



November 2007

President's Remarks

One of the subjects discussed this year, both by our Trustees and by the committee formed recently to explore ways to grow and to more productively use our resources, is member donations. It's a touchy subject, because many members have given generously of their time and efforts on behalf of MCMA, and no-one wants to request, or even imply, that they must do more. What we did decide, though, was to simply remind everyone that, if you are able to and wish to make a year-end donation to MCMA, that gift will be 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. (And we have included a return envelope to make it easy.) All donations will help to reduce our reliability on the performance of our portfolio as our sole means of survival.

Marty Joyce

Recent Happenings

Our July Quarterly was held at the Adams Inn in Quincy. As the summer meeting is a casual affair, we in recent years have opted for "semi-outdoor" venues to take advantage of the season. The Adams Inn's outdoor rotunda on the Neponset River offers such a venue, and we were blessed with a perfect day and a pleasant breeze, though the breeze did make conducting business a challenge. Not to overlook the historical significance of the setting, the granite quarried in Quincy for the Bunker Hill Monument was loaded onto barges just a short distance upriver in Milton, and passed by this very location some 180 or so years ago.

We conducted our October Quarterly at the Neighborhood Club in Quincy, a location popular with much of the membership. In addition to business items, we were pleased to hear that two of our members who have had serious health issues over the past few months are now doing well, as Past-President Bud Hansen updated us on Arthur Southall and Rich Adams did the same with regard to Dick O'Meara.

Planning Committee

In our previous issue we highlighted an organization with a long history of its own (The Eliot School, c. 1676), and a lengthy history with MCMA as well. This time, we're on the

opposite end of the spectrum, as we focus in on *More Than Words*, an organization which MCMA is assisting for the first time this year, and which itself was founded only three years ago.

More Than Words is in business to help youth who face significant risk factors as they prepare for their transition to adulthood. The majority of youth are in state custody preparing to age out of the foster care system, but they also work with low-income youth who are court involved, youth who receive services through the Dept. of Mental Health, and youth who attend alternative educational placements as a result of behavioral and/or emotional challenges. For youth in foster care in Massachusetts, approximately 600 age out of the system annually, and they are expected to be ready to live independently, attend school, work, pay their bills, and maintain a household. Not only do these youth lack family support networks, they also face a myriad of challenges accessing the training and job experiences needed to prepare for self-sufficient lives. (67% have not passed the GED or obtained a diploma; 61% have no job experience; and within 4 years of leaving state care, 1 in 3 experience homelessness, and up to 35% spend time in jail.)

More Than Words' approach to this challenge has been to work with youth to manage a retail and on-line book business on Moody Street in Waltham, a space which serves also as an art gallery and community center. In this setting, youth are provided with supportive employment positions that include peer-led training focused on business, communication and technology skills. Youth receive real-world, hands-on job and leadership training, while simultaneously covering 50% of the organization's budget with earned revenue. Only 15 slots are available for youth training at any one time, but the organization has a number of success stories already, and its strength rests in the unique youth-centered, empowering model of the program. As responsibilities and systems are increasingly taken on by the youth, they gain more and more experience, competency, and self-confidence.



MCMA's support in 2007 to this young organization was in the form of seven laptop computers, needed mainly to replace outdated or damaged equipment with limited connectivity. While our support is specifically aimed at the existing business, *More Than Words* is developing other initiatives to deepen and expand activities and enhance current operations. One of these is a Café Training Program, supported by *Starbucks*, that will provide an additional array of skill development opportunities for youth, as well as

increase foot traffic at the *More Than Words* store. This is a small organization with worthy goals and good ideas. But they face a big challenge, and we are hopeful that MCMA's support will help them grow to meet that challenge.

MCMA History

We sometimes joke, after hearing Ray Purdy's *Moments in History* on MCMA's early members, that we feel a little "inferior" in comparison, since so many of those early

members were inventors as well as artisans and businessmen. Our subject for this issue is an equally accomplished past member, from a somewhat later era, whose name may not be familiar to you, but whose work almost surely is.

Orlando Whitney Norcross was born in Maine in 1839, moved with his family to Salem, Massachusetts in 1848, and received his education in that town. "O. W.", as he was called, served in the Union Army from 1861-1864, and then went into business with his brother James in the firm of Norcross Brothers. The brothers won some contracts in Worcester, as a result of which they moved their headquarters from Salem to Worcester, where it remained for the rest of their careers. In 1869 they were engaged to build the (since demolished) Worcester High School. Importantly, the successful completion of that building began the firm's long and rewarding association with its architect, H. H. Richardson, who was to become one of the most influential architects of the late

nineteenth century.



Norcross actually pioneered the business of general building contracting when it took whole contracts - lump sum - for large buildings. The practice in this country, until that time and even into the 20th century, had been for the architect to coordinate the various trade contracts. The Norcross

brothers, though their training was in carpentry, took contracts for large masonry buildings, and stone construction soon became the firm's specialty. Two important features defined the company. The first was that the firm hired tradesmen and worked with its own employees rather than subcontracting. The second was that it supplied much of the material used in its projects, and for that reason operated quarries, brickyards, and workshops for cabinetmaking, blacksmithing, painting, etc. The rationale was to ensure that materials would get to jobsites when needed and thereby minimize costly delays.

In 1873 the company signed a contract for its largest project to date, Richardson's Trinity Church in Boston. Although full of risks (Norcross had a lump sum contract, yet the architect designed the building as it was going up), the project was a success, and the result is a masterpiece. In addition to Trinity Church, Norcross buildings in this area

included Symphony Hall, South Station, Latin and English High Schools, the Thomas Crane Library in Quincy, the Milton, Malden and Woburn Public Libraries, Harvard Medical School (the marble for which had been rejected for use on the New York Public Library, and so became known as "Harvard's Bargain Marble"), the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard's Austin, Sever and Conant Halls, the Colonial Building and Theater, the Algonquin Club, the Exchange Building, Worcester City Hall, the Clark University Library, and the Custom House Tower, many of which are of course still standing.

It should not be overlooked that Norcross was known for having its own architectural draftsmen, and provided much of the detailed design that went into his buildings. Harvard's Sever Hall, for example, was built off only eleven working drawings, and while the architect (Richardson) was known to visit frequently and make onsite changes and issue directives during construction, it was Norcross' draftsmen and skilled tradesmen who were responsible for working out the details.



South Station



Thomas Crane Library

Outside Massachusetts, Norcross constructed multiple buildings at Yale, Brown, Columbia, and Princeton Universities, built the New York Public Library, New York's Horace Mann School, the Marshall Field Store in Chicago, the Rhode Island State Capital Building, the Bank of Montreal Buildings in Montreal and Winnipeg, the Bank of Toronto Building, and completed the 1902-1903 alterations to the White House in Washington, D.C. In addition, Norcross quarried a block of granite 20' square by 50' long from which it created and erected the West Point Monument, which was dedicated in 1897 as a memorial to graduates killed in the Civil War. Norcross was able to get business in distant cities by bidding on projects designed by architects they knew well, and by the early 1900s they had offices in Boston, Chicago, New York, Washington, Montreal and Toronto, in addition to Worcester, and were the largest general contractor in the country.

O.W. joined MCMA in 1879, and was a life member. He died suddenly in 1920 (at age 80) while in a streetcar *on his way to work*. That fact alone is probably a good indicator of the work ethic that this man possessed, and that had much to do with his success. His firm was known as "trustworthy", and he was held in high regard by his peers. O.W. Norcross is yet another of the members of this Association with whom we are honored to be linked.