

The Clark: A maverick's vision

By Charles Bonenti

Robert Sterling Clark may have looked the starchy, aging businessman when he opened his Clark Art Institute on South Street in Williamstown on May 17, 1955, but to those who knew him, he was a hotheaded maverick. Accounts in the archives of the Williamstown Historical Museum picture him as opinionated, reclusive, and prone to feuds and grudges. He was also described as a bon vivant, soldier, horseman, art collector and a suitor bold enough to marry a French actress who'd had a child out of wedlock by another man,

Estranged from his fabulously rich family over his marriage and the terms of his inheritance, he used much of his fortune to endow the Clark Art Institute that reopens this summer after a massive, \$140 million expansion.

Remote, rural Williamstown might have seemed an odd choice for an art collection of the magnitude Sterling and Francine Clark put together. Several factors contributed to their decision. Security was one. Having lived through two world wars and the dawn of the atomic age, Sterling Clark was said to want his artworks safely outside an urban center that might be targeted in a nuclear attack.



Sterling and Francine Clark

The proximity to Williams College was another. His grandfather, Edward, a lawyer who made millions as the business partner of sewing machine inventor Isaac Singer, was an 1831 graduate. He and his son, Alfred (Sterling's father), served as trustees of the college and the family gave Williams the money in 1908 to build Clark Hall biology lab.

Finally, housing the collection near the college in Williamstown, rather than in Manhattan, which was already rich in cultural institutions, would help make the Clark's artworks the renowned academic resource they have become.

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All these considerations came together once Sterling Clark started talks in 1947 with Karl E. Weston, art professor emeritus at Williams, that culminated in acquisition of the Vanderpool Adriance property on South Street in May 1951.

The late Mary Flynt, who moved with her husband, Henry, to a house opposite the Clark site in 1952, remembered how the razing of the Adriance house rattled everything in her own home. She told *The Transcript*, in a 50-year commemorative issue in 2005, that the Clarks, who had an apartment created at the institute for Williamstown visits, kept pretty much to themselves. Francine Clark would say hello in passing, Mary Flynt said, but Sterling Clark “wasn’t interested in neighbors. He was interested in the art department. I don’t think he probably ever spoke to us.”

That didn’t mean the philanthropist was necessarily a snob, if a story in that same *Transcript* issue can be believed. It said Clark, who had trained as an engineer and was an expert horseman, liked to don workman’s attire and present himself as “Joe Clark,” a truck driver, mechanic or stable hand willing take on odd jobs for no pay. One of his “employers” was said to be Vic & Paul’s Motor Sales, owned by Victor Lampiasi and E. Paul Beauchamp, on State Road in North Adams where Munro Muffler now stands. Clark, in old clothes, would have his chauffeur drop him off out of sight and walk the rest of the way to “work.”

The Clarks, who kept their art in storage or on the walls of their various homes, had their architect, Daniel Perry, design the institute’s interiors to look like a home, with modest size galleries, decorative trim, fireplaces and windows overlooking the pond and pastures.

After the couple died — he in 1956 and she in 1960 — they asked that the institute be their final resting place and had their remains interred under the front steps. 



Vanderpool Adriance House





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The success of the museum’s 2014 fundraiser, “March in the Valley” exceeded expectations. Among guests attending the cabaret and silent auction at The Orchards were (1) Ruth and Bob Gallagher and Susan Clarke; (2) WHM Board President Pat Leach, left, Nancy Samuelson and Mary Merselis; (3) Hank Flynt, Bernice Shainman and Linda Conway; (4) Ron Feldman and Elizabeth Morse, who performed in the cabaret; (5) Carolyn Umlauf, left, Emily Eakin and Jane Patton.

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**Williamstown
Historical
Museum**

**Located in the Milne Public Library
1095 Main Street, Williamstown, MA 01267
413-458-2160
info@WilliamstownHistoricalMuseum.org
WilliamstownHistoricalMuseum.org**



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(1) Katey Winant, left, and Pat Greenberg peruse silent auction offerings; (2) Steve Lawson delivers a humorous reading. Other guests enjoying the event included: (3) Joan Jones, left, and Sara and Tom Loughman; (4) Kathleen Toohey Carbone, left, Rita Watson and Elizabeth Morse; (5) Deb Di-Massimo, left, Dusty Bahlman and Bob Greenberg. Carbone, a professor of voice at MCLA, led a group of students in a musical performance.



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From the collection

By Sarah Currie

On May 6th, the museum was the fortunate recipient of a generous donation by Marilyn and Carl Faulkner, former owners of the Williams Inn. As they approached the conclusion of their thirty five years at the inn, Carl and Marilyn went through the memorabilia, artifacts and ephemera they had collected over the years. As a fan of history and as the keeper of the Williams Inn's history, Carl has a keen eye for material that could be useful to the museum and future research. He invited me to the inn to take a look at the potential donations and we were able to determine what would be appropriate for our collection and could be used for research and future exhibits.

The Williams Inn is significant not just as a cornerstone of the lodging options in town, but in the development of hospitality culture within New England. Lauris G. Treadway's name became synonymous with high quality lodging and dining after running a successful chain of hotels that featured a colonial decorative motif and easy access along auto touring routes.

One of the items included in the donation is a roof baluster from the former Procter house that occupied the site of the current Williams Inn. The house was built by Harley Procter, son of William Procter (of the Procter and Gamble fortune) in 1874 and was sold to the Kappa Alpha fraternity at Williams College in 1907. The building burned in 1968; the baluster is, as far as we know, the only remaining architectural element from the original structure.

I envision these pieces comprising an interesting exhibit tracing the history L. G. Treadway and the Williams Inn. 



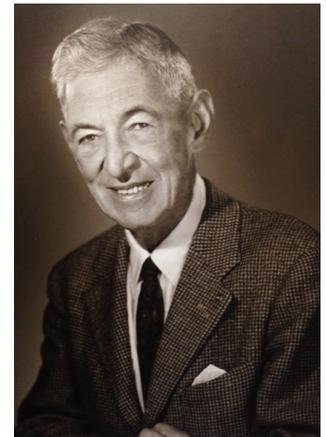
Procter—Kappa Alpha house baluster



Pip, the cat, greeted the inn's guests



Cigar box with Treadway Inn logo



L. G. Treadway

Williamstown Historical Museum

JOIN or RENEW your MEMBERSHIP

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1095 Main Street

NAME(S) _____

ENCLOSED is my membership contribution for:

STREET ADDRESS _____

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___ I would like information about volunteering

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Plan for town hospital faded in late 1940s

By D. R. Bahlman

If a group of public-spirited townspeople had prevailed in the late 1940s, a hospital would have been established on South Street.

“Nearly perfect,” was Dr. Norman B. McWilliams’ assessment of the potential of the Mann house for hospital purposes. Asked in 1949 if the expense of renovation had been taken into account, Dr. McWilliams replied that the work could be done and the building properly equipped for \$30,000 to \$35,000 – money to be spent in addition to the acquisition price of \$50,000.

Formerly the property of Elias P. Mann, an industrialist from Troy, N.Y., who married Eliza Harding of Williamstown, the mansion was built in 1904 on a 12 ½-acre lot situated just south of what is now the Clark Art Institute. The couple used it as a summer home. Mann died in 1932 and the property was unoccupied for nearly a decade. Subsequent owners included Helene Robson Griswold, who purchased it in 1942, having sold her house in the south of France to escape the ravages of World War II.

Plan for town hospital faded in late 1940s Continued from Page 6

Sterling and Francine Clark bought the property in September 1953, intending to take what a newspaper account described as “a protective measure against its use for purposes that would detract from the atmosphere surrounding the institute.”

In 1958, three years after the Clark opened to the public, the mansion was demolished to make room for a parking lot to accommodate the increasing number of tour buses bringing visitors to the museum.

The fate of the house might have been far different if Williamstown’s political and economic stars had been so aligned.

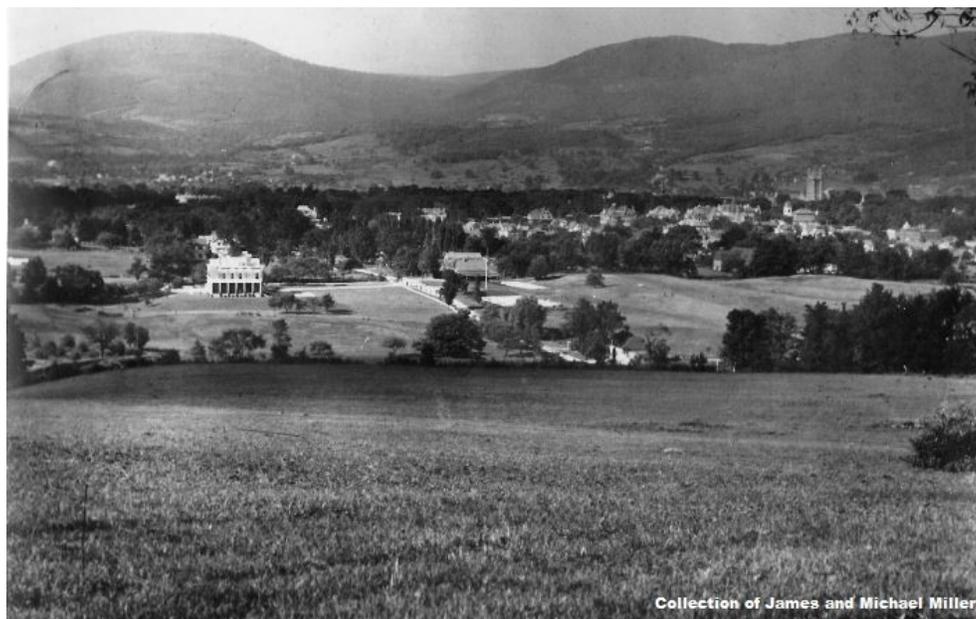
Voters at a town meeting in March 1949 deferred action on a warrant article calling for the appropriation of \$50,000 for the purchase of the site for a hospital. Instead, they backed formation of a committee to be appointed by the moderator to study the issue and report at the next town meeting.

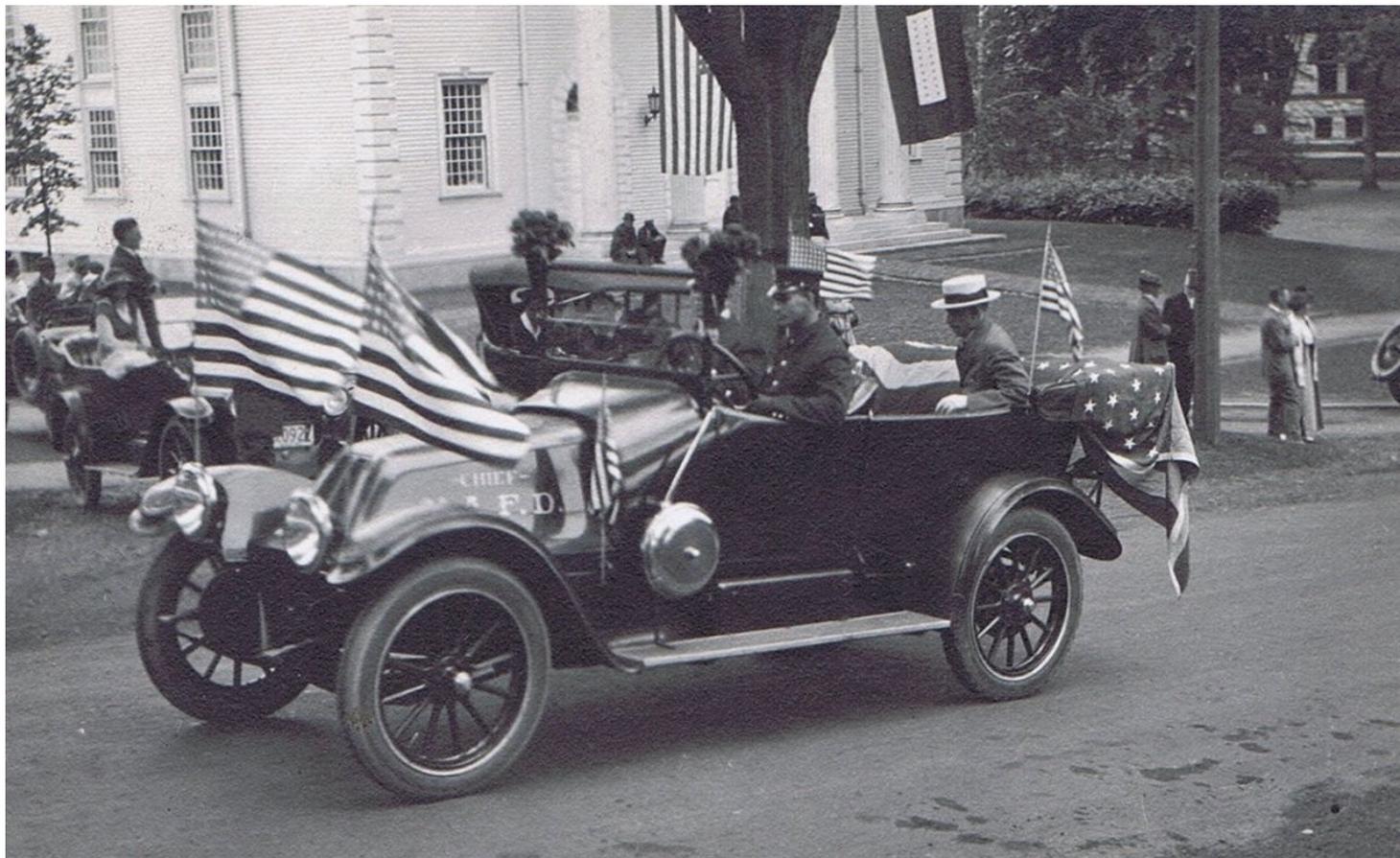
Even before the question came before town meeting, it had sparked controversy. The town’s lawyer, O. Dixon Marshall, declared in February 1949 that the article was illegal under a state law that forbid the town from paying more than 25 percent of the assessed valuation in buying property from a private individual.

However, the day after issuing his opinion, Marshall reversed himself, saying that the law did not apply to Williamstown.

Over time, the project faded into the background, upstaged by more pressing questions surrounding how best to spend taxpayers’ money. It had become clear that another school building would be needed to accommodate a rapidly-increasing number of young scholars – the earliest Baby Boomers.

In 1951, voters appropriated \$369,000 for a new school building to be constructed on School Street between the high school (then located at the corner of Southworth and School streets) and the Mitchell School. The Grant School was completed in 1952. 





1918 Fourth of July Parade on Main Street.

Williamstown Historical Museum

1095 Main Street, Williamstown, MA 01267