



## September 2008

### President's Remarks

Our Planning Committee met in June to review, discuss and decide upon the recipients of our 2008 Grants. The Committee had met previously to preview all the requests, and to whittle that list down some. Each "requesting agency" had then been visited by at least two members of the Committee so both the request and the requestor could be reviewed in detail. *[This is the process followed every year by our Planning Committee. It requires*



*a good deal of time and effort on the part of Committee members, and especially Committee Chairman Paul Lohnes, but it gives us better familiarity with the requesting agencies, allows for follow-up on previous Grants, and assures us that our money is being put to good use. This Committee does outstanding work, and we very much appreciate their efforts.]*

At the June meeting, members reported on their visits, the needs and merits of the various requests were evaluated, and decisions were made as to how best to allot the available funds. But for a change we wanted to let you know of worthy requests that unfortunately did not win MCMA funding. These include: a request from Wellesley High School for woodworking equipment for a proposed shop program; a request from Life Resources for woodworking and automotive equipment; and a request from Community Work Services for kitchen equipment for training purposes. If any member would be interested in directly assisting any of these requests, or knows of some other possible source for support, please contact Rick at the office for more detailed information.

Marty Joyce

### Recent Happenings

Our July Quarterly was held once again at the Adams Inn, in their open-air rotunda on the Neponset River in Quincy, and once again we enjoyed perfect weather. Among the issues discussed were the status of the necessary restoration of our painting of Harrison Gray Otis (the financing for which we have negotiated with the American Meteorological Society, to whom the painting is on loan), and an outline of the current efforts of our Resources Committee to solicit other "grant makers" (either private or corporate-sponsored foundations) to augment the grants we are able to make on our own. Also, Tom Crowdis updated us on the activities of our History & Preservation Committee, Bill Scott gave us some insight into the work of Life, Inc., an agency that has received continued support from MCMA (and which presented to Bill and to his fellow Planning

Committee member Charlie Gale (its 2008 Gold Leaf Award), and Rick Purdy filled us in on a serious health issue that had hospitalized his father, Past-President Ray Purdy. *[Thankfully, Ray is now doing much better.]*

### Planning Committee

One of the long-term recipients of MCMA support has been the North Bennet Street School in Boston's North End. Located not far from the Old North Church, this non-profit institution was incorporated in 1885, initially to help immigrants adjust to their new country and teach them the skills needed to obtain employment. It in fact pioneered the concept of intensive instruction in a classroom/shop setting for the purpose of learning a trade. Today, this school (which operates a satellite facility in Arlington) preserves and promotes excellence in craft, and trains students (many whom are career changers) in traditional trades that use hand skills in concert with developed technology. In each Program, highly skilled instructors teach students small classes, and these students graduate with real proficiency in a chosen trade or craft, ready for employment in their field.



sole  
also  
of  
in



Students can choose from Programs in Carpentry, Preservation Carpentry, Cabinet and Furniture Making, Piano Technology, Violin Making and Restoration, Jewelry Making and Repair, Locksmithing and Bookbinding.

And regardless which Program they pursue, students are likely to work with equipment and tools provided by MCMA. In the past seven years alone, we have furnished a wide variety of equipment (band saws, table saws, mortiser, joiners, chain hoist, scaffolding system, computer-based design and documentation system, engraving machine, sawdust collection system, etc.) and tools worth approximately \$88,000. But part of our 2007 grant was used to replace an 18" thickness planer that we bought for the school thirty years ago and had been in daily use in the school's Cabinet and Furniture Making Shop. An important element of the school's shop curriculum is maintenance and repair of equipment, which accounts for the lengthy service of this prior contribution, and indicates to us that the school truly values these contributions.



The North Bennet Street School is a unique industrial educational institute that preserves skilled crafts and promotes excellence in the practice of those crafts. The work of this organization truly reflects the goals of MCMA, and we continue to respect, admire and appreciate the work they do and the results they achieve.

## MCMA History

Many of us remember the Mechanics Building on Huntington Avenue, and the Automobile, Sportsman, or other shows we may have attended there. Some of our members may even recall the MCMA Quarterly meetings that were held there. But when MCMA had that building constructed in the early 1880s, its main purpose was to house the Mechanical Exhibitions that were conducted by MCMA. Originally held at Quincy Market and Faneuil Hall, from 1837 through 1902 these Exhibitions were held roughly every three years, with the purpose of exhibiting, promoting and rewarding outstanding examples of invention and art and craftsmanship. Prize medals (Gold, Silver and Bronze) were awarded in many disciplines, as were diplomas (awarded for entries not meeting the standards for medals, but considered worthy of recognition). What few of us recognize or appreciate in this day and age, however, is the importance that was placed upon those awards by the individuals who vied for them, and the impact that the awards could have on the business or careers of those individuals.



The die for the MCMA medal was created by Christian Gobrecht, who was born in Pennsylvania in 1785 and was the designer of many noteworthy medals, but is best known for his work with the U.S.Mint in Philadelphia. He designed the 1836 Seated Liberty Dollar, also known as the Flying Eagle Dollar from its reverse image, but most commonly known to numismatists as the Gobrecht Dollar. The Seated Liberty design was subsequently used on smaller-denomination coins from half dimes to half dollars. Gobrecht also created the classic Liberty-with-coronet design used on gold coins from 1838 to 1908.

Competition for these medals was by no means limited to amateurs. These awards were both prestigious and widely recognized, and were sought even by well-established manufacturers. When Samuel Colt was awarded a Silver Medal for revolvers submitted at the 1853 Exhibition, for example, his Connecticut firearms factory was already very successful. But the exhibitions and awards were also vehicles by which an inventor with a new idea could both showcase that invention and hopefully secure MCMA's endorsement of it. The Gold Medal awarded to Alexander Graham Bell at the 1878 Exhibition for his "Bell Telephone" was surely useful to Bell in his efforts to demonstrate and gain wider acceptance for his recently patented device.





**"In Flanders Field"- Robert William Vonnoh**

who had not won major recognition until his receipt of a Gold Medal at MCMA's 1884 Exhibition. Vonnoh won a teaching position at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston the following year, went on to study in Paris, and ultimately enjoyed a successful career as an artist and a teacher of art. He was one of the earliest painters to introduce European Impressionism to America, and his work today can be found in the MFA in Boston, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and other museums throughout the country.

It was not uncommon for individuals to exhibit and compete at multiple Exhibitions, and sculptor Henry H. Kitson (1865-1947) managed to win a total of three Gold Medals from MCMA. Born in England, Kitson came to America at age thirteen, and initially worked as a stone carver in his older brother's ornamental architecture shop. His brother recognized talent, and financially made it possible for "H.H." to move to Paris to study sculpting, from where he returned to Boston in 1888. Kitson became successful, and completed numerous public works, mainly in the Northeastern portion of the country,



**Lexington Minute Man Statue**

though one of his major works is located in Vicksburg, and he even completed a bust for the Queen of Rumania which earned him a knighthood from the queen. His work can be found in many museums, including the MFA in Boston, but other very visible local examples of Kitson's work include the statue of Admiral Farragut in South Boston (overlooking Pleasure Bay), the William Conant statue in Salem, the statue of Robert Burns in the Fenway, The Pilgrim Maiden statue in Plymouth, and of course, The Minute Man statue in Lexington. And possibly his most famous work is his hobbit-like "Gingerbread House" studio in Tyringham, MA (near Lee).

These few examples only begin to tell the story of MCMA's past Exhibitions and what they meant to the mechanics, artisans, inventors and manufacturers of their time. The award of an MCMA Medal was recognition of excellence that was important to recipients and widely respected by their peers, and even by the public at large. These Exhibitions and Medals are an important part of our history that we should not overlook, as they illustrate one of the successful avenues taken by MCMA in our unchanging mission to promote the mechanical arts and support mechanical artisans.