



Kent Historical Society

Newsletter



Volume 3, Number 1

2002

Emily Mills Hopson November 7, 1902 ~ January 1, 2002

On New Years Day, 2002, the town of Kent and the Kent Historical Society lost one of their greatest treasures. Miss Emily Hopson passed away at Sharon Hospital. Having spent over two months in a private room at the Kent, Emily was finally able to go home for Christmas, to the peace and quiet she had been longing for. She was ready for the end, and had no regrets about any part of her life which she had lived to the fullest and thoroughly enjoyed.

Since her death, tributes have been pouring in, which we would like to share with you. Emily was an avid supporter of many organizations in town. I asked representatives of these groups to share their thoughts about what Emily meant to their organization. The responses give us a glimpse of the selfless dedication and enthusiasm which this remarkable lady had for everything she chose to be involved with.

Allan Priaulx, President of the Kent Library Association, wrote "The Kent Memorial Library is the literary heart of Kent and Emily Hopson was literally at the heart of the Kent Memorial Library. When the library was formed in Kent in 1915, Emily was a teenager with a hunger for learning and a love of books. She savored these traits all her life and our library benefited immeasurably. When the library needed to expand in the 1990s, she provided the vision and led the struggle to raise funds that made our growth a reality. When improvements were needed, she

organized them, whether it was our beautiful bluestone terrace or our refurbished reading room. Members of the Board of Directors of the Kent Library Association always turned to Emily to find solutions to perplexing problems and she invariably had the right answer, offered with a gentle sense of humor that made the outcome easy. There was no nonsense in Emily and she was impatient with ours. But, when contributions were down, she stepped up with cash. When volunteering took too much of our time, she inspired us by sitting for hour after hour on steamy days

helping at the book sale. Emily led us by example and good will. She is a model for us all to emulate - a person of dignity and passion, clear-headed kindness, caring and strength. She has our unending thanks."

Jane Kates, the Kent Garden Club: "The Garden Club, like all organizations in Kent, benefited mightily from Miss Hopson's incredible knowledge, generosity and creativity. We always did what she suggested. Her ideas would propel us into action quickly, willingly, and enthusiastically. She was an amazing woman. One with grace, dignity and a sense of humor. Coffee was an absolute necessity after a meeting - not tea! She'd always arrive impeccably dressed for meetings, even work projects, wearing her wonderful jewelry and an elegant hat - no jeans or sweats for her. Her knowledge was formidable. Want to know the name of the old rose planted at the Swift House? Ask Miss Hopson. Need a great idea for a fund raiser? Ask Miss Hopson (our Lawn & Garden Sale

Sale in May and our Applefest in October are both Miss Hopson's suggestions.) Need a cashier? Ask Miss Hopson. Main Street just won't be the same without her sitting behind a cash box collecting money for some worthy Kent cause. Miss Hopson was an integral part of the Garden Club and will be sorely missed!"

Harmon Smith, the Kent Land Trust: "When the Kent Land Trust was established in 1989, one of the first people I approached to be on the board of directors was Miss Emily Hopson. I didn't know Emily at the time except to say hello to, at a library party or at the Kent Market, and didn't know how she would like the idea of a former weekender taking on an effort like this in her town. Knowing her, you can guess what her reaction was. 'When do we get started?' I learned right away what a hands-on person she was. When I arrived at Swift House to set up for our first organizational meeting, she was already there, moving chairs into place. At the end of the meeting as the others chatted by the door, she was helping put the chairs back where they belonged. That was the way she approached everything. "Don't talk about it - do it" was her motto during the twelve years she served as First Vice President of the Land Trust. Emily's knowledge of the town, its history and its residents was invaluable to the work of the Land Trust. Whenever a question came up, we knew that she would have the answer or she would get it for us. Many times she saved us from mistakes through her knowledge of people and their relationships. The depth of her understanding of the town and the way it works was truly impressive. What I remember most vividly about Emily, however, was the clarity of her speech. There was never any doubt where she stood. She always found the right words to express her meaning. Without a trace of pretension in her manner, she conveyed the strength of her intellect and the breadth of her education to all who met her."

Davia Fink, the Kent Art Association: "Whether visiting each new exhibit, or commenting on the interesting variety of artwork, Miss Emily Hopson was a loyal visitor at the Kent Art Association over the years. She was a devoted member, believed strongly in its statement of purpose and credo, and lent lasting support to the very essence of the seventy nine year old organization. She touched our lives in many ways. We will miss her deeply - but, the memory of her presence will be with us always."

Tony Hanny, the Kent Childrens Center:

"Miss Emily"

There was a grand woman who lived in our town
From here and there and parts all around.
She was known as "Miss Emily", a champion of rights,
A doer of great deeds, a beacon of light.

She was mother to the legions, though not one of blood.
And she spoke of her children with words full of love.
But the gentle words melted and became words of steel
When opponents attempted to deny what was real.

'Cause she was Miss Emily, their champion of rights,
Their doer of great deeds, their beacon of light.
But God sent his angels the first of this year
To guide our Miss Emily home to His side.

Our loss is tremendous, our sorrow so deep
But we know His Miss Emily, His champion of rights,
His doer of great deeds, His beacon of light...
Now rests in heaven, her life's work complete
As God had decided the timing was right.

So thank you Miss Emily, for all that you've done.
You were our champion of rights,
Our doer of good deeds and our beacon of such bright light.

Let us pray that we always remember all that you've taught us
And keep your legacy of light forever burning in our hearts and souls.

With love, gratitude and lightness
Your children of Kent.

In addition to these tributes from her cherished organizations, we have received many marvelous letters from all sorts of people, too numerous to share here. But one does stand out. It came accompanied by a copy of a painting of a rather familiar looking, librarian type figure – a slightly stern faced lady peering over the top of her reading glasses. The letter is from South Kent artist Deborah Chabrian, and it explains the face in the painting.

“I have many memories of Emily, starting when we first moved to Kent 15 years ago. We wanted to be involved in our new home town, and started by asking the history of our house. We were advised to ask Emily at the Historical Society, and that began a long friendship. We volunteered to help her with Seven Hearths and spent many days with her cleaning and hanging shows of paintings and photographs. There we learned many things about our house and Kent from the stories she told us and photos of the town she showed us. She was a driving force in saving two old houses in Kent we almost lost one winter. The Bull House and the old Mankin house (now NewMil Bank). The photos of the old houses Kent had already lost made us determined to not have it continue and I am proud to have been a part of that battle with her. We would compare notes to see how we were each doing and in the end were pleased to have saved them both for the town!

Emily with her father, William Trapp Hopson

“As artists we were inspired to paint her. Ed asked but she was camera shy and only relented when I needed her to model for me as a librarian for a Reader’s Digest book I was illustrating, thus we got a rare photo of her!

“When we were helping her at Seven Hearths, she knew we needed old furniture for our new old house. She found an old maple cannon ball bed in the attic for us, and now it reminds us of her every night. Emily taught us many things, to cherish the past, while looking to the future and not worry about what you couldn’t control. She was truly inspiring to see in town, forever active and busy doing work for the town. We will miss her often but are forever grateful to have known her!”

On February 2nd, the Kent Historical Society hosted a gathering at the Swift House to celebrate the life of Kent’s Citizen of the Century. We offered a variety of soups for our guests to sample as they mingled and reminisced. Soup was one of Emily’s favorite meals, a fact which I still hear over and over again as I talk to people about her. So it seemed fitting that we offer some of her favorites – ox tail, black bean, cream of mushroom and tomato bisque – and coffee, of course!

Emily would have enjoyed the simplicity of the fare, and the good, happy company. She would not have been so pleased to see the photographs of her scattered around the room. She hated to have her picture taken, calling herself “the old battleaxe” or “the Witch of Endor”. But the photographs of her life, which she had kept in spite of herself, show a happy, popular, intriguing lady. We are sharing a few of them here, with apologies to our dear friend.

At the gathering, we put out a guest book, and ended up with almost 100 signatures. Many people chose to add a few thoughts with their signatures: “She was a woman of vision”, “She was a woman ahead of her time”, “A true leader with great vision for the community”, “Emily contributed so much to Kent and all it stands for. She will be missed terribly but she gave us such pleasure and charm”, “One of the most remarkable and interesting people I ever had the pleasure of knowing”, “Our memories of Emily will never fade”, “What a wonderful role model and inspiration Emily has been for all of us”, “An awe inspiring woman – for her kindness, her commitment

Don’t take my picture!

and her spirit", "Oh, Emily and her rummage sales - what a gal!", "A true treasure and irreplaceable asset to Kent. Who else had a hat for every occasion?". One of the last entries in the book sums it all up well - "We will all miss the generous, firm determination that guided us all to make Kent a better place". I think Emily would have been quietly pleased to hear this recognition of her heartfelt legacy to the town of Kent.

The passing of this extraordinary woman marks the end of an equally extraordinary family in the town of Kent. Emily was the last of the Hopson clan, a direct descendant of John Hopson who came to Kent in the mid 1700s. She was also descended from many of Kent's other early, illustrious citizens - Swift, Pratt, Mills and Spooner, as well as the Rev. Cyrus Marsh, Kent's first preacher. But it was her Hopson heritage in which

Miss Amy and Miss Kate

she was most interested. The Hopson family figured hugely in the flourishing iron industry which fueled much of Kent's economy for well over 100 years. Emily and her cousins, a surprising number of whom were, like her, bright, single well-educated women, could expound upon any detail of the iron industry in the Northwest Corner. Though Emily herself was born and raised in New London, CT, where her father, William Trapp Hopson, had relocated due to changes in the waning northwest corner iron industry, her ties to Kent and the remaining Hopson clan here were very strong. Emily's generation of the Hopson family was large, her great grandparents, William Trapp Hopson and Annie Waterman Swift Hopson, having had five children, and her grandparents, John Hopson and Rebecca Spooner Hopson, seven children. Four main families of Hopsons existed in Emily's generation. Emily, the youngest, was an only child. Her Uncle John and his wife Mary Britton Haxtun were parents to Helen, Myra ("Maisie"), Annie, Elinor, and Alice. Her Aunt Annie married Charles Wesley Chapin and gave birth to Elma Swift Chapin ("Sister"). After Annie's death, Charles married her sister Julia, and they gave birth to Ann Hopson Chapin ("Nan"). The fourth family were Emily's second cousins, children of her father's cousin William Rufus Hopson - Elizabeth Fuller ("Bess"), Ann Eliza, and Dorothy Slade.

Myra

Though Emily and most of her cousins inherited a sizeable fortune, they were not idle. They continued in the strong Hopson tradition of dedication to the town. All the Hopsons from the very beginning were taught to do good, to give back in some way because life had been so generous to them. Their selfless devotion to the town and its organizations was epitomized in Miss Emily, who was involved in more ways than we will perhaps ever know.

Emily's aunts, "Miss Kate" and "Miss Amy" ran a highly respected private school in Kent, educating some of the town's most inquisitive minds in the early 1900s. This school was in a building behind their house, which was located where the Kent Hills Condominiums now stand. After their death, the house was left to Nan and Sister Chapin. Nan taught piano to several generations of Kent children, myself included. Unable to maintain the house well, the Chapin sisters had to sell it, and it was torn down to make way for the present condominiums.

The Hopson women at the boathouse on Pond Mountain.

The little school building was moved to Elizabeth Street, where it is now a private residence. Cousin Ann Hopson was also a respected school teacher. She lived with her sisters, Dorothy and Bess in the house that is now Pauline's Place. Dorothy had retired back to Kent after a career as Dean of Women at the Hampton Institute in Virginia. Later she was Director of Religious Education at the Trinity Episcopal Church in Hartford. Upon her retirement to Kent, she became active in the League of Women Voters, the Historical Society, the Informal Club and other town programs. The Hopson women have always been legendary in Kent! (Note: Another Hopson house on Main Street was that of Emily's great-great-uncle George Hopson, now the home of NewMil Bank).

Dorothy, Ann and Bess were charter members of the Kent Historical Society, along with cousin Nan Chapin. Bess seems to have been particularly dedicated to setting up the Society – from bylaws to filing systems! Barbara Prisch, another early member of the Society, remembers Bess announcing that the Society really ought to have a filing cabinet, so Barbara drove Bess down to Bethel, where they made the big investment. I think Bess would be pleased to see the extensive files we have today. One of the reasons that we have the excellent archives on Kent that we do is that all the Hopsons seem to have been packrats! Packrats with a keen sense of history and a love of writing. They left us a treasure trove of Hopson family papers, much of which deals with the local iron industry. Without this legacy, we would not know nearly as much detail about the industry as we do today. There have been many other seriously dedicated members of our Society who worked with the Hopson clan and who deserve equal recognition, but Elizabeth, Dorothy, Ann and especially Emily Hopson left their mark on Kent and the Kent Historical Society in a way which perhaps no other family has. It is truly the end of an era.

- Marge McAvoy

The Kent Furnace and the Hopsons

Emily Hopson stubbornly cherished a vision that historic Kent Furnace, which her family once ran as a vital part of the tri-state area's 19th century iron industry, would one day be restored. Repeated delays in long-promised state action were disappointing, but not enough to quench her hopes.

Now it appears, as of mid-March, that work at the 1826 furnace site could resume by this summer. A go or no-go decision may come from the Connecticut Historic Commission by April first.

As noted in previous newsletters, the Legislature approved more than \$200,000 for this purpose nearly a decade ago. Some preliminary work was done, including excavation around the base of the crumbling stone furnace stack, discovery of unique interior brickwork and weatherproofing of the structure with a big blue plastic wrap over the past two winters.

Now the Historic Commission's architect, engineer, archaeologist and contractor have agreed on a new design for the continuing the project. It involves insertion of three specially designed steel fabricated "ribs" to hold the furnace arches in place and grillwork in each arch with spaces big enough to permit a good look at the rare brickwork but small enough to prevent vandals from getting inside. All the commission needs before giving the green light is assurance from all parties that the remaining funds are adequate to do the job.

Emily Hopson's vision, of course, went far beyond what's now on the drawing boards. She wanted a protective shed and walkway above the furnace, with exhibits to illustrate how the furnace functioned in its heyday.

At the height of the Civil War in 1864, Miss Emily's father William Trapp Hopson wrote some years ago, production at the Kent Furnace hit a peak volume of 14 tons of ore per day – not a huge amount by 20th century standards, but impressive for the time, especially when you read that to produce each ton of iron the operation consumed 138 bushels of charcoal, 432 pounds of lime and 2,612 pounds of ore.

- David Parker

Kent Wish List

In the tradition of Miss Bess Hopson, we are still looking for file cabinets! We need some 4 drawer, legal size FIRE PROOF file cabinets. Please help us with this if you can.

A Friend In Me

A Tribute to Miss Emily

She needed me as an employee, we got along just fine. We planned and we drove, with an agenda on our mind. A simple task, she would ask, a Driver, I could be? Little did I know the gift she'd end up giving me!

As time went on, I became aware of the friendship we would share. I felt enlightened, I felt blessed! I knew I had to do my very best; for she would teach me lessons on life I'd carry with me through the tests. I can't express how deeply I've been touched; I can only say, I miss her very much.

She was so gracious, so dignified, I barely felt qualified. But, that first day she took my hand, I buried those doubts in the sand. She made it clear, without a sound, a friend in me, she had found.

~ Dawn Stone

**Emily's parents:
Elizabeth Mary Hopson & William Trapp Hopson**

Kent Quiz

Answer to Quiz: 13. Although there were at one time 14 separate school districts in Kent, District #11 fell out of use due to the steep road accessing it and the children then attended the neighboring schools. This steep road was Ten Rod Road and ran from the east end of Cobble Road straight up the mountain where it became Jennings Road. The upper portion of Ten Rod Road still exists with a few houses on it. The Town eventually abandoned the rest of Ten Rod Road for the same reason the school system did - it was just too darn steep! In the mid 1850s the other school districts were: #1 Flanders, #2 Center, #3 North Kent, #4 Macedonia, #5 Bulls Bridge, #6 South Kent, #7 Geer Mt., #8 Rock, #9 East Kent (Bromica), #10 Fuller Mt., #12 Kent Hollow, #13 Ore Hill, #14 Skiff Mt. (Source: 1874 town map. Other lists have a different order after District #7).

Next question: In the iron industry language, what were "pigs" and "sows"?



**With the best accessories,
of course**

Veterans Exhibit

The other summer exhibit at Seven Hearths, as we mentioned in the last newsletter, will be a tribute to Kent's veterans. Planned before the current war in Afghanistan began, it now seems even more appropriate. We have been promised loans of many items from World War II and some from Viet Nam. We would also welcome anything else - from WWI, the Korean War, the Gulf War, even the Civil War or Revolutionary War - any armed conflict in which our citizens participated. Plane spotting, Civil Defense, WACS and WAVES.....if you would like to share your family's contribution to the country's military efforts we will be most grateful. Please call Marge at 927-3153, or email at Aloysius@webtv.net, or write to PO Box 651, Kent, CT 06757. Thank you!

(PS - We also need to borrow mannequins - male and female- on which to display some of the uniforms, and glass display cases to protect some of the more valuable items being loaned to us)

Copies of Adam Journal Available

The Kent Historical Society is pleased to announce the completion of one of Emily's long term pet projects. We are offering for sale transcribed copies of *The Journal of John Adam of Canaan concerning the operation of the South Kent Ore Bed*. The journal, begun in 1792, gives a very clear illustration of the history of the Ore Bed, the first in Kent, from the original acquisition of the various lands to the account books and ledgers which reflect the daily operation of the business. There are letters to and from Adam about the many aspects of the business as well as almost daily entries of various events, such as: "Monday 6th February 1797. This morning rainey & thawey. Great destruction among the Shafts, Converse's old shaft sunk & buried all his tools. His new shaft near the Ditch full of water & a link on the East side. Caldwell lost 3 or 4 tons of ore by a Link of earth. Endeavoured to shovel the snow out of the ditch but water prevailed.". The hundreds of pages of writing were painstakingly transcribed by KHS Trustee Dick Lindsey, with Emily's constant encouragement. While we are all saddened that she did not live to see the actual publication of the diary, she knew it was in the hands of the printer, and that we would make sure this remarkable document is available to all serious students of the iron industry. KHS Secretary Lynne Hicks, owner of Thistle Graphics printing shop, is producing a limited number of copies of the Adam diary for sale. The cost is \$40. Please let us know if you are interested.



Call for Gardeners

Gardening season is fast approaching. Once again, we are looking for volunteers to help us with several projects on the grounds of Seven Hearths. Our gardeners generally meet to work there on Wednesday mornings. We welcome any and all levels of garden experience, and all degrees of commitment. You can come every week, once a month, or just once. Please call Marge McAvoy at 927-3153 if you are interested, to find out when we are going to begin.

Learning the finer points of croquet from her father.

It's Volunteer Time again!

As the summer approaches, our need to be open to the public increases. Many of you gave generously of your time last summer at both Seven Hearths and our Archives in the Library. We hope that you will be willing to do so again, and that new volunteers will sign up as well. Last summer was quiet at Seven Hearths, but this summer promises to be more active. We have already had many inquiries about the Veterans Exhibit, and word has spread about the beautifully restored Nelson paintings which will be on display. It will be a much busier season, and we will need lots of help. The Museum is open from 2 to 4:30PM on Saturdays and Sundays in July and August. We are looking for hosts and hostesses to be there to welcome guests, and give tours when needed. Our hostesses last summer enjoyed the variety of visitors and their questions. We often learn from these guests as we talk about the house and the history of Kent. Please, consider giving just one brief afternoon to this effort. We need your help! The Archives are also a fascinating place to volunteer your time. Genealogical researchers come from all over the country to trace their New England roots, and we need to be here to welcome them. Last year, we asked for volunteers on Friday afternoon from 1 to 4. If we get more help, we may be able to expand those hours. Please let us know.

Kent Historical Society

PO Box 651, Kent, CT 06757

Est. 1954

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Upstairs in the Kent Memorial Library

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Kent Historical Society

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