

Fitchburg Historical Society

JUNE
1992



McCoy House



Fox Hall



Mann House

JUNE GENERAL MEETING

Summertime is picnic time---and that's what we have planned for our June meeting. We will meet Sunday, June 14 at 1:30 p.m. at the Gorman wayside, next to Fitchburg City Hall.

June 14 is Flag Day and we selected this spot for our picnic because the wayside is the location of the memorial statue, The Kneeling Soldier, which will be the focus of our program.

Many of you may remember the decision in the 70's by the Fitchburg Club to commission a sculpture to honor Robert Schley, a Fitchburg soldier who was killed in Vietnam. In addition to Robert Schley, the soldier kneeling before the adjacent flag honors "all who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States and especially dedicated to those residents of the Town of Fitchburg who have given their lives in service to their country."

The individuals honored also include Nelson H. Salisbury (Civil War), William Byrne (Civil War), Edward Skelly (W.W.I) and V. Jerry Stich (Vietnam).

We have invited several guests who had a hand in establishing the memorial. We are also pleased that Harry Whitehorse, the Madison artist who created the sculpture, will be with us. Mr. Whitehorse has agreed to provide a presentation on the artistic decisions and the process that was followed in designing the artwork.

Harry Whitehorse is a regionally recognized artist who has been commissioned for various large scale projects. He is also well-known as a carver and painter in addition to being a sculptor and his work often reflects his Native American heritage and culture.

Fitchburg residents are fortunate to have such a distinctive sculpture in our city. We hope you will join us on Sunday, June 14 (bring a dish to pass and table service) as we recognize this aspect of Fitchburg history as well as celebrate its artistic expression. See you Sunday!



HISTORICAL SOCIETY SOLICITS CONFECTIONS

Due to the success---with both the young and old alike---of last year's "Old Fitchburg Days" cakewalk, the Fitchburg Historical Society will again be sponsoring this activity on Saturday afternoon, July 25 as part of this year's "Old Fitchburg Days" celebration.

This provides each of you with plenty of warning and time to decide what delicious donation you can provide this year. Last year we had a grand spectrum of confections---from Angel's Food to Devil's Food and Chocolate Chip Cake to German Chocolate Cake---much to the delight of those participating in the cakewalk. Everyone with an active sweet tooth seemed to participate and it was truly an old-time activity which fit the "Old Fitchburg Days" theme perfectly.

(The response was so good that the organizing committee has agreed to do two Cakewalks this year. One will be sponsored by the Historical Society and one by another group.)

We again need about 25-30 cakes and the Cakewalk Committee will be contacting you sometime in July in order to get a "cake commitment" from you. We will also be providing a "sweets sheet" for sign-up at our June meeting.



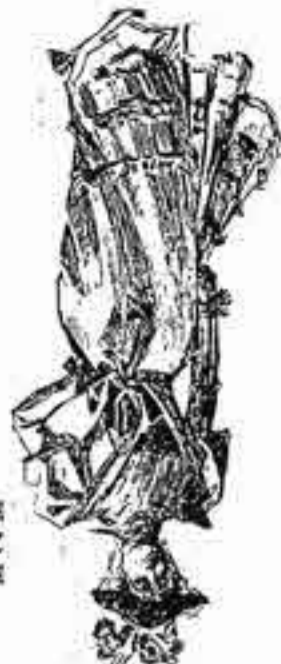
OLD FITCHBURG DAYS RETURNS

"Old Fitchburg Days" will be held on July 25 and 26 in Greenfield Park. In addition to the Historical Society's "Cakewalk", other events that will be repeated will be a softball tournament, horseshoe tournament, kid's games, beer tent, food tent, dunk tank, craft sales and demonstrations, as well as a Saturday night dance, this year featuring "The Shakers."

Tethered hot-air balloon rides are planned for Sunday (weather permitting) and entertainment on Sunday will include singer/storyteller Reid Miller and the Southern Wisconsin Old-Time Fiddlers.



FITCHBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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DID YOU KNOW?

We know you know that the McCoy House on Syene Road is one of Fitchburg's four listings on the National Register of Historic Places, but how much of its history, before it became the McCoy House, do you know? Thanks to the research and information provided by the current owners, Mickie and Tony Schmudlach, here is more of the story.

The land surrounding the McCoy House was purchased in 1846 for \$504.00 by Henry Yager. The farm was cultivated by Ralph Pomeroy and J.R. Hiestand, who grew the area's most successful tobacco crop in 1853. Mr. Benjamin Brown, "a liberal" and "a democrat" from New York, built this Italianate style cream-colored brick house between 1857 and 1861.

The foundation walls are limestone. The exterior walls of the house are three courses of brick thick. There is no wood frame; the house is solid masonry.

The house has had many owners and residents. The more recent history is that Mrs. Joe Sweeney sold the house and 60 acres to David Peterson for \$12,000 in 1944. Mr. Peterson raised mink there, and eventually sold the house and 12 acres to Professor Elizabeth McCoy, a microbiologist of world renown. Her grandfather had bought the house in 1893 and Elizabeth had spent many childhood hours there.

When Miss McCoy died in 1978, the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation received the house and associated farmland that she had acquired. The house was saved from demolition by the efforts of local residents and preservationists. The house was declared a "cemetery" and therefore could not be demolished. The basis for this claim was the persistent tale that an itinerant workman had been killed during construction and was buried in the basement.

In August 1980, the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation publicly offered the house and 2.9 acres to the highest bidder. The Schmudlach's became the owners in December 1980, and moved into the house in May 1982.

BOARD REPORTS

The Board of Directors met on May 13 and in addition to summer festival and June meeting discussion, we were also addressed by Tom Kinney in regard to his project on Irish history in Fitchburg.

Many of you who enjoyed Tom's presentation at our April meeting will remember that he anticipated publishing the information in booklet form. Tom is now soliciting donations from various area businesses and foundations in order to make the booklet a reality---perhaps by the end of July.

The Historical Society, with Board approval, will be acting as a repository for those donations and later will be providing the monies to Tom for publication costs. The Board also voted to provide a donation to help complete the booklet.

Tom anticipates needed funds to be between \$2,000-\$2,500. If you are interested in making an individual donation toward documenting this aspect of Fitchburg history, you may do so by writing a check to the Fitchburg Historical Society with a notation that it is intended as a donation toward this project. All contributions are tax deductible.

