In the last few years, we have noticed an increased number of young students and curious adults visiting the Fitchburg Historical Society to learn more about the history of the Underground Railroad in Fitchburg. Many of them had read the book on Shadrach Minkins, and his hair-raising escape from slavery and recapture; others had seen the harrowing movie “12 Years a Slave.” Fitchburg was filled with anti-slavery activists in the years leading up to the Civil War. Central Massachusetts was extremely important in the flight toward freedom for slaves and the political changes that led to the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation.

We have decided to create a resource that will make it easier for historians and interested hobbyists to make full use of our historical records on abolition and the Underground Railroad. With help from a Fitchburg Cultural Council grant, our volunteers have been working on the “Researching the Underground” research guide for nearly a year, and it is being finished as this newsletter is being written. It will be available for free to those visiting the Historical Society and we plan to given them to local educators, too.

To celebrate the creation of this new study guide, we are presenting related letters, newspapers, books, maps and photographs in the exhibition “Researching the Underground”, on view from January 19 to March 9, 2016.

For many communities, it’s difficult to identify the homes that served as waystations for escaped slaves travelling toward freedom in Canada. Ultimately, it was illegal to house or aid these slaves, so nothing was official or public. However, Fitchburg was home to early Abolitionist political groups; that is, groups organized to “abolish” slavery. Ultimately, there were so many local abolitionists that they formed a church specifically to fight slavery: the Trinitarian church.

(Continued on Page 2)
A New Exhibition on the Fight Against Slavery (cont...)

There are veiled references and local traditions, as well as documents recording high-profile Abolitionist families; using these records, the Historical Society is working on a list of possible stops on the Underground Railroad. Records from the Trinitarian church; Abolitionist groups, families like the Snows, Kimballs and Palmers; and Fitchburg homes that sheltered runaways will also be featured in the new exhibition. In addition, we have a number of published slave narratives and other anti-slavery books that will be shown. Finally, we will explain the story of “Bleeding Kansas”, where 30 Fitchburg families went to convert the slave state to freedom…and some died in the process.

Researchers Past and Present

History is kept alive by those who preserve it and by the researchers who return to the same subject over time. As we have done research on abolition, we have been thankful to those who collected artifacts and those who left manuscripts for us to read. The Fitchburg Sentinel has been the major newspaper since 1838 and its articles provide a major resource. Reporters like Andrienne Clark helped kept the history of abolition alive with articles like “Once a Hotbed of Protest” in 1993.

The Fitchburg Historical Society had presentations on “The Fugitive Slave Law and its Workings” by Martha B. Crocker in 1894, “Fitchburg’s Pioneers in Kansas” by Henry A. Goodrich in 1896 and “An Historical Sketch of the Trinitarian Church” by Martha D. Tolman in 1911. William A. Emerson’s Fireside Legends: Incidents, Anecdotes, Reminiscences, etc. published in 1900 and Fitchburg Past and Present published in 1903 identify men and women who were supporters of the anti-slavery movement, the underground railroad, founders of the Trinitarian Church, and the Fitchburg families who moved to Kansas to keep it free from slavery. We know more about Benjamin Snow, Jr.’s role in the abolition of slavery because his daughter Martha Snow Wallace wrote a short sketch entitled “My Father’s House” in 1915. Her brother Francis Snow’s autobiography features photos of the Snow Family and their home.

Each new generation discovers an exciting resource like the Fitchburg Historical Society and the Underground Railroad for itself. We are hoping to make it easy for today’s young historians to build on the work of the past. We want to help them create new scholarship and books on Fitchburg’s role in the fight to end slavery.

Written by: Susan Navarre

Pictured Left: Young woman is Fannie Hooks, daughter of Lewis and Nellie Hooks, FHS class of 1893. Her family is one of the African American families documented in Fitchburg in the 1800’s.

Pictured Above: This is a Moulton photo made from a pre-1850 portrait of Deacon Samuel Crocker, an abolitionist who sheltered fugitive slave Shadrach Minkins when he was in Fitchburg.

Doris Kirkpatrick and Barbara Crocker’s research led to the publishing of The City and the River in 1971. They also wrote the play A Bell for Shadrach which was presented at the Historical Society in 1954 and at the Fitchburg Public Library in 2002. A video of the 2002 performance is available to watch. Students have used the resources of the Society to write papers such as Rick Simmons’ “The Social Reform Movement in Fitchburg: the Trinitarian Church and the Issues of Slavery, Temperance, Women’s Rights and Tobacco Use,” Anthony Gleason’s “A Study of the Freedman’s Society in the City of Fitchburg,” Gary Robert Kozloski’s “Fitchburg Moral Reformers.” In 2015, Erin Primeau’s article on “Slaves Escape to the North” appeared in the May newsletter.

In 2012, Cindy Jones shared a PowerPoint presentation on Shadrach Minkins with Fitchburg teachers. She also has an adaptation of the play “A Bell for Shadrach” with language suitable for middle school students. Shirley Wagner has worked on the annotated bibliography which will be made available to anyone who wants it. Bill Bourbeau has done extensive additional research on the Trinitarian Church as well as research on some of Fitchburg’s early African American families. Kay Hillman is doing in-depth research on the Kimball family, which was active in anti-slavery efforts in Fitchburg and in Kansas. Her neighbor Patrick Westervelt (who recently moved to Fitchburg) is doing additional genealogical research on the Kimball family for the project.

Written by: Shirley Wagner
From Fitchburg to the Met: Metropolitan Museum of Art Curator Alan Priest

Alan Priest was born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts in 1898. One of three sons born to George and Marion (Works) Priest, his father was the owner of C.A. Priest Lumber Company, and they lived quite comfortably on upper Main Street.

Alan often told a story from his childhood about visiting a Chinese laundry in town with his nanny. While they were there picking up her cleaning, Alan recalled being treated very kindly by a Chinese worker who gave him some firecrackers, joss sticks and scenic pictures of China to keep. Sparked by this profound encounter in his young life, Alan became fond and fascinated by all things Chinese. That curiosity took him to Harvard University in 1916, where he studied Art History with an emphasis on Chinese Art.

Following graduation in 1920, Priest remained at Harvard for four more years as an assistant tutor and lecturer in the Fine Arts Department. In 1924, he was invited to China and Japan with the Second Fogg Museum Expedition led by the famous art historian Langdon Warner, whom many say the character “Indiana Jones” was modeled after. Their expedition followed the old silk route from northern China to Kansu in the central region. Along the way, they discovered treasures, studied artifacts and collected artwork for the museum.

In 1925, Priest was awarded a Carnegie Fellowship; the following year a Sachs Fellowship enabled him to continue to stay and travel from Kansu through Turkistan and Siberia. On these adventurous journeys, they would deal with vandals, rivals, forgers, plunderers and other dubious types. The group carried off great works of art from these foreign countries with the justification, common to the period, that they were rescuing and preserving these treasures from further neglect and vandalism.

Alan remained in Peking until 1927. Following his return, he moved to New York in 1928 to become Curator of the Far Eastern Art Department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he served as curator until 1963. He spoke fluent Chinese and became one of the world’s leading experts on Asian Art. Throughout the 1930s, he made several trips to China and Japan where he was able to acquire high quality works of art for the Met. After World War II, he added many more valuable acquisitions from Japan, once the international art market reopened.

Following his retirement in 1963, Priest moved to Kyoto, Japan. There he spent part of his time purchasing artwork for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. Before his death in 1969, it was Alan’s hope to be buried in China, a country that he grew to love dearly. However, when he died, China was closed off to the world by the Communist government. Instead, Alan Priest’s ashes were scattered in the garden near a Buddhist Temple in Kyoto.

Little did the friendly Chinese laundryman ever realize that day, just how much his one gesture of kindness would stimulate a young boy’s mind so profoundly...

Written by: Kathy Flynn

Thanks To All The People Who Contributed Time And Effort To This Newsletter: Katrina Brown, Kathy Flynn, Susan Navarre, Megan Provencial; and Shirley Wagner!
Healing Hands to be Honored and Celebrated

Last spring, to mark the closing of the Superior Court building and to show our thanks for the generous artifacts entrusted to us by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Fitchburg Historical Society presented a Wallace Foundation exhibit Law and Justice in Fitchburg to honor the legal history in Fitchburg. This spring we are proud to announce that we will present our next Wallace Foundation exhibit Healing Hands: Medicine in Fitchburg that will explore the 200 year history of medical practice in our city.

The exhibit, on view from April 4-May 25, 2016, will contain artifacts and stories from our own collections to introduce some of the doctors, nurses and staff, as well as the institutions, education and medical practices that they developed and used during the 19th and 20th centuries while tending to the sick in the hope of making them well again.

The earliest medical history in Fitchburg varies from the innovative – the first use of ether during oral surgery in Massachusetts – to the outdated – “eclectic medicine” – but it all illustrates the city’s role as Worcester County’s professional hub and a center for innovation. For example, one of the earliest doctors to use X-rays for diagnosis was based in Fitchburg: Dr. Curtis Jennings, who established the first radiology department at Burbank Hospital in 1905.

Fitchburg was also an important center for medical education: nurses were trained at the Burbank School of Nursing for generations. For doctors, the Fitchburg Family Residency was created by Dr. Robert A. Babineau, Sr. in 1978. During this time, Burbank Hospital also pioneered new approaches to Emergency Room care and same day surgery.

The Historical Society is also creating free hand-outs for visiting children that will help introduce them to the principles that underlie scientific research and medical practice, while they learn more about Fitchburg history. Copies can be picked up at the Historical Society, or may be requested by calling 978-345-1157.

We will also celebrate Fitchburg’s medical tradition with a fundraiser on Thursday, May 5, 2016. Details will be announced on our website, in our electronic newsletter and in the local press.

Something New for the Collection

This photo just entered our collection this year: it was taken by the prolific Fitchburg photographer Joseph C. Moulton in 1896, and shows the Orin and Florence Lowe family. Moulton is known for his technical excellence and his willingness to embrace the new photo technologies as they were developed. This photo is in very good condition, with rich darks that have not faded. The Lowe ladies are wearing large puffed sleeves that were known as “leg of mutton” sleeves, small tight waists and high collars, all very fashionable in the mid-1890’s. Orin Lowe operated the Lowe Brothers Company at 10 Cushing Street, which advertised “Swift’s dressed beef, Provisions, Produce, Fruit, Butter, Eggs and Cheese.”

The Historical Society is famous for its photography collection, its Civil War records and its information about Crocker-Burbank and other mills. However, we are still hoping to expand our collections in a few new directions. For example, we are hoping to collect more photos and documents relating to Fitchburg’s newer churches, organizations and businesses. Also, we will welcome information about businesses that have closed, before everything has been dispersed. If you would like to donate something for our collections, please drop in, give us a call or send us a quick email message.
You Can Help the Fitchburg Historical Society Thrive. Become a Sustaining Member.

Sustaining members are the lifeblood of any historical society. As a non-profit organization, our finances can be tight and the support of the organization through voluntary donations becomes vital to our survival. Although our budget is rather humble, we never let that limit our vision of what we can accomplish at the Fitchburg Historical Society.

We know you see our requests for support in the mail, maybe all too regularly. Thankfully, many of our members reply with enthusiasm; they hear about the increased number of educational programs being offered here and the dozens of new researchers frequenting our library, and they make the choice to write us a check. With our need for state-of-the-art storage facilities and archival supplies always on the rise, there are big long-term projects that your contribution can fund. You truly can make a big difference!

Many of our members choose the Sustaining Membership and that is because it does exactly that - sustains us. It’s a membership level that reflects their dedication to culture on Main Street. It links their love of Fitchburg with the desire to honor its history.

We need members who feel strongly about preserving Fitchburg’s local history so that it is not lost or forgotten over time. We are blessed with good fortune to have board members, volunteers, community partners and members that are stepping up their annual contribution (membership dues) to the Sustaining level. With each sustaining membership, our organization gains more strength and vision for the future. With their help, we feel we can confidently plan for the development of our exhibition spaces and collections storage. With this big building and our even bigger dreams for it, every little bit makes an enormous difference. Our sustaining members are getting us closer to achieving our vision.

By becoming a Sustaining Member, your membership dues directly enable us to do that future planning and therefore you become a part of our legacy. Your investment in our future is an investment in the future of Fitchburg. Work with us, share your input and ideas with us, help us grow and change to meet the needs of this wonderful community. We will be here: as a resource, an event space, an educational liaison and most of all as a dedicated supporter for our city.

Written by: Katrina Brown and Susan Navarre

Happy New Year and Thanks to all of you who made our December House Tour so successful!

FITCHBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL APPEAL

Yes, I am pleased to contribute to the Annual Appeal of the Fitchburg Historical Society. Please accept my contribution of $_____ to be used for your general operations.

Name: _________________________________________________
Address: ________________________________________________
                                      ________________________________________________
Email: _________________________________________________

☐ I have included a check payable to the Fitchburg Historical Society
☐ Please charge the credit card I have listed below: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard
Card #: __________________________ Exp. Date: _____ CVC: _____

$25.00 provides free research for local students
$50.00 assures clean archival collections storage
$100.00 supports a free local history presentation
$250.00 funds an issue of our newsletter
Letter from the Director

Because our mission covers all aspects of Fitchburg’s history, we love to connect with other Fitchburg organizations to create educational and fun programs. We’ve worked with the schools for years. If you grew up in Fitchburg, you may remember Eleanora West coming to your school dressed in costume with stories of “Fitchburg’s Fabulous Females”. Or, you may have participated in one of our archaeological digs organized for public school students by Joy Contois and exhibited at the Fitchburg Art Museum.

In another show, the art museum exhibited an important lathe from the Historical Society’s collection that was built in 1836 by John and Samuel W. Putnam. What a wonderful way to highlight Fitchburg’s industrial design heritage in a big, roomy gallery. There’s more: just last year, the Historical Society worked closely with FAM artist Anna Schuleit Haber and her team. They researched the history of Fitchburg here in the Arthur Lowe Library of the Fitchburg Historical Society, in order to create their public art essays and designs for the Sentinel and Enterprise. We also worked with curator Mary Tinti in 2015 to lend a selection of Eleanor Norcross photos, artifacts and artworks from our collection to their new exhibition; you can enjoy the beautiful results in the 2016 calendar that the art museum and historical society created together.

I am proud of what my staff and volunteers are accomplishing, as we work with our peers at other cultural organizations to create meaningful experiences of Fitchburg’s proud history for the public. We are building on a 124-year history of scholarship and community leadership. If you are part of that tradition, thank you! (And please keep coming.) If not …. I invite you to become part of our future.

Written by: Susan Navarre

Looking ahead, there is more collaboration in the works: we are continuing our project with the Fitchburg Historical Commission to provide historic house markers for Fitchburg buildings. And this Valentine’s Day, we will provide a display of historic valentines for the tea luncheon at the Fitchburg Senior Center.

This spring, we will be mounting a Wallace Foundation exhibition, Healing Hands, about doctors, nurses, hospitals and medicine in Fitchburg. In it, we will display a timeline on disability history that is being created for us by the Fitchburg Disability Commission. Soon after, we will offer a public event with the Fitchburg Public Library, Freedom’s Way, and the Mass 15th Regiment Re-enactors as part of the region-wide Hidden Treasures weekend on Sunday, May 14.

You will find us contributing historical perspective everywhere. In recent years, we also collaborated with Fitchburg State University on the Fahrenheit 451 Community Read, the “Teaching History” professional development program for teachers, and many more projects. Right now, we are creating a new walking tour of the neighborhood with the North of Main Initiative.

Come visit us!

Fitchburg Historical Society
Hours of Operation
Monday: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Tuesday: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Wednesday: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Catholic Elementary Schools

Not so many years ago, Fitchburg could count six Catholic (parochial) elementary schools, which served the same number of ethnic parishes. The immigrants who built these churches and schools felt it was important to send their children where they would be combining religious training with their education. At that time these schools were free, each staffed by a religious order of nuns whose low salaries could never match their time and talents. Later, fewer of these women were available and the parishes were forced to hire lay teachers and charge tuition. Tuition increases, along with general population shifts and the convenience of neighborhood public schools led to the closing of most parish schools.

The mother church, St. Bernard’s, was established by Irish immigrants on Water Street. It had two schools: the boys’ school was opened on First Street in 1886 and the girls’ in 1891 on Middle Street. Both were combined at the Summer Street location in the sixties.

Immaculate Conception, a French parish, opened its school on Walnut Street in 1894. This parish was responsible for the St. Francis School in South Fitchburg, which opened in 1904. Another Irish parish, Sacred Heart in West Fitchburg operated St. John’s school, while St. Joseph’s in Cleghorn, a French parish, had an active elementary school for many years. The Italian parish, St. Anthony’s, opened their school in 1951. Only two of the six original elementary schools are still in operation, the oldest, St. Bernard’s on Summer Street and the newest, St. Anthony’s on Salem Street.

We plan to provide information about each of these ethnic schools in future newsletters, but will begin here with St. Anthony’s school. St. Anthony of Padua church on Salem Street was dedicated in 1908, the first Italian Church in North Worcester County. In 1919, at the request of their Pastor, Monsignor Angelo Carpinella, the Venerini Sisters came to Fitchburg and soon were operating a childcare center and holding classes to prepare parish children for First Communion and Confirmation. The Sisters also taught embroidery, sewing and Italian to the older children. This order was founded by Saint Rosa Venerini who, in 1685, established the first public school for girls in Italy. The first group of Venerini Sisters came to the United States in 1909, primarily to help the Italian immigrants establish day care centers and schools in many cities in the Northeast.

It wasn’t until the 1950s that Msgr. Carpinella’s vision to have an elementary school was realized under the leadership of his successor, Rev. Nicola Mongiello and curate, Rev. John J. Capuano. Thanks to generous gifts of $100 per family, the first building was built in 1951 and the second was dedicated in 1954.

Written by: Simone Blake

Many Thanks!

Our business and corporate members help the Historical Society provide historical and educational programming about Fitchburg to local students, families and visitors. We all work together to highlight and preserve Fitchburg’s vibrant history: please stop in and thank them for all they do.

- Workers Credit Union
- Rollstone Bank
- Rome Insurance Company
- Dillon Boiler Works
- P.J. Egan Plumbing Company
- WPKZ 105.3FM AND AM 1280
- IC Federal Credit Union
- Ron Bouchard’s Auto Sales
- Godin Construction
- Windmill Florists, Mechanic Street
Save The Date

• **Ongoing through March 9, 2016**: “Researching the Underground”
  An exhibition of the Historical Society’s Collection on the Abolition Movement and Underground Railroad in Fitchburg

• **Friday, February 12**: Valentine’s Tea Luncheon - 11:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.
  Historic valentines from the collection of the Historical Society will be on view at Fitchburg Senior Center, 14 Wallace Avenue ($4.00, $2.00 for Senior Center members)

• **April 4 – May 25**: Healing Hands: Medicine in Fitchburg
  A new exhibition on doctors, nurses, hospitals and medicine in Fitchburg

• **Sunday, April 10**: 10:30 a.m. Susan Navarre, Director of Fitchburg Historical Society speaks at First Parish Church of Fitchburg

• **Thursday, May 5**: Healing Hands Fundraiser

• **Sunday, May 15**: Freedom’s Way Hidden Treasures Program, presented in collaboration with Fitchburg Public Library

• **June 20 – August 17, 2016**: Historic Iver Johnson Bikes exhibition

• **Sunday, June 26**: Longsjo Race and Fitchburg Rides

• **Sunday, July 3**: Extra exhibition hours during Civic Days Block Party, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.