

Charitably



Speaking

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A PUBLICATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS CHARITABLE MECHANIC ASSOCIATION

President's Message

“Eleemosynary” ... Merriam-Webster states: “A grammarian once asserted in reference to eleemosynary that ‘a long and learned word like this should only be used under the stress of great need’”. Today I am following up on my letter asking for your help to increase the “eleemosynary” legacy of MCMA. No one likes to be asked for money, but if the cause is right, and the justification compelling, good people do the right thing.

For any organization to continue its eleemosynary efforts, ongoing and increasing sources of revenue are needed to cover inflation and an increased need. Many philanthropic groups have annual events such as a golf outing, or as with the early days of MCMA, annual dues or fairs and exhibitions. For too long, we have done neither, yet still provide cost-free meetings and functions.

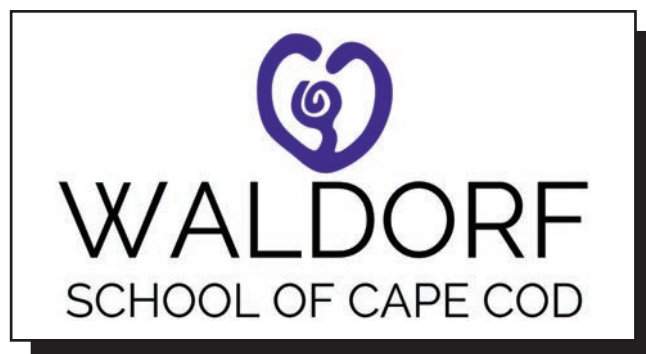
Nothing of value comes free; we all know that. The payment we first made to MCMA was to become a Life member. As promised, you have not been asked to pay dues ever since. However, one could also reasonably expect that the reason anyone joins a “Charitable” organization is to be just that, Charitable. As the very giving people you are for a variety of causes, I am now asking that as part of your philanthropic effort, you include the very organization to which you belong, the one which has “Charitable” as its middle name.

Not everyone's financial position is the same, but whatever the amount, it is gratefully accepted. My place is not to question the amount anyone gives; however, I am at a loss to understand why anyone would belong to a “Charitable” organization without also being the same to that very organization themselves. The time has come for us to be the eleemosynary members our middle name says we are. Be Just and Fear Not – **Chuck**.

Helping Others

Seemingly every year, our grants process introduces us to organizations with which we have had no prior experience, and our Planning Committee reviews, investigates, and when warranted, approves those requests. Last year the **Waldorf School of Cape Cod** was one such grant recipient. This independent school, now located on a new 3.5-acre site in Sandwich, Massachusetts, has been educating students since its founding in 1984, offering a nursery-level to grade-8 education as well as a variety of parent-child programs. In addition to preparing students for academic success, the Waldorf curriculum encourages self-confidence and self-reliance, personal integrity, and a sense of responsibility. In each school day students participate in academic work along with art, music, energetic physical activity, and work with their hands in fiber arts, gardening, or crafts. There is an emphasis on outdoor activities and field trips where students learn hands-on and make deep connections between what they learn and what they experience.

The activity for which Waldorf sought our support was their woodworking program, which offers traditional hand-tool woodworking instruction to its students. The program had been operating outdoors under a canopy tent, a situation that presented a host of challenges, weather among them. Nonetheless, the students took to this class enthusiastically, and Waldorf anticipated that much more could be accomplished if a proper space could



be found for it. MCMA was approached to help with the purchase of a post-and-beam barn kit to provide a dry location for the class. Our committee members visited the school to look into the request. They were very positive about the program, but believed the proposed structure would be inadequate for the use intended. Waldorf re-assessed their plans, and ultimately decided upon a more substantial, winterized and somewhat larger structure, and we did provide support for its construction. The kids have been able to get involved already with shingling the exterior and constructing storage units inside.



MCMA History

For many years now we have written about MCMA's involvement in local activities and the more widespread accomplishments of our past members. One of our take-aways from that accumulation of information is that MCMA and/or our members have had connections, in some way or other, to a remarkable number of events, developments, and advancements in our country's history. Here, in no particular order, are just some of them ... all member names are in boldface:

In the mid-1840s **Otis Tufts** was walking past the construction site for the new Custom House in Boston, and he 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 he did not benefit from it, save to his reputation.

New England is widely noted for its picturesque towns, though the towns and villages of Vermont and New Hampshire seem to get the most attention. In reality, it's quite difficult to choose between so many towns across the region for the very simple reason that they look so much alike! Aside from foliage it is the architecture of these towns that makes them difficult to distinguish from one another, and the man largely responsible for that architecture is **Asher Benjamin**, whose pattern books, the first written by an American architect, brought architectural history, style, and geometry to ordinary builders in the field. Early 19th-century New England had few trained architects, so he wrote his handbooks for the rural carpenter, providing measured drawings for

homes, churches, and even a courthouse, along with details such as doorways, fireplace mantels, circular staircases, dormer windows, and even fences. Other architects freely assimilated his plans, as did numerous carpenters throughout New England and beyond. Benjamin is responsible for much of the charm of early New England towns, and even today the layout and details of many houses, churches, and town halls can be matched directly to the pages of one or another of his handbooks.



Ephraim Wales Bull was a well-regarded gold leaf artisan. More significantly, Bull was an amateur horticulturalist, and in 1836 he purchased a farm in Concord and set about trying to improve the so-called “wild” American grape, which was common in this area but quite bitter. By 1849 he had planted some 22,000 seedlings before arriving at what he considered the ideal grape (early opening to escape northern frosts, but with a rich, full-bodied flavor), and he named it the Concord grape. Bull began selling cuttings, but plant patent laws had not yet come into existence, and soon Concord grape cuttings were being sold by many others. Bull failed to benefit appreciably, and was eventually to die a poor man. *[Others, however, were to benefit handsomely from the Concord grape, including Vineland, N.J. physician and dentist Thomas Welch, who in 1869 processed the first bottles of unfermented wine, an achievement that marked the beginning of the processed fruit juice industry.]*

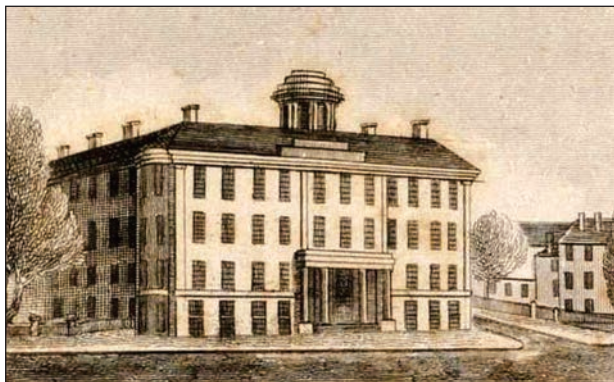


**First Parish Church (1809),
Ashby, Mass.**

Hammatt Billings, in addition to his accomplishments as an architect, 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 Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walter Scott, and Charles Dickens, though children’s books actually occupied the bulk of his time. Readers were moved by Stowe’s description and Billings’ depiction of the death of Little Eva in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, or thrilled to his and Alcott’s visualizations of the exploits of the March girls in *Little Women*.



**Tom Mourning Little Eva
Hammatt Billings illustration (1853)**



**Tremont House Hotel (1829),
Boston, Mass.**

Boston’s Tremont House, designed by **Isaiah Rogers** and opened in 1829, set the standard for luxury accommodation and became the model for hotels built in other cities. This four-story building was the first hotel in the nation to boast indoor plumbing for water closets, bathrooms (for bathing), and running water for the kitchen and laundry. Other “firsts” included a reception area, locked rooms for guests, bellhops, and free soap. The hotel was an immediate success (notable guests in the coming years would include Davy Crockett and Charles Dickens), and that success catapulted Rogers to become perhaps the country’s foremost hotel architect.

The *USS Congress*, built in Portsmouth by naval architect **Samuel Moore Pook**, was the second Union ship destroyed (along with *USS Cumberland*) by the Confederate ironclad *CSS Virginia* in Hampton Roads on March 8, 1862, the day prior to *Virginia*'s historic battle with the Union ironclad *USS Monitor*. Incredibly, Pook's *Congress* had in effect been destroyed by another Pook ship, because *CSS Virginia* was the rebuilt hulk of the *USS Merrimack*, which was built by Pook and launched at the Charlestown Navy Yard in 1855. *Merrimack* had been laid up for repairs in the Norfolk Navy Yard when *Virginia* seceded from the Union in 1861. Unable to evacuate her from the harbor, Union forces burned the ship to make her unusable to the Confederates, but she was salvaged, converted to an ironclad, and commissioned *CSS Virginia* in February 1862. She would meet the *Monitor* and take her place in history weeks later.



CSS Virginia vs. USS Congress, 1862

In 1833, at the age of 20, **Arioch Wentworth** moved to Boston (from Rollinsford N.H.) to seek employment, initially in a granite yard where he hoped to learn the “granite business,” and later in a soapstone shop. His employer’s business failed the following year, but Arioch was able to lease the property, and he was able to make the business a success by inventing or improving many of the machines, tools, and processes necessary to his business. Arioch ran it until 1850 when, with an eye on the materials demanded for upscale homes and buildings in Boston, he switched his focus to marble. Here again, he was able to build a successful enterprise, employing over 300 workers, helped in part by his mechanical ingenuity as he built machinery to cut and fashion ornate moldings. With his business success and many savvy property investments Arioch accumulated a substantial estate, and in his will he provided for the founding of “a school to furnish education in the mechanical arts.” That bequest led to the founding of Wentworth Institute in 1904.



Few of us these days are familiar with Boston-born **Albert Augustus Pope**, but in the 1890s his name was known throughout the country, both as the father of the American bicycle industry, and as a pioneer in the early automobile industry. (He was known popularly as Colonel Pope from his service in the Civil War, during which he participated in major actions that included Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg, and earned two battlefield promotions for gallantry.) Following the war Pope started a business providing supplies and tools to the shoe industry. The business was a great success, but Pope’s interest was diverted in 1876 when he became fascinated with bicycles. He began building (in Hartford, Connecticut) a two-wheel model that was immediately successful, and within a decade production of Pope’s “Columbia” bicycles was over 5,000 per year. Pope’s knack for advertising contributed to his success, and controlling his supply chain helped lower costs and maintain quality. But he pushed innovation as well, like reduced wheel friction and the use of hollow steel tubing, making his bicycles lighter and easier to pedal, allowing him to market them to women and children. By the time the bicycle craze peaked in the mid-1890s, Pope’s company was the largest employer in New England.

In 1866 Confederate President Jefferson Davis was indicted for treason in the courtroom of the Custom House and Courthouse in Richmond, Virginia. That structure was designed by **Ammi Burnham Young**, and because of its fireproof construction it was one of the few major structures to survive the conflagration that accompanied the city’s evacuation by the Confederates in 1865.

U.S. Custom House & Courthouse, Richmond, Va. (1856-1858 design by Ammi Burham Young; expanded in 1889, 1912, & 1932).

