Fitchburg High’s Basketball Team of 1923

Fitchburg High School won the national championship in 1926, and sometimes the story of that team overshadows the extraordinary team that played in 1923. Of 21 games during the regular season, they lost only 4 times and won every home game. The class book complains on March 12, “The referee knew how to play the game, it seems; the boys won, however.” Later readers can infer that the writer thought that the referees’ decisions were unfair.

1923 was also a notable year because the Fitchburg team twice roundly defeated the Leominster team. During one of the games, there was a fight on the court that led to a broken tooth for a Leominster player. On Saturday, March 10, the Fitchburg Sentinel reported that the Leominster team captain, Barrett, had been playing aggressively all night when he crashed his elbow against the eye of Fitchburg player Erwin Beach “with force enough to be heard several feet away.” The referee did not see the hit, and after a moment’s hesitation, Beach “turned around and swung his left fist right at Barret’s jaw. Barrett rose into the air and then slumped to the floor while blood flowed from his mouth and one of his teeth dropped out.” That blow was seen by the referee, and Beach was kicked out of the game. Barrett was sufficiently dazed that he left the game, too.

The paper reported that the crowd “took the incident as a matter of course. There was no excitement, no jeers, no cheers.” (Fitchburg won the game, 47 to 6.) But the violent incident was a turning point for the rivalry between the two cities. The Leominster paper soon filled with “a bitter tirade against Beach” and Fitchburg, according to the March 24 Sentinel. Further, Leominster Principal Irving Smith wrote to the organizers of the regional basketball tournament to protest against Beach being allowed to play. The Fitchburg school committee regarded Smith’s action as “underhanded and an insult.” Fitchburg’s High School athletics were run by a committee of alumni called the athletic association: its executive... (continued on pg. 2)
committee immediately voted to cancel the remaining basketball games against Leominster and to invite a different team to play football at the annual Thanksgiving game in the fall. The Sentinel noted that the Thanksgiving game was a moneymaker for both schools, which would make it easy for Fitchburg to find a new opponent. (The relationship was patched up enough that the 1924 Thanksgiving football game between the traditional rivals was played, after all.)

The New England championship tournament was played at Tufts, where Fitchburg began by winning two nail-biters. In the first game – played against Newport, Rhode Island - they rallied from a 16 to 11 deficit, scoring seven unanswered points and winning 18 to 16. The next game featured higher scoring, and Fitchburg ultimately pulled ahead to defeat Montpelier, Vermont 24 to 14.

They played Northampton in the regional tournament. Northampton was leading when they committed a foul in the last 90 seconds of play. Fitchburg took advantage and pulled ahead for a 21 to 20 win, and the regional championship. The class book exulted on March 28, “The basketball boys are going to Chicago. Fitchburg is certainly in the limelight.”

They then progressed to Chicago, on April 4, 1923, for a first-round win over Eatonville, Washington, where Fitchburg took an early lead and never gave it up. According to a Sentinel article on April 12, 1923, Fitchburg was hampered in the tournament by the rougher games, illegal tactics and looser officiating that was common in western and midwestern games. The Sentinel quotes tournament attendees as saying, “that if the same strict officiating in effect at Tufts was in vogue in Chicago, the Fitchburg team would have been seen in the finals.”

Instead, in the second round of the national tournament, Fitchburg struggled against the Osage, Iowa team. They rallied to a two-point lead at the half. Ultimately, they were badly outplayed in the second half, scoring 6 points to Iowa’s 15. Still, the team would live up to its motto, “Bringing home the BACON” three years later, by winning the 1926 national championship.

This month, many of us will be turning our attention to the XXIII Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang, South Korea to see who will be bringing home the gold, silver and bronze medals. The USA, and eighty-eight other countries will be vying “for the gold” from February 9th-25th. These Winter games trigger memories of a few of Fitchburg’s finest athletes who have participated in Winter Olympic competitions and of one who was able to bring back a special souvenir.

Most people remember Arthur M. Longsjo, Jr. as an Olympic cyclist, but he was an Olympic speed skater first. Art grew up skating on the ponds in Fitchburg, and he won 9 out of 11 national speed skating events to qualify for the 1956 Winter Olympics in Cortina, Italy. Later that summer he competed on the American Olympic Cycling Team in Melbourne, Australia, making him the first American athlete to compete in both the Summer and Winter Olympics in the same year.

Raymond Jude LeBlanc was born in Fitchburg in 1964, and spent much of his youth playing hockey. After graduating from Monty Tech where he starred as goalie, Ray went to Ontario for two years to play junior hockey before he turned pro. In 1992, he was a member of the USA Men’s Olympic Hockey Team, where he played goaltender in eight games at Albertville, France. Ray and his team lost 6-1 in the bronze medal game against Czechoslovakia. LeBlanc continued to play hockey after the Olympics until 2000 when he retired and moved to Florida after twenty years on the ice. However, Ray has great reason to be cheering on this year’s men’s US Hockey Team, because his son Chris will be playing offense for Team USA! Chris was a 2004 graduate of Cushing Academy and currently plays for the Hershey Bears in the AHL.

Erika Lyn Lawler was born in Fitchburg in 1987 and attended Cushing Academy (2001-2005) where she too, was a star on the ice hockey rink. Erika won the Bette Davis Award at Cushing Academy three times for being the top athlete in her class. Yes, this award...

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**Fitchburg’s Winter Olympians (continued from pg. 2)**

is named after the famous actress who was an alum of this prestigious local prep school. After Cushing, 4’ 11” Erika won a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin, where she and her teammates brought home three NCAA Championships (2006, 2007, and 2009). After graduating, Erika tried out and made the 2010 US Women’s Olympic Hockey Team. She and her teammates brought home Olympic Silver Medals from Vancouver, B.C. after losing 2-1 to Canada in the final game. Erika hoped to repeat her luck in 2014 in Sochi, Russia, but an injury followed by surgery kept her from the try-outs. Last fall, after a five year hiatus, Erika surprised the hockey world by signing with the Manhattan Riveters of the National Women’s Hockey League. Erika has also signed on as an Olympic (studio) analyst with NBC. She will be giving her input on the Olympic hockey games from PyeongChang when she’s not playing for the Riveters (currently 8-0).

There are many more reasons to watch the competitions as fifty-eight New England athletes will strive to make their dreams of playing and winning in Olympic competitions come true.

Good Luck, Chris!

Written by: Kathleen Flynn

**Women Entrepreneurs in Fitchburg in 1890**

Throughout history, women have found ways to support themselves and their families and maintain their households. Sometimes the women were widows left to support themselves. Sometimes they were unmarried women who supported themselves or contributed to the support of their families. Sometimes they were married women also contributing to the support of their families. In 1890, we have identified women who were known for the businesses they owned, some of which catered to women consumers, others providing services to the general population.

Five of these women were prominent enough to be included in the 1890 publication, *Leading Businessmen of Fitchburg and Vicinity*. Here they are, in order of their appearance in this booklet.

A.C. Fuller, a native of Fitchburg, sold ladies furnishings and fancy goods. She also taught piano forte and organ while carrying on her late husband Simeon’s business selling musical instruments. Abbie Fuller had rooms at 56 Oliver Street.

Mrs. T.J. Butler, another widow, was an undertaker who sold coffins and caskets at 154 Water Street and resided at 156 Water Street. She also was responsible for selling the burial plots at St. Bernard’s Cemetery. In 1890 she had been in business for 14 years, 12 at the Water Street address. Katie Butler’s display ad in the 1890 Directory indicates that she sold bibles, prayer books, rosaries, statuary and other religious articles as well as pictures and picture frames. She also framed pictures as a service.

Mrs. L.M. Babbitt was a manufacturer of human hair goods. She also cut women’s hair and styled it for weddings and parties. She rented wigs at reasonable prices and sold fancy toiletries. Mrs. Babbitt moved to Fitchburg from Marlboro, Connecticut in 1866. In 1890 her business had been located at 199 Main Street for 24 years. She had rooms at 58 Laurel Street.

Mrs. N.E. Hunt sold fashionable millinery at 241 Main Street, beginning in 1886, when she moved to Fitchburg from Corinth, Maine. Her shop featured millinery from New York, London and Paris and she employed eight assistants in 1890. She boarded at Drury House, which was located at 144 Main Street.

Mrs. A.B. Jacquith’s shop was located at 194 Main Street. She dealt in fancy goods, ladies’ furnishings and infants’ clothing. She also did embroidery and fancy stamping. Originally from Jaffrey, New Hampshire, Mrs. Jacquith opened her business at 195 Main Street in 1880 and also boarded at Drury House.

The Fitchburg City Directories provide additional information on women entrepreneurs and women who were self-employed in Fitchburg in the 1890s. In the Business Directory section, there are alphabetized lists of business and services individuals may seek and many women can be found here.

Some of the businesses are unique. For example, Mrs. H.F. Smith is first listed as a Clairvoyant Physician in 1890 and then as a clairvoyant through 1901. Unlike the women...*(continued on pg. 4)*
Women Entrepreneurs in Fitchburg in 1890 (continued from pg. 3)

in *Leading Businessmen*, Mrs. Smith’s husband Henry was living: he was identified as a bread peddler. Their home was at 71 Central Street and this is also listed as her business address. Another unique listing was for Mrs. M.J. Davis, a Christian Scientist whose business and home were at 355 ½ Main Street.

Eight women are identified as artists in 1890. These include Mrs. S.(ybil)A. Fairbanks, Mrs. H.T. Barden, Mrs. A.M. Farrar, Mrs. J.W. Green, Miss E.(leanor) A. Norcross, Mrs. Adelaide L. Sawyer, Mrs. Inez D. Spooner and Miss Susie E. Stewart. Eleanor Norcross donated the funding that created the Fitchburg Art Museum and several of her works are exhibited there. The FHS owns several of Sybil Fairbanks’ paintings.

There is one woman – Mrs. Ellen Phelan of 179 Water Street – listed among the bakers in 1890. There were four women grocers: Julia Fletcher at 269 Water Street; Mrs. Mary A. Marks, 254 Water Street; Ellen McMahon, 42 River Street; and Mrs. J.J. Shea, 30 Granite Street. Ellen McMahon also sold confectionaries and fruits. Julia Fletcher and Mary Marks were both widows. Mrs. Shea’s husband worked at Parkhill Manufacturing.

While Mrs. N.E. Hart probably had the largest and most elite millinery shop in Fitchburg in 1890, Mary L. Barker had a millinery shop at 198 Main Street, Miss M.E. Holgate was located at 166 Main Street and Mrs. S.C. Stanley and Miss A. E. Trenholm shared space at 184 Main Street. (Millinery is the manufacture and sale of hats; hats used to be a more common accessory than they are today.) Mrs. Stanley owned a home on North Street while each of the single women boarded or roomed.

While many women would have continued to make their own dresses in 1890, there are 36 dressmakers listed in the city directory that year. Twelve of these women had shops on Main Street. Miss K.J. Maney was at 176 Main Street, Mrs. M.J. F Allen was at 188 Main Street, Miss R.I. Simpson and Miss Mary E. Westcott shared a shop at 191 Main Street, Miss Mary Weld was at 207 ½ Main Street, Mary and Alice Noonan had a shop at 217 Main Street, Jennie Moriarty and Agnes LeBlanc were located at 239 ½ Main Street, Miss Jennie Taylor was at 294 Main Street, Mrs. Della Page was at 333 Main Street and Miss Bridget Murphy was at 349 ½ Main Street. Additional dressmakers are identified in the individual listings, which also identify the homes where the women lived or boarded. Nichols and Frost, a department store located at 152 Main Street, also provided dress-making services and employed female clerks and dressmakers.

There was one woman, Mrs. M.H. Wright, who ran a corset parlor at 368 Main Street in 1890. M.T. Greenwood, at 72 Grove Street, made and sold furs. Mrs. Annie McLane Sawyer also provided hair dressing services to women at 180 Main Street.

Women who provided nursing services in 1890 were listed. Three nurses were single and eight were identified as “Mrs.” Elizabeth Worthington and her husband boarded together but Mary Swift, Elizabeth Starr and Sarah Watson were identified as widows. The other women identified as “Mrs.” may have been widows or may have no longer resided with their husbands.

Nine women ran boarding houses in Fitchburg in 1890. These included Mary A. Bagley at 24 Pritchard, Mrs. A.H. Bickford, 21 North Street, Mrs. Sarah E. Clapp, 14 North Street, Mrs. H. Coggswell, 33 Sanborn, Miss Mary Collins, 80 Main Street, Esther Royce, 104 Main Street, Mrs. Rose Finn, 24 Day Street, Mrs. J.E. Welch, 12 Cherry Street,... (continued on pg. 5)
and Mrs. E.R. Young, 17 Newton Place. Other women may have taken in boarders or rented out rooms for extra cash without having an identified boarding house business.

Women teachers are single and listed in the individual listings in the City Directory. Music teachers had a separate listing in the Business Directory. There were nine of these in 1890 and some were married, while others were single. These included Miss M.G. Carey at 31 Clinton, Miss Kate Chaffin at 10 Oak, Mrs. Almira Chase, 10 Cottage Square, Miss L.K. Farrar, 41 Ashburton, Mrs. A.C. Fuller, 56 Oliver Street, Miss Mahoney, 85 Lunenburg, Miss Sarah O’Connor, 48 Day Street, Mrs. Lucy Conn Potter and Mrs. A.G. Wright.

The high quality of music instruction in Fitchburg was noted in the national music press in the late 1800’s as being an important part of the city’s lively classical music scene.

The Fitchburg Directory helps us develop a better understanding of how women made a living in 1890. The Business Directory provides businesses and services owned by women, while the individual listings identify women who are employed by companies, are bookkeepers, are cooks or waiters, or are clerks in stores or at the Post Office. By reading the directories carefully, we can develop a better sense of the large number of women who worked outside the home in Fitchburg in the 19th Century.

Written by: Shirley Wagner

Teachers’ Resources for Women’s History Month

The Fitchburg Historical Society has been keeping an eye out for the history of Fitchburg’s women, who are sometimes less talked about in the earliest histories. Two of our researchers, Cindy Jones and Shirley Wagner, created an entire ALFA course at Fitchburg State University on the history of women in Fitchburg.

They have shared their research with us in the form of four PowerPoint presentations on Women in Fitchburg History: Politicians and Activists, the Philanthropists, Women in the Arts, and Women of Letters. They feature such big names as politicians Elizabeth Stanton, Mary Whitney and Lisa Wong; social leaders Fay Bigelow Crocker and the other Crocker women; artists Alice Mason, Stella Forrest, and Eleanor Norcross; actors and directors Miriam Lehto and Martha Daly; authors Lucy Thurston, Caroline Mason, and Doris Kirkpatrick; and librarian Alice B. Cushman. And there are lots more.

We think it’s a wonderful resource, and we are happy to share it with local educators and students, to help you with integrating more local history or women’s history into your projects and curriculum. Just call us at 978-345-1157 or email us at welcome@fitchburghistoricalsociety.com and we will get a copy to you.

Also, if you are an educator, historian or member who has created a similar kind of teaching tool that you would like to share with us and with our members, we would love to hear from you, too!

A Winner!

Congratulations to Ann Hedley, who won a copy of Philip Jordan’s book, A History of the Fitchburg Fire Department. We pass along our heartfelt thanks to the author Philip Jordan, who very generously donated a copy of this rare and extraordinary book.
Welcome to new Board members!

The Fitchburg Historical Society held its Annual Meeting on Wednesday, December 6, 2017 at 5:30 p.m., after the September meeting was rescheduled to allow more of the Board and Officers to attend.

After being called to order by President Jay Bry, the membership was addressed by outgoing Vice President Kathy Craigen, who presented the Nominations committee report. Two new board members were proposed: Amy Green and A.J. Tourigny. In addition, Secretary/Clerk Kay Alverson-Hillman was nominated for her second three-year term. They were unanimously elected, as was the slate of officers: President Jay Bry, Vice-President John Bogdasarian, Treasurer James Reynolds and Secretary/Clerk Kay Alverson-Hillman.

A Treasurer’s report was presented by James Reynolds and the audited financial statements handed out to attendees. Retiring Vice-President Kathy Craigen was thanked for her years of service and she was presented with a bouquet of flowers. Then, Executive Director Susan Navarre presented a brief slide show about the Historical Society’s activities through the year, with the Board’s ongoing plans for updating the Historical Society’s Master Plan.

Amy Green was elected for her first 3-year term. Green has been a city councilor representing ward one since 2013, and serving as the Vice President of the City Council since 2015. She is an enthusiastic transfer to Fitchburg, having grown up as a farm girl in Illinois. A graduate of the Bancroft School of Massage Therapy, she is the owner of Back N Touch Wellness Center in Fitchburg, and has produced a weekly TV show on FATV for seven years. She is a volunteer with the City’s Public Works subcommittee and Public Safety subcommittee, and a volunteer with NICE (Neighborhood Improvement through Code Enforcement.) She is also renowned for her baking skills.

A.J. Tourigny is a native of Fitchburg, and a graduate of Monty Tech High School, where he was in ROTC, Student Council and the Honor Society. His B.A. is from The Ohio State University, where he was captain of the varsity pistol team, was honored by the University as a scholar athlete, and was a national champion in pistol shooting. He graduated Summa Cum Laude in Political Science and Government and with a minor in Criminology. Having worked as a legislative intern at the Mass State House, he now works as the Chief of Staff for the Mayor of Fitchburg.

Board Secretary/Clerk Kay Alverson-Hillman was re-elected for her second three-year board term. She is a recently retired teacher and department head from the Lunenburg School system. She taught Spanish and History at the high school, 1972-1980, and 1992-2014. She resides with her husband, Tim, in their historic house on “Crocker Hill.” While raising their three children, she taught part-time at Notre Dame Prep, Fitchburg, and Fitchburg High School, from 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 has also served on the Fitchburg School Committee and the Fitchburg High School Building Committee. She also frequently translates texts into Spanish for the Historical Society.
Letter from the Director

When children visit our exhibitions, they help us see them through new eyes. For example, students helping us decorate in November became fascinated by a 1912 typewriter from the Raivaaja office that is on view.

They asked, “Where is the ink? Where’s the power? Where are the letters?” And lots more questions. I had lots of fun showing them the mechanism of a typewriter.

But the conversation got me thinking: the change from mechanical typewriter to electronic keyboard is a huge transition. So now we have started a quest: we are going to collect a few working manual typewriters, and set up a display where the students can type for themselves. They will hear the clack, hear the ding of the bell, and see how a mechanical system works when they push the return lever.

The Fitchburg Historical Society is where they come to learn about mechanical tools and Fitchburg’s history of engineering and producing fine machinery. We provide a fun place for a hands-on learning experience.

Susan Navarre
Save The Date

- **Wednesday, February 28, 10:30 a.m.**
  In Honor of Presidents’ Day
  *Location: Fitchburg Senior Center, 15 Wallace Avenue, Fitchburg.*
  Susan Navarre will speak at the Fitchburg Senior Center about the American Presidents who visited Fitchburg and their experiences here. Free and welcome to the public.

- **Ongoing, through Wednesday, February 28, 2018.**
  **Exhibition: “Fitchburg Immigrant Experience”**
  Learn more about the immigrant effect on Fitchburg and its neighborhoods, as illuminated by new acquisitions in the Fitchburg Historical Society collections. This exhibition is supported by a grant from MassHumanities.

- **Tuesday, March 20, 3:30 – 5:00 p.m.**
  **Talk by Susan Navarre**
  *Location: Fitchburg State University. Presidents’ Hall in the Mazzaferrro Center*
  Executive Director Susan Navarre speaks on a topic in Fitchburg history for Women’s History Month.

- **Thursday, April 12, 2018 at 6:00 p.m.**
  **History talk: “One Hundred Years of Service: To Fitchburg and the World”**
  *Location: Fitchburg Historical Society, 781 Main Street, Fitchburg. 978-345-1157*
  By Bill Lakso, Past President, Lunenburg Historical Society and Past President, Rotary Club of Fitchburg; and Susan Navarre, Executive Director, Fitchburg Historical Society

- **June 18 – August 22, 2018**
  **Exhibition: A generation on wheels**
  Iver Johnson and the Early Days of Sports. Open special hours on Sunday, July 1 for the Longsjo Race and Tuesday, July 3 for the Civic Days Block Party.