

Brockton Historical Society

Newsletter

Fall 2005

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Edison Essay Contest 2005
by
Barbara Lutz

A record crowd was on hand at the Homestead to honor award recipients of the Thomas Edison Essay Contest.

President Larry Siskind welcomed honorees and their families as well as special guests including Mayor Jack Yunits, Councilors Jim Harrington, Linda Balzotti, Charles Logan, Mike Brady, Tom Brophy, Greg Miller as well as Cultural Affairs Director Gayle Kelley and Tina Glidden, Director of the War Memorial Building.

President Siskind also expressed the society's appreciation to Harbor One Credit Union for supporting this program and for their ongoing commitment to the Brockton Historical Society.

"Edison," cont'd, p. 3

The Grover Disaster of 1905

Historical Society Observes 100th
Anniversary of Boiler Explosion

by
Derek Canavan

On March 20, 2005, the Brockton Historical Society held a solemn ceremony to commemorate the centenary of the terrible explosion and fire at the R. B. Grover Shoe Factory in the Campello section of Brockton. On this date one hundred years earlier, fifty-eight people, mostly shoe-workers, perished when the boiler exploded at the factory, resulting in a fire that destroyed four acres of land along Main and Calmar streets.

The bells of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church chimed fifty-eight times, once for each victim of the fire. At 7:50 am Mayor Yunits and Mary Grover-Rosetti, a direct descendent of Mr. R. B.

"Anniversary," cont'd, p. 7

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President Siskind looks on as Curator Gerald Beals demonstrates Edison's most important invention.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It is appropriate at this time to take stock of our recent accomplishments. I am proud to state that we have an extremely dedicated and energetic Board of Trustees and elected officers which has allowed us to expand our activities while fulfilling one of our main organizational purposes – “to enhance knowledge, awareness and appreciation of and pride in the role that the City and the region have played in local, national and world history.”

To that end we created The Historic Citizen Award, presented annually to outstanding Brocktonians whose accomplishments have been widely recognized beyond the City's borders. Past recipients have included Stanley Bauman, Brockton's visual historian and photographer extraordinaire; Caryle Murphy, nationally respected author, journalist and consultant on middle east affairs and Pulitzer Prize winner; Leo Narducci, famous international dress designer and Coty Award winner; Armond Colombo, the “winningest high school football coach in Massachusetts history”; and Kenneth Feinberg, the country's foremost mediator and Special Master of the 9/11 Victims Compensation Fund.

The latest recipient is Mayor John T. Yunits, Jr., who will be honored at our major fund raising event on October 22, 2005 at the Shaw's Conference Center for his ten years of extraordinary service as Brockton's longest serving mayor. The event promises to be another social City event of the year, and I urge everyone who is interested in attending the event to visit our website for ticket information and sponsorship opportunities:

www.brocktonhistoricalsociety.org.

The Society played a significant role involving the famed Liberty Tree when our City Council was requested to change the long standing street name of High Street to Frederick Douglass Avenue and sought historical insight from us as to Douglass's contributions to social justice not only here in Brockton, but nationally as well. We also had the opportunity of hosting Mr. Douglass's great grandson, Frederick Douglass IV, and his wife at a Society-sponsored event at City Hall commemorating the 200th anniversary of the birth of the city's

greatest human rights advocate, Edward Bennett, upon whose property the Liberty Tree was situated. Following the City Hall event, a clone of the Liberty Tree propagated by the Arnold Arboretum was planted on the grounds of the Historical Society.

Included in this newsletter are a number of articles authored by individual trustees highlighting other recent Historical Society events and activities as well as our curator's special contribution. I wish to thank all trustees for their hard work and dedication.

Looking to the future, we have a full plate of upcoming events. Besides the Yunits Historic Citizen Award, our annual membership meeting is scheduled on October 2, 2005 at 1:00PM at the Homestead to elect officers and trustees. Our program will feature the display of oil paintings of Brockton scenes and landmarks created by members of the Brockton Council on Aging. In addition, noted artist William Beyer will be guest speaker.

On November 11, 2005, a special Veterans' Day tribute will take place at the refurbished War Memorial Building immediately following the Veterans' Day parade. On November 24, 2005 at 9:00AM, the new Rocky Marciano Stadium/Armond Colombo Field sign will be unveiled and dedicated prior to the Brockton High School Thanksgiving Day football game.

Mention should also be made of the Historical Society's commitment to improving our technology capability. We place emphasis on finding ways to acquaint succeeding generations with information about our great Brockton heritage. Our website will be expanded this year to include more historic photographs and on-line exhibits. As we continue to procure, preserve, and exhibit Brockton's historical artifacts, we will continue to reach out to our members and the public at large for financial assistance and volunteerism to fulfill the objectives of our organization.

Lawrence M. Siskind



Edison Contest Winners

L-R: Chance Leary (3rd), Titilope Kolawobe (2nd), Nicole Miskinis (1st)
Back Row: Mayor Yunits, Gerry Beals, Larry Siskind, Barbara Lutz

Edison Contest, from page 1

Curator Gerry Beals, one of the country's foremost authorities on Thomas Edison, entertained the audience with a discussion of Edison giving special reference to why this "Wizard of Menlo Park" came to Brockton and how it changed the quality of life here. A question and answer period followed and prizes were awarded.

Barbara Lutz, coordinator of the program for the past seven years, spoke briefly on the history of the essay contest, which began with the idea to introduce the children of Brockton to the historical events that took place when Edison came here and gave Brockton the distinction of being the first city in the world to be powered by a central station.

Trophies and ribbons were awarded to the following students: 1st place – Nicole Miskinis; 2nd place – Titilope Kolawobe; 3rd place – Chance Leary; 4th place – Tayla Wilson; 5th place – Bradley Belanger; 6th place – Jazmine Bradsher. Receiving Honorable Mention: Shawn Barrett, Russell Logan, Jessica Hamelburg, Simonica Mendes, Elizabeth Chauppette, and Taylor Caldwell. All participants received a Certificate of Participation.

Barbara Lutz is the secretary of the Board of Trustees

The Brockton Shoe Museum
A Brockton Historical Society Museum

by John Learnard

The 2004-2005 season has been a busy, challenging, and exciting period for our Shoe Museum, which seems paradoxical when the American footwear industry continues to be decimated by foreign imports.

The footwear industry in the U.S. originated here in New England and is fondly identified with the early cobblers of Brockton.

In time, shoe production migrated through the eastern and central states with the highest employment in Massachusetts, Maine, Missouri, New York, and Tennessee, while the component product manufacturers and distributors were largely in the northeastern states except for the Tanning industry, which followed the Appalachian Trail south with another pocket in Wisconsin.

U.S. footwear production peaked in 1968 at 642 million pairs with imported footwear claiming 21% of the market.

While footwear consumption has grown steadily, U.S. footwear manufacturers have seen their share diminish drastically.

These unfortunate circumstances continue to fuel our commitment to collect, document, and preserve the artifacts and the fascinating history of the once great and powerful American footwear industry.

Four major gifts highlighting our acquisitions during the past year include the coveted William A. Rossi and the Shoe Trades Publishing libraries and two extensive collections from the Nettleton Shoe Company of Syracuse, NY and the Knapp Shoe Company of Brockton.

Acquisition of the Rossi and Shoe Trades libraries led us to establish a "Partnership Agreement" with the Archival and Special Collections Library at nearby Stonehill College, enabling us to efficiently and professionally inventory and preserve these priceless collections while making them available "to the world" for research and study!

The Rossi Library consists of over 2000 files and a vast collection of books, catalogs, industry directories, and manuscripts.

"Shoe Museum," cont'd p. 7



Brockton Historical Society

Historic Citizen Award 2005



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Shoe Museum, from p. 3

The Shoe Trades collection contains 100 years of bound volumes of *American Shoemaking* and *Leather Manufacturer* magazines, representing an incredible history of the U.S. shoe and leather industries.

In similar fashion, the Nettleton and Knapp collections will enable us to develop displays and documentaries illustrating the evolution of shoemaking with some hands-on fun for our visitors.

As we look forward to 2005-2006, we anticipate a year filled with busier and more exciting challenges as we prepare to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the 1981 dedication of our Shoe Museum.

We deeply appreciate the continued support of our members and urge you to spread the word about our exhibits and museums and the advantages associated with membership in the Brockton Historical Society.

John Learnard is Chairman of The Brockton Shoe Museum and Past President, BHS.



John Learnard with Stonehill Archivist Nicole Tourangeau



Brockton Firefighters Salute Grover Victims & Firefighters
"The men of the Campello firehouse were heroes that day." (Derek Canavan)

Credits & Permissions

Edison Winners	Bruce Benner
Edison Scene	
Grover Event	Janet Trask
Stonehill	

BHS painting Vincent Ricci

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William Larson, Barbara Larson Kempf, and Mary Grover-Rosetti at the Grover site in Campello

Anniversary, from p. 1

Grover, laid a wreath at the blast site. A moment of silence was observed. An Honor Guard of Brockton Firefighters stood at attention, and on-lookers reflected on the tremendous loss of life that was occurring where they stood one hundred years before. Following the moment of silence, the crowd of nearly one hundred walked over to the First Evangelical Lutheran Church for coffee and pastry and to see a display of Grover-related artifacts and some photographs of the fire. Present at the reception were William Larson and Barbara Larson Kempf, descendants of fire victim Hannah Lindberg, and they were able to speak with Mrs. Grover-Rosetti.

Featured at the reception was Mr. Mark Mooney, Assistant Chief Boiler Inspector for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Commonwealth's representative to the National Board of Boiler and Pressure Vessel Inspectors. Mr. Mooney explained exactly what caused the boiler to fail, and he also explained how this explosion caused the Massachusetts Legislature to codify into law the nation's first boiler code. The Massachusetts code serves even to this day as the national model.

Following a service at the church, the ceremony continued at the Melrose Cemetery on Pearl Street. There a wreath was laid at the granite monument that marks the mass graves of those who perished. Following this wreath ceremony a luncheon was held at the Shoe Museum. Mr. Bill Donovan and his staff at the Fire Museum gave tours to the dozens who wanted to learn about the storied history of the Brockton Fire Department.

Brockton Community Cable Television videotaped the entire event, and the story made the six and eleven pm news shows on the Boston networks. The Brockton Historical Society is grateful to Mr. Bob Martin of Advanced Lock and Key. Mr. Martin's business occupies the site of the Grover factory, and Bob played a key role in this event. The society also owes a debt of gratitude to the entire community at the First Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Derek Canavan is a Society Trustee and a history teacher at Brockton High School

A presentation by artist Bill Beyer and the Council on Aging Fine Arts Group will follow the 2005 Annual Meeting. Vincent Ricci submitted the following article along with a photo of his painting of the Historical Society.

Fine Arts Group,
Mary Cruise Kennedy Senior Center
by Vincent Ricci

The class is made up of senior citizens whose ages range from sixty-five to eighty-five years of age (average age of the group is seventy-five).

Our instructor is Phyllis Hancock, age seventy-six. Phyllis has volunteered her time from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM every Thursday for the past three years.

The goal is to encourage our students to take on the challenge of painting even though many have no experience. Only a few who joined had any experience.

Phyllis with all her energy and enthusiasm was and is determined to change the attitude of the group and give them the confidence to know they can paint successfully.

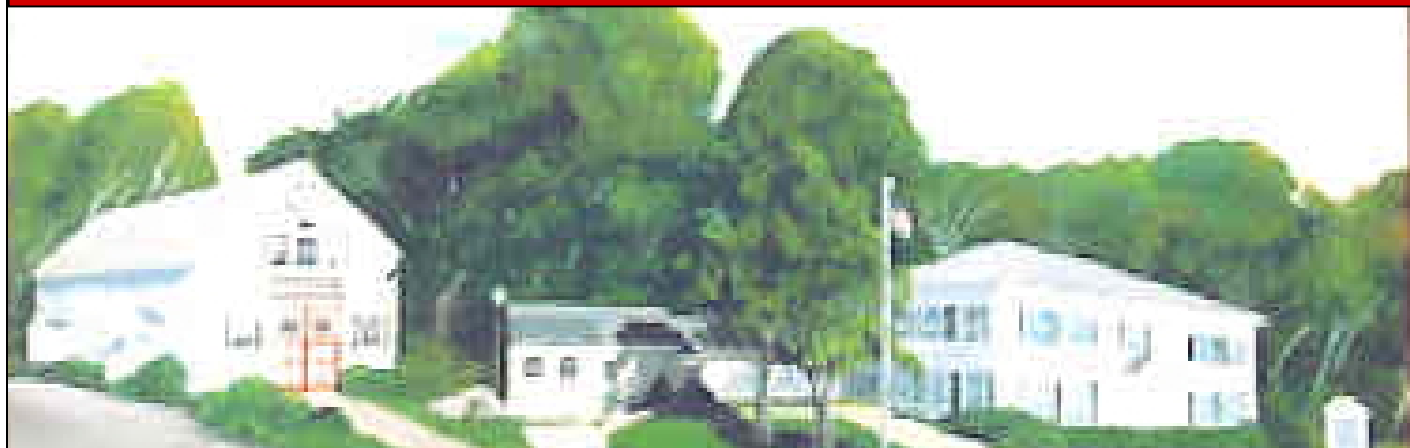
Her goal was to instill confidence and self-esteem, to show them no matter what their age, if they apply themselves they can succeed. Phyllis accomplished this by setting a very difficult goal.

Last year she announced that we were going to paint pictures of the old and new landmarks of Brockton. And we set off painting pictures of buildings and landscapes of the city; there was much moaning and groaning since many did not have much experience with painting buildings. With her perseverance and encouragement, the group completed thirty-eight paintings of the city.

It was decided that we would exhibit the paintings at the COA for the month of February. An opening reception was sponsored by the COA, the Friends of the COA, and many local sponsors. Even with the inclement weather the reception was very successful. Phyllis, with help from the COA administrator, the mayor's office, and classmates, set up a traveling exhibit that went to the Brockton City Hall, Brockton Public Library, George's Café, and Bay State Gas Company. The finale was when our state representatives and legislators hosted our exhibit at the Massachusetts State House.

The class is still painting with great enthusiasm and confidence.

A detail from Vincent Ricci's painting of the Historical Society buildings appears overleaf.



Brockton Historical Society
216 NORTH PEARL STREET
BROCKTON, MA 02301

Place
Postage
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NOTICE!

The Annual Meeting of the Brockton Historical Society:

Sunday, October 2, 2005
The Homestead
1:00 – 2:00 pm

The meeting will be followed by an art presentation by Bill Beyer
and the Arts Group from the Council On Aging.

Detail (above) of painting by Vincent Ricci