

THE PHELPS - HUNTINGTON BARN

1782 - 1931

On the 7th of March, 1782, my great, great grandmother, Elizabeth Porter Phelps, wrote in her diary, "Thursday our folks begun to get timber for a barn."

Again on May 27th, she writes, "We had a great number of men here to raise a new barn, move an old one and a house, all done and safely through the mercy of God."

I feel that the date chosen by these remote grandparents of mine for this event we are celebrating today was chosen carefully for we read in Judd's 'History of Hadley' that on the 27th of May, 1752, Moses Porter raised the house on Forty Acres. In 1782 this had become the home of Charles Phelps and there his wife, Moses Porter's daughter, wrote the above entries in her diary. Thus the raising of the barn was a celebration - a family event fraught with feeling - with sentiment.

In the years that followed, this farm prospered. Charles Phelps was a man of affairs - he represented Hadley in the Great and General Court at Boston. On March 16th, 1783, Elizabeth writes, "My husband set out with cattle for Boston." and again April 4th, 1786, "Monday my husband set out for Boston - his cattle went last Friday." Charles Phelps in a letter to his son dated Hadley, March 4th, 1790, writes, "The day after you

left us, I sold ten fat cattle and five shipping cattle to Major Dickinson of Deerfield," and again later in the same letter - "I have ten fat cattle more which I propose to keep some time longer." From Boston where he was attending court, Charles Phelps writes to his wife: "If there should be a pair of oxen brought to you, I would have them fed as well as may be - and the other cattle likewise. I hope matters are conducted with propriety at the barn." So we see what activities during its early years centered around the building we dedicate today.

To gather an accurate picture of the establishment of which this barn was such an important feature, let us turn to the writings of President Timothy Dwight of Yale College who visited Hadley, September 27th, 1790: "Among the interesting objects in this neighborhood, the Farm of Charles Phelps, Esq. about two miles north of this town, deserves the notice of a traveller. This estate lies on the Eastern bank of Connecticut River and contains about six hundred acres of which about one hundred and fifty are interval, annually manured by the slime of the river. The rest consists partly of a rich plain and partly the sides and summit of Mount Warner, a beautiful hill in the neighborhood. The interval is universally meadow and of the best quality. The remainder of the farm is remarkably well fitted for every kind of produce, suited to the climate, abounds in pasture and

yields an inexhaustible supply of timber and fuel. It is also furnished with every other convenience. On one border are excellent mills, on another a river furnishing cheap transportation to market. It is intersected by two great roads leading to Boston and Hartford. A bridge crosses Connecticut River one fourth of a mile below the house. Within two miles is the church in Hadley. The country around is highly improved and the inhabitants inferior to those of few places of the same extent, in their habits and character. The scenery both near and distant is eminently delightful and within very convenient distances all the pleasures of refined and intelligent society may be easily enjoyed. In a word this estate is the most desirable possession of the same kind and extent within my knowledge." Thus was described the farm of Charles Phelps. We can well imagine the life that went on in and about this barn during his lifetime - the great loads of hay pitched into the mows - the rye and wheat threshed on the very floor where stand the exhibits today - the long rows of fat cattle and milking cows - the farm horses and the oxen.

Charles Phelps died in 1814. In 1816 his son-in-law, Dan Huntington, retired from the ministry and came with his large family of children, nine in number, to live in the old house and take over the responsibility of this great farm. Dan Huntington, born in Lebanon, Connecticut, was graduated from

Yale in 1794. He held parishes in Litchfield and in Middletown, Connecticut. A scholarly man he was with clearly a poor head for business, being far more interested in the education of his children than in running a successful farm. His sons, with two exceptions, when old enough to work on the farm, were preparing to enter college. But we have evidence that the farm was still an active ~~establishment~~<sup>enterprise</sup> well through Dan Huntington's lifetime. After his father had taken charge of this ~~establishment~~<sup>estate</sup>, my grandfather, Frederic Dan Huntington, was born, and in his writings I find this reference to the life on the farm in the winter of 1831-32: "I was occupied in the woods on Mt. Warner, a part of my father's farm, with others in cutting and drawing wood to the house for the years fuel. I often took the entire charge of a team of two yoke of oxen for the day, driving them with a loaded sled down the mountain, then unloading and returning to the fields. I was proud of the trust and enjoyed the frosty air and the whole business keenly." Again writing of his last vacation before entering Amherst College, he states, "I had some three months of leisure, which I passed pleasantly at home, for the most part, and to a large extent (as indeed I was much disposed always to spend my vacation) - in the various labors going on upon the Farm, with my brothers, Theophilus and Theodore. For the business of farming I have always had a zealous love. I turn to it with longing often to this day and next to my present vocation, it is the enjoyment I should choose above all others, for its independence, the wholesomeness and the ennobling intimacy

with nature to which it introduces its disciples."

Of a decade later Mary Huntington writes telling of trips during her childhood from Northampton to Hadley. Her grandfather, Dan Huntington, was still the active head of the farm. She speaks of the barn and her anxiety to reach it soon enough in the late afternoon "to see the lambs gathered into their fold, and the cows being driven home into the big barn where we loved to watch the farm hands milking them. What a delightful buzzing sound the milk made as it came down with a swift strong stream into the pail and how pretty the bubbling foam."

In 1857 my grandfather, Frederic Dan Huntington, later to be so well known in all this country-side as "The Bishop," took over full management and legal ownership of the Farm although his father, the venerable Dan lived on here for seven more years.

During my grandfather's ownership from 1857 until 1904, he was ever interested in his herd of cows. This was mixed at first - a few grade cows, then some Kerry cattle, but as time went on more and more Jersey blood and purer stock. As far back in the eighties as I can well remember, Jerseys predominated and many ~~more~~ of these were registered stock. I can close my eyes now and see in the late afternoon the cows coming back from the pasture across the road down from the slopes of Pleasant Hill. They formed a long line, passing through the barnyard - many stopping at the drinking trough on their way to the big south door - then each cow going to her place. There were no

stanchions then, but simple rope halters held by a knot in a hole in the manger, that ran nearly the length of the barn from North to South on the West side. Here the cows were milked and what a busy scene it was! And how we children were fascinated - literally spellbound.

Of all the varied activities, I think my grandfather enjoyed haying more than anything else on the farm and even into his extreme age took an active part in harvesting this crop.

The desk in my grandfather's study was so placed that as he wrote, he could look down the hall out the South door to the barn - both the double doors stood wide open and he could look through this barn out to the slopes of Mt. Holyoke - this was his favorite view and in a measure I believe because it was framed by the doorways of this beloved structure.

After my grandfather's death in 1904, the ownership was continued by his wife. A few cows were kept and life on the farm continued much as it had done during the last years of my grandfather's life.

When my grandmother died in 1910, the old homestead and the barn descended to the heirs of the Bishop's oldest son, my father. The place was managed for the next few years by my oldest brother, Professor Henry Barrett Huntington of Brown University. There were many cows, a cow barn was added and for a time a real attempt was made to run a milk farm. It was very difficult, however, at such long range and with the very moderate amount of water the farm afforded. Then came the war and for a

time - a year or so - the buildings were closed and the barn uninhabited.

In 1920 feeling the necessity of making a summer home for my mother, her six children united to open up the farm again, a caretaker was established in the cottage and in the barn, a horse, a cow, then horses, cows, pigs, geese and lambs made this ancient structure once more alive. Hay and corn raised in the meadows filled the silo and the mows. My mother spent long seasons here from early April often to well into November, the barn being kept open all the year around. This continued after her death in 1926.

In January 1929 the caretaker's cottage burned to the ground and shortly thereafter the live stock were taken away and the barn deserted.

In July 1929 I purchased the farm from the other heirs and for the first time in twenty-five years ownership was in the hands of one individual. This building immediately became a serious problem - it was woefully out of repair and furthermore I could make no real use of it. Just then I heard from the lips of Clifton Johnson the plan that his brother Henry had for a museum. This seemed to me and to all my family a solution so beyond anything that we could have planned for this dear old barn that we welcomed it with open arms.

How the miracle was wrought, however, I must leave for

others to tell, but I am sure that all who have loved the barn through this century and a half are very happy today.

I am sure that all the love and thought and effort that have gone into this barn in these long years have made this building more fit for the new work that this ancient structure is to perform. Finally, as a museum let it ever be remembered that this barn has had a glorious past.