

## In the time of uncertainty...

We reach out to each of you at this time of uncertainty, when a pandemic has turned our world topsy-turvy. We know all of you are undoubtedly hunkered down, practicing safe “social distancing” and insulating yourselves to the best of your ability.

We look back and realize we have no real comparison for today’s events. Many remember the outbreak of polio before the vaccine. Others remember the time of WWII with blackout shades, sirens calling for blackouts as we sheltered within, and using binoculars to watch for planes from a look-out hut at the bottom of Southworth Street. During WWII, wardens patrolled the streets watching over us. 9/11 brought its own level of uncertainty and fear. **These issues were scary, but today’s pandemic is unique, bringing a different level of concern and disruption to daily life.**

We hope that you are taking good care of yourselves, that you are healthy. We hope friends are watching out for friends, and that you are availing yourselves of services and help within our greater community as needed. You are never alone.

In this newsletter you will find a couple of features that look at our community’s experience with upheaval and change, one about a 1955 polio victim and another about the 1918–1919 flu and its sweep through town. We made it through those challenging times. We will make it through this together.

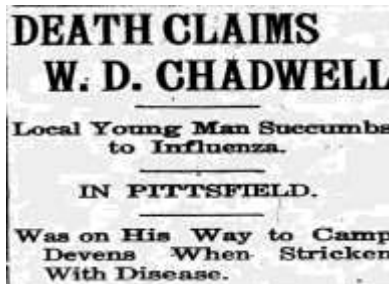


In it together...South Center School Students, 1894.

## The Spanish Flu in Williamstown, 1918-19

by Dustin Griffin

With coronavirus in our midst, the thoughts of many turn to the influenza pandemic of 1918-19. Called the “Spanish Flu” because it was thought (falsely) to have originated in Spain, it infected an estimated 500 million people worldwide, about 25% of the world’s population, and killed an estimated 50 million people. In the U. S. the fatality rate was about 5%, and deaths are estimated at 650,000. Its biggest impact was in large cities, but it reached Berkshire County too, particularly because of a



September 26, 1918, Transcript headline on W. D. Chadwell’s death

severe outbreak in September 1918 at Camp Devens, a military training facility about 44 miles west of Boston. In September and October about 5% of Berkshire County residents had contracted the disease. On Sept. 25 one of the first to die in the county was 21-year-old William D. Chadwell, who had grown up on Hall St. in Williamstown and moved to Pittsfield in December 1917. He was on his way back to Camp Devens when he contracted the flu. A week later William Donahue, a 25-year-old man who lived in a boarding house on Arnold St. in Williamstown, died from the flu.

On October 1 the state recommended that all towns close their schools and ban public meetings. Williamstown promptly complied. And since both Pittsfield and North Adams had been severely affected (and North Adams had not yet closed its schools), Williamstown imposed a quarantine, posting guards at the town lines on Rt. 2 and Rt. 7: nobody could enter or leave town without a special “card,” available to those who worked out of town, or unless they could demonstrate a good reason. By October 5 there were eighteen cases in town, especially among young adults. In the month of October there

*Flu continued on page 4*

# Williamstown's Early Mills

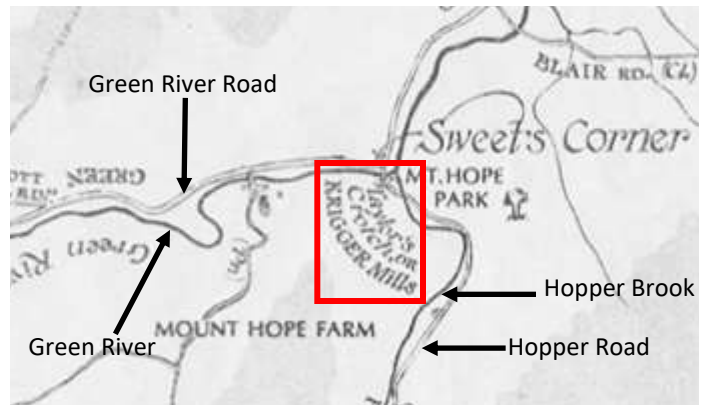
by Mary Fuqua

The allure of uncovering evidence of 18<sup>th</sup> century industry in Williamstown is a strong draw to those interested in the evolution of the town, but remnants of earliest mills have proved difficult to find, even after consulting early maps of the town. The shell of the mill at the end of Cole Avenue and Cable Mills on Water Street date to the next century, the 19<sup>th</sup>. In the 1700's, before the industrial revolution, Williamstown was a strong farming community.

Williamstown's earliest mills met the needs of the community, providing services essential to the life and comfort of the town's residents. Grist mills reduced grain to flour, ready for the kitchen. *Williamstown the First 250 Years'* discussion of sawmills reports that "in cutting fire-

Outside employees were not widely used.

Williamstown's first mill was built in 1762. The town's Proprietors Book records a vote at the second Proprietors meeting, in April 1754, to "agree upon some man or men to build a grist mill and a saw mill and what bounty they will give for the encouragement of the building the same." A local mill would provide services, until then, only available several miles away in New York. Action to build a mill in West Hoosuck (early Williamstown) was



**This map, a melding of recent and past landmarks, notes the location of the Krieger mill (spelled Krigger on the map), at Taylor's crotch, at the confluence of the Green River and Hopper Brook.**

not taken until the end of the French and Indian War. The successive falls on the Green River behind the fire station on Water Street, inconsequential to our eyes, provided an ideal mill site to Samuel Payne who, in 1761, opened the site and established Water Street as access. The new mill, built the next year, and operated by a newcomer from Connecticut, Titus Harrison, was a grist and saw- mill. The owner also built himself a house on the bank of the river.

In 1763, the town granted privileges to John Smedley, for a sawmill to be located in the northern part of town, drawing water from Broad Brook and with a right to carry water across the highway. Lumber for Williamstown's meeting house was sawed at this mill.

In a 1767 meeting of the Proprietors, a Dutch family, John, Peter and William Krieger, was given a privilege to construct a grist/sawmill halfway down the Green River at Sweet's Corners.

The 1760's also saw the emergence of distilleries. Joseph Talmadge, a farmer who distilled brandy from cider, was well known. He was reported to use a fine spring whose water dropped down to Hemlock Brook just before it emptied into the Hoosic River. Young John Smedley, son of the mill owner mentioned above, is reported to have carried cider to be distilled into brandy at the Talmadge brewery.

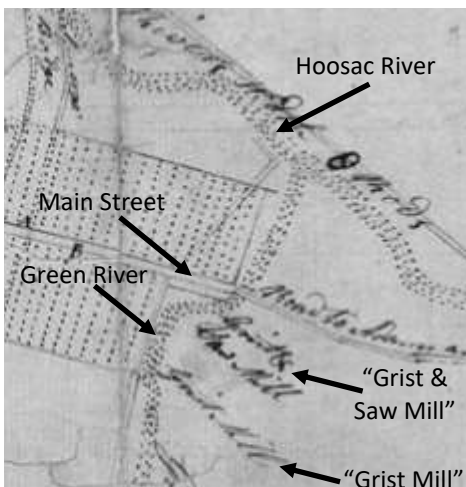
By 1788 a small grist/sawmill stood on the east bank of Hancock Brook a quarter mile south of Five Corners and a 1795 map shows a wool carding and fulling mill on the Green River south of Sweet's Corner.



**The mill at the right in this photo, located on the Green River, near 112 Water Street, was built around 1830, and was a successor to the 18<sup>th</sup> century mills once present near this location.**

wood alone, it could do the work of four men in one day." The "fulling" mill cleaned and finished the fabric woven at home and made it ready for the seamstress.

The mill buildings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were small, built of wood, and distinguished from farm buildings by their location by a brook and the water wheel that provided power. Water was brought to the mill by a small canal or wooden raceway. The working parts, including the water wheel, were made of wood. Unlike the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a mill was usually operated by its owner and family.



**Though difficult to decipher even on the high resolution image of this 1794-95 map of Williamstown on the MA Archives website, two mills, a combination grist and sawmill and an individual grist mill, are identified on the east bank of the Green River, near present day Bingham Street.**

*Early Mills continued on page 5*

# The Summer of '55: Polio in Williamstown

by Sarah Currie

The 1957 Williamstown High School yearbook is dedicated to Richard (Dick) Lopardo, a casualty of a terrible disease, last seen in the community decades ago. An article that appeared in *The North Adams Transcript* on Monday, August 8, 1955 records the tragedy, stating that



**Richard (Dick) Lopardo**

**“the boy was taken ill on Wednesday and treated by Dr. Adolph Salomon. On Friday the illness was diagnosed as a presumptive case of polio and the boy was taken to the Pittsfield hospital and placed in an iron lung. Dr. S.P. Mikitas of Pittsfield said that Richard had been stricken with the bulbar type of polio.” An active athlete, Richard was only 15 at the time of his death. A schoolmate remembers that his death occurred at the “time of year with baseball season beginning**

and kids wanting to swim in the Green River... Fear was rampant. **True facts about polio were unknown then.”** As with the current coronavirus pandemic, children and adults lived in fear of the potential danger and, in the summer of 1955, participating in common summer activities like swimming would feel risky.

Polio vaccines were first administered in June of 1955 to local first and second graders through a county wide school vaccination program. A *North Adams Transcript* article noted, **“The first and second grade children have been selected for the free school program since they are at the most susceptible age. Other children, however,**

**will be able to get the polio vaccine through their own physicians.”** The vaccine, referred to as the Salk polio vaccine, named after its developer, Jonas Salk, consisted of a series of three shots, given over a five-week period.



**Cora Brown, school nurse, weighing students, c. 1955**

After the first shots were administered at Mitchell School, the school nurse reported **that “the mass vaccination proceeded without incident with all children taking the shots cheerfully. Lollipops supplied by Eddis Kronick of the Esso Service Station were given the children.”** Students at Pine Cobble School,

## President's Remarks

Dear Museum Family and Friends,

We are experiencing such trying times, and I hope you are all well. It was a quiet winter at the museum and we look forward to late spring and summer and a grand reopening.

Our last event before closing was on March 7th when we had a lovely commemoration reception for Steve Burnham and the family and friends who donated substantial funds to the museum in his memory. Nearly 40 family and friends **attended and Steve's daughter Mackenzie and our Executive Director, Sarah Currie,** shared memories. Steve was the general contractor during our 2017 move to our new location at the South Center School. A plaque in his memory now hangs in our exhibit area.

Even though we are not able to gather, our Communications and Executive committees have been meeting remotely to keep operations going. Please check Will-iNet, the WHM Facebook page, and our website where we hope to educate and entertain you as we shelter in place. We are especially proud to be sending this newsletter digitally for the first time and to have it include information about past local emergencies.

Our Third Annual Hay Day event is still on the calendar for August, and we will keep you posted on details.

Lastly, after 11 years on the board of directors, 5 as your President, I will be stepping down as President in June. The successful move to our own space has been especially gratifying. It has been an honor to work with our board of directors and our very knowledgeable Executive Director, Sarah Currie, and with you, our members. Thank you to all!

Stay healthy, and I'll be thinking of all of you until we meet again at the Williamstown Historical Museum!

Best wishes,

Kathy Thompson



**Kathy Thompson  
Board President**

South Center School, and Broad Brook School were also vaccinated.

In October of 1955, two local children, one of whom was vaccinated, fell ill. Once the children were diagnosed, all members of their immediate families received the vaccine. Both children are believed to have made a full recovery.

A vaccine for the current virus sweeping the nation may be a while off, but knowledge of the experiences **and tragedy in our town's past inspires us to maintain hope for the future.**

**Flu continued**

were four more flu-related deaths in Williamstown, all of young people in their 20s, including the chief clerk at the Greylock Hotel and a woman who died in childbirth. But by October 25 the number of new cases had dropped sharply. The Williams-Springfield football game on November 8 was canceled, but the town was able to lift the quarantine in mid-November.

The *Transcript* reported daily on the toll. It also carried advice on "How to Keep Well," including washing your hands before eating, avoiding people who cough or sneeze, getting plenty of fresh air and sunshine, and keeping away from crowded places. There were ads for flu remedies: Hill's Casara Quinine, Dr. True's Elixir, Fruit-a-Tives, Father John's Medicine, pinex (pine extract), cinnamon oil. And ads disguising themselves as news stories: under the headline "Just Grip Camouflaged Under a New Name" comes a recommendation for Vick's VapoRub. The *Transcript* got some things wrong - reporting that flu most severely affects "elderly persons" (when in fact very few over 65 died) - and some things right: the great danger that flu would develop into pneumonia.

In December new cases were reported in South Williamstown, which had largely escaped the first wave of

cases in October. On Sunday, December 22, services at the Second Congregational Church were canceled.

The town's death registry showed that eight had died from influenza in the fall of 1918, but many more died from pneumonia.

**DOCTORS ARE BUSY**  
**Nearly Every Family in Hancock Affected—South Williamstown Churches Closed.**

**March 29, 1919, Transcript headline calling attention to the epidemic in South Williamstown**

In January 1919 the selectmen reported that Williamstown had not suffered as heavily as many surrounding towns, "largely owing to the care and precaution taken in the way of quarantine."

In early 1919 new flu cases were concentrated in South Williamstown, though there were few fatalities. Church services were again canceled on March 30. In early April the town advised that all public meetings - in schools and churches - should be canceled, and residents complied. By the middle of April it was thought that the end of the epidemic was in sight.

**Opening of windows in houses and persons spending more time in the open are believed responsible for the improvement in health conditions and all are advised to obtain as much fresh air as possible.**

**April 14, 1919, Transcript article credits better weather for dip in flu cases.**

How many died in Williamstown from the flu? It is difficult to be certain: state records (the *Vital Statistics for 1918*) do not agree with the town's numbers in its registry of deaths. Mary Kennedy, current town clerk, reports that the town's registry shows nine deaths from influenza for

January through April 1919 (along with the eight reported for September through December 1918). But many additional deaths attributed to pneumonia were probably flu-related.

Suggestions for further reading: Dennis J. Carr, "The Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 and Berkshire County," in the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Winter 1991), pp. 43-60 (you can google "Dennis J. Carr"), and Mike Miller's posts about the Spanish flu on Sept. 20, 2018, and Oct. 30, 2019.



**Spring Street, 1901-1907**



**Spring Street, after 1940s?**

**Members, can you date this photo using the cars as a guide?**

**Photo Challenge:**

**If you live in or plan to visit Williamstown this summer, can you replicate the images above with a similar photo?**

We would love to add current images of Williamstown to our collection and invite you to photograph streetscapes, landmarks, buildings, and landscapes in town that can help us build a WHM collection of "current history." Your photos will serve as valuable research tools and photographic evidence of Williamstown's evolution. You needn't venture far to create these photos, simply photographing your home or residential street would be a great way to document today's history. We even welcome portraits of individual residents. We encourage you to be creative and have fun! Thank you and we look forward to seeing what you come up with!

**Photos may be emailed to the WHM at:  
info@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org**

### Early Mills continued

Danforth, who published a memoir in 1875, describes his experience as a youth visiting a carding mill. His words are a first-hand account of a way of life before the larger mills that arrived in town.

*I remember when a small boy driving my mother to the south part carding mill, located on the road to New Ashford ...We stayed all day waiting for the rolls to be manufactured from the budget of wool we brought to the mill...When the rolls were brought home, they had to be spun and made into cloth by the home weaver and stockings by the knitter, for the family use and wear...*

The larger mills we recognize in town today arrived in the 19th century. Stay tuned for a future article on the history of these mills in Williamstown.



**The mill obscured by trees at the right in this image is likely the Krieger mill, once located near the confluence of Hopper Brook and the Green River near Sweet's Corners. The mill was in disrepair when it was acquired by Mt. Hope Farm and was torn down.**

### *When the museum opens again...*

*Visitors will be welcome!*

#### Typical April through November Hours:

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Saturdays: 12 to 4 p.m.

Questions? Research request? Please call or email.

413-458-2160 or

info@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org

### History Book Group

Though the museum is closed, temporarily, during the Coronavirus outbreak, we encourage you to keep reading. The History Book Group selected three books for April through June. Please read and let us know what you think. If you have read a good history-related book, let us know and we will recommend it to the group!

#### History Book Group Recommendations, April - June:

**April:** *Heirs of the Founders: Henry Clay, John Calhoun and Daniel Webster, the Second Generation of American Giants* by H. W. Brands

**May:** *The Man in the Red Coat* by Julian Barnes

**June:** *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown. If you have read this book, which dates from 1971, you may be interested in *The Heartbreak at Wounded Knee* by David Treuer, a recent publication on the same subject.

### Future Volunteer Opportunities

#### Audiobook Recording Project

Members from the community are invited to participate in a project to record Williamstown's history book, *Williamstown the First 250 Years*. When the museum reopens, the community is encouraged 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. This project was funded with a grant from the Fund for Williamstown, a fund of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation.

#### Greeters Welcome!

In anticipation of the summer season, you are invited to learn more about being a greeter at the museum. Volunteering at the WHM is a great way to learn more about the history of Williamstown and give back to your community. If you have a couple of hours free each week or month our Executive Director, Sarah Currie, would be happy to talk to you about volunteer opportunities at the WHM. Please contact Sarah for more information.

413-458-2160 or

sarah@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

## Wishing for summer swimming....

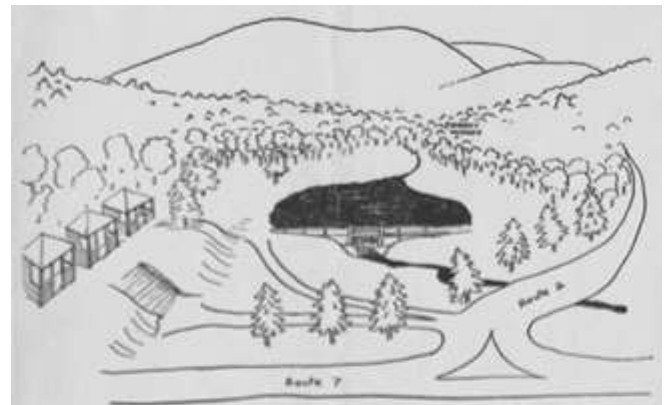
We hope everyone will be able to visit Margaret Lindley Park, a favorite town recreation area, soon, once social distancing requirements are lifted. With a swimming area, picnic tables, and trails, set in a beautiful forest, Margaret Lindley Park has drawn the attention of tourists, naturalists, and swimmers for decades.



The area now known as Margaret Lindley Park was owned by the Taconic Restaurant in the middle of the 20th century. Referred to as "Taconic Park," the area included a set of tourist cabins, a swimming hole, and eating establishments. The swimming area was created by damming Hemlock Brook. The postcard above identifies the swimming area as "Abe's Swimming Pool," named after a town character and employee of the restaurant.



"Taconic Park" featured a dairy bar, cabins, a swimming area, and more. Tourists coming off Route 2 from New York would find this a comfortable stopping point.



The rendering above, done by Pam Weatherbee, appeared in a pamphlet related to the town's 1967 acquisition of the property. The property was purchased for \$35,000, with support from a grant from the Massachusetts State Conservation Services.



Visitors enjoy a moment of respite in the shade and the cooling waters of the pond, c. 1970s.



The park was dedicated to the memory of Margaret Lindley, who was referred to as a teacher who "labored quietly and effectively for the children of Williamstown."