

FITCHBURG YOUR STORY: Echoes of the Past - Samuel Monteiro

["Saxifrage" choral music plays, performed by the Fitchburg State University Choirs]

Prof. Kisha Tracy (intro): Welcome to the Fitchburg State University Perseverantia Podcast network. This is the Fitchburg Your Story series in which Fitchburg State students tell the stories that make our city and university unique.

["Saxifrage" fades out]

[jazz music theme plays, hinting at bygone days ... like the heyday of a certain Fitchburg Theater]

Samuel Monteiro: Welcome to *Echoes of the Past*, an episode where history, community, and culture intersect. My name is Samuel Monteiro, and I'll be your host for today. Today we are taking a journey into the heart of downtown Fitchburg, a place where we hear all kinds of stories, but really one theater in particular is about to get a brand new lease on life. The Fitchburg Theater has stood nearly a century of change. Once a beacon of entertainment and laughter, it has since fallen into sadness and despair.

But, thanks to a two million dollar federal grant, this once-grand venue is preparing for remarkable transformation. And today, we're diving into the past, present, and future of this historic space.

[jazz music theme plays fades out]

Okay, so let's begin with some recent news. According to the Fitchburg State University website and deeper articles that I've went into, the federal funding is labeled for the Downtown Performing Arts Center, a collaborative initiative that aims to breathe new life into the theater block downtown. This isn't just about fixing a building, no, no, no. It's about investing into the cultural soul of the city we call Fitchburg. As a university article states, the grant supports local cultural development and community engagement.

The fact that the report comes from the university itself and the people of this community and students outreach adds a layer of credibility that makes it stand out to me. It makes it personal that as a student of Fitchburg State that all these people from the past and present and possibly future care about this theater and want to see improvements and see it progress. But hey, before we look forward though, let's just rewind.

[jazz music theme plays fades in]

Picture this, February 7th, 1929. The air is crisp and the Fitchburg *Sentinel* published a detailed article announcing the grand opening of the Fitchburg Theater. I managed to dig up this original report, and it's filled with exciting language and just vivid descriptions of the public reaction. It goes into saying about how the neighbors, companies are all excited about this new theater

FITCHBURG YOUR STORY: Echoes of the Past - Samuel Monteiro

Samuel Monteiro (cont'd): coming to town and how they're wishing them luck and they hope their business is gonna go great.

Though it may not dive deeply into the architectural details or long-term historical context, it gives us something valuable. A glimpse into how the people of the time viewed their newest cultural landmark. I mean, there were companies around and all these people in the town that were just saying that they hope it thrived and they hoped all these great things for it, that it really meant something that it was posted so big in the Fitchburg Sentinel.

But hey.

If you're someone who enjoys a touch of ghosting nostalgia though, there is a blog post from Antiquity Echoes that you'll absolutely love. This post explores the abandoned Fitchburg Theater through striking photographs and it offers an emotional connection.

[applause from a grateful audience fades in and swells]

You can practically feel the dust settling on the velvet curtains or hear the echo of forgotten applause in its crumbling hallways.

[jazz music theme plays fades out]

I mean, for a visual person as myself, I really liked this because it was able to match a picture to a place. So when I was first researching, I wasn't able to really see what I was looking at. When I was going on to Antiquity Echoes and I was going through these pictures, it was old pictures of this theater, like beaten down, kind of like things falling from the ceiling, or just the theater being empty and not used. It really helped me to see how important this place was at one point and how important it should be and how this big renovation is really important for us.

So I mean, like I said, it reminds us of the place that mattered and that time hasn't erased it entirely. That's the most important part.

But visual storytelling like this can be just as powerful as written history. Seeing pictures like this can be just as powerful as looking through a detailed article about it. I think Antiquity Echoes really helped me understand the personal, but almost haunting side of this theater's decay.

To move on though, if you're looking for more of a factual backbone to the theater's story, Judy Murray's entry on Cinema Treasures is a great find. This site serves as a database for historical cinemas across the country and Murray's write-up gives us a clear and concise historical details like when the Fitchburg Theater opened up and how long it remained in operation. This is a great source for establishing a timeline and understanding the broader legacy of the building. Seeing when they opened, how long they lasted for, why did they shut down.

FITCHBURG YOUR STORY: Echoes of the Past - Samuel Monteiro

Samuel Monteiro (cont'd): All these key details has really helped you understand the whole story of the Fitchburg Theater and why the renovation is so important. Reliable, detailed and written with care. Along with the great words from Murray, though, there are various people from years back that have commented with their own unique and touching experience. And that is the beautiful part about it. So as great as we love Murray, but the comments dating back to 2015 to all the way to 2005.

All these comments are just expressing how much it's important for us to have these renovations and keep this in check. I think they're all expressing their own emotions through their comments. And I think that's also a really great thing to know besides just the person writing the article having that feedback from your audience that really approves it.

But hey, it gets better because one of the most personal pieces I came across was from a student written article from *The Point*, Fitchburg State's campus news outlet. It mirrors the university's official stance, but adds more human voices to the mix. The article features quotes from the university officials and community members, like people who are genuinely excited and maybe even a little emotional about what this renovation means to them. Having students and staff members on campus throughout this whole process helped me make sure that this was something truly important and needed to be talked about. We have to really take care of those things that we care about, and this is definitely one of them.

A quote that really stayed with me though, because it captures something bigger than just architecture or money, they say, "I hope the theater project will add some vibrancy to the city, which would benefit our student body." See right here, in the flesh, it's about identity, about reclaiming history, not just as a story, but as a place we get to live in again.

[jazz music theme plays fades in]

So, what does this all mean? What does an old theater in a small Massachusetts city deserve this much attention? Because places are like anchors.

They hold stories. gather people. They connect generations. And when we lose them, when we crumble into forgotten ruins, we lose more than bricks and mortar. We lose a part of ourselves.

But that's not happening at Fitchburg because thanks to the federal support, community effort and visions of groups like Fitchburg State and Downtown Performing Arts Center, this place is about to rise again. And when it does, it won't just host performances. It will host memories. Old ones, new ones, yours, mine, and really, ours.

As we wrap up today's episode, I encourage you, wherever you are, to look around your city or town. What spaces are waiting to be revived? What buildings still whisper their stories? Because sometimes, the past isn't behind us. It's right there, beneath the dust, waiting to be heard.

FITCHBURG YOUR STORY: Echoes of the Past - Samuel Monteiro

Samuel Monteiro (cont'd): Thanks for joining me on this journey through time and community spirit. This has been Echoes of the Past with Sam Monteiro. Until next time.

[jazz music theme plays fades out]

[Perseverantia Network theme fades in]

Prof. Kate Jewell: You're listening to Perseverantia, the Fitchburg State University Podcast Network.

[Perseverantia Network theme fades out]