

## A candid look at the Crockers

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The documentary, *Heartfelt Memories: The Crocker Legacy*, which was made possible by a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, is shown to a full house at the Johnsonia Cultural Series. Archival footage of classic Fitchburg moments were featured, along with interviews of the surviving Crocker women. PRIDE PHOTO/CHARLES STERNAIMOLO

The Johnsonia Cultural Series recently hosted the premier screening of “Heartfelt Memories: The Crocker Legacy” to a packed audience of Fitchburg residents and members of surrounding communities. Judith Lindstedt, who produced and directed the one-hour documentary with the aid of a grant from the local Fitchburg division of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, was at the screening to answer questions about the Crocker family, particularly the Crocker women, and their influence on the Fitchburg area.

“Behind every great man is a great woman, and the Crocker family is no exception,” said Lindstedt when asked why she chose her subject. “The men are remembered for papermaking, railroads, politics, and their entrepreneurial spirit, but the women are often left in the men’s shadow.”

Lindstedt, who in addition to her roles as a digital filmmaker, choreographer, and producer/director of the weekly cablecast program, “An Uncommon View,” is a trained equine masseuse. She found inspiration for the film through her work.

“I love horses, and the Crocker family were all about horses,” said Lindstedt.

In the film, Rosemary Crocker Kemp refers to her childhood horses as “people” while scenes from old home movies show the family partaking in equine activities at their beloved farm in Princeton (since donated to the Autobahn Society), and at their former home on Prospect Street, now the Applewild School.

“These horses knew their riders,” said Lindstedt. “Through the family’s ups and downs, in good times and in bad, the horses were the family’s friend.”

Other vintage archival footage in the documentary displays the family’s rich history in Fitchburg with clips from Girl Scout outings, the Fitchburg Bicentennial Pageant, which both Barbara Cushing Crocker and Cilla Crocker co-chaired, and their annual fox hunts in Groton.

Helen Obermyer Simmons was also on hand to answer questions about the film. Simmons, who is a professor in the communications program at Fitchburg State College, was instrumental in researching and locating historical photographs and paintings for the documentary. She oversaw the selection and digital restoration of several images in poor condition.

“It was a labor of love; these women contributed so much to Fitchburg,” said Simmons. She also appears in the film as the interviewer of the surviving Crocker ladies.

Also in attendance was Janet Cragin, who portrayed Fay Crocker. Cragin, who has been with the Stratton Theatre in Fitchburg for 48 years, found it ironic that she would be acting as Fay after all these years, since it was Fay who was responsible for moving the sturdy little barn that is now the second oldest continuing theater in the country to its current location on Wallace Street.

“I was given an assignment and I did my assignment, and I am grateful to Fay Crocker and her family for giving our little theater such a wonderful home,” said Cragin.

Cragin wanted newcomers to Fitchburg to know that the Crocker family was the closest thing to royalty the town would ever know.

The Johnsonia Cultural Series holds programs and events each month from October to June that are free to the public. The series is designed to highlight the wealth of cultural, artistic, and educational resources in the area and to encourage people to return to Main Street. The events are held on the third Thursday of each month.