

Franklin Historical Society **December 2020**

"Out with the old, in with the new!" may work well on December 31st, but is not exactly the appropriate mantra for a city steeped in tradition and history. So many contributing buildings have been lost, with more being threatened. A possible resolution to be considered for 2021 may be to fully recognize the value of what the "old" has to offer the future, before condemning it to the wrecking crane or an identity-altering repurposing. Gone is 17-19 S. Main St. (according to one source, dating to the Geyer Drug Store in 1858) on the west side of the Daniel Webster Bridge, and the 19th century residence next to the auto body shop on the east end of that bridge. The venerable Webster Inn and Sturtevant Block disappeared decades ago, and the trend continues still. Understanding that development is inevitable, and decisions must be made, the sole criterion should not be cost alone. Putting a price tag on an irretrievably lost structure and its historical associations is a task no one should take lightly. As we move forward, we should never lose sight of what allowed that progress towards the future, and the beauty, pride, and workmanship that went into the creation of these marvels of the past should weigh heavily on their survival, or demolition.

[Below is the Burleigh Hall space, on the third floor of the I.O.O.F. (International Order of Odd Fellows) Hall. Before and after the Opera House opened in Soldiers Memorial Hall, this room was a popular venue for entertainments in Franklin, featuring stage productions from local groups as well as travelling troupes. Note the hand painted backdrop (of which there are several more hanging out of sight above) created by E.L. Foster in 1925, the original tin ceiling, and the vintage electrical light fixtures. Photo taken courtesy of access granted by Paul Morrissette, when he owned the building. The upper floors are currently being converted into condominium apartments by the current owner, Franklin Savings Bank. A recent email inquiring as to the status of the project was sent to Todd Workman, who is overseeing the conversions, has as yet not been answered, probably due to demands on his time this holiday season.]



Much as we wish to believe that 2020 was an anomaly, soon to be in the rearview mirror, much of the after effects of this year will linger well into 2021. When the Society will once again be able to enjoy the social interaction and sharing of memories that are the basis for monthly meetings, still remains to be seen. The new year holds a glorious promise of hope, and at least the possibility of a return to a subjective "normal", which is the one positive thought to which we should all hold firmly. The Society's financial condition is solid, with its investments doing well, seemingly posting a new high every week. However, the global economic outlook remains guarded, and caution should continue to be exercised. The one project for which these funds will be of great value is the assessment of the Webster building's foundation and sill, which have been subjected to water infiltration over the years and both need to be addressed. Estimates will be sought in 2021 from reputable firms, and a schedule of replacement and remediation will be considered by the board. In February, the officers and board will once again hold their annual meeting to discuss this matter as well as all issues confronting the Society's continued health and longevity.

In keeping with the mission of the Society, more reminders of the life of Franklin continue to find their way to our collections, for which the most sincere thanks to the donors is herewith offered: to **Tim Hampton of the USS Hornet Museum in Alameda, CA**, for an archive of digital material related to the WWII service of the Hornet and those who valiantly served aboard her, including Franklin's own Tadeusz "Ted" Lepianka; to **Maj Desautel** (and the volunteers of the Clothes Closet Thrift Store) for rescuing newspapers from 1984 with a story recounting the hiring of the first female police officer in the city; to **Scott Burns** for additional material from the Ralph Family including multiple books and some 1940's and 50's correspondence; to **Jason Blais** for (the promise of—details of transfer to be worked out) two latch needle boxes from the Franklin Needle and Mayo Knitting Machine and Needle Companies; and to **Jack and Bettey Tobey** for Christmas lights and miscellaneous garden tools and hand implements to be sold at next years Plant Sale. Nothing is insignificant when it comes to saving precious vestiges of the past, as everything has a story to tell and lessons from which future generations can learn and benefit. Thank you one and all for your generosity and ongoing support of the Society during a difficult 2020, while looking ahead to a promising 2021.

As we ring in the New Year, a final thought: may the only thing that is contagious in the coming months, be the spirit of looking out for one another.

Happy New Year.