

## Charitably



## Speaking

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

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### President's Message

It was wonderful to again see so many members for our summer Lobster Cookout at Paul and Jessica Lohnes' beautiful Gloucester home. It felt good to see so many members and guests enjoying themselves and being together. The now spreading Delta variant of COVID-19 is a growing concern as I write this. Let us hope it will not prevent the resumption of in-person Quarterlies and other events.

During the late spring/early summer, our Planning Board met twice to first determine which grant requesters to visit, and second to determine which requesters would be funded and at what level. I attended the second meeting as an observer. I stepped down from the Planning Board upon becoming president, and being there I realized how much I missed being part of it.

It amazes me to see around 20 men, most of an age where we are on the "back nine," get emotional talking about the wonderful programs they observed during their visits to the grant requesters. It is so impressive to hear about the many organizations working so hard to help people overcome physical and mental challenges in order to obtain and hold down jobs, as well as great organizations like the North Bennett Street School and the Eliot School that help to teach the trades.

One Planning Committee member said that if you look up MCMA in the dictionary, the definition would be North Bennett Street School. I look at the definition of MCMA differently; I think it is defined by the Planning Committee. While all of our Committees are essential to the work of our beloved organization, the Planning Committee's work is what we can all be most proud of, and is how most non-members get to learn about us.

Thank you long time Planning Committee Chairman Paul Lohnes and Secretary Marty Joyce for your work in leading the Planning Committee, and thank you to the dedicated Planning Committee members who work hard to ensure the limited funds we are able to donate annually go to the most deserving organizations. We are on target to grant over \$250,000 this year.

Looking ahead, we have our October Quarterly coming up (details coming) as well as our Triennial on December 4. Please put the Triennial on your calendar. It will be another memorable evening at the Liberty Hotel in Boston where our next President will be installed.

Be Just and Fear Not. – **Peter**

### Helping Others

Several years ago we highlighted in this newsletter an organization whose name is familiar to all of us, but whose mission is unfortunately misunderstood by many. **The Home for Little Wanderers**, with a history dating back to 1799, is the oldest child welfare organization in the nation and one of the largest in New England. Once thought of as "the orphanage in Jamaica Plain," The Home in reality provides services to thousands of children and families each year, ensuring the healthy development and physical well-being of children and families living in at-risk circumstances. It does so through 25 programs such as family-focused home-based support, adoption, foster care,





independent living programs for former foster youth, intensive residential treatment, special education, school-based mental health support, and early childhood mental health programs. The Home operates three special education schools for emotionally and behaviorally challenged children. Our previous article focused on their Walpole campus, but much of our more recent support has been directed to their Southeast Campus (SEC) in Plymouth.



Located on 53 wooded acres, the SEC serves youth 8-18 years old who have a history of trauma. (Many have been abused, witnessed

domestic violence, or have dealt with poverty and homelessness.) The SEC School, the special education school on campus, serves up to 40 students and accommodates residential students who benefit from The Home's clinical services as well as day students from the community. More often than not, these children are at least two years behind their age-appropriate grade levels and have behavioral and learning disabilities and other mental health challenges. The school provides a comprehensive program that combines education with career development, recreation and fitness, with individualized treatment and education plans as needed. Students feel safe, challenged, and supported in this environment, and most advance at least one grade level academically.

Knowing that many of these youth will not return to their families but will transition to foster homes, group homes, or to independent living, SEC helps prepare them for that day with vocational courses and real-life work experiences (such as in the culinary and equine science programs illustrated above), and this is where MCMA's interest lies. Our past support has included equipment for woodworking, small machine repair, and graphic design programs, while our most recent grant will help expand the school's culinary program, with a particular interest in catering opportunities. Our Planning Committee members who have visited the school speak highly of their work, and we are pleased to be able to continue our support of that work.



## MCMA History

In our previous issue we discussed MCMA's connection with the Benjamin Franklin statue that stands in front of Old City Hall on School Street in Boston. Further, we noted the history behind the Franklin Press, on which Benjamin, for about five years of his apprenticeship, worked in his brother James' printing shop on Court Street in Boston. That press was gifted to MCMA in 1864, in large part because its then-owner (a Mr. John Murray) had learned about MCMA's significant efforts to honor Franklin with the above-mentioned statue, and the press is today one of our most treasured artifacts.

Although Franklin was neither a member nor an honorary member of MCMA (he died several years before our founding), it is not surprising that our membership of that era held him in high regard. Some of that regard surely stemmed from his early career as a printer. (In his later years Franklin enjoyed visiting printing shops and giving tips to the apprentices, and our third president, Benjamin Russell, enjoyed several such visits during his own apprenticeship.) And Franklin's renown as a statesman, plus his well-known experiments with electricity and his work as an inventor (bifocal glasses, the Franklin stove, and the lightning rod, among others), would likely have been factors as well. What is a little surprising, though, is that the printing press is just one of four MCMA artifacts with a connection to Franklin, so let's complete the story.

Returning to the dedication of the Franklin Statue, a procession, or parade, wound its way through the streets of Boston to the dedication site. The circuitous route, which began at Park Street Church, was seven miles in length, the entire distance crowded with spectators on sidewalks, in windows, and even on rooftops. (Schools and businesses were closed, as a holiday had been declared, and visitors had poured in from surrounding towns.) It took two hours and fifty minutes for the procession to pass a given point, and as the lead elements arrived back at Tremont and School Streets, they encountered the final elements which were just beginning their march. Militia and fire units preceded the bands, dignitaries, professional and trade organizations, manufacturers, students, and others which were organized into nine divisions. The makeup of each division and the procession route are described in detail on a 28"x36" broadside that hangs in our office and commemorates the event. While the 1st Division was comprised of dignitaries, the 2nd Division, led by 200 members of MCMA and made up of trade organizations and manufacturers, was the largest, and it excited the most general interest. Various manufacturers paraded examples of their work (from tools, to pianos, to cannon, to a model of a fully-rigged clipper ship) on horse drawn wagons that were accompanied by the many hundreds of workmen who built them. (The most impressive was possibly the locomotive on a special-built wagon pulled by 24 horses.) This was a grand, well-organized, and well-received event in the city's history, and we are fortunate that we have this artifact to remind us of the role MCMA played in it.

The aforementioned electrical experiments performed by Franklin utilized Leyden jars, and one of his jars actually made its way to MCMA. (The Leyden jar, a 1740s European invention, was a metal-lined, water-filled jar with a metal rod that extended thru its stopper to make contact with the water. It could accumulate and hold an electrical charge, and was widely used in early electrical experiments.) Franklin conducted experiments with a battery of multiple Leyden jars in series, and one of those jars was later



**A view of the procession to the Franklin Statue dedication, Court Street, Boston, Sept. 17, 1856.**  
*(Boston Pictorial Archive of the Boston Public Library)*



acquired by Joseph M. Wightman, a maker of scientific instruments who himself conducted experiments using Leyden jars. Wightman joined our Association in 1842 and in 1857 became our 18th president. As recounted in our *Annals*, the jar went from Wightman to Edward S. Ritchie, also a noted maker of scientific instruments and a member of MCMA. Upon Ritchie's death his son Thomas P. Ritchie (also a member of MCMA) gifted the jar to us. For the past 60-plus years it has been on loan from us to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

And lastly we have the Franklin Chair. While he was still an infant, Benjamin's parents moved from the home of his birth on Milk Street to a small, two story building on the corner of Hanover and Union Streets. Over the entrance swung the "Blue Ball" sign of Josiah Franklin, Tallow Chandler and Soap Boiler. Josiah was Benjamin's father, and his shop occupied the ground floor while the family lived on the upper floor. Benjamin lived here until he left for Philadelphia at age seventeen. In 1858 streets in the area were to be widened, under the direction of the Chairman of Streets for the City of Boston, Mr. Joseph M. Wightman (yes, the same Wightman mentioned above), and the Franklin homestead faced demolition. Mr. Edward Everett, a prominent statesman (and Honorary Member of MCMA) urged that the building be moved and preserved for the benefit of future generations. Wightman agreed and purchased the building with the intention of moving it.

Further investigation, though, revealed that an earlier fire had structurally damaged the roof timbers and other parts of the building, making it incapable of being moved, so it ultimately was demolished. Wightman was able, though, to preserve some of the few remaining original beams in the structure, oak floor joists, and he had them cut and milled into workable sections. One of our members at the time was a Mr. Augustus Eliares, a gifted wood carver and furniture maker. Wightman contacted Eliares and others to consider how best to use these pieces of wood. Eliares suggested that if the pieces were glued together he could carve a chair out of them, and it was agreed to have him do so. The result was the magnificent, hand-carved chair that we display in our boardroom today.

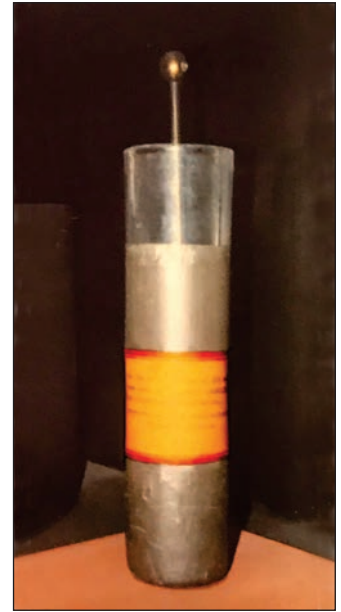
On the back headrest is our logo and motto, with a profile of Franklin on one side and Paul Revere on the other. Wightman presented the chair to our Association on March 20, 1860 "as an interesting memento of Benjamin Franklin and as a token of my esteem for my associates."

#### Sources:

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MCMA's  
Benjamin Franklin  
Leyden Jar

