

Williamstown Historical Museum

Newsletter

Williamstown, Massachusetts

Autumn 2019

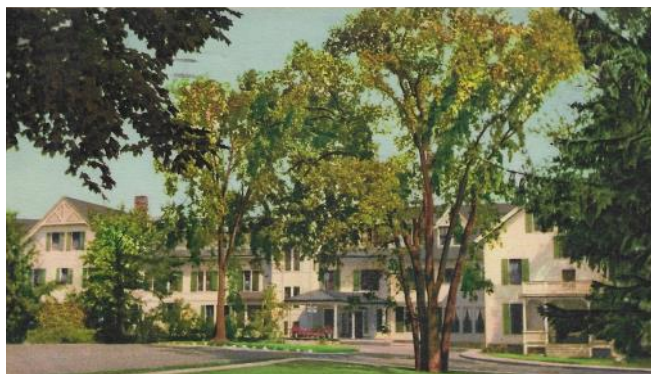
Volume XXI, Number 2

The Williams Inn: Then and Now by Gail Burns

There have been very few years when the Williams Inn was not owned by Williams College, but thanks to four hard-working innkeepers – L. G. Treadway and his son John, and Carl and Marilyn Faulkner – the town has had a strong attachment to the business.

In 1902 Arthur H. L. “Bemie” Bemis had a sign made reading “The Williams Inn” and installed it on his business at the northeastern end of Spring Street. Bemis was a popular shopkeeper, selling newspapers, candy, tobacco products, and Williams mementos, and, while he did rent rooms upstairs, his “inn” was hardly in competition with the nearby Greylock Hotel or the Idlewild.

Bemis had been inspired by talk among some New York City-based Williams alumni of the need for a



Early Williams Inn, “Dodd House”

“Williams Inn” to accommodate them on their visits to their alma mater. A committee was formed that included College President Henry Hopkins, money was raised, and plans were even drawn up for the site on Park Street now occupied by the Paresky Center. The business in which they sold shares in 1909 was named the Williams Alumni House Inc., not the Williams Inn, and it was housed in the former home of mathematics professor Cyrus Morris Dodd (Williams 1855).

In 1880 Professor Dodd had designed a large home just behind Consumption Hill for his family. It sat quite alone on its property at the time and afforded fine views in all directions from its Swiss balconies and verandas. After Dodd’s death in 1897, his daughters Grace and

Williams Inn continued on page 3

President’s Remarks

Dear Williamstown Historical Museum family and friends,

In this issue of the newsletter we are very excited to share with you our successful Hay Day Fair news. On August 11 we had approximately 430 visitors and perfect weather! It was fun to be seated at the entrance welcoming the fairgoers and then watching them, especially the children, enjoying the many activities being offered. (See the photos on page 2 for details.) The fair, now in its second year, has helped call attention to the many programs and holdings of the museum.

Summer always brings us additional visitors, and this year we enjoyed meeting both local residents and tourists. One highlight was a research visit from members of the Treadway family. If you haven’t yet visited our new space, do come. You will be delighted by our outstanding permanent and temporary exhibitions. Most of all, be sure to join the museum, or renew your membership when the reminder letter comes. And be sure your friends and neighbors are members. The museum is fully operated by generous membership contributions.

Best wishes for the holiday season,

Kathy Thompson

Board President



Kathy Thompson
Board President

Thank you!

The Williamstown Historical Museum thanks the community for its support of the second Hay Day Fair. The museum is grateful for the participation of local vendors, non-profit organizations, musicians, donors, and visitors who attended the fair.

The day was a success because of the community. With funds earned at events like the 2019 Hay Day Fair, the museum endeavors to inspire interest and a deeper understanding of Williamstown’s history through the maintenance of its collection, and with programs, exhibits, and research. Thank you!

HAY DAY FAIR

August 11,
2019



Woodworker Norm Jolin (above), welcomes friends. The Store at Five Corners (right) was one of three food vendors.



Patrick Quinn (right) delighted all with his announcements throughout the day.



Traditional music with Rosin the Beaux



The Williamstown Garden Club (above) shared information and an activity for children. The silent auction (below) had a wide selection of items to meet any budget and interest.



Pony rides in the field were a popular activity.



Children's games (above) included hoop and stick races, egg and spoon races, sack races, and more. Families enjoyed the maypole (left) throughout the day.

Williams Inn continued

Agnes, both unmarried and in need of an income, began operating a boarding house on the premises. It was called The Netherleigh, and the sisters added a wing on the north side in 1902.

In 1909 the alumni acquired what had become known as "Dodd's Monstrosity" and they put in charge another woman in need of an income, the recent widow of political science professor Henry Loomis Nelson.



L. G. Treadway, c. 1925

Alumni House/Williams Inn

Believing that visitors were unlikely to book a room at the Alumni House, L. G. Treadway purchased, for \$5, the sign and the name "Williams Inn" from Mr. Bemis. However, the legal name of the establishment he managed continued to be the Williams Alumni House Inc. until that corporation dissolved in 1956. He also started using what became the nationally known Treadway lamplighter logo on signs directing customers to the Inn in its off-the-beaten-track location.

The Inn flourished under L.G.'s leadership. Within a year he was turning away business and approached the college trustees for money to enlarge the premises.

When they refused he threatened to resign. The result was that in December of 1915 excavations for the foundation of a \$25,000 new addition, containing "20 sleeping



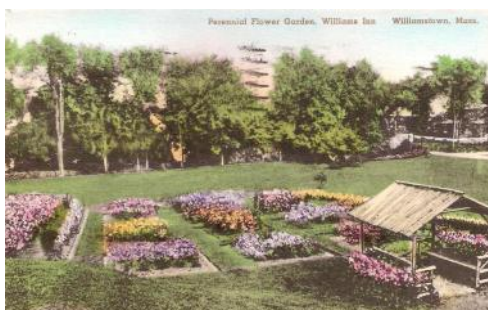
Early Williams Inn, "Dodd House"

rooms and 14 baths," were under rush order. That addition to the south and west of the Inn, completed in 1916, balanced the wing on the east side and gave the building the gentle U-shape it sports.

The Treadway Inns eventually comprised more than two dozen establishments nationwide, primarily east of the Mississippi. All five of the Treadway children—three sons, Richard, John, and David, and two daughters, Antoinette and Jane—were born in Williamstown, some in the Inn itself. The Inn was a major employer in town. The Treadways treated their employees well and they in

turn were a very loyal group. In 1962 the Treadways celebrated 50 years in business with much fanfare.

John Treadway was an amateur ornithologist and he planted gardens designed to attract as many species of birds as possible, simultaneously attracting many bird-



Color postcard of Williams Inn gardens

lovers to the Inn. In 1969 the gardens were the site of a college production of Shakespeare's "Henry IV, Part I." The Twelve Days of Christmas were celebrated in the Inn, commencing with the Boar's Head banquet, a tradition continued by the Faulkners into the new millennium. Pip the cat was a beloved member of the staff, and there was briefly a hound named Eph.

In 1936 it was announced that L. G. had leased the Inn from the owner, Williams Alumni House, Inc., for "a term of years" and intended to "operate the Inn on his own behalf." In



Pip the cat

1956, after the Alumni House corporation was dissolved, ownership of the land and buildings became the property of the President and Trustees of Williams College, with the Treadways continuing to lease. It appeared by then that fraternities would be disbanded and the college



Proctor House/Kappa Alpha, date unknown

would have to feed and house the majority of their student body for the first time since 1833. In 1960 the college announced plans for \$250,000 in renovations to the Inn, chief among them the installation of a wet pipe sprinkler system for fire suppression, without which the Inn could not later have been converted to student housing.

In 1960 the Treadways expressed their first interest in the property on the north side of Field Park. The former Proctor mansion, home to Kappa Alpha. The Treadways along with the Alumni Society petitioned the town to rezone the residential parcel to a Tourist Business District so that they could use the planned new fraternity building as a "summer guest house." The town

Williams Inn continued on page 4

Williams Inn continued

Refused. The Proctor House burned in 1968, the fraternities were disbanded, the college acquired the property, and nothing was built on the site for several years.

When the Treadways' lease with the college expired in 1970, the college did not choose to renew it. Instead they offered the Treadways an exchange of what is now known as Dodd House for the Kappa Alpha property in order to preserve a thriving, tax-paying business and a major employer of long-standing. As college property the land was off the tax rolls.

By 1970 the Treadway family had sold their business to Restaurant Associates, who in 1971 sold to NBO Industries (formerly known as the BOWL-O-MAT Company), which promptly took the name Treadway Companies, Inc. While L. G. and John Treadway were part of the public face of the company during negotiations with the town in the early 1970s, they were not part of the legal entity that owned the Inn.

The Inn at Field Park

In December of 1971, the Town voted to rezone the seven acre DKE property as a Tourist Business District to allow the construction of a new Williams Inn there. However, the town did not endorse any specific design, or even the Treadway Companies as the developer. There



Sketch of The Williams Inn at Field Park

followed a long battle over the design as the desire for architectural excellence competed with the need for corporate solvency, with at least three designs — variously described disparagingly as “modern,” “neo-Georgian,” “ordinary,” and “just another motel” — rejected by the college and the town even before the zoning was changed.

Williams students circulated a petition stating: “The three designs submitted to date have been disruptive to the community in their unimaginative and motel-like design and location on the site...” and urged the College trustees to demand “a more sophisticated design which reflects more of the value of the present Williams Inn (a gathering place for the community) and makes a positive rather than negative contribution to the architect-

ure of Williamstown.”

In 1973 Berkshire Associates in partnership with the Treadway Companies signed a 25-year lease with the college and ground was broken in April of 1973, with L. G. Treadway turning over the first golden shovel-full of dirt. (The shovel was given to Eugene Kemp, the Inn's gardener of 35 years.) The final design was described as “essentially modern” while incorporating a white clapboard-style vinyl exterior and a portico.

The Inn at Field Park opened in the spring of 1974 and the exterior design was never popular. *UpCountry*, a magazine published by *The Berkshire Eagle*, “found the Inn's interior and conveniences tolerable for all the blandness of its exterior.” *The Eagle* also ran the headline



Williams Inn Exterior, c. 1980

“Motel Replaces First Inn in Treadway Chain.” The Sabin Mansion on the south side of Field Park, home to Pine Cobble School since 1943, had burned down in 1970 and was replaced with a very modern structure in 1973, so that the “entrance” to Williamstown changed substantially in less than five years.

L. G. Treadway died in 1977, at the age of 93, and is buried in Westlawn Cemetery, probably aware that his flagship inn was rapidly sinking due to poor management. That same year Plymouth hoteliers Carl and Marilyn Faulkner came to the Berkshires to consider purchasing a different property. “As we were exploring the region we had a flat tire,” Carl Faulkner recalled. “And after I'd fixed it we stopped at the Treadway Williams Inn so I could wash up. I came back out and said to Marilyn, ‘Forget the other place, this place will go under in a year. We're going to buy the Williams Inn.’”

The day before the Faulkners took possession in December of 1979, the Treadway Companies closed the Inn and dismissed the staff. “I couldn't hire anyone for two weeks or they would lose their unemployment insurance,” Carl explained. “But staff from our inns in Plymouth came up to help me out so we could keep the Inn open and honor prior bookings because for every day you're closed you lose a month's worth of business.”

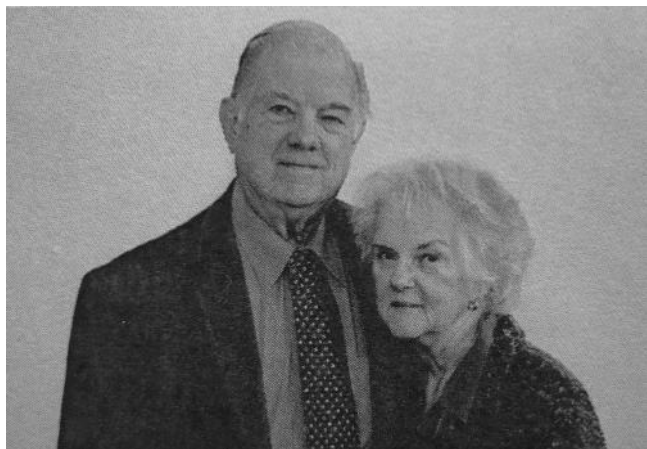
Once the Faulkners had the Inn staffed again they focused fully on making the business a part of the community. The Faulkners focused on booking bus tours and conferences, bringing business to the town and region.



Williams Inn Bus Tour

Carl recalls, "One of the reasons Williamstown appealed to me was its location three hours west of Plymouth. That's about how long a bus tour will travel before the next stop, then the passengers will enjoy a meal, take in the sights, and stay the night before moving on."

Beginning in the late 1980s the Faulkners started



Carl and Marilyn Faulkner of the Williams Inn

considering building a new wing off the north side of the Inn. "We had 104 rooms, and an average bus tour would book 100," Carl explained. "We needed more rooms so we could book tours and have rooms left over for regular customers." That addition was finally built in 2003.

During the 35 years the Faulkners ran the Inn it returned to its reputation as a thriving business providing steady employment, as well as welcoming area non-profit organizations for a variety of functions. Carl and Marilyn were awarded the Good Citizen Award from the Williamstown Community Chest in 1998.

The Faulkners paid off the mortgage the Treadway Companies had taken with the college in the 1970s and eventually became the sole owners of the Williams Inn building. They sold off their other properties to focus on Williamstown.

In 2008 the college, which still owned the land at Field Park, approached the Faulkners about acquiring the Inn. After some years of negotiation, the Faulkners sold the Inn to Williams and retired in 2014.

101 Spring Street

By that time discussion of the college's constructing a "boutique hotel" at the south end of Spring Street was public. The college had employed Pinnacle, a hospitality management group, who concluded that there was a need for only 60-80 rooms in a new Williams Inn, as opposed to the 128 rooms at Field Park. Several different firms operated the Field Park location for the college from 2014 and 2019.

In a repeat of the early 1970s the college had to approach the town for approval to expand the Village Business District in order to build on the 8.5 acre lot adjacent to Weston Field. The existing inn was deemed too costly to renovate and the renovation would have affected many local jobs. The once "ideal" site on Field Park morphed into an area "on the outskirts" of the campus.

The Inn at Field Park closed its doors on July 31, 2019. Construction of the 64-room Inn on Spring Street which had started in 2016, was completed in 2019, at a cost of \$32 million in time for an opening on August 15, 2019. As it has for most of the Inn's history, the College owns the Inn and the land on which it sits. It is managed by the Waterford Hotel Group, which had assumed final management of the Inn at Field Park and handled the transition. The new Inn is designed in three sections: the main house, bunkhouse, and barn, each with public spaces on the ground floors and guest rooms upstairs. The sections are distinguished with different architectural styles and different siding, with red barnwood-style siding for the restaurant.

As of this writing, the furnishings of the Inn at Field Park have been sold at a community-wide tag sale to benefit local organizations. A November 7, 2019 article by Scott Stafford of *The Berkshire Eagle* reported, that, "demolition of the old structure could take place next summer, but the timing depends on the extent of hazardous material abatement needed at the site... Williams College spokesman Greg Shook said there has been no determination on how the site will be developed in the future, although one option that has been proposed is a new college art museum." Only time will tell!



**New Williams Inn, 101 Spring Street
photo from Williams Inn website**



Recently Acquired by Sarah Currie

This summer, Norm Sweet, a Williamstown local whose family's presence in town dates back generations, contacted the museum. He was selling his family's home on Sloan Road. While cleaning out the house, he retrieved a collection of material (including many photos and documents) from his Sweet/Bratcher relatives. Norm has graciously permitted the Museum to scan and photograph the artifacts in the collection so that we may add them to the Museum's online collection. His family will be able to retain the original items to pass on to future generations. I will work with Norm to identify those individuals pictured in the photos that I am not familiar with. There is one gentleman, however, whose story and life were revealed as I started the cataloging process.

A primary focus of the Sweet/Bratcher collection was a set of documents, photos, newspaper articles, and memorabilia from Clifford Bratcher. Clifford was a WWII serviceman, and a member of the "Famous Fourth Division," who was wounded in action in Germany and tragically died of his wounds in March of 1945, when he was just 20 years old.



Clifford Bratcher, 1944

As one of the people who reviews and catalogs much of the material that arrives at the museum, I am able to delve into individuals' stories and am able to glean a hint of the personalities of the people related to the collection. As I cataloged the material from Clifford Bratcher I came upon an artifact that was particularly interesting and which was a deeply moving testament to a deceased serviceman and his family's love and extraordinary loss.

A scrapbook, offered during WWII for servicemen and their families, was begun by Clifford and his fiancé, Faith "Fay" Bellows. Written both in his hand, and possibly his mother's or Fay's hand, Clifford's story comes alive. Through reading the record we learn that Clifford was born on April 4, 1924 to Bessie Mable Sweet Bratcher and Roy Bratcher. He grew up on Sloan Road, graduated from Williamstown High School in 1941,

and enlisted in the Army in August of 1944. Before enlisting, Clifford worked at Mt. Hope and wrote that his favorite pastimes included fishing, hunting, and basketball as a civilian, and recorded that "writing to Fay" was a favorite pastime while he served in the Army. Clifford arrived in Germany in February of 1945 and, according to one of the postcards written to Fay, it appears that Clifford last wrote to her on February 25, 1945.

In addition to the details about Clifford's life, we are met with the sad details of his death through news clippings, telegrams, letters, and other artifacts in the album. Among the documents in the album is a certificate for a Purple Heart, awarded to Clifford, posthumously, in May 1945, "for military merit and wounds received in action."



Clifford was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart.

While I typically try to remain unsentimental as I catalog historical records, this time I was moved by documents in the album that detailed the Bratcher family's loss.

Within the album, there is a large envelope for storage of loose personal documents. I had nearly completed the album's scanning when I opened the envelope and carefully removed several pieces of paper and photos. I was struck with emotion when I came upon Clifford's report cards from elementary school. There was also a small souvenir booklet that Clifford's mother filled out when he was born and even a Mother's Day card given to his mother in 1935, by Clifford when he was 11. Though I am not sure who put the report cards, photos, and other early childhood documents into the envelope, I wondered if, perhaps, Clifford's mother carefully placed the documents,

WILLIAMSTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS															
Report of <i>Clifford Bratcher</i> Grade <i>IV</i>															
	Days Absent	Times Tardy	Arithmetic	Language	Geography	History	Reading	Spelling	Writing	Hygiene	Music	Drawing	Civics	Promotion	Class-ship
1st Period	1	0	C	B	B	B	A	A	B	B	B	B			A
2nd "	3 1/2	1	B	B	A	A	A	A	B	A	B	B			A
3rd "	0	0	B	B	B	B	A	A	B	A	B	B			A
4th "	0	0	B	B	B	A	A	A	B	A	B	B			A
5th "															
6th "															
Promoted to Grade V															
A — Excellent B — Good C — Fair D — Unsatisfactory															
* To Parents: The estimate of the teacher with reference to promotion, should be carefully noted. "Possible" or "Doubtful" appearing in this column are danger signals.															
<i>Clifford Bratcher</i> Teacher															

Clifford's fourth grade report card. He was a good student!

mementos from her son's birth and childhood, into the envelope, to preserve and pass on in his memory.

Clifford's life and his family's loss felt almost palpable and present as I scanned these personal documents. It became clear that, while this album was started by Clifford and Fay to serve as a record for his family to reflect upon after he returned home from his service



Mother's Day Card given to Bessie Bratcher by Clifford in 1935, when he was 11

abroad, it now had to serve as a testament to his entire life.

We are so fortunate to be able to observe and learn from this valuable collection of artifacts. Although Norm Sweet never knew Clifford, who was his first cousin once removed (his father's first cousin), he understands the importance of sharing Clifford's story and legacy. From these artifacts we are able

to learn a great deal about the life, stories, and sacrifices of those who served during WWII. We are grateful to Norm and his family for his willingness to share this special collection with the museum and the community. The collection is in the process of being cataloged and will soon be available in our online collections catalog for viewing.

Upcoming History Book Group

Have you read a good book lately? Would you recommend it to a history book group? Would you like to learn about other good history books? Please join the Williamstown Historical Museum's gathering of friendly readers who meet for discussion about books with historical themes on the first Thursday of each month from 1 to 2:30 p.m. at the Williamstown Historical Museum.

On December 5, 2019 the group will discuss the first four chapters of *The Clarks of Cooperstown: Their Singer Sewing Machine Fortune, Their Great and Influential Art Collections, Their Forty-Year Feud* by Nicholas Fox Weber. The group will also meet at the WHM on Thursday, January 2, to discuss chapters five and six.

The group welcomes new participants to share observations and ideas, and all are invited to attend even if they have not read the book!

Visit us this winter!

December through March Hours:

Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

We are also available by appointment.

Please call or email if you would like to visit outside of regular hours.

413.458.2160 or

info@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org

Volunteer Opportunity Audiobook Recording Project

The Williamstown Historical Museum takes seriously its mission to inspire interest in Williamstown's history. To help fulfill its mission, the WHM sought and received funding from the Fund for Williamstown, a Fund of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, to carry out an ambitious project to record *Williamstown the First 250 Years*. This history was originally written by R.R.R. Brooks and Williamstown's residents in 1953, and was updated in 1973 and 2003. The recording will make Williamstown's history accessible to a broader portion of the population and will be available online for all at no cost.

With the grant funds the WHM purchased recording equipment that will enable the recording of this book and other projects, such as the production of an audio tour of the museum's orientation exhibit and oral histories of current and former town residents.

Members from the community are invited to participate in the project as readers, by recording a chapter or a portion of a chapter, at the museum with support from our staff. If you are interested in reading aloud or would like to learn more about this project, contact Sarah Currie.

413-458-2160 or

sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org
www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org

**Williamstown
Historical
Museum**

NAME(S) _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL: _____

Please think of the Williamstown Historical Museum for gifts in memory or commemoration or

JOIN now or RENEW your MEMBERSHIP

Mail to: Williamstown Historical Museum
32 New Ashford Road
Williamstown, MA 01267

ENCLOSED is my contribution for:

_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$250 _____ \$500 _____ Other

To Join or Make a Donation Online:

www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org

Williamstown Historical Museum

NONPROFIT
US POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 10
NORTH ADAMS, MA
01247

32 New Ashford Road, Williamstown, MA 01267

December - March Hours:
Friday and Saturday, 10 - 2
Also open by appointment



The Artemas Stone Tavern (later Turner House) at 825 Simonds Road has changed dramatically in the past 219 years since its construction around 1800. Originally built by Artemas Stone to house a tavern, the building was donated to American Legion Post 152 in 1992 by Ferman Turner, a WWII veteran, for use as veterans' housing. The building was placed upon a new foundation and fully renovated to create a house dedicated as a transitional residence for homeless veterans, and opened in 1996. The town purchased the building in 2017 for use as the new police station. After another thorough renovation and addition the building opened for use as the police station in July of 2019.