

THE HENDRICKS HOUSE AND ITS PEOPLE¹

Introduction

At their annual town meeting in May, 1975, the voters of Holden appropriated funds to purchase the property of Miss Jennie L. Hendricks for use as a historic site. This vote, taken as the nation approached its bicentennial, expressed the town's growing awareness of the need to preserve significant historic properties in the face of a growing population and the pressures of commercial and residential development.

The location of the Hendricks House at the center of town and just outside the Holden Center Historic District made it a logical candidate for preservation.² The exterior of the house and barn remained essentially unchanged since their construction in 1884-85, and the building thus stood as a highly visible element of the town's architectural heritage. As in the case of many efforts to preserve historic properties, the interest of an owner - in this case Miss - was crucial. Her pride in her family's history and her sensitivity to the changes that she had witnessed over her long life prompted her to make the property available to the town and to write "The Hendricks House and Its People" in September, 1975.³

As an historic property, the Hendricks House is relatively unusual, for it was the modest home of an immigrant and his family. The size of the house, its origins, and available resources have determined decisions concerning restoration. The town entrusted management of the property to the seven-member Holden Historical Commission and has provided for basic maintenance - exterior painting when the town assumed control of the property in 1979, replacement of a failed boiler, lawn mowing and snow removal, utilities, a burglar alarm system, and funds for routine maintenance. With the overall guidance of the Historical Commission, members of the Holden Historical Society, other organizations, and individuals have worked to restore the property, hold exhibits, and conduct tours.⁴

¹An earlier version appeared in *Bay State History* 14 (Spring 1988), 1-10.

²The Hendricks House and two other properties were added to the Historic District by the town meeting in May, 1987.

³Miss Hendricks continued to reside in her home until 1979, when failing health necessitated a move to the Holden Nursing Home. She remained keenly interested in the restoration of the property and the ways in which the property was being used. She died on July 27, 1986.

⁴It would be impossible to list all the individuals and groups who have contributed to the restoration, but the following certainly deserve special mention. The Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities provided a Technical Assistance Grant which enabled the Historical Society to secure the professional advice of Rudy J. Favretti concerning landscaping. Early on, the Historical Society received a grant from the George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation for the temporary stabilization of the foundations and roof of the barn. The roof of the barn was replaced in 2000, and in 2001 the Town and the Holden Historical Commission successfully applied to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for a grant to replace the barn's foundations; matching funds were provided by the Town, the Historical Commission, and the Historical Society. The Holden Garden has contributed both funds and workers for landscaping and has also attracted hundreds of visitors to the property for its annual plant sale. The Woman's Club donated three display cases for exhibits and, with the Holden Business Association, provided funds for a teak bench as a convenient resting spot for passers-by. Members of the Hendricks family, from as far away as North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan, have donated funds and placed family memorabilia on long-

The plans for the building, which a local builder, Marcus Moore, prepared for Charles Hendrickson (the name was later shortened to Hendricks), and the photographs from the early 1890s suggest the modest size and appearance of the house. The builder departed from his plans in a few respects. The snow gable for the front porch was omitted; the bargeboard at the peak of the eaves is somewhat more elaborate than in the drawing; and a kitchen pump was installed on the opposite side of the kitchen. Today the exterior of the house looks very much as it did more than a century ago. The roof, originally shingled, was covered with slate after a fire destroyed the Damon Block across the street. In the mid-twentieth century a decorative fireplace, flanked by built-in cabinets and bookshelves, was added to the living room, and the front chimney was rebuilt and enlarged. Railings were added to the front and back porches, and the back porch was significantly expanded.

Over the years the Hendricks family made a number of changes to the interior of their home. The original parlor, which was entered from the front hall through a standard-size door, was opened up by removing the door and enlarging the entry between the hall and parlor. The first-floor bedroom became a dining room and was connected to the kitchen by a swing door; its closet became a china closet. The greatest changes occurred in the kitchen, although their precise timing and sequence cannot be determined. Town water made it possible to eliminate the pump and soapstone sink and to install a toilet and sink in the pantry, as well as a porcelain sink in the kitchen. A coal- and later an oil-burning furnace in the cellar provided hot water for the kitchen, the bathrooms, and radiators. With electricity came better light, an electric stove, and a refrigerator to replace the icebox (which, for a time at least, had been at the back of the pantry). Linoleum — in several different layers — covered the bare wood floors, and at least seven coats of paint hid the original layer of sky blue paint.⁵ Upstairs, the changes were less dramatic: electricity; radiators; a small bathroom, with toilet, sink, and bathtub, above the kitchen; and storage cabinets and a closet opposite the bathroom.

Within this relatively small space, those involved in the restoration have tried to achieve three goals that were not always in harmony: to provide storage for collections; to hold small exhibits; and to offer visitors a glimpse of life in the late nineteenth century. Storage space was easily found upstairs, as the second floor has been inaccessible to the public because of concerns for safety (the back stairway is especially steep); the bedrooms are used to store the records and collections of the Historical Commission, the Historical Society, and the Antiquarian Department of the Gale Free Library.

Restoration of the living room to its original appearance was beyond available resources (this would have entailed removal of the modern fireplace), and it was therefore determined to use the living room as the principal space for exhibits. The parlor has been restored with appropriate period wallpaper and partly furnished with period furnishings, including horsehair

term loan. Last, but certainly not least, scores of individuals have donated historic artifacts and furnishings to the Historical Society, greeted guests at exhibits, shared in the labors of the annual August flea market, and loaned materials for display.

⁵The Historical Society received technical advice concerning the kitchen paint and wallpaper in the first-floor bedroom from the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

chairs and a love seat, a hanging parlor lamp (fortunately one that was never electrified), and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century paintings by Holden residents. The entrance from the hall to the parlor remains open and wide.

The kitchen looks, one hopes, very much as it would have appeared a century ago: the door from the kitchen to the first-floor bedroom has been removed and the wall closed up; the linoleum has been removed; the electric stove, refrigerator, and washing machine have been replaced by a wood stove, ice box, stove-top boiler, and wringer. Hot and cold running water are still available, but the plumbing is hidden behind a panel above the original soapstone sink (donated to the house by a Holden resident).

The pantry still has a toilet, but the modern toilet has been replaced by its antique (and somewhat temperamental) precursor, a wall-mounted, tin-lined wooden box with pulleys and chain, and a new sink is hidden by shelving and a counter. Finally, the first-floor bedroom, as noted, has been closed off from the kitchen (this work uncovered both the original wallpaper in the bedroom and the original color of the kitchen walls). The bedroom is furnished with period furniture as well as a wash basin, pitcher, “thunder jug,” and other essentials – all to remind visitors that the house did not have indoor plumbing when it was built.

The Hendricks House thus stands as a visible and important reminder of Holden’s past, and Miss Hendricks’s brief memoir provides a glimpse of a bygone era and a recollection of the changes that have transformed domestic life.

(Note: Miss Hendricks’s essay is published verbatim except for the omission of four and one half pages of biographical sketches of various Hendricks family members.⁶)

THE HENDRICKS HOUSE AND ITS PEOPLE

By

Miss Jennie L. Hendricks

On the fourth of July in the year 1884⁷ Charles L. Hendricks, his wife, and three children, ranging in age from five years to three months, boarded the train at Lincoln Square Station in Worcester. The train conductor, as always, announced in a loud, distinct voice, “Train leaving for Gardner, Winchendon and Way stations.” The little Hendricks group’s destination was the Way Station, Holden, a very small community through which this Boston and Maine Railroad train made several trips a day.⁸

⁶For information about the family, see Charles H. Hendricks, *A Swedish Family Odyssey* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Hendricks Family Press, 1995).

⁷It is likely that the family moved into its new home in 1885. Charles Hendrickson (he later shortened the name to Hendricks) purchased the property in August, 1884.

⁸Holden had a population of 2,471 in 1885; Florence Newell Prouty, *History of the Town of Holden, Massachusetts, 1667-1941* (Holden, Mass.: 200th Anniversary Committee for the Town of Holden, 1941), 344.

Their spirits were indeed high, for there was waiting for them a house on Main Street recently completed. For many months they had been negotiating this project. Land had to be bought, a builder engaged, house plans decided upon, financing arranged, all in the midst of a full-time job and the duties of rearing a family.

The land on which this house stands had originally belonged to the Abbott Tavern whose property reached from Reservoir Street to Bailey Road. Of this huge area the Hendrickses purchased thirteen acres, a stretch of land between Main Street and the Boston and Maine tracks at its southern border.

The Abbott Tavern blacksmith shop was located where now grows a huge maple tree on the Hendricks house lawn.⁹ Here the old smithy was busily engaged in shoeing horses and mending wagons and coaches as the patrons whiled away their time at the Old Tavern. It was here, too, that the adept craftsman forged those long hand-wrought nails which we occasionally unearthed when digging in this spot. In this blacksmith shop probably were made those nails which Mr. Abbott presented to Mr. Avery, the first pastor of the Meetinghouse. In those days pastors were paid a mere pittance and parishioners made up the difference by sharing with them some of their choice possessions. In Mr. Avery's memorandum of articles received is that of thirty nails from Mr. Abbott.

Another relic from the Old Abbott Tavern, which we found on this property we purchased, is a section of what looks like a tombstone. On this partially demolished old stone there remains only the tantalizing letters

STER
MUEL ABBOTT
ov 1811

This section of stone, which still reposes in our cellar, we assumed was the tombstone of Lemuel Abbott, one of the early owners of the tavern. But investigation at the Worcester Antiquarian Society¹⁰ showed that Lemuel Abbott died about 1813.¹¹ With further study we have come to believe that this is not a tombstone but rather a milestone such as many tavern keepers of New England had erected and some of which are still standing. No doubt this is a section of the milestone which stood in front of the Abbott Tavern indicating the distance to Worcester, the date 1811 when it was placed in front of the Tavern, and the name of the innkeeper (Lemuel Abbott) on whose property it was placed.

⁹The maple tree, long past its prime, was removed when Main Street was expanded.

¹⁰She refers either to the American Antiquarian Society or to the Worcester Historical Society, now the Worcester Historical Museum.

¹¹Capt. Lemuel Abbot died May 15, 1813; *Vital Records of Holden, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Worcester, Franklin P. Rice, 1904), 195.

The Hendricks house was located exactly in the center of the town, a center vastly different from that of today. On our left lived the dearly beloved country doctor, Joseph Ames, whom we saw start on his daily rounds in a typical doctor's covered horse-drawn buggy. He used his living room as an office, which was not equipped with anything resembling a professional room. It was used as both office and sitting room. When he prescribed some sort of drug, he disappeared for a few minutes and usually returned with a bottle filled with some sort of vile-tasting medicine. But it was very potent - you were much better the next day.

Diagonally across the street lived Artemas Bascom in the little house which was originally the first school house in the center of town. His blacksmith shop was located just behind his home. It was close by this shop the children had to pass to attend the center school. This two-story school house provided education from the first grade through high school.

To the right of our house was a vacant lot where now stands the Holt business building converted from a former residence. Consequently the building next to ours was the old Warren building with a meat market and a store on the first floor. On the second floor was a pool room where the men of the town congregated for pool playing, other games, and gossip. Adjacent to this building was the Old Abbott Tavern, then occupied by the Rices and Lyonses. It was the daughter of this Rice family for whom the Rice School is named.¹²

It was four years after we took our abode in this Main Street house that Samuel Chester Gale, who had married Susan Damon, presented to the town the magnificent gift of the Gale Free Library, a memorial to the Damon family.

The Damon family house stood across the street from the Abbott Tavern on the site of the First Meetinghouse. The west section served as the living quarters for the various Damon families from time to time. Toward the east had been added a long section used as a general store, whose ownership changed hands many times during its existence. Tucked in between these two sections was a barber's shop and above these a spacious hall where the Alpha Club meetings were held.

One of the horrors of our childhood was in the early 1900s when this old landmark burned to the ground. My older sister, sleeping in one of our front bedrooms, saw a peculiar light on her window in the middle of the night. Upon investigation she found the Damon house in flames, which increased in spite of all efforts to combat this terrific conflagration.

Our house was in great danger from flying sparks which gathered with amazing rapidity. Holden had no fire protection, no source of water to draw on except the few house wells in the

¹²The neighborhood with which Miss Hendricks was familiar in her early years has significantly changed. Dr. Ames's house and its neighbor were demolished and the site is now occupied by the Caswell King Funeral Home. The school, siding now over its original brick exterior, is a beauty parlor. The two-story center school house, built in 1854, was moved a short distance to Boyden Road and is now an apartment building, its original decorative elements removed for modern siding. The Holt building, built for the Howe family about 1889 (and partly visible in the photographs of the Hendricks House), was destroyed by fire in 1979; its handsome carriage house has been used for various commercial activities. The Warren building was demolished and the Abbott Tavern (1763) was moved several hundred feet, and largely out of view, to make way for construction of the Mobil station.

vicinity. We had an excellent well and two pumps, one in the kitchen sink and the other in the barn. Our kind neighbors formed a line and with ladders and ordinary pails climbed and straddled our roof. Such meager apparatus seemed useless, yet with tireless effort they succeeded in extinguishing the sparks before they had an opportunity to ignite the roof. Our house, by this miracle, was saved. Fortunately no lives were lost in the fire.

Both the Congregational and Baptist churches, together with the Town Hall, had long been established. But on the spot where now rests the stone on the Common indicating the gift of John Hancock Common to the town by the then Massachusetts governor stood the town pump. One side securely fastened by a long metal chain was a tin cup graciously inviting all who would to quench their thirst with this clear, cool water - never mind the cleanliness of the cup.

The present Trowel Club building was there but occupied by private families.¹³ It is my recollection that it was here that all my grammar school teachers boarded, which suggests that this may have been a sort of boarding house. Adjacent to the old cemetery across the street from the churches was the Fales store, which sold all kinds of articles from fabrics to groceries. Here also was distributed the United States mail. It was in 1840 that Ethan Davis had this building constructed for the purpose of manufacturing boots and shoes. It is interesting that today, 1975, this building houses a shoe store selling footwear for men, women, and children.

Next to the Baptist Church lived Silas Flagg, the house and landscaping much as they are today. It was with Silas Flagg¹⁴ that my father negotiated the financing of our house and the thirteen acres on which it stood.

With a few other private homes scattered around the area, this constituted the center of Holden in 1884 when our family made its arrival.

The streets at that time had no means of illumination. Not until seven years later, in 1891, did the town vote \$500.00 for the street lighting. What progress we felt this was!

At various intervals were placed lamp posts just high enough to accommodate the town lamp lighter. Every night at dusk we would see Mr. Albert Trask arrive with horse and small wagon. By simply standing up he could just reach into the top glass enclosure to remove a little kerosene lamp which had burned during the night. From the back of his wagon he produced a refilled lamp with a gleaming chimney and carefully trimmed wick. This served through the night to give our town illumination.

The Boston and Maine Railroad served Holden well for many years in transporting its inhabitants between Holden and Worcester. On busy days the little railroad station located on

¹³This federal-style building (c. 1799) was subsequently purchased by the town, restored for use as town offices, and re-named in honor of the late Lloyd Starbard, who had long served the town as a selectman. Mr. Starbard was especially influential in securing the purchase of the Hendricks House by the town.

¹⁴Miss Hendricks's reference should be to Silas Flagg's son, Charles, from whom her father purchased the property. Silas Flagg died in 1870.

Sunnyside Avenue was completely filled with passengers. Businessmen, students, shoppers, and pleasure seekers had necessarily made an early arrival to be sure of a ticket before the train made its appearance. My father commuted to his work in Worcester by this means as did my brother when he was a student at Worcester Tech.

Then, in the early 1900s when electricity came to be more generally used, the Worcester Consolidated Company prepared to install a trolley car between Worcester and Holden. Huge gangs of Italian laborers with pick and shovel laid seven miles of track from Worcester to Jefferson, and the Worcester Holden Trolley system came into being.

Since the tracks were laid through the Main Street of Holden, we had the opportunity of watching the ties and rails carefully set in place. After all was completed and the schedule of trips was in order, one of our summer pastimes was to sit on our front porch and watch the trolleys come and go. In June we saw signs on all cars which read "Laurel and arbutus in bloom in Holden. Standing room only." I'm sure that this attracted many passengers to make the seven-mile trip in the month of June.

The effect of this easier and more convenient way of getting to and from our nearest city had a tremendous influence on the growth of Holden. People began to move from the city to the country. More Holden students could take advantage of this more efficient method of higher learning in Worcester.

In another thirty or so years we saw the trolley tracks dismantled and street cars replaced by bright, new shiny buses.

This newly built house to which the Hendricks family of five came was typical of that period. It had no conveniences, for electricity was yet to come into general use.

The dim light of kerosene lamps, refilled and cleaned daily, sufficed. Every household had a tin gallon container which we took to the grocery store to be refilled from time to time with kerosene. Lamps were decorated pieces of the decor, some most artistic, others frightfully ornate. Then hanging lamps came into vogue. These were indeed works of art and most useful, for with a double-chain contraption they could be raised or lowered for the reader's convenience.

In the kitchen sink stood the pump, with a second one on our back porch which pumped water for the cattle. What a convenience it was when a pipe was installed from the well under our back porch to the barn. That barn pump is still there where it was placed probably seventy-five years or more ago.

Heating for both comfort and cooking was provided for by two coal stoves. The big black kitchen stove with its huge oven served both for the preparation of food and for keeping the kitchen warm. The only other heat in the house was provided by a "parlor" stove located in the sitting room. Upstairs in the bedrooms there was no heat but somehow we never seemed to mind this when we were snugly buried under warm woolen blankets.

Of course our mid-Victorian parlor had no heat since it was only used when the minister called or some activity of extreme importance was taking place. It was furnished with horsehair upholstered furniture, a love-seat, one chair with arms, and several smaller chairs. In the center of the room stood a marble-top table on which rested the family Bible and photograph album.

On wash days the tubs were brought up from the cellar. On the stove was the huge copper boiler filled with water which threw off quantities of steam as the scrubbed clothes were added one-by-one for still more cleaning.

Ironing was done with numerous irons heated on the kitchen stove, more often than not smudged a bit on the bottom by the black shiny top of the stove, insisted upon by the neat housekeeper.

Twice a week Bryant's Ice Company left great cakes of ice in the ice box to keep the contents fresh. Underneath the ice box was placed a tin pan for the purpose of collecting water from the melting ice. It seemed that this pan was forever running over, leaving great puddles of water around the icebox.

All this primitive method of living was suddenly changed in 1912 when Holden installed the municipal light system. Living was completely revolutionized, and we began living in an entirely different world.

This new supply of energy made possible more efficient, cleaner illumination. When Mr. Marlowe, manager of the town system, completed wiring our house, we turned on every light in the house¹⁵ and went out on the street to behold a transformation. Then followed bathrooms (which replaced the "outhouse"), washing machine, refrigerator, central heating, and all the modern conveniences we enjoy today.

The barn housed four cows which furnished us and a few of our neighbors with fresh unpasteurized milk. When calves were born they were slaughtered. This meat, prepared in various ways, provided us with a succulent meal. The calf pelts always belonged to my two brothers, who walked down to the Warren tannery located on Sunnyside Avenue, where they received twenty-five cents.

These productive cows also provided us with that luxury of luxuries, home-made butter. For years the old wooden churn stood under the pantry window. Cream had to be accumulated until there was enough to reach the paddles of the churn. Each member of the family took a turn at cranking. It always seemed that the lumps of butter would never start coming, so we churned and churned. Rut finally, when a great lump of butter appeared, the buttermilk had all been drained from it, and just the right amount of salt had been added, you never, never tasted anything quite so luscious.

In the barn cellar a great fat pig waddled about. This also was properly prepared for the table and provided protein for good eating. From the hen house the huge handsome cock

¹⁵There was one light in each room.

announced daily the arrival of dawn, while the cackle of the hens proclaimed that eggs were ready to be collected. Here, too, was a source of good eating for the family.

The products of all these animals, together with plenty of land for huge lush gardens, made our place almost self-sustaining. But none of this came into being without hard, backbreaking work.

Our garden produced everything, even potatoes enough to be stored for the winter's supply. We had all sorts of fruit trees, including apple, peach, plum, and pear, together with bushes of currants and gooseberries. Such strawberries, blackberries, and raspberries I have never seen since.

The canning period was indeed a busy time. We canned and canned until the cellar shelves were completely filled with those delicious and very necessary staples. My mother always said, "Now the canning is done. But we are not going to use any of this until the snow flies." It must last the winter through, and with her careful planning it always did. It is interesting to note that all these self-grown products provided exactly the protein and vitamins prescribed for the proper daily diet today.

Our pasture was, in my eyes, the most beautiful spot on earth. In June acres of laurel in full bloom with deep pink and white clusters of flowers were a heavenly sight.

At the lower end near the railroad tracks ran a brook which eventually flowed into Bryant's Pond. Here grew cowslip, wild calla lily, hobblebush, and swamp pink. Oak, beech, birch, and chestnut trees were scattered here and there. This was before the chestnut tree blight wiped these most interesting and beautiful trees out of existence. Collecting chestnuts when the early frosts arrived became one of our happy activities.

Among all those beauties of nature, during the migratory season we found all sorts of birds, most of which we learned to identify.

What a wonderful place to bring up a family of five children! What an opportunity, of which we took advantage, to learn at first hand the wonders of nature!

In 1918 we sold all this land, with the exception of the 5/8 of an acre on which the house stands, to Fred Bascom and Goulding Warren. This most desirable property was made into a small housing development most appropriately called "Laurelwood." On its one street are sixteen well-built and attractive homes, surrounded by well-kept landscaping. It is one of the more attractive developments established in Holden in recent years.

My father spent most of his youth in a small, very attractive village, Munkeljingby, a rural community near Engleholm, Sweden, where he was born exactly 125 years ago on November 14. He was a prolific reader and was fascinated by the tales of buffalo hunting in the United States. He and his cousin Jan spent many evenings dreaming of life on those western prairies. Adventure was surely there and some day they must find out at first hand what it was really like.

Finally, when they reached the age of 21 in the year 1871, their adventurous dreams culminated in their leaving their fatherland. They immigrated to the United States and headed for the buffalo country about which they had read and talked so much. For two years, 1871-1873, they lived this rugged life. Adventure was indeed there but with it hard, grueling work. Loading those almost unbearably heavy, awkward buffalo hides onto horse-drawn wagons eventually wore down their enthusiasm and they decided to make a change.

They learned from young men out of the eastern part of the United States of a wire factory, the Washburn and Moen Company (now the American Steel and Wire Co.), where anyone who wanted a job could get one. So in 1873 they decided to head for Worcester to take advantage of this opportunity to find easier work and a more developed community life.

A job in the piano wire department appealed to my father and for this he was hired. He worked there forty-two years, retiring at the age of sixty-five. I am under the impression that he was one of the first workers in this country to receive a pension upon retirement. This job was interrupted in the year 1876 for a few months when once again the desire for adventure overtook him. He went back to the little community in Sweden to marry "the girl behind."

When he returned to Worcester he had with him his bride Mathilda Olson Hendricks, a very superior and pretty Swedish girl born in that delightful little village of Munkeljingby in 1857.

For seven years they lived in Worcester; then, on that eventful Fourth of July in 1884, they moved to Holden to take up residence for the rest of their lives in a house they planned and completed. From this union were born five children, two boys and three girls. The three oldest, Esther Constance, Henning Vitalis and Edith Florence, were born in Worcester. The two youngest, Jennie Lucy Mathilda and Charles Lewis, Jr., were born in Holden.