Mary G. Hopkins and the Origins of Village Improvement in Antebellum Stockbridge, Massachusetts

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ABSTRACT The Laurel Hill Association of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, generally considered the first village improvement society in the country, was founded in 1853 at the urging of a local citizen and native of the town, Mary G. Hopkins. This paper examines the discussions among members of her generation and class that set the stage for Hopkins' promotional campaign and, eventually, the wide acceptance of her ideas as village improvement spread through New England and then across the United States. Specifically, this study delves into a history of social activism, moral reform, and theories about taste occurring in Stockbridge, the Berkshires, and New England between 1800–1853. Life histories of several members of Hopkins' family, friends, and associates are described, helping to shape a picture of the values, philosophical perspectives, and activities that surrounded this pioneer of landscape reform. This essay traces village improvement's origins in the fields of scientific farming, landscape gardening, sermons from the pulpit, and literary arts.

KEYWORDS Mary Hopkins, Village Improvement, Stockbridge, Massachusetts

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INTRODUCTION

The Laurel Hill Association of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, generally considered the first village improvement society in America, was founded by a group of local citizens on August 26, 1853 (Figure 1). The first two years of the Association's work were remarkably successful. In mid-May, 1854, the Executive Committee discussed the "merits of hedges and particularly concerning the pretentions of Norway spruce" as the best way to handle the boundary of a town cemetery under improvement. In discussing the options, the group considered the recently published 1853 collection of Andrew Jackson Downing's *Rural Essays*, perhaps brought to the meeting by Mary Hopkins. The Executive Committee minutes note, "Mr. Downing's *Rural Essays* was appealed to as competent to decide in favor of its competency for a hedge around the cemetery." The Cemetery Committee appropriated $100 to cover the costs of the hedge (LHA-1, 3).

By 1855, the Association had planted 400 Norway spruce around the cemetery in a long hedge. Members also made major improvements to the vehicular and pedestrian experiences in Stockbridge by grading Main Street and installing sidewalks and street crossings. At the Congregational Church grounds, the group installed a railing around a section of the green to keep out wandering cattle. The Association began receiving donations for a town library, and a member of the society donated money for a fountain to be installed near the library site. Finally, the Association planted 423 shade and ornamental trees in the village center (LHA-1).

At their second Anniversary Day gathering in August 1855, the members re-drafted their mission statement. Association President, Charles M. Owen, stood on the podium at the spot where two

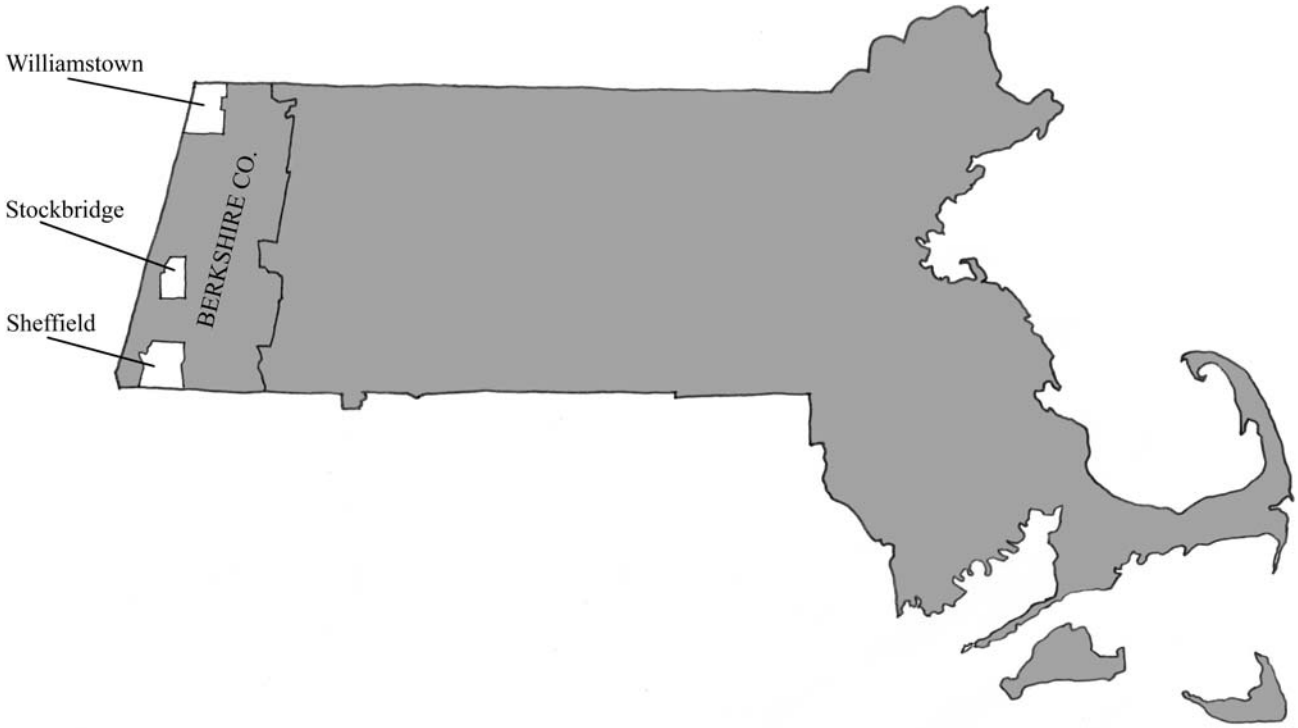

Figure 1
Map of Massachusetts showing Berkshire County, Stockbridge, and other towns discussed in this essay.

years earlier the group had first been called and there announced:

> It is intended that the Institution shall be a permanent affair, that the object for which the organization was instituted may be prosecuted, until every street shall be graded; every side-walk shaded; every noxious weed eradicated; every water-course laid and perfected; every nook and corner beautified; in fine, until Art, combined with Nature, has rendered our town the most beautiful and attractive spot in our ancient Commonwealth (LHA-1, 33).

The reference to Downing's *Rural Essays* within the minutes, the accomplishments of the society over their initial two-year period, and the zeal and sentiment of President Owen's speech describe an ambitious group, educated in contemporary ideas about landscape gardening, moral refinement, and rural taste. Shading sidewalks, eradicating untamed plant material, regulating drainage, and beautifying their village scene would encourage virtue in the citizenry and incite regional recognition for the town.

Although the group clearly ameliorated the physical landscape of Stockbridge—for example, it was estimated in 1895 that the Association had planted 4000 trees and improved the grounds in other parts of the village—the group also inspired other communities to follow their example (Northrop 1895). Within two decades of the Laurel Hill Association's founding, new improvement societies proliferated throughout New England and ultimately across the United States.

The meaning and impact of those numerous village improvement associations across the nation has been researched and analyzed from numerous perspectives. For example, landscape architectural historians have discussed those associations' importance in telling the story of *Women in Landscape Architecture* (Szczygiel 2011). Others have taken nineteenth century women's issues a step further by linking village improvement to the suffrage movement (Upton 1895). Planning historians have further described how those associations led to the formation and merger of organizations of central importance to the City Beautiful Movement (Wilson 1989, Peterson 2003). Recent scholarship has delved more deeply into nineteenth-century improvement theory and evaluated the influence of the movement on the development of the American small town as well as the mythology associated with the New England village. Very recent research is exploring the linkage of village improvement to the

professionalization of planning and design disciplines, new town building in the Midwest and West, and the rapid growth of America's first suburbs (Makker 2014, Turnbull 2009). As more scholarship emerges associated with the larger narrative of nineteenth and early twentieth century American history, American studies, women's history, and social history, our understanding of the importance of these associations will continue to grow.

While the scholarship on the significance of the village improvement movement from 1853 until the Progressive Era continues to expand in both quality and quantity, there is a dearth of research about the antebellum foundations of the movement. In particular, the details of the founding of the Laurel Hill Association, arguably one of the formative events in the development of village improvement, are understudied. While Mary G. Hopkins is by every measure the predominant figure in promoting the development of the society, the essential task is to delve more deeply by asking: what were the influences that inspired her creative actions? What intellectual and practical ideas supported her initial promotional campaign for village improvement as well as the eventual wide acceptance of her ideas?

During the years prior to the founding of the Laurel Hill Association, Mary G. Hopkins was surrounded by several prominent public intellectuals involved in various reform efforts. These men and women were experienced in education, law, state and national government, international evangelicalism, prison reform, horticulture and agriculture societies, and ornamental arts. They wrote and lectured on religious intolerance, equal access to education, the relationship between taste and morals, the value of social order to developing a moral citizenry, and lyrical views of nature. Surveying this wider intellectual discussion allows us to sketch an explanation for her interest in village improvement work and ambitious efforts to start a society in Stockbridge. A more comprehensive examination of the ideas and practical knowledge that surrounded Hopkins adds depth to the rather simplistic explanations of the Association's founding that appear in local legends.

HISTORY AND ORIGIN LEGENDS

Much that has been written about the origins of the nation's first village improvement association falls into the category of legend, with Mary G. Hopkins as heroine, carrying the central plot in the story. According to local and national lore, this thirty-nine-year-old, unmarried woman single-handedly started the longest lasting village improvement society in the country. Hopkins (1814–1895), was granddaughter of Electra Sergeant, the first white child born in the village, and great-granddaughter of the missionary John Sergeant, considered the founder of Stockbridge, who came to the area in 1734 to convert natives to Christianity (Smith and Cushing 1885, Berkshire Family History Association 1995).

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, as the Berkshires grew and transportation routes improved between the cities on the east coast, Stockbridge gained a reputation throughout New England and New York as a prosperous village. In 1826, a local judge, the Hon. Theodore Sedgwick II (1780–1839), brother of novelist Catharine Sedgwick, wrote a series of long articles in regional newspapers advocating for rail service between Stockbridge and New York. Hon. Sedgwick II had political roots: his father, Theodore Sedgwick (1746–1813), had also been a young and active judge involved in the area's development and, later, became Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives between 1799–1801 and Justice for the Massachusetts Supreme Court between 1802 and his death. This was the first effort in the county for train lines connecting the Berkshires to east coast cities (Smith and Cushing 1885, Massachusetts Historical Society 2014). Other signs of prosperity occurred with frequency during this period, including the establishment of a boys academy, the Stockbridge School, incorporated in 1828 (Child 1885). Beginning in the early 1830s, manufacturers began using the village as a pleasant stop on business trips, staying at a local inn, the Stockbridge House. Between 1830 and 1837, the population in the township rose from 1580 to 2036. In 1838, passenger railroad service was finally established from Hudson, NY. Boston was still only reachable by stagecoach, but the Hudson line brought consumer goods and some passengers to the community from New York City. Just over a decade later in 1849, the Pittsfield and Stockbridge Railroad Company opened, and the village gained direct passenger rail service to New York City and Boston. Business trips soon expanded into summer sojourns with family members in tow, mostly coming from New

York and Boston (Smith and Cushing 1885, Lincoln and Drickamer 1982).

These years were also a time of active organizing in the Berkshires. Numerous civic groups, social societies, and associations emerged in Stockbridge and other nearby towns. As individuals visited the region or moved to the area to develop farms or businesses, they brought their organizational affiliations with them. In 1807, a member of the New York Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Manufactures, and Art, bought a farm near Pittsfield. A year later, he started one of the nation's first countywide agricultural associations, the Berkshire Agricultural Society (Berkshire Family History Association 1995), and the group officially incorporated in 1811 (Massachusetts Register 1854). In the summer of 1812, women in Stockbridge organized a lending library in a local building. In 1815, the members of the Berkshire Bar founded a Law Library Association in Pittsfield and proceeded to develop its collection, which was open for public use. In 1817, a Berkshire Bible Society formed, just one year after the formation of the American Bible Society in New York City (Berkshire Family History Association 1995). Theodore Sedgwick II took over as President of the Berkshire Agricultural Society in 1823 and began discussions with regional leaders about introducing a railroad to the area (Massachusetts Historical Society 2014). In 1833, a group of men formed the Berkshire Horticultural Society in Lenox (Bush 1834). In the early 1840s, two small newspapers were started in Stockbridge—*The Weekly Visitor* and a temperance society paper. The men and women, including Mary G. Hopkins, who were involved in these causes in the 1830s and 40s were the same individuals who formed the Laurel Hill Association in 1853 (Smith and Cushing 1885).

Mary Hopkins has been called the "mother" of village improvement and given credit as the "moving spirit" behind Stockbridge's village improvement society, the Laurel Hill Association (Willard and Livermore 1897, Abbott 1907). An article in the *International Journal of Women's Studies* identified her as the sole author of the association's constitution (Richter 1982). Depending on the cultural filter used in descriptions of Hopkins and her work, she has been associated with republican motherhood, municipal housekeeping, and feminism (Beard 1915, Hoy 1996).

One narrative about the founding of the Laurel Hill Association appears in Liberty Hyde Bailey's and Wilhelm Miller's *Cyclopedia of American Horticulture*. In that version, Mary Hopkins, in early summer of 1852, overheard a conversation between some summer visitors staying at the Stockbridge House. These summer residents made sharp remarks about the untidiness and unhygienic condition of Stockbridge center. They criticized the village's wretched state and commented on its undesirability as a place for summer respite. The main roads were muddy, there were few shade trees in the center of town, and weeds cluttered the roadsides in brambles. After Mary Hopkins overheard this exchange by visitors to her beloved hometown, the story suggests, she began to lobby for organized beautification. Fourteen months and much agitation later, a meeting for village improvement took place (Bailey and Miller, 1900).

In another story that has been repeated many times over the years, Mary Hopkins was visiting her grandmother's and great-grandfather's graves late on a summer day in 1853, when she was struck by the unkempt state of Stockbridge's cemetery, which she apparently saw with fresh eyes that particular day. Where was the unification of Art and Nature in their cemetery? The fence was broken. A couple of cows wandered freely among the graves with nearly no trees to impede their grazing progress. She believed the cemetery was an affront to the living and the dead and hardly reflected the refinement of Stockbridge's citizens. In the weeks that followed, Mary Hopkins decided to solicit public support for a project to bring beauty and order to the cemetery and the town itself. The whole village needed to be improved, and its amenities, general tidiness, and appeal to outsiders and residents needed more care. There were only two small stands of trees in the village. One of these stands was a group of elms near the post office, which had been planted by William M. Edward, the grandson of the famous minister Jonathan Edwards, in 1786, to celebrate the signing of the Constitution. The other stand of street trees were a group of Maples along Main Street, which were planted by volunteer citizens in 1814 for State Fast Day (Smith and Cushing 1885). Besides these trees, few basic streetscape amenities existed in the village center. Main Street needed re-grading, and the absence of sidewalks made walking difficult (Cresson 1953). The Stockbridge Common was a

muddy open space void of vegetation. Laurel Hill, a six-acre site of oak and mountain laurels, was only used occasionally for passive recreation, but its paths were overgrown. As Mary travelled around the village, she tacked up notices inviting all citizens of Stockbridge to assemble on Laurel Hill "To take measures for the regular improvement of the Burying Ground, the streets, the walks, the public grounds and Laurel Hill" (Cresson 1953, Anonymous 1878). The story of her ardent community advocacy was later captured in a quotation attributed to Mr. Canning, the long time secretary of the society.

> The professional man at his studies,—the merchant behind his counter,—the mechanic in his shop,—the farmer in his field, and even the children on their way to or from school were repeatedly interviewed by a lady on horseback—she was the embodiment of the gospel of aesthetics, whose daily journeys . . . were in advocacy of beautifying the town. Her words . . . were effective . . . "Men, women, and children of Stockbridge, God has made us a beautiful world. . . . Will you take the hint which the God of Nature has given you in the beauty of your surroundings, and make them more beautiful? If so, lend hands, and teams, and tools, and by your combined action it shall be done (Plunkett 1901, 207)."

While it is impossible to verify many of the details in these stories, it is clear that Mary Hopkins was a major force in the establishment of the Laurel Hill Association. Yet, there exists no detailed historical analysis of Hopkins' capacity and motivation to found the society. In existing histories of planning and landscape architecture, there are gaps between the facts of the Association's establishment and the motivation for its formation (Robinson 1902, Farwell 1918, Lohman 1931, Wilson 1989, Spain 2001). This paper describes the contextual history of ideas concerning social activism, moral reform, and taste occurring in Stockbridge, the Berkshire area, and New England between 1800–1853, when the Laurel Hill Association was founded. In addition, this study delves into the life histories of several members of Hopkins' family, friends, and associates to shape a picture of the values, philosophical perspectives, and activities that surrounded her when she was a child and young adult. Mary Hopkins was plainly influenced by some of the most prominent writers, theorists, and reformers of the period. She also was schooled in a host of practical experiences in landscape design, planning, and management, which she saw as direct means of accomplishing social goals.

REFINEMENT AND SOCIAL GUIDANCE

The early national period (1789–1824) and the antebellum period (1825–1861) were times of great change in New England. Those changes—including the erosion of Puritan religious principles in favor of Unitarianism and religious revivals; the beginnings of the industrial revolution; political shifts and related fears of disorder; the arrival of early immigrant groups from Germany and Ireland; domestic migrations from farm to factory and the westward movement to new farmlands; the emergence and growth of the middle class; workplace efficiencies resulting in more leisure time; and printing advancements making books and periodicals affordable—led to the development of new institutions for human improvement, a growing emphasis on domestication, a widespread belief in the concept of gentility, and an attraction to ornament, craft, and design as evidence of good taste (Howe 1970, Rothman 1971, Waters 1978, Bushman 1993).

During those periods, Puritanical faith in strict class distinctions gave way to a new set of beliefs based in character development. Hard work, strong family relationships, patient reading and study, and access to and immersion in inspiring environments nurtured one's refinement and thus closeness to God. While upward class mobility was thought possible, the process could be long and arduous and was always to be guided by those who had progressed the furthest along the refinement path. This placed pressure on writers and other highly educated members of society to not just lead by example, but to find ways to broaden their positive impact on those less educated (Boyer 1978, Bushman 1993).

Stockbridge had established a reputation as a locus for intellectuals, writers, and reform-minded residents. Many of these individuals were widely admired for their literary prowess and creative exploration of ideas and advanced the general philosophies of improvement and refinement through their writing, sermons, or other activities.

The best selling novelist, Catharine Sedgwick, had grown up in Stockbridge and spent nearly every

summer in the village. By 1850, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Nathaniel Parker Willis, and G.P.R. James were regular figures in the social life of Stockbridge. David Dudley Field, for example, hosted a picnic for a large party of locals and literati in Stockbridge on August 5, 1850, including Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., and editors Evert Duyckinck and Cornelius Mathews (Parker 1996). Hawthorne had stayed in a small cottage near the town's lake, Stockbridge Bowl, in 1850–51, and it was during these eighteen months that he wrote his novel *House of the Seven Gables* (Smith and Cushing 1885).

Others visitors included Daniel Webster, Martin Van Buren, Washington Irving, H.W. Longfellow, and Frederika Bremer. These prominent people and intellectuals stayed with the Sedgwicks or at the Stockbridge House. Nearby Lenox was the summer home of Fanny Kemble, William Ellery Channing, Henry Ward Beecher, and George William Curtis. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and William Cullen Bryant, also occasionally came through Stockbridge. Bryant often summered in Great Barrington and sometimes stayed in Sheffield located a few miles from Stockbridge. These men and women enjoyed the region's rural beauty, untarnished by factories. The Stockbridge Bowl was a favorite spot for boating and fishing. In addition to Nature's gifts, those visitors and residents were nurtured in the midst of a creative community of intellectuals (Hayward 1846, Bryan 1886, WPA 1939).

Mary Hopkins grew up in that rich intellectual environment and was nurtured by that creative community during her adult years. When she was one year old, her parents died within a few days of one another and she became the ward of her father's brother, who lived in Stockbridge. She and her two sisters Lucinda, aged nine, and Hulda, aged eleven, moved into the home of her Uncle Archibald and Aunt Mary Curtis. Her aunt and uncle had three children who soon became her adopted brothers, regular playmates, and mentors. Mark Hopkins was thirteen, Henry was eleven, and Albert was eight.

In 1818, her sister Hulda was sent by her Uncle Archibald to study at Sarah Pierce's Female Academy in Litchfield, Connecticut and a few years later, in 1827, when sister Lucinda was twenty-one and Mary thirteen, their uncle also sent both of them to study at the school (Litchfield 2014). Pierce's Litchfield Academy was one of the most respected institutions in the country for women's education during the 1820s, involving some of the most prominent voices in reform. Pierce believed strongly in the role of women in social activist projects aimed at moral betterment. The widely regarded Congregational minister, Lyman Beecher, had been the Academy's minister for several years, and had supported Pierce's ideas about social outreach and voluntarism as a moral reform strategy (Boyer 1978). At the Academy, students studied traditional liberal art subjects, but were also given lessons in various refined activities, including the "ornamental arts," a curriculum common among female seminaries of the period. There, Mary learned the value of music, painting, dancing, and needlework to a genteel (and therefore ideal) woman's life (McClelland 1992). The Academy also had an Herbarium, a collection of flowers and ornamental plants, that had been developed with some faculty from Williams College in the Berkshires. She was also in school with daughters of some of the Northeast's most educated and esteemed families. Her peers were the children of ministers, politicians, and physicians. They were from New York City and the surrounding area; Boston; Burlington and Bennington, Vermont; Kingston, Ontario; Hartford, Connecticut; Providence, Rhode Island; Buffalo and Utica, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Detroit, Michigan; and Cleveland, Ohio (Litchfield 2014).

During the summers, Mary's sister studied under the tutelage of their neighbor, the novelist, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (Litchfield 2014). All three of the Hopkins girls visited regularly with Catharine Sedgwick when she was in Stockbridge. The famous writer felt strongly about the education of women. Although she lived in New York City in the winters, she still managed a school for girls that she had taken over in 1813. Sedgwick had converted from Calvinism to Unitarianism and wrote about religious intolerance. She was a passionate social reformer who believed strongly in the value of bringing "vernacular gentility" to the nation's poor and uneducated. She believed wholeheartedly in the power of refinement to remedy society's social ills, and those ideas were central to her teaching at her girl's school and in her private lessons with Lucinda and Mary (Moulton 1904, Bushman 1993). The ideas also were the central lessons in her novels: *Clarence; or A Tale of Our Own Time* (1830), a novel of manners and *Hope Leslie; or Early Times in*

Massachusetts (1827), an historical novel that develops themes of love, trust, friendship, and virtue set amid the tensions of 17th century Puritan/Native American conflicts. In *Hope Leslie* and other novels, Sedgwick tied aesthetics to morality set within actual New England landscapes (Healey 2009).

Members of Mary's immediate family were equally vested in similar philosophies of moral advancement. For example, Mark Hopkins, her cousin and adopted brother, was a minister, medical doctor, and President of Williams College, who lectured on relationship of aesthetics, taste, and human refinement in his capacity as a professor of moral philosophy. Dr. Hopkins felt strongly about impacting the lives of not just his elite students, but the country's citizenry through reforms aimed at social improvement. In lectures he described at length "The Connection between Taste and Morals, 1847." Hopkins argued that humans "associate the beauties of nature with the wisdom and goodness of God," and so Americans "instinctively infer from the displays of taste in man, something of his moral character." Hopkins used the example of a traveler in the forest who happened upon a "neat log-house, with a trellised woodbine at the door, and with everything orderly and clean about it." From this pristine appearance, the traveler could assume the inhabitant of the cabin is civil, harmless, and kind. Likewise, he argued, "No one expects to find indications of taste about the dwelling of a drunkard, or of one abandoned to any low vice" (Hopkins 1847, Smith and Cushing 1885).

THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF THE LANDSCAPE

That belief in the moral and psychological influence of ornamented, rural, and natural landscapes was disseminated to the larger public in the literature of scientific farming and horticulture. Improvements in printing technology before 1820, including the use of steam power to expand the production capacity of new cylinder and rotary printing presses, and increasing prosperity among the New England middle class fostered a plethora of journals and books on these topics and a wide readership (Leavis 1965). Communities, including Stockbridge and other nearby towns, initiated circulating libraries and book clubs to meet increasing interest in printed materials (Smith and Cushing 1885). As Raymond Williams has observed, these changes also signaled a new role for society's writers and artists. No longer dependent on a small group of elite patrons, authors could reach larger audiences and incite local discussion of new ideas. The result was that religious leaders, literary writers, and visual artists gained influence in middle class society as intellectual and cultural guides, who particularly advocated the connections between morality and landscape (Williams 1958). As sacred views of nature and landscape improvement ideas were disseminated through the printed media, the middle class' awareness of the connection between a cultured and moral life and rural sensibility became more acute.

Mary Hopkins, like many others in Stockbridge, was well aware of the content of these journals and books. Her close relationship with the Sedgwick family was probably one reason. Judge Theodore Sedgwick II was a strident leader of efforts by the Berkshire Agriculture Society in the late 1820s and early 1830s to develop the state's support of the county's economic diversification as subsistence farming became less viable. In 1830, as President of the Society, Sedgwick had given a speech about this subject, in which he argued that in order for Massachusetts to retain its population, those in power had to encourage new industries and put their wealth toward social and public projects. These efforts would ensure that everyone in the state, including the poor, could both work to earn wages and benefit from the wealthy population's benevolence (Sedgwick 1830). His passion for these ideas was developed more fully in 1833 when he founded the Berkshire Horticultural Society (Lee 1833). Sedgwick's work with the Berkshire Agricultural and Berkshire Horticultural Societies was important in that it brought a wealth of ideas about social reform linked to landscape improvement into Stockbridge through the circulation of publications, public speeches, and a general discussion of ideas from abroad. Mary's uncle and adopted father, Archibald Hopkins, a progressive Stockbridge farmer, likely subscribed to those ideas and some of the journals, which by the 1820s and 1830s included the *New England Farmer*, the *Cultivator*, the *Genesee Farmer*, the *American Farmer*, *American Garden Magazine*, the *Horticultural Register*, and other periodicals.

Examples from period discussions of the moral influence of the landscape abound in this literature. For example, the editor of the *New England Farmer*, Thomas Green Fessenden, had zealously promoted ornamental plantings. In 1826, an article that

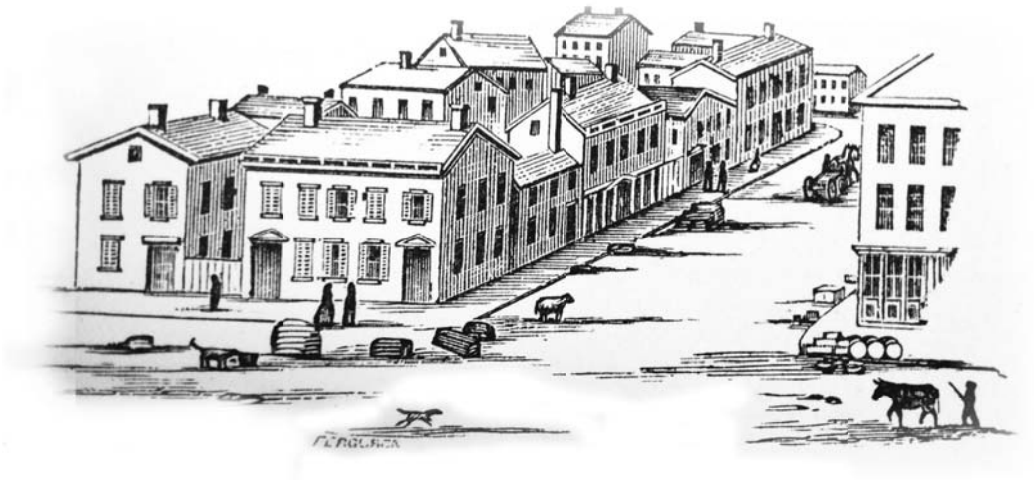

Figure 2
Copeland's caption read "Streets without Trees." 1870. (Courtesy of Winterthur Library and Archives.)

Figure 3
Copeland's caption read "Street Planted with Trees, with Shrubs in the Door-yards." 1870. (Courtesy of Winterthur Library and Archives.)

Figure 4
Concord, Massachusetts, circa 1840, after tree planting by the Concord Ornamental Tree Society in the mid 1830s. Note the tree guards around some of the younger trees, also installed by the Society. J.W. Barber, 1841. (Courtesy of Winterthur Library and Archives.)

originally appeared in the *Christian Spectator* was republished in the *New England Farmer*. It read:

> I regard the man who surrounds his dwelling with objects of rural taste, or who even plants a single shade tree by the road-side as a public benefactor; not merely because he adds something to the general beauty of the country, and to the pleasure of those who travel through it, but because, also, he contributes something to the refinement of the general mind; he improves the taste, especially of his own family and neighborhood. There is a power in scenes of rural beauty, to affect our social and moral feelings (365).

Only a few years after the founding of the Laurel Hill Association, the landscape architect and scientific farmer, Robert Morris Copeland, summarized years of publishing about the affective power of rural landscapes in the dedication to his book *Country Life*:

> To all lovers of nature and to all engaged in cultivating and adorning the earth, this book is dedicated, with the earnest hope that it may attract to the practice of the arts of culture some who now earn their bread with the sweat of their brow, and look upon their calling as a treadmill of drudgery and endurance, may here learn that in the round of their daily duties they have everything which can expand the mind and ennoble the soul (Copeland and Tishler 2009, frontispiece).

The authors of these articles and books linked the moral power of designed, natural, and improved landscapes to the refinement of people, and explored the power of the landscape at various scales. Copeland published drawings to illustrate the benefits of tree planting in town settings. In those drawings, he illustrated that trees fostered a cleaner environment, where trash, wild dogs, and other markers of unrefinement did not clutter the scene (Figures 2 and 3). Proposing and executing such plans, Thomas Fessenden further argued, would produce "an increase in solid wealth and comfort." His articles "Trees by the Road-Side," and "Shade Trees and Sidewalks," outlined the benefits of sylvan villages. Adorning villages, reported an unnamed writer in the *New England Farmer*, would also "serve to arouse public spirit, and call forth the ingenuity, taste, and exertions of the enterprising young gentlemen of the place" (1830, 278, 312).

Andrew Jackson Downing, who first published his *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* in 1841 and founded the *Horticulturist* in 1846, was a synthesizer with and disseminator of many of these landscape strategies. In writing for the public (especially the growing middle class) he was able to coalesce the wealth of knowledge published in the scientific farming literature, horticultural journals, and English sources—especially the work of J.C. Loudon—into actionable categories. Downing recommended forming Ornamental Tree Societies, something Fessenden had published on years earlier, albeit with less dramatic language (Fessenden 1834). Downing argued that Northampton, which had such a Society, was "the pride of its citizens" and "the delight of travellers [sic], who treasure it up on their hearts, as one does a picture drawn by poets, and colored by the light of some divine genius." Downing recommended "this plan of Social Planting Reform, to every desolate, leafless, and repulsive town and village in the country" (1847, 306–307).

The emphasis on tree planting, no doubt, built upon the knowledge and enthusiasm gained from the formation and development of tree planting societies throughout New England for more than twenty years before the establishment of the Laurel Hill Association. The Concord Massachusetts Ornamental Tree Society, which formed in late 1833, is likely the earliest known tree planting society, although the travel writer Theodore Dwight mentions one in New Haven in his 1834 text (76). The Concord Society was formed to "set out trees in public squares, avenues, and roads," and the group managed to plant 116 trees in their first year of operation. Planted species included sycamore, elm, rock maple, ash, and black birch, all placed in front of the town's two Meeting Houses and along three of Concord's principle streets. Also installed were 74 tree guards to protect the new arboretum from wandering cattle and sheep (Figure 4). The secretary of the organization reported that public reaction to the season's tree planting effort was generally favorable and expected that as the plants matured and people enjoyed their shade and beauty, "every man of taste" would support the group's noble efforts ("Ornamental Tree Society" 1834, 115). The Society's work was also widely publicized; a story of the Concord Society's

founding and accomplishments appeared in local newspapers, then was re-told in the *New England Farmer*, the *New York Farmer, American Gardener's Magazine*, and ultimately in J.C. Loudon's *Gardener's Magazine*, an English publication based in London (1835, 207). Organized tree planting in America had received international attention.

By the 1840s and 1850s ornamental tree societies were quite common throughout New England and parts of upstate New York. In 1850, the *Daily Evening Transcript*, a newspaper in Boston, mentions the Chelsea Ornamental Tree Society's work on "the borders of all the streets and avenues." The *Transcript* also praised the efforts of the East Boston Ornamental Tree Society: "There is every inducement to make all the region surrounding Boston a paradise in the way of trees and shrubbery. Let the good work go forward year by year." There was no mention the organizations' leadership, but the names of several Boston area private donors are referenced (1853). Period newspapers and journals reported on work by ornamental tree societies in Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Connecticut as well (Gardener's Magazine 1835, New England Farmer and Gardener's Journal 1838, Buel 1838, Horticulturist 1859).

During this period, those tree-planting activities were inspired by both legislation and research. In 1830 the Massachusetts General Court institutionalized the appreciation of trees by protecting ornamental and shade trees growing along streets and highways. Persons who "wantonly and without cause, break, cut, mutilate, injure or destroy any tree standing and growing by the side of any public or private way, and useful to the public for the purpose of ornament or shade . . . shall forfeit and pay to the use of the Commonwealth, a sum not less than five dollars. . . ." The text from this statute was published in full with an enthusiastic endorsement by Thomas Fessenden in the *New England Farmer* less than two weeks after it passed into law ("Trees by the Road-Side" 1830, 278). And in the late 1830s the state legislature commissioned George Barrell Emerson, a cousin of Ralph Waldo Emerson, to write *A Report on the Trees and Shrubs Growing Naturally in the Forests of Massachusetts*, 1846. Because the report emphasized both aesthetics and scarcity, it helped inspire even greater tree planting efforts across the state. These governmental endorsements on the importance of healthy ornamental and shade trees within Massachusetts underscore the widespread interest among intellectuals and leaders on topics relevant to the development of improvement associations and other early examples of landscape reform.

BERKSHIRE LANDSCAPE PROJECTS

Those tree-planting efforts came to fruition in the Berkshires by the 1840s and Mary Hopkins was well aware of those projects. For example, beginning in late May of the same year that Emerson's report was published, residents in Sheffield held a two-week "Tree Bee." Prior to that important tree planting event, the streets of Sheffield were mostly devoid of trees except for one giant elm that had stood tall in the community since its founding in 1733. Sheffield residents Frank Ensign and Graham Root were among those who intended to remedy the situation by organizing the Tree Bee and mobilizing much of the citizenry. The planting efforts began at the historic "Sheffield Elm," because it held heritage symbolism for the community, with participants fanning out from there along the village streets. In total, over 1,000 American Elms were planted over the two-week period—an impressive accomplishment (Campanella 2003).

The Reverend Orville Dewey, a nationally famous Unitarian minister, was a native and favorite son of the village. Because he frequently summered in Sheffield and was Root's uncle, he may well have had a hand in conceiving the Tree Bee (Campanella 2003). Dewey's growing prominence as a Unitarian theologian had resulted in his selection as the minister of the Second Unitarian Church in New York City in 1835, where he soon became close friends with William Cullen Bryant, *New York Evening Post* editor and later, along with Downing, a tireless advocate for the first public park in America. As a consequence of his close association with Bryant, Dewey was invited to join the Sketch Club, whose members, including Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, Henry Inman, John Inman, John Howard Payne, and Bryant, were primarily Hudson River School artists and writers. At club meetings the members often engaged in impromptu writing and sketching activities on various subjects, including landscape and social themes (Callow 1967). After Dewey returned permanently to Sheffield in 1848, he invited the entire Sketch Club to his home (Campanella 2003). Dewey therefore was a conduit who brought renowned thinkers, writers, and artists to Sheffield.

During the late 1840s, Dewey engaged himself more deeply in landscape improvement. Building on the success of the Tree Bee, he founded an organization called the Elm Tree Association in 1852. The group's mission was to enhance the beauty of the community through tree planting, grading, sidewalk construction, and other projects intended to also improve the human condition. Although no archives of the Elm Tree Association exist, it is commonly believed that Mary Hopkins attended their spring 1853 meeting, because she was voted an honorary member of the society just before she helped found the Laurel Hill Association in Stockbridge (Eaton 1941, Campanella 2003).

Landscape design was also on Mary Hopkins' mind in part because her cousin and adopted brother, Albert Hopkins, had organized a Landscape Gardening Society at Williams College in 1833. As Professor of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy he also organized natural history travel expeditions and, with his students, built an astronomical observatory on the Williams campus in 1837. Albert had spent time at educational institutions in Europe and was impressed with their beautifully landscaped campuses. Besides putting in trees and graded walks on the College's campus, Albert Hopkins' group built a public park in Williamstown. Like many of his associates, Albert believed that such landscape improvements influenced "great moral improvement among the young men" (Williams College Archives 2014, Sewall 1879, 118).

Because of her personal associations with reformers and knowledge of landscape design articles within period literature, Mary was likely well aware of the rural cemetery movement. Since the construction of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Watertown, Massachusetts in 1831, rural cemeteries were constructed throughout New England as well as in Pennsylvania and New York. Just an hour by rail from Stockbridge was the Albany Rural Cemetery, which was built in 1844 and considered one of the most beautiful rural cemeteries in the country (Cleaveland and Smillie 1846). Several distant relatives of Stockbridge families were buried there—Hopkins, Goodrich, Fields, and Sedgwick (Albany Rural Cemetery 2014). Even closer to Mary's home was the new rural cemetery in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, constructed in 1850. The board of directors of the Pittsfield Cemetery had visited the Albany Cemetery along with rural cemeteries in New York City, Providence, New Haven, and Springfield before hiring Dr. Horatio Stone of New York to complete a design (Smith and Cushing 1869). The design included zones named the Forest, Lake Meadow, Linden Slope, Terrace Grove, and Orchard Hill, all in keeping with new approaches to the landscape design of burying grounds. At the widely publicized dedication on September 9, Oliver Wendell Holmes read a poem he had written for the occasion. The Reverend Henry Neill, a local Congregational minister, gave an oration in which he reminded those gathered that the designed cemetery was actually a place for the living (Neill 2012). "[The Cemetery] is a sign of progress in other directions, than those of commercial enterprise, or agricultural thrift. It is the index, and herald of higher cultivation in most ennobling lines. It is a token and a means of opening the heart to the love of God and the love of man. It is a step toward a better state of society than ever known before" (Address, 44). Once again, the speaker reaffirmed what so many in the Berkshires already believed, that the improvements in the landscape might lead to profound moral advancement among the people.

If Mary Hopkins had her revelation about what must be done in Stockbridge in a cemetery, as legend has it, there was much more on her mind than embarrassment, as the Bailey and Miller narrative attests (1900). Because she understood that these numerous Berkshire landscape improvement efforts were tied to social betterment, she would have believed that much the same should happen in Stockbridge.

ENDORSED BY LAW

By 1853, government leaders from the Berkshires and throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts were so convinced of the growing importance of landscape improvement that they promoted new legislation focused on that need. Because of Mary's many associations with judges, legislators, and others closely linked to state government in Stockbridge and other Berkshire communities, she would have been aware of important pending legislation well before its passage. One of those important individuals was John Z. Goodrich (whom Mary would marry five years later). A Justice of the Peace in Stockbridge, Goodrich had been intensely involved in state politics and had served in the Massachusetts Legislature. When he attended the Laurel Hill Association's initial gathering, he had recently been elected to the U.S. Congress. Besides his governmental

insight, Goodrich was well informed about the tree-planting efforts of the townspeople in Sheffield, Massachusetts. Because he was born in Sheffield and much of his family still lived there, he would have known many of the individuals who participated in the 1846 Tree Bee as well as Orville Dewey's Elm Tree Association (Smith and Cushing 1885, Massachusetts Register 1854).

Just three months prior to the Laurel Hill Association's founding, the Massachusetts General Court passed a law granting corporal rights to groups of ten individuals who gathered "for the purpose of encouraging agriculture, horticulture; improving and ornamenting the streets and public squares of any town or city by planting and cultivating ornamental trees therein and also otherwise improving the physical aspects of such city or town and furthering the recreation and enjoyment of the inhabitants thereof." The statute went into effect May 10, 1853 (General Laws of Massachusetts 2008). Clearly the legislators believed that the social advancement power of the landscape was at least equal to that of lyceums and libraries because the legislation extended the same "rights, powers and privileges" that had been granted to those institutions to village improvement societies (Campanella 2003). The Laurel Hill Association was the first group to take full advantage of this new legislation and was officially warranted on September 3, 1853, only a few days after the formation of the society, and four months after the state law was passed (LHA-1).

CONCLUSION

When Mary Hopkins made the initial call for townspeople to gather for the purpose of organizing a village improvement group in Stockbridge, she did more than tack up notices around the town. She arranged for several prominent men associated with Stockbridge to travel to the village to give speeches, not only to rally the community, but also to highlight the affective power of the landscape to influence the minds and emotions of the citizens. Among those who gathered with her were Mark Hopkins, members of the Sedgwick family, John Z. Goodrich, and other like-minded individuals who shared a belief in human refinement and social guidance made possible through landscape improvements. Those individuals held the same philosophy that led to the completion of numerous design and improvement projects in the Berkshires during the years prior to the establishment of the Laurel Hill Association, and the passage of state legislation.

Perhaps the story of the influences that led to the formation of the first village improvement association may also add new dimensions to the general historical narrative of American landscape architecture, which is sometimes described as a profession emanating from English precedents as interpreted by Downing and first applied in rural cemeteries before its principles were ultimately perfected by Frederick Law Olmsted. Obviously, that interpretation, in many ways as simplistic as the Laurel Hill foundation legends, fails to capture the profession's roots within a groundswell of thinking and activity captured in scientific farming and horticultural periodicals, tree planting society minutes, sermons from the pulpit, and Catharine Sedgwick's novels.

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