



December 2008

President's Remarks

2008 has not been what one might call “a good year for investors”, and MCMA has suffered along with many others. Despite the diversification built into our portfolio _ intended to allow us to weather a downturn in any individual sector _ the damage this year was felt across all sectors, and it shows in our net worth. I expect your individual situations have been no less immune, and that makes it even more difficult for us to make our year-end request for member donations. But this year those donations are even more important. So again, we simply ask that, if you are able to and wish to make a year-end donation to MCMA, your gift will be greatly appreciated, it is tax-deductible (Rick Purdy will send a written acknowledgement to each donor), and you may instruct Rick to record it as an anonymous contribution if you so choose. (We have included a return envelope to make it easy.) All donations will help to reduce our liability on the performance of our portfolio as our sole means of survival.

Marty Joyce

Recent Happenings

Our October Quarterly was held at the Neighborhood Club in Quincy. In addition to a pleasant atmosphere and a fine meal, members enjoyed a most interesting presentation by our guest speaker, Mr. Anthony Sammarco. A local historian, and the author of several books on Boston's neighborhoods, Mr. Sammarco was fittingly introduced by his friend, Past-President Bud Hanson. Mr. Sammarco's presentation focused on the filling-in and building-out of Boston's Back Bay in the mid-nineteenth century. His grasp of facts, dates, characters and figures was remarkable, and his presentation was crisp and thoroughly interesting, as were his old photographs which were shown as slides throughout the presentation. Importantly, Mr. Sammarco made note along the way of the various key figures in his story who were also members of MCMA. *[We will, in future issues of this newsletter, highlight several of these individuals.]*

Planning Committee

In our previous issue, we noted that two of our Planning Committee members (Bill Scott and Charlie Gale) had been recognized by Living Independently Forever, Inc. (*LIFE*) for the continued support MCMA has provided to this organization. In this issue, we will try to give you some insight into the work that *LIFE* does, and the ways in which MCMA has been able to assist their efforts.

Incorporated in 1992, *LIFE* opened its Supported Independent Living Program to 10 adults with learning disabilities at the Hyannis condominium village in 1993. At that time, *LIFE* residents were young adults in their 20's. By 1996, the Hyannis location had more than doubled in physical size and number of residents served. In 1997 *LIFE* identified another Cape Cod site (in Mashpee) on which to build a second condominium village as a result of their growing success. Currently, *LIFE* provides support to 70 men and women between the ages of 22 and 52.

The mission of *LIFE*, working in collaboration with families, is to assist residents to develop the skills they need to function as independently as possible, and to provide supports to assist them in attaining their maximum level of independence, self fulfillment and happiness. Their commitment is life-long, and encompasses the personal, social, and employment needs of its residents. *LIFE* believes that all residents should be employed or engaged in a volunteer job. The enhanced self-esteem and sense of responsibility that accompanies a "good job, well done," be it paid or volunteer, is often worth more than the paycheck itself. Residents receive assistance in identifying job opportunities, completing applications, job coaching and ongoing follow-up.

MCMA has been supporting this agency since 2001, initially in the form of equipment, such as cash registers with scanners and software, used for training purposes. (The development of employability skills is a priority within their program, and on Cape Cod a majority of suitable jobs for their residents are located within the retail and food service industries.) *LIFE* also

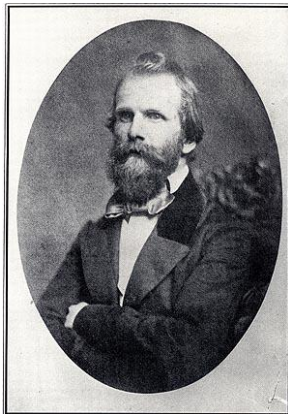


operates an *Impressions* program, however, in which they offer training and in-house employment in specialty print work and gift products. These products include tee shirts, coffee mugs, tiles, brochures, greeting cards, tote bags, mousepads, keepsake boxes and other promotional items. MCMA support (folding machines, color copiers, mug press, etc.) in recent years has been directed toward this program, which has become a real success as their products are now

sold throughout the USA. *LIFE* appreciates our support, and we appreciate what they do with that support.

MCMA History

In this issue we are going to spotlight a very remarkable MCMA man who, though virtually forgotten today, was known to and respected by all levels of Boston society 150 years ago — Hammatt Billings. [*Other MCMA members mentioned in this article will be identified by bold font.*]



Born in Milton in 1818, this future illustrator and designer's full name was Charles Howland Hammatt Billings, the "Howland" and "Hammatt" linking him to the earliest settlers of New England. The family had run the Blue Hill Tavern in Milton since the seventeenth century. The youngster grew up in Boston and Milton, and apparently showed enough talent at an early age for his parents to invest in private drawing instruction for him.

By 1831 Billings was at the English High School, one of the forty-six members of the class of 1834. English was a finishing school for boys whose parents could not afford to send them to college; Latin High then as now prepared its pupils for continuing education, while English High grounded its students in subjects potentially useful in a commercial life. Billings did not graduate (nor did twenty-nine other members of the class). Billings may have left English early because of the founding of the Boston Bewick Company in 1833, as accounts mention his youthful apprenticeship to one of the founders, **Abel Bowen** (1790-1850), a graphic artist and Boston's pioneer wood engraver.

While in Bowen's shop, it is probable that Billings learned not only how to engrave wood but to design as well, and the architectural bent of some of Bowen's work may have suggested to the apprentice another avenue for his talent. Bowen had not only engraved views of buildings for his *Picture of Boston* and *American Magazine*, he had signed two copperplate engravings published by the architect **Asher Benjamin**. And Billings is next found in Benjamin's drafting room as an apprentice. Asher Benjamin (1772-1845) was one of the major neoclassical architects and the major publicist of Roman and Greek architectural forms in New England, if not the United States, and it was under Benjamin's tutelage that Billings finished his education.

Benjamin's younger rival **Ammi Burnham Young** (1798-1874), fresh from designing the Vermont State Capitol at Montpelier, won the competition for the federal Customs House in Boston in 1837, and that domed cruciform building of Quincy granite was erected over the next decade. Probably because he needed help in the Boston drafting room he established in 1838, Young hired Billings away from Benjamin, who had been among the losing competitors. While Billings did not design the building, it is thought that all the drawings were made by him.

By 1841 (at age 23) Billings was ready to go out on his own. By 1842 he was listed as an independent architect, and by the following year he had added "designer" to his title. At this time too, he shortened his "professional" name to the crisper Hammatt Billings. By the age of 28 he had created one of the earliest Renaissance Revival buildings in the United States, the Boston Museum on Tremont Street, and in the following years he turned out Gothic churches, Italianate schools, clubs, and residences, and a Moorish arch over Tremont Street to celebrate the arrival of the public freshwater supply into the city. By the early 1850s he was an established architect and designer who was both sought after by patrons and envied by his peers.

Few of Billings' buildings survive today. His crowning achievement, the original campus of Wellesley College, was destroyed by fire in 1914. Had Billings not died at age 56 in 1874, a year prior to its opening, that achievement might have propelled him to other works of equal importance, and better solidified his place in American architecture. Many of his monuments do still exist, however, including his most colossal work _ the *National Monument to the Forefathers* in Plymouth.



Billings' interests and talents were by no means limited to architecture, however. His earlier artistic training had left him with a love of art, and he was torn between it and architecture until he reconciled the conflict by embracing both career options. So in parallel with his blossoming architectural practice, Billings developed into one of the best-known and most sought-after illustrators of books and periodicals in his time. In 1845, with the many woodcuts drawn by Billings and engraved by **Alonzo Hartwell** in Munroe and Francis's *Chimes, Rhymes, and Jingles; or, Mother Goose's Songs*, Billings established himself as heir to Abel Bowen, as an important Boston illustrator of children's and other books and periodicals. By 1852 he was illustrating Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and had begun a decade-long career as chief illustrator for *Gleason's*

(later *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, Boston's illustrated monthly magazine whose circulation reached over one hundred thousand by the middle of the decade.

Billings was a premier illustrator for many Boston publishers, and drew illustrations for well over 250 titles during his career. His work covered the literature of writers such as Oliver Wendell Homes, John Greenleaf Whittier, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and English authors from Walter Scott to Oliver Goldsmith and Charles Dickens. Though many topics engaged his pencil, children's books occupied the bulk of his time, and when he has been remembered in the modern literature, it has usually been for his work in this area.

As busy as he was as book and periodical illustrator, and as architect _ not only of his own buildings but as (sometimes anonymous) designer for any number of other architects in the city, especially the prolific **Gridley J. F. Bryant** _ Billings turned out a bewildering variety of other work. This ranged from fireworks displays for the Common to the composition of diplomas and Certificates, the creation of private and public monuments, painted works in oil and watercolor, the design of sculpture as well as furniture and other decorative arts, the embellishment of public events stretching from the Water Arch of 1848 to the decorations for the reception at the Boston visit of the Prince of Wales in 1860. He was, in short, everywhere in nineteenth-century Boston where the arts of design were called upon.

The people viewed his illustrations in the exploding number of children's books produced by the new high-speed presses for a growing literacy, monthly saw his work in the illustrated periodical press beginning in the 1840s, attended the patriotic fireworks displays he created for Fourth of July celebrations, mourned the death of Zachary Taylor with a public parade punctuated with a funeral car of Billings' design, worshiped in churches he designed, bought the sheet music he embellished with Boston scenes and other vignettes, and received certificates he emblazoned. Readers cried at Harriet Beecher Stowe's description and Billings' depiction of the death of Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or thrilled to his and Louisa May Alcott's visualizations of the exploits of the March girls in *Little Women*. Billings was omnipresent in the lives of mid-nineteenth-century Bostonians of the middle as well as the upper classes. He was the designer who gave visible expression to personal as well as civic, patriotic, and other collective sentiments of his day.



Hammatt Billings. If his was not a household name, it was certainly broadly recognized in the Boston of his day. This talented and accomplished man was a member of MCMA, as were the talented and accomplished men under whom he apprenticed and learned. Quite an organization!

[Much of the information in this article was drawn from the book "Accomplished in All Departments of Art", by James F. O'Gorman.]