

Williamstown Historical Museum

Newsletter

Williamstown, Massachusetts

Autumn 2020

Volume XXII, Number 2

Station Mill

by Gail Burns

The original "Station Mill" at the north end of Cole Avenue was built in 1865 for the Williamstown Manufacturing Company on the banks of the Hoosic River, directly across the river from the railroad station that had



Station Mill, c. 1870s

been built in 1853. The Williamstown Manufacturing Company owned much of the land surrounding the mill where they built housing, a school, and a store. The area on the east side of Cole Avenue between the Hoosic River and Hall Street, is now designated the Mill Village National Historic District, but company-owned land stretched all along Elm Street from Arnold and Mill streets south to Linden.

The mill sits at the center of a scandal involving a college president who maintained his business holdings after assuming office. Paul Ansel Chadbourne (1823-1883) dabbled in local stocks and factories for years before becoming Williams College's fifth president in 1872. He shortly thereafter became a majority stockholder of the Williamstown Manufacturing Company mill and served as its treasurer.

According to Arthur Latham Perry in *Williamstown and Williams College* (1899), "Chadbourne was proud of the combined designation of college president and cotton manufacturer. At [an alumni dinner in Cleveland...Chadbourne], probably in pleasantry, contrasted the running of a cotton-mill with the running of a college to the disadvantage of the latter function, adding with considerable emphasis, 'A cotton mill never rebels!' This

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The Last Cole Avenue Resident from the 1920s

by Paul Guillotte

Charles Hanlon, an Irishman from Troy NY, and my grandfather, had followed the railroad to Williamstown. Mr. Potter, the Station Master, welcomed Charlie and set him up in a bachelor apartment on Cole Avenue. Every day Charlie walked to work where he served as ticket agent/telegrapher at the Boston and Maine (B&M) station on Cole Avenue. On his way to work, Charlie caught the eye of a young seamstress, a certain Nora Veronica McCarthy from County Cork, Ireland. She had traveled with her mother and four siblings to find their place in a new world. Nora left her father and five other siblings back in Ireland. Charlie courted Nora and, with her mother's approval, he married the young seamstress. Having left his own family in Troy, Charlie was ready to start a new one. He had proved himself as a good, solid worker at the B&M and was encouraged by Mr. Potter to



242 Cole Avenue, c. 1890s

purchase a house across the street from him on Cole Avenue. It was the Richards house, built by a merchant in town. Mr. Butterfly, an overseer at the Cole Avenue mills, had lived in the house with his wife for one and a half years. They were ready to move on. Charlie assumed the mortgage and moved into "The House" on September 11, 1920.

The Hanlons established themselves in the Irish
Hanlon Family continued on page 4

President's Remarks

Dear friends,

Before turning to current matters I want to thank outgoing President Kathy Thompson for her ten years of service to the museum board, including four years as president. During Kathy's tenure we moved to our new home at the old South Center School — an important and challenging accomplishment.



Linda Conway
Board President

We hope you have enjoyed our recent months of online pieces on the subjects of town historical markers and the woman suffrage movement as it applied to Williamstown and surroundings. The latter have been brought together in a recently opened exhibit at the Museum, well worth a visit.

In addition to the articles and reminders in this fall newsletter, please pay special attention to our revised mission statement and the explanatory material that accompanies it. The statement and explanations reflect our heightened commitment to collecting material on and highlighting the important roles of Native Americans and African-Americans in the history and current life of Williamstown. A series of articles on these subjects will begin soon online and will continue in each forthcoming issue of the newsletter.

To introduce myself, I have been on the board for five years and have been delighted to work on behalf of my avocational interests in local history and material culture. Over the summer the Museum has proceeded with a major project that definitely fits those categories. After long months of consideration, in March the board voted to accept a donation from Carole and Peter Dolan of the iconic barn on Green River Road that has been part of their family property since the mid-1800s. The structure will be disassembled next spring and eventually rebuilt behind the museum. This fall timber framer and barn restorer David Babcock stabilized the structure, a necessity before disassembly.

With this addition we look forward to adding a new dimension to our offerings and to being able to educate the public on 19th century barn construction and tooling. Having space for displaying objects too large for our indoor exhibits is another advantage. Undertaking



The historic Dolan-Jenks barn on Green River Road

this major project would not be possible without significant pledges/gifts of financial support, which are largely in hand.

We will keep you posted as the project proceeds and hope you will share our excitement about saving an historic structure at a time when many barns are being lost to decay and demolition. It is important to add that we have been and will continue to be in regular communication with the town about the project.

Meantime, please check our schedule of webinar programs for 2020-21, enjoy our regular email postings on Williamstown history, and visit the museum to see the Woman Suffrage exhibit.

Best wishes for good health and for new and different holiday plans!

Linda Conway

Mission and Supporting Statements

The mission of the Williamstown Historical Museum is to promote interest in the history of the Williamstown area by collecting, cataloging, and preserving items of historical significance, and to increase the public's knowledge of Williamstown's past through educational exhibits, programs, events, research, publications, and any other functions that further this purpose. The Williamstown Historical Museum is committed to collecting and sharing the stories of all of the residents of this area across the centuries.

The WHM Collection

The museum's collection consists of items dating from pre-history in the region through the present day, and the collection is always growing. The museum encourages all residents and museum members to share their stories, make suggestions about areas of research and program presentation, and participate in the museum's activities so a broader understanding of the history of Williamstown can be gained and shared. The museum needs your help to ensure that everyone is represented. Please contribute to the diversity of the collection by sharing your story, your thoughts, and artifacts related to the town's history. Thank you for your investment in your town.

Land Acknowledgement

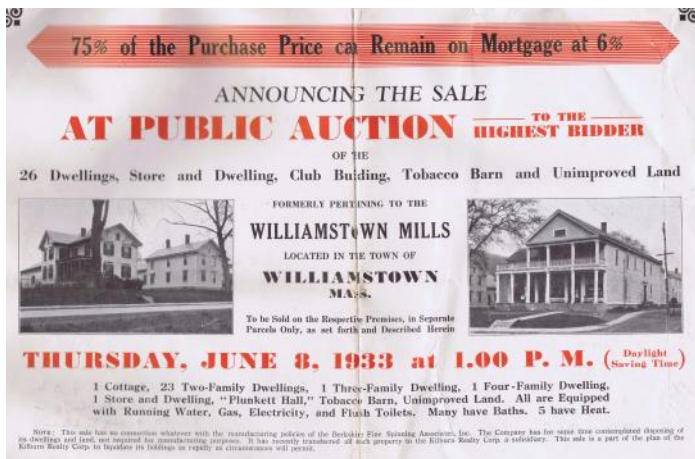
Wording from the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Community

"It is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are learning, speaking, and gathering on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all."

Station Mill continued

extremely injudicious reference, under all the circumstances and the wide publicity given to it, and the hostile criticism excited by it, brought matters to a head so far as the action of the trustees toward Chadbourne was concerned." In modern parlance, the remark went viral, and at the commencement ceremonies of 1881, Chadbourne resigned.

A booklet in the museum's collection shows that on June 8, 1933, Berkshire Fine Spinning Associates Inc., the owners at that time, auctioned off the entire Mill Village piece by piece, retaining only the properties used for



Cover of 1933 auction advertisement booklet

manufacturing purposes at what was then known as Greylock Mill B. Similar auctions of properties surrounding the BFSAs mills in North Adams and Adams were held the days before and after the Williamstown event.

Twenty-six buildings, the store and dwelling, the club building, and unimproved land were sold for \$103,000. More than 300 people turned out for the three-hour proceedings. Several tenants were able to purchase their homes, but a fair number of real estate developers bought properties that day too.

In 1939 the mill property was acquired by Gevaert, a Dutch company that was moving out of Holland to escape the Nazis. At the height of its operations, Gevaert Company of America employed 450 local residents in the manufacture of photographic paper. In 1944, a large addition was built on the east end of the mill and a

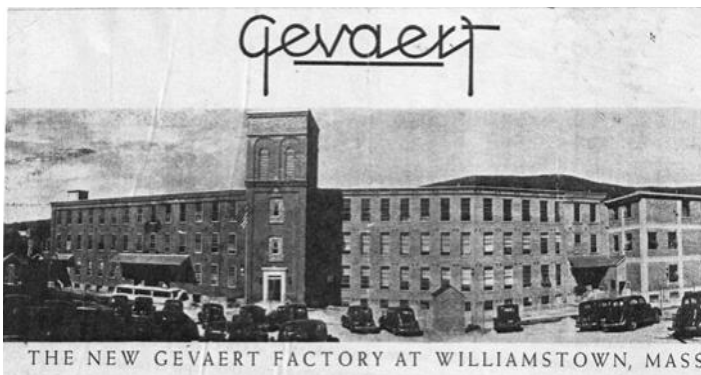


Image from Gevaert advertisement, c. 1940

separate lab building was constructed on the property.

After Gevaert closed in 1948, the building was used from the mid 1950s through the 1980s by various operations, including a photocopy unit of Sperry Rand, the Anken Chemical and Film Corporation, and then Photech Imaging Systems, which made typesetting paper and photographic film for newspapers until 1988.

In 1989 the building was purchased by the Photech Acquisition Corp of Rochester, NY and, later that year, after the company fell behind in its water and tax bills, they just up and left. The company went bankrupt and dissolved shortly after abandoning the Williamstown site. The Selectmen placed a lien on the property that same year.

The mill sat unused for about five years. With \$900,000 owed, the property legally belonged to the Williamstown Tax Collector, who could have sold it to try to recoup monies owed, but the buildings and property were in such poor condition and contained so many environmentally hazardous areas requiring cleanup, that no developer would touch it.

In 2002, \$750,000 was acquired from the state for clean-up of the 4.8-acre property, and two buildings - the laboratory and barrel storage building - were immediately demolished. In 2003 a section of the old mill building's roof collapsed, and that entire structure was razed in



Roof collapse of mill building, 2002

2005. The 1944 addition to the east end of the mill, colloquially referred to as "The Cube," was in the best condition and was left standing.

The western end, which was the oldest and of the most architectural interest, was demolished first, as water damage had severely rotted and weakened the center portion of the building, which had begun to collapse southward, away from the river. Hazardous waste clean-up was initiated. Floor tile, a lot of transite -- a hard, thick asbestos wall covering used as fireproofing -- old chemical tanks, and piping were among the materials removed. In all, about \$2 million was spent on the clean-up process over the years. An Environmental Protection Agency grant had paid for soil remediation well before the town sold the land to the Berkshire Housing Development

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Hanlon Family continued

community in town and had a firm commitment to St. Patrick's, the Irish Church. Charlie was the "bread winner," working for the railroad, and Nora controlled the family and the house. Four children (Chuck, Peggy, Mary, and Jane) soon filled the house between 1923 to 1929. The house filled when Nora's sister, Mary O'Donnell, arrived with her three children, Joe, Margaret, and Jimmy, after Mary's husband passed away. Charlie Hanlon was a strong believer in family and when Nora asked if her sister Mary might occupy the upstairs apartment and provide assistance in helping the finances of the family, Char-

Hanlon Family, 1931: parents Nora and Charles with (left to right) Chuck, Peggy, Jane, and Mary



lie agreed to the plan. Everyone chipped in to make family life work "Down the House."

The family raised chickens, planted fruit trees, and had a huge garden sufficient to feed everyone in the house. Nora Hanlon's goals were for the children to be industrious and well-rounded with education, music and religion. Piano lessons were a must but, as Mary would tell us kids, it wasn't for her. Each child would go through the ritual of music lessons, which failed to hold their interest. Mary and Jane soon acquired a paper route in the Cole Avenue area and knew all the residents and their families.

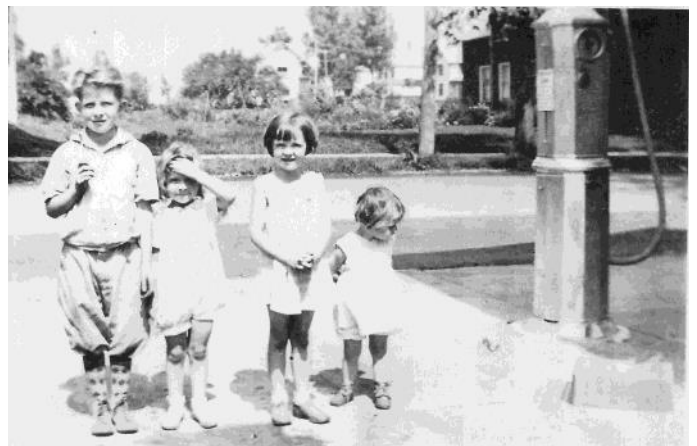
Mary was the most outgoing and mischievous of the four Hanlon kids, guiding the others into creative escapades that often got them in trouble. Church ladies with fancy hats would often visit their mother. The kids were curious about the fruit on those fancy hats. Mary led them into dismantling a hat to see if the fruits were real. The disappointment led them to make a quick repair job with a flour and water paste that barely held the fruit to the hat.

Mary and Jane had exceptional teachers in their parents. Grandma would feed hungry hobos, who came up from the railroad yard, from their back door. The location was important because she didn't want the individuals she was helping to feel uncomfortable. I knew that the stories were true when, one day in 1976, I was helping Mary clean under a porch on the side of the house and noticed some chalk scratch marks on the wall. I asked Mary if some kids had written on the house. She told me that the hobos often left messages under porches as they traveled through a town, a kind of "Hobo's newspaper."

When asked what the message said, Mary indicated that it meant, "A good man lives here. Don't 'screw' with his family." Later, I researched the symbols and was impressed that they had telegraphed a message to people that was seldom seen in public.

"Grampa" Charlie had a humane side to him as well. He knew many families with sons in the military during WWII. On several occasions, when he became aware of troops traveling by train to Boston from boot camp in New York state, he was unable to communicate to families what was actually going on and held to the adage, "loose lips sink ships." He would contact only the father and indicate "You have a package coming into the loading platform tomorrow around noon." The fathers simply kept the information to themselves and would show up down at the station a few minutes before the aforementioned time with their wife and children. They would see the train coming and start waving madly as local boys, who knew where they were, would wave out of the train. In many cases these were the last moments that families would see their sons. The families would then walk away from the station silent as to any activities that may have occurred on the platform, but always thankful for that last opportunity.

The House became the foundation for family life celebrating religious events: baptisms, first communion, confirmation, weddings, Easter, Christmas, wakes, and funerals. The graduations, sport celebrations, and returns from military duty were all celebrated with Mary and Jane Hanlon. As adults they became the ring masters,



The Hanlon children stand by a gas pump on Cole Avenue (left to right) Chuck, Mary, Peggy, and Jane

guiding the family through the years. Mary would perform the manual work of preparing "The House," inside and out, with each event's unique decorations, while Jane performed her magic, creating feasts to please all the families in attendance.

Mary had a soft spot for all the children in the family, insuring a unique experience for all, from colored ice cream forms packed in dry ice that would be delivered from Albany for Christmas and Easter to making sure that all the children received gifts, no matter how hard

Hanlon Family continued on page 6

Station Mill continued

Corporation (BHDC) for \$1.

Talk began of building housing on the mill site as early as 1988. Luxury, elderly, and affordable housing were all proposed at various times, some hoping to incorporate some remnants of the mill buildings, but ultimately all except the Cube were demolished before construction finally began in 2020. After six years of negotiations and seeking funding, BHDC broke ground in early 2020 on a 41-unit housing development project on the mill site, which is expected to be ready for occupancy in July of 2021.



The Cube, photographed by Brian O'Grady, August 2020

The brick siding and wall materials were removed from the Cube, leaving only the support pillars, floors, and roof. About \$240,000 was paid for removal of asbestos, and an additional \$20,000 was spent to remove the large amounts of pigeon guano on the roof. When finished, that structure will hold 22 mostly one-bedroom units, with a couple of two-bedroom apartments, a community room, and offices for the property management staff. Three townhouse buildings will surround the Cube and will contain an additional 19 units of one-, two-



Aerial view of Photek construction site by Carl Villanueva



The site is prepared for the townhouses—Mill Street seen in background, photographed by Brian O'Grady, August 2020

and three-bedroom apartments. These will feature a typical New England-style architecture, while the Cube will have a more modern, postindustrial feel, using a variety of siding materials, including metal panels.

Thirteen units will be set aside as affordable units for renters who make less than 30 percent of the area median income (or about \$30,000 for a family of five), and the rental rate would be 30 percent of their income. The rest of the units will be available to renters who make less than 60 percent of the area median income (or about \$55,000 yearly for a family of five). That would mean that



One set of townhouses, overlooking the river, photographed by David Lachman, November 2020

a one-bedroom would cost \$965 per month, a two-bedroom would go for about \$1,200 per month and a three-bedroom would cost \$1,350 monthly.

In the mid-20th-century the Mill Village was a thriving neighborhood with its own school, store, and clubhouse, along with steady employment at the mill. Until late in that century Eddie's Market, Leo's Lunchonette, Rickert Electric, and The Spirit Shop remained a bastion of retail property outside the Village Business District on Spring and Water streets. The school building served as the Williamstown Youth Center for many years, with the popular and much missed Women's Exchange across the street. These additional housing units – projected to be ready for occupancy in the summer of 2021 – will ensure that the Mill Village remains one of Williamstown's outstanding family neighborhoods.

Hanlon Family continued

the times were. Mary and Jane even hosted a party for the Moon Landing in 1969 with all the families surrounding a color TV in the formal living room, a room we seldom had permission to enter, as it was reserved for receiving formal guests, Grandma's friends, or the parish priests.

Mary and Jane worked together to achieve their



Jane Hanlon's 1947 Williamstown High School yearbook entry

dreams. Jane came home from work one day to find a huge hole had been dug alongside the basement in back. Trained as a hairdresser, Jane was working for someone else at the time. She inquired of Mary, "What's the big hole for?" Mary simply turned and said, "For your new beauty salon." Jane had only wished to get to that point, but Mary was going to make her dream a reality. Mary had a contractor friend named Dean and always had wanted to surprise Jane. She succeeded that day, back in 1966. Jane saw customers until 2018, and her last customer to visit was Red Robinson.

Jane was a respected businesswoman in town, and a member of the Williamstown Savings Bank Board of Trustees. Both Mary and Jane enjoyed Williamstown to the fullest. They were active members in Williamstown High School's Fabulous Forties Group, a group based on members of the 1940s graduation classes. Jane and Mary knew every family on Cole Avenue.

They were landlords for about 60 years, providing a comfortable, safe home for many families like the Burnses (meat inspectors); the Cunninghams, lifelong family friends; the nephews; four elderly women who proved to be quiet as mice; and a retired librarian, Mary McNerney, who always enjoyed the view of Cole Avenue from the second floor.



Jane Hanlon, c. 2000

Jane was able to stay in her house without going to a nursing home. It was the family wish that she pass in the house she loved so dearly and which held so many memories of family and friends. When Jane passed, there was a distinct energy level change in the feel of The House. It is difficult to explain the energy reduction; it's similar to a building that had a loud ventilation system and, due to an electrical storm, the power went out leaving an eerie silence. The House knew she was at rest, the last Cole Avenue resident from the 1920s.



Yankee Fiddlers Nelson A. Roberts of Williamstown and Jesse Maynard of Hancock (Photo by Elliot Fenander)

Memories Wanted

Jeffrey Gaskill is working to document local musicians, bands, callers, square dances and kitchen parties, as well as dance barns and dance halls of the 30's, 40's, 50's (and earlier) and is asking the community for help.

Anyone with family memories, images, recordings, or artifacts to share is encouraged to contact Jeff by email at jeffreygaskill@gmail.com about those experiences.

The museum is open to visitors!

WHM Hours:

Saturdays: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The museum is also open by appointment.

Masks are required for entry.

Visit our exhibit

"Woman Suffrage: A Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment in Williamstown and Beyond"

Please call or email 413-458-2160 or sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org.



"The House," 242 Cole Avenue, 2018

Williamstown Historical Museum

2020-2021 Programs

Upcoming WHM programs will be presented online via Zoom Webinar. Please join us for a great series of lectures:

November 14, 2020, 11 a.m. — "The Chadwells of Williamstown," presented by Dustin Griffin with an introduction by Allen Hart

January 2021 — "The 1918 Flu," presented by Dusty Bahlman

March 2021 — Christine DeLucia, Williams College Assistant Professor of History, focusing on Native American Histories — program title TBD

May 2021 — TBD



Visit the Woman Suffrage exhibit at the WHM and learn more about these remarkable women of Williamstown—all firsts in their fields in town. Clockwise from top left, Katherine Wyckoff, Mildred Boardman Leigh, Helen Renzi, and Margaret Hart.

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. via Zoom.

On December 3, 2020 the group will discuss *Little Heathens* by Mildred Armstrong Kalish.

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

Zoom login for December 3, 2020, 1 p.m. book group:

<https://zoom.us/j/92959029105>

Meeting ID: 929 5902 9105

Volunteer Opportunity Audiobook Recording Project

The Williamstown Historical Museum is recording *Williamstown the First 250 Years* as an audiobook. A grant from the Fund for Williamstown, a fund of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, provided financial support for the recording equipment for this project. The recording will make this book accessible to a broader portion of the population and will be available online for all at no cost.

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

413-458-2160 or

sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org

Williamstown Historical Museum

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To Join or Make a Donation Online:

www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org

Featured Photos: Just a few of the dramatic changes in Williamstown in 2020



Coronavirus clears the street. Spring Street looking south. The photo on the left was taken on April 10, 2008, by Mike Miller and the photo on the right was taken on April 3, 2020, by James Grady.



Spring Street looking north. An empty Spring Street, photographed by James Grady on April 3, 2020, on the right. The image on the left was taken on October 15, 2008, by Mike Miller.



Clockwise from photo above: The Williams Inn is pictured in 1974, around the time it opened, the Williams Inn is prepared for demolition in August 2020, photo by Brian O'Grady, the Williams Inn during demolition, photo by Carl Villanueva.

Do you have photographs of changes in Williamstown that you are willing to share with the museum? If so, please call or email Sarah at 413-458-2160 or sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org.

