

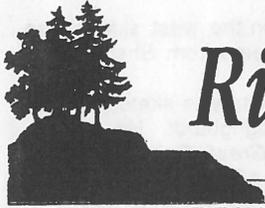
# RIVER WALK

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## History Underfoot



Bernard A. Drew



# River Walk: History Underfoot

## GREAT BARRINGTON'S DOWNTOWN GREENWAY ALONG THE HOUSATONIC RIVER

The Housatonic River Walk in Great Barrington, Massachusetts -- the entrance is between Riverbank House and Brooks' Drugs on Main Street -- is a well-manicured, undulating, tree-shaded path beside a fast-flowing river.

And it's a whole lot more.

This one bend in the river offers a microcosm of the use and some of the misuse of the entire waterway over the past three centuries. And the River Walk sets a course for the future.

Beneath the walkway is history, some of it mundane, most of it interesting, a little of it surprising and fascinating.

What follows is an attempt to trace the growth of this small village neighborhood, from Native American and early colonial and industrial times through residential, commercial, educational and religious use.

On our trek through the past we'll find a grist mill, two inns and a jail, a girls' boarding school, a photography studio, a pharmacy, several residences and a pair of parking lots -- yes, even the pavement has a story to tell.

We'll meet a rubbermaker, a tanner and a telephone operator, a priest, two Minutemen, an undertaker and a bus driver.

We'll discover a spunky war heroine, an avowed spiritualist, a former oil well operator, a mystery woman from New York City and the best judge of cheese in Berkshire County.

And we'll learn about a raid to lower a dam, a brilliant electrical experiment literally cut short by a wrench falling into the works and a house moving blocked by a stubborn tree lover.

The history is annotated as inobtrusively as possible for readers who wish to pursue individual topics on their own.

Enjoy an armchair tour.

Better yet, visit the River Walk or take part in one of the scheduled work sessions!

-- Bernard A. Drew

### NATIVE AMERICANS, FISHERS & HUNTERS

Hunting and fishing Mahicans trod the banks of the Housatonic River in South Berkshire until the early 1700s.

Noting "a tradition that there was a considerable Indian settlement at this spot..." the Rev. Sylvester Burt wrote in the earliest history of this region, *A History of the County of Berkshire, Massachusetts* (1829): "...It is known that as early as 1726, the river used to be crossed half a mile below the Bridge, at what was then called the 'Great Wigwam'..."

Burt mentions two geographic landmarks which bracket the present-day River Walk. He refers to the "Great Bridge," better known now as the Brown Bridge, which spans the Housatonic at the north end of Main Street.

The fordway he describes long ago disappeared. Town historian Charles J. Taylor (1824-1904) identified it as being behind the Congregational Church on Main Street, "directly east of the foot of Church street."

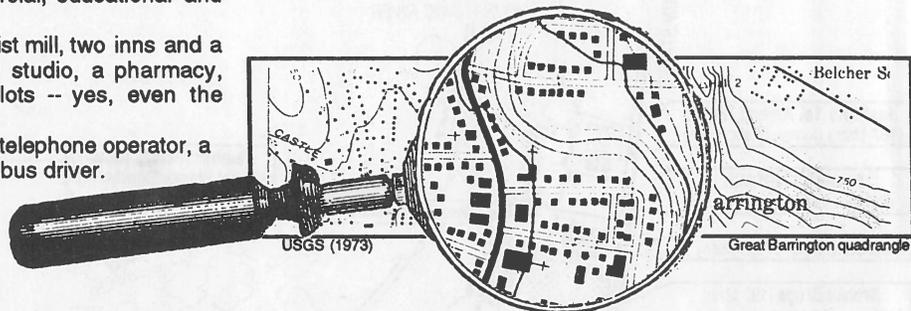
"The Indians who inhabited the southern portion of Berkshire, at the time of settlement by whites in 1725, were few in number, there being only two small settlements; but they formerly had been quite numerous and had dwelt here for a very long number of years..." amplified Harry C. Crafts in a talk before the Great Barrington Rotary Club. (*Berkshire Courier*, 22 January 1935)

It takes little stretch of the imagination to envision those Stockbridge Mahicans hunting along or fishing from the bank which is now the River Walk. Taylor collected arrow and tool

heads along the river, in his day. More recently River Walk volunteer Comstock Small discovered a projectile point during clearing.

Benjamin Wadsworth's published journal of a trip in 1694 from Boston to Albany offers an early description of the Housatonic River here. On 10 August that year, Wadsworth, a Boston clergyman, and party "took up our lodgings, about sundown, in ye woods, in a place called Ousetonuck, formerly inhabited by Indians. Thro this place runs a very curious river, the same (which some say) runs through Stradford; and it has, on each side, several parcels of pleasant, fertile, intervale land."

Wadsworth saw no sign of natives because he traveled between the then remaining settlements, just north and south.



"At this time, all the Indians of Berkshire county lived at two places which were eight or ten miles apart. One of these places was called Skatekook, and was within the present limits of Sheffield. The other was called Wnahktakook, and was within the present limits of Stockbridge. At each of these places there were from four to five families. Konkapot, the principal Indian, lived at Wnahktakook. Umpachenee, the second to point of consideration, lived at Skatekook," according to an 1869 report by Charles Allen, Attorney General of Massachusetts. (*BC*, 9 February 1870)

"Konkapot" and 20 others for "Four Hundred and Sixty Pounds, Three Barrels of Sider, and thirty quarts of Rum" on 25 April 1724 conveyed to Conreat Borghghart and three others on a committee a tract which now comprises Great Barrington, Sheffield, Mount Washington, Egremont and parts of Alford, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge and Lee, west of the Housatonic River, reserving for themselves a piece of land in the northwest corner of Sheffield. (*Colonial Records and Proprietary Plans of Berkshire Southern District*)

Thus ended the benign custodianship of the Native Americans.

### WHITE SETTLERS, FARMERS

The first white men of record to set foot on Berkshire soil were Major John Talcott and a militia force which, in August 1676, pursued a band of Narragansett over the mountains from Westfield into what is now Great Barrington in one of the final episodes of King Philip's War. (See L.E. Munson's "Old Indian Fordway" in *Collection of the Berkshire Historical & Scientific Society* [1899])

Permanent settlement by whites came about 50 years later. They gravitated toward the river, as William Carney explained in A

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*Berkshire Sourcebook* (1976), because the "fast water could turn a paddlewheel which would provide power to grind grain, saw wood and do many other jobs for the new community."

Proprietors mapped and drew lots for land in the Upper and Lower Townships.

The unincorporated area which became Great Barrington was originally the Upper Parish or Northern Township of Sheffield. The dividing line between the townships was just south of the Great Bridge. Sheffield incorporated as a town in 1733.

In the first 10 years of habitation by whites, "the river was not bridged, and the [Indian] ford-way... was the only available place of crossing, in the vicinity of the village," Taylor wrote.

Burt offered this description of the area along the river: "From Monument Mountain, in a slow, winding course [the Housatonic] comes to the middle of this town, through a beautiful interval, where it forms an important mill site at Barrington Bridge. Thence its course is southerly, winding, and generally slow, to and through Sheffield...."

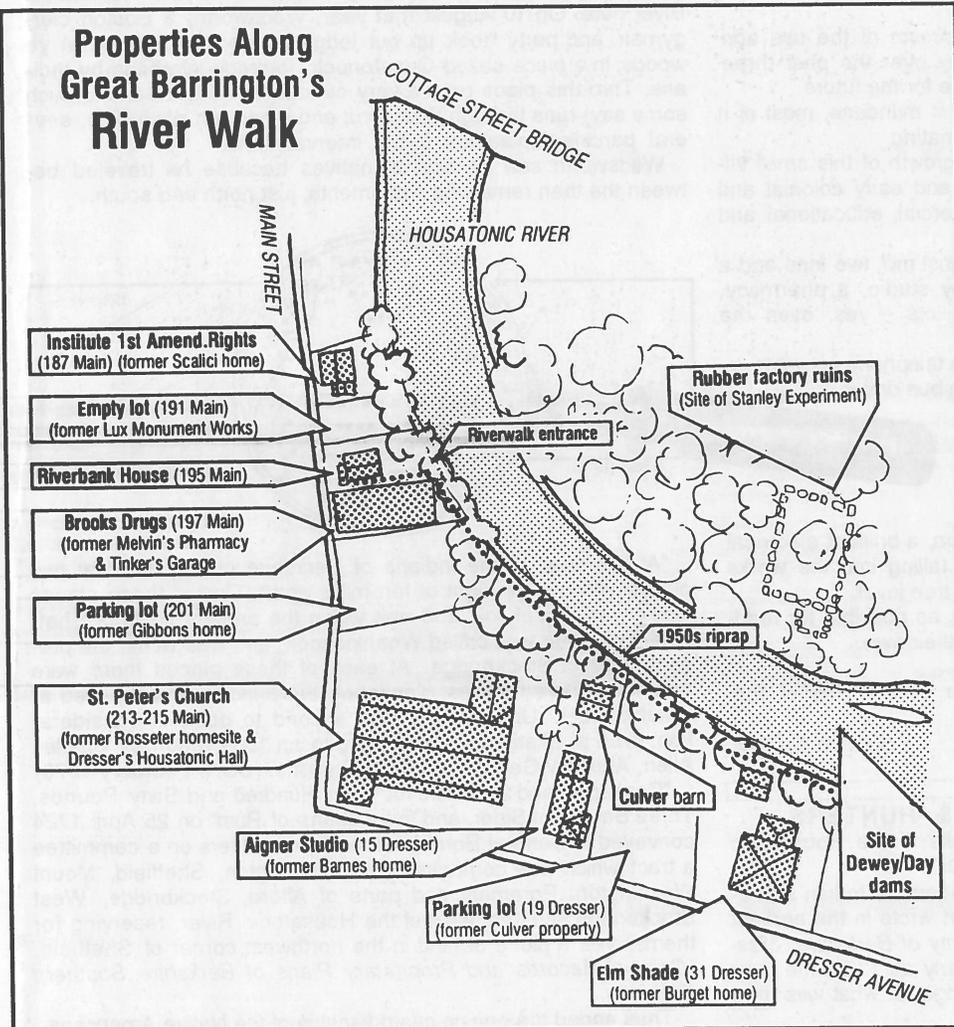
Sheffield," on the west side of the river, "numbered from Sheffield old line."

Taylor's history is sketchy in describing Broghghardt. He died in 1787, per *Great Barrington Vital Records*. The Dutchman had a wife named Mary and at least one son, John.

Broghghardt with others established a sawmill on Seekonk Brook in about 1749.

Sheldon (1712-92), according to Taylor, in 1744 purchased a big chunk of land east of the river. He at one time "kept a tavern near the site of the Berkshire House [corner of Main and Bridge], which he is supposed to have continued until 1768...."

Sheldon sold the land to Israel Dewey on 5 October 1761 for £50.13.4. Not bad -- a 163 percent profit in five years, without improving the land one bit!



River Walk and various properties which front it.

### PETRUS BROGHGHARDT, PROPRIETOR

One could show more progress in an hour of clearing the gnarl of trees and brush along the River Walk than in a day of trying to sort through the tangle of deeds and proprietor's records at the Southern Berkshire Registry of Deeds to establish a solid chain of ownership for the land abutting River Walk. This despite the properties covering barely a half dozen acres and involving 10 parcels today.

"In dividing the lands the compass was but little used...." Taylor observed. "It is, therefore, no easy matter, at the present day, to accurately relocate the house lots and other lands of some of the settlers."

Amen.

In the absence of a proprietor's map, records seem to indicate the River Walk lies in land referred to in a sale by Petrus Broghghardt (aka Peter Burghardt) of Sheffield to Aaron Sheldon on 5 July 1756. The price was £19.

The land is described as 34.75 acres and 20 rod, "the east end of half of Lot 4 in Upper

### ISRAEL DEWEY, SAWYER & MILLER

Israel Dewey (1712-73) was the first white to live on the land which has become the town's River Walk.

And he was the first to build industry on the river in this section.

Dewey, his wife and 10 children came to the Upper Township from Westfield in 1757. The family later moved to Van Deusenville.

Dewey was among those to agitate to separate the north parish from Sheffield. In October 1757 he was one of three appointed to a committee to petition the General Court regarding tax ratings.

In 1761, the year Great Barrington incorporated as a town, Dewey "purchased land in the village, the same on which Major Samuel Rosseter afterwards lived, and on which Henry Dresser now resides. He built the first house which stood upon that spot," Taylor wrote; "he also erected mills on the river in the rear of his dwelling...."

St. Peter's Church stands on the approximate spot today.

The mills "appear to have been the most important manufacturing interest in the place for many years," F.A. Hosmer said in the J.B. Beers' *History of Berkshire County* (1885). "Israel Dewey's ability and sturdy character early gave him prominence in local affairs."

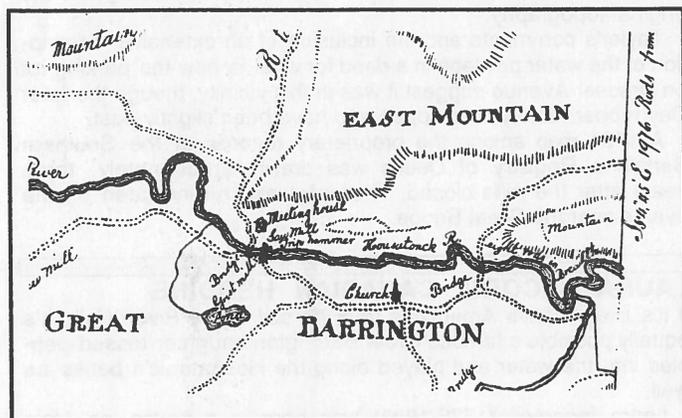
Dewey's house was the first between the Great Bridge and the Congregational Church. Taylor noted that "simultaneous with the incorporation of the town, the business of the village, which had long been to the eastward of the bridge, began to move southward to the

present Main street."

By 1829, Burt verified, south of the Great Bridge and west of the Housatonic River stood "two houses for public worship, about 50 dwelling houses, a post office, two taverns, four merchant stores, two large tanneries, a grist mill and plaster mill and various mechanic shops."

Industry of the time relied on water to rotate wheels, pull belts, turn pulleys and power equipment. Water privileges, Taylor explained, were "sequestered by the settling committee for the joint use of both the Upper and Lower Townships, but... had for a long time been occupied by David Ingersoll [1700-73], and of which John Williams, as successor of Ingersoll, then claimed possession."

Ingersoll had built saw and grist mills on the west bank of the Housatonic just south of the Great Bridge in 1739, running them until about 1755. The rights, of dubious legitimacy in Taylor's opinion, fell to Williams and were challenged in court in 1761 by agents of the town. Williams eventually gave up his claim.



East-oriented 1794 map shows early roads, mills

The town gave a new, conditional grant of water power on 10 March 1762, voting "that Israel Dewey have leave to build a saw-mill and grist-mill upon the Housatonic River, within any part of the same between the present Great Bridge on the County road and the north part of Ensign Aaron Sheldon's land..."

Dewey built the mills downstream, "nearly in rear of his dwelling, on the west side of the stream, the approach to them being by a land where Dresser Street now is. His dam was upon the site of the present Rubber Works dam, a little below which some of its timbers are still visible..." Taylor recorded.

The historian figured the dam "must have rendered the works above it useless, for... this dam was about six feet high, set the water back above the bend in the river north of the bridge, and raised the water two or three feet at the bridge."

For 30 years, Dewey's combined saw and grist mill was the only improvement on this section of the river, Taylor ventured. "These mills, though somewhat inconveniently located on the steep bank of the river, were important works; for, though saw-mills were sufficiently numerous, with the exception of the Williams grist-mill at Van Deusenville, there appears to have been no other place in town at which the inhabitants could have their grain converted into flour or meal."

Taylor had access to Dewey's account book, and cited this entry for when the mill was constructed: "Oct. 14th, 1762. Wheeler Finished the mill and went off all but Bill. Bill Lain worked five days after Wheeler went."

Taylor copied out selected transactions from Dewey's ledger: October 1762: Town of Great Barrington, sawing slit work for school house 3215 feet, £9.9; August 1765, Daniel Allen, plank for gaol 126 feet, £3.9; July 1771, Truman Wheeler, 1375 feet clapboard, £1.17.0; and February 1773, William Whiting, lumber for house, £4. (Great Barrington Historical Commission collection)

"Israel Dewey was a man of strong mind, of more than ordinary ability, and apparently fond of discussion and argument," Taylor

said. "He was a member of Mr. [Samuel] Hopkins' [Congregational] church, to which both he and his wife came recommended from the church at Westfield. He was not in full accord with the minister in some of the theological doctrines held and taught by the latter, and engaged him in a written controversial discussion, which was printed and attracted considerable attention."

Dewey served on a committee in 1761 which built the first town school. It cost £25 and stood somewhere between the Dewey house and the Congregational Church. There was some misunderstanding between the town and the building committee, and Dewey brought suit against the town, eventually recovering judgment, according to Taylor. He was among freeholders placed on a list of jurors in 1761. And Dewey served on a committee in 1767 to determine seating in the meeting house.

Dewey's wrote his will in a cramped hand in 1773, on two sides of a now-brittle piece of paper. It includes these provisions:

"I resign my Soul to God as into the Disposal of a being Infinitely good, Hoping for a Happy and glorious resurrection through the merits of Jesus Christ.

"My Body, I remit to the Earth from whence it was made.

"And my worthy substance I disperse of in the following manner...."

Dewey left £100 each to six sons, £25 each to three daughters, a third of his estate to his wife, and after retirement of debts and payment of burial expenses, divided the rest among his children. (Berkshire Probate Court, document 901)

## THE WATER STREET LOCKUP

The Upper Township was a rowdy place, in the early years.

It "had lain in an unorganized and lawless state, without even so much orderliness as would be given by a division and sale of lots," Chard Powers Smith wrote in *The Housatonic: Puritan River* (1946).

"It had, in consequence, become a paradise for tax dodgers and all kinds of criminals centered around the fastnesses of Monument Mountain. In 1736 the northern half of this area was enclosed in the new township of Stockbridge.

"But this left the southern half, including the mountain, as wild as ever, a plague to the decent people in the northern part of Sheffield, who were under the additional hardship of having to ride six miles down to Sheffield Center to church. Soon after the incorporation of the town they began to agitate for separate parish rights, with the lawless region to the north incorporated with them so that they could bring the rascals there under control."

"Israel Dewey's house [St. Peter's Church is there today] was fitted up and used as a jail for several years," Hamilton Child wrote in his *Gazetteer of Berkshire County, Mass. 1725-1885*.

In 1763 the court paid Dewey £6 "for the use of his house as a Gaol for ye current year," according to Taylor.

Taylor left in his files a copy of a bill submitted by Dewey dated 9 September 1762 and addressed to the "Justices of Court now Holdin att Great Barrington for the County of Berkshire."

It sought "For the use of my house a year for a Gaol, £4.0.0" and for "spikes and mending Gaol £0.5.0."

The cell wasn't idle; there was a charge of £1.11.6 "for boarding Abraham Waunaumpas nine weeks while in Gaol." Associated other activities relating to this prisoner -- whose crime isn't specified -- brought the total to £7.1.2.

Truly Waunaumpas was the last of the Mahicans to enjoy a prolonged exposure to the future River Walk -- even if it was only a view from a jail cell.

## JUSTIN & HUGO DEWEY, MINUTEMEN

After Israel Dewey died two of his sons, Justin and Hugo, ran the mills on the Housatonic.

They sometimes had to interrupt their work, though.

The Dewey brothers were Minutemen.

They served together at the Battle of Bennington -- actually fought two miles west of that Vermont town, at Walloomscoick, N.Y. -- on 16 August 1777.

A third Dewey brother, Benedict (1736-96), was there with them and a fourth sibling, Paul, also fought for independence from Britain.

Hugo (1752-1833) was the first Dewey to enlist, as a private in Capt. Enoch Noble's company, Col. John Brown's regiment, for 30 days beginning 29 June 1777. He was among militiamen ordered out by Brig. Gen. John Fellows of Sheffield.

He again enlisted 15 August with Capt. Silas Goodrich's company, Col. John Ashley's regiment. They raced to Vermont to serve under Brig. Gen. John Stark. Stark led the colonial militia forces which defeated Lt. Col. Friedrich Baum's combined Brunswick Dragoon, Tory, Canadian volunteer and Caughnawaga Mohawk force which had been sent by Gen. John Burgoyne to capture supplies from Bennington.

Forty-six men marched from Great Barrington to fight at Bennington, according to Hosmer, citing payroll records of Goodrich's company.

"Captain Ashley's regiment, of Stockbridge, seems to have furnished 38 men who were at Bennington days in advance of the battle," John Spargo said in *The Bennington Battle Monument* (1925).

Unless they were with the one horse-mounted unit from Great Barrington, the Deweys, leaving on the 15th, may have arrived late.

"A few never saw the battle on the 16th, arriving after the fighting was done," Denis Lesieur observed in a *Berkshire Eagle* commemorative of the battle (16 August 1977). "But, significantly, they at least made the effort."

Hugo served seven days then was discharged.

Justin (1751-1832) was a private in the same Goodrich company, also leaving service after a week.

He was a corporal in Capt. John King's company, under Ashley, in late June-early July 1780, marching to the defence of West Point, N.Y. And in October the next year, he joined Capt. Thomas Ingersoll's company under Ashley for a dozen days of service at Stillwater "by order of Brig. Gen. John Fellows on an alarm." (*Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the War of the Revolution* [1898])

Justin Dewey was married to Lucy (1763-1845). They had two daughters.

Hugo was married to Hannah (1757-1813). They had one daughter.

One or both of the Dewey brothers may have resided at their father's homestead near the river. After working the Housatonic River mills for nearly two decades, they sold them and bought adjoining farms near the Alford line. They lived there the rest of their lives in Tweedledum, Tweedledee fashion.

"Justin and Hugo Dewey were notable characters, and in some respects remarkable men," Taylor said. "Both were large and portly; both were genial and sociable; and a fondness for mirthfulness equally characterized both. They were brothers in every sense of the word. Living but a short distance apart, they were almost constantly in each other's company. They tilled their farms and harvested their crops together. If they went to church, they went together; if they visited the village tavern it was together, and together they told their stories and sipped their mug of flip. Their lives were of that peaceful, unruffled nature which tends to happiness and longevity, and which in their case won the esteem and respect of their townsmen...."

A quit claim deed dated 28 March 1791 describes the Housatonic River property as "consisting of a Gristmill, Sawmill and Dam standing on Housatunauk River and small tract of land...."

The Deweys sold to their brother-in-law Major Thomas Ingersoll

and his partner Moses Hopkins, "with all the privileges of the stream which were granted to our father, Israel Dewey, deceased, by the proprietors of Housatunauk River in Great Barrington."

In 1792, Ingersoll and Hopkins abandoned the Dewey mills and built a new dam at the site of the old one of David Ingersoll, upstream near the Great Bridge. They built a grist mill on the west side of the river and a sawmill on the east side. They took down a portion of the Dewey dam, to improve water flow. A dam remained at the upper privilege -- Southern Berkshire Power & Light later generated electricity there -- until breached in 1972.

The Dewey mill was said to have been removed to another location and converted into a distillery.

But this wasn't the end of industrial activity at the Dewey dam site, as we will see.

It's not clear exactly where the Dewey dam and mills stood. As River Walk designer Peter Jensen points out, there's a lot of fill along the banks in some sections and it's hard to distinguish the original topography.

Taylor's comments and the inclusion of an extensive description of the water privilege in a deed for what is now the parking lot on Dresser Avenue suggest it was in this vicinity, though the later Day rubber factory dam appears to have been slightly east.

A 1794 map among the proprietary records at the Southern Berkshire Registry of Deeds was drawn, unfortunately, three years after the mills closed. The only saw mill indicated on the river is near the Great Bridge.

#### Laura Secord, Canadian Heroine

If it's likely Native Americans trod the soil of the River Walk, it's equally possible a famous Great Barrington daughter tossed pebbles into the water and played along the Housatonic's banks as well.

Laura Ingersoll (1775-1868) was born in a house on Main Street, just south of the Dewey home. In later years it was known as the Girling property.

Her father for a time owned the Dewey water privilege.

Laura was "the daughter of Major Thomas Ingersoll, who built in 1782 the house on Main street now occupied by the library... Maj. Ingersoll sold this house in 1793 and moved to Canada...." (*BC*, 10 August 1911)

Ingersoll (1729-1812) came here from Westfield in 1774. The next year he married Elizabeth (1758-84), daughter of Israel Dewey.

According to Taylor they bought a small piece of land on Main Street with a dwelling on it. Ingersoll later purchased a strip of land which went all the way to the river (along the north side of Pleasant Street) and built a new house. He ran his hatter's business from a shop in the rear; Emma A. Currie described it in *The Story of Laura Secord and Canadian Reminiscences* (1900).

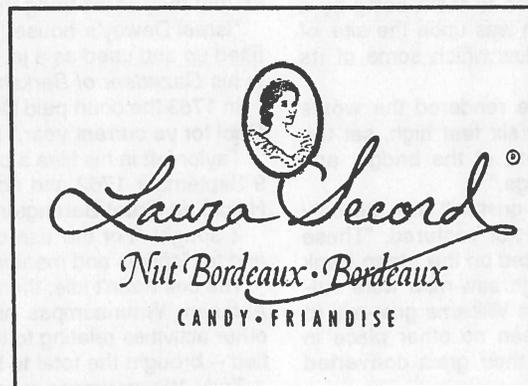
Ingersoll was a constable and tax collector and became a captain, then major, in the militia, serving frequently from 1777-79. He was an "energetic,

enterprising man," Taylor recorded.

Ingersoll was three times married, and had eight children.

In the aftermath of the war, farmers in western Massachusetts were severely affected by economic dislocations. After the incidents of Shays' Rebellion, Ingersoll's business apparently floundered. His left his mill speculation with Hopkins within a couple of years. He packed up and moved his family to Upper Canada, or Ontario.

Oldest daughter Laura went along, and in about 1797 took a husband, James Secord (1773-1841). He was a merchant. They eventually had five children.



"On the outbreak of the war of 1812, Mrs. Secord with her husband took sides with the British. Learning that the Americans were at a certain time to attack the British at a given point, she aroused the British and in the battle which followed they defeated the Americans," *The Courier* related.

This was the Battle of Beaver Dams, 24 July 1813.

Laura Secord isn't mentioned in Taylor's history – apparently she troubled his sense of American patriotism. Consequently she's nearly forgotten in Great Barrington. A line of ice cream and candy products in Canada bears the "Laura Secord" name. And she was honored on a commemorative postage stamp in that country in 1992.

**SAMUEL ROSSETER, TANNER**

Major Samuel Rosseter (1769-1854) "was a man of remarkable energy, industry and promptness, and was for more than fifty years conspicuous in the business and improvements of the village," Taylor said.

The major's home for many years was the former Dewey property. The trail of real estate sales between ownership of the

Dewey brothers and Rosseter is difficult to follow. It appears to be about 4.5 acres of land Rosseter bought in 1792 from Elijah Egleston, a shoemaker, for £110. The deed dated 11 January refers to a "mill spot." This was about the same time Ingersoll and Hopkins abandoned the privilege.

A tanner and shoe manufacturer, Rosseter "was not an educated man, but prominent for his forceful way of keeping to the front in church and social functions, his general good feeling and a considerable degree of harmless egotism..." S.G.Pope wrote in *Berkshire Hills* magazine (1 August 1902).

Rosseter was instrumental in the formation of the Housatonic Agricultural Society. He was elected its first president in 1841. He served again in 1844-45.

A top state official came to the 1849 fair and for the opening day parade. "Major Rosseter walked proudly behind the plow, while before at least a hundred stalwart oxen were aligned, while his Excellency, Governor [George N.] Briggs,



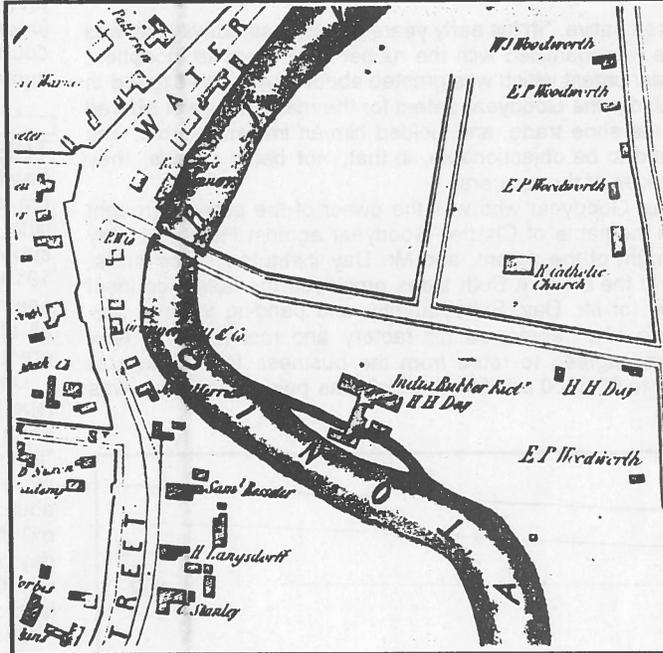
and magnates, marched behind." (Hosmer)

Rosseter laid out and built Rosseter Street in about 1847.

Rosseter's granddaughter, Carmelia Crossman, in the 1860s ran a girls' school at the family home – predecessor to a later school on the site to be known as Housatonic Hall.

Rosseter died leaving an estate valued in the tens of thousands of dollars. He left his wife \$1,000 cash and use of their dwelling and barn in her lifetime, after which it went to the children.

He penned a will in his strong hand: "I also give to my wife one good cow which she may select..." and "the right to cut as much wood as she may want..." (Berkshire Probate Court, document 8001)



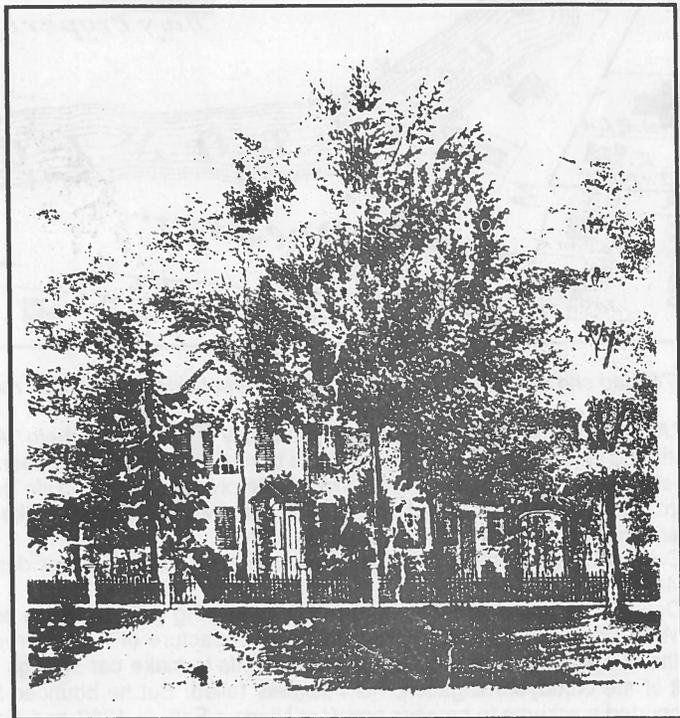
**STRUT STREET BLUES**

Samuel Rosseter was a prominent man in his time. But he chose a homesite just beyond the town's fashionable section.

Taylor in 1894 read before the Thursday Morning Club a paper describing bygone days on Main Street. The historian noted that Main from Maple Avenue to the Robert Girling house, "which stood where the library now does, was called Strut street, because the smart people lived there. North from there was Water street..."

"The story goes that Maj. Rosseter, much concerned because his house did not fall within the limits of the smart section, offered to furnish a quart of rum to be drunk on the occasion, if the cronies would get together and alter the limits of the street.

"They met, and drank, and debated. Their decision was ren



Section of 1854 map shows area of River Walk, top; Samuel Rosseter, left; Rosseter house on Water Street, above

dered to the unhappy Major in these words: 'We have had our meeting, have given your proposition very mature deliberation, and have come to the conclusion that innovations are dangerous; you can not be admitted into Strut Street'...." (BC, 13 April 1939)

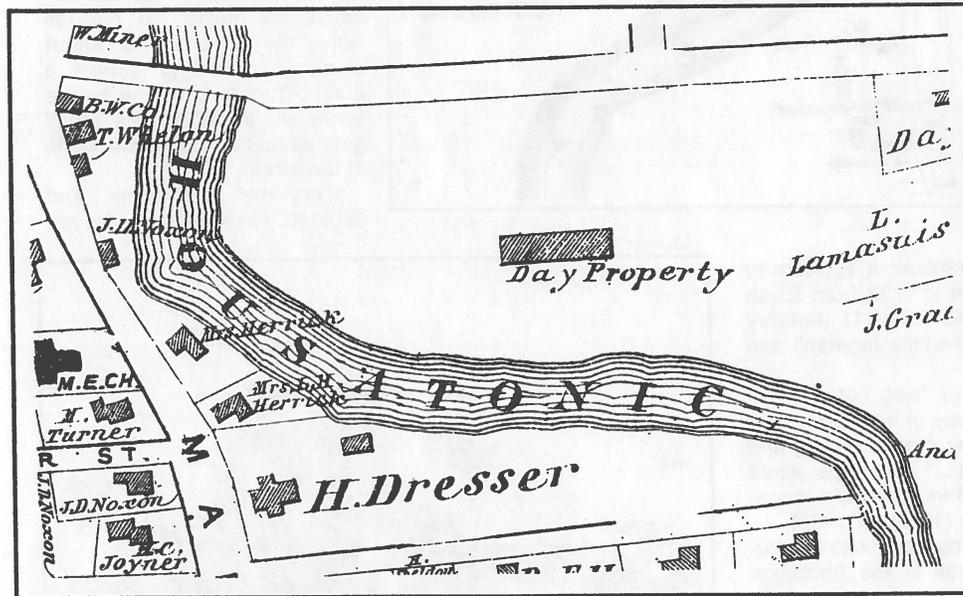
## HORACE H. DAY, RUBBERMAKER

To continue the story of the water privilege at this crook in the Housatonic River, we have to wade to the opposite shore, where Horace H. Day erected a dam at the site of the old Ingersoll & Hopkins, or Dewey, dam in 1847 "and began the manufacture of India-rubber fabrics.

"This business, which promised to be an important industry to the town, after four or five years' continuance was abandoned for want of sufficient water power for its successful prosecution," Taylor said.

Day (1813-78) was a Great Barrington native. "In his early years of business activity he was prominent in the affairs of the town. He was identified with the rubber trade from its inception. He was the licensee under the Goodyear patent which was granted about 1842, and expired in 1865. He was the exclusive licensee under the Goodyear patent for the manufacture of shirred goods, which were used principally in the shoe trade, and yielded him an immense profit. The shirred goods were subsequently found to be objectionable, in that, not being porous, they injured the feet, and particularly the ankles of the wearers.

"William Judson, the attorney of Chas. Goodyear who was the owner of the patent, brought suits in different parts of the country in the name of Charles Goodyear against Horace H. Day for infringement of the woven goods right of the patent, and Mr. Day instituted cross suits, which led to extensive litigation all over the country. Both sides employed the ablest counsel at the bar. Rufus Choate was attorney for Mr. Day. Subsequently and pending various lawsuits, Mr. Day surrendered his license and transferred his factory and machinery at New Brunswick [N.J.] to William Judson, and agreed to retire from the business for the sum of \$350,000 and counsel fees, amounting to \$21,000 additional, which was paid to him. This was in 1862." (BC, 28 August 1878)



1876 map shows Herrick, Dresser homes on west side of river, Day mill on east

"At times rubber footwear was almost the only goods made there. At other times waterproof cloth and clothing were the only products turned out. A story has been related that at one time when a person was drowned in the river, waterproof clothing and life preservers were borrowed from the mill. These were worn by several men, who armed with rakes, floated down the river searching for the body." (BC, 27 January 1916)

Day was twice married, to Sarah Wykoff in 1838 and, after her death, to Catherine Alice in 1844.

Day experimented with India rubber manufacturing processes as early as 1828, according to *Who Was Who*. He was involved in the manufacture of rubber products in New Brunswick. In the late 1840s he bought English patent rights to make car springs in this country. As a result of the Goodyear litigation, his business failed. But he bounced back with new ideas. He supported a scheme to harness power at Niagara Falls in 1860 and planned to supply Buffalo, N.Y., with 6,000 horsepower of compressed air in 1870.

"The speculations of his later life were unfortunate, and his large fortune was gone and he became comparatively a poor man. Twice in his life he was believed to be worth \$1,000,000," said *The Courier*.

"Mr. Day was a man of resistless energy and undaunted courage, and he always claimed to be 'a born leader of men.' Personally Mr. Day was a man of rather commanding figure, strong physique and robust health. His hair, which was very gray, was brushed straight up from the forehead. In his intercourse with men he was dictatorial and arrogant."

Added the paper, "Mr. Day was an avowed spiritualist, and had been so for thirty years. About the time his mortgages were becoming due, he remarked to the holder of one of them that he was coming out all right. Through a medium, he said, he had just heard from Daniel Webster [counsel for Goodyear in an 1852 court proceeding] that he should be sustained."

## THE GREAT DAM FEUD

Day built a rubber shop "on the eastern bank of the Housatonic river, a little south of the present Cottage street bridge," *The Courier* related in 1916. "For some reason the place seemed fated to bring difficulties to all of its owners who attempted to erect a mill on that site."

Day secured the west bank privilege from Samuel Rosseter for \$35, per a deed dated 9 September 1847: "the right and privilege of constructing a dam across Housatonic River abutting on my land at or near the old mill dam site, opposite the land this day purchased by Sd. Day of Benjamin Coles." Coles had owned the land on the east bank.

Construction of the dam riled mill operators upstream, and touched off a long-running feud.

Day's opponents in the squabble were formidable ones: John C. and Asa C. Russell.

The Russell brothers had incorporated Berkshire Woolen in 1836 on the David Ingersoll river privilege near the Great Bridge.

"The company gradually increased its manufacturing facilities by the purchase of all the immediate water-power and buildings on both sides of the river, and the erection of extensive works including the large stone factory built in 1858-59 on the site of the old tannery and a machine shop on the site of the old forge, on the east side of the river," Child explained.

John Russell (1804-73), born in Ashford, Conn., was educated at Bascon's Academy in Colchester. He taught school before coming to Great Barrington to clerk for his uncle, Alvenus Cone, who had a store at the corner of Main and Castle Streets.

There's a story that Russell's father gave him a Spanish dollar. When he arrived in Stockbridge by stagecoach, instead of spending the coin for further passage, Russell decided to walk to Great Barrington. "That dollar he kept till his death, and it is now among the cherished possessions of his children." (BC, 22 October 1873)

Russell after three years became a principal in the store, and in 1832 took his brother Asa in as partner.

Asa Russell (1808-76), also born in Ashford, came to Great Barrington in 1825, a year after his brother. He was married but had no children.

The brothers built a new store, where Pittsfield Co-operative Bank is today, and opened it in 1835. The next year, they incorporated Berkshire Woolen, John serving as president and Asa as agent.

The Russells in 1852 acquired the defunct Housatonic Manufacturing, incorporating it as Monument Mills in the village of Housatonic.

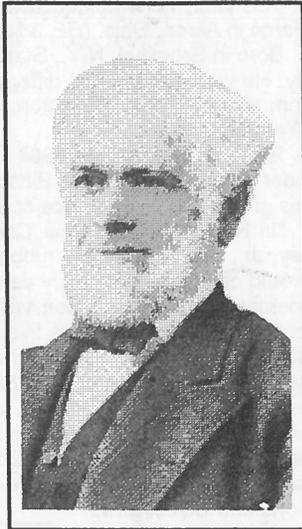
Parley A., son of John and Jeannette Russell and nephew of Asa, later took over the mills and other Russell business interests. The younger Russell (1838-1916) developed the land east of the river and north of Cottage Streets, putting up mill housing. He laid out Parley and Russell Streets, named for himself, and Everett Street, named for one of his mills.

Berkshire Woolen closed down in the Panic of 1873 and went out of the family for a time -- but that's another story.

The following is an account of the rubber dam feud from *The Courier* for 14 March 1940:

Concerning Great Barrington's  
Old-Time 'Rubber Factory

"Among the many industries which have come and gone in Great Barrington, one which gave great promise and yet was beset with difficulties from its very inception, was the rubber factory which more than ninety years ago was built near the Cottage street bridge and which until a few years ago was a well-known landmark. The days of its brisk activity in the making of rubber fabrics were short-lived and the building was used but intermittently for business in the years following. It is remembered now as a place

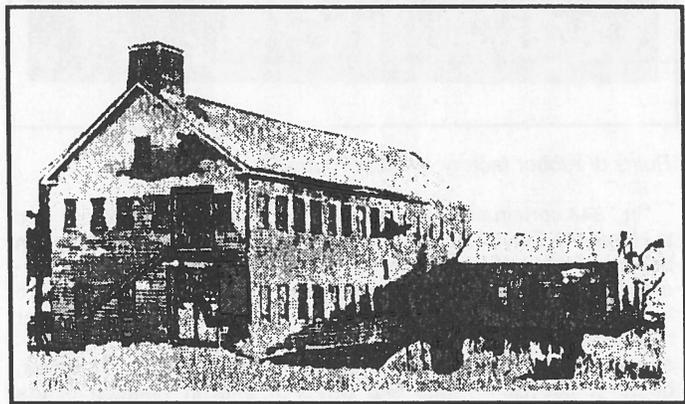


long been associated with the manufacture of India rubber. The factory, according to press releases of the time, was for the purpose of making India rubber cables for ships. From later records, however, it is believed that the factory's main product was rubber fabrics. Mr. Day erected a sturdy building, 35 by 100 feet, on the east side of the Housatonic river at Cottage street, to house his enterprise.

"*The Courier* of December 2, 1847, said in a self-congratulatory statement: 'We presume Mr. Day was actuated in this step by a desire to benefit his native town as much as by any other consideration, for certainly there could have been privilege obtained nearer his warehouse in the city, more convenient of access and more eligible in every way.'

"Power for operations was provided by a dam, which proved to be an important and crucial factor in the business. It was built on the historic site, originally granted by the town in 1762 to Israel Dewey...

"Until 1847 when Horace Day erected his dam and factory, Dewey's original dam and mill-site had remained unoccupied. Day, it is believed, lived in the small white house still standing on Main street opposite Cottage street...." [Day also, according to maps, had a home just uphill, at the corner of East and Cottage Streets.]



Horace Day, left; his rubber factory, above

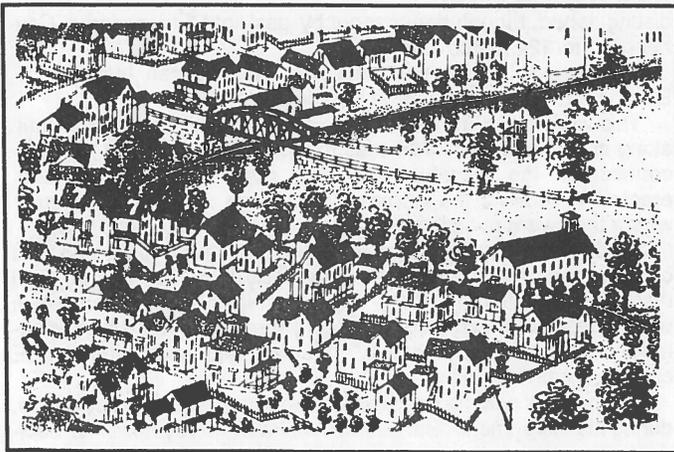
"The India rubber business, which promised to bring a valuable industry to Great Barrington, found itself nipped in the bud locally in a short time. There had been some question as to the advisability of the rubber factory dam when it was built, as is shown by the following item from the *Courier* of December 2, 1847: 'His dam is about 1200 feet below the Berkshire Woolen company's works, and although there is not very much fall, he deems it sufficient for his purpose. The works are in active progress and we believe will be completed this winter.'

"A report from an able engineer, Mr. Durant, who surveyed the premises, is now lying before us from which it appears that he could use more water than he proposes to do.'

"However, within the first year of its operation, the Berkshire Woolen company complained that the rubber factory dam caused back-water upon their wheels. After a spirited controversy and considerable bickering, the woolen company went so far as to tear down by main force part of Day's dam. Day, equally incensed, had the dam properly replaced.

"The case was taken to court and both parties were involved in long and expensive litigation during which the feeling was strong. In a final hearing of the case before the United States court at Boston in 1849, the decision was adverse to Mr. Day, and he was eventually obliged to cut down eleven inches in the height of his dam. The reduction cut off the water power to such an extent that the situation was useless for manufacturing purposes. The factory was closed and the machinery removed.

"Mr. Day, who seemed to be followed by misfortune, removed to Naugatuck, Conn., where he founded a business which was later taken over by the Goodyear Rubber company. *Hunt's Merchants Magazine* in 1856 contained an article entitled 'The Great India-



1885 bird's eye view of Great Barrington shows Henry Dresser home, with "7's" on roof, left; rubber factory at far right

popular with children of the vicinity as a slightly eerie and dangerous place to play, and also as a source of pieces of rubber which made excellent substitutes for chewing-gum.

"The building, itself, was erected in the fall and winter of 1847 by Horace H. Day, a native of Great Barrington, whose name had

Rubber Litigation," which chronicled Day's further difficulties in what was called 'the greatest lawsuit ever prosecuted, one which cost the most money and was tried in the greatest number of places.' There were in all more than 150 suits and the expenses of litigation exceeded \$600,000.



Ruins of rubber factory, above; William Stanley, right

"In 1844 certain patents were granted to Charles Goodyear and to Horace H. Day. Corrugated or shirred rubber goods had by then been profitably manufactured some two years. Goodyear's patents for his process of manufacture and for his machines were so far superseded by one of Day's patents for cutting the rubber threads and another for shirring goods that Goodyear's processes were abandoned. Numerous establishments, however, began to use Goodyear's and Day's patents in violation of the rights of their inventors.

"Goodyear was finally successful in aligning the violators with him against Day, and the number of suits mounted up. Various agreements were made at times between Goodyear and Day, the main inventors of the processes, but the struggle over the highly-lucrative market for India rubber and shirred goods continued. Day was besieged by suits in different states and in Massachusetts (probably Great Barrington) his goods were attached and an officer placed in his factory.

"New Jersey was the scene of the culminating trial. Day had as legal counsel Rufus Choate and Francis B. Cutting, while Goodyear, the plaintiff, was advised by Daniel Webster, Seth P. Staples and James S. Brady. Webster is said to have received \$15,000 as his fee for a single hearing. The trial opened in 1852 when the rubber business had grown to five or six million dollars a year. Day was finally held for contempt of court and meanwhile a large factory in Connecticut (perhaps the Naugatuck business), which Day owned in connection with Anson G. Phelps and others, was consumed by fire. Railroad companies to whom Day had sold car springs were prosecuted and claimed protection from Day. Complications mounted for several years, during which Day was forced to surrender his interest in various concerns at a fraction of their value. Finally, with his business broken and interests lost, Day was found innocent of contempt and allegations, and the case was closed.

"In the meantime, the rubber factory in Great Barrington, which had been used for such a short time, fell into disrepair. Power was insufficient to allow any manufacturing concern to start. Children played around the building and there are many in town now who remember digging up from the sand and junk piles near the factory bits of rubber, a chewy black substance, which was an excellent substitute for chewing-gum..."

### WILLIAM STANLEY, ELECTRICAL WIZARD

Electrical inventor William Stanley (1858-1916) in March 1886 was the first to successfully transmit high voltage alternating current electricity by the principles employed today.

This year, he was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in Akron, Ohio. (*BE*, 3 May 1995 & *BC* 20 July 1995)

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., Stanley showed early mechanical ability. He was assistant at different times to electrical pioneers Hiram Maxim, Edward Weston, Sir Joseph Swan and George H. Westinghouse.

Recently married (in 1884 to Lila Courtney Wetmore) and in poor health, Stanley left Pittsburgh for Great Barrington, where his grandparents had once operated a general store and inn.

"In November 1885, the *Courier* announced that William Stanley, Jr., had leased the 'rubber factory' for a term of years and would occupy it at an early date. 'It is to be a laboratory for experimental work in connection with Messrs. Westinghouse of Pittsburgh, Pa. A boiler and a five horsepower engine will be at once set up and some fine testing machinery, all of which will be under Mr. Stanley's direction. The building will be fixed up quite a little and will make, when finished, a most excellent place for the proposed work.' The 'rubber factory' was Stanley's headquarters when Great Barrington was provided with the first electric street lamps in 1886, and it was the scene of many of his early inventions and discoveries."

(*BC*, 14 March 1940)

Stanley placed his transformers in 13 stores, a barbershop, two doctors' offices, the telephone exchange and the post office. He fastened insulators in trees and ran a wire across the river to the factory.

In March 1886 he flipped a switch and lighted Main Street -- securing a spot for himself in history.

"These lights are so powerful, and so perfectly white, that green and blue can be readily distinguished, though they cannot be gas light," marveled a *Courier* reporter (24 March 1886).

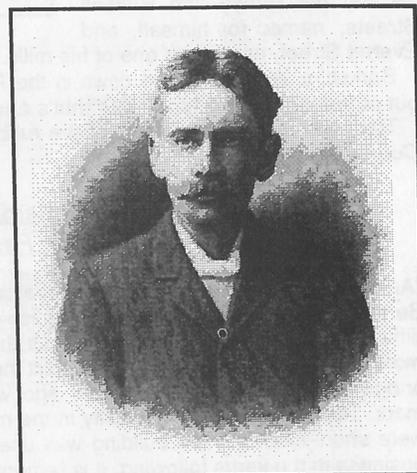
Stanley recalled the experiment for the American Institute of Electrical Engineers' dinner at Pittsfield in 1911:

"This work took me most of the winter of 1885 and it was until along in the spring of 1886 that the generator was set up and connected, the transformers were completed, tested and erected in some of the stores of the village of Great Barrington where they were put into service on a regular commercial basis.

"Crude as the apparatus was, with all its faults of design and construction, it operated in a marvelously beautiful manner, and thoroughly satisfied me that I had a system of distribution which was capable of indefinitely extending the limits over which electricity could be publicly served," Stanley said years later. (*AIEE* commemorative booklet, 1911)

The inventor said he trembled at the lack of safety precautions, during his experiment. "But all went well with the system, no accidents occurred and no dangers, other than a small fire, were reported until an attendant dropped a screwdriver into the armature of the Siemens machine and entirely ruined it."

Thomas Hughes in *Networks of Power* (1983) remarked on the creative spirit Stanley unleashed here: "The freedom to conceptualize a system made up of one's own invented components won out over the restrictions of fitting one's inventions into the conceptual framework of another... It is interesting to note that Stanley, who had been depressed and in poor health in Pittsburgh,



was rejuvenated soon after his arrival in Great Barrington...

"His alternating-current transformer, central-station system for public service, 'the very first in America beyond all dispute,' used a 25-h.p. steam engine, transformer supplying either twenty-five or fifty incandescent lamps, and wires strung on insulators attached to the 'grand old elms' that lined the village streets."

Stanley in 1887 formed Pittsfield Illuminating Co. He moved his laboratory to Pittsfield. Working with Cummings C. Chesney and John F. Kelly, he developed the SKC transformer. He and others established Stanley Manufacturing in 1892.

Needing capital, Stanley sold his interest in 1899. By 1907, the Stanley name was replaced by a new one: General Electric.

After selling his company, Stanley returned to Great Barrington to experiment with and manufacture watt-hour meters and insulated metal bottles -- Stanley vacuum bottles are still sold today -- at a factory on River Street.

As his story has been told more than some others', Stanley's accomplishments are greatly compressed here.

The inventor eventually died at his home at Brookside in Great Barrington, near the river south of town.

*It's one of those ironies which delights historians: Stanley's work in Great Barrington was unobtrusive on the river; but his Pittsfield endeavor evolved into General Electric's Power Transformer Division, which leaked quantities of PCBs into the river and still pollute it today.*

#### MICHAEL KELLY, BLACKSMITH

One of the joys of the River Walk is that the view -- which could be of the backs of more homes or stores -- is a wild and wooded section. Few realize when looking across the river that they are seeing the site of the old rubberworks.

After Day shut down his factory, the property went through several owners. In 1861, it was described in one deed as including "machinery therein Water wheels, dams, bridges and rights of the said Horace H. Day."

Michael Kelly (1834-1902) acquired the factory land in 1881.

Kelly "was one of the best known men in Great Barrington. He was a man who, through a life of industry, frugality and good judgment, had accumulated a large amount of property and he was recognized as a man whose opinion in business matters was always wise and safe. He was almost without education -- had only the benefit of meager schooling while a lad in Ireland, supplemented by one year in the common schools as a young man after coming to America. He had, however, made the most of a native ability that, under more favorable earlier conditions, would have made him, it is safe to say, a remarkable man. He possessed the strictest sense of honor, both in fulfilling obligations and in expecting similar fulfillment on the part of others...." (BC, 25 September 1902)

Born in County of Kilkenny, Ireland, Kelly learned blacksmithing and at age 18 went to England "where he had an older brother and where he continued to work at blacksmithing for about a year, at the end of which time he sailed for this country."

He met another brother in New York, and went to Connecticut as a farm laborer. The brother, James, then came to Sheffield, and Michael followed, working first for Henry Couch, who had a smithy at Belcher Square, then for James O'Brien. He worked in New York City and Baltimore, then returned to Great Barrington, eventually purchasing his own shop.

He married Julia Dwyer and the couple took rooms above the blacksmith shop on Water Street. In 1893, they moved to a new residence on Cottage Street.

Deeds show that Kelly gradually developed the old Day property, selling lots on Cottage Street for home sites. According to his *Courier* obituary, Kelly "had become the owner of a large tract of land east of the river on the north [sic] side of Cottage street and built the several houses between the river and East street and also improved the old 'rubber factory' which was in a dilapidated condition when he became the owner of the land upon which it stood."

"After Stanley had moved his laboratory from the rubber factory in a few years, various shops were housed in the building. A carriage repair shop did business for some years, and for a time prior to 1910, Daniel J. Hickey had his building supplies there until he removed them to the canning factory.

"At one time when the factory was vacant, boys were accustomed to play basketball in its shadowy interior. As time went on and the building was again unoccupied, it again fell into a state of disrepair. There were treacherous holes in the floor over the river and all the windows were broken. Three years ago, the old rubber factory was torn down leaving no trace of the landmark which for almost ninety years had carried the name of the business which operated there less than five years." (BC, 14 March 1940)

John W.P. Mooney, who grew up on Cottage Street, recalled playing in the ruins as a youth, and after one flood period, coming upon the foundation and witnessing it alive with crayfish.

Cottage Street once went by another, more elastic name.

Deeds for lots carved out of the land offer the description: "southerly of rubber bridge, so called," east of the river and south of "rubber" street.

Kelly was the one who leased the empty factory to William Stanley for his electrical experiments.

As was noted earlier, the remnants of the old factory were torn down in the late 1930s. The land including the old factory remained in the Kelly family until the '70s.

#### FREDERICK T. SEELEY, ANTIQUES DEALER

Michael Kelly sold off several lots from his Cottage Street acreage, including the parcel southeast of the bridge, which is visible from the River Walk.

Kelly's heirs sold this lot -- 12 Cottage St. -- in 1903 to Anna M. (Dellert) Seeley (1863-1934). A lifelong resident of town, she was married to another native, Frederick T. Seeley (1858-1940). They had one son. (BC, 22 January 1934)

Seeley operated a store on Railroad Street, dealing in antiques and metals. He continued his business from his home, retiring in 1935. He also advertised himself as a carpet cleaner and furniture repairer. (BC, 25 January 1940 & directories)

The property went through a half dozen owners after the Seeleys died. At present it is owned by Thunder Realty Trust.

#### SPANNING THE RIVER

We've visited the east side of the river, but not considered how that section was reached.

Roads and bridges were critical to travel and commerce and to the exploitation of land in town. The earliest road through Great Barrington was the Springfield-to-Albany route which approximately follows Route 23 today.

Early growth in town naturally came along that road first. The road went right by what is now the River Walk. And as we shall see, the Main Street frontage quickly sprouted homes and shops. Dresser Avenue would come later.

A map of the town from 1794 shows only two bridges over the Housatonic River, one the Great Bridge, the other south of town probably on what is now Brookside Road.

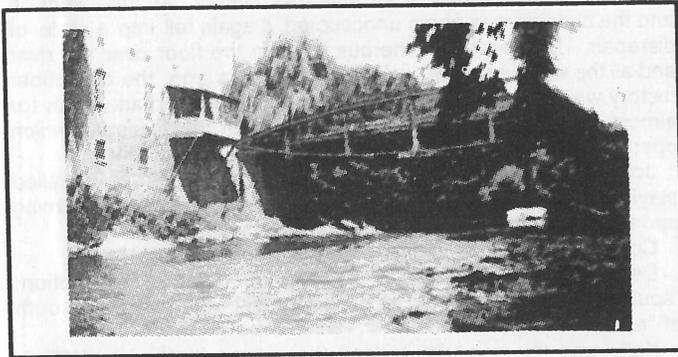
Rubbermaker Day built the first, wooden span which came to be known as the Rubber (now Cottage Street) bridge, when he erected his factory in 1847-48. He got to the mill by an access road which went right along the river; it is described in a deed in later years. Berkshire Woolen Co., though, owned a lot of land on the east side of the bridge, and eventually took advantage of the bridge to lay out streets and build mill housing for its workers.

The first metal bridge at Cottage Street was a lenticular truss erected in 1879 by Corrugated Metal of Berlin, Conn., at a total cost of \$2,407.57. (Town Report, 1880)

The bridge soon proved to be too narrow, and "The Selectmen were instructed to change the Rubber Bridge so-called to a double track, with a footway..." The abutments were raised four feet and widened and the approaches filled. This time, the total cost was \$5,743.38. (Town Report, 1887)

The old bridge was removed to the Leavitt site -- Brookside Road -- where it served for several more decades.

The present Cottage Street bridge was installed in 1961, and most days, its traffic is the only noise to be heard along the River Walk.



Cottage Street bridge in 1930s

### JASON COOLEY & HIS OLD HORSE

The East Street section of town was known for years as "Brooklyn." Its development was slow, largely because of no roads or bridges until the late 1870s.

Early residents were adaptive, however.

Jason Cooley (1837-1911), for example, ferried people back and forth across the river by small boat.

Born in Sheffield, Cooley came to Great Barrington to work for the Artemus and Judith Bigelow family on Main Street. A black man, he later ran a restaurant in the Marble Block and was a well-known caterer.

Cooley "built one of the first houses to be put up in that section of Great Barrington known as 'Brooklyn,' and he had occupied it for over thirty years," his obituary said. (BC, 19 January 1911)

The house still stands at 174 East St., just uphill from the bend in the river east of the River Walk. But for the trees, it would be visible from the river.

Cooley supported the A.M.E. Zion Church, was for several years sexton of the Congregational Church, and with his wife eventually joined St. James' Church. (BE, 13 January 1911)

Cooley had an old horse.

"It was while caring for the horse that Mr. Cooley was stricken with apoplexy and after he was taken ill the animal could not be induced to take any grain," *The Courier* reported.

"Since Mr. Cooley had driven the horse almost daily to Main street for the past twenty-five years, and despite its age [about 35] it was quite a lively animal, residents of Brooklyn could generally tell when Mr. Cooley's horse would pass over the bridge near the mill, for it would not slacken its speed when coming across the bridge as most horses do...."

After Cooley passed away the horse refused to eat.

It died a few hours after Cooley's funeral.

The man's wife of many years, Almira, didn't take it so hard. She lived another 21 years, to the age of 90. (BC, 3 March 1932)

### HENRY DRESSER, FARMER

Backing up in time, and returning to the west side of the river, we meet the squire of Dresser Avenue.

Henry Dresser (1812-1899), a Stockbridge farmer, acquired the nine-acre "Samuel Rosseter premises" from heirs in 1872. He paid \$8,800. The property just to the north at that time belonged to John Herrick, to the south to Couch, Girling and Langsdorf.

Dresser was born in Sheffield, one of 13 children. He came to Great Barrington at age 10 to live with his sister, Mrs. John Hulbert. He married Margaret French (1811-60) of West Stockbridge and they had seven children. Soon after his marriage, Dresser purchased the Judge Wilcox place in Stockbridge, known as

Edgehill Farm, on Field Hill. (BC, 16 February 1899)

After Margaret died, Dresser married Caroline Chamberlain (1821-70) of Austerlitz, N.Y. Following her passing, he married a third time, to Ann E. Fitch of Sheffield. She survived him.

The *Courier* described Dresser as genial. He "delighted in the prosperity of his fellows. His farm in Stockbridge was a model. He made farming pay. As a life member of the Berkshire and Housatonic Agricultural societies, he did much to create a sentiment among farmers that has resulted in the well kept farms which have made Stockbridge famous."

Dresser is listed as an HAS member beginning in 1859. He served on the executive committee in 1866-67. He won a \$3 prize for a field of meslings (mixed grain, usually rye and wheat) in 1866, took second for four acres of winter rye in '67 and placed fifth for one acre of oats the year after.

The agricultural event was as much educational as entertaining in those years. Participants took an interest in scientific aspects of farming. Of his rye, for example, Dresser shared with his fellow agrarians: "I make it a rule to raise most of my rye after oats or barley, leaving it the third crop, with only one manuring. I have not failed of having good seed rye once in ten years to average. Rye very heavy three-fourths of the time; thus I get a crop at every plowing, which is a savings of time and labor." (HAS 1867 report)



Dresser family and house, circa 1880s

A deeply religious man, Dresser "was a man of the most sterling qualities and was one of the town's most highly respected citizens. He was one of the best known men in Southern Berkshire." (BE, 9 February 1899)

A Republican, Dresser represented Stockbridge in the General Assembly in 1857.

He provided financial help for several young men to attend college.

By the time he reached 60, Dresser decided to give up active farming. He moved to Great Barrington.

"Henry Dresser, who recently bought the Rosseter place in this village, made preparations to build an addition to the house, but has now decided to move the present house to the north a few rods, and will erect a new residence on the present site during the next year." (BC, 30 October 1872).

Thirteen months later, it was noted: "Quite a number of new houses have been built in town during the past summer, or are now in course of erection. That put up by Henry Dresser on Main street is the most noticeable, and is really a credit to the village." (BC, 12 November 1873)

Dresser sold his Stockbridge farm in 1878.

After his move to Great Barrington, Dresser didn't retire. He sold tile pipe, according to Child. And in his last years he divided up his land in, on both sides of Dresser Avenue, into lots of about a quarter acre each.

"He lived at Housatonic Hall for some time, and then built the residence on Dresser avenue which he occupied until the time of



*Housatonic Hall was a girls' school which enjoyed a good community reputation for 16 years*

his death," according to the obit. Records are vague; this could either have been a cottage at the rear of Housatonic Hall, or possibly the home at 39 Dresser Ave. Housatonic Hall, by the way, was not Dresser's name for the property -- as we shall see.

It was a bitter winter, in 1899.

"The death record in this locality has thusfar in 1899 been unprecedented," *The Courier* said. "Undertaker Culver alone conducted twenty-seven funerals during January. The prevalence of grip has been very severe on old people of weakened constitution. It is estimated that the average age of all who died in January was not less than sixty years." (*BC*, 9 February 1899)

The day the newspaper came out, Henry Dresser died of pneumonia.

He was 87.

Three days later arrived a cold winter storm -- one *The Courier* called the worst since the Blizzard of '88.

Dresser apparently died intestate.

An inventory of his estate, as submitted to the court by his neighbor-executors C.J. Burget, E.E. Barnes and E.B. Culver, showed personal assets of \$376.15 and real estate valued at \$11,950.

Besides his widow, Dresser was survived by two sons, two

daughters, a granddaughter and a grandson. (Berkshire Probate Court, document 20290)

#### **MARY SARGEANT, EVALINE HATCH, FANNIE M. WARREN & ASSOCIATES, EDUCATORS OF YOUNG WOMEN**

After living in his big Main Street home for nine years, Dresser in 1882 signed a 10-year lease with Mary A. Sargeant and Evaline C. Hatch. (*BC*, 25 August 1898)

They established Housatonic Hall, a school for young women.

"Misses Hatch and Sargeant, the managers of the newly organized 'Housatonic Hall' school, have taken possession of the Dresser homestead and cottage and are furnishing and fitting them for occupancy, respectively, the larger house for a residence and dormitory and the cottage for a school room," *The Courier* reported (30 August 1882).

"The fall term of the school will open on Wednesday, September 20th, with, as we are glad to know, a goodly number of boarding pupils. Day scholars will also be admitted, and it is hoped that our citizens will appreciate both the opportunities which this new enterprise presents to them and the beneficial influences it will bring

to this community, educationally, morally and financially, even, and give it a cordial and substantial countenance and support.

"Both Miss Hatch and Miss Sargeant come with a rich and varied experience in teaching and the benefit of travel, of a successful and high order, and with abundant commendations from old patrons and friends as to capability and character...."

The school enjoyed a good first year, "both financially and in educational results. The first term of the second year commences on the 20th of September, when all the scholars now in attendance, with one exception--that of a young lady who has been preparing to teach -- will return, supplemented with already engaged scholars to nearly the capacity of the school premises...." (BC, 27 June 1883)

The following week, the paper noted that Misses Sargeant and Hatch were off to Saratoga, N.Y., for no doubt well-deserved rest and recreation.

Sargent retired after five years and Fannie M. Warren, who had been an assistant teacher, became a principal with Hatch. The latter retired in 1891 because of bad eyesight. She left town. Hatch's vision apparently never recovered; several summers later, at age 67, she was vacationing in North Egremont when she was injured in a fall down stairs. (BC, 25 August 1898)

In 1892, a Mrs. Thrall became Warren's partner in running the school. A couple of years later, a Mrs. Stevens succeeded her, then two years after that, a Mr. Van Shaack for a year. Warren ran the school on her own until it closed in summer 1898.

"The aim of this school is not to unduly crowd pupils, but to develop the mental faculties soundly, along the lines of advanced culture...." *The Courier* explained (25 June 1890). "We note with satisfaction, the plan of the principals to revise their curriculum, making it precisely four years, and consisting only of those studies, required for admission into Vassar, Smith, Wellesley and Holyoke colleges. This will be supplemented by a post-graduate course, furnishing certain specialties among which are the study of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Browning, The School of Fiction, Aesthetics, Moral Science, Logic, History of Art, etc...."

Classes were never very large. In 1896, for instance, Gertrude Tyler Platt was the lone graduate. For her closing exercise essay, she spoke on "The Flower Lore of Shakespeare." "Miss Platt was charmingly attired in white and wore a bunch of daisies at the bodice. Her handling of the subject matter showed careful study and love of Shakespeare," the local newspaper said, "but, more particularly, did it show a deep and strong affection for the flowers, whose praises she sung." (BC, 18 June 1896)

The next year there were two graduates, Ethel Louise Culver and Bessie Eldridge Norton. (BC, 11 June 1897)

Housatonic Hall was resplendant for its final graduation: "The parlor was handsomely draped with flags which represented the class colors -- red, white and blue. The parlor in which the class was seated was trimmed for the occasion. Large American flags were draped around the room. The large mantle was banked with laurels and maiden hair ferns, interspersed with daisies and colored peonies, through the mass of green could be seen the red, white and blue. Large bouquets of flowers and ferns added to the beauty of the room." (BC, 16 June 1898)

### MARTIN MURPHY, PRIEST

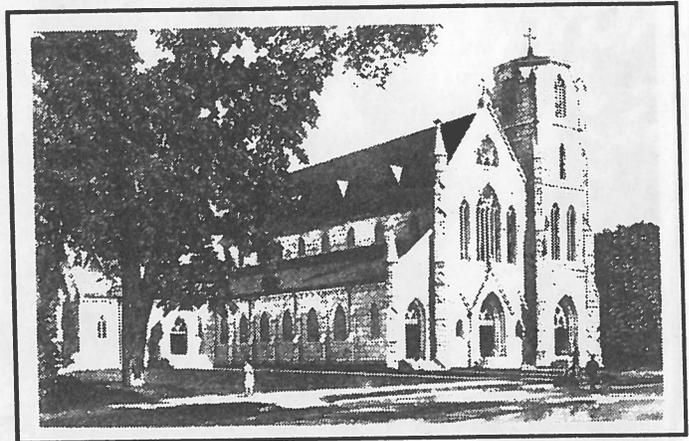
The Rev. John D. Brady came to Great Barrington in 1841 to celebrate the town's first Catholic mass at the old Town Hall on Bridge Street.

Masses were celebrated irregularly for the largely Irish congregation. Then the parish grew to include not only Great Barrington but also Housatonic, Sheffield and Mill River.

In 1853, Father O'Cavanaugh of Pittsfield purchased land at the corner of Russell and Cottage Streets. Two years later, the parish built the first St. Peter's Church. It was a wood frame building.

Town's center was originally east of the Great Bridge. That's where the first Congregational meeting house stood. But by the

end of the 19th century, the present Main Street had asserted its dominance. The new Town Hall was built in 1876, not on Water Street, where the original meeting house stood, but next to St. James' Episcopal Church. The Congregational Church had already moved to Main Street, in 1813.



St. Peter's Church

St. Peter's, too, would shift to a more central location thanks to the purchase by Mary Coleman, who according to a deed paid Henry Dresser \$12,000 on 4 April 1890 for Housatonic Hall.

Coleman was a mystery woman.

She owned the property three days.

Then on 7 April she conveyed title to Bishop Patrick T. O'Reilly of Springfield.

Was she a real estate intermediary? Was she a lawyer? If she had been a benefactress, presumably she wouldn't have charged the church the same amount she paid, \$12,000.

*The Courier* barely noticed the transaction. This was buried in its news columns: "It is understood that Henry Dresser has sold the Housatonic Hall property on Main Street and Dresser Avenue to a New York lady." (BC, 2 April 1890)

A week later, the paper noted that the sale would not affect the business of the private school. (BC, 11 April 1890)

Deeds recognized the validity of Evaline Hatch's private school lease, which ran until September 1892. The lease was renewed for another six years, as the church wasn't ready to build.

After the school closed, the Hall continued for a time as a boarding house.

"My grandmother, Mary Ann Norton Mahar, moved to Great Barrington from Lee to run a boarding house on the river called Housatonic Hall until the property became St. Peter's Church," recalled Mary Gilligan, River Walk volunteer and president of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy. "She left and moved to Elm Street, where she opened a boarding house where Linscott and Lamme have law offices today."

Gilligan's memory of the river is that, except in times of flooding, when everyone would go watch ("It was always a great social event"), "Nobody ever used it. Where the River Walk is was just the banks of the river. The river was considered a no-no when we were growing up."

It would take two decades before a new church would arise on Main Street.

Father Martin Murphy (1858-1944) saw the church's ambitious building plans through.

Murphy, like Michael Kelly, hailed from County Kilkenny, Ireland. He was educated at Waterford College, where he played rugby and was a runner and jumper.

Murphy was ordained in 1884. He served in several churches in the Springfield diocese before coming to Great Barrington in 1895.

Construction of the church began with the laying of a corner-

stone 1 May 1904 and took seven seasons.

"It was several years after the structural part of the church was finished that the interior was completed and ready for dedication in 1911." (BC, 16 March 1944; see also 22 June 1911)

"The edifice is built of white marble from the Goodale quarries in the town of Egremont," according to *The Courier* (17 June 1915). "James Murphy of Providence, R.I., was the architect who prepared the plans and specifications, but he died before the completion of the church, and the plans were carried out by G.E. Haynes, a Pittsfield architect. Daniel O'Connell's Sons of Holyoke were the building contractors..."



"The windows in the church and chapel were made in Munich, Germany. The altars are of white marble with hone finish and are works of art. They were imported from Pisantra, Italy..."

"The church is 142 feet long by 68 feet, six inches wide, with a chapel extending 42 feet to the north. The tower is 22 by 22 feet, with heavy buttresses and corners, and rises 90 feet. The vestry surrounds the chancel and extends outside and to the south of the church nine feet.

The church and chapel are 20 feet high on the side walls and the clear story is 40 feet high, extending ten feet above the oil roof. The seating capacity of the church proper is about 1000 and of the chapel about 200.

"The church is entered by three doors into a broad vestibule with a vaulted ceiling and a floor laid in 12-inch tile. It is wainscotted in quartered oak. Leather-covered doors with plate-glass panels open into the body of the church. The clerestory is carried on quatrefoil marble columns, and the aisle arches above support the high clerestory. The ceiling, both in nave and in aisles, is embellished with early English bosses at the intersections."

The church cost about \$125,000 to build, George Edwin MacLean recorded in his extension of Taylor's history (1928).

St. Peter's was consecrated 27 May 1923.



Photos: The Rev. Martin Murphy, top; statue of Mary, center; Thomas J. Kearin, right

### OUR LADY OF GREAT BARRINGTON

A statue of Virgin Mary has kept tabs on the Housatonic River since climbing her pedestal 29 May 1983.

St. Peter's then-pastor, the Rev. John H. McDonnell, chose the style of the statue during a trip to Rome in 1982.

"He commissioned the Marta Sacred Statue Co. of Rome, a company situated near the Vatican, as the sculptor. The statue stands 5 feet 2 inches high and is made of Carrara..."

"The reason I picked an Italian marble statue was to pay tribute to the Italian artisans who came to the country, many of them to work in the building of the mansions of Berkshire County, and those whose families have remained in masonry and stonecutting

until today,' Father McDonnell said." (BE, 19 May 1983)

### HOUSATONIC HALL'S EVENTFUL MOVE

Housatonic Hall remained standing during most of the construction of St. Peter's Church.

Then it was scattered all over.

A cottage on the property was relocated to Lake Buel.

One section of Housatonic Hall was moved to upper Main Street.

And a local businessman, Thomas J. Kearin, carted the other section to 17 Church St. to replace the old Cass house which had burned 28 January 1908.

This last move created great melodrama.

Here's a little background of three key players involved.

Lee-born Kearin (1862-1918) clerked for 15 years in Robert Girling's ready-made clothing store in Great Barrington. He eventually purchased the Railroad Street business. He relocated it to the Marble Block in 1902. He also developed a real estate business.

Kearin served as a selectman and was a member of the fire district's prudential committee.

He married Elizabeth Blowe in 1888. They had one daughter.

"He was a man of strong personality, honest and straightforward in all his dealings and even those who did not always agree with him gave him credit for sincerity in all his undertakings and opinions." (BC, 5 December 1918)

Contractor Harvey Shufelt (1860-1923) of Housatonic was hired to move the building. Shufelt worked on his father's North Egremont farm for four years before moving to Housatonic to work at Monument Mills for a dozen years. He then began his own business as a builder.

From 1914-22, Shufelt was Housatonic postmaster.

A Democrat, he was active in local and state politics. He was elected a selectman and, in 1900-01, held a seat in the state legislature.

He was twice married, to Clara Wilcox in 1893, and, after her death, to Louise M. Anderson. They had one daughter.

Shufelt was a determined individual.

"He took a stand early in each discussion and left no stone unturned in an effort to bring about its accomplishment." (BC, 26 July 1923)

The *Pittsfield Sun* credited Shufelt with obtaining state aid for local highway work. (18 October 1900)

"Mr. Shufelt did not discontinue his good work on the passage of the bill," the paper said, "but secured the maximum appropriation for every town in his district entitled to it."

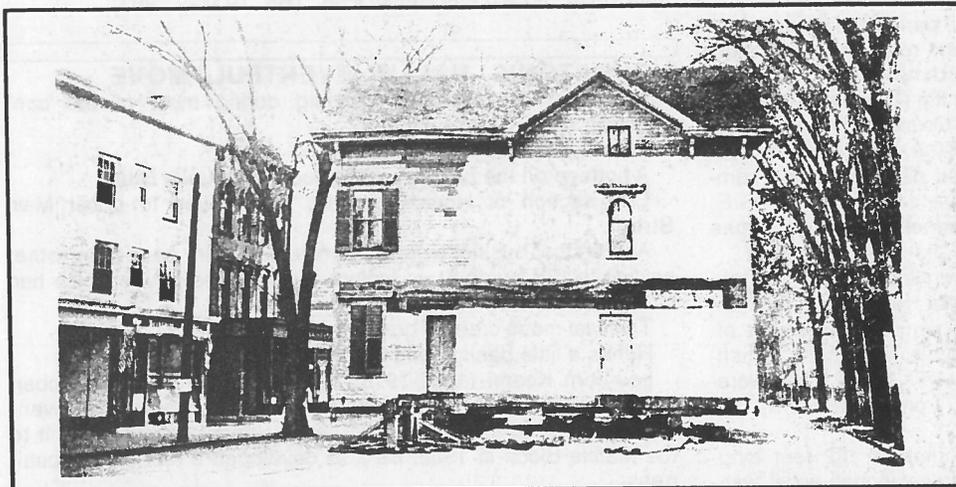
And the tree-hugger in this story was Dr. Orville W. Lane (1855-1932). Vermont-born Lane worked for the Central Vermont Railroad, then the Boston, Concord & Montreal, before deciding to study medicine. He graduated from Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia in 1884. He set up practice in Great Barrington.

Lane was a staunch Republican and was active on the library board of trustees.

He married Mary Heald Dix in 1887 and they had three children.

"Dr. Lane belonged to a generation of country doctors who were, and are, if still in active practice, more than physicians; they were family friends. In the horse and buggy days the Doc-



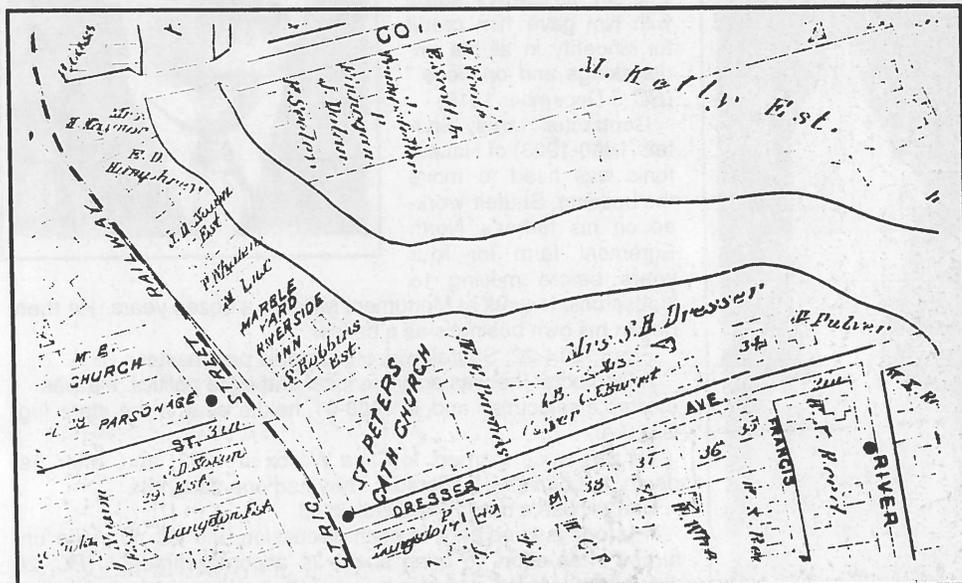


Hall waits over trolley tracks, in front of Marble block

tor's old black horse made long trips at any hour of the day and night, and when the automobile came the little Maxwell car was a familiar sight on the country roads of South Berkshire as the Doctor made his rounds among the sick." (BC, 28 April 1932) Now to the story.

The Courier for 12 May 1910 gave this report of the moving of Housatonic Hall:

"The main portion of the house had been rolled into Main street Tuesday morning, and, in spite of delays caused by tree branches and wires, fairly good progress was being made. It was desired to get the house off Main street as soon as possible, and a force of workmen were to be kept busy during the evening and Tuesday night."



1904 atlas: Housatonic Hall remained while church was built

Trying to keep things moving, Kearin chopped branches from a tree which blocked the way. One was unusually stubborn.

"The large branch, which was a long one, extended from the top of the building to the ground, the butt being in the air. The house was then nearly opposite the Congregational Manse and Mr. Kearin was near the east side of the street. He chopped down the small branches which were holding up the main branch, and the whole thing came down with a crash. Mr. Kearin was hurled into the air by that part of the tree which had been on the ground and fell backward on his head. Joseph H. Maloney and others who were near the scene believed he had been killed." Kearin survived.

But he was unconscious for some time.

He was treated by Dr. J.B. Beebe, who got a second opinion from Dr. Mortimer Cavanaugh.

As might be expected, the accident caused quite a stir.

"Yesterday the building was rolled to the corner of Church street, after some difficulties

caused by tree branches, and trolley cars which have not been run below Rosseter street since Tuesday noon, will make their usual trips this afternoon."

And that was only the beginning.

Following is further account from the next week's paper, dated 19 May 1910:

### Housatonic Hall Blocking Traffic on Main Street

"Housatonic Hall, once a boarding school for young ladies, appeared in a new role this past week, and for a time the old building furnished a topic for some of the hottest town talk heard in years. The structure was recently purchased by Thomas J. Kearin, and, as noted in last week's Courier, was being moved from its old location near the new Catholic church to the Cass property on Church street, when Mr. Kearin was injured while chopping branches of a tree near the Congregational church.

"On Thursday morning of last week the building had reached a point in Main street opposite the Courier office [268 Main St.] and at 9:30 o'clock was making fair progress down the street, lopping off a limb or two from surrounding trees as it passed along pulled by two horse-power capstans, under the direction of Harvey F. Shufelt, who had the contract for moving the building.

"Just as the house was beginning to make the turn to pass into Church street, Deputy Sheriff Truesdell appeared and read to Mr. Shufelt a notice of an injunction which it appears had been secured by the visit of an automobile party, consisting of John S. Stone, clerk of the district court, H.M. Whiting, J.H.C. Church and E.B. Carroll to Springfield on Wednesday. The injunction was signed by Dr. O.W. Lane and was designed to prevent the mutilation or destruction of a certain tree standing within the highway boundaries of Church street.

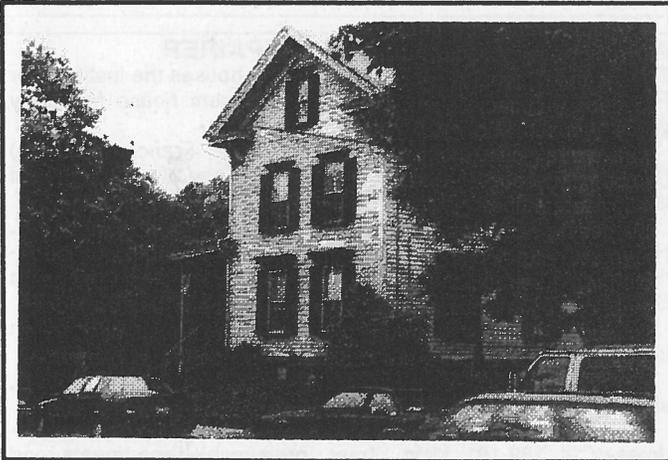
"The injunction itself, issued by Judge Schofield of the superior court, arrived later in the day. The notice of the injunction had been telephoned to Great Barrington from Springfield and the memoranda, written in pencil, furnished the basis for the notice served by the sheriff. Although the injunction was issued to prevent damage to the tree and did not prevent moving the building, Contractor Shufelt declined to go on with the work and progress stopped immediately, with the building

astride the trolley tracks, pretty effectually blocking traffic.

"Most of the Main street population immediately resolved itself into sidewalk committees and tried to talk matters to a finish. This was kept up all day, groups gathering in the middle of the street, in front of the stores and on the street corners. As fast as one group would gather in front of a store and be good-naturedly dispersed by an officer, they would swarm in a new place and resume the argument.

"All kinds of suggestions were offered and all sorts of charges and counter-charges were made, Messrs. Shufelt and Truesdell getting into several heated arguments. A special gathering of the selectmen was held during the day and legal advice was sought by the board.

"Late in the afternoon P. A. Russell secured a nice yellow yard stick and proceeded to measure the building and the width of Church street. He announced later that he believed the building could be moved down the street without cutting a limb, and expressed himself as willing to risk \$200 in support of the idea. A conference of the selectmen, the contractor, the tree warden and other parties interested, was held late Thursday afternoon after the arrival of the court clerk with the injunction from Springfield.



Half of hall as it sits today

"Some progress toward a settlement of the difficulty was made at this meeting, but Friday morning Contractor Shufelt declined to go to work until the injunction was removed. Another conference was held, and about 10 o'clock Friday morning an agreement was reached whereby work was to be resumed under the oversight of the tree warden, with the understanding that there should be as little tree cutting as possible. Work proceeded smoothly until about 2 p.m. Friday, when James K. Parker objected to the contemplated trespass on land in the rear of the Southworth block upon which the house occupied by Mrs. Schreiber's stands. It transpired later, however, that Mr. Kearin had some time ago secured the necessary permission from Mrs. Schreiber's agent.

"The building was far enough advanced Friday evening so that the trolley could again go down Main street about 7 o'clock. The trolley employees followed the work very closely and had all the wire strung and everything in readiness for operation as soon as there was a comfortable distance between the house and the tracks. Charles J. Potter, the tree warden, was on the job almost constantly the last few days while the building was being moved, as no trees were touched without his permission.

"Very little trimming had to be done to the trees, although some of the branches had to be raised in order to allow the building to go under. A climber was kept busy while the house was near the trees and with much difficulty he managed, with the help of several others, to keep the branches high enough so it was not necessary to do any sawing. These limbs scraped some, but not seriously.

"It was close figuring all the way down Church street until the

large trees were passed and the house was almost ready to be moved on the Kearin lot. The building was touching the Parker block nearly all the way down the length of it and it was just as tight squeezing on the other side of the street. Wires, posts and everything else of that nature had to be moved from the street in order to get down the thoroughfare. At the Parker house, occupied by Mrs. I.R. Schreiber, it was necessary to remove the veranda in order to get the house by, and it was thought that it would be necessary to cut off a large branch from a tree in front of the Dewey house, but that was avoided. While the house was at a standstill on Church street several people who were curious to see how much damage had been done to the interior of the building by moving, went through it. There was not a room in the house where the plaster was firm, the jar having been such that in some rooms the plaster fell off in such large portions that it made it almost dangerous to walk around.

"Shortly before Mr. Kearin was injured last week Tuesday the house crashed into a tree which, owing to the darkness, had been miscalculated. So much damage was done to the plaster at the time that no effort was made afterward to save it. Following Mr. Kearin's injury no night work was done, as it was believed unsafe.

"There was much speculation as to whether or not the house could be moved down Church street without cutting any of the branches, and there was a sign of relief when the building was finally cleared on Monday afternoon."

And Kearin was bedridden through it all.

A week later Great Barrington residents had something else to distract them: Halley's Comet soared across the night sky.

The upper Main Street half of the old Hall still stands just north of John B. Hull Fuel.

Kearin lived in the Church Street half of the Hall until he died. The house along with an adjacent property was purchased by First National grocery store in 1965 and torn down to make a bigger parking lot. (BE, 13 & 27 March 1965)

Dr. Lane's house had been razed to make way for that Finast outlet 25 years before. (BC, 26 May & 20 June 1940)

### JOHN & LUCITTA HERRICK, HOMEOWNERS

John and Lucitta Herrick owned land on Main Street north of Samuel Rosseter's holdings and south of Granger, Hill & Co. store (where the Caligari Block stands), according to deed records and the 1854 E.M. Woodford published map of the town.

This land, which deeds indicate at one point encompassed 7.75 acres, was divided into lots in the late 1800s.

Stories of those lots are told individually.

Herrick died in 1883. The local newspaper's notice gave no information about him, other than his age: 70. (BC, 27 June 1883)

John B. Haskins' 1874 *Berkshire County Directory*, though, describes him as a "fac. op.," or factory operator, presumably with Berkshire Woolen, the closest mill. It would seem he had a supervisory position, since he was able to purchase, rather than rent, a house.

His widow Lucitta Herrick (1816-95) ran a boarding house at what is now 187 Main St. (*Child's Gazetteer*) and was survived by five children. (BC, 19 September 1895)

### MATHIAS LUX, MONUMENTAL MAKER

Chunks of marble and granite found along the river in this section didn't come naturally.

A marble yard once operated in the lot between 187 and 195 Main St.

Mathias Lux (1855-1933) was a prominent local stoneworker. He emigrated to the United States at age 18. He came to Great Barrington during construction of Kellogg Terrace (Searles Castle) in 1887-88.

"Upon the completion of that job he started a monumental shop near the Hopkins quarry [on Quarry Street] and had since continued that business.

"Born a poor boy in Germany he had a hard life in childhood and

young manhood. Practically self-educated, full of determination and with a natural taste for mathematics, he had achieved an enviable reputation for excellence of workmanship in his life of business. A deep thinker, positive in his opinions, if not always tactful in expressing them, he was something of a local storm center during the recent war. With the dying out of the animosities of that period and the approach of old age, he had lived a quiet life at his home on Silver Street." (BC, 15 June 1933)



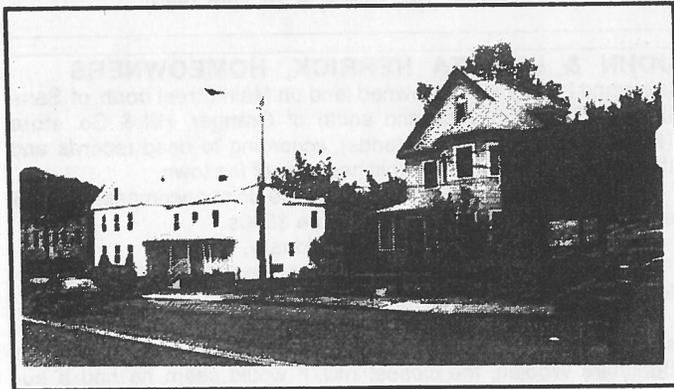
**Lux Monumental Works,**  
M. LUX, Prop.  
Engravers and Sculptors,  
Artistic Stone Cutting,  
Designers & Monumental Architects,  
Contractors for all Kinds of Building  
and Monumental Works.

MAIN STREET,  
Gt. Barrington, Mass.

Lux Monumental Works advertisement from 1898

The yard stood on land which came down through Lux's wife's family, the Herricks.

Lux came close to losing his business in 1890. He was taken to court by creditors, who claimed he owed more than \$10,000 and had given his mother-in-law a \$3,000 mortgage in preference to other debts. Creditors included a granite dealer in Quincy and a marble dealer in Fair Haven, Vt. (BC, 11 & 18 June 1890)



187, empty lot and 195 Main St.

Lux apparently worked out his financial difficulties by joining with John P. Viola under the name J.P. Viola & Co. With works at the same property, the 1894-95 directory lists Lux as manager.

Viola (1844-1922) was born in Chriglea, Italy, and came to the United States in 1870. He worked in Chicago and was a master mason for the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad before coming to Great Barrington in about '71.

"While in Great Barrington he was a contractor and was engaged in the construction of many of the local buildings. He was a part owner of the Crotty & Viola property on Railroad street. For a few years he was a member of the fire district sidewalk and sewer commissioners...." (BC, 23 February 1922).

By 1898, Lux was back on his own. Viola continued as a mason, in partnership with his brother Charles.

Lux at times worked up a head of steam over a local issue. The 1 January 1925 issue of *The Courier*, for example, carried a

strongly worded letter from the stonemason decrying the advent of the automobile, a "murderous menace on the public highways."

Lux "constructed many of the large mausoleums and monuments in Great Barrington and other Berkshire towns." (BE, 12 June 1933)

He also made the First Resistance marker on Town Hall lawn, of dolomite taken from the Searles-Hopkins quarry, and he crafted the base of the Newsboy Statue on Maple Avenue.

Lux's first wife Adaline (d. 1898) was daughter of John and Lucetta Herrick. Her obituary carries no personal information. (BC, 24 February 1898)

The couple lived in the house at 187 Main St. Following Adaline's death, Lux wed West Stockbridge-born Ellen (Wheeler) Fellows (1845-1933), who survived him.

In 1911 Lux allowed his mortgage to lapse and moved to a larger space on Silver Street, near the railroad track. He moved his residence there, too.

Robert Jones Jr. of Great Barrington related a recent anecdote. He said electrician Rob Clausen, excavating for an electrical line across the Main Street lot, came upon old gravestones -- including one bearing the name "Robert Jones."

### ANTONIO SCALICI, SHOE REPAIRER

The building once owned by Herrick today houses the Institute for First Amendment Rights. It was an apartment house for many years.

Antonio Scalici (1888-1951) and his wife Francesca (Troia) (1892-1968) owned the building from 1927. They also owned what is now an empty lot next door. They bought it in 1939.

Born in Italy, Scalici emigrated to the United States at age 17. He lived in New York City until 1921, when he came to Great Barrington. He operated a shoe repair shop for 28 years at 185 Main St., in the block built just to the north of his home.

Scalici was a veteran World War I and belonged to the American Legion. (BC, 22 March 1951)

Mrs. Scalici was also born in Italy. After her husband's death, she took in boarders. (BC, 3 October 1968)

Street directories since the turn of the century indicate addresses at 189-191 Main Street, presumably apartments and shops in this same building. Among later tenants were Bessie Klahn and Keller Antiques.

### LOUIS J. TINKER, BUS OPERATOR

Community Land Trust's Riverbank House at 195 Main St. 90 years ago was a boarding house run by Nellie H. Brusie. The Barnes & Farnum 1904 atlas shows the Riverside Inn standing on this parcel.

Town directories suggest the building was vacant for several years until Louis J. Tinker (1880-1959) moved there in the mid-1920s. Tinker's wife was Sarah E., a Brusie. Egremont-born Tinker took title to the property in 1946.

Tinker established a garage next door to this lot, at 197 Main Street, "and later he operated a bus line to Canaan, Conn., from Great Barrington. He also operated a school bus service here for several years." (BC, 2 July 1959)

The Crowley & Lunt *South Berkshire Directory* of 1932-34 carried an advertisement for Tinker Bus Company, describing Great Barrington-Canaan service: "7.45, 11.15 a.m., 2.45, 5.10 p.m. Return 8.30 a.m., 1.00, 2.45, 5.45 p.m. Buses for Parties at All Times."

The ad also noted, "Furnished Rooms-195 Main Street Mrs. L.J. Tinker, Propr."

The Tinkers had a son, Preston L., who for a time drove bus for the family company, and a daughter, Dorothy Lundy.

Tinker "was a well-known horseman," *The Courier* said, "especially in harness racing. He owned and trained horses during his career and was a familiar figure on the sulky tracks in the East. His keen interest in harness racing did not diminish during

the years, and he could recall vividly many incidents in connection with harness racing either as a participant or as a bystander. When the Great Barrington fair had harness racing featuring county horses, Mr. Tinker was one of the most popular entrants. He was also a prominent figure during the races held on the Main street in Stockbridge during the winter months a couple of generations ago, when he was a keen competitor of the late James 'Gentleman Jim' Malumphy of that town."

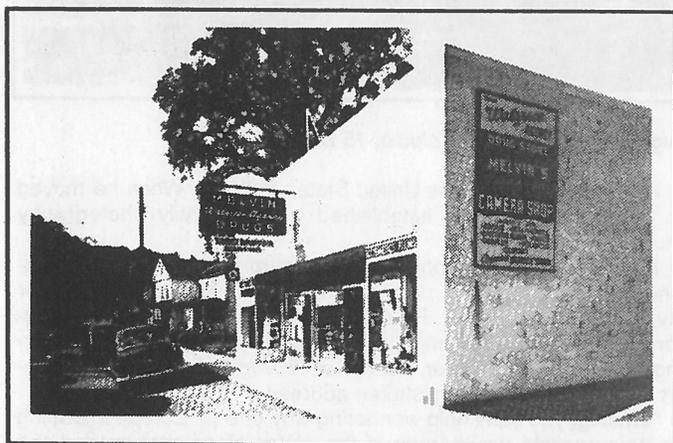
The Tinker family sold 195 Main St. to Melvin Katsh in 1962. It had one other owner before becoming the property of Community Land Trust in 1987.

### MELVIN J. KATSH, PHARMACIST

Melvin J. Katsh built his drug store on the Tinker Garage lot in 1949-50.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1916, Katsh was six when his family moved to Pittsfield. He attended Columbia University School of Pharmacy and in 1946 opened a small store at 179 Main St., Great Barrington. Within four years, he was ready to open a new store, Melvin's Prescription Pharmacy, at 197-199 Main Street. This was the former location of Tinker's Garage and bus company.

*The Courier* (18 May 1950) hailed the new store as "one of the finest modern drug stores comparable to any in the county. The store is housed in the new building for which construction work was started last September.



Melvin's Prescription Pharmacy in 1950s

"The building is a one-story cinder block construction with reinforced cellar walls. Fifteen tons of steel girders were used in the roof, and thus eliminated the necessity of columns for support in the merchandising area. The interior was completed with the cooperation of the Walgreen company, in accordance with the pretested design in modern superstores developed by the company over many years of experimentation. The harmonizing white metal exterior of the new full-vision front is both simple and attractive."

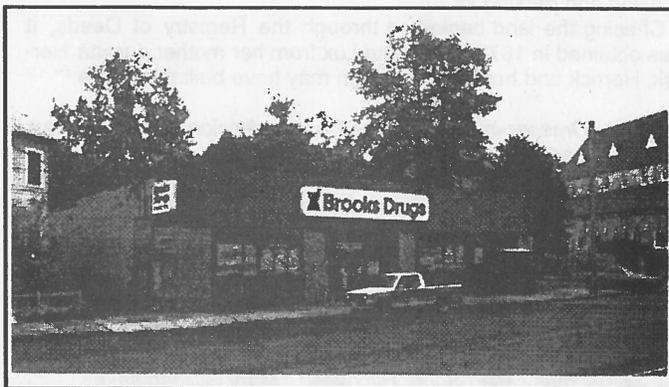
The store had 2,800 square feet of floor space and departments for drugs, prescriptions, tobaccos, cosmetics, candy, photography and miscellaneous merchandise. Marsh B. Giddings Jr. was architect. Charles Davis was general contractor.

Mr. Katsh told *The New York Times* (2 August 1976) how he came to settle in a small town:

"Most of the others in my class went to work in the New York City area," he recalled the other day. "But I thought it was a rat race down there, and I couldn't see any future. I wanted to go where there would be less competition and where I would know the people I was dealing with."

The year before, the paper noted, Melvin's Pharmacy did \$700,000 worth of business.

By the time of the article, the store had grown from its original size. One addition was put on the rear in 1962. *The Courier* of 21 April 1972 carried an illustration of a planned further expanded store. Another addition of 3,000 square feet was built onto the south, where the Gibbons house once stood at 201 Main Street. There was also room for a 12-car parking lot.



Brooks Drugs at 197 Main St. today

"A new small coffee bar will be installed," the paper said. Also included were to be expanded cosmetic and photography departments. Melvin's Book Mark was another new feature. The contractor was A.J. Magadini. Interior design was by Walgreens.

The store was destroyed by fire in July 1978.

The store set up temporarily in the Methodist parsonage across the street while Katsh rebuilt. He opened again in July 1979. A few years later, he sold the business to Brooks Drugs chain. He still owns the building.

Associated with Katsh in the pharmacy was his wife Hilda (Katz)(1917-83). Born in the Bronx, N.Y., she graduated from Hunter College in 1937 and earned a master's degree in education from Columbia University. She worked as a dietician, then joined the Women's Medical Specialists Corps and served in Europe during World War II. She was later a dietitian and nutritional clinic supervisor at Bronx Veterans Hospital. In Great Barrington, she was active with Hadassah, Hevreh and Fairview Hospital Auxiliary.

The Katshs married in 1957. They had one son, Stuart.

The Katsh property on Main Street may be traced back through the Registry of Deeds to ownership by Louis and Sarah Tinker and heirs from 1921 to 1949. In a deed from Great Barrington Savings Bank to E. Roy Humphreys in 1917, it is described as having buildings and being located north of land of Patrick H. Whalen and south of land of Katherine Doyle.

It is described in an 1899 deed as "a certain tract or parcel of building lots known as 'Morningside' situated on a hill westerly of the main street in the village of said Great Barrington consisting of seven and three fourths acres of land." Morningside would appear to be the division of land once owned by John and Lucitta Herrick.

### MARION GIBBONS, SWITCHBOARD OPERATOR

Marion K. Gibbons (1902-71) owned the the house which stood at 201 Main St., just north of St. Peter's Church, from the late 1920s.

A lifelong resident of the town, she worked at the Great Barrington exchange of New England Telephone until retiring in 1965, when the exchange was automated.

Gibbons was a supervisor with the company for many years. She was a member of the Telephone Pioneers of America and volunteered as a Grey Lady at Fairview Hospital. (BC, 8 November 1971)

In the 1940s, Rosalie Gibbons ran a hairdressing business from

the house.

"A portly woman she was, and a very kind and gentle person; at least, that's how I found her," recalled Leo La Fontana. (BC, 4 February 1993)

Marion Gibbons sold to Melvin Katsh in 1967. The house was moved to River Street, he said, and the land was used for a store addition and parking lot.

Chasing the land backward through the Registry of Deeds, it was obtained in 1877 by Adaline Lux from her mother, Lucitta Herrick. Herrick and her husband John may have built the house.

Henry Dresser in 1876 planned a sub-division on a new way, Dresser Avenue, which extended perpendicular from Main Street east to the river. River Street, which connected the eastern end of Dresser Avenue with Church Street to the south, was built in 1898. (BC, 3 March 1898)

The area is transitional, on the edge of the town's commercial center. The fancier homes were on the hill to the southwest. Mill housing lined the river to the north and northeast. "In my youth the Housatonic River was the division which we called Brooklyn on one side (east) and Irish Hill on the other, which included Knob Hill, sometimes called Snob Hill (west)," Mary Gilligan said.

The Dresser lots sold fairly quickly to up-and-coming, middle-class merchants and soon created their own neighborhood.

### EDWARD E. BARNES, GROCER

Henry Dresser held off selling the parcel directly east of his home until 1892, when he transferred title to Edward E. Barnes.

Barnes (1831-1913) was born in West Stockbridge and attended Lenox Academy. He came to Great Barrington in 1853. Two years later, he married Nancy A. Seymour (1833-1911) of Lee. Their only child died when a baby. They eventually celebrated 56 years of marriage.

"While here he was engaged in the grocery business, which line he developed in extensive trade, locating at first on the site of the present store occupied by R.F. Tyler. For a few years in partnership with C.W. Norton, Mr. Barnes was engaged in the hardware business. It was as a groceryman that Mr. Barnes achieved a reputation among his townspeople as the best judge of cheese in the county." (BC, 15 May 1913)

Barnes "carries a full and carefully selected stock of choice staple and fancy groceries, including teas, coffees, spices, condiments, table luxuries, confections, &c., and sells at the lowest possible prices," said *Along Housatonic Lines* (1892).

Barnes sold his grocery to Charles J. Burget for the latter's son John. (BC, 1 June 1899)

Barnes served as town constable for 43 years and was on the board of overseers of the poor for 11 years. He was elected three terms as tax collector. Both Barnes and his wife belonged to the Methodist Church. He was a member of Cincinnatus Lodge, AF&AM, and also Monument Chapter, Royal Arch Masons and Knights Templar.

### LUCIEN AIGNER, MASTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

After E.E. Barnes died, the house at 15 Dresser Ave. went through several owners, including Sarah A. Dewell and William and Charlotte Fenn.

Mildred H. Allen (1904-92) bought it in 1955.

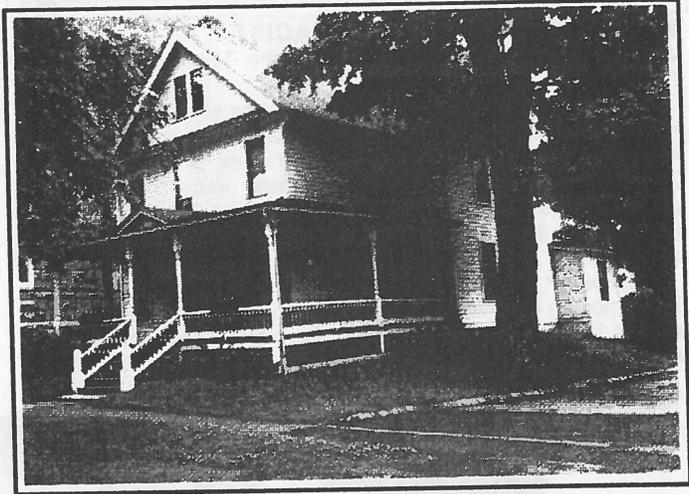
That was the year she married an emigrant who was handy with a Leica.

A town native, she taught business courses, shorthand and typing in Great Barrington schools for more than 25 years. (BC, 3 September 1992)

Her husband Lucien Aigner was born in Hungary in 1901. He grew up in Budapest. He began a career as a photojournalist in 1923, and according to *The New York Times* (25 March 1973), "amassed an historically invaluable collection of more than 100,000 negatives ..."

"Included among Aigner's negatives are extensive essays on Einstein at Princeton, musicians (Menuhin, Paderewski, Chaplin and others), Ghandi, American political figures such as Jimmy Walker and Fiorella LaGuarda, and virtually the entire panoply of diplomats and politicians who paraded across the European scene between 1923 and 1938 Churchill, Selassie, Mussolini, and scores more...."

Aigner, said the *London Times* (7 March 1976), "is recognized, belatedly, as a great photographer, worthy to rank with Capa and Bresson, perhaps more important than either for his record during the 1930s, of the dissolution of Europe."



Aigner home and photo studio, 15 Dresser Ave.

Aigner had come to the United States in 1939. When he moved to Great Barrington, he established a small family photography studio.

*Polaroid Close-Up* (April 1981) was surprised at the photographer's eventual settling down: "Ring the doorbell at 15 Dresser Avenue, next door to St. Peter's catholic church in Great Barrington... there is little evidence, except for an antiquated card bearing the title *Lucien Aigner, Master of Photography*, that you haven't arrived at an utterly mistaken address.

"Waiting, you can't help wondering why one of Europe's leading photojournalists would trade in the glitter of celebrities and the proximity to power, in order to photograph babies, high-school graduates, weddings, the positive rites of passage in this small western Massachusetts town. Is it, after all, pain and suffering that are deeply woven into the now out of style hand-colored photographs, the green outdoor carpeting, the simple but nearly anonymous furnishings of the last twenty-five years?..."

Aigner in 1994 gave his collection of photos, negatives and archival material to the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art being established in North Adams.

Aigner still lives on Dresser Avenue and has watched progress on River Walk.

### EDMUND B. CULVER, UNDERTAKER

Henry Dresser in November 1881 sold a house lot to a mortician.

Edmund Bishop Culver (1849-1919) was a furniture retailer and undertaker on Railroad Street. Born in Lee, Culver taught school for a time in the Beartown section. His sister was married to Levi Beebe, the well-known farmer and weather prophet.

Culver worked on his father's East Lee farm and traveled in the west and south "with Prof. Richardson giving exhibitions of various experiments with electricity and gases. While thus engaged he at one time had a narrow escape from serious injury when one of the experiments was being conducted." (BC, 27 November 1919)

Culver came to Great Barrington in 1875 and purchased Frederick Langsdorf's undertaking business. He later bought the stock of R.M. Couch and began a furniture business.

In 1918, Henry A. Stevens became his partner, and Culver eventually sold his entire interest to Stevens.

Culver was a selectman for five years and was superintendent of highways.

He wed Alice N. Pixley (1851-1919) in 1875. Born in Great Barrington, she taught school before marrying. The couple had two daughters and a son. (BC, 6 March 1919)

After his first wife's death, Culver wed Sarah J. Conway (d. 1938). She was born in Salisbury, Conn., and lived in Sheffield

most of her life, returning there in the early 1920s, after Culver's death. (BC, 10 November 1938)

Culver's business was on Railroad Street in what *Along Housatonic Lines* called "one of the handsomest furniture establishments in the Housatonic Valley."

The funeral home was across the street. "As accessories to this he possesses hearses, funeral goods and paraphernalia, and conducts everything in this line entrusted to him with great tact and decency."

Culver and his neighbors were fairly prominent in town. *The Courier* for 3 March 1898, for example, included this item: "Mr. and Mrs. E.B. Culver entertained a number of their friends at their home on Dresser Avenue Tuesday evening. Whist and refreshments were among the enjoyments of the evening."

Culver acquired the 19 Dresser Ave. land, according to the deed dated 18 November 1881, "together with the right to use my [Dresser's] premises in the rear of the above land to go to and from the basement of a barn to be built by him on said land and also a right to lay and maintain a drain from said land across my said premises in the rear thereof to the Housatonic River and if I shall separately sell my residence or my pasture lot lying on said river, I promise to sell and convey to said Culver his heirs and assigns the land lying between the premises now conveyed and the Housatonic River for the price of sixty-five dollars."

Dresser sold Culver the land between the lot and the river on 11 November 1882, thought the deed wasn't recorded until 1904. Along with the small section of land went the old water privilege: "the right to erect and maintain a dam across said river, opposite said premises, on, or near, the site occupied by Horace H. Day, and also the right of way across said premises."

The Barnes & Famum 1904 atlas indicates only one barn behind the Culver lot; actually, it's behind the next house to the west, Aigner's, and is still standing.

City directories indicate that Culver ran a "livery in connection" with his funeral home. Perhaps the right-of-way served to reach pastureland. Mary Gilligan, though, is convinced the path, along the edge of the River Walk, was an easier way to get caskets to and from various churches.



Goslee (1873-1966) was born in Great Barrington. He worked on the family farm in Monument Valley before joining Charles E. Platt in a hardware business at 15 Bridge St. Today it is Harland B. Foster's.

Goslee and his wife Harriett (Hall) (1873-1957), a town native, were charter members of Great Barrington Grange. They received their 50-year pins in 1956. The Goslees also belonged to First Congregational Church and she was a member of the Parish Club and Women's Guild. (BC, 19 December 1957)

The couple were one of the longest married in the area, surpassing the Barneses by six years. They celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary two months before Mrs. Goslee's death.

Goslee then moved to the Boston area.

Goslee "wrote his own popular advertising column, marked with homespun humor, that appeared weekly in *The Courier*," the newspaper reported in an obituary notice (17 March 1966).

Great Barrington Savings Bank purchased the Goslee home and a garage in the rear in 1958. Goslee had been a bank corporator since 1919. (BC, 6 November 1958)

"After the house on the property is razed," the newspaper said, "the land, approximately 100x150 feet, will be used for a parking lot by the Great Barrington Savings bank. It is expected that parking for 40 cars will be provided. This is expected to ease considerably the acute parking situation that now exists, and will also make employee parking less difficult."

In 1964, the bank transferred title of the parking lot to the Roman Catholic Bishop.

*Culver barn, left, as seen from the river.*

#### A FREAK PARKING LOT ACCIDENT

Katherine G. Pratt started her car in the Great Barrington Savings Bank parking lot on Dresser Avenue.

It was about 11 a.m. on 28 January 1962.

She attempted to put the car in reverse but shifted into forward gear instead.

"The car ripped through a sign post, jumped a guard rail at the edge of the parking area and careened down the steep rock embankment into the icy waters of the Housatonic.

"Fortunately during its hair-raising trip down the steep bank which is almost perpendicular at that point, the car did not nose over," said *The Courier* (1 February 1962).

"As it was it came to rest upright, facing upstream. The gates up stream were closed making the water low in the river so that it reached about seat high in the car...."

"Firemen lowered themselves by ropes to the edge of the river and then extended a ladder to the hood of the car. Fire Chief M.T. Cavanaugh and Gordon Hammer jumped into the water in 20 degree weather and pulled Mrs. Pratt from the car. She was assisted up the embankment and taken to Fairview Hospital," reported *The Eagle* (29 January 1962)

Mrs. Pratt was treated and released. The car was towed across the river to Cottage Street, after several trees were removed to accommodate a wrecker from F.W. Spaulding & Sons Garage.

#### CHARLES J. BURGET, HARDWARE RETAILER

One of the first parcels Henry Dresser sold from his new Dresser Avenue was on 1 January 1876 to Charles J. Burget. As the case with others to build homes on the street, Burget was an established businessman.

Born in Alford, Burget (1837-1900) was the son of a tanner. He was a friend and playmate of Judge Justin Dewey as a youth. He taught school in New Jersey, where he met his future wife, Lydia A. Pinney (1833-1917). She was born in New Jersey. They wed in 1860. They had one son. (BC, 9 February 1917)

Burget operated an oil well in Pennsylvania for a time. When he returned to Great Barrington he went into partnership with William Kilbourne to run a grocery store on Railroad Street. Burget soon bought out his partner and moved the store to Main Street.

#### ARTHUR H. GOSLEE, HARDWARE MERCHANT

After E.B. Culver's death, his heirs sold the property to another retailer, Arthur H. Goslee.



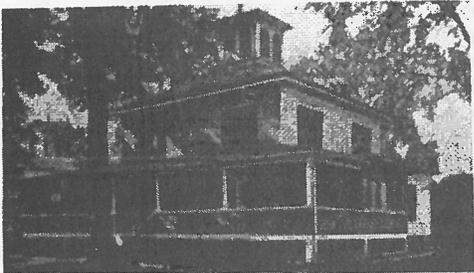
House at 31 Dresser Ave. today

"In 1887 he became a member of the hardware concern incorporated under the name of the Burget & Lewis Co.," according to *Biographical Review* (1906). This store was at the corner of Castle Street.

Burget retired from business in 1899. He served as town clerk from 1882 until his death. He was also a district representative, town assessor and county commissioner. He was a trustee for the savings bank.

**ELM SHADE**  
GREAT BARRINGTON, MASS.

OPEN ALL THE YEAR  
Patent and convenient Treatment and  
Auto Parties. Homelike Hospitality and  
Have Looking you will like.  
Dining Room accommodates 40.



**STEAKS, CHOPS and CHICKEN DINNERS A SPECIALTY**  
**BOARD BY DAY, WEEK or SEASON**

Elm Shade Tea Room. Comforted. Quick Service.  
Cold Cuts, Salads, Hot Lunches and Dinners.

MRS. ROBERT PAUL, Tel. 114 31 DRESSER AVENUE.  
Third House from Catholic Church.

Elm Shade Inn advertisement

Burget belonged to the Congregational Church and conducted the choir. He was a Mason and past master of Cincinnatus Lodge.

The merchant "was a decidedly practical man. Whatever he did was well done, a fact clearly shown by the neat and exact way in which the town records were kept." (BC, 5 April 1900)

Dresser had sold the lot at 31 Dresser Ave. to Burget, reserving the river frontage. Later transactions passed over title to this land, too. Recorded in 1904 was a deed from Dresser for an extension of the Burget house lot in uniform width to the river reserving rights to "maintain a dam across said river, opposite said premises, on or near the site occupied by Horace H. Day, and also the right of way across said premises."

C.J. Burget's widow sold the property in 1904 to George Robins. He in turn sold it six years later to the Pauls.

**CLARA S. PAUL, ELM SHADE INNKEEPER**  
Born in Pierpont, N.Y., Robert S. Paul (1848-1928) operated a

livery, Paul & Walker. (BC, 19 April 1928)

The business offered livery, sales, boarding, feed and hitching services from a stable at the rear of Hotel Miller, according to an advertisement in J.B. Goussett's 1898 *Berkshire County Directory*. "Teams furnished single and double at reasonable terms."

The teamster traveled widely. "Robert Paul has left Green Mountain, Iowa, with a car of horses and expects to be home the latter part of the week," read one news item about the horseman. (PJ, 16 February 1899)

Paul's wife Clara (Hess) in about 1920 established Elm Shade Inn as "transient and family boarding and tea room for auto parties," we learn from a 1929-31 directory.

Crowley & Lunt's 1932-34 *South Berkshire Directory* carries an advertisement for the boarding house boasting "Homelike Hospitality" and noting "Steaks, Chops and Chicken Dinners a Specialty" and "Cold Cuts, Salads, Hot Lunches and Dinners."

Mrs. Paul gave up the business and moved to Sheffield a year before her death in 1938. (BC, 19 May 1938)

Sarah U. Harding is listing as the inn's proprietor in the 1940-42 directory.

Roy A. and Margaret L. Hammer later held title to the property and it has since gone through several more owners.

Today the building is an apartment house owned by Roger Tryon and Nion Robert Theriot.

## RIVER PADDLERS

Henry Parker Fellows (1854-1918?), a Boston lawyer, with a companion traveled the length of the Housatonic River in 1882. He recorded his experiences in the book *Boating Trips on New England Rivers* (1884).

Though they spent a day in Great Barrington, Fellows was brief in his description of this section of river:

We "swiftly drifted stern foremost through a stretch of rapids, past a deserted mill on one side and the houses of the village opposite. The sun shining on the turbulent water gave it the appearance of molten lead in violent agitation...."

More than a century later, William "Ting" Tingley of Connecticut, former U.S. Open canoe champion, with two companions undertook Housatonic River Adventure 1995 to publicize the river's plight. Housatonic Valley Association organized it.

The canoers found Great Barrington much more welcoming, on their spring trek.

"The River Walk was just great to see from the river. It's cleaned up and nicely landscaped," Tingley remarked, noting how much it had changed for the better since a previous canoe adventure in 1986. (BC, 22 June 1995)

## A POLLUTION INVENTORY

Great Barrington opened a \$4.7-million wastewater treatment plant near Bridge Street in 1974, ending decades of agitation for a cleaner river.

"A Sewer Needed," headlined a brief item in *The Courier* for 12 February 1872. "Henry Ward Beecher says: 'I don't say that good sewerage is gospel, but I do say that bad sewerage is heresy.' Then there is a deal of heresy in this village, for the greatest need of the place is a good sewer, and we have hope that the want will be supplied some day."

The paper's editor at the time was Marcus Rogers (1835-1926).

A system of sewer lines and storm drains was built in town just before the turn of the century. Henry Dresser was assessed \$15 one year, a quarter of his share of costs. (BC, 28 July 1898)

There were new cries to do something about the malodorous and unhealthy river.

The new sewers were likely dumping into it.

The Rev. R. DeWitt Mallery, pastor of Housatonic Congregational Church (1901-08), railed against sewage flowing into the river from Housatonic, Great Barrington and neighboring towns. (BC, 8 March 1906)

Dr. Charles McBurney, Stockbridge physician, complained of river conditions a few years later (BC, 30 November 1911).

A frank catalog of abuse appeared in September 1926. A *Report on Sources of Pollution Housatonic River Valley Massachusetts* was WPA Project No. 65-14-8070, supervised by George T. Hamilton of Housatonic Valley Survey.

For Great Barrington, the report gave a lengthy description of discharge into the river between the Great Bridge and Bridge Street bridge.

It listed 31 pipes on the west side of the river, 14 on the east.

In the approximate area of the River Walk, typically, it found "A 4 inch tile pipe from private house discharging well up on the bank of the river, allowing sewage deposits to be scattered down the side of the bank of the river."

A number of sewer remedies were offered over the years.

In January 1951, a treatment project was suggested at Olympian Meadows. In 1963, three sewage plans were aired. Taxpayers over the next several years questioned costs.

Finally approved and built, the plant went into operation 19 September 1974, "Nearly 15 years after initial engineering began and two years after construction started." (BC, 19 September 1974)

That was one source of river pollution pretty much brought under control, though Peter Jensen said he's pointed out to the town engineer one still-active sewer pipe along the river.

Pollutants far more difficult to resolve are polychlorinated biphenyls.

Used as a lubricant and insulator for power transformers, PCBs saturated ground at GE's factory in the Morningside section of Pittsfield and leached into Silver Lake and the Housatonic River for decades before officially going on a list of toxic substances in 1979. The largest accumulation of PCBs in the river is at Woods Pond in Lenox.

"The PCB problem still weighs on everyone's mind - a problem visible from Pittsfield to Ashley Falls in the green signs posting the river as unsafe for fishing or hunting waterfowl," Paul Karr wrote in Massachusetts Audubon Society's *Sanctuary* (September-October 1993).

"...The presence of that cancer-causing substance... makes the wildlife seem imperiled, more fragile and, therefore, more exalted," Steve Silk commented in "Down the Lazy Housatonic" (*Hartford Courant*, 6 August 1995).

divert the stream and cause further damage."

The work didn't anticipate the massive flooding in January 1949, which inundated South County and destroyed many bridges. New retaining walls and rip-rapping were installed in Great Barrington and Sheffield at a cost of \$100,000. Sen. Ralph

Lerche of Northampton led a fight for more funding, saying, "There is need of a retaining wall near St. Peter's church in Great Barrington, and if it is not done, the river may undermine the church...." (BC, 16 February 1950)

The following year, Rep. Sidney Q. Curtiss (R-Sheffield) obtained an amendment to cover the additional work in Great Barrington. "Among those at the hearing Monday were: Eugene Caligari, Mr. and Mrs. Marion Grant, Arthur Goslee, Miss Marion Gibbons, Mrs. John Kubik, Walter Smith, Mrs. John Hammer, Ralph Hammer, Miss Blanche Bradford, Melvin Katsh and George Betros,"

said *The Courier* (22 March 1951). These individuals all owned properties south of the Cottage Street bridge.

## Housatonic River Warning

### HOUSATONIC RIVER FISH CONTAMINATED WITH PCBs

**Do not eat fish, frogs or turtles caught in the Housatonic River. Please release unharmed any fish caught in the Housatonic River.**

For more information contact:  
Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (617) 754-1100  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (617) 646-6000  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health (617) 725-7120

## EXCAVATED TREASURES

River Walk workers have become amateur archaeologists, as they uncovered a few layers of riverbank used to dump household waste over the years.

Some of the surviving refuse dated back to the mid-19th century. Prior to that, while the riverbank may have been a repository for household trash, the material was less in quantity, and often was bio-degradable.

With the advent of disposable packaging, the amount of household trash increased. Tin cans and bottles appeared in trash heaps -- and haven't readily disintegrated.

Pastor Mallary called for action at the turn of the century: "All throwing of garbage in little piles to collect should be punishable by law, the town should set aside a public dumping ground." (BC, 8 March 1906)

The town apparently listened.

At a special meeting 6 August 1907, residents "voted to purchase ground for a Public Dump. This was done at an expense of \$470." (1908 Town Report).

The money paid for "8 acres of ground near the Sheffield town line from John McCarty for dumping purposes." (BC, 8 August 1907)

This sanitary landfill served the town until a new, leased site was opened 1 December 1975 at the base of Monument Mountain on Route 7. (1975 Town Report)

Despite the availability of facilities, some homeowners along the River Walk continued to throw trash out the back door. One mound uncovered by volunteer workers held numerous Spam and Schlitz beer cans from the 1950s.

Erik Jensen, son of Peter and Wendy Jensen of Christian Hill Road, an avid riverbank worker, collected a variety of old materials, from a work shoe, about size 10, to an aluminum horse-shoe. He also found a spoon, an ash tray, razor and fountain pen. (BC, 15 October 1992)

"It's exciting," he said of his finds. He unearthed medicine bottles and a perfume dispenser with perfume still in it, behind the former Melvin's Prescription Drugs.

His favorite treasure: a 1961 Great Barrington bicentennial coin.

*"Walking through history. Wherever people go in Great Barrington, history surrounds them; developing this resource relies mainly on the ability of individuals to recognize and respond to the past in certain sites and landscape patterns. Like much of the*

## EROSION CONTROL

Left to its own devices, the Housatonic River wanders.

As historian Taylor noted, "The river in former days (for with devious and ever-changing course, it has flowed back and forth all over the meadows), skirted the bluffs along the village street, washed the base of Mount Peter [near Maple Avenue], and came near the highway south of John Brewer's house" on South Main Street."

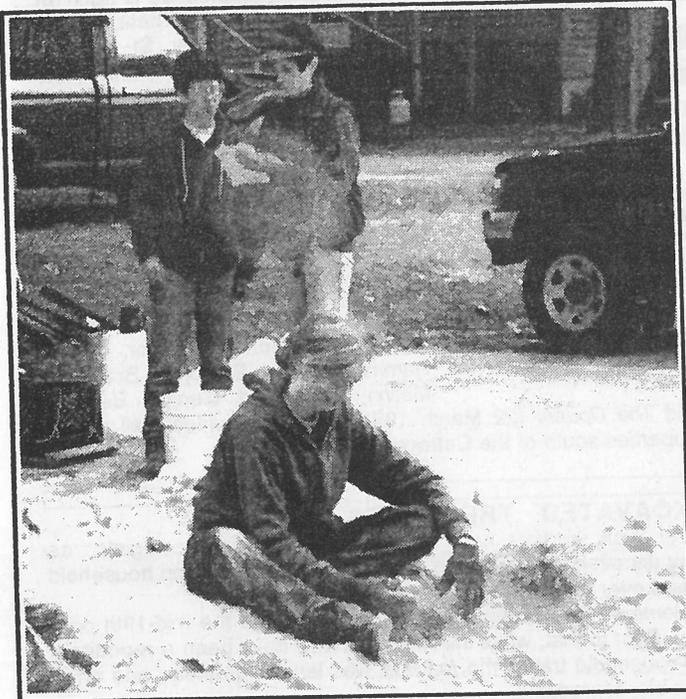
Attempts have been made to harness the river and control erosion in the vicinity of River Walk.

The Great Barrington Selectmen in 1939 negotiated with the state Department of Public Works to extend flood control efforts then underway by contractor Interstate Construction. (BC, 13 April 1939)

"Many tons of steel plates have been driven into the bank at a spot where the erosion of the river was undermining the church land. Back of the plates and at each end some rip-rapping is to be done under the original contract, but no provision was made for the Gibbons property directly to the north. It is feared that the placing of the embankment on the church property might tend to

environmental awareness, it involves placing particular sensory inputs into a context of larger knowledge. Historical markers can help point out the particulars, and trails can help link them to the entire landscape experience...."

— William Carney, *Town Plan Great Barrington, Mass.* (1973)



Volunteer Gail Berneike consults with River Walk Coordinator Rachel Fletcher while Willa Johnson sorts rock, above. Below, Don Bernier and Comstock Small, foreground, install a gabion with an assist from Bernard Drew.



### HOUSATONIC RIVER WALK

"People are always saying thank you to me, but it is the community that is doing this," Rachel Fletcher told *Berkshire Green* (Winter 1992-93).

"Nobody has ever said no to us for anything. It is amazing. For me this has been more than a project about cleaning up the envi-

ronment. As a community people are realizing how much we are able to accomplish together. What happens here not only affects the river, but also how people treat one another. You realize that your neighbors are people you can count on."

What started out as a one-time effort to clean debris from the bank of the river behind the Community Land Trust office at 195 Main St. grew into a more-or-less permanent project.

"I saw all this junk on the bank and said how can we be a land trust if we can't take care of our own backyard," Fletcher recalled in *The Berkshire Eagle's Great Barrington Community Guide 1995*. (See also *Women's Times*, March-April 1995)

"I thought, 'How bad can it be?' But it's like an iceberg. For every piece of rubble on the surface, there are dozens more underneath. I was so stupid. I had no idea how this would blossom."

In 1988, Searles Middle School 8th graders cleaned 266 feet of riverbank north of Bridge Street.

This was followed by another riverbank cleanup in 1991 behind Brooks' Drugs at 197 Main, owned by Melvin Katsh.

What has to have been the most enthusiastic, and bizarre, parade on the river was organized by Fletcher on 3 August 1991. Real Mahican Indians and fake Viking maidens, Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher, a Keystone Kop, Hermit Crosby, greedy land exploiters and more took part in the "Housatilla" to shout their support for the waterway. The parade paddled and floated from Searles Middle School to Eisner Camp for Living Judaism.

The Land Trust and Katsh granted the Great Barrington Land Conservancy, on behalf of River Walk, a permanent easement to the river.

The initial 136 feet of River Walk begins behind Riverbank House, reached by a stair down to the river.

It opened to the public 1 November 1992.

Karl Finger of Monterey composed a song, "River Run," with a chorus which ended: "Oh, River keep rolling along."

On 23 October 1994, volunteers completed 277 feet of trail south behind St. Peter's and the Aigner property. More than 40 friends of the late Jim Secundy installed a memorial garden on the trail. Peter Champoux designed a stone bench and did the lettering.

In 1995, the trail is continuing south another 150 feet behind land of Tryon and Thieriot, while Institute for First Amendment Studies has granted further easement a short distance north.

Fletcher coordinates the cleanup work. Peter Jensen of Openspace Management designed the trail. Safety and insurance concerns limit participation for the town's youngest and oldest. But a diverse group may be found toiling any workday, from Rotary Club members planting ferns and wildflowers to Rudolf Steiner or Simon's Rock College students passing stones down a line to fill wire gabions.

The River Walk is in its eighth year of operation. As of October 1995, there have been 185 work days in the field. Some 900 volunteers have worked on the path and another 250 have donated materials and services. Volunteer field hours total more than 8,500 -- not including planning and designing.

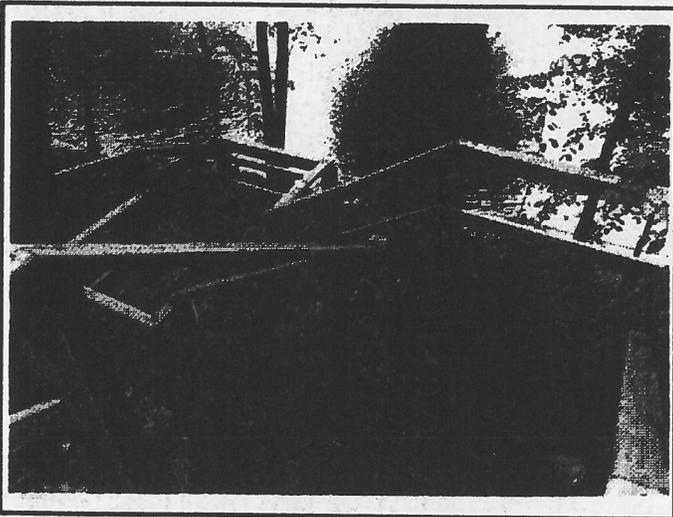
Removed have been 180 tons of trash, including 114 tons of rubble and garbage, 56 tons of woodwaste and firewood and 3 tons of compost.

Participants most days are provided with coffee and snacks and a lunch. Mealtime chat adds to the sense of community.

Donations have included a wide variety of goods and services. Helping with trash removal have been Joseph and Robin Mallory, The Master Garbologist. Helping with volunteer supervision, landscape design and special projects have been Peter Barrett of, Green River Lumber; Gail Berneike and Don Bernier; Champoux of Champoux Masonry; Anne Condon; Jensen; Bernard Kirchner; Bill Laska and Don Ward III of Ward's Landscaping & Nursery; A. Santos Manzon and Craig Okerstrom-Lang of Okerstrom-Lang Landscape Architects; Mark Pieropan of Kelly, Granger, Parsons & Associates; Monica Schultz of Fine Garden Maintenance; Comstock Small; Lincoln Smith of Lincoln K. Smith Landscape & Tree Maintenance and countless others. Lou Oggiani has as-

sisted with legal and administrative matters, Ed Szwyd with financial services.

Organizations which have sent groups to work on special days include Rudolf Steiner School, Eisner, Searles Middle School, Simon's Rock College, Brookside School, Kolburne School, The John Dewey Academy, Landmark Volunteers (Nature Conservancy), Mount Everett Regional School and Southern Berkshire Youth Association.



Stairs down to trail from 195-197 Main St.

"With this design, we take our first step toward achieving a greenway along the Housatonic River corridor, proposed back in 1973 for Great Barrington's Open Space Plan," Fletcher said (BC, 12 December 1991).

"In time we hope other riverbank property owners will consider linking their section of riverbank with its trail, which we envision traversing initially between the Cottage and Bridge Street bridges...

"New England towns were built with their backs to the river," Fletcher said (BE, 15 November 1991).

"We're going to put our fronts to the river with the greenway."

#### RACHEL FLETCHER, WALK COORDINATOR

"Today, as we bring the community back to the river," River Walk Coordinator Rachel Fletcher said, "the river is coming back into our lives."

A design consultant and geometer, Fletcher (b. 1947) holds master's degrees in dramatic literature and lighting design. She was Great Barrington's first recycling coordinator.

"Instead of hiring a professional crew, we use as many volunteers as are willing. Ordinary people do extraordinary things to make River Walk happen," she said. "We work whenever we can. Through these days we become a presence that endures - day after day, week after week, year after year. Through these efforts, the river is once again winding its way back into our hearts.

"In the process, we're learning something about who we are as a community, who our neighbors are, and who we can count on. We're learning about our place in the landscape and our place in the world.

"When the community is involved in this way, people become stewards and take social responsibility. With each act of caretaking, there forms an attachment that leads to a sense of place.

"Sometimes, it seems that embedded in the landscape is the stuff of memories, a legacy of previous generations. As we work, new memories are created and these, too, are laid into the soil.

"The Housatonic River forms the spine of our region. It defines our watershed's geography and geology, our sense of history and

local mythology.

"Much of what we do feels like a laying on of hands. Like so much of New England's landscape, the beauty that results is more hand-crafted than it is wild.

"For all these reasons, our is more voluntary than it is coerced, coming from love rather than shame and guilt. It's renewed with each physical act that we do, each ordinary action that ordinary people like ourselves can do.

"For that reason, I think it will be enduring. It certainly has produced a deepening affection and sense of place."

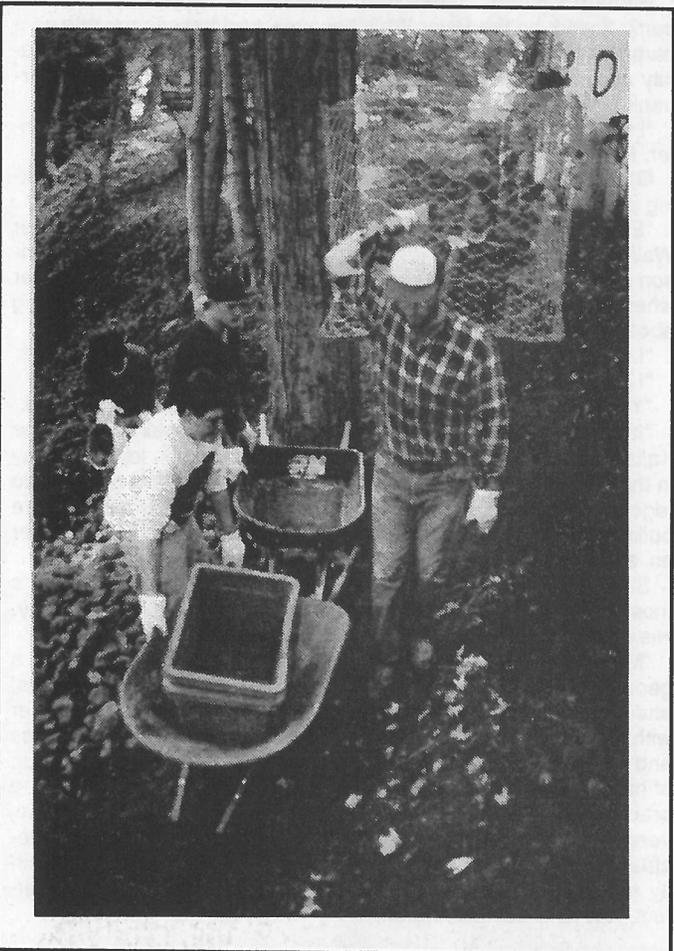
#### PETER JENSEN, COMSTOCK SMALL, BERNARD KIRCHNER, DANA CUMMINGS, WILL MARSH, GAIL BERNEIKE AND HUNDREDS MORE VOLUNTEERS, YOUNG & OLD

There's a group of regular riverbank volunteers, many of whom have achieved 50-hour (for children) or 100-hour (for adults) marks.

Comstock Small has put in more than 600 hours. Peter Jensen has worked more than 400 hours, Bernard Kirchner more than 300. Passing the 100 hour mark have been Gail Berneike, Don Bernier, Glen Chamberlin, Peter Champoux, Ann Condon, Dana Cummings, Tony Manzoni, Will Marsh and Judd Reiss.

Younger volunteers who've donated more than 50 hours of time have been Erik Jensen, Willa Johnson, Alden Johnson, Ben Kalish, Ben Passmore and Hannah Kirchner.

Several volunteers recently articulated why they're devoted to the River Walk.



River Walk workers move materials to trail site

Marsh thought back seven years to the earliest cleanup efforts: "It seemed like a good idea, for in those days there was a better chance of walking on the water than along the bank... Thanks to the River Walk, a lot of us now have a view of the river."

"In 1991, when I was temporarily, shall we say, at loose ends, the River Walk and the Housatonic Flotilla gave me a summer of gainful unemploy by the river. Thanks to the River Walk, we can all look forward to many years and years of gainful unemploy by the river."

To many, it's the process as much as the end product which is important.

"The river, the volunteers and the work itself all share a common value -- stability and continuity," Berneike said. "You do the work and you see the results. It will always be there."

"It's the diverse involvement of the community" that gives its appeal, echoed Peter Jensen, "the broad support by the citizenry that's reflected in the number of volunteers and in their diverse backgrounds."

"Getting to know different people working together, volunteering their time and their ideas" appeals to Monica Schultz. "When I first saw River Walk I thought, this is the kind of town I want to be in. Maybe I'll come and live here."

Chamberlin, too, came around this theme of community. "I started out just wanting a cleaned up riverbank. Little did I know the labor of love the River Walk project would turn into, and how it would add to my sense of home."

Cummings, who lives in Great Barrington, said she puts hours in on the Walk "so I can have a refuge in the middle of town."

It's not just townspeople who volunteer, though.

Bernard Kirchner comes from Sheffield to help clean the riverbank. "I work on the River Walk because it addresses my role as a parent with a child who also works on the River Walk -- the community aspect, the ecological aspect -- they're all here on the riverbank," he said.

"I want to help make it nice for other people," added his daughter, Hannah.

Other youthful volunteers expressed diverse reasons for taking part.

"Every once in a while someone says, 'Let's go to the River Walk,' and I say, 'Okay, let's go.' It's nice. It's fun," Alden Johnson said, while his sister Willa remarked, "It makes me feel better when you see trash and stuff around and you're doing something about it. It's cool. Why not?"

"I like finding stuff" [treasures in the ground], Jessie Drew said.

"I like working," Erik Jensen said.

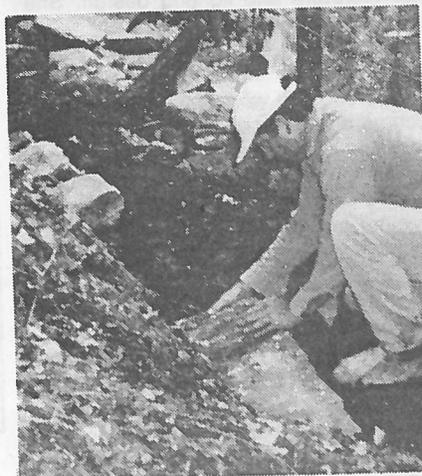
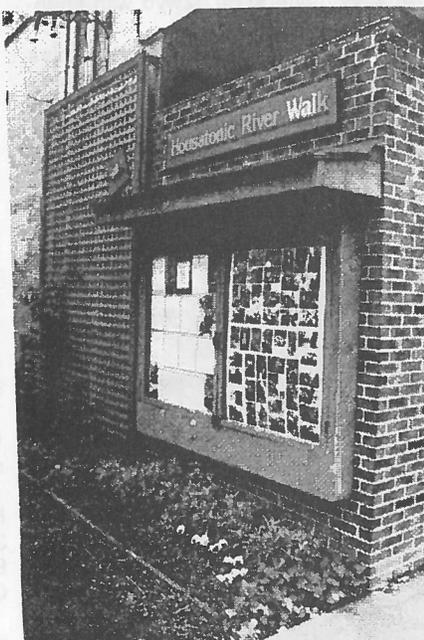
"You don't have to do it and that makes it fun," Ben Kalish said.

"It's fun," chipped in his sister Emily, while their dad, Gene Kalish, said, "Every child -- even this 48-year-old -- loves to play in the dirt. This gives me the freedom to do it. It's a fun thing to do together as a family. There's a sense of accomplishment -- we're building something beautiful. There's a sense of working together as a community, of everyone pulling together."

Small lives in West Stockbridge, but is one of the River Walk's most tireless volunteers. His comments serve as a fine summary. His enthusiasm, he said, stems from several sources:

"My great pleasure -- and pride -- in contributing to such a genuinely worthy civic project, in such beautiful surroundings, and in all kinds of weather; deep satisfaction in working together with a widely diverse group of people: all ages, all kinds of abilities and points of view; the bountiful benefits, to both body and soul, of hard physical labor; opportunity to learn a good deal, of both a practical and organizational nature, from wonderful leaders who, year after year, spark the progress of the trail and guide its construction; and delight in giving back to the community accessibility to a priceless natural resource too long neglected and, in effect, lost to Great Barrington."

Photos from top: River Walk entrance beside Brooks' Drugs; Secundy memorial bench; Peter Champoux installs stone wall.



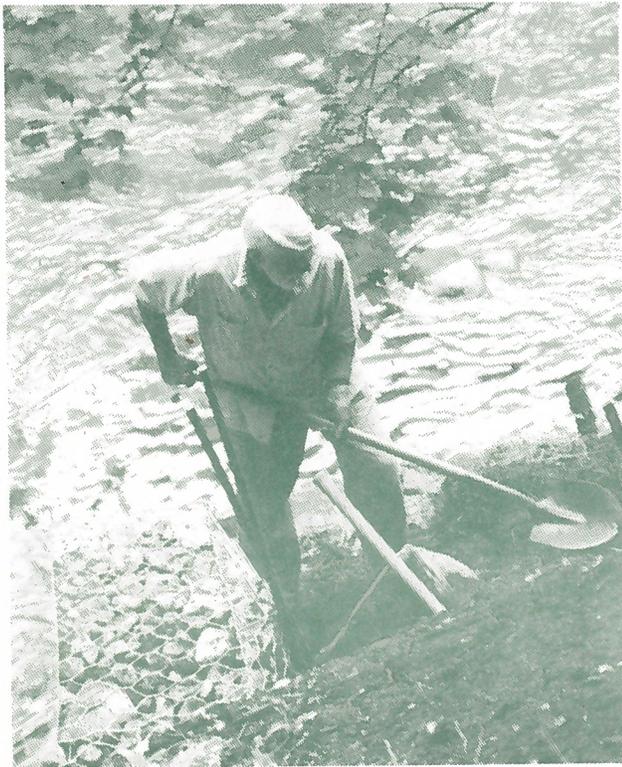
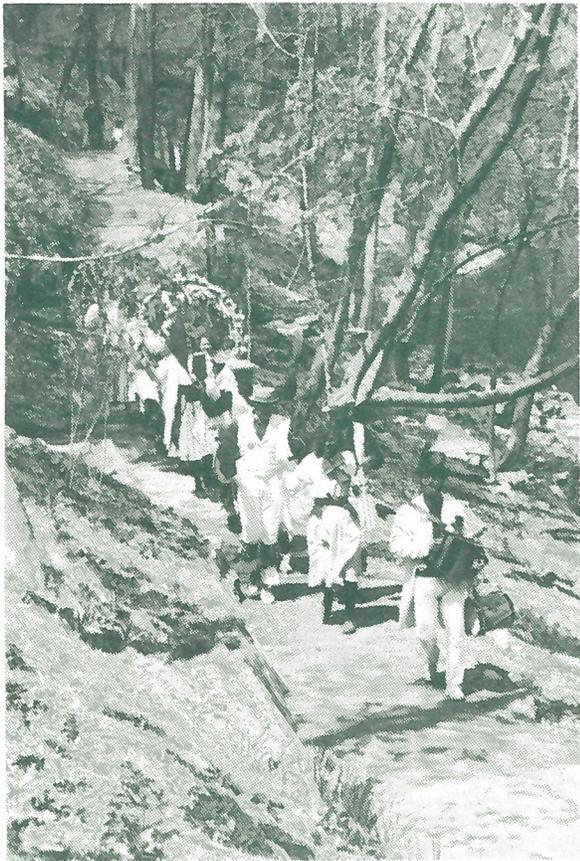
Cover: All photographs - courtesy Rachel Fletcher.

Front, River Walk on autumn day. Back, clockwise from upper right: mound of debris; Peter Jensen and Bernard Kirchner; chain of volunteerers; volunteer Comstock Small; Berkshire Morris Men & Garland Dancers; and young workers from Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School.

Illustrations: Page 1, map segment -- U.S. Geological Service, 1973; Page 2, map -- Drew; Page 3, portion of 1794 map of Great Barrington; Page 4, Laura Secord wrapper -- courtesy Drew chocolate collection; Page 5, Rosseter house & street section -- 1854 Woodford map of Great Barrington; Page 6, map segment -- 1876 Beers atlas; Page 7, Day portrait -- Mason Library; rubber factory -- *Berkshire Eagle*; section of Lucien R. Burleigh 1885 bird's eye view of Great Barrington; Page 8, factory ruins -- Drew; Stanley -- *Biographical Review*, Vol. 31 (1899); Page 10, bridge, courtesy Berkshire County Historical Society; Dresser House -- 1961 Great Barrington Bicentennial book; Page 11, Housatonic Hall & students -- courtesy Gary Leveille; Page 12, St. Peter's postcard -- courtesy Leveille; Page 13, Murphy -- 1961 Great Barrington Bicentennial book; statue -- Drew; Kearin -- 1916 Great Barrington Directory; Page 14, house moving -- 1961 Great Barrington Bicentennial book; map segment -- Bames & Farnum 1904 *Atlas of Berkshire County*; Page 15, half of Hall -- Drew; Page 16, Lux advertisement -- 1898 Berkshire County Directory; Main Street lots -- Drew; Page 17, Melvin's postcard -- courtesy Leveille; Brooks' Drugs -- Drew; Page 18, Aigner home; Page 19, barn; Page 20 house -- all Drew; Elm Shade advertisement -- Great Barrington Directory, 1924-26; Pages 22-24, workers and River Walk -- all Drew, except bottom of Page 22 -- Fletcher.

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Cover Photographs · Rachel Fletcher

*A history of the bend in the Housatonic River that is Great Barrington's downtown greenway*

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