When the Fitchburg Kingsmen Drum & Bugle Corps met for a reunion on Saturday, 15 January 1994 at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Leominster, former members who gathered from across the nation had much about which to reminisce and be proud.

The corps organized after World War II and were originally known as the VFW Drum & Bugle Corps. At the end of the 1949 season, they broke away from the VFW, and began the 1950 season as the newly formed Blackhawks Senior Drum & Bugle Corps. The corps became independent, supporting themselves principally by offering charter memberships for $300. In 1952, they picked up the sponsorship of the Fitchburg Fraternal Order of Eagles 448.

It was soon discovered that the Blackhawks conflicted symbolically with the sponsoring Eagles. The group then became the FOE Kingsmen Senior Drum & Bugle Corps. They held rehearsals in a room at the Fitchburg Gas & Electric Co. on Sawyer Passway, and later at St. Joseph’s School in the Cleghorn section of Fitchburg. Through diligence, tenacity, dedication, and innate talent, the group built an enviable reputation as a highly regarded drum & bugle corps within their genre. Precision, discipline, uniformity, and innovation were their defining characteristics.

By the mid 1950’s, the Kingsmen had won five state championships, and went on to win the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Open Class Championship held in Boston in 1955. Indeed, the early and middle 1950’s proved to be a highly fruitful time for the Kingsmen during which they amassed numerous awards. These included the VFW state championships in 1954 and 1955; American Legion state championship in 1955; Fraternal Order of Eagles state champions in 1950, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1956; New England Interstate Association Championship in 1953, 1954, 1955, and 1956; Eastern States Exposition Champions in 1955; Vermont State Champions, and New Hampshire American Legion Champions, both in 1959.

Their sponsorship with the Fitchburg Eagles eventually dissolved in the mid 1950’s, and Mr. George R. Wallace, a well known business leader and benefactor in the city of Fitchburg, took a keen interest in the Kingsmen, which he deemed a highly beneficial function in the community. (continued on pg. 2)
became their sponsor until 1962, when members of the corps voted to become inactive for a year in order to build a bigger and better corps. It had become difficult to recruit and retain members in the senior corps. Men had jobs, families, and other responsibilities. Wives who traveled nationwide with the corps often slept in sleeping bags on floors in gymnasiums and similar environments. To say these stalwart ladies had pluck is understatement!

In 1963, the group voted to reactivate the corps, but as a junior drum & bugle corps for members up to 21 years of age. They became the Junior Kingsmen, and continued to win many competitions, taking the state championship in 1965. In that same year, a feeder group, the Little Kings was formed for youngsters from nine to fourteen. These aspiring corpsmen were taught the music, rudiments, and disciplines required to compete as a viable drum & bugle corps, and would eventually graduate and become members of the junior corps. This aggressive endeavor required substantial funding. The ever industrious Junior Kingsmen sustained themselves with prize monies from competitions, augmented by tag sales, bake sales, auctions, and weekly Bingo games that were held at Kingsmen Hall, which was the former Chubby’s Market on Water St.

The Kingsmen also struck revenue gold during the 1960’s by sponsoring a popular annual drum & bugle corps competition called Drums In The Night. This event featured premier drum & bugle corps from all over New England and as far as Canada. The competition was held at the Bernardian Bowl in Fitchburg, and attracted a widespread audience. Alas, all things must pass, and as the decades marched on, times, tastes, and priorities languished. Interest in the drum & bugle arena waned, and by 1995, after a half century of crowning achievements, that special group...truly an integral part of the vibrant history in the city of Fitchburg known as the Kingsmen Drum & Bugle Corps...decided it was time to hang up the snappy uniforms, banners, drums, bugles and rifles...and all the Kingsmen called it a day.

All The Kingsmen (continued from pg. 1)

Photos: courtesy of Ken Bujold

Written by: Nunzio Nano

Hockey Comes to Fitchburg

For many years in Fitchburg, Friday nights meant a home game for the Wallopers at the Wallace Civic Center. The All New England Hockey League brought something magical to Fitchburg that had never been here: some really good hockey in a brand-new rink. When the first season began in 1973, even high school hockey was new in the Twin Cities, because the ’69-’70 winter season was the first for High School level hockey. Within three years, the beautiful new Wallace Civic Center was ready to host the most talented players after their high school years. Young men came from area cities to play as a Walloper and progress to college study and college-level play.

According to Walloper Ray Richard, the team provided Fitchburg with its first opportunity to see a game that looked like the pros, played at home and played every week. You could watch on cable TV (channel 3) every Friday night. Soon after, a deck hockey rink was built in about 1974 – 75, and it was possible to for local athletes to play hockey year-round.

The Historical Society is planning to host a program of reminiscences about the Wallace Wallopers during Winter 2018: if you were a fan, a player or a cheerleader, or if you have photos, uniforms or other memorabilia about the team, the games, coach Tom Moon or G.M. Leo Gould, we would like to talk to you about your memories and possibly copy or borrow the items to show during the program. We may even make space for memorabilia of their arch-rivals, the Tyngsboro Huskies! Please contact the Historical Society for more information at 978-345-1157 or welcome@Fitchburghistoricalsociety.com.
People Watching

From ancient times to the present, portraiture has represented the people of its day and the complex social, political, and cultural moments in which each subject and artist lived. Through an investigation of historical portraits, we can speculate on the intention of the artist, the identity of the sitter, and the narrative attached to the history of art and, more generally, history.

The Fitchburg Art Museum’s fall exhibition, People Watching: Then and Now, brings together a selection of works by thirteen contemporary artists in New England with paintings and sculpture from FAM’s collection–principally ancient busts, Western paintings from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, and African sculptures. This mix explores the way that observation and representation of the human subject has shifted over time. Included in this selection are two paintings on long term loan from the Fitchburg Historical Society: Amasa Reading and Mr. and Mrs. James M. Leavitt.

Amasa Reading is an intimate portrait of Fitchburg’s first mayor by his daughter and FAM’s beloved benefactor, Eleanor Norcross. The well-traveled artist had a close relationship with her father and painted several portraits of him. Eleanor’s skilled rendering of her father’s slightly downward gaze places Amasa as a learned and thoughtful man–traits appropriate for a trained lawyer and politician. In contrast to Eleanor’s personal study of Amasa, Mr. and Mrs. James M. Leavitt (19th Century) is by an itinerant artist. At that time, it was not uncommon for residents to commission portraits by painters who made their living by traveling the country and producing likenesses at an affordable rate. Many of these artists were self-taught. Indeed, the portrait of the Leavitts is flat and uniquely stylized in comparison to Amasa Reading, for instance. Still, the props are meant to convey something of the status of the sitter. James was a Fitchburg merchant, and the elegant costuming and rich drapery capture his wealth.

Such portraits as these remain relevant not only as valuable vestiges of the past that offer insight into historical periods, but also because they are used by artists today as reference and source material to respond to the present.

These paintings will be on display at the Fitchburg Art Museum from September 24, 2017 through January 14, 2018 as part of the exhibition People Watching: Then and Now, organized by Curator Lisa Crossman and Koch Curatorial Fellow Lauren Szumita. The exhibition is made possible in part by the Simonds Lecture Fund. There will be an opening reception on September 24, 2017 from 1:00 to 3:00pm.

Written by: Lisa Crossman and Lauren Szumita, Fitchburg Art Museum

Summer Reading

At the Fitchburg Historical Society, we often encounter bibliographic references to books with a Fitchburg connection. For our members who are also enthusiastic readers, we are beginning an occasional newsletter feature where we share those titles with you, so you can search them out at the library, on Kindle, or through a used book outlet. Here are a few for the late summer of 2017:

The Kalevala: An Epic Poem, collected by Elias Lönnrot. The Kalevala is the great Finnish epic, which grew out of an oral tradition with prehistoric roots. The poem was collected by Elias Lönnrot in the 1840’s in Finland, and was studied as important national literature. It influenced Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “The Song of Hiawatha.” Many of the Finnish immigrants to Fitchburg knew long verses of the Kalevala by heart, and it was the namesake of the American-Finnish cultural societies that sprang up in Fitchburg and elsewhere.

David I. Walsh, Citizen-Patriot, by Dorothy Wayman. David I. Walsh was born in Leominster, but practiced law in Fitchburg. He was elected the first Irish and first Catholic Governor of Massachusetts in 1914, and later, the first Catholic U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. He was considered the father of Worker’s Comp insurance and an important voice for the rights of factory workers. Dorothy Wayman was a trailblazer in her own right: a Bryn Mawr College graduate, foreign correspondent from Japan, and journalist for the Boston Globe, she wrote this book in 1952.

My Life, by Hiram Maxim (1915). Maxim, an inventor who was granted a knighthood by Queen Victoria, was a polarizing and possibly maddening man. He wrote this book about his life, and was later lauded in a biography entitled A Genius in the Family, written by his son Hiram Percy Maxim. He was also mentioned in memoirs by his brother Hudson Maxim, with whom he had quarreled and never reconciled.
Fitchburg’s “Unco-operative Women”

Fitchburg has always been a very giving and caring community as is evidenced by the records and old city registers (City of Fitchburg 1892 through 1896). While researching an entirely different subject, I came across a register listing the money given to the poor and insane being housed in The Almshouse, a community farm.

While many good citizens donated food and clothing to the poor families, others paid for things such as shoes and hats for children of the widows and widowers. Many widows and their children actually lived in the Almshouse, also called the Poor Farm. The doctors who treated the residents were given produce and meat, along with a small salary as compensation for their medical services. The farm was located on a plot of land adjacent to what is now Wanoosnoc Rd. The farm not only provided shelter for the poor and indigent of the city, it was also used as a home for the “mentally insane.”

In the late 1800’s and early 1900’s there was a sudden increase in what was being called “insane women”. While trying to research the cause it became evident that as medicine became more advanced, and fewer women were dying as a result of childbirth, the population of older women was on the increase. This in turn was resulting in more and more women reaching menopause. It seems that women were “talking back to their husbands, becoming uncooperative, crying for no reason and experiencing bouts of melancholy.” This terrible malady was filling the Almshouse and resulted in many women being sent miles away to the Worcester Lunatic Hospital**. Menopausal women were considered mentally ill. Those sent there spent many months being treated for what we now know is a normal phase of aging.

During the early 1920’s Fitchburg continued to grow not only in population, but also in their search for better medical care for the mentally ill. Fewer women were being diagnosed as "crazy". New hospitals, better schools and more citizens obtaining higher education, ultimately resulted in more resources for the mentally ill.

What started out as a little research about the number of women and children here in Fitchburg 100 years ago, has resulted in a testimony to the insightful men and women of yesterday.

Thank you to those who gave, and those who continue to give so generously of their time, knowledge, effort and finances to keep Fitchburg moving towards the future.

Fitchburg was, is and will continue to be a great place to live. Especially for us women!

**The Worcester Insane Hospital and Women’s Lunatic Asylum was opened in January of 1883 and eventually became Worcester State Hospital.

Written by: Judith Normandin

Fitchburg’s Ellen Leland Cushing describes her visit to Paris during Bastille Day, July 14, 1908, in her travel diary, owned by the Fitchburg Historical Society:

Took a short ride on top of an omnibus, but it was rather hard. After dinner, went to Opera Comique in the Champs Elysee. There were beautiful costumes. And fine ballet dancing, but some of the costumes were very scant. The Marseillaise (sic: Marcellaise) was beautifully sung. And was most inspiring.

At ten o’clock we walked along the Rue de Rivoli – and saw the Illuminations. The Louvre, and all the public buildings were brilliantly lighted. The fireworks were the most wonderful that I have ever seen.
The Gun that Transformed Warfare

Now that we have reached the centennial of the first World War, you may read a British or European book about World War I that references “Maxim guns.” Well, there is a Fitchburg connection! Maxim guns were the first modern recoil-operating gun: in other words, a machine gun. They were considered central to British Imperial conquest around the world after being patented in 1883 and manufactured in 1884. The inventor was Sir Hiram Stevens Maxim, whose career began in Fitchburg’s machine shops in the 1860’s.

Born in Sangerville, Maine in 1840, Maxim came to Fitchburg at the age of 24 to work in a brass foundry operated by his uncle, Levi Stevens, at 28 Laurel Street. (Stevens’ foundry would later become the William A. Hardy Company brass foundry.) The Fitchburg Historical Society has a copy of Stevens’ payroll from February 28, 1865, which shows Maxim as employee number 68, being paid $47.25 for a month of work.

Within a few months, Hiram S. Maxim is corresponding during a trip to Boston with Fitchburg’s Dr. Thomas Palmer to assist him with introducing ether anesthetic to his dentistry practice on Main Street. Three of these letters are in the collection of the Fitchburg Historical Society.

Sir Maxim wrote a memoir entitled “My Life,” published in London in 1915, in which he described his sojourn in Fitchburg. He remembers, “These were glorious days. All my working hours were given to hard work and study. I left no stone unturned to become expert at everything I had to do. It was a very happy time, because I was fully employed and learning very fast, but the pay that I received was small.”

He married his first wife, Jane Budden, in 1867. Their children were: Hiram Percy Maxim; Florence Maxim, who married George Albert Cutter; and Adelaide Maxim, who married Eldon Joubert. His son Hiram Percy became an inventor as well: he invented the Maxim silencer and started the American Radio Relay League. He also wrote a book about his father entitled “A Genius in the Family.”

In 1881, Sir Maxim was married a second time, to Sarah, daughter of Charles Hayes of Boston. By 1883, they had moved to London, where he invented his gun and began to manufacture it in partnership with Albert Vickers, the son of a British steel magnate.

Maxim credited his invention of the Maxim machine gun to a childhood experience, when he had been knocked over by a rifle’s recoil. Later, he came up with the idea of harnessing the recoil force to automatically operate a gun. Between 1883 and 1885, Maxim patented a number of automatic guns, trying out gas, recoil and blow-back to fire the guns automatically.

Maxim’s total output included 271 patents. He also invented a curling iron, an apparatus for demagnetizing watches, magneto-electric machines, devices to prevent the rolling of ships, eyelet and riveting machines, aircraft artillery, an aerial torpedo gun, coffee substitutes and various oil, steam and gas engines. He also invented the first automatic fire sprinkler, which would douse the fire, and report it to the fire station. The invention was not commercially successful until after Maxim’s patent had expired.

Join us for the Annual Meeting!

As a member of the Fitchburg Historical Society, you are cordially invited to meet the board, see our newest exhibition, and chat with your fellow history lovers at the Society’s next Annual Meeting on Wednesday, September 13, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. The meeting is open to the public, and free to attend.

The Fitchburg Historical Society is celebrating 125th anniversary year, and we know that our mission to save and interpret Fitchburg’s history by creating new educational programs is more important than ever for Fitchburg’s residents. As a longtime leader in documenting the history of culture and industry in central Massachusetts, we at the Fitchburg Historical Society take our role in the community very seriously. We value your input and ideas as we kick off our year!
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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.

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Megan Provencial

Amherst musician John Root is coming to the Fitchburg Historical Society, to present the popular music of the turn of the century in a free concert entitled Music of the Gaslight Era. Please join us on Thursday, October 26, 6:30 p.m., at the Fitchburg Historical Society for a fun opportunity to relive the earliest era of “pop” music.

John Root makes it fun to rediscover the social trends that underlie these classic songs, while inspiring you to joining him for a few rousing singalongs, too. The concert is free, but a donation of $5.00 is suggested.
Fitchburg Historical Society
781 Main Street, P.O. Box 953
Fitchburg, MA 01420

Save The Date

• **Friday, August 18, 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m**
  Open House: “Fitchburg Immigrant Experience”
  A chance to look at a new exhibition on Fitchburg’s immigrant history, as part of a Twin Cities celebration of Finland’s 100th anniversary of independence. Enjoy some coffee and Finnish snacks, too.

• **Monday, August 28 – Wednesday, January 31, 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.

• **Wednesday, September 13, 2017, 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**
  Fitchburg Historical Society Annual Meeting
  Meet our Board of Directors and your fellow members.

• **Friday, September 15, 2017, 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**
  Annual Day of Caring
  Opportunity to volunteer for a morning in the Fitchburg Historical Society’s collections.

• **Thursday, October 26, 2017 6:30 p.m.**
  **Music of the Gaslight Era, by John Root**
  Free concert of music from 1890 – 1920 that people still enjoy and sing today.

• **Saturday, December 2, 2017 11:00 a.m. – 4 p.m.**
  **Annual House Tour**
  A beloved holiday tradition celebrating beautiful architecture and decoration. Tickets available at the Fitchburg Historical Society and local merchants starting in early November.