However, the show gathered its own momentum: we are grateful for a major gift from the family of Fitchburg native Felix J. Legier, who served in the First Infantry (the famed “Big Red One”) in World War II. We are showing much of this collection this fall, and are planning a follow-up installation in 2013. We have been loaned two stunning house-sewn World War II Red Cross uniforms used by Efthemia Marawell. Local collector and FSU student Jason Driscoll has been instrumental in helping to shape the exhibition: in addition to offering loans from his collection, Jason and his grandfather Dennis Driscoll have worked steadily on the research and installation. “Distinguished Service” is shaped by the vision of the team who created it, including many volunteers. In addition to Jason and Dennis, the show is the creation of volunteers Dona Stein, John Johnson and Shirley Wagner, working with our Program Assistant Katrina Brown.

I hope you have a chance to see what they have achieved. The exhibition is up through November 20, when it will change slightly to become “Home for the Holidays”, as part of our Historic House Tour. We have seen that visitors have been deeply moved to revisit memories of their own service and we are honored to remember Fitchburg’s long history of patriotic service.

We are also honored to be entrusted with our city’s heritage: Fitchburg is the perfect microcosm of America and we hope that you will come to visit us in order to share your part of the American story with us.

Susan Navarre,  Executive Director
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HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Sept. 2014 - Sept. 2015

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Written by: Kathleen Flynn

A Walk Down Main Street In 1912

In 1912, the Fitchburg Sentinel published a book entitled Fitchburg A Quality City, A Manufacturing and Mercantile Review. There are 108 pages of information with long descriptions about the most well-known businesses in the city. The publication is a treasure trove of information about the kinds of services that were provided to Fitchburg residents. It is fun to read and imagine walking into some of the shops.

A stroll down Main Street with well to do shoppers would find them stopping at Geo. A. Mayberry & Co. at 383 Main Street which the Sentinel described in the following way:

“There are always in any city, two or three, seldom more and sometimes less, grocery stores that have a particular class of customers, the people who not only demand good things to eat, but dainties and luxuries that are not afforded by a large number of people."

Mayberry provided fancy groceries of superior worth and brands seldom shown outside of the largest cities. Included in this list are still familiar brands, S.S. Pierce, Crosse and Blackwells, Heinz of the “57 Variety” and Chase and Sanborn coffee and tea. I am not sure that Mayberry’s is the proper store for my family to shop but Market Basket was not yet open.

Margaret Rock had a hair dressing and manicure business in a suite at the Johnsonia in 1912. Rock’s business had been in Fitchburg for 18 years and employed three assistants. They did manicuring, hairdressing, chiropody and facial massage and I enjoyed the opportunity to stop there for special occasions.

Once my hair was fashionably dressed, I might have stopped by to see Mrs. C.A. White at her milliner’s shop at 199 Main Street. There I could have a lovely hat made to order or buy ribbons, silks, velvet, feathers, (continued on page 4)
A Walk Down Main Street In 1912 (continued...)

...foliage, combs, hair pins and barrettes to decorate my hair. I wonder what kind of foliage was available for the fall...

The Park Restaurant located at 121 Main Street welcomed both men and women customers, clearly advertising a Ladies Café and a Gents Café. There is an exterior photo that seems to suggest there might have been separate dining spaces for the men and women. Hopefully, that was the case since the men in Fitchburg seem to have smoked a good many cigars in 1912.

There were several cigar manufacturers with cigar shops located on Main Street. M. Nolan was at 183 Main Street. His cigars sold throughout Massachusetts and he employed two cigar manufacturers and one stripper. Daniel Teehan, a state representative, owned a cigar store and a manufacturing plant in the Belding shops located on Main Street. He sold frankfurters, sausages and bologna - he only sold Vienna and Sicilian bread but obviously served a lot of households. The bakery was located at 263 Water Street. Hot from the oven, I might have added some of Wagner's sausage – Robert Wagner, the sausage manufacturer, had been in Fitchburg for ten years and had opened his building at 132 Kimball Street in 1910. He sold frankfurters, sausages and bologna - he made a thousand loaves a day.

Hopefully, that was the case since the men in Fitchburg were in the vicinity. Ladies, I suspect, politely coughed when they were in meet the approval of the most discriminating males. Rock building. One of his cigars was named "the Fay a cigar store and a manufacturing plant in the Belding shops located on Main Street. M. Nolan was at 183 Main Street. His cigars sold throughout Massachusetts and he employed two cigar manufacturers and one stripper. Daniel Teehan, a state representative, owned a cigar store and a manufacturing plant in the Belding shops located on Main Street.

After a day of shopping, I would have stopped at Ye House of John L. Bailey for a butterscotch sundae and perhaps, some butterscotch kisses for my family, before heading home.

One of the places I suspect a lady could not have entered at that time was the Putnam Pool Hall and Bowling Alley but it was already in business. Come visit and thumb through the pages of the Mercantile Review and see which shops you might have visited if you had the opportunity!

Adjacent to the downtown area were other businesses that whet my appetite. I wanted to sample J.B. Pahula’s bread – he made a thousand loaves a day. He only sold Vienna and Sicilian bread but obviously served a lot of households. The bakery was located at 263 Water Street. Hot from the oven, I might have added some of Wagner's sausage – Robert Wagner, the sausage manufacturer, had been in Fitchburg for ten years and had opened his building at 132 Kimball Street in 1910. He sold frankfurters, sausages and bologna - he only sold Vienna and Sicilian bread but obviously served a lot of households. The bakery was located at 263 Water Street.

WH Ritter Floral Shop, located at 70 Main Street, had already been in business for ten years in 1912. Ritter was a wise businessman who built his hot houses and greenhouses on Westminster Hill Road so he had a reliable supply of flowers before he opened his shop for business. I think I will stop by and get some cut flowers to decorate the dining room table. We are having guests this evening.

On Thursday, October 9 at 6:30 p.m. 125 people gathered in the George Wallace Exhibit Hall to celebrate the premiere of Judith Lindstedt's docufilm about the pink plastic lawn flamingo and its creator, Don Featherstone. The audience was flamboyantly arrayed in shades of the bright pink color associated with the flamingos. Each person was given a raffle ticket when they arrived. Most attendees left with one of several gifts – pink plush flamingos, flamingo drink cozies, and beach flip flops with flamingo designs.

Don and his wife Nancy, who is also featured in the film, were both in attendance. Nancy supplied many of the flamingo decorations in the front window display designed by Katrina Brown. Nancy also brought the refreshments – luscious red velvet, pound cake and sugar free cupcakes that were served with apple cider. Don and Nancy were dressed alike in chartreuse jackets with pink flamingos – Don wore his over a bright pink shirt with a dark green tie and Nancy wore hers over a pink dress. As described in the film, Nancy makes all of their outfits which always have matching fabric.

Donald Featherstone is a long time Fitchburg resident whose flamingo was first created in 1957, while he was working for Union Products in Leominster. Hugely popular in the 1960’s, the decorative plastic lawn sculpture experienced a dramatic resurgence in sales and popularity during the 1980’s, as part of the 50’s-influenced “New Wave” styles. More recently, Featherstone’s pink flamingo was featured as a character in the animated Disney film “Gnomeo & Juliet,” the character was named “Featherstone”, after its inventor. The pink flamingo lawn sculptures continue to be produced by a Fitchburg company, who purchased the copyright in 2010. The flamingos created by Featherstone are always sold as pairs. Look closely and you will see that there is a male identified by his longer neck and a female identified by her shorter neck.

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For information on Featherstone’s Flamingo, Pink and Proud: written by Shirley Wagner

Thank You To All Of The People Who Contributed Time And Effort To This Newsletter:

Simone Blake, Katrina Brown, Joy Contois, Kathy Flynn, Cindy Jones, Susan Nawarre, Megan Provencial, Charles Sternainolo, And Shirley Wagner!

Written by: Shirley Wagner

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