

# FALL RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# IN FOCUS

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## BEHIND THE SCENES

Work on the HVAC installation continues and is making good progress with contractors representing various trades on site daily. The project was identified as a top priority in the Preservation Master Plan and Site Survey and is the culmination of a multi-year two phased project that included the HVAC Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing Design, and the HVAC Installation. The museum remains a busy construction site, and, as one would expect, evidence of all aspects of the ongoing work is visible throughout the building and grounds.

As was detailed in the *In Focus News Brief*, this is the largest infrastructure project in the 102-year history of the FRHS; construction and installation are underway in every room in the building, affecting all aspects of day-to-day operations. The offices are open and function with very limited access to anything other than electronic files. All museum collections, exhibits, and period room settings have been dismantled, packed, and securely stored to ensure that no damage occurs during this phase of the project.

Accordingly, the FRHS is expected to remain closed to the public until Spring, 2024; scheduling remains very fluid, and we adapt as required. It has been necessary to scale down or postpone all events for members and the public. Fortunately, work is proceeding according to the projected timeline and has not been seriously hampered by scheduling or supply chain delays.

During this period, the directors and staff have been very actively working behind the scenes on several projects, including infrastructure, strategic planning, grants, collections, exhibits, and the *Because History Matters* endowment campaign. Stay tuned for some very positive updates.

The FRHS is grateful to the Trustees of **The Manton Foundation** for partnering with us by generously providing the funding for all phases of this impactful and truly transformative project. Thank you for your interest and extraordinary support.

To the members and friends of the FRHS:

*Thank you, all, for your understanding and support as we work together to create a better organization.*

## BISHOP CONNOLLY YEARBOOKS



In May 2023, the Diocese of Fall River announced that Bishop Connolly High School, founded in 1966 by its namesake, Bishop James Louis Connolly (1894-1986), would close its doors at the commencement of the school year.

Apprised of the news, the FRHS immediately contacted Kathy St. Laurent, principal at Connolly, with the request that their full run of class yearbooks be donated to the museum archive, ensuring that they remain in Fall River, are preserved as a collection, and made available to the public. Kathy agreed and set into motion the process that saw the transfer of the volumes.

The FRHS maintains the city's largest collection of yearbooks from various Fall River public and parochial high schools, with the earliest dating to 1912; they are an important source for portrait photographs, and frequently used for research.



Lewis Latimer from *Lewis Latimer* by Winifred Latimer Norman and Lily Patterson

Front row, left to right: Lewis Latimer, Mary Wilson Latimer, Louisa M. Lewis (Mary's mother). Back row, Gerald Latimer Norman, [unknown], Jeannette Latimer Norman, Gerald F. Norman, [unknown], Louise Latimer, and Winifred Latimer Norman. From *Lewis Latimer* by Winifred Latimer Norman and Lily Patterson (1994).

# LEWIS LATIMER

BY STEFANI KOOREY

Lewis H. Latimer was born on September 4, 1848, in Chelsea, Massachusetts, the youngest of four children of George Washington Latimer (1818-1896) and Rebecca Smith Latimer (1822-1910).

George Washington Latimer was well known during his lifetime and his daring story of his escape from slavery inspired many prominent people before the Civil War. He “was the first fugitive slave whose emancipation guided and influenced the American abolitionists of the 1850s. His flight to Boston, arrest, imprisonment, trial, and emancipation, as well as the numerous public meetings held all over Massachusetts on his behalf, made his a cause celebre, fifteen years before the famous Dred Scott Decision” (Davis, “The George Latimer Case”).

George had grown up in Norfolk, Virginia, the son of a white stonemason, Mitchell Latimer, and Margaret Olmstead, a slave owned by Mitchell's brother Edward. The first sixteen years of George's life were spent as a house servant for Mr. and Mrs. Edward Mallery (Mrs. Mallery's first husband had been Edward Latimer). Apparently, George was well treated and allowed to hire himself out “as long as he paid a quarter a day for food, clothing, and shelter” (Fouché, *Inventors in the Age of Segregation*). When financial times were hard in the 1830s, his freedom to work for himself ended and, over the next eight years, George “was hired out, jailed for the Mallery's debts, sold several times, and generally mistreated” (Fouché).

Because of his dire circumstances, in 1840, George escaped his captivity, only to be captured and returned. He ran away again in October of 1843, but this time took his wife Rebecca Smith, whom he had married in January of 1842, and who was pregnant with their son George Jr.

According to the book *Lewis Latimer*, co-written by his granddaughter Winifred Latimer Norman and Lily Patterson:

On October 4, 1842, Rebecca and George Latimer slipped onto a steamer at Norfolk and hid nine hours in the darkness of the ship's hold. When the vessel reached Baltimore, they used their railroad tickets [which George had saved for] to travel to New York. Being fair skinned, George posed as a Virginia planter, and Rebecca played the role of his servant. Four tense and exhausting days of travel later, the courageous couple reached the free state of Massachusetts. George chose to go by the name of Latimer, vowing that in freedom he would bring honor to the name of his father.

Unfortunately, the couple ran into a man who worked for George's master after their arrival in Boston. His slaveholder, James B. Gray, a shopkeeper, appeared in Boston on October 18 to reclaim his property. George was arrested.

In this short space of time, George gathered the support of many of Boston's most notable abolitionists, such as Dr. Henry Bowditch, William Francis Channing, Frederick Cabot, and William Lloyd Garrison (Fouché). Working together, the group had published six issues of the abolitionist paper *The Latimer Journal and North Star*, which publicized George's plight. After several weeks of incarceration, during which the excitement of the public in his favor grew, George was manumitted on November 18, when a Black minister, the Reverend Samuel Caldwell, minister of the Tremont Temple Baptist Society, raised \$400 and paid the attorney representing James Gray for his lost property.

George Latimer used his new-found notoriety to attend abolitionist rallies, conventions, and meetings throughout the area, speaking about his experiences and the evils of slavery. He says he appealed “for signatures to the famous ‘Latimer’ petitions, to be presented to the Legislature and to Congress. These asked the respective bodies to erase from the statute books every enactment making a distinction on account of complexion, and the enactment of law to protect citizens from insult by alleged arrest” (Davis).

“In 1894, Frederick Douglass wrote to Lewis Latimer about the impact his parents had on Northern abolitionists after their freedom was won. Douglass stated that one ‘could hardly imagine the excitement the attempts to recapture them caused in Boston. It was a new experience for the Abolitionists and they improved it to the full extent capable’ . . . [Lewis, thus] saw his father as a valuable participant in the fight against slavery. . . . He saw many whites as benevolent citizens working for the betterment of an underprivileged race” (Fouché) and did not grow up experiencing the white population as a malevolent foe.

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Lewis Latimer's early years were quite normal, attending Phillips Grammar School and secondary school in Chelsea. He assisted his father in his barbershop, which was a well-respected business for Blacks in the nineteenth century. George's father additionally had secured employment as a paper hanger, and Lewis helped him there as well.

In 1858, when Lewis was ten years old, his father left his family. According to Dr. Philip T. Silvia, George's “new residence was the state prison at Charlestown [Massachusetts] where he was incarcerated, whether justly or not, after having been found guilty on a breaking and entering charge” (Silvia, “Sarah Anna Lewis”). He was never to be reunited with his family, but according to Fouché, George had stayed in the area and was sighted by Frederick Douglass in Boston in later years, who wrote to Lewis about his encounter.

(continued on page 8)

# GRANTS AND FUNDING

The **Community Preservation Committee (CPC)** has awarded a grant of \$236,374.29 for a major electrical service upgrade for the museum building; this funding has been approved by the Fall River City Council. This service will be installed concurrent with the extensive installation of an HVAC system for the entire museum building that is currently underway.

National Grid recently confirmed that the underground utility line that runs along Maple Street and serves the FRHS museum building, via a vault transformer, provides only single-phase power, which is not sufficient to service current – or any future – infrastructure upgrades that require three-phase power.

The scope of work originally described in the engineer's contract documents called for the existing single-phase feed to the building to be removed and replaced with new wires in the same conduit feed from Maple Street. However, National Grid has established that the nearest utility line with three-phase power is routed to an underground vault just north of the intersection at Walnut and Rock Streets, in a location over a city block south. As such, new underground infrastructure will need to run from that vault and up Rock Street, north, to the FRHS.

To ensure the appropriate infrastructure is provided, National Grid has issued a design proposal for the installation of two 4" concrete-encased underground conduits extending from the existing vault located near the intersection of Rock and Walnut Streets, to a heavy-duty handhole on the FRHS grounds, and then to a transformer pad. The new transformer pad will be located southeast of the museum building, along the edge of the off-street parking lot. The new pad will be provided with oil containment and a meter enclosure on the secondary side. From the proposed transformer, a new 4" non-encased conduit will extend underground to the south side of the building. Upon completion of the electrical work, all paved and unpaved site areas damaged during installation will be restored to their original condition.

It is uncertain if any subsurface anomalies, such as granite ledge, will be encountered during the excavation/installation process. As such, it was necessary to anticipate and/or allow for potential ledge removal and subgrade conditions as part of the funding request. Work on this project is currently underway.

The FRHS is extremely grateful to the CPC, the mayor's office, and the members of the

Fall River City Council for their support. Thank you, all!



The roof replacement and exterior restoration work, funded by a \$389,943 grant from **Community Preservation Committee (CPC)** that was awarded in 2021, remains on temporary hold due to the ongoing HVAC installation. As part of that project, several penetrations must be cut into the existing roof to provide proper ventilation for various HVAC components. As such, the decision was made to postpone the roof replacement until after this work is completed, ensuring that the new roofing material is not compromised. The required penetrations will be cut shortly and fitted with necessary ventilation devices; it is anticipated that the roof replacement/exterior restoration project will commence in the spring. The CPC has been kept informed of the situation and is supportive of this prudent decision.



A bequest of \$50,000 has been received from the estate of **John J. Moriarty** (1930-2022), a life member and strong advocate of the FRHS; he was also a very good friend. John was an astute collector of Fall River memorabilia, with a particular interest in artists of the Fall River School, of which he assembled an important collection. Several paintings from his collection have been acquired by the FRHS.

John, a Fall River native, was a brilliant pianist and enjoyed a highly successful career in the world of opera as an educator, author, administrator, director, and most importantly, as a Principal Conductor. In 1975, E.C. Schirmer Music Co. published his book *Diction* for singers, a reference and instructional manual for the stage pronunciation of Italian, Latin, French, and German; having gone through numerous reprints, it is recognized as the standard textbook of its type by conservatories and universities throughout the United States. He also made numerous recordings of operas and opera excerpts and performed as piano accompanist for prominent singers and recording companies.

A significant collection of biographical material documenting John's life and career is preserved in the FRHS archive, donated to the museum by his husband, the late James T. Bynum (1944-2022). This includes his fascinating memoir of his time at the esteemed Santa Fe Opera Company in New Mexico – his first professional opera position – where he spent seven years, beginning

in 1959, serving as Chorus Master, Stage Director, and, finally, Artistic Administrator. The manuscript is unfinished; John was working on the final chapter and making editorial revisions when he died.

After residing away from his native city for most of his working career, John moved back to Fall River in 1989 and purchased a residence at 511 Rock Street, painstakingly restoring the iconic, ca. 1851 Victorian Gothic Gingerbread structure. Ironically, the house was directly across from the former location of St. Helena's Convent of the Holy Union Sisters, where he received his first piano lesson when a child. Indeed, with his return to Fall River, John's life had come full circle.



The FRHS is in the process of securing an **IRS Employee Retention Credit**, which is one of the benefits provided under the CARES Act to assist private-sector businesses and tax-exempt organizations that have been financially impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The FRHS qualifies due to having experienced a decline in gross receipts during 2020 and the first three quarters of 2021, when the museum was closed to the public due to compliance with Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Federal pandemic protocols.



**David Amaral**, a FRHS member and supporter, has generously provided a generous gift for procuring a large portion of the supplies necessary to safeguard fragile artifacts in the museum collection that had to be packed and relocated for the HVAC installation. This herculean task was greatly aided by having the funding available to pre-order various boxes and packing materials, ensuring that they were in-house when needed. Thank you, Dave!



FRHS member and benefactor **Douglas H. Borden Jr.** has made very generous contributions in memory of his beloved late wife, Joan Louise (Goodreau) Borden; the funds will be used to acquire artwork in her honor. In a letter to the curator, Doug wrote: "*Now, looking ahead, it is my intention to honor Joan on our special days through contributions to the Fall River Historical Society. My family and I are much pleased that you have been able to acquire selected paintings and have dedicated them to Joan.*" Thank you, Doug, for establishing this poignant memorial that has provided the opportunity to significantly expand the museum's holdings of paintings by artists connected to Fall River.



## A GALLERY DEDICATION

On the afternoon of June 2, 2023, the new *Douglas Hills Borden Jr. & Joan Louise (Goodreau) Borden Gallery* was dedicated with a private reception attended by Doug, his family, close friends, and personally invited guests. The FRHS was represented by the board officers, directors, and staff members. The affair was planned with the support and very helpful assistance of Doug and Joan's four children: Douglas ("D3"), Jeremy, Valerie, and Lorianne, who deserve hearty thanks for their patience and understanding. Thank you, all!

As detailed in past issues of *In Focus*, the gallery was made possible through the generosity and foresight of Doug Borden, a FRHS life member and long-time supporter of the organization. Doug had expressed a desire to fund a transformative project and, when presented with the idea of a gallery, he fully embraced it, generously providing the finances that brought this much-needed and long-hoped-for project to fruition. In his words: *"Completion of this action will satisfy a long-time desire to be a permanent part of the Society. From the day we first met Florence Brigham, we have come to know and appreciate your mission and our heritage. It is intended that they blend in this action I am taking for Joan and me."*

The gallery, located in the southwest room on the first floor of the building – formerly the music room when a private residence – is brilliant in its design and is a real game changer for the FRHS, allowing for frequent, rotating exhibits drawn from museum collections and outside sources. The space, which has

been entirely transformed, features state-of-the-art lighting, a versatile gallery rail hanging system, and is fitted with customized display cases that are adaptable to various exhibits. It is stunning.

The reception commenced with a viewing of the new gallery and a preview of its inaugural exhibition: *Recent Acquisitions in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture*. The exhibit includes a selection of works recently acquired for the permanent collection, with paintings and drawings in various genres by noted artists of the Fall River and Providence Schools, still life by other American artists, and paintings and sculpture with provenance linking them to 19th- and 20th-century Fall River collections. Included in the exhibit are nine works of art from the *Joan Louise (Goodreau) Borden Memorial Collection*, acquired by the FRHS with funds specifically contributed by Doug in memory of his late wife; funds are poignantly gifted to commemorate their "special days." As a souvenir of the opening, a catalogue of the memorial collection was prepared for presentation to attendees.

Following the opening, the party visited the Fall River Country Club (FRCC) where an informal "business casual" reception began with a speaking program; FRHS board secretary Kathy Rockett entertained as MC, and comments on the occasion were delivered by Mark Gendreau, president, and Michael Martins, curator. The gallery design was briefly discussed by Michael Keane, AIA, of CIVITECTS, whose firm was responsible for

adapting the room and maximizing exhibit space without permanently altering its period interiors or historical integrity. Lighting designer Evelyn Audet, whose stellar design transformed the room, spoke about the importance of lighting in a gallery setting, and the strategy she employed for this project, ensuring for clear, well-balanced illumination that adds drama, yet is highly adaptable to changing installations.

Fall River Mayor Paul Coogan and State Representative Carole A. Fiola offered fitting laudatory remarks and each presented citations recognizing Doug and his impactful contributions to the FRHS and the greater Fall River area.

The program concluded with heartfelt remarks delivered by the keynote speaker and "man-of-the-hour," Doug Borden:

*Good Evening or Good Afternoon. It is a matter of your choice. To the members of the Board of Directors, Historical Society Officers, Michael, Staff members, designers, special guests, and the dreamers and the builders of the Douglas Hills Borden Junior and Joan Louise Borden Gallery, my family and I thank you for your efforts and many courtesies today and every day. And I hope you will indulge me with a few moments of your time.*

*This is a special day because, in a way, I am coming back to Fall River, and I'm bringing Joan with me.*

*(continued on next page)*

## GALLERY DEDICATION CONT.

History shows us that in 1635, Richard Borden and his family emigrated from England to what is now Portsmouth, Rhode Island. From there, families grew and moved about. Over time, many of his descendants, and my ancestors, came to live in and about Fall River, some of whom are still in the area. My sisters and I are part of the 10th generation of Bordens born in Fall River.

With that background, it is my privilege to be here today to ensure the Borden name stays associated with the city represented by this revered educational institution, the Fall River Historical Society.

As I said, I was born in Fall River, but spent only a few of my early years in the city. My older sister, Nancy, now deceased, and I attended Kindergarten and First Grade at the Westall School, just a block away from the Society building. Then, beginning in April 1938, with my family, including my new sister Barbara, I spent many years in and about Touisset in Swansea, and, when old enough, came to Fall River to patronize such businesses as the Cherry and Webb store, McWhirr's, theaters, Brady's Barbershop, the Borden Bakery, and occasionally, a visit to my dentist or eye doctor.

In 1951, I enlisted in the US Naval Reserve at the Fall River Unit which was then sited along the Taunton River between the bridges. For many years I trained at that center while attending Brown University and later graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design. After

graduation in 1955, I took an oath as a Naval Reserve officer and began a different kind of life, beginning with an assignment to a destroyer in Newport.

In April 1956, while on a double date with a then neighbor, I met the girl of my life, Joan Louise Goodreau, a resident of Valley Falls, Rhode Island. We were immediately attracted to one another, which resulted in a lifetime marriage and a fine family of four, all of whom traveled and moved about the country with me as the Navy ordered. Joan, now deceased, was frequently involved in Naval Officers Wives Programs, and often had a leadership role.

But living away from our former hometowns kept us from visiting with families and friends back home often. My last Naval assignments were in the Washington, D.C., area, which led us to settle in suburban Alexandria, and now, Woodbridge, Virginia, where happily, my sister Barbara is a resident of the same retirement community.

However, while visiting in Fall River nearly forty years ago, Joan and I were driving on Rock Street when she noticed the attractive and distinctive building which is the home of the Fall River Historical Society.

On the first of many visits, we were warmly welcomed by the then Curator, Florence Brigham. That friendly initial reception will always be remembered, as it was a significant factor in our desire to develop a more permanent connection to the Society. Happily, that relationship with the Society and its Staff continues in spite of our infrequent visits.

For some time, Joan and I had been thinking of how we could be linked to and become a part of the Society. It might have been something simple like a sculptured brick in a sidewalk or a plaque on a stone in a garden. But, instead of that, it has been my pleasure to have found a way to achieve that goal by assisting the Society with its introduction and updating of the gallery concept. This gallery will forever link Joan, my wife of nearly sixty-four years, and me, to the Society, its administrators, and the city of Fall River. From the bottom of our hearts, my family and I "Thank you for the



Doug and his children at the gallery dedication. Left to right: Lorianne Borden Mack, Valerie Borden McCarry, Douglas Hills Borden III, Douglas Hills Borden Jr., State Representative Carole A. Fiola, Jeremy Scott Borden.

honor." Although our visits may be infrequent, you will always be a part of our lives. May God bless you all. Thank you, Doug. Well said!

After the program a jovial cocktail reception commenced, during which a fine selection of hors d'oeuvres was served. The assembly was softly serenaded by two violinists, who performed a musical selection including several pieces specifically chosen by Doug's children because of their personal significance to their parents. The reception was very much a meet-and-greet affair, offering a welcome opportunity for Borden family members and their invited guests – some of whom do not have the opportunity to frequently see each other – to catch up. As many of the attendees were meeting in-person for the first time, it also afforded the chance to "put a face to the name" and forge new relationships; it was a fine affair and friendly banter was shared by all. After the conclusion of the reception a leisurely dinner was served, culminating with a decadent dessert buffet.

The setting on the second floor of the FRCC was lovely, with expansive north and south views of the Taunton River; the location had been specifically chosen because Doug, an avid, life-long sailor, would enjoy the view. Tables set with white linen featured beautiful floral

(continued on next page)



Douglas Hills Borden Jr. at the dedication of the Douglas Hills Borden Jr. & Joan Louise (Goodreau) Borden Gallery, June 2, 2023.

## A JOINT CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

On Saturday evening, September 30, 2023, the Fall River Lions Club, Inc. (1923-2023) and the FRHS (1921-2023) celebrated their joint centennials with an evening reception at the Fall River Country Club. The event was attended by members and supporters of both organizations. In fact, the FRHS was celebrating its 102nd year, having been unable to do so in 2021 due to Covid pandemic protocols on large gatherings. It was a milestone occasion for both organizations and a fine time was had by all.

The celebration was planned as a social occasion with no formal program, and the gathering was addressed with brief comments by Mark Gendreau, who serves as President of both organizations. Thoughtful remarks were also offered by Paul Coogan, Mayor of Fall River, State Representative

Carole A. Fiola, and State Senator Michael J. Rodrigues, all of whom presented citations commemorating the event. Testimonials and citations were well received; the documents presented to the FRHS will be preserved in the archival collection.

The celebration was organized primarily by a committee of Fall River Lions Club members and proceeds from the event benefited the FRHS – thank you, Lions! Thanks also to the attendees, donors, and all those who advertised in the program book. Your support is sincerely appreciated.

Special thanks to The Fall River Country Club for the fine selection of cupcakes that were served as a dessert following the buffet. They were delicious!

## GALLERY DEDICATION CONT.

decorations, designed with Joan in mind, featuring a selection of informally arranged brightly colored flowers, just as she would have liked.

The event was a fitting tribute to the man and in recognition of his significant gift to the FRHS. Although Mrs. Borden was not with us in body, she was with us in spirit, and very much present in the hearts and minds of her loved ones, and in the memory of those of us who had the privilege of knowing her.

Joan was undoubtedly with us at the FRHS the day before. During final preparations for the gallery opening, staff members were doing housework and related activities. Caroline Aubin was vacuuming the first-floor hallway when she noticed, much to her chagrin, that the lights in the gallery had gone out. Her attempts to reengage the system were unsuccessful and, as worry began to set in, she called the curator. One look at her expression spoke volumes; the situation was, indeed, dire. Further attempts to turn on the lights were futile – it was not a tripped circuit breaker – so worry quickly morphed into panic.

Fortunately, a telephone call to the FRHS's electrician, Richard Biello, helped save the day; he was out-of-town on a job, but assured us that he would address the situation on his return to the city.

The irony of the story: Rick was working in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, that day. Coincidentally – or was it fate – Joan, born in 1932, was a native of that city. We like to believe that she intervened on our behalf.

Following his return home, Doug penned a note to the curator:

*As I write this "Thank you" note, I recall that the usual medium for such desired correspondence is usually a small, decorated card, rather than a long letter. But, in this case, a card would not suffice, hence you are reading this longer missive to you.*

*In short, however, speaking for my family, we cannot thank you enough for what you have done for my family and for the Society and its members and visitors. The Gallery is beyond description and it is my hope that [my son] Jeremy's photos and your texts will enable me to really "see" it all, for I was not able to do so as I was inclined to greet and talk with others in the Gallery. It is my hope that one day I shall be able to revisit the Gallery and take my time perusing the art and the accompanying descriptions and definitions.*

*In the meantime, I shall read and reread the delightful "Joan Louise Borden Memorial Collection." And, yesterday I sat with Joan at the Quantico National Cemetery for an hour or so, read to her, and described the weekend of activities.*

*It was a pleasure to go to the Fall River Country Club for the reception and dining. I have known of the Club for many years but had never visited the site. On the 2nd of June, it was brightly sunlit and very much in use by avid golfers, which was a nice sight to see ... the accommodations ... were just right for the event, as it overlooked the Taunton River, a waterway I had only once sailed on, but it was welcoming then and now.*

*The evening at the Club was all-too-short, but was so very meaningful, with the laudatory comments of the speakers, and the handshakes and good words from others. It was an evening to remember for me and my family.*

*It was a pleasure to ... have a chance to briefly exchange greetings with your staff members. It is my hope that they will enjoy welcoming members and visitors to the Gallery for a long time to come. Ah, the memories, and thanks to you and the Society Board and Staff for making it happen.*

Doug, for those kind words, you are very welcome. But in fact, it is the FRHS that should – and sincerely does – thank you. The organization can now present rotating exhibits in a setting on par with much larger and far better-funded institutions, and we have you and Joan to thank for that. It would have been impossible otherwise.

**A postscript:** On August 8, 2023, Doug Borden, who was on holiday in Massachusetts with his family, returned to the FRHS. As mentioned in his letter to the curator, his "hope that one day I shall be able to revisit the Gallery" became reality, furnishing ample "time perusing the art and the accompanying descriptions and definitions." It was a thoroughly enjoyable visit during which myriad topics were covered in leisurely conversation with the FRHS staff.

**Note:** *Recent Acquisitions in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture* will open to the public following a pre-view reception for FRHS members; the date, likely in spring 2024, is yet-to-be-determined pending the ongoing HVAC installation.





## THANKS TO:

**BankFive and Anne P. Tangen, President & CEO**, for the use of the Board Room of the bank's corporate headquarters in Fall River, where the FRHS board of directors have been holding monthly meetings. When the museum closed to the public due to the ongoing HVAC installation project, it was necessary to relocate various committees that could no longer assemble in the museum building; Anne immediately agreed to provide space at the bank for the FRHS board. The lovely room is ideally suited, and its use is very much appreciated. Thank you, Anne!

**BayCoast Bank and Nicholas M. Christ, President & CEO**, for providing meeting space in their corporate headquarters in Swansea for our Because History Matters endowment committee. Lunch meetings of the campaign leadership steering committee have consistently been held in the beautifully appointed Board Room, for which the FRHS is very grateful. Thank you, Nick!

**James Kay, President of John F. Stafford Insurance Agency Inc.**, for the use of a conference room in their Fall River office for meetings of the Fall River Historical Society Press. Thank you, Jay!

## LEWIS LATIMER CONT.

Without George's income, the family was now in severe financial straits. Rebecca could no longer afford to care for George Jr, Margaret, William, and Lewis. While many sources claim that Lewis and his siblings were sent to a pauper's "State Farm," Fouché reports that in Lewis's 1911 Logbook, he stated that because of their family's situation, his "two brothers were sent to a state institution ... the Farm School from here they were bound out." George worked for a farmer, William for a hotel keeper, and Margaret was "taken by a friend," probably as a house girl. Lewis, in fact, remained at home with his mother as he was too young to be sent to the Farm School.

By the time Lewis was thirteen, he was working as an office boy for an attorney "and became familiar with legal practices at an early age. After a stint waiting table for a Roxbury family, he secured a job as an office boy for Isaac H. Wright, a distinguished local attorney" (Fouché).

At the age of sixteen, Lewis lied about his age and enlisted for a three-year term of service in the Union Navy on September 16, 1864, and served briefly on the *USS Ohio* and later the *USS Massasoit*. While aboard the *Massasoit*, the gunboat patrolled the New England coast for Confederate raiders, participated in several escort voyages from New York City to Hampton Roads, Virginia, served picket duty on the James River in Virginia, and took part in the January 24, 1865, duel with Confederate batteries at Howlett's House. Later, she took part in preventing any southern rams from reaching the coast and was ordered on April 6 to carry dispatches to General William Tecumseh Sherman in North Carolina.

Lewis served honorably and was discharged after nearly ten months on July 3, 1865 (the Civil War officially ended on April 9, 1865) in Boston. In short order, he found a position in the firm of Crosby, Halsted & Gould, Solicitors of American and Foreign Patents (later Crosby & Gregory). They had been looking for "a colored boy with a taste for drawing" (Fouché). John J. Halsted was a former principal examiner of the Patent Office, as well as a partner in the firm. It was while working there that Latimer acquired his drafting skills, carefully watching the other draftsman at work, and purchasing his own set of drafting instruments. Latimer would practice at home until he could replicate the work of the more experienced professionals. "This process of emulation, an informal apprenticeship, was the best training that many craft, technical and engineering people received in the nineteenth century" (Fouché).

When the draftsman at the firm left for another position, Lewis Latimer was appointed to fill the vacancy and, from 1866 to 1878, his income increased from \$3 to \$20 a week, a marked improvement on his standard of living. As a sign of the times, however, Latimer was

paid \$5 less a week than the white draftsman he was replacing.

Latimer's duties were varied. He was responsible for "making drawings for, and superintending the construction of, the working models ... required by the US Patent Office" (Fouché), performing patent research for the firm in the Boston area, all while having a firm handle on the technical and legal aspects of patenting.

Latimer's first patent was in 1874, an "Improvement in Water-Closet for Railroad-Cars," co-patented with Charles W. Brown. Says Fouché:

Instead of having a toilet opening to the ground, where 'dust, cinders, and other matters [could be] thrown up from the track,' Latimer and Brown devised a commode with a trap door activated by the toilet lid. They 'constructed the apparatus with an earth-closet mechanism; by which a supply of dry earth, sand, or equivalent material is lodged upon the ... receiving or discharging plate whenever the seat-cover is raised, and before the apparatus is used.'

Because Boston was one of the centers of electrical invention, it was through Latimer's eleven-year tenure at Crosby & Gregory that he became conversant in electrical technology. By the mid 1870s, Latimer had drafted the drawings for the application for a telephone patent for Alexander Graham Bell. It is unclear if this was part of his duties at Crosby & Gregory or if he did this work on a freelance basis. Even though some historians have suggested that Bell asked for Latimer's services, there is no evidence of this. According to Fouché, "It was merely that Latimer was the draftsman of the patent law firm that Bell retained to file his patent application which required Latimer to perform the final drawings."

No research thus far has revealed the actual event or circumstance that precipitated the introduction of Lewis Latimer to Mary Wilson Lewis (1847-1924), the woman who would become his wife. During the time of their courtship, Latimer was working in Boston for Crosby & Gregory and Mary was living in Fall River, Massachusetts. Mary's sister was Sarah Anna Lewis, the first Black person to graduate from the State Normal School in Bridgewater, Massachusetts (later to become Bridgewater State College), a prominent teacher's college.

Lewis Latimer and Mary Wilson Lewis were married in Fall River on November 15, 1873. Their marriage lasted over fifty years.

Managerial changes at Crosby & Gregory, and Latimer's inability to find agreement with the way Gregory did business, resulted in Latimer resigning his position in 1878. He soon found a similar position with Boston patent solicitor Joseph Adams. Unfortunately, "the adverse business climate" forced him to support himself as a painter and paper hanger. After a short stint working for the Esterbrook Iron Foundry in South Boston, his sister Martha and her husband Augustus Hawley suggested he move to Bridgeport,

Connecticut, where she and her family lived. It was this decision that was to change Latimer's life forever.

After moving to Bridgeport at the end of 1879, Latimer worked briefly as a draftsman at the Follandsbee Machine Shop. It was during his time there that he met Hiram Maxim, founder and chief electrician for the U.S. Electric Lighting Company, and inventor of the Maxim guns, which had become standard weaponry in the US and Britain.

Maxim was impressed by Latimer's drawing talent and his work with Crosby and Gould, which had an excellent reputation, so he hired him only a week after being introduced. Latimer recalled, "I was installed in Mr. Maxim's office busily following my vocation of mechanical draughtsman, and acquainting myself with every brand of electric incandescent light construction and operation" (Norman and Patterson).

Latimer made important social connections as well as expanded his expertise in the scientific and technical aspects of electric lighting. He wrote articles and gave lectures about recent science and technology and became a public voice in the electric light community. Regardless of his race, he had become "increasingly accepted by the corporate electrical culture that had a position of prominence in the development of electrical technology" (Fouché).

It was only a year before Latimer joined Maxim that Thomas Alva Edison had received his patent for the electric light bulb. But there was a problem with the invention: the carbon wire filament lasted only for a few days at the most, so it became expensive to use this invention as it needed to be frequently replaced. Of course, experts and inventors from around the globe worked to solve the problem. And who was the man who was able to figure it all out? Lewis Henry Latimer.

After conducting hundreds of experiments using differing methods and materials, Latimer succeeded by combining "previous manufacturing techniques with several new materials that allowed carbon filaments to last longer and to be made much more inexpensively." Continues Norman and Patterson:

Latimer's procedure involved stuffing blanks, or shapes, of such fibrous materials as wood or paper into small cardboard envelopes and thus exposing them to extremely high temperatures in an airless environment. He discovered that by coating the inside of the envelopes with a substance that kept them from sticking, or encasing the blanks between two strips of tissue paper, he could keep the blanks from welding to the envelopes. It was the cardboard envelopes that made Latimer's invention different from existing filaments—and that made it work so well.

The company that Latimer worked for did not structure itself to build an entire electrical system, as the Edison Company had done. Instead, they focused primarily on the production of a quality incandescent lamp, which

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## LEWIS LATIMER CONT.

the owner, Hiram Maxim was not optimistic about. With such extreme competition in the industry, most companies had small staffs. The U.S. Electric Lighting company had only eight men working at their factory when they moved to New York City.

Because of Maxim's waning interest, Latimer took on more and more of the responsibilities for the company's survival. He participated in all of the lighting installations that were undertaken in 1880 and 1881, which included the Equitable Building, Fiske & Hatch, Caswell & Massey drugstore, and the Union League Club. According to Fouché, Latimer was solely in charge of operations and when the company "expanded its operations to Philadelphia, Latimer was one of the valued men brought along to assist in the implementation of a lighting system in the Philadelphia Lodger Building."

Latimer's biggest achievement, however, was the installation of several lighting systems in Montreal, Canada, around the middle of 1881. He was most successful with his dealings with the French Canadian workers as he learned the language in order to communicate instructions effectively.

Latimer continued to invent products that proved fundamental to the development of the U.S. Electric Lighting Company, including a patent for an improvement in incandescent lamps in 1881, a patent for the "Process of Manufacturing Carbons" in 1882 (with Joseph Nichols), and a new type of globe supporter for arc-lamps in 1882 (with John Tregoin).

According to Fouché, "By the summer of 1881, Latimer had become the superintendent of the incandescent lamp department of the United States Electric Lighting Company. In this capacity, he directed the production of filaments, commonly known as carbons, for Maxim lamps," and supervised forty men in the division.

In 1882, Latimer and his wife went to London so he could oversee the opening of a Maxim factory there. He finished the job ahead of schedule and when he returned there was no job waiting for him. With that, Latimer left Maxim's employ in 1883. But less than a year later, he went to work for Thomas Alva Edison, joining the engineering department as a draughtsman.

Writes Norman and Patterson:

Patents clearly played an important role in Edison's work. His Edison Electric Light Company had been founded as a patent-holding company, which meant that the company's success depended on its continued ability to acquire new patents. And the acquisition of patents depended on a detailed knowledge of the process of filing the forms properly at the U.S. Patent Office. ... Edison needed a man such as Latimer. The 35-year-old black inventor knew the patent process inside and was well versed in electric lighting and power. In addition, he

possessed self-discipline, patience, and was attentive to details. ... Latimer quickly justified Edison's faith in him. He tested and checked equipment, and he was put in charge of the company library. But a big part of Latimer's job with the Edison Electric Light Company was to collect information that could be put into lawsuits concerning Edison's patents. A number of inventors tried to capitalize on Edison's work without his permission. It was Latimer's role, as an expert on patents and electricity, to set the record straight.

In 1886, Latimer received a patent for an "Apparatus for Cooling and Disinfecting"—a device to make rooms cooler and cleaner. Other patents he secured were for a "Locking-rack for Hats, Coats, Umbrellas" for use in public places, and "A Book Supporter" to prevent books on shelves from getting bent out of shape.

In 1890, his book titled *Incandescent Electric Lighting, A Practical Description of the Edison System* was published by D. Van Nostrand & Company. It was wildly popular and was reprinted with additional content supplied by Latimer and several of his colleagues.

Latimer's private life was filled with his artistic and literary endeavors. He was a poet and painter and even created portraits of his family, which included his wife and two daughters, Emma Jeannette (later Norman, 1883-1934) and Louise Rebecca (1891-1963).

Patent lawyer and engineer Edwin Hammer had been the chief technical assistant for the Board of Patent Control and was the unofficial historian of the Edison organization. On February 11, 1918, Edison's 71<sup>st</sup> birthday, Hammer marked the occasion by gathering the twenty-eight charter members of the Edison organization, to which Latimer belonged. This select group became known as the Edison Pioneers and every year on Edison's birthday, they would meet in Newark or the Menlo Park laboratory to celebrate. Latimer was the only Black person in this august body of inventors and engineers.

In 1922, at the age of seventy-four, Latimer's career came to an end when his eyesight began to fail. According to Norman and Patterson, "He received a pension from the Edison General Electric Company of \$17.50 a week, which was supplemented by a pension from the military of \$72 a month."

Soon after the Latimers celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, Mary died. She was laid to rest in Oak Grove Cemetery in Fall River. Lewis was devastated by the loss of his wife and after a stroke that left one side of his body paralyzed, he fell into a state

of depression. In an effort to offer him solace and joy, a group of family and friends collected the hundreds of poems he had written over the years and had them privately printed on handmade Italian paper, bound as a book titled *The Poems of Love and Life*.

Lewis Latimer died three days later, on December 11, 1928. According to Norman and Patterson, "The Edison Pioneers were among those who paid tribute to Latimer, issuing a statement that said in part:

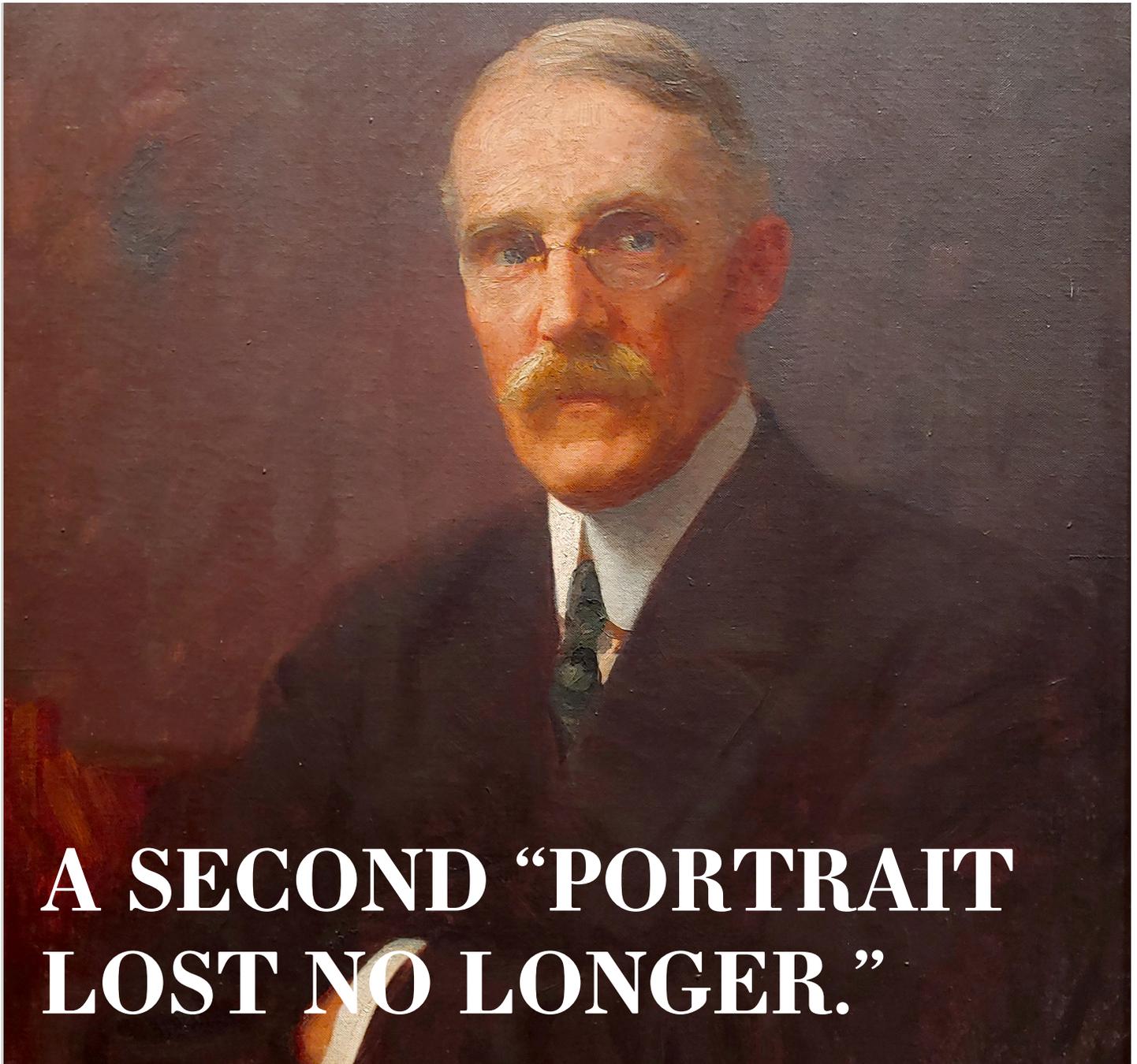
He was of the colored race, the only one in our organization ... Broadmindedness, versatility in the accomplishment of things intellectual and cultural, a linguist, a devoted husband and father, all were characteristic of him. His genial presence will be missed from our gatherings.

He is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery in Fall River with his family, which includes his wife Mary Wilson (Lewis) Latimer, their daughter Louise Latimer, mother Louisa M. Lewis, Mary's sister Sarah Anna (Lewis) Williams, her husband Edward A. Williams, their daughters Florence Rebecca Morgan and Harriet E. Pinkney. In a recent turn of events, a new headstone was placed on this grave on Saturday, September 23, 2023. It is a dedication and celebration of the life of this remarkable man.

Sources: "Sarah Anna Lewis" by Philip T. Silvia Jr. (Bridgewater State College, n.d.); *Black Inventors in the Age of Segregation* by Rayvon Fouché (John Hopkins University Press, 2003); *Lewis Latimer* by Winifred Latimer Norman and Lily Patterson (Chelsea House, 1994); "The George Latimer Case: A Benchmark in the Struggle for Freedom" by Asa J. Davis (Rutgers University, Thomas A. Edison Papers).



Installation of the Lewis Latimer monument at Oak Grove Cemetery in Fall River. The gentleman is the great-great grand nephew of Lewis Latimer. He is the great-great grandson of Latimer's sister, Margaret.



Nathan Durfee (1867-1948) painted by Frederick Adolph Demmler (1888-1918). The gift of Mr. & Mrs. Allison Brown Durfee, #2023.46.1.

In the last issue of *In Focus*, an article titled "A Portrait Lost No Longer" detailed the quest by filmmaker Charles Kaufmann for four portraits of prominent Fall River businessmen, painted by the American artist Frederick Adolph Demmler (1888-1918); the painter is the subject of a forthcoming documentary film by Kaufmann. We were immediately able to confirm that one of the portraits, that of industrialist George Henry Hills (1850-1917), has been hanging in the FRHS collection since 1953.

But what of the three remaining "lost" portraits: Col. Thomas James Borden (1832-1902); Nathan Durfee (1867-1948); and

Charles Jarvis Holmes (1834-1906)? The FRHS readily accepted the challenge, and the search was on.

Research provided a few clues: Borden once hung in "the directors' room of the Metacomet National Bank" – it may have been lost in the Great Fall River Fire of 1928, when the bank was destroyed; and Holmes, a former treasurer of the Fall River Five Cents Savings Bank (now BankFive), hung "in the board room" of that bank.

Descendants of both Borden and Holmes were contacted; they were intrigued but, unfortunately, none were able to provide

any answers. An inquiry to Anne P. Tangen, President and CEO of BankFive, immediately initiated a search of the corporate headquarters building; the portrait, however, was not located.

Longtime FRHS member, the late Sylvia Buffinton Tompkins (1934-2023), a maternal granddaughter of Nathan Durfee, was telephoned – "Syvie" did not have the portrait, but immediately offered to contact "the family" to see if anyone knew of its whereabouts.

Within days, a telephone call from Syvie confirmed the good news: A second "lost"

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## A SECOND PORTRAIT CONT.

portrait – that of Nathan Durfee – had been discovered in the possession of her first cousin, Allison Brown Durfee, a grandson of the subject on the paternal line. The painting had descended in his branch of the family and the provenance was easily documented: Nathan Durfee (1867-1948); to his wife, Helena Woodrow (Brown) Durfee, (1869-1961); to her son, Nathan Barry Durfee (1904-1993); to his son; Allison Brown Durfee.

Shortly thereafter, following a telephone conversation with Syvie’s cousin, the portrait was at the FRHS, on loan for a filming session for the Demmler documentary. The filmmaker was ecstatic that another painting could be added to the catalogue of known works by the artist.

During Syvie’s conversation with the curator discussing the discovery of the painting, she stated: “I think this is a great outcome, but that portrait should be at the Historical Society. Get him to give it to you.” And so, this

desire on her part came to pass, but not at the request of Syvie or the FRHS.

A few months later, in response to an inquiry about arranging the return of the portrait, Allison contacted the curator and stated that he and his wife had been giving the matter some thought and felt the best place for the painting was at the FRHS. Was the museum interested? The answer: Yes.

The portrait has since been donated to the FRHS. It is a stellar example of the artist’s work, is housed in its original hand-carved giltwood frame, and is in an excellent state of preservation, requiring only minimal surface cleaning by a conservator.

Syvie, who had passed away only two months before the portrait was donated to the museum, would have been delighted!



## IN GRATITUDE

Thanks to FRHS members and volunteers **Kathy Rockett, Trish Rebello, Betty Prescott, Suzie Mills Shaw, Jim Smith, Fran Rachlin, Dennis Binette, and Judy Perreault**, for their assistance in moving and packing FRHS collections in preparation for the HVAC installation. Your assistance with this complex, exhaustive, and often overwhelming work is much appreciated.

Special thanks are due to **Kathy and Trish**, who consistently helped on some of the most oppressive days of summer when heat and humidity rendered the upper floors of the FRHS building practically unbearable. Despite the many difficulties encountered, you willingly returned, day after day. This commitment to the FRHS takes volunteerism to a new level and it is duly recognized. Thank you, both!



The Fall River Historical Society is pleased to unveil a remarkable transformation of our online presence—the revamped **FRHS website**.

Please explore our dynamic platform, which is designed to bring the captivating history of Fall River right to your fingertips and help foster a deeper connection between you and our treasured heritage.

Embrace the past, connect with the present, and be inspired for the future as we take you on an exciting journey through the rich history of the city and its people.

Fall River Historical Society  
History Matters



FallRiverHistorical.org



Jane Welsh on the golf course at the Acoaxet Club, September 1938, shortly after the devastating hurricane. She is sitting in what she captioned “one of our chairs” that had washed up on the golf course. It was swept away from her family summer home that was totally destroyed in the storm.

## PROFILE IN PLANNED GIVING

### Margaret Jane Welsh (1921-2021)

Born and raised in Fall River, Margaret Jane Welsh – Jane to her friends – was the daughter of Madison Francis Welsh (1891-1991) and Margaret Buffum (Barker) Welsh (1893-1976); she was a long-time FRHS member and supporter.

A 1940 graduate of Stoneleigh-Prospect Hill School for Girls, she attended Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, and received her B.A. in English in 1944, after which she resided and worked away from her native city for several years. In 1960, she received her M.A. in Rehabilitation Counseling at Boston University and was employed as a Rehabilitation Associate with United Community Services (UCS) in Boston. In 1968, she returned to Fall River, having been appointed Executive Director of the Health Division of UCS. Summers were spent at Westport Harbor, Massachusetts, a tradition started by her maternal ancestors’ decades before.

Jane had been deaf since childhood and throughout her successful career was a strong advocate and tireless worker for fair housing and employment rights for people with disabilities. She never married, nor did her only sibling, Madison Nelson Welsh (1924-2008), a life-long social worker who resided in Jakarta, Indonesia, for many years.

Her father, a native of Kansas City, Missouri, resided in Fall River after his marriage in 1918 and was thereafter prominently involved in the business, civic, philanthropic, and social affairs of the city.

A noted insurance executive, he was a shrewd businessman and investor. Jane inherited her father’s investment acumen and, an ever-practical person, was cautious and very frugal.

Jane maintained a keen interest in the work of the FRHS, as had her parents, and was a generous, albeit quiet, financial contributor. Over the years, she donated several family pieces to the museum including paintings, decorative arts, textiles, and extensive collections of photographic and genealogical material. She was proud of her deep Fall River roots, and in her veins flowed the blood of prominent Fall River industrialists, including members of the Flint and Barker families.

The success and financial security of the FRHS was important to Jane. When making her estate plan, she established the Margaret Jane Welsh Trust and generously remembered the FRHS as an income beneficiary, directing that a ten percent share be allocated to the museum annually. As its first distribution, the FRHS received the significant sum of \$43,209.

This generous bequest stands as testament to Jane’s life-long familial connection with the FRHS and her personal commitment to safeguarding its future.

With this legacy, she has secured her commitment to the organization in perpetuity. Rest in peace, Jane.

**Jane maintained a keen interest in the work of the FRHS ... and was a generous, albeit quiet, financial contributor**