



**Fitchburg Historical Society**  
**5530 Lacy Road**  
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## **MARCH 2023**

Welcome, 2023! Despite the record-breaking 12.1" snowfall a few days ago, there are hopeful signs that winter may be on its way out, including robins, outdoor decorations that emerged from under the piles of snow, and teeny tiny buds on the trees and bushes. Throughout the winter, the Society's committed volunteers continued their efforts. The website was updated with new content and information about displays, monthly segments for "Talking Fitchburg", the obituary database resource was updated, and volunteers responded to calls and emails from people with questions about, or connections to, Fitchburg. *(As an aside, at least a few times a year we get contacts from people who confuse us with the Fitchburg, Massachusetts, historical society. Sometimes events in "the other" Fitchburg tag our Facebook page. We're sorry if an enticing event that caught your eye turned out to be 1,100 miles away).*

This newsletter includes information about our exciting spring program, Fitchburg's 40<sup>th</sup> "birthday, and a deep dive into our website's information on historic sites and landmarks.

### **ANNUAL MEETING AND PROGRAM, APRIL 23, 2023, 1:30 p.m.** **Historical Places: Valuing Our Past and Moving Into Our Future** **Fitchburg Public Library, 5530 Lacy Road, Fitchburg**

We are excited to hold this year's annual meeting and program, Historical Places: Valuing Our Past and Moving Into Our Future, in person, as well as returning it to the Fitchburg Public Library, which a year ago was still closed to the public. A brief business meeting and election of new board members will be held before the program. The public are welcome at the meeting and subsequent program.

Our fall program included many details and insights into Fitchburg's past, current, and projected growth. We learned that among the challenges a growing community faces is how to balance development with preservation of existing resources and structures. This topic has been of long interest to the Society, as shown by a review of many years of newsletters that included information about its support of efforts to recognize and preserve local landmarks.

We are pleased to expand on that topic with our spring program. In 2019, our speaker, Traci E. Schnell, completed a survey for the Fitchburg Landmarks Preservation Commission and has also evaluated historical sites in the former Town of Madison. Ms. Schnell will give some details about historic properties from her 2019 report, along with current updates and, in her words, "some interesting random additional Fitchburg property information." Ms. Schnell continues to do investigations of many locations and will include Wisconsin State Historical Society information in her presentation. Ms. Schnell acquired over twenty years' experience as an architectural historian after her graduation from UW - Milwaukee and then established her own consulting firm. She works with non-profit organizations, community groups, and businesses investigating historical locations and completing surveys about historic old properties.

Learn more about the City's Landmark Preservation Commission, including the 2019 report, at the Commission's website: <https://fitchburgwi.gov/2156/landmarks-preservation/>

## **FITCHBURG IS TURNING 40!**

Although the Town of Fitchburg predates 1853, when it was given its current name, the City of Fitchburg is just reaching middle age, having been recognized as a city on April 26, 1983. The FHS is proud to be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the City of Fitchburg as part of our annual meeting and program on April 23. We invite all of you to

join us for refreshments at our annual meeting and spring program as part of the Fitchburg anniversary event. The meeting will be held at the Fitchburg Public Library, 5530 Lacy Road, at 1:30 p.m.

For more information about the unusual and some might say, arguably questionable, path that Fitchburg took on its way to become a city, check out this article by former Board member Rich Eggleston.

<https://fitchburghistory.org/fitchburg-becomes-a-city/>

(Photo: the first members of the city council being sworn into office, 1983)



## WEBSITE DEEP DIVE: FITCHBURG HISTORIC SITES

The historic structures in a city that has its origin as a sprawling, rural township may be of a different type than those typically found in a city. At a minimum, they are likely fewer and farther apart, with clusters of remaining structures sometimes providing hints of areas that had some hope of becoming a population center. An old weathered building adjacent to a field may simply look like an old building to us, but to an historian, it may tell a century's old story.

Fitchburg has a number of structures or sites that are on the National Register of Historic Places, or the Fitchburg Landmarks Preservation List. Still more are of interest, but not officially recognized. Our website has brief histories and photos of many of these. Visit <https://fitchburghistory.org/historic-sites> to check them out – you may recognize a few. Here are a couple to whet your interest.



**Location: 5212 County Hwy. M, Fitchburg, WI**  
**National Register of Historic Places, 91001391**  
**September 13, 1991**

Currently the site of Oakhill Correctional Institute, the facility was originally built in 1932 for juvenile girls.

### **Location: Bjorksten Pl, Fitchburg, WI**

This small observatory, just off Fish Hatchery Road on property owned by Fitchburg Research Park Associates, was built about 1879-80 as a student observatory for UW-Madison. It was originally located on the shores of Lake Mendota, just east of the Washburn Observatory. (The photo is from the Society's website, which was given permission to use it by the Fitchburg Landmark Preservation Commission.



## SUPPORT OUR WORK: BECOME A MEMBER!

**JOIN US!**

Our work may be carried out by volunteers, but we do have expenses, including website and speakers. We don't have a nifty t-shirt or tote bag to offer, but we hope that won't deter you from joining. Individual membership is \$10/year, family \$12/year, and business/profession, \$50.

Fill out the membership form on our website at <https://tinyurl.com/4rf8vkh9> or send your name, address, email address, membership level and check payable to Fitchburg Historical Society, to Roger Tesch, 3417 Brighton Place, Fitchburg, WI 53713-2842. We'd be happy to renew your membership or begin a new one at our annual meeting on April 23 (see article above for meeting details).