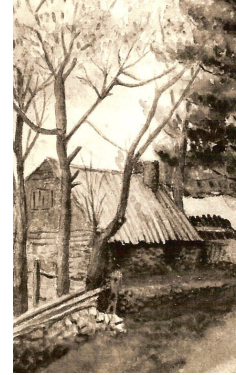


FITCHBURG
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY



125
years



Special Issue



2023

The War of 1812

A surprising discovery from Colonel Ivers Phillips, a resident of Fitchburg and Colorado

One of our favorite manuscripts in our collection is Colonel Ivers Phillips's reminiscences. The successful railroad and mining magnate spoke to the Historical Society in 1895. We just did the math and realized that he had been a child in 1812. He remembered Fitchburg's soldiers going off to fight in the War of 1812. First, they trained on an open field specially cleared for military exercises: the Campus Martius. And he shared those memories [HERE](#), at the Fitchburg Historical Society! It is still thrilling

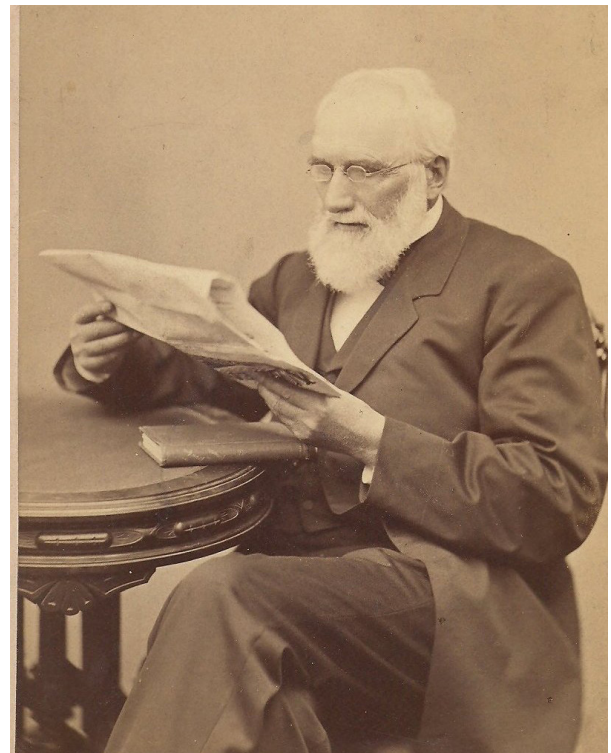
The Boyhood of Ivers Phillips

Memories shared by Ivers Phillips when he was about 90 years old. He was born in 1805, so his description of being a student dates back to about 1810 to 1820.

Going to school in Fitchburg

I worked hard to get what little education I did get. There was no opportunity to get it except from the common district schools of Fitchburg, and they were very short, the usual length being about 8 weeks in winter, and about the same time in summer. The inhabitants were mostly farmers and the boys were kept at work on the farms in summer so it was seldom they attended school after they were 10 or 12 years old, which was the case with me, and we had to exert ourselves in every way to get a decent education. The terms were short and the teachers incompetent sometimes. I was in the habit of going to school in the winter wherever there was a winter school being kept in the town if I could and entering my own district while that was kept. One school would begin early in the fall and close early in the winter and another commence about the time this one left off. One winter I lived in district No. 6, in the western part of the town where the term lasted 7 or 8 weeks in winter, and the Carter school, about a mile and a half away, all the way across lots, commenced just after and I went to school every day. When the academy

was established in 1830 I was 25 years old. I have been for years the only survivor. We made a very strong effort to get that school established. It was rather not a school. It was not incorporated and did not belong to the town.
(continued on pg. 2)



The Boyhood of Ivers Phillips (continued from pg. 1)

War Breaks Out When Ivers is Seven Years Old

I am a native of Ashburnham, but our family removed to Fitchburg when I was in my seventh year of age.... Soon after, the war of 1812 broke out. I saw and heard of many military movements....

There was great excitement all over the state. Ashburnham Light Infantry marched down through Fitchburg on Sunday morning, led by Captain Ivers Jewett with fife and drum, and a large baggage wagon following and when the danger was over, they came marching back. My father had been discharged from the company and he did not go but my uncle, Asia Phillips, did go. I, boy as I was, took great interest in all the military movement, and I became quite an enthusiast in them, which had not yet entirely died out. Soon after the close of the war steps were taken to raise and organize an independent company in Fitchburg, which resulted in the organizing of the Fitchburg Fusiliers. I watched the movement with great interest. The first public parade of the company (I think) was on the fourth of July 1817, about the time that I was twelve years old. I was there, saw the flag presented and heard the speeches. I well remember now the appearance of the men. It is safe to say that I took as much interest in the occasion as any of them, looking forward to the time when I should be old enough to join them. From that time on, whenever

or wherever the Fusiliers met in uniform I was there, and five years after, when I was seventeen years old, I became a member of the Company.



Doorway of Iver Phillips' home



This newsletter on African-American History in Fitchburg is one of four thematic newsletters being created by the Fitchburg Historical Society for distribution to new residents of Fitchburg; students, teachers and professors; senior citizens; churches and clubs; in addition to the membership of the Historical Society. These extra issues were funded by a grant from the Fitchburg Cultural Council, which is funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency. The FCC is part of a network of 329 Local Cultural Councils (LCCs) serving all 351 cities and towns in the Commonwealth.

Boarding House Stories from the 1820's

In the early 1800's, Fitchburg was a small town and local stories made the rounds to keep everyone entertained with gossip. The memoirs shared with the Fitchburg Historical Society often share starting memories of crime and misbehavior. While setting up his memories of elementary school, in "Mr. Skelton's School", Ebenezer Bailey describes the people who lived in (or ate at) his mother's boarding house on Mill Street. Most of them worked only a few steps away, at the Old Stone Mill textile factory.

One exception was an itinerant teacher, named Mr. Crosby, who was also an arsonist and thief. He told elaborate tall tales and insisted on sleeping on the floor and walking everywhere he went, which everyone in town talked about. His incredible speed led Bailey to say,

"Any one, at that day, seeing him as a pedestrian going up the road from the Old City to the upper common, would have very much the same emotions which we had, when we saw the first electric car streaking up Main Street.

Two men even tried to hold a long wood railing across the road to trip him up, but he just knocked down the two men and the railing "like a rushing, mighty wind."

He says,

"I think he was the most accomplished villain who ever lived in Fitchburg. On that very night, when my little friend, Wm. Snow, was driven from his burning home, barely escaping death, in the breast of Crosby lay the conscious secret, which no one else in the world then knew, that he, himself held the incendiary torch which started the conflagration. Prompted by no motive of revenge, dislike or plunder, but solely for the love of pure, unadulterated cussedness – just for the amuse – merit and fun of hoodwinking the people, and by arson, treachery and deceit, and a show of activity to palm himself off upon a trusting community as a man of great heroic and altruistic qualities, while all the time he was the Devil in disguise.

Previously, in the early winter, he had procured the burning of the Capt. Zachariah Sheldon's shop, by inducing a half witted fellow to light the torch – which showed the meanness of his soul. In the early spring, following, he set fire to the barn of Dr. Marshall, which was connected to the house by a shed. The barn was entirely consumed, but the house was saved by tearing away the connecting shed. Crosby was first on the roof, ax in hand –

the bravest of the brave.

Another arsonist from an earlier time in Fitchburg, was suspected. According to Bailey,

This last fire, taking place almost under the very eyes of the patrol, aroused the people, who, early in the morning rallied forth in various directions with determined earnestness to secure the possession of Lapham. Crosby was the foremost and most active one in the search. His party came to a brook, and, in attempting to clear the stream at one leap, he came a little short of reaching the other bank, and his foot landing on a rolling stone, his ankle was badly sprained. He was carried to my mother's house and laid on the floor in the front room, for the floor had always been his couch, and he would have no other now.

The people crowded in to commiserate the supposed heroic and altruistic saint. Dr. Marshall, with feelings of respect and gratitude, gave his professional services. Here was a spectacle unique for this world. One of the worst and meanest rascals in all christendom, being tenderly ministered to and nursed by the very man whose barn he had just burned, and who, no doubt, also intended the same fate for his house."

The Baileys were glad to get rid of Mr. Crosby, but first he would take advantage of them one more time:

"A few weeks after we were visited by my aunt from New Hampshire. One day she left her purse on the table in the room where Crosby was lying for a few hours and when she took it up again she found that five dollars were missing. My mother had no doubt at the time that Crosby stole it, but she would not then have dared to intimate such a suspicion, as he was so generally patronized as the sweetest of saints. My mother never had a high opinion of him, and was very glad when he got entirely well and left town."

There were a few other unusual or unsavory characters who passed through: The Superintendent of the Stone Mill textile factory, Mr. Griswold, became mentally ill and spent his time racing his horse and chaise all over the countryside at dangerous speeds. Another manager -- Mr. Hayden – was caught falsifying cloth production numbers and left town.

(continued on pg. 4)

Boarding House Stories from the 1820's (continued from pg. 3)

Finally, a Mr. Lothrop from Rhode Island ran off. He was an overseer in the mill and a gambler, exaggerator and "given to some other rascally practices," according to Bailey. The mill went bankrupt in the spring of 1829 and Lothrop raced out of town. According to Bailey, he had to "get out of town in season to place a safe distance between him and the Sheriff, so that he could get into the State of Rhode Island without arrest. ... He had purchased a horse and chaise, and quantities of jewelry and other things – all on credit, which, at the time of purchase to presume he had no idea of paying for.

According to Bailey, he had to "pack up and git." "They loaded up the chaise, harnessed the horse, and the last seen of Lothrop he was streaking down Water Street with his gray colt – game for any Sheriff's team." In a town with so many new industries and people trying to become successful, there were a few scoundrels who left behind stories and unpaid bills, but nothing else.

Stories Collected by Ebenezer Bailey about early Fitchburg

In 1830, Main St., between Oliver Street and Church Street was level and was the lowest part of the street, there being a rising grade in each direction from that point. In the spring or in very rainy weather the ground was very muddy. In 1831, the citizens clubbed together and built a dirt sidewalk through this section. There was a dam and a small pond, where ice was cut, on Punch Brook, near Main Street also a private bath house owned by Oliver Fox.

Alvah Crocker, when quite a young man, worked for General Leonard Burbank in his paper mill on Water St. and boarded with him. Mr. Burbank warned him against trying to win the affection of his daughter, telling

him that it could not be allowed as their positions in life were so different. In later years General Burbank failed in business and the family was helped by Mr. Crocker. Mr. Burbank died in the poor house.

Samuel Hale was a witness in the Superior Court on the afternoon of June 23, 1876. He was

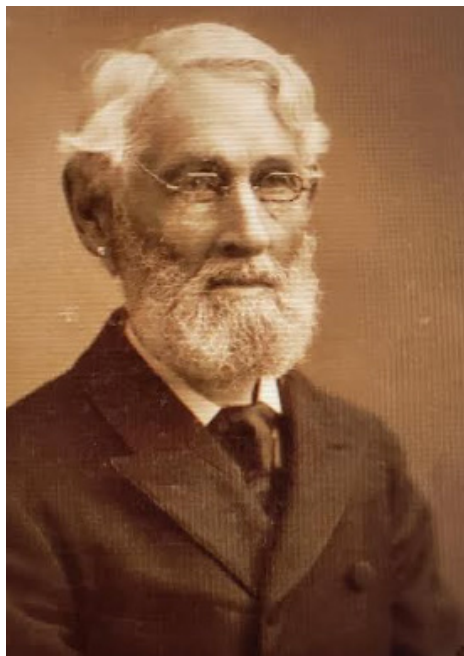
asked how he remembered that there was

a wall in front of Dr. Marshall's house on Main St., seventy years before. He replied that an old man named Lawrence used to live some miles out of town and when he came to meetings, he used to bring his shoes and stockings in his hands till he reached this wall on which he used to sit and put them on. The boys used to gather round to watch him.

When my mother's sister, Jane Kimball (the mother of Henry M. Francis) was a girl, she attended a ball in Fitchburg in a dress which was covered with mica from Rollstone, cut in the form of diamonds and sewn on the dress by her sister Mary.



Jane Kimball



Ebenezer Bailey, at various ages

Fred Eveleth describes the 1840's in Fitchburg

Eveleth wrote a very long letter, where he described his teachers and the various ways that they punished the students by hitting them with something, or getting other students to hurt them. He doesn't mention anything about what they learned, except that his first teacher taught to read early, when he was only six years old.

About the town and its people, he wrote:

The "one-horse shay", the doctors gig, the patient ox were common in our unlighted, unpaved streets, while in our houses the spinning wheel, the distaff and the loom were in use, or were preserved as precious heirlooms. The singing-school, corn-huskings, hay-rides, barn-raising, The Virginia-reel or Contra dance, sometimes called the Country dance, was still popular.

In short, we had all the charm of the simple life; and happiness and comfort were common. The ladies wore bonnets – not hats – in those days. The gentlemen of those days wore large white beaver hats – Dr. Marshall's was one of the last I can remember – with blue-broadcloth, swallow-tail coats and brass buttons – Judge Taylor's of the Fitchburg Insurance Company was near the last I remembered, and stiff "dickies" that came up around the chin and a bit of the cheeks, for all the world like the sideboards of a wheel-barrow, being held in place by a black silk stock which came around the lower part of the collar having a sort of bow in front under the chin.

The pants small at the ankle and held in place by a strap passing from one side of the foot to the other under the instep were just passing out. With the blue broadcloth swallow-tail sometimes went a yellow vest: so that in full rig the good dresser of 1840 was a fearful and wonderful

object. No wonder Dickens styled one of them in one of his novels – Mr. Turveydrop. The yellow vest & blue coat came down to us I think from Revolutionary times and in my boyhood were rapidly disappearing. I think Mr. Wood was one of the very last to wear the dickie and the silk stock.



The nine o'clock stroke of the bell was adopted about the time that Fitchburg became a city (1873), in place of the nine o'clock ringing of the bell of the Unitarian church by Mr. Pierce who lived opposite the Deacon Caldwell place on Prospect Street, which ringing we were told was the successor to the old curfew bell established by the Norman kings after the Norman Conquest, to keep the Saxons in their homes, and adopted by the Puritans to conserve the morals of the young people.

Fitchburg at that time as well as since, was the second [that is, second-largest] municipality in the country and noted for the variety and volume of its manufactures. Even little Punch Brook, that rises between High and Mechanic Streets that formed a part of the Dr. Marshall farm and is occupied now by a flourishing Finnish settlement... even that little brook in which as a child I fished for minnow with a bent pin for a hook and thread for a line, had to do its part by furnishing water for a little pond in the hollow of Academy Street that turned machinery for a wheelwright's shop and then hurrying in a meandering course to help turn the wheel at Cushing's flouring mill.

The population of Fitchburg in those days was made up almost completely of descendants of the Puritans, or of later comers from England, Scotland, or Ireland. Those from Ireland were induced to come to Fitchburg by Mr. Alva Crocker to work upon the railroads; and finally, they came, increased, and settled what is called The Patch. I can remember hearing some of them talking in their dialect of the Gaelic tongue in the intervals between their working moments, as they stopped to light their dudeens. [A dudeen is a short clay tobacco pipe that comes from Ireland.]



A Memoir of childhood in Fitchburg from Henry Goodrich, written in 1922 to describe what life was like in the 1840's

In the early forties during the building of the Fitchburg railroad, “pick and shovel brigades” of laborers were numerous in Fitchburg, as well as all along the line.

The working day was eleven hours, “from sunup to sundown” as the phrase was. And they worked during that time, for the foreman stood over them enforcing his commands with vigorous language and sometimes by more strenuous methods.

It was a long hard day and the pay was 90 cents. This was the standard wage for the whole line.

As a lad of eleven or twelve at that time, I found the busy scene of great interest, and often spent my leisure time there. I well remember one night at “knocking off time,”



when the foreman called the welcome “all over.” I shall always remember the fervor with which one workman remarked to another—“Aren’t ye glad Joe!”—

These men with their families lived in rude hastily-constructed shacks, familiarly called “shanties.” There was a settlement of them on Water Street and another near Baker’s Pond.

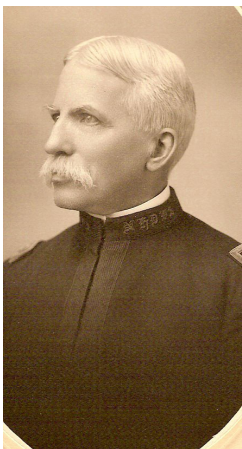
We lived in South Fitchburg at that time. My father kept a cow, and I was dispatched with the surplus milk to Baker’s pond, a pail in one hand and a qt. measure in the other. The milk sold for 4 cents a quart. The mothers would come to the doors of the shanties with basins or pitchers, and as I measured out the milk in the quart measure would say, “Put in another little drop for the children.” It would have been somewhat of a mathematical problem to have divided one drop among all the children in some of the shanties!

It was about this time also, that one June day, I picked a six qt. pail full of wild strawberries at the crossroads near what is known as the Start place, on the Suburban line. These I sold to a man at the Hollow Mill for 18 cents.—3 cents a quart.

I guess “A dollar went some distance those days.”

Important National Politics Play Out in Fitchburg: Daniel Webster and Charles Sumner From a letter written by Henry Burrage in 1918

I remember as a boy eleven years old of visiting my grandfather Upton in 1848. It was the time of the breaking up of the Whig Party. My grandfather had been a long time Whig, but was then an ardent Free Soiler. Daniel Webster came to Fitchburg during my visit, but my grandfather, who had no use for Daniel withheld the information from me that Fitchburg was to have an opportunity of hearing him in a political address, and I did not hear of his coming until he had gone. But Charles Sumner came to Fitchburg



a few days later, and my grandfather took me to hear him — my first opportunity of hearing Charles Sumner.

It occurs to me that the presence of Daniel Webster and Charles Sumner in Fitchburg at that time furnished material for two good papers, one having reference to the breaking up of the old Whig party and Daniel Webster’s relation to it, and the other having reference to the beginnings of the Free Soil party (which soon became the Republican party) and Charles Sumner’s relation to it. The columns of the Sentinel at that time would furnish much material, and the lives of Webster and of Sumner would also furnish much as well on the political histories.

Memories of an 1850's childhood and a Civil War teen, by *Margaret Lydia Ray*

Margaret Lydia Ray was born in Fitchburg on April 4, 1850 and died in Franklin, MA on June 22, 1915. Her father was Artamus Smith, her mother Ardelia (Fairbanks) Smith. Though she was a teen during the Civil War, her memories are mostly of schools and local adults. In 1911, she recalled,

It seems a hundred years to me since I was running round Fitchburg a little girl – I can remember well when sent to Caldwell's store on an errand how Charlie Caldwell would look at me seriously and say: "Peggy where did you get your black eyes, they are dirty, run home and wash them" –

when six years old I attended a small private school kept by Rev. William Tilden's daughter Laura, she thought me very quick in numbers for the baby of the school - but my quickness laid in the fact that George Wheelright (the big boy of the school) sat just behind the teacher and wrote the answers to my problems on his slate which he held above her head and glancing quickly upwards I read the figures very promptly and gave my solutions with great gusto -- and the attitude of the tittering pupils was called to Maggie's rare ability.

Then came my dancing lessons with the Sinclairs and dear old Master Green -- lessons when the height of my ambition was to have Fred Day ask me to his partner – for I thought him the handsomest boy in town.

I often think of the rhetorical Wednesday afternoons -- when we waited with baited breath for the last speeches on the program- we all felt he would far outclass Patrick

Henry - why, I can hear his deep tones now, his intense feeling - for it was during the civil war and he spoke from the speeches of Phillips and Garrison and Andrew -- and Mr. Lamb ordered us all in our gestures to point to Heaven at the word "north" but to the floor on the word "South."

This great school orator was none other than Alfred Marshall and in those days I felt sure he would some day be President of the United States, but never mind, I believe there is a big strawberry named for him and that is more honor than most of us have achieved.

Then came the young lady days - filled with music and frolic. Playing for the Choral Union with Moses Lyon and my father leading the basses - and John Upton leading the tenors -- with Kate Wallace and Mary Adams among the sopranos - Lizzie Eddy & Kate Adams, leading the altos. Great were our efforts and successful the results reinforced by an orchestra and my piano.

Many thanks to Ava Boegermann, who created the first draft of this transcription, when working as an intern during her junior year of high school.



Reminiscence by Mrs. George L. Grant



In 1957, Mrs. George L. Grant (who was born in 1893) shared these memories with the Historical Society:

Do you remember?

Our first A&P tea store at top of Cushing Street – a real breath of the Orient. Nolan's Tobacco shop next door – The Katherine Roper Co at the Cummings Theatre. Thompsen's "Way down East." The Minstrel shows, one put on by local talent. "The Fitchburger's" Dr. Page sang a solo. The trap door on the stage. The beautiful damsels on Horseback that adorned the walls in the Cummings –

"Pie Alley" a short cut to Day Street and Hill's candy shop under "American House." The Bank at corner of Day Street....The Children's Party at City Hall. Once a year sponsored by Universalist Church. Picnic's at Washacum Lake by Christ Church Sunday school. We rode down on the train, someone always fell in lake and came home wet.

*Excerpt from War Comes to Main Street,
by Dorothy Sawyer Bates*

Written 1981. Bates was born in 1900, lived in Fitchburg until 1925, when she was married. This text is about her years in high school and college, and the impact of World War I and the 1918 worldwide Influenza epidemic.

“It was an orderly household with set tasks for each day of the week. My mother ran a tight ship, putting in her daily order to the grocer and butcher early each morning for delivery before noon. I recall that Wednesday mornings were always devoted to the family mending, especially darning stockings. Nothing was ever thrown away....”

...”we young people were not chauffeured – we walked. My how we walked! The high school was a good mile away, down a steep hill and back up again in the afternoon. When I was squired to a school dance, my escort usually walked from another part of the city, then we walked to the party downtown, danced all evening, back to my house whereupon he still had to walk to his house. Not a word about getting tired.”

...I was always happy when I was allowed to sleep out on a tiny porch off our attic, which was just big enough for a bed-type hammock. Here it was quiet (the trolley which passed our house did not run at night) and delightfully private. I like to see the sparkle of the city lights as they stretched down the hill to Main Street.”



...And then a world at war began to intrude on this contained and peaceful existence.

...[My brother was] unable to pass the physical for active service, he considered ambulance service, secret service and other areas, finally settling for work on a farm as his patriotic contribution. With his friends all getting into uniform, his deep feelings of frustration took a severe psychological toll from which he never fully recovered.”

...Between the epidemic and wartime tensions, it was a disrupted and difficult semester and marks suffered drastically. Some students were on the verge of nervous breakdowns. Finally we were sent home [from college], but we managed a number of parties with Devens friends. There was...a talk by a girl who worked in a munitions factory.”

...Surely the war years left their impact on each and every one of us at an impressionable age. Life was never the same again.”



A Look Back to High School, by Judge Benjamin Abbot Goldberg

Judge Benjamin Abbot Goldberg (of the California Superior Court) gave a speech for his Fitchburg High School Class Reunion in October 1978. He reflected on his memories of school and the worst years of the great Depression, when you needed connections to get any job, and when a Simonds Saw employee would exult at getting two days of work in a week.

Goldberg grew up in Fitchburg's Orthodox Jewish community near the Agudath Achim synagogue. His parents were David and Bessie Goldberg; his father was a tailor whose employees were mainly Finnish. In his memoir, Goldberg also reflected on the extremely diverse community, and how he slowly learned about the lives of his friends and neighbors who were not Jewish:

"But the teachers were only part of our education and, I suggest, not the largest part. The largest part of our education may have been ourselves. Consider what a heterogenous group we were. Some were from families that had been in New England, even in Fitchburg, for generations. Others were from families that had gotten off the boat a few years before or had gotten off the boat themselves. Many of us lived in two worlds, that of our parents and grandparents and that of the United States as represented by the school system. Of course, I can speak only of the Jewish world, but I doubt that the Finnish, French, Greek, Irish, Italian, or American, (to mention but a few) were too different.

In the twenties and early thirties we still had racial neighborhoods, Boutelle Street was Jewish; Cleghorn was French; Water Street, "the Patch" was in transition from Irish to Italian with the Italians gaining. In some aspects the Jewish community might as well have been transported from the small towns of Poland or Lithuania. Yiddish was the language of common conversation, and many of us were bilingual as youngsters.

We were coerced into following old customs and compelled to try to integrate them with American ways. Customs, speech, foods other than Jewish were suspect or derided. But simultaneously there were questioning attitudes. Maybe the old ways were not the only ways; they might not even be the best ways.

The ultimate in my inter-group experiences was playing in bands. We played for a Greek society. I think it was for the formal organizations of AHEPA, the American Hellenistic



Protective Association. I was surprised to find that except for the language and the food, the function might as well have been Jewish. The priest even had a beard and but for his distinctive hat and pectoral cross, I would have thought he was a rabbi. Playing for the Italians was similar. The Society of Santa Maria de la Cava put on a fine festival in the summer. It really beat either the Greeks or the Jews, because in addition to food, prayers and charitable appeals, they had fireworks. The Finns sponsored the Saima Band with whom I had so much fun that I know that the picture of dour surly northerners is a contrivance of somebody's imagination.

Similar synthesizing processes must have gone on at all levels and under more significant circumstances. Certainly they were helped by the native Americans, because I can recall the enthusiasm and zeal with which "Americanization" classes were sponsored and attended by adults. Those already here not only desired but encouraged the newcomers to become citizens, to adapt to the New World and to be absorbed by it. Of course, there is much of the Old that is beautiful and charming and should be saved, and one of the problems of our generation is how to simultaneously assimilate and preserve."

After graduating from Fitchburg High, B. Abbot graduated from the University of Michigan, followed by Harvard Law School and the Army during World War II. His wife, Barbara Laven Goldberg was a graduate of M.I.T., where she had studied production engineering.

My Memories of Christmas Shopping

Long before the Malls were even a glimmer in the eyes of the large department stores and developers, Fitchburg families went shopping uptown or downtown depending on where you lived in the city. Whether going uptown or downtown, shopping was often a weekly event for some families, but it was especially fun during the Christmas season because stores would be open every night until 9 usually beginning in mid-December. But if you were a last-minute shopper, you had to plan carefully because the stores closed at 5:30 on Christmas Eve.

Destinations might include the 5 and 10 Cent stores (Woolworth's, Kresge's) or the clothing stores (Nichols & Frost, Miller's, Rome's, Barney Rosen's), the candy shops (Ye House of John L. Bailey, Fannie Farmer's), shoe stores (W.C. Goodwin, Student Brothers, Edson) grocery stores (Brockelman's, A & P), or many more specialty shops, just like in the mall. But the difference is they were not arranged along indoor walkways, but along both sides of Main Street. However, like the mall, it was where you met your friends and neighbors.

At Christmas time. Main Street was bustling with shoppers beginning in late November, and it seemed as though

everyone knew everyone else. Even the store clerks greeted customers by name. Christmas music provided by Radio Station WEIM filled the air as customers moved from store to store. The broadcasters, who could see shoppers from their studio windows above Main Street, would call out to people they knew—usually startling the shoppers when they heard their names over the loudspeakers. People stopped to enjoy the Christmas scenes in Monument Park provided by the Chamber of Commerce, and oh those Christmas goodies at the Penny Bryn, Clover Hill and Cottage Garden bakeries!

Main Street light poles were decorated with small trees and wreaths, lights were strung from buildings to utility poles, and store windows were decorated and inviting. Each store was warm and bright with plenty of clerks to provide assistance. Clerks were dressed formally and usually stood behind the counters ready to help. Although there might be racks of clothing, most evident were the counters where you could purchase shirts and ties, purses, gloves, blouses, stockings, jewelry, cosmetics and more. Instead of plastic bags, purchases were put into boxes embossed with the store's name and many stores offered free gift wrapping.



Parke Snow's had a manually operated elevator as well as a lovely wide staircase as did Nichols & Frost. In most stores you could hear the sound of the pneumatic cash carriers as they whistled overhead and disappeared to an unknown destination and soon returned as mysteriously with your change and receipt.

❧ *Written by*
Simone Blake

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Robert Proctor Returns to Fitchburg from New Mexico

Though the 'past is always with us', it is not always clear in the mind's eye. Collectively, we have remedied this: the Fitchburg we once knew and loved dearly (even if we often took it for granted) is closer to us now than it has been for a very long time, and, I would suggest, our lives are richer for it.

I seem to recall an early boyhood chum who back in the late '40's just might have lived on a farm on or near Marshall Road. I do remember bicycling--so many hard hills!--from Longwood Avenue over to Pearl Street, and then up Marshall to Fisher Road (which was gravel for the most part, I believe, and in mind half way to Canada) to Pearl Hill and then back home. I haven't taken that route since, so can't



confirm the presence of a golf course, though it would come as no surprise to find one out there. The Proctor farm of my ancestry lay along the east side of Pearl Hill Road for about a quarter mile south of the intersection of this road

with Fisher. My grandfather's house and the houses of my Uncles Douglas and Roland are extant, except for the huge greenhouses that were torn down sometime in the early '70's, I think.

A pleasant surprise, is the discovery that, in spite of passings and disappearances and changes—in shops, neighborhoods, streets--much of Fitchburg's past is still there! I was especially impressed by this phenomenon in 1998 (when I took several rolls of film of homes, stores, churches, whole parts of the city, still functioning as I knew them some 50 years earlier), and in 2000, on the occasion of the reunion of the Fitchburg High School Class of '55, the one I most likely would have been part of had I not left Fitchburg in 1951. There were so many wonderful and fondly remembered people from my past.

And the city itself? Imagine us talking about Thai and Spanish restaurants downtown. When in the Foreign Service, I spent many years in South and Southeast Asia, and was not surprised to meet immigrants from that part of the world in the big metropolitan areas of the east and west coasts of the U.S. Imagine my surprise--and delight--to meet and be able to talk the language of the manager of the motel I stayed in during my last visit to the Fitchburg-Leominster area. She and her family turned out to be from the part of southern Laos I worked in for a number of years during the Vietnam War.

Though we didn't have friends from Laos in common, we had elements of a 'past' in common that included not only her original homeland, but her new homeland, America, and a city of no small importance to both of us: Fitchburg.

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