

Williamstown Historical Museum

Newsletter

Williamstown, Mass.

Fall 2013

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Hank Flynt: 50-Year Museum Benefactor, Volunteer

By Nancy Buratein

More than half a century! That is how long Hank Flynt has been sharing his talents and generous spirit with the House of Local History, now the Williamstown Historical Museum.

Hank was not a history major in college, nor did he have a particularly strong interest in history, but his parents' work at Historic Deerfield was important to him, and by serving on the Board there, he developed an understanding of museum work from both archival and business standpoints.

When asked by Louis Rudnick to help with Williamstown's Bicentennial Celebration in 1953, Hank accepted, and played a major role in the construction of the 1753 House. His involvement with Williamstown's history had begun! When that project was completed, Murray Smith, then president of the House of Local History, asked him to join the Board. It seemed a natural transition, given his earlier experience working with local history. Hank was there to welcome me with his inimitable warmth when I joined the organization, and helped introduce and connect me with others in the "history biz."

Hank remembers the organization in its early days as very different from what it is today. It was very small and low-key, almost completely unknown in town, and tremendously limited by having no director, no curator or full time employee, and very limited space in its first home at the Botsford house. The Board, he related, was composed entirely of "old men" who spent most meetings reminiscing about growing up in Williamstown (If only someone had run a tape recorder while they did



Hank and Mary Flynt at their South Street Home.

this.) He particularly recalls one meeting in which the Board president actually fell asleep.

Slowly, Hank recalls, things began to change. A couple of women joined the Board, usually serving as secretary. Since the House of Local History was located on the second floor of the Botsford House, above the public library, Board member Annette Jenks, while serving as Director of the library downstairs, was able to provide a

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Patricia Leach Elected Museum Board President

Patricia Leach of Prospect Street has been elected president of the Board of Directors of the Williamstown Historical Museum. She succeeded interim president Rita Watson at the Museum's annual meeting in June.

A graduate of Franklin & Marshall College with a PhD from Princeton University, Leach is experienced in fund raising and has worked in a variety of arts environments. She has taught art history at Williams College for more than 20 years and also been director of development for the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts in Wilmington, Del., director of development and education at the Park McCullough House in Bennington, Vt., membership director of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Arts, and director of education at the Williams College Museum of Art.

Profile: Sarah Currie

Museum's Director Since 2011

Sarah Currie, Director of the Williamstown Historical Museum since 2011, holds a BA in Sociology from Franklin and Marshall College and a MS in Design from UMass.

Her interest in Williamstown's history was sparked as a young teenager on a visit to Taconic Lumber on Water Street with her father and discovered a historic architectural treasure, the former Williamstown Opera House. Her fascination with hidden histories has continued and today she is particularly curious about the stories buildings and their inhabitants can tell.



‘March in the Valley’ Silent Auction & Cabaret

Goods, Services, Arts, Antiquities

To Benefit the Williamstown Historical Museum

Save the Date Sunday, March 16, 5 to 8 p.m.

The Orchards Hotel

222 Adams Road

Revolutionary War Canteen 'Discovered' in Collection

By Sarah Currie

During a routine editing session of our online catalog, I came across a curious object in our collection. Listed as "a wooden keg," from the 18th century, it was found in our collection in 1984 and was from an unknown donor. The "keg" appears to be a canteen and was processed when it was found, though it may have been part of our collection since the 1940s, when the organization was founded. The initial entry suggested the item needed attention to remediate some insect damage, but there was no record of treatment. I immediately located the item and was fascinated by

what I found. I sent information and images to our Board President, Pat Leach, who was intrigued and reached out to one of our colleagues for suggestions about how to proceed.

In addition to contacting Jamie Franklin at the Bennington Museum, we referred to a book about Revolutionary War period objects and online resources. We also met with a colleague from the Williamstown Conservation Center for advice about how to best preserve this object. Based on our research, we believe that this object is a unique wooden cathedral style canteen from the last quarter of the 18th century. We think that the canteen is probably comprised primarily of oak, with oak staves and perhaps hickory or oak bands holding the staves in place. The leather strap, unusual for this type of canteen, is still with the piece, though it has become detached over the years.

Our goal is to preserve the canteen and determine



if it really does need treatment. We learned that the bugs that might be interested in this kind of wood emerge in the summer and spring, so we're keeping the canteen isolated in a sealed zip locking plastic bag in an area where it won't be disturbed until next spring. We have placed black paper under the canteen inside the bag so we can determine whether bugs show up over next few months.

I was so pleased by the cooperative nature of investigating this object. Our board president took the lead by reaching out to our friends at surrounding institutions. I was also interested in how taking a small step to uncover something about an object leads to more questions – like, where did this object come from, to whom did it originally belong, who donated it? I hope a reader remembers a story that their relative told about donating a Revolutionary War period item to the old House of Local History (now the WHM) years ago. Might you be that reader?

**Williamstown
Historical
Museum**

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

Flynt: Consumate Volunteer

From Page one

bit of help to the few visitors who found their way to the House of Local History looking for information. However, the tiny organization still had no one in charge until 1984, when Deborah Schilke, a *Yankee Magazine* student intern became the museum's first paid employee, and began the process of cataloguing the collection.

She established the precedent for the part-time Director/Curator position, filled by Nancy Burstein from 1985-2013, and now by Sarah Currie. The Board now, Hank notes, recruits members for their particular skills, and each member finds a niche in the organization for his or her talents.

During his time in the organization, Hank has filled a variety of roles. He served as vice president, as treasurer for many, many years, and he helped new treasurers when they began their terms. For a while he was in charge of the travelling exhibit panels. He made contacts to find venues for their display, developed a schedule for the locations, and then recruited volunteers to help with transporting, setting them up and then taking them down to move to a new location. For many years he even provided the truck for this activity!

Hank cites the move to the Pine Cobble building off Field Park as one of his major satisfactions during the time he served on the Board. "It is wonderful to have some space to show off our collection," he notes. Another particular satisfaction was the system of volunteer monitors, or docents, at the museum that he initiated, organized, and implemented. These volunteers answer phones, give tours, answers visitors' questions, help them with research, and keep records of visitation numbers.

The continuity of seeing a need, imagining a way to meet it, designing a program that might work, overseeing it as it grew, recruiting people to help as needed, and keeping track of the statistics it generated was exponentially more fulfilling than one limited job would have been for him.

Hank's priority for the museum for the next decade would be to find someone to take over responsibility for this monitor system he put in place, and to improve it. Its goal is for the museum to have an accurate tally of visitation numbers, and for visitors to be responded to

promptly, knowledgeably, and in a warm and friendly manner that makes them feel welcome.

How about it? Is anyone willing to take on this job? If so, please call Sarah Currie at t 458-2160 or email her at sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org.

Thank you, Hank for your years of dedication to local history and for the legacy you leave at both the 1753 House and the Williamstown Historical Museum!

{ Editor's note: If this project isn't your cup of tea perhaps you have another thought for something that would improve or expand the museum's services. Jump in, just as Hank did, and help us fill the void. }



Hank Flynt in the Berkshire Wheelman persona which is familiar to at least three decades of Williamstown parade goers. The bike in this photograph is one of several antique cycles Hank has provided parade organizers. A crowd favorite was a six-man version with Hank in the lead position.

Professor Emeritus Hyde To Open Spring Lecture Series

The Museum's 2014 Lecture Series will continue on Jan. 25 when Professor Emeritus John M. Hyde, a member of the faculty and administration of Williams College for the past 50 years, will give an illustrated talk on the life and death of trolley cars as a means of public transportation in the United States with particular emphasis on the emergence, dominance, and ultimate disappearance of trolleys in Williamstown and Berkshire County.

Professor Hyde, who is on the Museum Board of Directors, is a member of the fifth generation of a family which has lived in Berkshire County for more than 200 years. He is an ardent "rider of trains." Too young to have "taken the trolley," still he turns his attention here to those "other" rail-traveling vehicles.

On Feb. 22, life-long Williamstown resident Andrew Bernardy will speak on "Maple Sugaring and its History." And, on April 19 the subject will be the Smedley Family and the land now occupied by The Orchards Hotel. Presenters will be first-cousins Judith Wilson and Louise Dudley, the great-granddaughters of two Williamstown natives, Sarah Caroline Cole and Charles Rollin Foote, (m. 1872) who moved west in 1879 to become one of the pioneering families in Pasadena, CA.

Judith and Louise also share an uncle, George W. Clapp, whose genealogical research (he is the author of *Ancestors and Descendants of Harvey Towner and Caroline (Waterman) Cole of Williamstown 1810-1881*) inspired them to learn more about family roots here.

Louise, of Charlottesville, VA, is a graduate of Smith College, where she majored in American Studies. During her career in publishing and public relations, she worked as an editor for the *Saturday Evening Post* in New York; Heldref Publications, a nonprofit publisher of journals in Washington, DC; and the University of Virginia, from which she retired 11 years ago as assistant vice president for university relations and university spokesperson.

Judith, of Providence, RI, graduated from Barnard College after a year each at Smith and the University of Iowa. Her career included writing and producing educational filmstrips, as well as many years in advertising. After several years with agencies in New York City, she worked in San Francisco for 10 years as a creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi Direct, and ran her own freelance business until her retirement in 1997.

Board Member Dustin Griffin will speak May 17 on "Big Days in a Small Town," in conjunction with a Museum special exhibit on community "celebrations."

These lectures will be offered at 11 a.m. on Saturdays in the meeting rooms at the rear of the Milne Public Library off Field Park.

In conjunction with the Museum's June 8 annual meeting, the final lecture will feature John Sprague, former Sprague Electric executive, reviewing the history of the Sprague company in North Adams. It will be given in the Heritage Room at the Williams Inn at 1:30 p.m.

Williamstown Historical Museum

JOIN or RENEW your MEMBERSHIP

Mail to: WHM

1095 Main Street

NAME(S) _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

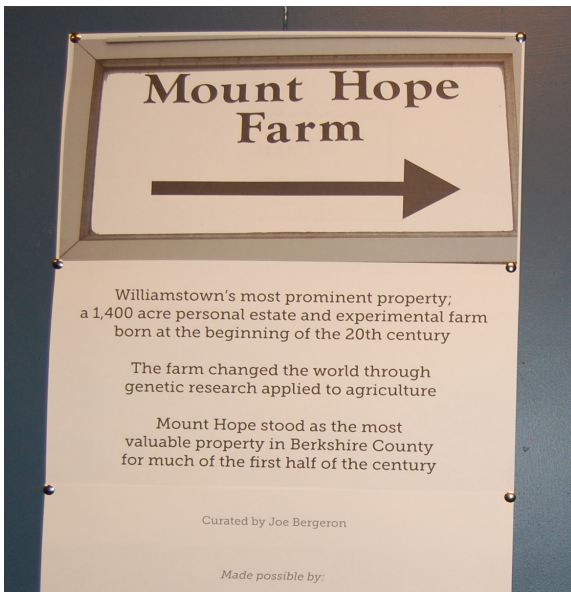
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

ENCLOSED is my membership contribution for:

___ \$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 ___ \$250 ___ \$500 ___ Other

___ I would like information about volunteering

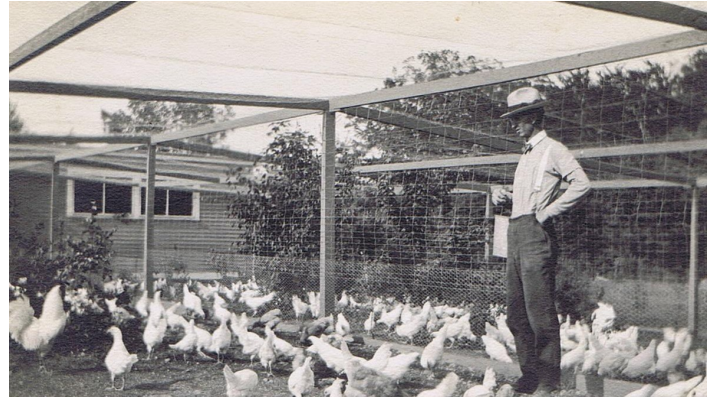
___ Sponsoring a gift membership



Mount Hope Farm was started in the early 1900s by Col. E. P. Prentice and his wife, Alta Rockefeller Prentice, to show that genetic research could increase efficiency in all sorts of agriculture.

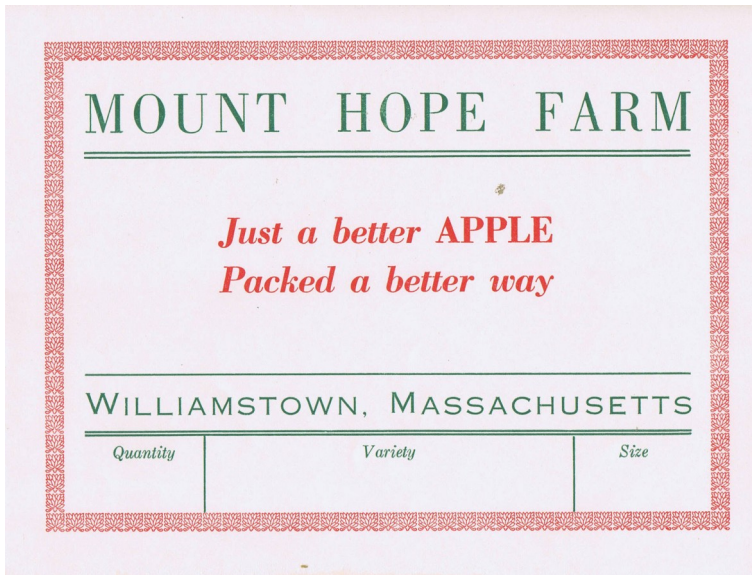


Mount Hope Farm chickens, Single Comb White Leghorns and Rhode Island Reds, were carefully cared for and their progress charted and recorded. The results of the Mount Hope Farm practices set standards followed by poultry breeders around the world.



Improved chicken and egg production were two major concerns of the geneticists at Mount Hope Farm, under the leadership of Dr. Hubert Goodale who wrote many of the large number of pamphlets and booklets published at Mount Hope. Selective breeding and specialized care were carefully studied at the farm. A supervisor is shown above in typical farm-employee garb...dress shirt and necktie.





The Mount Hope Farm special exhibit at the Williamstown Historical Museum opened in November and will remain up through April. It explains and showcases the influential research, incredible expanse and wealth of the landmark farm.

Through the first half of the 20th century, Mount Hope was home to world-leading genetic research and served as the summer home to part of the world's wealthiest family. The Rockefeller/Prentice families brought extreme wealth to Williamstown. They created Berkshire County's most valuable property by an order of magnitude and developed everything from awe inspiring buildings to experiences in Williamstown during their nearly 50 year stint in town.

The current exhibit displays selections from the museum's permanent collection of historic photographs, documents and artifacts. For people familiar with Mount Hope, the exhibit serves as a wonderful tour through memories and interesting one of a kind pieces. And for people with no prior knowledge of Mount Hope, the exhibit introduces and educates on topics ranging from the farm's inception through construction and research highlights.



The Mount Hope Gift Shop gave townspeople and visitors the chance to purchase items produced on the Farm such as apples (top) and Virgin Wool Blankets made from the wool of sheep bred and raised there.

A feature of the so-called million dollar cow barn, right, was the practice of storing hay in a separate structure with an elevated tramway leading to the floor above the stalls to transport feed and bedding to the animals.





One of Mt. Hope Farm's collection of fine cars: A 1931 Pierce-Arrow. Mrs. Prentice's car, it was seldom seen in town.

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1095 Main Street, Williamstown, MA 01267