

Williamstown Historical Museum

Newsletter

Williamstown, Mass.

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Taconic Golf Club Grew Out of Old Tomato Cans

One sure sign of the changing seasons in Williamstown is the arrival and departure of the flags on the greens of the Taconic Golf Club. This has been true now for 116 years, ever since “three men with tomato cans” gave birth to the Club in 1896. That year William Howard Doughty, James M. Ide and Edward C. Gale received permission from Williams College to install those cans on Weston Athletic Field, adjacent to the present 18th fairway, creating a rudimentary golf course. The trio had picked the game up while serving as Army officers at the Watervliet Arsenal.

Later that summer Henry N. Sabin and James Bullock joined the group. A few weeks later a “real” course was laid out. There were seven 125- to 150-yard holes between South and Hoxsey Streets. Included was the present 17th green, one of the oldest in the country still in use in its original form.

The course started on Main Street just west of the Alpha Delta Phi (now Perry) House. It zig-zagged south and east to the present 17th and then back along a parallel path to the starting point on Main Street. A small building off Main Street belonging to the Bullock family stood near the McMahon livery office and Zeta Psi (Wood). It was used as a clubhouse. Later the Taconic group, most of whom from a colony of summer residents from Troy, N.Y. The club rented clubhouse space in the rear of the Kellogg house. Charles Van Horn, a local jack of all trades, was greenskeeper and J. Fred Walden (later proprietor of the College Pharmacy on Spring Street) was a caddy.



Stanley Tworig and Dick Baxter with the old South Street clubhouse.

In 1954 Walden recalled, writing for the *Williams Alumni Review*:

“When I was a boy, I delivered telegrams, sold papers and was general errand-boy for Spring Street. I lived where the theater is, so was available...

“One summer day in 1895 a fellow asked me if I knew where he could find three empty tomato cans. I told him I could, so I asked my mother and she sent me to the garbage barrel. I asked her if she could cut the tops off. She did and wanted to know if I was going fishing.

“I said, ‘No, some fellows are starting a new game called *golf*.’

“‘What’s that,’ she answered.

“I told her I didn’t know but would find out. Then I borrowed a carving knife to cut holes for the cans, and our lawn mower to trim around the holes, and that’s how the first golf links in these parts started.”

In 1897, with the addition of several members,

the club laid out a longer, 9-hole course on land formerly part of the Meacham property but owned by W. H. Doughty—the western half of today's course.

That year Edward Gale drew up plans to convert the Whitney Sampson house on South Street into a more suitable clubhouse. The building, with views to the east from broad verandas, stood on a rise west

of what is now the second green. Gifts from Robert Cluett (Williams Class of 1892) made possible additions and modifications.

In 1924 Taconic hired a Canadian, Dick Baxter, as the club professional and greenskeeper. He would serve until 1963 and, with Stanley Tworig, who took over greenskeeper duties in 1927 and oversaw the emergence of the present course.

In 1926 a committee had been formed to investigate expanding the course to 18 holes and in 1927 George A. Cluett, (Williams Class of 1896) one of those Troy-based summer residents, was elected president. He negotiated several expansions of the property available to the Club. Alice C. Doughty, widow of W.H., contributed 47 acres already being used by Taconic to the College on the condition that it be leased to the Club to be used as a golf course.

Next Cluett secured, as a gift to the College, property owned by John H. Denison, Williams Class of 1890, where the present clubhouse is located. Denison purchased the nearly 1,800-acre Amos Lawrence Hopkins estate on Northwest Hill (now the Hopkins Memorial Forest). The College completed the Tacon-



In 1954 the present Taconic Club House opened.

Tournaments and Course Records

Several leading tournaments have been held on Taconic including the 2004 Massachusetts Amateur (the fourth), the 1999 NCAA Championship (the third), the 1996 USGA's Senior Amateur Championship, the 1992 Massachusetts Open, the 1963 USGA Women's Amateur, and the 1956 USGA Junior Amateur Championship in which Jack Nicklaus scored a hole-in-one on the 14th hole.

Before the recent restoration the individual course record of 66 was held by Chad Collins of the Methodist College Golf Team, playing in the 1999 NCAA Division III Championship on his way to the Individual Title which he won in three of his four undergraduate seasons.

Following the restoration project club member Bill Hadden shot a 68 in the 2010 Club Championship tournament. Club Professional Rick Pohle on two occasions had carded a score of 64 from the membership tees in the annual Pro/Member tournament.

ic site by purchasing the 17-acre Dillon lot in the southeastern section of the present course.

With the land in hand, Wayne Stiles of the Boston firm of Stiles and VanKleek was hired to design and construct an 18-hole course. Work as begun in 1927 and completed by Labor Day 1928. The architect envisioned the start and finish of the course as they are today. However the club house remained on South Street with the first hole, playing to the present third green from an abandoned tee farther back, and the 18th playing as a par 5 over the present 2nd hole to an old green, also closer to South Street.

John P. English (Williams Class of 1932), a former Mass Golf official, College Alumni director and president of Taconic from 1972 to 1975, writing *Three Men, Three Tomato Cans – and The Taconic Golf Club is Born* in 1963, noted “the land on which

Taconic Has Had Only Three Golf Pros

Taconic Golf Club is situated on land owned by Williams College. It is a semi-private club whose regular resident membership stands at about 500.

In Taconic's 116-year history the club has had only three PGA professionals, all of whom have also served as coach of the Williams College's Golf Team. Dick Baxter served for 40 years, from 1924 to 1963; Rudy Goff, for 20 years, from 1964 to 1983; and Rick Pohle, for 29 years, since 1984. Pohle will retire at the end of the 2012 season.

A One, a Two, a Three, and a Four

Several years before Baxter retired (in 1964) he was playing with club members Tommy Danaher, Jim Keith and A. V. Phillips.

Writing in his "About the Berkshires" column in the Aug. 30, 1964, *Berkshire Eagle*, Golf writer Ed Toole reported that Danaher hit his tee-shot on the par 3, 215-yard 17th (in those days it was the ninth) to within two feet of the flag. Turning to the pro: "Let's see you beat that, Dr. B."

Baxter's retorted: "I haven't let you down yet, Tommy, I'll see what I can do." With that he hit his drive to the green where it landed, bounced over Danaher's ball and rolled into the cup for Baxter's first and only ace as a professional.

Keith hit to the green and went on to garner his par 3 while Phillips, shaken up with all the excitement, drove to just off the green and took a bogey 4 before Danaher rolled in his birdie 2. The results for the foursome: an ace, a birdie, a par and a bogie: 1, 2, 3 and 4.

the present course was constructed was practically treeless in 1928."

In a recent email exchange English recalled: "The Current Stiles and Van Kleek course opened in 1928 and I entered Williams that fall so I in effect came with it—and with Dick and Denise Baxter (Dick having come down from Montreal, with a wonderful Scottish accent, to supervise the construction and to continue as professional and greenskeeper).

"When the course opened, with its clubhouse on South Street, Dick was confronted with, in effect, a large open pasture spotted with golf holes. I could go up there, stand on the clubhouse porch, and see where my friends were playing and join them.

"The immediate problem was to get some trees growing and Dick took this on, with Scottish thriftiness. His principal source of supply was the markets of North Adams, which often offered seedlings in the spring. Dick took full advantage of this, and I especially recall accompanying him on the purchase of willows which he wanted to place beside the brook on what is now the 4th hole (trees which had aged to the point that they were removed during a major course renovation two years ago)."

By 1954 the need for a new club house had to be addressed. Nearly \$50,000 was raised from members and College alumni, to build a new facility on Meacham Street on the site of a large red barn/house which had been the home of greenskeeper Tworig and his family.

In accordance with an agreement with the Dougherty family, the old club house and the few acres on which it stood reverted to the family when the new facility was built, "east of the brook running through

the course." The old clubhouse was moved down South Street to become a staff cottage of Buxton School and the present hole layout was adopted.

The new building contained office space, a dining room and bar, men's and ladies' locker rooms, a pro shop and a club storage area. Within ten years the popularity of the course and increasing use by an expanding membership necessitated an enlargement of the men's locker room and the dining room/bar area.

By her 100th birthday Taconic was showing her age. While the new irrigation system and meticulous maintenance had kept fairways lush, bunkers and greens needed some rejuvenation and the New England forests had begun to reclaim those open expanses enjoyed by John English in the late '20s.

Dick Baxter's saplings had grown up—to the point of impeding play to several of the greens and severely shading parts of the course. The bunkers had been over worked and needed deep therapy.

The club hired course architect Gil Hanse in 2008 and over the next two seasons his restoration crews worked. They took on three or four hole sections at a time so play could continue around and between workers and construction equipment. Tree lines were trimmed and wood lots thinned. Bunkers were rebuilt. Fairways were reshaped to better reflect the original Stiles design. Drainage was improved by installing new drains and re-contouring fairways.

Taconic, back in full-out operation since the start of the 2010 season, has returned to its lofty position on the "bucket lists" of golfers nationwide and the "best lists" of golf publications. Consistently rated as one of the most demanding courses in the country, the course frequently appears on golf magazine lists of "select" courses to play. This year it is 39th on *Golf Magazine's* "Top 100 Courses You Can Play."



Taconic's third hole with Dick Baxter's row of Willows along the stream on the left of the fairway.

Hannah Cohoon: A Shaker Spirit Artist and Composer

Hannah Harrison Cohoon, a 29-year-old Williamstown woman entered the Hancock Shaker community in 1817 with her children, five-year-old Harrison and three-year-old Mariah. She signed the covenant in 1823, giving her services and property to the community, and remained there until her death in 1864. She became one of the community's best known "spirit artists." Her drawings are featured in several publications. She also composed music.

There were several unique aspects to Cohoon's artwork according to Williamstown's Deb Burns, author of *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and Union: A History of the Hancock Bishopric*. She signed her paintings, which was unusual for a Shaker. She used a distinctive, bold style, focusing in each painting on an individual element such as a tree or apples. Finally, she accompanied the paintings with written explanations that add a religious dimension to what otherwise might be viewed solely as folk art.

Burns cites folk art historian Ruth Woolf's comment that one of Cohoon's pictures in particular, *The Tree of Life*, seems to reflect the artist's familiarity with the technique of applique, and notes that the leaves and apples appear as if cut from gingham and calico rather than painted.

The Shaker attitude towards art is complex. Laws forbade the display of pictures and there weren't records kept of them. However they do seem to have been put away and preserved, even and the paper and colors remain remarkably bright and unfaded. Inscriptions on the pictures reveal that they are visions and messages from the spirit world.

I really wanted to know what led a Williamstown woman with two children to join the Shakers, and how did she learn to paint? Unfortunately, this information has remained elusive.

Hannah's birth to Noah and Hulda Bacon Harrison is listed in *Williamstown Vital Records to the Year 1850*, as February 1, 1788. Two sisters are also listed: Lois, born March 18, 1784; and Polly, born November 16, 1785.

Noah served in Benjamin Simonds's regiment in the Revolutionary War, and died in 1789 when he was 30, leaving Hulda to raise their three daughters. The Harrison family was descended from Titus Harrison, who moved to Williamstown from Litchfield, Conn. Titus was one of the town's first settlers and owner of the town's first grist mill.

**Shaker Gifts II:
Tree of Life**
Quilt based on a drawing
by Hannah Cohoon



A biography from *Ask ART*, found through an internet search, describes Hannah as having had a "comfortable upbringing and judging by the penmanship on her scrolls, she had a good education." It also describes her as "untrained as an artist," her images "coming from her heart based on religious conviction." Ruth Woolf, however, has a different view. "Such is the power of Hannah Cohoon's design," she writes, "that it seems unlikely she had no previous artistic experience or that the four extant paintings are the only ones she ever made."

Arthur Latham Perry, in his *Origins in Williamstown*, describes the family as playing a strong role in the valley, especially along the Green River, for a century." He relates that "Noah and Huldah (sic.) brought up a family of children on Water Street who did credit in life to their parents and grandparents." One might question this, however, given that Noah died when the children were so young. He reports the marriages of Hannah's two sisters, but says nothing about Hannah's marriage nor anything further about her. There is no record of her marriage, or any mention of her husband, in either Williamstown or Pownal records.

Nick Wright, through Ancestry.com's library edition, found 49 Cohoons in the 1810 census, most of them in Eastern Massachusetts. The only one anywhere near Williamstown was a John Cohoon in Nassau, N.Y., with a listing of six in the family, including two females between the ages of 16-25. Hannah would have been 22 in 1810, so this family cannot be ruled out.

This serves to open a mystery rather than solve one, but it does introduce an intriguing Williamstown woman and reveals some of the stumbling blocks often encountered when hunting for information about people who lived long ago.

Volunteer Profile

Museum staff members describe Dave Loomis as a “jack of all trades, willing and able to do anything that needs to be done.” This makes him “the ideal volunteer,” they say.

In the late 1950s his grandfather, J. J. Leu, moved to Prospect Street in the Haley development. Dave would come up in the summers from the family home in New Canaan, Conn., to stay with him, and work at Mohawk Motors, a garage his grandfather and uncle, Jack Leu, owned and operated in North Adams.

Around 1965 Dave’s family moved from Connecticut to Williamstown, building a house on Stone Hill. By this time Dave was attending Valparaiso University in Indiana, but during vacations and school breaks he’d be back in Williamstown. Dave met and married his wife Judy while at Valparaiso. He studied geology and then transferred to the University of Hawaii, graduating in 1969.

His work with a surveying company involved a lot of traveling. After managing a hotel in New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), he took a job on the schooner *Four Winds* out of Singapore. After about four years of “jumping from boat to boat” around Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, returning to Williamstown only periodically, he realized he was hooked by the sea. In 1975 he got his Captain’s license and became the skipper of an 82-foot schooner doing charter work out of St. Maarten in the Netherlands Antilles. His work on this schooner was another step that eventually led to Dave’s involvement in local history.

In 1977 his mother, Dorothy, was living and teaching in Williamstown so in order to be around family, Dave and Judy bought River Bend Farm, Benjamin Simonds’ old homestead, on North Street. Interestingly, it was not a love of local history or of old houses that drew them to the house--that developed later, through living in and working on it.

While they did not know the history of the property when they purchased it, in the process of working on it they soon discovered many of the original features just intact, but covered over by subsequent renovations.

Fortunately, Dave had the skills to restore the house. He had grown up around woodworking, as his father always had a workshop wherever they lived, and Dave had expanded his skills through working on wooden boats.



Detailed descriptions of the restorations he and Judy made to the house are contained in their Historic Preservation Certification Application (a copy of which is in the museum). By December 1983 the house was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

For several years after the purchase of River Bend, Dave, now a navigator, had lived a dual life--half on land and half at sea working on boats in Tahiti and Venezuela navigator.

Benjamin Simonds’ old home did not leave the couple unaffected. In the early 1980s, Judy’s interest in history landed her on the Williamstown Historical Commission, and Dave’s name was suggested for membership at the House of Local History as early as 1980. He was a member by 1984, on the board by 1985, and president by 1988. Over the years he has been president (twice), vice-president, secretary and treasurer. During one of his terms as president, he and Henry Bratcher negotiated the lease for the Museum’s

Continued next page

Loomis — Continued

current space in the then-new Milne Library.

In 1986, Dave and Judy's growing interest in local history and historical preservation led them to take on converting the former Bloedel House at Field Farm into a B&B, in order to save it from demolition. Their involvement with two historic properties and membership in two local historical organizations completed their transformation into preservationists.

They were honored in 1984 with a preservation award from the Massachusetts Historical Commission for their work on River Bend Farm, and in 2003 with the annual preservation award of the Williamstown Historical Commission.

Dave has contributed the accumulated skills of a lifetime to the Historical Museum (and its predecessor the House of Local History). From serving as a board member or officer, to dismantling, moving and reinstalling the Museum's traveling display; from hanging exhibits to building a shelf or repairing a display case; from sorting and filing old newspaper clips to conducting research--his volunteer resume goes on and on.

By Nancy Burstein

From the President

This past spring, with the help of our dedicated and talented board member and volunteer, Patricia Leach, we applied for a grant to fund our Collection Accessibility Project to allow our organization to digitize our collection and ultimately have our collection viewable online.

We received a grant of \$1,284 from the Fund for Williamstown, a fund of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, to host our collection online for three years.

To accomplish our goal of digitizing our collection, we enlisted the help of four efficient interns who entered data, scanned photos and manuscripts, and photographed larger objects.

Our work continues this fall and we look forward to having a large portion of our collection online by the end of Spring 2013. We are looking forward to several compelling lectures and a special postcard exhibition opening at the museum this fall.

Carl Westerdahl

Fall Programming Underway at Historical Museum

The Museum's Saturday morning lecture series continues on October 20, when Robert Volz, curator of the Chapin Library of Rare Books at Williams, will speak on: "What If? Some Questions for America Posed by the Unique Set of Founding Documents Owned by the Chapin Library of Rare Books."

The Chapin is the only location outside of the National Archives where the three founding documents--the Articles of Confederation, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution--are displayed. Coupled with them are the first official British reply to the Declaration, Washington's personal copy of the Federalist Papers, and George Mason's "Objections to this Constitution of Government."

Especially relevant to this presentation is the Chapin's ultra-rare printed set of 17 proposed amendments to the Constitution as passed by the first House of Representatives in August 1789.

Volz, a member of the Museum's Collections Committee, came to Williams 35 years ago after serving as director of the Department of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Archives at the University of Rochester. Earlier he held rare book and special collections positions at Bowdoin and Northwestern.

The talk will be in the meeting room at the back of the Milne Public Library on Field Park. It is free to the public and starts at 11 a.m.

**Williamstown
Historical
Museum**

Located in the Milne Public Library
1095 Main Street, Williamstown, MA 01267
413-458-2160 whlh1753@roadrunner.com

Bringing Families Closer Together Through Food

In the last Children's Corner we discussed beginning an exploration of family history with children by having them create a basic family tree to help them understand their place at a particular point in the life of a family. We promised to follow up with some enjoyable ways to expand this understanding, and, as promised, here is one.

The fall and winter holidays are traditionally occasions for families to gather for a large, festive meal. This is a perfect time to begin a collection of family recipes which can document one aspect of the family's story.

Ask grandparents what foods were served at their holiday celebrations, and about their favorite childhood recipes. Ask where the recipes came from, stories about them, memories of making them, occasions when were they served. Try to get copies, in the original handwriting if possible. If one of these recipes is part of your current holiday meal, take a photograph of the dish to accompany the written recipe and the stories about it. Connect the recipes to the people on the family tree. These details about a favorite dish will help flesh out the basic information about the

name on the tree and begin to create an image of a person.

For older children, looking at recipes can also lead to a discussion of shifts in preparation, over time. There may be ingredients mentioned in the old recipes that are rarely employed today because of concerns over fat and sugar content or the popularity of time-related "fad" foods.

In my own family food history I was struck by the cucumber mold salad that my mother made with lime Jello and cottage cheese, a reflection of the popular molded salads in the 1950s and early 1960s, and affectionately dubbed "green slime" by my cousin when she was a child. We last enjoyed the dish at a place where we vacationed one summer, and the cook was kind enough to provide the recipe, invoking childhood memories. We also had "Nana Cookies," made by my father's mother who sent us home with a tin of them every time we visited. When she died they disappeared for a while, until I came across the recipe and began to make them for my father as a sentimental treat on his birthday.

By Nancy Burstein

Williamstown Historical Museum

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1095 Main Street

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One of more than 100 postcard images of Williamstown during the “Golden Years” of postcards, from the beginning of the fad for local cards, about 1900, until about 1910, on display in the Special Exhibits section.

Williamstown Historical Museum

1095 Main Street, Williamstown, MA 01267