

Charitably



Speaking

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A PUBLICATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS CHARITABLE MECHANIC ASSOCIATION

President's Message

I hope your summer was a good one. For those of us who attended the summer Quarterly Luncheon at Paul and Jessica Lohnes' home in Gloucester, I am sure you would agree that day was one of the highlights of the summer. It was a beautiful day to enjoy one another's company, spend some time at a beautiful home overlooking the ocean, and enjoy a lunch of steak and lobster. Thank you, Paul and Jessica, for welcoming us to your home.

During a brief business meeting at the Quarterly, our membership voted to approve some changes to our bylaws. These changes were approved as recommended by a Bylaws Committee and by the Board of Government. The affirmative vote of the membership made them official. The changes bring our bylaws more in line with how we have actually been operating the past couple of decades. Thank you to Joe Valante and Marty Joyce, who chaired the special Bylaws Committee. With the bylaw changes, you can look for an updated "Bylaws and List of Members" book. We hope to have this available by the January meeting. Our current Bylaws and Membership book was last printed in 1998, so we have lots of new members to list as well as the revised bylaws.



In June, our Planning Committee completed some of the most important work MCMA does today; selecting organizations who will receive our grants. The Committee approved about \$260,000 in grants! As you know, Planning Committee members visit all grant applicants and then meet as a group to decide who will receive grants. The Planning Committee's detailed work ensures that the money we donate is well spent. Thank you all for your work to help MCMA fulfill its mission.

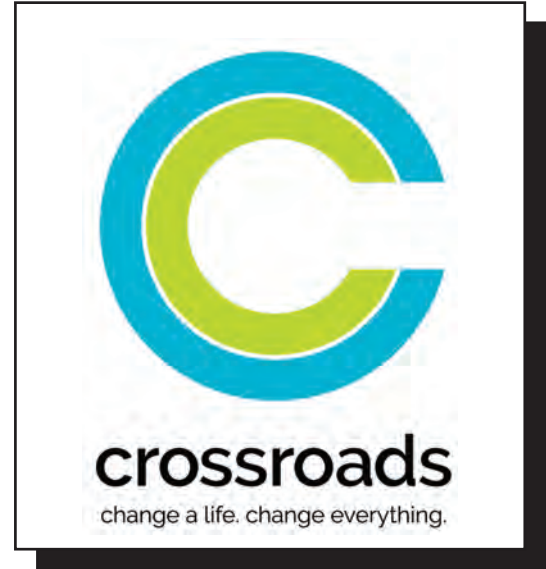
As you may have heard, our Building Committee has been unusually busy with maintaining and improving our office. We now have a new roof, new front entrance, a new HVAC unit, and a new tenant! Thanks to the Building Committee for taking on these jobs and ensuring they were completed properly and cost effectively.

In this edition of Charitably Speaking you will read about Honorary Member **Harrison Gray Otis** and the portrait of him that MCMA has on loan with the American Meteorological Society (AMS) on Beacon Hill in the home that once belonged to Otis. The portrait is being restored, and once it is back in place the AMS has agreed to let us plan an event in this beautiful Beacon Hill home and view the restored portrait. Details have not yet been worked out.

In the coming weeks, please watch for details about a MCMA Christmas Party in early December. It has been a long time since we last hosted a Christmas Party for members and guests, and the Board of Government feels the time is right to revive this tradition. In the meantime, Be Just and Fear Not! – **Peter**

Helping Others

Founded in 1936 as Boys' Camp, Inc. (and later as Boys' and Girls' Camps, Inc.) for children from Boston, **Crossroads** has grown beyond its "fresh air camp" origins and expanded to serve over 1000 diverse young people every year from Boston, Brockton, and surrounding towns. It has also progressed to become a recognized leader in the youth development field. Over 90% of their youth come from families at or below the poverty level, and the camping experience provides them access to opportunities for skill development, relationship building with peers and mentors, and learning experiences that have application far beyond summer camp. The original camp was located in the woods of Duxbury on what is now Crossroads' Camp Wing campus, and in its earliest days boys from Boston Boys' Clubs helped clear the land and build the cabins. Since that time Crossroads has grown to operate three summer campuses, plus a year-round Leaders Program for students in Grades 8-12. A majority of the summer campers continue into the leadership program, where they refine and practice their leadership skills, ultimately graduating from the five-year program with the confidence, skills, and dispositions to succeed in college and the workplace.



Crossroads sought our support in creating a woodworking program through which they could provide low-income youth with an opportunity to explore basic woodworking skills, work with hand and power tools, and potentially spark career ideas in them. To accomplish it, they dedicated a section of the newly-built Facilities Maintenance Building at Camp Wing, and MCMA helped equip it with a sizable grant for shop equipment and



multiple sets of hand tools. The classes began this past June with the first of this year's three overnight summer camp sessions. Interest among the campers has been high, and the results have been extremely positive. Students have learned to use woodworking tools, create a basic design and follow the steps to create it, follow safety rules, and work with others to complete a project.

As with other Crossroads learning experiences, the program calls for comprehensive hands-on practical activity, followed by discussion of challenges encountered and problems overcome. The format helps youth build confidence and self-awareness. As many of this year's students will be returning next summer, Crossroads will be challenged to offer a more advanced experience for them while still enabling new students to enter the basic program. But they have made a great beginning, and we are very pleased that MCMA has been able to be a part of it.

MCMA History

We have, over the past dozen years, written about MCMA's history as an organization, and about at least 60 of our past and present members. This time we'll focus on one of our Honorary Members, Mr. **Harrison Gray Otis**, who was elected to honorary membership in 1827, and once again we thank President Peter Lemonias for the research that yielded this article.

Harrison Gray Otis was an extraordinary person. He was a businessman, lawyer, and politician who became one of the most important leaders of the United States' first political party, the Federalists. He was born in Boston in 1765 and died in Boston in 1848. In his career as a lawyer and real estate developer, the Harvard-educated Otis also served twice as U.S. Attorney in Boston, and served in the Massachusetts legislature as a Representative and as a State Senator. He was elected to two terms in the U.S. Congress (1797-1801) and was known for his strong Federalist beliefs. He led a group of New England political leaders who met in Hartford, Connecticut, during the War of 1812 to consider having New England secede from the Union because of the harmful effects the War was having on the New England economy. He later became a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts (1817-1822) and then served as the third Mayor of Boston from 1829 until 1832. He was also one of the wealthiest citizens of Boston.

Harrison Gray Otis was already well-respected in Boston when he was 30 years old. He was asked to lead a committee to find a location for a soon to be constructed Massachusetts State House. In the course of arranging the purchase of the former home and property of John Hancock for the State House, he found other property nearby that was available. John Singleton Copley, the famous painter for whom Copley Square is named, had left Boston for England when the Revolutionary War broke out and was not going to return. Otis put together a group of investors and they bought Copley's property at a very good price. Copley wanted to fight the purchase, but did not want to return to Boston to challenge it and the deal went forward. Otis' group, the Mount Vernon Proprietors, eliminated or reduced the three hills of the Beacon Hill area and filled in marshes at the foot of the hills, creating Charles Street. They then mapped out the Beacon Hill neighborhood and sold the lots for homes. They named the streets after trees as was done in Philadelphia (Cedar, Chestnut, and Willow), and for famous Federalists (Pickney, Revere, and, in tribute to George Washington, Mount Vernon).

Otis was undoubtedly well known to many of our members of the time, but MCMA records note only one instance where he assisted our organization with a legal issue. One of our members had an apprentice who left his employ to join the Army. Our member wanted his apprentice released from the Army to serve out his apprenticeship as he was legally bound to do. Otis advised that the apprentice was obligated to his contract, but the army was not obliged to release him from military service. Therefore, all pay the apprentice earned during his military service should become the property of the employer. The employer decided to simply release the apprentice from his legal obligation.

Otis built three homes in Boston, all of them designed by Charles Bulfinch, Boston's first famous architect. His first home, at 141 Cambridge Street near Mass General Hospital, is now a museum. His second home, still a residential property, stands at 85 Mount Vernon Street. Otis built his third and last Boston home at 45

Beacon Street, just down the street from the State House. At this house, Otis hosted a reception for President James Monroe when he visited Boston, and he hosted all the leading figures of Boston from time to time. The home is very impressive with 11 bedrooms, a ballroom, a carriage house, and gardens. It is currently owned by, and serves as the headquarters for, the American Meteorology Society. And that brings us to the other MCMA connection to Harrison Gray Otis ... our 10-foot x 5-foot full-length portrait



Above is a c. 1860 photograph of the third house built by Harrison Gray Otis, located at 45 Beacon Street (*Boston Public Library Pictorial Archive*). At right is a more recent view provided by the current owners, the American Meteorological Society.



of Otis painted by Chester Harding, a well known portrait painter in the U.S. and in England. [*Harding, who lived from 1792-1866, had his home on Beacon Street across from the State House, and it currently houses the Boston Bar Association.*]

We are unclear as to how we came to own the Otis painting, though we know from our *Annals of 1862* that the Library Committee of MCMA was tasked to find an appropriate place to hang this portrait. For the past 50 years it has been on loan to the AMS and has hung in Otis' former home. It has an estimated value of \$75,000 and is currently undergoing a \$33,000 cleaning and repair by an art restoration company. The AMS is paying for this work with our agreement to leave the painting on loan to them for the next 50 years. [*In the room housing the Otis portrait also hangs a classical painting entitled The Music Lesson that Otis believed was done by Peter Paul Rubens, but it was later determined to be the work of Willem De Poorter, another Dutch painter.*]

Harrison Gray Otis helped to shape the politics and the landscape of Boston. While being the equivalent of a multi-billionaire in his time, he continued to serve the public and be engaged with the important issues of the day. When he died at 83 years of age, he was buried with his wife at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Sources:

Morison, Samuel Eliot. *Harrison Gray Otis: The Urbane Federalist*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969.

www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/harrison-gray-otis-fleeces-john-sigleton-copley-thinks/

