

Charitably



Speaking

353 Southern Artery

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A PUBLICATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS CHARITABLE MECHANIC ASSOCIATION

President's Message

As time goes on I feel that I am learning what it means to be president, and our Board of Government and past presidents have been a good guiding force. I believe the membership also should be informed about what goes into making our organization run, and *Charitably Speaking* gives us an opportunity to pass along some of that information, especially to those unable to attend our annual meeting where the workings of each committee are detailed. When your Board of Government meets each month, we first discuss finances and approve the payment of bills, then move on to address issues and problems that need answers. Currently, the Board is updating our member contact information (Fred Arrowsmith is heading up that effort), VP Peter Lemonias is looking further into *The Wounded Indian* ownership issue, and Tom Crowdis III is putting together a subcommittee to explore opportunities for non-business, casual, and mini-functions. Hopefully, in future issues, I will be able to report further on the workings of our Association. – **Arthur Anthony**

Recent Happenings

Our most recent Quarterly Meeting was held at on April 13 at Spinelli's Function Facility in Lynnfield, and, sadly, it began with a moment of silence in memory of recently deceased member and past president of MCMA Howard "Skee" Noel. As many of those present did not know Mr. Noel (he had relocated to Maryland in 1999 to be closer to his son and daughter), President Anthony took the occasion to acquaint us with him.

Born in Revere, and a longtime resident of Wakefield, Skee Noel was a WWII veteran who served as a navigator on a B-24 with the 15th AAF, 464th Bomb Group, flying several missions out of Africa and Southern Italy. He was a recipient of the Purple Heart, and was a POW at Stalag Luft III in Sagan, the prison camp which achieved notoriety in the movie *The Great Escape*. Following the war, Skee had a long, successful career as a painting contractor, helping to manage E.J. Noel & Sons, Inc., the company started by his father. The company did commercial painting jobs in the Boston area and neighboring states, and at times employed up to 200 employees. Skee enjoyed wintering in Naples, Florida, and spending time during the summers on his boat based in Gloucester. Prior to the onset of visual problems in his later years, Skee's hobby was photography, and as a young man he earned money as a freelance photographer for the local Boston newspapers. In addition to his longtime service to MCMA, including as our president from 1983-1985, he was a Scottish Rite Mason, a Shriner, and a lifetime member of the First Parish Congregational Church of Wakefield. Skee was widowed in 2007 from Alice Marie Noel, his wife of 64 years, and Skee himself passed away in late January at age 99.



**Howard "Skee" Noel,
MCMA President 1983-1985**

As to the meeting itself, President Anthony touched on current activities of the Board of Government, particularly in the areas of social get-togethers and more complete member information. Additionally, Membership Committee chairman Bellomo reported favorably on the membership application of Mr. Stephen Kelly, and it was voted to approve Mr. Kelly's application. And the president relayed an offer from North

Bennet Street School to MCMA members of a discount on its continuing education classes for 2016. Our guest speaker, MCMA member Mr. Richard Trethewey, was well known to all present since he has been appearing for the past 35 years on the PBS television show “This Old House.” Richard gave us an interesting and entertaining account of the show and his plumbing and heating role in it, and suggested the show has perhaps changed the public’s perception of the skilled trades. We very much appreciated Richard’s presentation, and thank him sincerely for sharing it with us.



Richard Trethewey of “This Old House,” was the guest speaker at MCMA’s April 13 Quarterly Meeting.

Helping Others

We were pleased last year to become acquainted with an organization whose name was already well known to us. The Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism was established in 1998 by former Boston College and New England Patriots quarterback Doug Flutie and his wife, Laurie, in honor of their son, Doug, Jr. who was diagnosed with autism at the age of three. Its primary objective is to help the families of children with autism obtain the support, educational opportunities, special equipment, and tools necessary for those children to live happy and rewarding lives. Since its inception, the foundation has raised millions of dollars for autism through corporate and individual donations, fund-raisers, endorsements, and promotions featuring Doug and Doug Jr., as well as sales of Flutie Flakes and other related items. The foundation awards grants to nonprofit organizations that provide direct services, family support grants, education, advocacy, and recreational opportunities for individuals with autism, and to date the Fluties have distributed over \$10 million for such grants and programs.



Last year the Flutie Foundation, expanding its mission, launched a new venture which will create micro-businesses with the express purpose of employing adults with autism in jobs that will integrate them into the community. The first business they sought to create was an office solutions venture that would offer bulk mailing, paper shredding, and other services to small businesses in the area. They sought MCMA support for this startup effort, and after due consideration we approved their request for a shredder and a refurbished folder/insertor machine. We are very pleased to report that this office solutions micro-business is off to a great start, with five employees on the payroll busy with mailings, shredding, and other assembly work. Meanwhile, they work to find more customers to grow this micro-business into a self-sustaining one before taking on another. We were, from the start, impressed with the due-diligence the Flutie Foundation had performed in studying other micro-businesses before embarking on this venture, and we are cautiously optimistic that they will be successful in it.



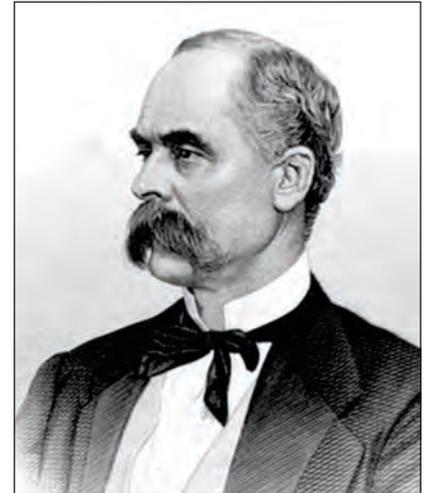
MCMA History

As noted earlier, Skee Noel was a long-time resident of the Town of Wakefield, which prompts us to revisit one of the favorite moment-in-history stories of our past executive director Ray Purdy. Ray liked to withhold the full name of this subject until the end of the story, but we'll admit up front that we are about to discuss **Cyrus Wakefield**. [We have expanded Ray's story, which can be found in his book, *The Quiet Philanthropy*, with information obtained in large part from the book, *Wakefield: 350 Years by the Lake*, excerpts from which are available on the Town of Wakefield website.]

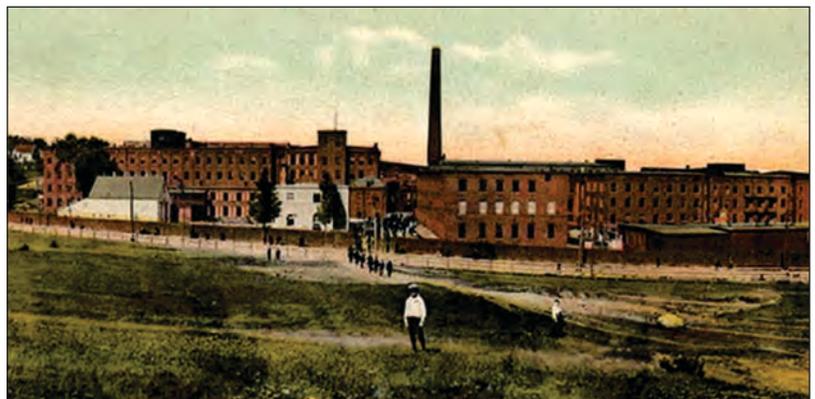
Born in Roxbury, New Hampshire in 1811, Cyrus worked on the family farm from an early age. His education was limited to the curriculum of the "common school," three months a year, and by age 12 he was working in the pits where charcoal was made, and later as a "picker-boy" in a Peterborough cotton mill, but at age 15 he moved to Boston to seek his fortune. [*Cyrus always regretted his limited education, and in later years he sought to broaden it by attending night classes and lectures.*] He found work as a clerk at a wholesale grocery business on India Street, but he also worked after hours as an independent jobber, scavenging and reselling castoff wooden barrels, casks, and other commercial refuse. By age 23 the energetic and thrifty Cyrus had saved enough money to become a partner in his own grocery business, Foster & Wakefield, opposite Commercial Wharf. With that firm's demise, he sent for his younger brother, Enoch, and together they formed the firm Wakefield and Company in 1836.

Wakefield and Company did well, and the brothers prospered. Aside from his grocery business though, Cyrus was ever on the lookout for business opportunities in discarded commercial refuse. He came upon a fortuitous one with the purchase of a small lot of rattan discarded from a sailing ship that had used it for packing on a voyage from Asia. (Bales of rattan were used to protect the actual cargoes.) Wakefield was able to sell the rattan at a profit to local furniture makers, and the favorable purchase led to others. By the early 1840s Cyrus had left the grocery business to his brother Enoch, and he had formed a firm specifically devoted to buying and reselling lots of rattan from visiting cargo ships. The Wakefield Rattan Company, at the corner of Commercial and Cross streets in Boston, prospered as demand for rattan increased. The ever-alert Cyrus, though, recognized that his buyers incurred considerable expense in the labor-intensive effort of hand-splitting the rattan stems into strips. Here we need to back up a little.

Around that same time he had brought his brother Enoch down from Roxbury, Cyrus had also sent for his sister Hannah, with the intent of obtaining for her a better education than he had enjoyed. Soon after, upon the recommendation of relatives in the Reading area [*Cyrus' great-grandfather was born in Reading, and branches of the family remained in the area*], Hannah enrolled in South Reading Academy, and Cyrus became both familiar with and enamored of the area during his subsequent visits to see Hannah and his cousins. He also met there the woman who would in 1841 become his wife, Eliza Ann Bancroft, daughter of a wealthy former sea captain. Eliza's family was active in the China trade, and one of her brothers worked for a trading company in Canton, China.



Cyrus Wakefield
(1811-1873)



The Wakefield Rattan Factory, Wakefield, Mass.
(Early 20th-century postcard view)

Returning to our narrative, Cyrus sent his brother-in-law samples of the split products most in demand, with the expectation that the splitting work could be done there at far less cost, and within a few years his imported Canton Split Rattan was known throughout the United States. By then Cyrus nearly monopolized the rattan trade, but he elected to go beyond importing and reselling the raw material, and opening a small factory on Canal Street, he entered into the manufacture of finished products. And like other entrepreneurs of his time, he sought to mechanize his operations wherever possible. As demand for his rattan products increased beyond the capacity of his Canal Street facility, he needed to move.

Cyrus had for some time been buying property in South Reading. He built his home there in 1851, and four years later relocated his factory there and expanded its operations. The site chosen was adjacent to a mill pond, the availability of water-driven machinery producing further savings in labor, and in the coming years Wakefield's engineers, and Wakefield himself, would continue to develop machinery to maintain the company's competitive advantage. Additionally, he sought and found ways to utilize the "waste" products from his operation that had hitherto been discarded. The South Reading factory at first, with several dozen employees, produced mainly baskets and skirt hoops (don't laugh ... in 1860 the company produced over 1.3 million of them), but by the early 1870s the company had grown to over 1000 employees and it made tables, chairs, carpets, mats, curtains, baby carriages, brooms, and many other products.

Cyrus also achieved significant savings in shipping his raw materials from the Far East by buying or contracting for his own ships, and this led him into another area altogether. Because the rattan materials were so light, other cargo was required for ballast to stabilize the ships, so Wakefield began buying spices and tea from Malaya and the East Indies. In his advertisements he called this his "Straits Goods" business, and at the time of his death in 1873 Cyrus Wakefield was the largest importer of these goods in Boston. And in yet another area, Wakefield ventured into the "woodenware" business, aiming his production of these household products at Europe in general, and Great Britain in particular. He was successful to the point that the Liverpool Board of Trade petitioned Parliament to impose a high tariff against the company's products, and he eventually had to abandon that venture.

Without question Cyrus Wakefield was a talented and energetic man who recognized his opportunities and made the most of them. But he also appreciated the support he had received at every turn from the town of South Reading, and he in turn supported many of their projects. In 1867, in response to a Town effort to construct a memorial to its Civil War dead, he pledged a parcel of land and \$100,000 to construct a new building (it became the Town Hall) that would house the memorial. In gratitude, and much to Cyrus' delight, the townspeople voted to change the name of the town to Wakefield. He joined our Association in 1851 as a manufacturer, was active on committees, and served two terms on our Board of Government. As Ray Purdy liked to remind us, we should not pass through the Town of Wakefield without recalling that it is named for a member of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association.



Wakefield (Mass.) Town Hall (1871)
(Early 20th-century postcard view)



An 1894 painting of the ship *Cyrus Wakefield*,
by William Howard Yorke (1847-1921).
The ship was built in Thomaston, Maine in 1882.