

## Charitably



## Speaking

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**A PUBLICATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS CHARITABLE MECHANIC ASSOCIATION**

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### President's Message

As my third year as president of MCMA is coming to a close, I remain amazed at the dedication of the members and officers of this august organization. It has been an honor to have served MCMA over the years and I look forward to serving future presidents as well. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks for your help and support. My job is made easy by the willingness of our officers, committees, and members to serve.

The planning committee has performed its appointed tasks, and grants totaling over \$162,000 have been made for the year 2015.

We continue to work to keep MCMA strong into the future, and to that end I would like to make our annual appeal for your donations to help keep this unique 220-year-old organization strong. Please ... think about it ... and donate what you can. – **Thank you, Rich Adams**

### Recent Happenings

Our October Quarterly was held on the 28th, and we met once again at the Montvale Plaza in Stoneham where we enjoyed a nice luncheon. The meeting opened with an invocation by past president Erling Hanson, after which President Adams called for a moment of silence in memory of recently deceased member Ralph Bagley, who for many years handled the legal needs of the association. The president welcomed new associate member Miguel Gomez-Ibenaz, and Triennial Committee Chairman Peter Lemonias gave us an update on plans for that fast-approaching event (January 30 at the Millenium Boston Hotel), and noted we will be mailing a reminder with more detailed information.

We were then treated to presentations by two guest speakers. Mr. Tom Whalen researches (and has written a book about) the tool makers of early 19th-century New England, and he discussed a number of them. He also brought with him several dozen examples from his extensive collection of planes from that period, and invited everyone to handle and examine them. Mr. Art Gaffar, who is the librarian (and historian) of the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association, then outlined the history of that association, and it bore a very strong resemblance to our own from its founding in 1815. Both presentations were well received and very much appreciated by our members.

### Helping Others

The great majority of the organizations we help to support are, in essence, “old friends” whom we know well and have visited often. Each year, though, we are introduced to “new” organizations and often find them qualified for and deserving of our support. Such was the case this year with the **Boston Higashi School**, which serves children and young adults with Autism Deficit Disorder. The school uses a methodology they call Daily Life Therapy to help students reach their full potential. It's a unique educational philosophy developed by the late Dr. Kiyo Kitahara at her Musashino Higashi School in Tokyo, incorporating a broad and balanced curriculum that includes academics, art, music, physical education, good



nutrition, technology, and social education. It emphasizes the three fundamental pillars of physical stamina building, emotional stability and intellectual stimulation to provide a broad and full education, rather than merely focusing on remediating deficits. And it recognizes the importance of, and requires active participation from, parents in their child's program.

As recognition of her success with students grew, Dr. Kitahara was invited to this country to share information about her approach, and in 1987 opened the Boston Higashi School with students from across the United States and from many other

countries. The school is now located on the former Boston School for the Deaf property in Randolph, and makes full use of its 55-acre campus, with outdoor activities from sports to gardening to nature walks and science classes. Of particular interest to us, though, is the vocational element Boston Higashi includes in its overall program. Students begin "employment education" in junior high where the emphasis is on soft skills such as following directions and developing a sense of responsibility. Practical employment training takes place on campus at the high school level, and an "emergence program" bridges the span from school to



adulthood, serving students between the ages of 19-22 as they move forward to adult life. In this latter program, students work 20-30 hours per week in the community while continuing to learn in specialized areas, plus they access community facilities such as libraries, supermarkets, banks, gyms, and in general become better prepared for life after graduation.



Boston Higashi asked for MCMA's support as they created a teaching kitchen that will be used for academic and vocational purposes, but will also allow students to have exposure to culinary arts activities during the evening and on weekends. (Most of the students live on campus during the school year.) For most students, the goal is self-reliance in the kitchen (i.e., planning and cooking their own meals), but some already work in food service jobs, and the expectation is that this kitchen will lead to increased opportunities for those who wish to pursue careers in that field. We were able to provide the kitchen appliances (refrigerators, ranges, and microwaves) required for this project, and we will follow its progress and hopefully continue a relationship with this very well-regarded organization.

### MCMA Past ...

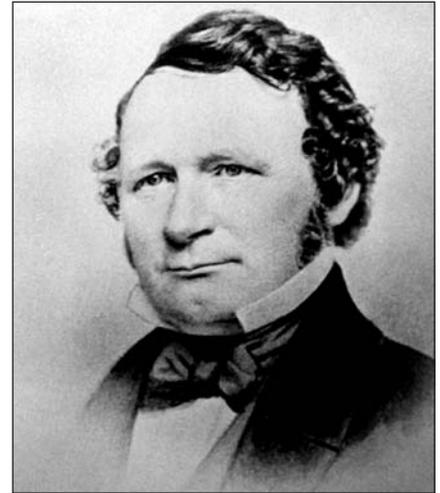
We all enjoyed the *Moments in History* with which our former Executive Director Ray Purdy used to educate us on the rich history of MCMA, and one of Ray's favorite stories was that of **Otis Tufts** and his invention of the steam-driven pile driver. To briefly recount it, in the mid-1840s Tufts was walking past the construction site for the new Custom House in Boston, and stopped to watch piles being driven by the use of pulleys, ropes, and other labor-intensive equipment. He commented to the foreman, whom he knew, on the time-consuming nature of the operation. As 3000 piles were to be driven, he was challenged by that foreman to

come up with a better way if he could. Tufts, who was by that time very experienced with steam engines, worked on the problem and came back to the site *the very next day* with a sketch for a steam-driven machine. A prototype was built immediately, and it worked so well that the other equipment was discarded, and the job was completed using the Tufts drivers. The equipment was widely adopted by others, but Tufts never patented the invention, so did not benefit from it, save to his reputation.

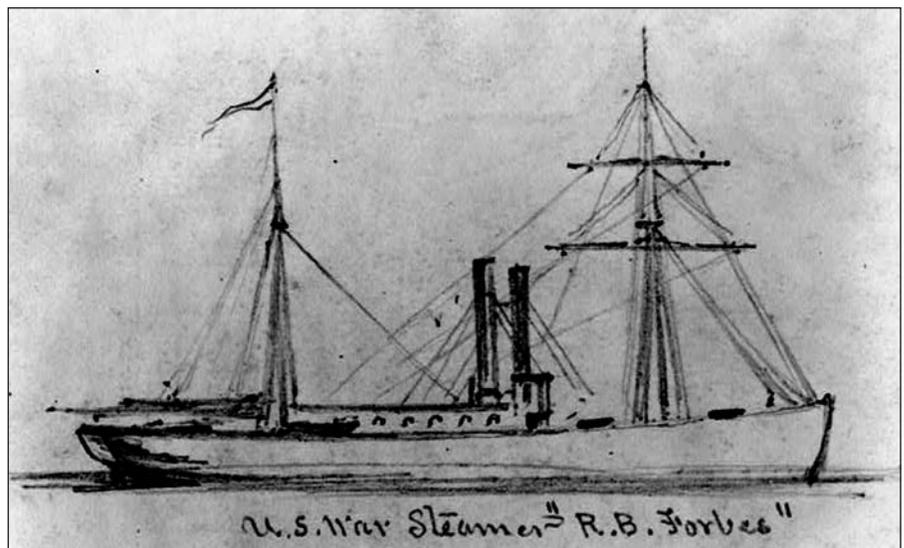
This, though, was but a single accomplishment of this man who was one of the most prolific and useful inventors of his age. Otis Tufts was born in Cambridge in 1804, and apprenticed as a machinist. Early on, he worked on printing presses, and by the late-1820s was manufacturing his own presses and patenting improvements to them. In 1837 he built the first steam-operated printing press. Tufts was fascinated with the potential uses for steam power, and used it in the design of a special tool for cutting marble, and more famously in a steam-driven passenger elevator. In what he called a “Vertical Railway” or “Vertical Screw” (a 12” diameter continuous screw ran the full height, through the car, from basement to roof), steam drove a mechanism that would raise or lower the passenger compartment on command from a special control device (also his invention). The system was installed in the seven-story Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City in 1859, and in Philadelphia’s Continental Hotel in 1860. It proved to be extremely safe, and it drew wide acclaim. Unfortunately for Otis Tufts, his invention preceded by a mere two years the invention by Elisha Otis [*the Otis name we do associate with elevators*] of an elevator braking system that would finally alleviate the grave safety concerns associated with the less complex and far less expensive cable elevator.

And in yet another application of his talents, Tufts built steam-driven ships. (Tufts did not operate a traditional shipyard, but he was able to build smaller vessels because his East Boston plant had frontage on the water.) He patented a double-hull design for iron ships, and he built the first ship in Boston to be constructed entirely of iron. His most widely-known vessel was the 329-ton tow-boat (or tug) *R. B. Forbes*. This twin-screw propeller-driven steel vessel, built for the Boston Board of Marine Underwriters in 1845, was designed by John Ericsson (who would later design the *USS Monitor*), and was suited for rough seas and rescue work. The ship was sold to the government upon the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, and later that year took part in the Battle of Port Royal in South Carolina (where it towed a sailing frigate to safety). It was destroyed in a gale the following year. [*The Forbes House in Milton was built by the same Captain Forbes for which the ship was named.*]

Otis Tufts joined MCMA in 1833, “was very interested in the prosperity of our association” (as is noted in our *Annals*), and served on our Board of Government. He was described as “an estimable citizen, a man of strict integrity ... genial, social, and affable, a great favorite among his acquaintances.” He died suddenly of a heart attack at age 65, leaving two daughters and a son, **Otis Tufts Jr.**, who succeeded his father in business and became a member of this association.



Otis Tufts (1804-1869)



### ... and MCMA Present

*“Local jobs lost to foreign competition.”* It’s a familiar story in these parts, and has been for decades, so it’s refreshing to hear of a local company that has been able to both survive and grow in spite of such competition. That it’s the company of an MCMA member makes the story even better. **John J. Lordan** grew up in Charlestown, where his parents owned and ran a local variety store, and later in Everett. Upon graduation from Everett High School he enlisted in the Navy for four years, stationed initially aboard a sub tender, then in Newfoundland, and lastly in Virginia where he was able to begin furthering his education with classes at The College of William and Mary. Following his discharge, John utilized the G.I. Bill to attend Burdett College (full time) for two years while working part-time jobs, then joined the Steele Canvas Basket Corp. in Cambridge in an assistant manager role. He continued his education at night (for another three-and-a-half years) at Suffolk University, ultimately earning a B.S. degree in business administration. John’s career at Steele progressed to manager, general manager, then vice president, until in 1985 he was able to finance the purchase of the company following the untimely death of the then-owner, and the following year moved it to its current location on Williams Street in Chelsea.



Steele Canvas Basket Corp. dates from 1921, when the coal and textile trades were its primary focus. Through the years its wire-framed baskets and carts gained a reputation for near-indestructibility as they became widely used by contractors, laundries, hospitals, and others. Introduction of a waterproof fabric made the products useful to, among others, the fishing industry (as the well-worn basket in the photo exemplifies). Other customers have appreciated the company’s willingness to adjust size and shape to their needs. (For example, the Brinks Company moves money in bags customized to their specifications, and the balloons used in Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade are stored in jumbo-sized Steele Canvas containers.) Today the product line has expanded to include gym bags, totes, and even butterfly chairs as the company collaborates with retailers such as J. Crew, Urban Outfitters, and Crate & Barrel to design, customize, and market its products. Homeowners can order and customize even single units online, and the company is finding new demand from Europe and especially in the Far East, where, in a welcome twist, its “Made in the U.S.A.” label is prized.



John and his wife Sylvia (long a key part of the company) live in Medford, and are parents of four ( John, Paul, Andrea, and Alison) and grandparents of eleven. Though still closely involved with the company, they have cut back on their responsibilities, and sons John and Paul now lead the ever-challenging effort to keep this 94-year-old company thriving. We, of course, are simply grateful to have John as a friend, active and contributing member, and trustee of MCMA.

