When the great Fitchburg industrialist, Alvah Crocker built the railroad from Fitchburg to Boston in 1845, the city's population began to double, and factory production increased dramatically generating a huge growth in business. Paper, textiles, machinery, tools, and guns were just some of the products loaded onto the trains each day and sent to all parts of the country. These thriving companies began to draw many people to Fitchburg on a regular basis to conduct their business. The people came by horse, wagon and, now more conveniently, by the train. Many required overnight accommodations. The American House hotel helped fulfill those needs.

In 1846, Deacon David Boutelle tore down his small inn and tavern and built the American House on what is now the easterly corner of Blossom and Main Streets. The five-story, brick structure consisted of a lobby, a dining room and a kitchen on the first floor and four floors above with rooms and baths to accommodate the guests. Also on the first floor were several small shops fronting the hotel that looked onto Union Station Depot.

Within eight years, Boutelle sold the American House. The new owner expanded the building with an addition that brought it further down Main to the corner of Day Street. The new space included extra rooms for guests and rooms for salesmen to display their goods. It had a new tavern, hotel offices and a grand ballroom on the third floor. They also added a new road to the back stables off Day Street where the horses and wagons could be kept.

The fashionable hotel became the social center of Fitchburg with dining, dancing and civic events. In the winters, they provided sleigh rides that ended with people gathering to finish their evenings around the great fireplaces within. In 1899, the Cummings Theater was built on the Blossom Street side to provide further entertainment for the guests and city residents.

Many famous people came to the American House. Ulysses S. Grant, Thomas Edison, Henry David Thoreau, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Ralph Waldo Emerson were among those who came to speak at Fitchburg City Hall and spent the night at the hotel.

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Gone but Not Forgotten... The American House (cont...)
Throughout its one-hundred and seven year history, the hotel overcame many fires and many changes in ownership. Among the later owners were L. W. Cummings, for whom the Cummings theater was named, and Raymond Dwyer, owner of the Hotel Raymond, who became proprietor in 1934. Dwyer oversaw the complex until 1952 when its doors were finally closed. The American House was sold a few years later. It was razed, and Roger’s, a clothing store for women was built on the original site.
In 2013, the Fitchburg Historical Society was given two American House Guest Registers that cover April 1870 to April 1871. They both show the signatures of their guests and where they traveled from. As you look through these registers, you can see beautifully written names. They capture the authenticity of those people who passed through our town 143 years ago, leaving their autographs behind for us to enjoy and wonder about...

Written by: Kathleen Flynn

Remembering Fitchburg Through Postcards
In 2014, the Collections Committee was pleased to accept the Charles (Chip) Lavoie collection of Fitchburg memorabilia, which his wife Barbara donated in his memory. The collection includes over 300 Fitchburg postcards that Chip found and organized.
Chip understood the history of postcards so he knew that postcards got a boost in popularity when they were placed on sale at the Colombian Exposition in 1893. From 1893 to 1898, in the United States, there were both governmental printed postcards that cost a penny to mail and souvenir postcards that were privately printed and cost two cents to mail. Writing was not permitted on the address side of the card so the earliest postcards were sent with either no message or with a short message on the front of the card. Postcards were originally printed in Germany which had superior lithographic techniques. Local newsdealers could send photos to be printed and sold in their stores. Two of the Fitchburg newsdealers whose names appear on postcards in 1905 were G.W. Porter and W. W Burnap.
In 1898, Congress passed the Private Mailing Card Act which reduced the price of mailing the privately printed cards to a penny. Chip’s postcard collection includes a few of the Private Mailing Cards. One of these is a black and white card of the Boulder, Summit of Mount Rollstone. This particular card is fascinating not only because of the image of the Boulder but also because the postal marks on the back show that it was sent from Sterling, Mass. at 8 a.m. on October 5, 1903 and received by the Lynn Post Office at 11:30 a.m. on the same day! Mail traveled by train at this time. Probably, the recipient of the post card received it in the afternoon delivery.
Since this is a Private Card, there is only the address of the recipient on the back of the card. On the front is a short note written by the sender, identified as Susie E.K. Susie tells Miss White that she did not leave Saco,...

(continued on page 3)
**Remembering Fitchburg Through Postcards** (cont...) 

Maine in time to stop in Lynn. Instead she suggests that “Mama and I would like you to come here. The latch string is always out.” This phrase meant that Miss White was always a welcome visitor although it also referred to how doors were opened and closed at that time.

The Golden Age of Postcards in the United States was 1907-1915. The establishment of the Rural Free Delivery system in 1902 allowed relatives and friends, living in the countryside or the cities, to keep in touch with one another. In 1907, the divided back postcard was introduced. Now, messages could be written on the left hand side of the back which made postcards easier to use for correspondence. The postal system was very efficient and well used. The annual report for the US Post Office for 1908 estimated that seven hundred million postcards were mailed in the United States between July 1, 1907 and June 30, 1908.

Americans were also postcard collectors in the late 19th and early 20th century. Postcard albums featuring both local postcards, postcards from friends and postcards from places people visited were displayed in homes and shown to guests. Special albums were created just for this purpose.

Chip’s postcard collection is arranged so that photographs of the same areas of Fitchburg are near one another. Sometimes he has black and white postcards which are face to face with colorized postcards of the same photograph. One example of this is a horse and buggy driving up Nichols Street to the Burbank Hospital near Blossom Street. Another example is the Moses Rock at Coggshall Park. The black and white postcard of this was sent in 1905. The colorized version was never used.

Postcards are an interesting way to remember Fitchburg at different moments in history. Turning the pages of Chip’s binder is a walk through the city – Main Street is depicted with its shops, theaters, churches and its residents walking, riding the trolleys or driving in cars. The architectural beauty of the city - its hotels, its governmental buildings, its factories and its train depot – is well represented. Stop by to see the Chip Lavoie postcard collection and reminisce about the city’s history!

Written by: Shirley Wagner
Ice Harvesting in Fitchburg

Ice harvesting was a necessity in Fitchburg, indeed throughout New England. Home refrigerators were not common until almost 1940, although ice boxes and home delivery satisfied the needs of most people much earlier. Many people over age 70 still remember block ice home delivery and iceboxes that were considered a part of home furnishings. Today those ice boxes command high prices at antique stores.

Block ice was cut at local ponds and lakes from late January to early March. When ice was clear and a foot deep, men gathered to mark ice fields into channels then cut each channel into 20 X 28 blocks, and hauled the blocks to an ice house for storage and use until the following January. Each block weighed about 250 pounds and was stacked in community or private business ice houses between hay for insulation. Large businesses shipped huge ice blocks onto ships in Boston headed for the tropics or India. But most Fitchburg ice was kept for use in local areas.

Locations of Fitchburg Ice-Cutting Ponds and Storage Houses

Nichols Pond, located near the corner of Drepanos Drive and Nichols Road on the grounds of Burbank Hospital, was harvested yearly, despite the pond’s small size. Four thousand tons of ice were harvested at Nichols Pond and used for the large dairy operation of 50 to 60 cattle located at the old hospital farm.

Nichols Pond was owned by C.H. Greene and Company, the largest ice harvesting operation in Fitchburg. They started business in 1864 and continued on until 1955, when Greene’s sons dissolved the company. The first Greene headquarters was on land later used for Crocker Field. To make way for Crocker Field, they later moved to Ashby State Road. They also had a larger pond and ice house at Putts Pond, with ice storage barns that were located near today’s intersection of John Fitch Highway and North Street. Upper Greene Pond harvested about 11 ton of ice yearly and Lower Greene Pond cut approximately 8 ton.

The Greenes are also credited with the founding of the Leominster Ice Company and a second company in Lawrence, Kansas (the city that was founded by about 180 former Fitchburg residents trying to keep Kansas a “free state.”) Mr. Greene not only had an interest in Fitchburg’s anti-slavery cause in Lawrence, Kansas but he was also awarded a medal for assisting yellow fever patients in Memphis, Tennessee according to the Fitchburg Sentinel in 1878. The Fitchburg Railroad carried two carloads of ice to help Memphis patients free of charge.

C.H. Greene also harvested McTaggart’s Pond on Phillips Brook in West Fitchburg. “Using 30 men and four pair of horses” they put out about 10,000 ton of ice yearly, whereas Saima Park Pond averaged 1,000 ton yearly. In January 1914, ice for the public drinking fountains reportedly came from Falulah Reservoir, using approximately 400 tons of ice. One other small Fitchburg supply was yielded by “Ideal Ice Co.” Their facility was owned by the Couture Brothers who had an office in Cleghorn. The Fitchburg ice harvest took care of the refrigeration needs of local citizens for the whole year.

There were local pond cutters, and teams that worked other nearby ponds and had their own ice houses. Sometimes Fitchburg residents got ice from Lake Whalom in Lunenburg. E.A. Stone had an office at 13 Day Street for the Crystal Lake Ice Company. They sometimes cut from Whalom or Putt’s Pond. There is no ice house location identified for “Crystal Lake Ice Co.” but the Normandin Bros. of Cleghorn may have stored their ice. They employed 50 men to cut ice at Parkhill and Notown Ponds. Both these ice dealers are noted in Anthony’s Business Directory of 1892, but offices or ice house addresses are not identified.

Manufactured ice was made in Cleghorn when Mr. and Mrs. Henry Bolduc installed a 25-ton ice manufacturing plant in 1933. By the end of that year they increased production another 25 ton and in 1937 they added another 40-50 ton. J. Andre Guenette bought the ice company from the Bolducs in 1943 and soon increased it to 110-ton maximum capacity with three shifts a day working around the clock. The only other manufacturing facility was that of Leominster Ice Co. originally founded by C.H. Greene.
Ice Harvesting in Fitchburg (cont...)

Philip Whitney conducted ice harvesting programs for public and students. His 1998 training package on ice harvesting is included in the manuscript collection of the Fitchburg Historical Society. Phil described his process for calculating ice production in Fitchburg. “These figures are obtained by taking the surface acres of water times 43,500 square feet times 50 lbs. per sq. ft. divided by 2000. The weight of the ice is reduced from the normal cubic foot weight and the figures are rounded off allowing for coves, inlets, outlets, etc. To envision the storage area required, an ice house 30’ X 100’ X 35’ high would hold 2,600 ton; 50’ X 200’ X 30’ high would hold 7,500 ton; and 100’ X 500’ X 30’ high would hold 38,000 ton of ice.”

- Ideal Ice Co., Fitchburg-------------------1,100 ton
- Whalom Lake, Lunenburg----------------109,000 ton
- Upper Greene Pond, Fitchburg-----------11,000 ton
- Lower Greene Pond, Fitchburg------------8,000 ton
- Putt’s Pond, Fitchburg-------------------4,000 ton
- McTaggart’s Pond, West Fitchburg-------10,000 ton
- Saima Park, Fitchburg--------------------1,000 ton

Resources used:
- Ice Cutting Demonstration, Stonewall Farm, Keene, NH, Jan. 2001
- Ice House Trolley Tour, Fitchburg Historical Society and Phil Whitney, Jan. 2001
- Paper on Ice Harvesting and Tour, Phil Whitney, Files of Fitchburg Historical Society.
- Fitchburg Sentinel, various issues and ads

Written by: Joy Contois

Stop the Presses!

As this newsletter went to press, we learned that we have received a matching grant of $19,000 from the Massachusetts Cultural Council Cultural Facilities Fund in order to install air conditioning and dehumidification in the Lowe Library, Wallace Exhibition Hall and the ground floor file storage. This means that it will be much more comfortable to visit the Historical Society and research during the summer, while helping us to keep our collections at appropriate temperatures and humidity levels. We will keep you informed of our progress on this welcome update to our headquarters.

Welcome to the Board: Kay Alverson-Hillman

Kay Alverson-Hillman is a recently retired teacher and department head from the Lunenburg School system, having taught Spanish and History at the high school, 1972-1980, and 1992-2014. While raising their 3 children, she previously taught part-time at Notre Dame Prep, Fitchburg, and Fitchburg High School, 1988-1992. She holds an undergraduate degree from SUNY at Potsdam, a graduate degree from University of Buffalo and a CAGS from Fitchburg State University. Kay served on the Fitchburg School Committee, 1993-98, and was a member of the Fitchburg High School Building Committee. She resides with her husband, Tim, in their historic house on “Crocker Hill.”

Kay Alverson-Hillman es una profesora y jefa del departamento de lenguas extranjeras recién jubilada del Sistema de Educación de Lunenburg, enseñando español e historiología a la escuela secundaria, 1972-80, y, 1992-2014. Mientras estaba criando a sus tres hijos, enseñó a tiempo parcial al colegio Notre Dame, Fitchburg, y la escuela secundaria de Fitchburg, 1988-92. Se graduó de SUNY Potsdam con su licenciatura, la Universidad de Buffalo con su maestría y la Universidad de Fitchburg con su CAGS. Sirvió con el Comité de las Escuelas de Fitchburg, 1993-98, y fue miembro del Comité de la Construcción de las Escuelas durante esa época. Vive con su esposo, Tim, en su casa en “Crocker Hill.”
Letter from the Director

Since the Fitchburg Historical Society moved into its new Main Street home, we have been able to create special exhibitions because of a generous grant from the George R. Wallace Foundation. Last year, we drew people from Fitchburg, New England and across the U.S. with a ground-breaking exhibition of Iver Johnson bicycles from private collectors and the Historical Society’s own collection.

This year, we will present a new Wallace Exhibition in April: “Law and Justice in Fitchburg”, which focuses on new additions to the collection from Fitchburg’s Worcester County Superior Courthouse (also known as the old Elm Street Courthouse.) It will also include contemporary photos by Charles Sternaimolo and Eric Baird, and stories of those whose paths crossed in one of Fitchburg’s most beautiful Victorian buildings.

After all, the courtroom is where private events go public. The story is told: stories of justice and injustice, stories of guilt and innocence. People from all walks of life make their way to the courthouse and take their part in the story: criminals try to defend themselves, ordinary people sit in the jury box trying to determine the truth, attorneys wax eloquent and judges preside above.

Lurid stories, funny stories, true stories, misleading stories – these tales are coin of the realm for the people who walk through the courthouse doors every morning.

I hope you will plan to join us on Thursday, April 30, from 4:30 to 7:00 p.m. to celebrate some of those stories. We will host some of Fitchburg’s legal minds, who will share Stories from the Bar: a casual, behind the scenes look at everyday life in the courthouse during the years when everyone – from the petty to the powerful – starred in courtroom dramas right here in Fitchburg.

This fundraiser welcomes spring with some after-work fun: a cocktail hour with Fitchburg legal luminaries sharing the untold stories from the cloakroom, sidebar and the local watering hole. It’s a fun chance to get behind the scenes with Judges Andre Gelinhas and Ed Reynolds, and a few other special guests. Tickets are $50 and will support our collections storage and care in our new headquarters.

We will mail out invitations, but if yours goes astray, we will be using many different media to get the word out. We publish this newsletter four times per year, but we are now going to institute an additional way to learn about our events and news stories: with an email newsletter that we plan to mail out approximately once a month. Please write me at welcome@fitchburghistoricalsociety.com or visit our website to sign up. Plus, learn about our Facebook presence and activities by reading Katrina Brown’s article on page 7 of this newsletter.

As you see, as we ramp up for the busy spring and summer seasons here at the Historical Society, we are opening the doors wide, and inviting you to join us and help discover new, exciting stories from Fitchburg’s unique history.

Susan Navarre, Executive Director

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Fitchburg’s History Now on Social Media

History is always happening. Even when the weather keeps us indoors, we at the Society like to stay active and involved in historical conversations via Facebook.

Our Fitchburg Historical Society Facebook page gives us a social media space where we can be visible and informative around the clock. With the ability to post updates about our facilities and what we have planned on a particular day at society (in real time and with greater reach), we feel that much more connected to our audience. This is how we have been able to communicate special hours, drawing more people out to events with same-day reminders.

Posting photographs of the merchandise we sell in our gift shop on Facebook has generated a lot of interest among our viewers. Not an hour after posting photos of John Chittick’s most recent calendar, we had four individuals come in to the society to purchase it. They all cited the social media update as the reason they knew about it so quickly. So, Facebook is actually bringing people through our doors to see what’s new in the gift shop. Word of mouth has always been wonderful and this brings it to a whole new level.

On Facebook, we’ve been hearing from local history followers as well as our international audiences. A large international conversation took place about the tapestry we had on display in our exhibit hall window in October. The Fitchburg Art Museum gave us a painted tapestry that was believed to belong to a Finnish congregation in Fitchburg… but nobody knew which one. Posting about it on Facebook got history lovers talking about their ideas and coming forth with any information they had on the tapestry. We are still trying to solve the mystery but it was such fun to see the buzz of people talking about it from here to Helsinki!

In some cases, sharing a need or interest in a particular collection will actually lead to new acquisitions for the Society. The Felix Leger collection, from his service in the First Infantry during World War II, is a great example of this. When Rod Leger, who lives in Texas but follows Fitchburg on Facebook, heard that we were having a display of veterans’ uniforms this past November for Veteran’s Day, he was inspired to ship his own complete collection - It includes full uniform, pilot’s helmet, memorabilia from the Nuremburg trials, scrapbooked news articles and objects relating to his father Felix J. Leger, of Fitchburg. It was a heartwarming experience to receive these items and accept them into our collection. You can imagine our delight when relatives of Rod’s still living locally visited us on Veteran’s Day to see those same materials displayed as part of the exhibition. (By the way, we are planning to show a larger selection from the collection within the year.)

There is also a Facebook Group, called Fitchburg Historical Society (begun by Anne O’Connor) that has grown to include 453 members. By joining, members get a social experience and can converse about Fitchburg’s history - without ever leaving the house. You can also see what we are doing by going to our website, Twitter, and Instagram. They are all great ways to supplement your Historical Society membership. Maybe you are just curious about ways to be connected to Fitchburg History and stay in the loop about Society happenings - our group is here for you.

Written by: Katrina Brown

Remembering Henry A. Burnham, Jr.

In April, 2014, Henry A. Burnham, Jr. passed away after a long illness. Henry came to Fitchburg in 1963 to take over as the President and CEO of Fitchburg Federal Savings Bank, a position he held until his retirement in 1989.

Henry’s life was a testament to the history of his time. He served in the US Army’s Combat Engineers as a mine sweeper during World War II and was at the invasion of Normandy. He remained in service to his country in the Massachusetts National Guard and was re-activated during the Korean War in the 3rd Infantry.

Living in Fitchburg, Henry was an active member of the community, serving as President of the Rotary Club, a member of the Masons and a supporter and friend of the Fitchburg Historical Society. He participated in the 1994-95 endowment campaign for the Society and appreciated the generosity of Fitchburg contributors. During the 2008 Capital Campaign, Henry made a bequest of $25,000. The Fitchburg Historical Society thanks him for his friendship, his generosity and his commitment to the preservation of the history of Fitchburg.

Written by: Shirley Wagner
Save The Date

“Fitchburg’s Italian Americans and Assimilation”
Presentation by Fitchburg State University historian Teresa Thomas - April 2, 2015 at 5:30 p.m.

Evoking Eleanor: The art, life and legacy of FAM founder Eleanor Norcross
Begins Thursday April 9, 2015, at Fitchburg Art Museum
Exhibition includes loans from the Fitchburg Historical Society.

Law and Justice in Fitchburg Exhibition
Fitchburg’s Worcester County Superior Courthouse - Supported by the Wallace Foundation

Stories from the Bar
The Unwritten History of Fitchburg’s Legal Traditions
Special event: Thursday, April 30, 2015, 4:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Tickets: $50

Hidden Treasures of Fitchburg
Tours of Christ Church Episcopal and the House of Grace and Restoration
Saturday, May 16, 2015 Times: TBA. Meet at the churches
For more information, visit: www.freedomsway.org and look for “Hidden Treasures Weekend”

Check our web calendar at fitchburghistoricalsociety.org for our calendar of events!
Events are held at 781 Main Street, unless otherwise specified.