

The Amos Lawrence Hopkins Memorial Forest

By Henry W. Art

The Hopkins Memorial Forest is a 2,500-acre tract that lies a mile and a half northwest of the central campus. A century ago the land was largely the farm of Amos Lawrence “Lawrie” Hopkins, the sixth of ten children of Mary Hubble and Mark Hopkins, then President of Williams College.

In 1887 A. L. Hopkins started to assemble his “Buxton Farms” and by 1910 had amassed 1,636 acres stretching from the eastern slopes of Northwest Hill west to the New York State line and north to Vermont. This horse-powered farm had several teams, more than 300 sheep, and a sizable dairy herd. The 36-room mansion was one of more than 15 buildings on the farm, including cow and sheep barns, ice house and wash house, a farm manager’s house, and other houses for year-round farm employees and their families. The carriage house and stable, constructed in 1906, even had a tower clock that struck the hour.

In 1908 Arthur E. Rosenberg, then aged 17, came to work as a farm hand. He kept his eyes open and became a care-

ful interpreter of the landscape. On April 3, 1912, Hopkins died in Boston, a week shy of his 68th birthday. His wife continued the farm for another dozen years before auctioning off most of the farm equipment and disposing of the horses and livestock on Nov. 1, 1924. Rosenberg, who had more than proved his trustworthiness, was kept on as a caretaker. Mrs. Hopkins had the mansion boarded up and became an increasingly infrequent visitor. During the 1920s, northwestern Williamstown reposed in agricultural quiescence.

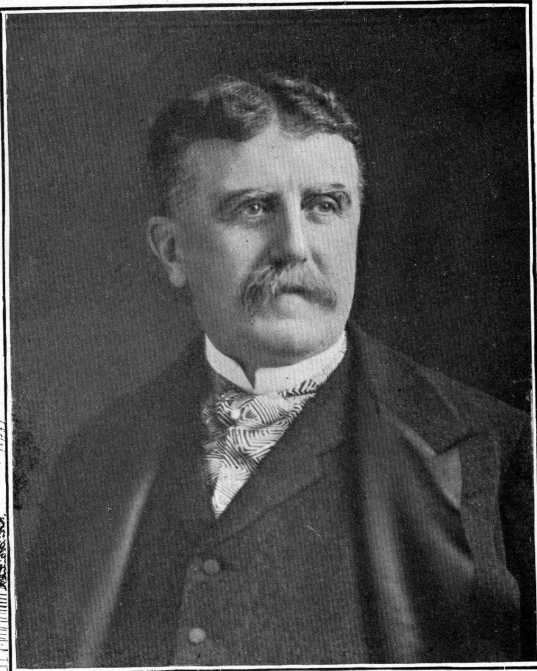
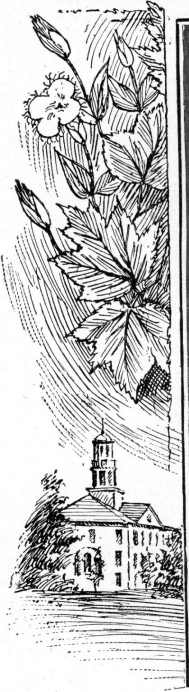
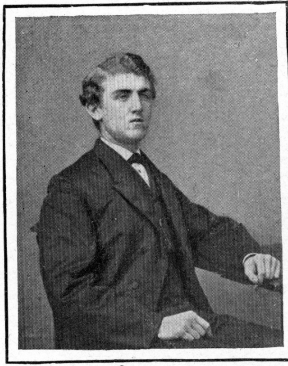
In November of 1933 Mrs. Hopkins wrote to Williams President Harry A. Garfield indicating that she would like to give Buxton Farms to the College as a memorial to her late husband. Six months later the trustees were involved in negotiations with the U.S. Forest Service to establish the Hopkins Memorial Forest as a research facility.

Between 1935 and 1968 the Forest Service conducted research on hydrology, forest growth, and tree genetics in the Forest. It had been hoped that the Forest Service could use the



The 36-room Hopkins Mansion, the main building in Amos Hopkins’ Buxton Farms, was home to the Hopkins family. The house was razed shortly after the U. S. Forest Service took over the property in the mid-1930s.

The author is the Samuel Fessenden Clarke Professor of Biology at Williams, the Director of the Center for Environmental Studies, and the former Director of the Hopkins Memorial Forest.



AMOS LAWRENCE HOPKINS

Hopkins as a Williams senior and 30 years later, in 1903.

Hopkins mansion as a headquarters, but had to raze the structure shortly after they arrived. Its condition had deteriorated.

The second story of the Buxton Farms carriage house was converted to a dorm for the 45 Civilian Conservation Corps men who worked in the Forest in the mid-1930s. It later became a combined residence and depot for trucks. In April 1968, the USFS returned the Hopkins Memorial Forest to the College and vacated the site.

The initial plans of the College were to liquidate the land, but over the course of 1971 there was a sea change in the view of the administration regarding the highest and best use of the property, and it was agreed that a Center for Environmental Studies proposal to use the site for environmental education and research be adopted. Students quickly took advantage of the recreational opportunities of the newly accessible trails and registered for independent study opportunities and summer research positions. The permanent forest inventory plots established by the USFS in the 1930s were reinventoried to determine changes that had occurred over the 35-year period.

Peter B. McChesney, class of 1975, through his research experiences in the Forest and course work in environmental studies and history, developed an intense interest in land-use history. During his senior year he wrote a proposal for the establishment of the Hopkins Forest Farm Museum in the center of Buxton Farms, to be housed in a relocated and renovated barn used by the Moon family a century before in a small farm which remained independent in the midst of the Hopkins holdings. The dismantling, raising, and restoration of the Moon Barn into the Hopkins Museum would be part of Williamstown's observance of the U.S. bicentennial.

In July 1977, a two-year grant was secured from the National Science Foundation for the conversion of the carriage barn into a field lab, classroom and office complex, and the addition of a caretaker's residence. The main challenge of the project turned out to be renovating the 1906 carriage barn into a modern field station facility that would meet building codes while not violating the aesthetics of a graceful structure historically significant to the site. It was not easy to carry out this bridging of the past to the future, but the combined creative skills of a group of young architects from RPI (Tech Associates), the Williams Buildings and Grounds Department, and a project advisory committee managed to prevail. In addition the college administration willingly doubled the Williams contribution to matching funds once the project got underway.

On Oct. 20, 1979, the renovated carriage barn was officially dedicated as the Rosenberg Center in honor of Arthur E. and Ella M. Rosenberg. The structure was appropriately named for a farm family which had maintained close ties, first to Buxton Farms and then to Hopkins Forest, as well as to scores of Forest Service personnel and Williams students. In the dedication address I remarked:

"In one respect, the Rosenbergs are a uniquely human resource—active participants in the landscape's history with its field patterns and fence lines accurately traced on their memories. This alone is deserving of recognition. But more than that, it is their wit, charm, and love of the land and its people that serve as a foundation for the facility which we dedicate today."

Since the Hopkins Memorial Forest has returned to



Arthur Rosenberg at the wheel of a 1909 Model T Ford.



Farm Manager's house at the top of Bulkley Street.

Williams, it has grown to over 2,400 acres through gifts and purchases of land, although a few small parcels have been sold from time-to-time. In addition to the original Buxton Farms in Massachusetts, purchases of land and various gifts have extended the reach of the Hopkins Forest to include the adjacent crests of the Taconic Range in New York and Vermont.

The site is used for many courses in Environmental Studies, Biology, Geosciences, and even Studio Art and Religion. We have continued long-term research of the changes in the landscape over time and the role of human history and its influences on biological and geological processes. In addition, we have initiated limited experimental studies requiring the manipulation of small areas of forest. When David P. Dethier joined the Geology Department in 1982, he expanded the scope of research in the Hopkins Forest to include a systematic collection of meteorological and hydrological data.

Not all of the activities in the Hopkins Forest are of a strictly academic nature. The Williams Outing Club in the 1980s cut a new trail, known as "The Shepherd's Well Trail," to connect the Taconic Crest Trail with the upper portion of the RRR Brooks Trail and at one time built a low "ropes course" just inside the Bulkley Street entrance to the Forest.

There have been numerous changes in the Buxton Farms/Hopkins Forest landscape during the past century. The configurations of land ownership have been altered, the uses of the land have changed from agriculture to education, recreation and research. And the cast of characters interacting with the land has turned over several times. However one constant has become most evident as we study the linkages between the past and the future: the intense identification with the land that has been embraced by those who have interacted with this landscape. Early in the century it was Amos Lawrence Hopkins, later the Rosenburgs, and then the employees of the U.S. Forest Service. During the last several years, this sense of place has been felt by dozens of Williams faculty and the hundreds of students who have conducted research and the thousands who have taken courses, to say nothing of the tens of thousands of townspeople who have enjoyed the Amos Lawrence Hopkins Memorial Forest as a place for recreational and spiritual refreshment.



Buxton Farms work crew in the 1930s.

Williamstown Historical Museum

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Transforming Truth

By Nancy Burstein

The museum's collection of Williamstown history is interesting in and of itself, but more exciting is what is set in motion when a researcher encounters the collection—the impact it has, and the ways in which historical material may ultimately be used.

This is exemplified in the experience of Heather Hart, whose great-grandfather, Harry Hart, Sr., was a cook for Williams College and responsible for creating meals for the football training table that would keep the athletes in prime condition and maximize their performance. He seems to have been a bit ahead of his time—a combination of cook and dietician—although it seems he had a sweet tooth.

In 1956 he published a book titled *Harry H. Hart's Favorite Recipes of Williams College* with training table records, notes and menus. The book contains 43 pages of cake recipes, and only 20 of meat and fish dishes and 17 of salads.

According to family lore, Harry, Sr., learned to cook from his mother before he left his native Virginia for Williamstown in 1902 with his employer, Rev. J. H. Dennison. He worked as a stable boy before beginning his cooking career.

Heather grew up in Seattle, Wash., the daughter of Harry Herbert Hart III, who moved to Oakland after high school, and his wife, Susan, an illustrator. Heather, as an artist, is carrying on a family tradition: her parents met in art school.

Before coming to the Williamstown Historical Museum, Heather had scoured *Ancestry.com* and visited branches of her family from Seattle to North Carolina, Virginia, and Massachusetts, looking at whatever family memorabilia she could find. Here, in July 2012, luck was with her. Thanks to a 2007 gift from Peggy Neyland Altman, the museum has a variety of Hart family papers containing information that she had not seen anywhere else.

"It was amazing finding the original manuscript of my great-grandfather's cookbook," she said. "There was a patent that my grandfather applied for, insurance policies, a diary, personal letters, business cards, a dance card...photos I had never seen, documentation on houses my family had lived in, and a term paper that someone wrote about my great grandfather based on interviews with him.

"The paper included...family history including the tribe in Africa he said he was descended from as well as his journey to Williamstown. This kind of first-hand documentation was nowhere else. The mementos I found bridged some of the gaps I had and fleshed out a better picture of who my forefathers were."

Heather's art made its way into a work inspired by her great-grandfather's cookbook. "Oracle of Epicure: Tooth for

Tooth," refers to the Greek philosopher Epicurus's Ethic of Reciprocity, which advises each person to treat others the way he or she would like to be treated. This idea is important to Heather's work, much of which is interactive: she provides a stimulus to which viewers are encouraged to react.

"Oracle of Epicure," a participatory installation, was part of the exhibit *With Food in Mind*, at the Center for Book Arts in New York. It is a public recipe swap with the stimulus being recipes from Harry Hart's book, written on index cards and illustrated by Heather. The response consists of recipes contributed by viewers.

Heather stresses that "Oracle of Epicure is not a memorial piece" but is "about change and evolution." As the work has evolved it reflects less of Harry Hart's legacy and more of the cuisine of the visitors. Heather is intrigued by "how pieces of history lose and inherit value or meaning as they change hands."

"Stories can break down and transform with each telling, and through each generation." The storyteller can embellish or forget details. The story transforms to meet the needs of those involved.

"For example," she said, "I was overcome with emotion when I saw the name of the tribe my great grandfather had told the student he was from...I needed that to be fact. It was something I had been searching for without necessarily knowing it. For a black American in this day to find a tangible link to Africa, beyond slavery in America, is something nearly intangible. So I grasped at that and it holds great value for me."

But later, she said, I realized that I didn't know the author but I did know my great grandfather—a charming, self-made man who I could imagine might choose to embellish the truth for a document like this."

"I felt that was okay," Heather said. "Science is fact until proven differently. Historians need to be creative thinkers like artists, able to sift through pieces of evidence and paint a larger picture that may be truth or may only be truth for them, in this moment, in this space.

"This is one of the inspirations behind my Oracle series," she said, "including Oracle of Epicure. Oracles are truth-givers, and they are traditional, and they are historical, and I fabricate them to meet the needs I have and the needs I see in the world."

Harry Hart Sr., Harriet's great-grandfather.



Researcher Extraordinaire

The Williamstown Historical Museum receives genealogical inquiries from people all over the world whose ancestors spent time in Williamstown. We could not possibly respond to each one without the help of David Primmer, who developed skills in genealogy research while hunting for information on his own family, and now volunteers his time helping those searching for their Williamstown ancestors.

David's father, grandfather, and great-grandmother were born in Williamstown. His great-grandfather, Louis Primmer, worked on the Bacon farm and married Ida Haley (daughter of George W. Haley and Elizabeth A. Quackenbush) who grew up on Hopper Road. His ties to the town go way back.

David was born in North Adams but he moved to Williamstown when he was in sixth grade, attending local schools until he left for UMass in 1955. He became a civil engineer and worked for the Connecticut Highway Department until 1965, when he and his wife moved to Pembroke, Mass. After working for consulting engineering firms in the Boston and South Shore areas, he returned to Williamstown in 2006. He now works part-time as a consulting engineer for towns, reviewing onsite sewage system plans. The skills in deed research he developed as part of his work have proved helpful in genealogy research.

His interest in genealogy research was sparked by a visit to Williamstown about 1990. He stopped at the Nassau, N.Y., library looking for information about his own ancestors, and the part-time town historian happened to be there. She and the librarian made arrangements for him to see his family's original house in Schodack, N.Y., and he was hooked.

There are many stumbling blocks when hunting for information in old records. David has encountered the usual ones: spelling variations, missing data, and conflicting records. A vexing problem he recently encountered involved sealed records. A query came from a man searching for his great-great-grandfather who was adopted in the 1850s in Williamstown. He was trying to find his ancestor's original surname. David found that the original records from the 1850s are still sealed at the Probate Court in Pittsfield, and the available information in the Probate Index is also blacked out.

Certain intriguing findings stand out. When researching a Porter family from around 1850, he was able to find the grave-stones for their four young children in Eastlawn Cemetery. The children, however, were buried in a plot owned by someone else. David still wonders about the connection between the Porters and the plot owner.

David also recalls two wills from 1803 and 1865 that he found in court records. Together they tie three generations of one family together. In the case of the 1865 will, the court records had about 50 pages of testimony both for and against the



David Primmer — Doing what he does best!

probate of the will.

Coincidences can also be striking during the course of research. Care must be taken not to jump to conclusions. David recalls a recent inquiry about a Robert Williams, who went from Williamstown to Pennsylvania. The man David found had gone to a different place in Pennsylvania than the researcher's ancestor. They were never able to find a connection between these men of the same name.

One of the things David enjoys about genealogy research is that he is always learning something. Sometimes it can be a law that has research implications. For example, he learned that after September 1922 a husband and wife had to be naturalized separately, so if a search for one name does not yield results, there is a second chance to find a record under the spouse's name. Sometimes one must use a different way of searching—once he was able to find a name by searching for it by state when it did not appear in a search by town. Sometimes one develops a new technical skill. David recently learned how to e-mail a photograph, something he'd never done, because a researcher from Scotland wanted a photo from our collection of one of his ancestors.

His advice to new genealogy researchers is simple:

- Don't give up! Try again!
- Finding conflicting information is common: always test new information by finding a second, independent source.
- Your work is very important. Back it up!

By following his own advice David has become a dogged researcher, a boon to both the Museum and to those searching for ancestors in Williamstown. To learn about our genealogy research visit our web site at www.williamstownhistory.org and click on Research Center.

By Nancy Burstein



Carl Westerdahl

Westerdahl Resigns As Board President

Carl A. Westerdahl, president of the Museum Board of Directors since June 2010 resigned from that position Jan. 1 due to ill health. He has been succeeded by the board's current vice president, Rita Watson.

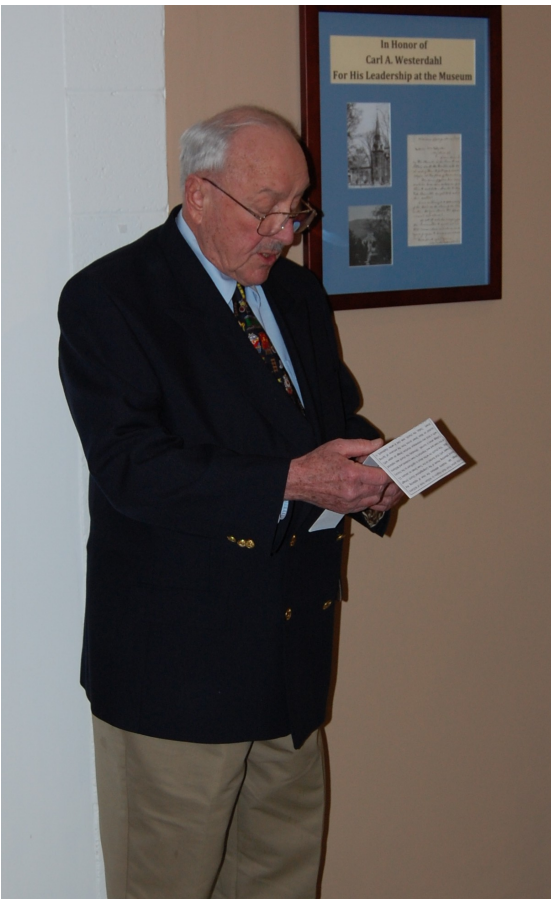
Under Westerdahl's leadership the name of the organization was changed from The House of Local History to the Williamstown Historical Museum, its committee structure was refined and the professional staff was expanded. Westerdahl is a retired college administrator (R.P.I.).

New Leader Named

Rita Watson is a long-time member of the Museum board. Vice president since June of 2012, she has been especially active in setting up exhibits, chairing fund-raising events and arranging programming. She headed last year's hugely successful benefit auction and delivered last winter's standing-room-only lecture on the *History of Spring Street*. A Water Street business owner for more than 20 years, she started work with the Museum when she retired in 2002.



Rita Watson



John Hyde

Westerdahl Honored By WHM Board

Past President Carl Westerdahl was honored by the WHM Board with a plaque on the Museum's front wall near the entrance to the Special Exhibits section. The display reads "In Honor of Carl A. Westerdahl For His Leadership at the Museum." It features an 1866 letter from Mark Hopkins to William Hyde referencing a College contribution toward a building to replace one which burned. Photos of both the destroyed "Second Meeting House of the Congregational Church," and the new, brick "First Congregational Church" are displayed. Mr. Westerdahl had been active in the Church since coming to Williamstown. WHM board member John Hyde, a descendant of the recipient of the letter, donated the document of behalf of the Board and officiated at the presentation

**Williamstown
Historical
Museum**

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

Lecture and House Tours Will Introduce The Grid of Williamstown

Southworth and Moorland Streets will be covered

This year the Museum's biennial tour of historic houses will be a walking tour covering eight homes on Southworth and Moorland Streets, *The Grid of Williamstown*.

It will be from 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, May 11 (rain date the 18th), with tickets on sale in advance at the Museum, the Williams Inn, Goff's and Where'd You Get That. Tickets (\$25) will be sold the day of the tour from a kiosk at the corner of Southworth and School Streets.

Information sheets on the houses, compiled by WHM researcher David Primmer, will be available in the kiosk and on board a horse-drawn wagon on which David Larabee, a WHM board member, will offer rides along the tour route. The lot behind the elementary school will be available for parking.

Next month, WHM board member and local architect Andrus Burr will introduce the *Grid* in the fourth program in the Museum's winter lecture series. His presentation, *The Architecture of the Grid, Southworth, Moorland and Cole Avenue*, will address the residential core of Williamstown, the architectural styles there, and what preceded the buildings now seen there. His talk, free and open to the public, will be at 11 a.m. on Saturday, April 20, at the Milne Library.

Burr (Williams 1966 and Yale School of Architecture 1970) moved to Williamstown in 1983 with his wife Ann McCallum (Yale School of Architecture 1980) and they started their own practice. From 1983 to 1996 he also taught architectural design at Williams.

Children's Corner

Creating a Child's Personal Archive at Home

Children can develop a sense of their history by creating a timeline of their lives starting with their birth, and progressing through significant events such as starting school, getting a new pet, moving to a new house, learning to ride a horse, dancing in the Nutcracker—anything they consider important.

A natural expansion of that activity is documenting those important events by creating a personal archive. The *Encarta World English Dictionary*, 1999, defines archive as "a collection of documents such as letters, official papers, photographs, or recorded material, kept for their historical interest."

Use items relating to each important event on your child's timeline. For example:

- The child's birth—a birth announcement or certificate, a baptismal record, a news clip about the birth or perhaps a birth photograph
- Beginning school—a first-day-of-school photo, a teacher's report or report card, a class photo, schoolwork.
- Adopting a pet—a photograph of the pet when new to the family.
- For a move—house photographs, copies of address listings from phone books (with dates) showing the change.

Clearly this is a long-term project. Add to the record annually. A birthday or new year's are good occasions to reflect on what of significance has happened and what might be added.

This can be broadened into a family archive including the same documentation for others. In addition to photographs and printed materials, objects can be included: a wedding gown,

family-made quilt, needlework, military medals, items from a family business, etc.

It is important to keep some basic storage tips in mind:

- Keep items out of direct sunlight, in a dark place.
- Avoid exposure to temperature shifts or high humidity.
- Do not store items near plants which may draw insects.
- Separate types of items. Isolate news clips from other materials. Store items with their own kind; do not mix photos and printed matter, textiles and metal items, etc.
- Protect fragile items.
- Don't use tape, glue or staples, or encapsulate items.
- Don't eat or drink near the collection.

If you are interested in learning about options for optimal, acid-free archival storage, or have other questions, feel free to contact the Museum for resources.

Once the archive has begun to grow, don't just ignore it and let it sit there. Remember that items from the archive can be used in a number of ways to make meaningful holiday cards and gifts for family! Consider creating a family history calendar using a different photo for each month of the year, or use a wedding photo to create a unique anniversary card.

You might create a family history wall at home, using reproductions of original photos so light exposure is not a concern. Look at the *Curator's Choice* column in this newsletter to see one way in which a family history collection was used as the basis for an interactive art project.

By Nancy Burstein



The History of Spring Street, describing the evolution of the town's central thoroughfare from a residential lane to the commercial hub of the community, is on display in the Special Exhibits area. It follows the changing ownership and use

Williamstown Historical Museum

1095 Main Street, Williamstown, MA 01267