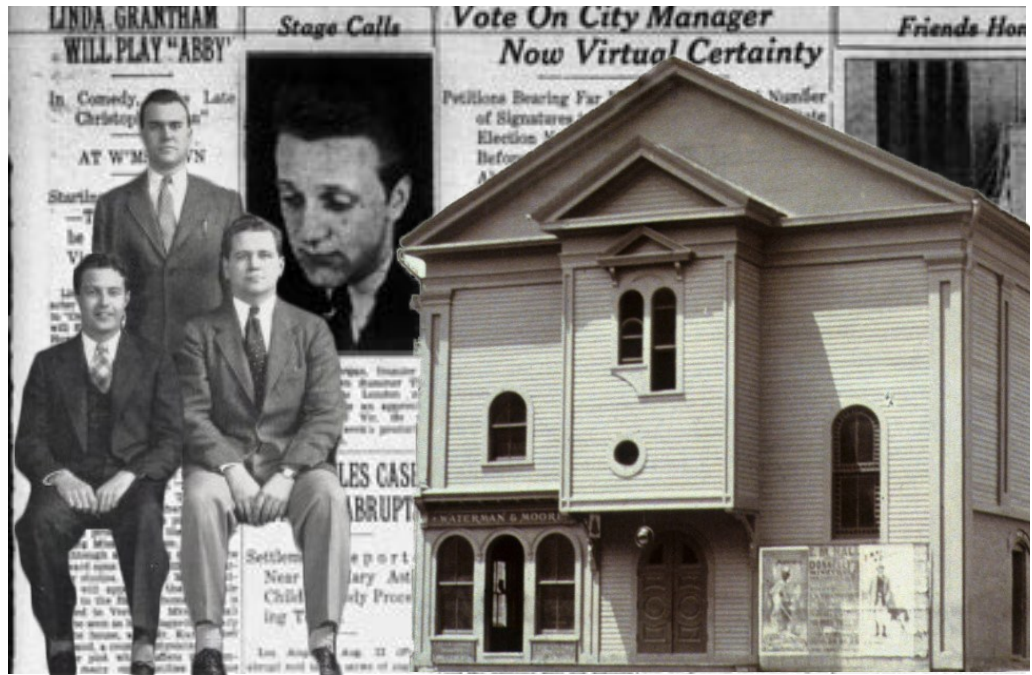


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Williams professor Max Flowers and students Talcott B. Clapp, Gordon Kay and Thomas Morgan (L-R above) were heavily involved in local theater. In 1936 and 1937, the students organized a summer theater in the old Opera House, pictured.

The First Williamstown Summer Theater

By Dustin Griffin

Most people know that the Williamstown Theater Festival, formerly called the Williamstown Summer Theater, was founded in 1955. But few probably know that back in the 1930s there was an earlier "Williamstown Summer Theater" that had nothing to do with the WTF of today.

In the spring of 1936 three Williams sophomores – Talcott B. ("Teeb") Clapp, Gordon Kay, and Thomas Morgan, all members of the class of 1938 and members of the Little Theater, a student group that put on evenings of one-act plays, and of Cap & Bells, the college's major + dramatic organization – decided to organize what they called a "co-operative summer theater." There had long been a lively theatrical culture at Williams during the academic year, but there was little theater in the Berkshires in the summer, apart from the Berkshire Theater Festival in Stockbridge, which put on 8-10 plays a summer. (The Colonial Theater in Pittsfield, which hosted traveling productions, closed in 1934, and reopened in 1937 as a movie theater.) Morgan and Clapp constituted the production staff of the new organization, Morgan the general manager and Clapp the stage manager. They raised money from the Rotary Club and hastily assembled an acting company of local amateurs, including Williams students – Gordon Kay was a talented character actor – Bennington girls, Williams faculty, and several faculty and staff wives. They were joined by Linda Grantham, a drama school graduate with some summer stock experience. As director of the productions, they hired S. Wesley McKee, a recent graduate of the Yale Drama School who had directed summer theater in Connecticut in 1934 and 1935, and established himself as an itinerant director-for-hire.

Summer Theater continued on page 3

Land Acknowledgement

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.

President's Remarks

Life at the Museum has been busy and fruitful in the last three months. This may be a result of growing comfort with pandemic restrictions combined with growing hopes for better days ahead. Here are some reasons why we are encouraged:



Linda Conway

- We now have an intern, Kendall McGowan, and three new volunteers and are concentrating on catching up on cataloging and other tasks that have been waiting in the wings.
- On Saturdays, our weekly open day, we welcome both visitors and members, many of whom are grateful to find a spot open for entertainment and education. The "Woman Suffrage" temporary exhibit will remain up into the spring, so please come see it and learn about the many women in our area who were important to the movement.
- The barn project is moving ahead on schedule, with disassembly of the Dolan Barn on Green River Road to take place as early as late March, depending on weather conditions. Watch for photos!
- Our series of Zoom lectures continues successfully. The number of attendees is greater for each one, with 80 people tuning in to hear Dusty Bahlman speak on the 1918 epidemic in Williamstown in January. Coming up on March 27 is "Native American Names for Local Places" by Williams Professor Christine DeLucia.
- December 30 marked the end of our fiscal year, and one of the most significant committee reports was that of the Membership Committee, headed by Patricia Greenberg. Pat reported that we have 26 new members since January 1, 2020, as well as renewals from several former members. We consider this a "roll," and hope you will help us keep the ball rolling by recommending WHM membership to neighbors and friends. See the application form in this newsletter, and joining online is always a possibility.

All of us are looking ahead to opportunities to meet safely as vaccinations increase, and the museum is planning possible outdoor activities. Stay tuned!

Mission and Supporting Statements

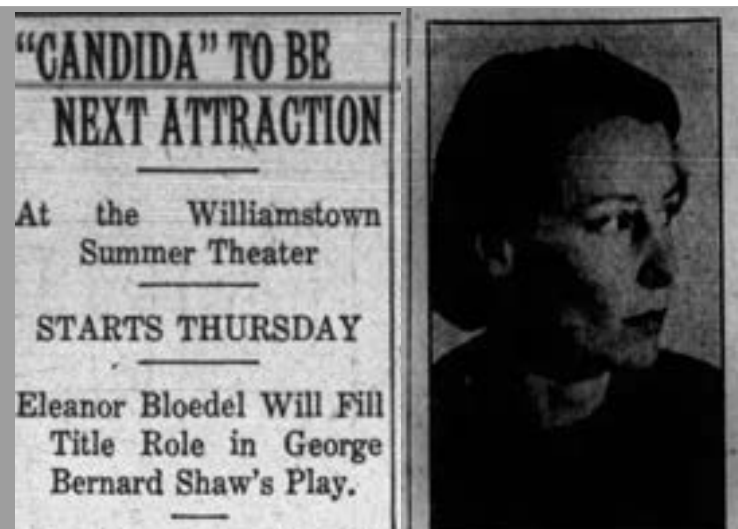
The purpose of the Williamstown Historical Museum is to promote interest in the history of the Williamstown area by collecting, cataloging, and preserving items of historical significance, and to increase the public's knowledge of Williamstown's past through educational exhibits, programs, events, research, publications, and any other functions which 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 early 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.



The Dolan Barn, pictured here in its current location on Green River Road, will be disassembled as soon as this spring and will eventually be rebuilt near the museum.



A 1936 article in *The North Adams Transcript* describes some of the plays offered in the Williamstown Summer Theater's inaugural season. One was *Candida*, headlined by longtime Williamstown resident Eleanor Bloedel, pictured, who returned for seasons in 1937 and the 1950s.

The new Williamstown Summer Theater put on an eight-week season in July and August of 1936, a new play every week. This was back in the days before the Adams Memorial Theater was built. The founders initially planned to put on plays in a barn on Rt. 7 south of town that later became the 1896 House restaurant, but then secured access to the Williamstown Opera House on Water St., where they arranged to put on three performances a week in the 300-seat auditorium on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. During the day the company would rehearse the next week's play. Tickets were only 55 cents (35 cents for children), and season tickets were available. The plays, mostly forgotten now but popular in their day, were chosen to appeal to "every variety of taste." But they tended toward light, summer fare, including J. Frank Davis's *"Gold in the Hills; or, The Dead Sister's Secret"* (a 1929 melodrama), George Kelly's *"The Torchbearers"* (a 1922 comedy about community theater), and Arnold Ridley's *"The Ghost Train"* (a mystery thriller). The most ambitious production was George Bernard Shaw's *"Candida"* (1894), with Eleanor Bloedel (a staff wife, and the mother of Pam Weatherbee, still a Williamstown resident) and William J. Sprague (a Williams undergrad who aspired to a career on the stage) in the lead roles. It played to enthusiastic audiences, including a capacity crowd on Saturday night.

The season was a critical success, with glowing reviews in local papers. Thus encouraged, the producers set their sights higher for the summer of 1937. McKee was again hired as director, and he brought with him several professional actors to play the leads, including Maury Tuckerman, a New York actor who had some Broadway credits, and Marion Rooney, an instructor at the Yale Drama School, as well as Robert Crane, Joy Higgins, and William Whitehead, who had all played summer stock around the northeast for several years. The company also included several actors who returned from 1936, including William Sprague and Gordon Kay, Mary Lou Taylor (a Bennington student), Isabel Calaine (a Wheaton College student), as well as Linda Grantham. (The

acting company of today's Williamstown Theater Festival has long included some local amateurs alongside professional actors.) For the 1937 season Williams undergrads again served as Business Manager, Stage Manager, Property Manager, and House Manager. Bennington students designed the sets. Constance Welch from the Yale Drama School was brought in to run the "Williamstown School of the Theater," which enrolled seven apprentice actors. Ticket prices were doubled, to \$1.10. Members of the company were put up in a college fraternity house (Theta Delta Chi, now Mears House, on Park St.)

Again there were eight plays in eight weeks, this time including plays that had enjoyed successful productions on Broadway in recent years (Samson Raphaelson's *"Accent on Youth,"* a 1934 comedy; Philip Barry's *"Spring Dance"* from 1936) and two plays that had already become modern classics, Sean O'Casey's *"Juno and the Paycock"* (1924), with Marion Rooney in the title role, and *"Candida,"* brought back from the 1936 season, with Mrs. Bloedel again in the lead. She also starred in Clement Dane's *"Bill of Divorcement."*

The 1937 season was also critically successful, but it struggled financially to meet its expenses, apparently failing to sell enough tickets. And the three Williams students who founded the theater were all scheduled to graduate in June 1938. So in the spring of 1938 a newly formed Williamstown Summer Theater Association took over management of the theater, with a board of local residents, including several of the actors who had performed in previous seasons. President of the board was Mary Dempsey, who was then serving as the town's Postmaster. Another member was the president of the Williamstown National Bank. They determined that to be successful they would need to sell 200 subscriptions to a four-week season. They planned to put on four plays, including Shaw's *"Arms and the Man"* (1894) and Ferenc Molnar's *"Liliom"* (a 1909 drama that was a hit on Broadway in 1921 and was later the basis for the Rogers and Hammerstein *"Carousel"* in 1945).

The board hired McKee to return as director, and he arranged to bring four Equity actors – none of them headliners and apparently available at short notice – who would be joined by returning local amateurs, including Eleanor Bloedel and Hallett Smith (an English professor at Williams). But everything depended on selling 200 subscriptions. By July 12 the Theater Association had only sold sixty, and on July 20 decided that they had to cancel the season. And thus the Williamstown Summer Theater came to an end after only two seasons.

Read the [extended article](http://williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org) at williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org.



In 1938, control of the Williamstown Summer Theater was transferred from its student founders to a board of local residents. In a fundraising campaign, they only sold 60 out of their goal of 200 subscriptions, ending the festival until its return in 1955.



In 1965, a committee planning Williamstown's bicentennial celebration sought to represent the area's Indigenous history.

The source they looked to was not the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, who had lived in this region long before Williamstown's founding, and who were residing in Wisconsin at the time.

Although generalized and inaccurate presentations of Indigenous history were common in decades past, the museum is striving to improve its representation of Stockbridge-Munsee history.

Another look at the 1965 Bicentennial

By Kendall McGowan

As an intern getting my first experience in cataloging with the WHM this winter, I was hoping to encounter surprises in the archives. Almost immediately, I struck upon a small mystery. It came in the form of photos of Williamstown's bicentennial, celebrated by residents in 1965, to commemorate the town's incorporation, which included acquiring its current name. The bicentennial planning committee arranged a number of activities, including parades, shows, and historical reenactments. Several of the pictures I found showed people in Native American-style dress participating in the celebration, dancing, performing rituals, and constructing teepees. This puzzled me, as the event whose anniversary was being commemorated-- the official naming and establishment of a white settlement-- took place in 1765, in the context of a widespread colonial effort to push Indigenous peoples off their lands, including the Mohican and Munsee people in what is now known as Western Massachusetts.

My curiosity led me to carry out some research and I found that, as an apparent effort to connect to the historical presence of Indigenous peoples in the area, white students from Springfield College's Hosaga Club were hired by the planning committee to put on this performance. According to committee records, the group was paid \$150 and their food and lodging were provided by residents. I did not find any evidence that the members of the club or the bicentennial committee made any effort to reach out to or learn the history or even the name of the Mohican people, who inhabited this region at the time of the town's settlement.

If members of the Hosaga Club or the bicentennial committee had tried to contact Mohican community members, they might have discovered a more nuanced version of Williamstown's history. As I looked into the bicentennial and began to research Mohican history, I started to compare the portrayal of Native Americans at the bicentennial to the reality of the Mohican Community's experience over the past two centuries. By 1765, Europeans had already been in this region for a century and a half, according to Tribal Member Edwin Martin on the official Mohican [website](#). In the 17th and 18th centuries, the resource- and culturally-rich Mohican society had been challenged and diminished by previously irrelevant factors like diseases, privatization of land, competition for resources, and white efforts to replace the existing culture and language with their own. Like other Native groups in the area, the Mohicans went on to support the colonists against the British in the Revolutionary War. In the first half of the 19th century, however, white greed for land pushed the Mohican community from one of their remaining villages in Massachusetts-- Wnahktukuk, renamed Stockbridge-- to land donated by the Oneida near Syracuse, NY, then to land in Wisconsin. There they were joined by a group of Munsee people and became known as the Stockbridge-Munsee.

The land in Wisconsin was covered by pine forest, with soil too swampy for farming. This, combined with broken promises by the government to provide adequate services in the area, led to conditions of poverty for many living there. To survive, many Stockbridge-Munsee people were forced to sell valuable cultural artifacts, the rights to lumber on their land, and the land itself. Through the early 20th century and the Great Depression, these challenges were only compound-

ed. By 1965, policy changes and community effort meant the Stockbridge-Munsee could regain some of their land and reorganize their tribal government. However, the centuries of displacement, governmental mistreatment, and resource loss that occurred between 1765 and 1965 had imparted compounding and negative consequences for the Stockbridge-Munsee. With this perspective, it is clear that there was a disconnect between the bicentennial performances and the true Indigenous history of the area which they sought to represent.

The white members of Springfield College's Hosaga Club were not alone in acting out Native American stereotypes, a practice today known as "redface." Throughout the 20th century, the practice was ubiquitous in movies, sports, Halloween costumes, and even children's games. While many depictions were deliberately disparaging, others, like the Hosaga Club, professed to be well-intentioned. A pamphlet produced by the club states that the group was founded in 1947 in order to "study the history, ritual, art, dress and dance of native American Indians," with the ultimate goal of "realization of the wealth to be found in [their] cultures." While this sounds like a well-meaning goal, portrayals

**Bicentennial Celebration
of
Incorporation
of
Williamstown
Attend These Events
This Week-end**



Headdresses are only worn by a few Plains tribes, and never by the Mohicans, but they were depicted in promotions of the bicentennial and at the event. The suggestion that only a generalized Native American history is available is untrue.

of Indigenous people as exotic or foreign have long been used to justify historical and ongoing violence against them by the government. Other common misconceptions include the belief that Indigenous communities no longer have a significant presence at all, or are otherwise incapable of representing themselves, or that the diverse cultures of the 574 federally recognized tribes in the US are easily studied or interchangeable.

These falsehoods can lead to cultural erasure or a denial of necessary resources or attention. When a role depicting an Indigenous person is given to a white performer instead of one from that background, they are denied not only the job but control over how Indigenous communities are presented to the world.

The WHM is committed to presenting an honest story of the region, and that story emerges over time. We are working to be thoughtful about how the history of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community is depicted at the Williamstown Historical Museum. In collaboration with the Stockbridge-Munsee Community's Historic Preservation Office in town, we are revising our section on local Indigenous history and including more of this history throughout the museum. Every trip into our archives is capable of exciting curiosity and bringing up lessons like this one, which is why ongoing preservation and use of the WHM collection is so important!



*Williamstown and
Williams College
Further Explorations
in Local History*

By Dustin Griffin
Available spring 2021

Dustin Griffin has produced a sequel to *Williamstown and Williams College: Explorations in Local History* (2018). Like Griffin's previous book, this volume is a collection of microhistories, each of them focused on a single narrowly defined topic in the local history of Williamstown and its most notable local institution, Williams College. Griffin writes clearly and engagingly about places in Williamstown, events in the history of the town and college from the 18th century to the 1960s, and remarkable people, from a Williams College president to a four-generation local Black family. Based on documentary research, this book is designed to be accessible to the general reader. Contact the museum for a copy of the book or more information.

Price \$20

Other books for sale

Support the WHM and local history!

Williamstown the First 250 Years, 1753-2003
Hard cover \$20.00; Soft cover \$8.00

*Williamstown and Williams College
Explorations in Local History*
Dustin Griffin
\$20.00

Yankee Fiddler
Phillip Marshall Brown
\$10.00

*Massachusetts in the
Woman Suffrage Movement*
Barbara F. Berenson
\$20.00

Contact the museum to inquire about purchasing books.
sarah@williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org
413.458.2160



Williamstown's first meetinghouse (above) was built within a few years of the town's incorporation and stood for more than six decades. However, by the middle of its life, a second meetinghouse (right) was built, stealing from its relevance.



Williamstown's First Meetinghouse

By Patricia Leach

In 1765, at the incorporation of our town as "Williams Town," there was not a true meetinghouse, per se. Services featuring our newly settled minister, Yale graduate Whitman Welch, were held in the young settlement's log schoolhouse. But soon, as early as 1766, the need for a dedicated meetinghouse was realized. Although it was not an expensive project — its cost was approximately \$600 and many white oak trees, a primary building material, were available nearby — construction went slowly. By 1768, however, a tiny 40 x 30 ft meetinghouse was established on the Square (now known as Field Park).

As our revered Williamstown historian, Arthur Latham Perry, tells us: "Lumber was exceedingly abundant....the sills and corner-posts...the rafters and studs and braces, and certainly all the pins that in those days fastened the [white oak] timbers together....these were likely 'sawed out at John Smedley's mill, two miles north of the building site, along a fair road passing near what is now the Vermont line.'" While there were other local options, Smedley's brother served on the first meetinghouse building committee and might be expected to have influenced the choice of a supplier. But what did this original little meetinghouse look like?

Perry tells us this: "The ridge pole ran north and south the longer way of the building, which was 40 feet. The roof was plain, without belfry, or tower, or other protuberance whatever. The only door was in the centre of the east side; the only aisle led straight from the door to the pulpit, which filled the center of the west side within; the pews rose up at a slight angle on both sides of the aisle to the north and

south ends, which were thirty feet each; there were two galleries on these ends, reached by stairways on either side of the pulpit; the pulpit was a high one, as was universal in those days, and the preacher preached at right angles to the people; that is to say, the audience on the south side of the aisle below and above fronted [faced] exactly the audience on the north side below and above; *it is no more than charity allows us moderns to infer, that the young people (perhaps the old ones too) watched each other more than they watched the minister (this author's italics).* The windows were few, and there was no chimney at all, consequently the room was relatively dark and cold; the site was high, in the middle of Main Street and at the junction of that with two cross streets, exposed to all winds in all weathers, but somewhat protected, after all, in the fact that there was no door or other opening on the west side or either end."

The little building hosted meetings of the Proprietors as well as church services. From ca. 1795, it also accommodated town meetings (until 1828) along with "schools" in the summer until well into the 19th c. By that time the meetinghouse's interior, which still possessed its pulpit, had degenerated into a "dark and dismal den" "peopled by spooks" according to one young scholar. And, in 1828, someone set it on fire and in no time, it lay in ashes. But even before its sorry end in the fire of 1828, it had lost its prominent position on the Square: in 1796, a new meetinghouse was proposed. And, to give this new building pride-of-place, the old meetinghouse was moved further west and pivoted around. By 1798, a new Second Meetinghouse, "more than twice the size" of its tiny predecessor, was hosting Williams College Commencement.

For more on our meetinghouses, watch for Patricia Leach's lecture on May 29.

Upcoming lectures

Please join us at these free events through Zoom. Links will be available on our website and members will receive email notification.

Saturday, March 27, 11 a.m.

**Many Stories in the Land: Revisiting
'Williamstown' and its meanings – Past, Present,
and Future**

**Presented by Christine DeLucia, Assistant Professor
of History at Williams College**

What does it mean to look past the Euro-colonial experiences and labels commemorated in the lands around us? Join us at this event to learn about the vital ongoing work done by the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Community and about ways to engage with Native/Indigenous stewardship, interpretation, and sovereignty. We will reconsider the complex stories of seemingly familiar historical documents, objects, and sites, through methods that attest to the pressures and ongoing legacies of colonization.

Saturday, April 17, 11 a.m.

The History of Oblong Road

Presented by Dustin Griffin,

This presentation will paint a picture of life in Williamstown through the lens of Oblong Road, going back to the 19th century. It covers notable houses, schools, residents, and farms including Field Farm and Cricket Creek.

Saturday, May 29, 11 a.m.

**The Several Williamstown
Meetinghouses**

Presented by Patricia Leach

Find a preview of this lecture on page 6.

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.

Digital Research Resources Available at the WHM!



Visit the Williamstown Historical Museum to access digital research resources including Newspapers.com. Staff and greeters are available to get you started on your research today!

You may also access our collection online by visiting
www.williamstown.pastperfectonline.com.



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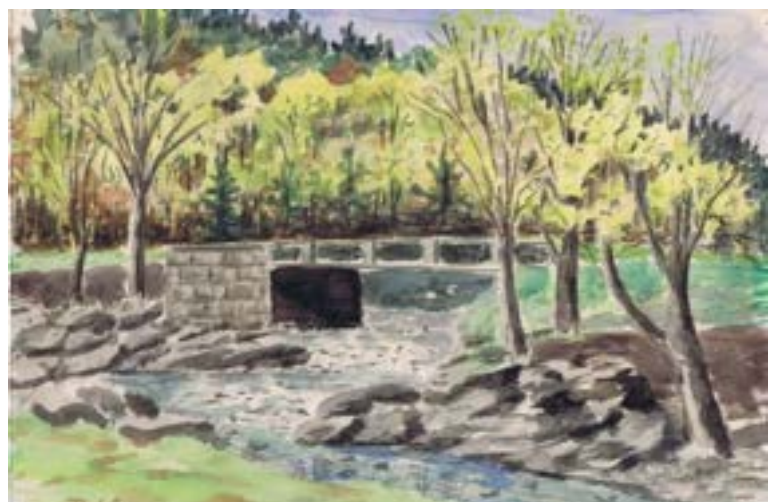
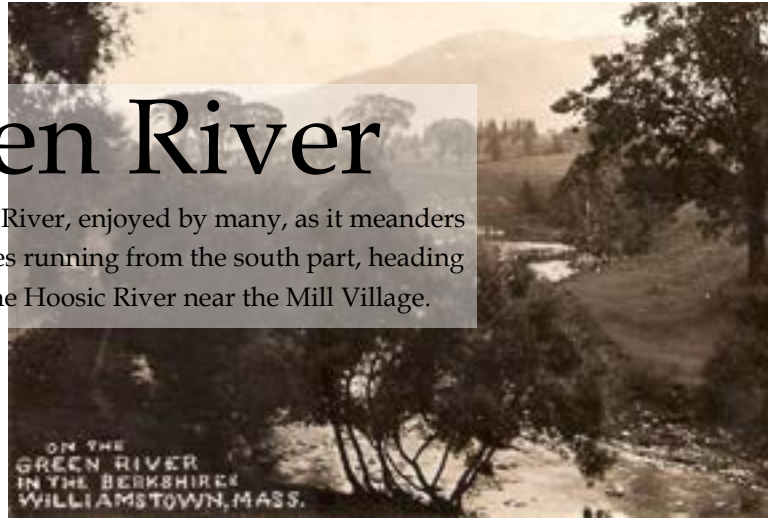
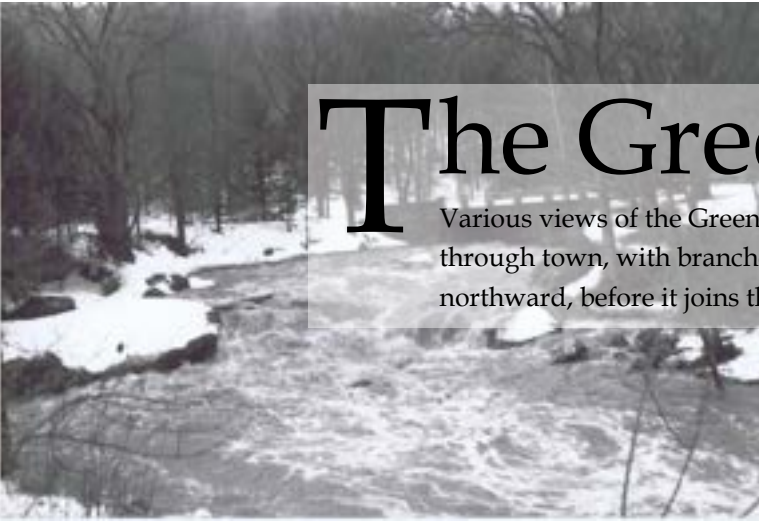
To Join or Make a Donation Online:

www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org



The Green River

Various views of the Green River, enjoyed by many, as it meanders through town, with branches running from the south part, heading northward, before it joins the Hoosic River near the Mill Village.



THE FALLS, GREEN RIVER, WILLIAMSTOWN, MASS.