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# SIMSBURY FREE LIBRARY Quarterly

Volume 18 Issues 1 & 2

Spring & Summer 2011

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## Memories of the Ketchins of Tariffville

### Part 2: The Early Years of A. J. Ketchin & Son

*In Part 1, excerpts from William Mansfield Ketchin's memoirs told the Ketchin family history from their arrival from Paisley, Scotland, in 1821 to their eventual founding of stone masonry and monument businesses in the Tariffville section of Simsbury, Connecticut. The article ended with a confrontation between young Will and his eighth grade teacher at the Tariffville Grammar School. At the end of the winter term Will left the school and worked in his father's marble shop until the beginning of the next school year, when his family enrolled him in the Simsbury Academy run by Rev. John Bunyan McLean.<sup>1</sup>*

About the time Will entered the Simsbury Academy, the Ketchin family lost a second son. He wrote in his memoir about the death of his little brother Frank Arthur Ketchin on December 5, 1886. "Antitoxin had not been discovered at the time and diphtheria took a heavy toll among the children of Frankie's age (4 years). He was a fine, handsome little fellow, and would run to meet me as I came from work and say 'piggy back.' I would lift him to my back and carry him home. He was buried beside his brother Georgie on the Spencer lot in Middletown, Conn."<sup>2</sup>

Young Will Ketchin spent two years in Rev. John McLean's private secondary school. His memories of those days are happy ones. He wrote, in part:

The Conn. Western Railroad was then operating between Hartford and Poughkeepsie, N.Y. (since abandoned). The Academy was situated four miles from Tariffville at Simsbury Center, and I went back and forth on the train. The school was divided into two clubs, "The Old Hickorys" and the x y z's. I was in the "x y z's." A play or farce was put on at the town hall [now Boy Scout Hall] every month and the clubs alternated in putting on the show.

One night three of the boys from Tariffville decided to stay overnight and walk home the next day (Saturday) if they could get permission to sleep in the school room. The Prof. gave permission. In front of the teacher's desk was a large hot air register, so the boys went to the McLean barn and got several old horse blankets and an old buffalo robe. These they spread near and over the hot air register on the floor and lay down without removing their clothes. Those old blankets had been in that barn for years, and that night saturated the clothing of the boys, so that when I got home, all of my clothes were hung out on the line to air.

That year my father was able to buy a horse and a business wagon, and that winter the Academy was moved to the north end of Simsbury Street and the name changed to "The McLean Seminary."<sup>3</sup> I was allowed to take the horse whenever I stayed for the monthly plays because the last train went through at 5 p.m. I took advantage of that privilege and that winter had a grand time skating on the Eno Pond near the seminary with some of the girl boarders.

Months after the McLean Seminary opened, the area was hit by the Great Blizzard of '88. William Ketchin recalled his experience:

On March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1888, came the notable blizzard. Starting Saturday, snow came down in a driving sheet, all day Sunday and Sunday night, and Monday morning found it drifted into great heaps in places. Arch and I dug a tunnel from the back door of the house to the barn, about 50 feet away. It was packed so hard it could be cut out in blocks.

At that date the Conn. Western R.R. was in full bloom, and the Saturday of the 10<sup>th</sup> took several ministers to the western city [Winsted] to preach on Sunday. But Saturday night developed into a very heavy storm, and Sunday morning, when the people wanted to go to Hartford they found the snow on the ground several inches deep, and snowing and blowing with tremendous force. So much so that all traffic was stopped.

The early train scheduled to go to Hartford from Winsted was started and tried to make it, and one train got as far as Tariffville, 12 miles from Hartford. There they tried to make it thru the cuts in the snow. The 1<sup>st</sup> cut in the rocks was just south of Tariffville and it was about 500' long and 15' high. They evidently got through this one, but ¼ mile south of that one was another not so long, and not so high. This one they never got through. Some rocks had rolled down on the track and there they were stalled all night.

Somehow they got word back to the village Monday morning and a track gang was sent down to get them out. I was [almost] 17 and husky, so I went down and engaged to go with the track gang. We got an ox team through [to] the top of the mountain road adjacent to the stalled car. It had stopped snowing, but drifts were tremendous everywhere. From the train up the hill to the ox-cart we made sort of steps to climb in the snow, and we got the people out and down to the hotel.

One or two funny circumstances developed. The people in the cars had been there all night, and the weather wasn't very far from zero. One of the 1<sup>st</sup> to come out and climb the hill was a minister who had been fishing in Winsted. I happened to be the one to help him get off the car steps. I never knew whether he saw me smiling or not, for I could not help it, for he [had] reached into his bag when he got cold and pulled therefrom a set of flannel underwear. This he had drawn right over the top of his trousers, and he said, as I helped him down, "Oh, this is awful, all night in this freezing weather." He was a sight.

The next little thing was amusing. Everyone was crawling on their hands and knees to get up to the cart, when a rather flashy priest came out. He was slipping back most as fast as he made headway, just as the foreman of the R.R. gang came along. The foreman was a big, tall, red-headed Irishman. When he got alongside the priest, the priest said, "Hear me, man, give me a hand." The Irishman said, "Crawl on your hand and knees like the rest of them." Finally, we got them all safely down to the hotel.

In the meantime, the 1<sup>st</sup> big cut had become filled with snow clear to the top and we had word that an engine with men was coming down from Winsted to clean the snow out. We heard that they were to run the engine right through the cut and clean it out that way. The engine drove through with tremendous force and there was stopped. They kept it running, but all it did was to shape the snow all the more firm down around the gap. Pretty soon they found the situation was becoming quite serious because the men in the cab were entirely under the snow. However, a bunch of men on each side began to extricate them.

Before trains would run through, I had worked with the regular R.R. gang for two weeks. The pay was 1.50 pr. day of nine hours and a hot dinner, eaten in the cars stuck in the drifts. The main highway between Tariffville and Simsbury, passing the Ketchin house, was drifted solidly ten feet deep in places, and it was many days before the town teams opened it.

Just as his second year at the McLean Seminary ended, Will Ketchin turned seventeen and he did not return in the fall. Later he would attend a business college, serve an apprenticeship with an architect and take correspondence courses, but he already had finished his apprenticeship under the tutelage of his father and was a journeyman stonecutter. At this time Andrew Ketchin still had his marble shop in Tariffville on Center Street, with a small show room and a cutting room on the first floor and an apartment above for John Kitchen, William's grandfather.

"In those days," William Ketchin wrote, "a journeyman stonecutter and letterer was paid 3<sup>00</sup> pr. day of nine hours, common labor was paid 1.50 pr. day. The stone cutter must be able to cut soft and hard stone mouldings or monumental letters and lay out his own work. A great deal of the work was cutting marble mantels, plumber's slabs, and lettering monuments in the cemeteries."

A job involving monuments came his way the summer after he left the McLean Seminary. He wrote

about it in his memoirs:

One day father said that the D.A.R. had decided to renew the lettering on the old brownstone slabs in the Simsbury Cemetery, and he had agreed to do the work at 10 cents pr. letter. He told me that I could take over the work if I cared to do so, and I might make some extra money. He also told me that some of the inscriptions were so worn that I might have to go to the records, but he thought that I could perhaps make a few extra dollars and gain experience. I was delighted to take over. The present price for cutting marble or brownstone letters was 25 cents pr. letter, which included marking out the letters.

On the job which I took over, the letters were marked out, but had to be cut deeper. Occasionally one would be entirely worn away, especially [on the] sarcophagus style, [where] the rains and sun could get at the soft spots. I worked hard and was able to renew 100 letters pr. day. I was careful not to tell anyone how many I averaged, because 10<sup>00</sup> pr. day was unheard of even for a tradesman who had served years at his trade.

In that old cemetery are many queer inscriptions and verses. Some telling the good qualities of the deceased and some giving good advice, as the following, which occurs three times in different parts of the cemetery:

Stop, my young friend  
As you pass by.  
As you are now,  
So once was I.  
As I am now,  
Soon you must be.  
Prepare for death  
And follow me.

Here is one that may be seen in the Catholic Cemetery at Tariffville, Conn., on the Patrick Wall lot. It is on a white marble slab erected in memory of Patrick's son John.

Now that I'm dead and in my grave  
And all my bones are rotten,  
This marble slab will bear my name,  
While I am quite forgotten.

Father and I erected a double headstone on the Wall lot in memory of two daughters who were killed in an explosion at the fuse factory in Simsbury. We made for him a double stone of blue Vermont marble with a cross on top. Pat had a four-line rhyme to tell how the girls met their death, but father persuaded him to simply say in verse letters "Killed by an explosion at the fuse factory."<sup>4</sup>

While I was re-lettering the old stones for the D.A.R. in the Simsbury, Conn., cemetery, I re-lettered the oldest one in the cemetery. It was a small brownstone slab, three feet tall, twenty inches wide and three inches thick. I was obliged to dig a hole for my feet so that I could sit on the ground to do the re-lettering. This was the inscription –

Betsy Buel  
Wife of Peter Buel  
Died July 4, 1688

Note: The name on the headstone is Mercy Buel,  
not Betsy. Her age is given as 22 years.

So it happened that I was renewing the inscription in July 1888, or 200 years after the lady died.

William wrote that he was good at lettering, but that his father was the expert stone carver. He proudly described a monument in Simsbury Cemetery that demonstrated Andrew Ketchin's skill:

Father made a handsome design in Vermont Marble for the Ely family of Simsbury and it was accepted.



Elizabeth and Anne Wall Monument

It was composed of a granite base, a marble plinth and a shaft mounted by an urn. An ivy [vine] ran from the top of the plinth, winding across the shaft clear to the urn. On the front of the shaft was raised a shield, on which the inscription was cut in raised letters. This monument was about 12' high in all, from the plinth to the urn. It was shipped to us in one solid block. From this point my father personally carved the whole monument. This monument now stands in the Simsbury Cemetery, about one-third of the way up the center path, on the right hand side.

His father also carved the marble monument on the graves of William's great grandparents, Deacon Andrew and Elizabeth Kitchen, in Old Tariffville Cemetery.

While the father and son team could handle transporting and erecting average-sized monuments, they had to hire extra hands for heavy jobs. For example, they were awarded in 1894 the contract to make the Mitchelson monument that stands in Old St. Andrew's Episcopal Church cemetery in northern Bloomfield. According to the *Hartford Courant*, the granite monument cost about \$2,500 and weighed twenty-five tons.<sup>5</sup>

Young Will's training soon extended to the business side of his trade. His father had always made all the sketches and all the sales, but he decided to "step aside and push his son to the front." William Ketchin wrote:

I was delighted when my father told me that I might get a sample case and try my hand at selling. So I purchased a fine leather case and, putting 14 or 15 marble and granite samples and about 50 cottage and sarcophagus designs in my case, I started out. I worked hard, but had little success. Of course my father knew the answer, but he wanted to have his son learn by trial. So when I came in with my report that I had many prospects but few sales, my father said, "Suppose you reduce your marble and granite samples to four or five and your designs to 12 and try again. I believe your prospects were confused by the number of samples which you carried, and it must have taken your time to explain the differences." His advice was taken, and the next trip brought sales.

Not all the work that his father found for him was as easy as sitting in the cemetery re-lettering headstones or calling on prospective clients. He recalled one of the first jobs his father took outside his monument carving business:

The winter I was eighteen I weighed 185, was 5-9½ and "fit." My father had taken a contract to furnish stone for bulkheads for a log dam across the Farmington River three miles below Tariffville.<sup>6</sup> The stones were quarried from an outcrop near North Bloomfield and hauled through the woods, as there were no roads to the dam. The dam was built by a crew of Maine loggers. When foundations were blasted out for the bulkheads, water leached through rock crevices and washed out cement in the mason work, and I was hired to cut channels in the rock to carry the water away. This work was carried on through the winter and I walked to and from (6 miles). On some very cold days, within thirty minutes after starting work my clothing would be covered with ice from the dripping through the rocks overhead. The pay was considered good (3<sup>00</sup> a day).<sup>7</sup>

Will's other memories of 1888 include joining the Tariffville Baptist Church, which his great grandfather had helped to found. Years before, when this grandfather and grandmother were baptized, a thin coat of ice had covered the Farmington River, so he felt fortunate that his baptism was in the summer. He wrote that the baptism took place at Adam's Grove. The others baptized at the same time were Ira Barnard, his sister Alice, and their cousin Nettie Newberry of North Bloomfield and Celia Munson of Tariffville "At that time," he reminisced, "the amusements of the young folks were centered around the churches in socials and suppers and church get togethers. About all that held this church together was a young preacher. He was liked by everybody."

Of the five that the preacher baptized in 1888, Nettie Newberry was the church organist and the others sang in the choir. Will was a bass.<sup>8</sup> His mother raised \$1,200 for a new organ and a carpet, he

remembered, and he was president of the Christian Endeavor Society for three years. For twelve years he was the church janitor and he gave these details:

The church was heated by warm air through three floor registers, one near the pulpit, one near the rear of the auditorium and one in the center. The furnace was in the cellar and was called "The Hog" type wood burning. In fact, it was shaped like a large hog, legs and all, except for the tail. This was enclosed in a brick wall room, leaving a space about the furnace from which the hot air was carried in pipes to the floor registers. The furnace burned four-foot wood.

During the winter the fire was started Saturday night and sometimes during zero weather it was impossible to get it over 60° in the church. The auditorium was about 35 feet by 50 feet with a prayer meeting room at the rear, 15' x 35'. I had a thermometer hung from the chandelier in the middle of the auditorium. An old lady with her two daughters, who lived outside the village, would come to church early and go directly to the thermometer and if it was down to 60°, she would hop all over me, so on very cold mornings, I would watch for her coming, and when I saw her drive into the shed, I would hold a lighted match under the thermometer and run it up. The old lady would go straight to the thermometer, and if it registered 70° or more, she would compliment me on having the church so warm and comfortable.

The membership was small and depended on help from the convention to keep the church alive. Sometime it had a regular preacher at 600<sup>00</sup> a year, but usually it was supplied by students from Hartford at 10<sup>00</sup> pr. Sunday, with dinner, supper and breakfast if he stayed overnight. Tariffville village was in the town of Simsbury and had about 1,000 population, 75% of whom were Catholic and the balance divided between the Baptist and Episcopalian. Baptist families moved away until at last the church was closed and the Baptist Convention sold the building.<sup>9</sup>

Will worked nine-hour days most of the year in his father's business, studying in his off hours. Eventually he took architecture and civil engineering courses offered by the International Correspondence Schools.<sup>10</sup> He and his brother Archibald also had the winter months to pursue more education. He wrote:

The winters of 1891-1892 I spent in Hartford, Conn., part of the time in the office of Curtis and Johnson, Architects, and evenings at Hillyer Institute. In the 1893 winter, Arch, who was then 18, and I went to the Huntsinger Business College of Hartford, going back and forth to Tariffville (12 miles) daily.

On Feb. 9, Arch left [the] classroom at noon. I stayed until the later train. When I got home I found a commotion. Arch had been seriously injured in coasting on the mountain road. He was rated as one of the best coasters in town and the supposition was that he must have fainted. There were but two on the "Bobs" and both were lying flat. This position was considered very dangerous. It brought the driver's face within a few inches of the ground. The mountain road was a sheet of ice and the Bobs obtained a terrific speed. Only experienced drivers would take the run and they were careful to stay in the "rut."

Near the foot of the hill, Arch's Bobs left the "rut" and drove with terrific speed against a rail fence. Arch had on a heavy coat with a high collar. The top of his head grazed the bottom rail of the fence, but the high collar of his coat checked the speed at his twelfth vertebra, throwing his heels up against the fence with great force, literally breaking his back, causing a compound fracture and dislocation of the twelfth vertebra. This terrible accident caused a change in the lives of each member of the family. Although Arch lived until he was 52 and became very useful in the community, he never walked thereafter.<sup>11</sup>

Archibald Brown Ketchin did much to promote musical organizations in Tariffville.<sup>12</sup> He played the drum before the accident and later mastered string and band instruments. He also became knowledgeable about music theory and harmony and composed music.<sup>13</sup> Toward the end of his life he married a longtime family friend, Mabel Dent. William explained in his memoir that his father had intended to take Archie into his company when he reached eighteen, giving each of his sons a third of the business, but with Archie disabled the business always remained A. J. Ketchin & Son.

Andrew Ketchin had made his son William a partner in his business in 1891.<sup>14</sup> The first mention of

the company name in a Simsbury annual report is dated April 2, 1892, when A. J. Ketchin & Son was paid \$368.00 for "labor and stone for [a] bridge at Tariffville."<sup>15</sup>

At the end of 1891 the Berlin Iron Bridge Company had gotten a contract to replace the wooden bridge known as Middle Bridge, which carried the main road from Tariffville east over the Farmington River to the Spoonville section of the town of East Granby.<sup>16</sup> The company hired A. J. Ketchin & Son to build the stone bridge abutments. As William Ketchin recalls they were working at the rapids in the river. He wrote:

The old wooden bridge had been taken down, leaving just the skeleton timbers. This day in question we had thrown a line across the river, about 212', and had fastened one of our derrick guys on the east side, and to the top of the derricks on the west side. As to the other guys to the derrick, they had already been set. This brought the one that we had just put across to partially tight, although it left it swaying from one side to the other, and when we went to straighten some of the other guys, this particular guy swung far enough to swing beyond a heavy spike sticking out of one of the heavy timbers of the old bridge. This left it in a very dangerous position for anyone to release it from the spike.

And while we were discussing the danger of anyone trying to stand on that old timber and release the guy, a young man came jauntily down the road, dressed up to the Queen's taste, and asked if there was any chance to get a job there. We all looked at him and father said to him, "This is a pretty dirty job, young man, for a man dressed as you are." And the young man, who was about 25 and sturdy and good looking said, "Give me a job and I'll be back in 15 minutes ready for work." And back he came. We hadn't up to this time sent anybody to release the guy across the river. And when this man, whose name was Gene Trudo, learned of the situation, he said, "Why, I can go and take that guy off that pin." Father said to him, "Can you swim?" And he said, "Sure, but I won't have to swim." And father said, "There's a good deal of tension on that guy over that pin and it will be pretty heavy to lift it over the pin to let it loose, and if you have a good hold on the guy when it is released, it might carry you right over the rapids." And that is exactly what it did when he lifted it to the top of the pin. When Trudo hung dangling over the rapids we were all at first alarmed, but Trudo swung his leg over the guy and said, "I think I can make it all right." Which he did. And during the whole construction of the abutments he was one of our best laborers.

In March 1892 the *Hartford Courant* reported that the wing stone walls and grading for the bridge were nearly finished and on April 5 it said that traffic had begun to cross the bridge and that it was "a credit to the builders and all parties concerned." However, the abutments were not quite complete. Two months later the paper reported, "A four-ton stone was being raised to the corner of an abutment of the new iron bridge Wednesday when the guys slipped and down came the stone upon the spot where four men had been working but a few minutes before."<sup>17</sup>

William Ketchin wrote that the bridge company asked if the Ketchins would let them hire Mr. Trudo and they agreed. He was on the job during the summer of 1892 when the Berlin Iron Bridge Company erected another iron bridge, near the Tariffville train depot. Known as North Bridge, it was at the west end of Tariffville's main street. The road crossed the river over the bridge and ran north to East Granby, Granby and beyond, as the relocated Route 189 does today. He recalled:

Of course Trudo came with the bridge company to erect the 2<sup>nd</sup> bridge as soon as we had the abutments built. We were there building the wings to these abutments when the bridge company came to erect the bridge. These bridges at that time were all parabolic and the iron work was built from both sides, and each side was blocked up from the river bottom until they came together at the center.

As this was a parabolic bridge, the top cords would be about 20' above the floor of the bridge. Astraddle of the top cord of each side was a man ready to insert the pin. On one side at this time was Trudo, and [on] the other side was the foreman of the bridge company. Suddenly, the blocking in the river bottom slipped and dropped these cords 24". For a few seconds, as these cords swung up and down, we all thought the whole thing would drop into the river. The foreman on his side got to the floor of the bridge and on the

ground in record time. But Trudo calmly looked around and said, "Is she going, boys?" That was the narrowest escape from death that I ever witnessed. The blocking in the river was repaired and the bridge finished.

Another narrow escape, within an hour of this time, came near to killing old Mike Burns, who had worked for my grandfather as a stone mason and [for] my father for several years. We started to take down our derrick on the west side when one of the guy clamps slipped and the derrick fell and came down across one of the wings within 3' of Mike Burns, who was working on the wall.

We built for the Berlin Iron Bridge Co. three more sets of abutments on the Farmington River without further incident.<sup>18</sup> I must say at this point that years later I saw in the paper that the Berlin Iron Bridge Co. was building a bridge in Scranton, Pa., and that the blocking had slipped in some way and 3 men were killed and the name of one was Eugene Trudo.

The Town of Simsbury paid A. J. Ketchin & Son \$464.12 to build the cement wall at this Tariffville bridge and for stone and sluices.<sup>19</sup> In June 1893, the reporter for the *Hartford Courant* wrote fretfully, "The trotting of horses over this bridge should be prohibited, as the bridge has already been much injured by reckless driving." (In 1897 the Berlin Iron Bridge Company was called back to make repairs.)

The *Hartford Courant* reported in 1894:

Work on the new iron bridge over the Farmington River at Hoskin's has begun and the old bridge is closed to the public. Andrew J. Kitchen [sic] of this place has the contract for the masonry. The stone is being quarried at the new quarry on the Salmon C. Eno farm, north of the [McLean] seminary. Experienced men judge the product of this quarry to be in all respects equal and in some points superior to the celebrated Portland free stone. It contains very little loose stone and shale, and will yield blocks of almost any length and width and from three to five feet in thickness.<sup>20</sup>

This 1894 iron bridge replaced a wooden bridge that took vehicles over the river on the road that now is Route 315. "Portland free stone" refers to brownstone quarried in Portland, Connecticut.

A. J. Ketchin & Son also provided the stone work for the bridge from Bloomfield to the Spoonville section of East Granby when the Berlin Iron Bridge Company replaced that wooden bridge in 1897. Those two towns paid for the bridge.<sup>21</sup> Simsbury paid A. J. Ketchin & Son \$809.54 in January 1901 for the Hop Brook bridge and almost every year they were paid for bridge building or repair until February 1918, when they received \$404.81 for a bridge they had built in the town's Bushy Hill section.

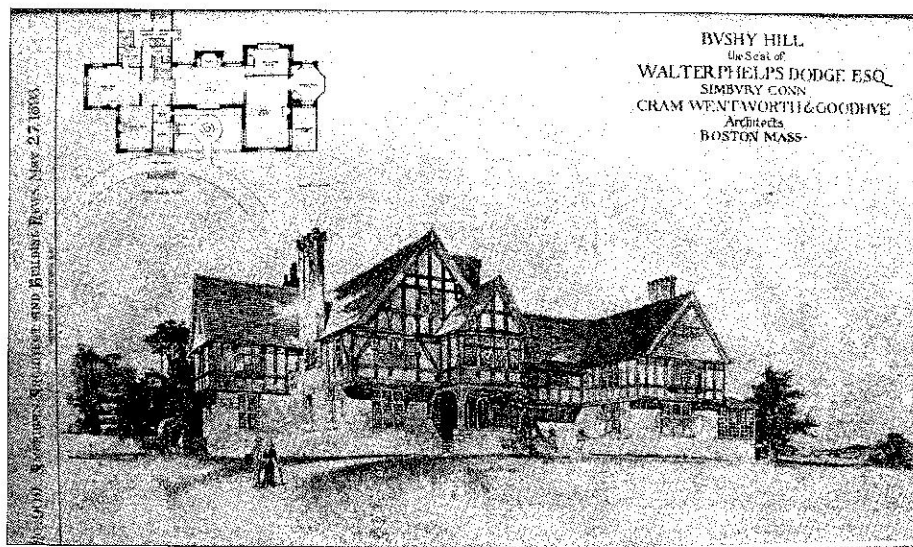
William Ketchin wrote in his memoirs that A. J. Ketchin & Son had built "all of the stone bridge abutments (6) for the iron bridges on the Farmington River between Spoonville and Weatogue inclusive." He added, "As these abutments were started below the river bed, cement that would set underwater was required. And as the manufacture of Portland cement in the U.S. had not been standardized by the government, Portland cement from England was used. And at this writing, 1949, all of those abutments, some over 50 years old, are in good shape." He added that the company had made "all the stone sluices and small bridge foundations and abutments through the town of Simsbury."

William Ketchin sometimes mentions the sources of stone that the company used. He states that the abutments for three of the bridges they constructed for the Berlin Iron Bridge Company "were built of stone picked from the old wooden bridge abutments capped with Portland brownstone blocks weighing three tons each, used for bridge seats. Other abutments were [of the] same construction, except more of our own quarry stones were used." There will be more later about the Ketchin's brownstone quarries in Simsbury and Avon and the buildings constructed with that stone.

William Ketchin was very interested in telling in his memoirs about building the Walter Phelps Dodge house in the Bushy Hill section of Simsbury. It was, he wrote, the first important work on which he

was allowed by his father to assume full responsibility. The imposing Tudor-style house was designed about 1892 by the Boston firm of Cram, Wentworth & Goodhue. Charles A. Ensign, an architect who lived in Tariffville, had the general contract and A. J. Ketchin & Son had the sub-contract for the stonework.

Andrew Ketchin and his crew quarried the stone they needed from boulders that produced fine stone found in a farmer's pasture about a mile and a half from the building site. His father had a knack, William wrote, for splitting boulders into sizes for corners, window and door jambs. Will, then in his early twenties, took charge of the crew building the house's walls. He described the house's walls as being of various sizes of stone, commonly called hammer dressed rubble work and said they were eighteen inches thick.



*Courtesy of the Simsbury Historical Society*

**The Grange – Residence of Walter Phelps Dodge**

The owner of the house, Walter Phelps Dodge, was just two years older than young Will. Walter Dodge was the great grandson of Simsbury native Anson Greene Phelps and the grandson of William Earl Dodge. These two forebears had founded Phelps, Dodge & Company, one of America's most successful mining companies. Walter Dodge's parents were the Reverend D. Stuart Dodge and Melissa Phelps, the daughter of Simsbury native John J. Phelps, a most successful New York businessman. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century railroads provided easy access to the town and several of the Dodge families based in New York City had summer estates in Simsbury.<sup>22</sup>

Walter Phelps Dodge had entered Yale University with the Class of 1891, but left and studied at Oxford. William Ketchin gave this account of Walter Phelps Dodge and some incidents that occurred during the building of his house, which he called The Grange:

When I started to lay out the porte-cochere, which was to be all cut brownstone, I noticed that it was too narrow for a driveway, so I called the attention of Mr. Dodge to it. He promptly told me that my business was to follow the architect's plans. This I did, and the nice moulded stone work was about 5 feet high when Walter's uncle – Phelps (at that time ambassador to England) visited him.<sup>23</sup> Walter was showing him about the building, and when he came to the porte-cochere he said, "And here I shall drive through with my *coach and four*." I was watching the proceedings from the second floor and I shall never forget how his uncle looked at him and said, "Coach and four. Hell, you couldn't get a goat wagon through there. Someone has made a mistake."

The result was, Walter called his architect and when he came I kept out of sight until he called for the plans. As soon as he looked at them he turned to Walter and, without mentioning the subject at hand, said in a very serious tone, "Walter, have you seen those miserable brick that Mr. Fox (the brick mason) has sent here?" And dragging Walter by the arm, he took him over to as fine a brick as could be made, and taking one in each hand, he slapped them together and threw the pieces to the ground saying, "I'll look up Mr. Fox immediately." With Walter gone, the architect came to me and said, "Get as many men as can work on the porte-cochere, and widen it to 12 feet in the clear and send the bill to me."

Walter spent a great deal of his time in England and aped the English, even in accent. If I could imitate his tone and accent on paper, the following would sound funny. I was up on the wall one morning while constructing his house. When he came around, looking up at me he said, "Good morning, Mr. Ketchin. It's very warm this morning, almost warm enough to take off your skin and go in your bones."

Walter carried the aping of the English so far that it was said of him, "He turned up his trousers whenever it was reported raining in England." Anyway, before we finished his residence, he hung a large English flag from a second story window. As all of our tenders and most of our masons at that time (1892) were Irish, that English flag flying over their heads bothered them not a little, and when we began to point up the walls, and finally clean them, the trouble came to a head, as the cleaners would have to work directly under the flag. They "struck."

I called the leader aside and asked him what he was using to clean the walls. He replied, "Why, you know we use scrub brushes and muriatic acid." I told him that quitting work because of that English flag flying over their work was only injuring themselves, and advised him to continue work. I told him many people disliked Walter Dodge, especially [for] flaunting his English airs and calling himself an English barrister while holding the advantage of being a United States citizen. And yet, I said, I would not like to hold up the job or get into trouble over that English flag and again asked him to get the men back to work. I said please remember what you are using to clean the walls, so be very careful about flourishing those brushes about while working near the flag, because if a drop of that acid should strike the flag, it would burn a hole right through it.

About 10 days after the walls were cleaned, Mr. Dodge returned from a trip to his beloved England and found his beautiful flag ruined. A flock of moths or some bug had riddled it with holes.

Several years after the house was built Walter Phelps Dodge was called to the bar by the Middle Temple, London, and afterward specialized in international law.<sup>24</sup> The house was often vacant and it was sold in 1919. Now gone, it was once a part of the Ethel Walker School known as the Emily Chuet House.



*This series is being compiled from the several manuscripts of William Mansfield Ketchin's memoirs provided by Frederick Henry Herpel, his great grandson. The compiler is Mary Jane Springman. The next installment will appear in the Fall issue.*

## Notes

1. It was wrongly reported at the end of Part 1 that Will left the Tariffville Grammar School before the end of the winter term. At his father's urging, he did finish the term. However, by this time he attended school only in the winter and helped his father in his monument and stone cutting business during the spring and summer.
2. In the first section of his memoirs, William Mansfield Ketchin referred to himself in the third person as "Willie" or "Will." In a subsequent section he declared that he would write in the first person from then forward. For consistency and to avoid confusion, his references to himself have been changed to the first person throughout. Also, William Ketchin wrote that his brother George died in Hartford in 1882, but the 1880 Federal Census shows him with the family living in Tariffville. So George was born in Hartford in 1878, but he died in Tariffville, the family having moved there three years earlier than William Ketchin remembered.
3. The McLean Seminary was dedicated on January 14, 1888. The building stood approximately where the Sycamore Apartments stand today at 949-953 Hopmeadow Street. The Spring 2008 issue of this quarterly contains a biography of John Bunyan McLean, who established the private school.
4. The headstone records the deaths of Elizabeth M. Wall and Anne M. Wall, daughters of Patrick and Mary Wall, on January 16, 1879. The *Hartford Courant* on January 18 reported that the young women were about 20 and 17 respectively and that Miss Nellie McNulty had also died in the explosion at the Toy, Bickford & Company fuse factory in Simsbury. The Ketchin family had lost members in a Toy, Bickford & Company explosion on December 20, 1859. John Kitchen's daughter (A. J. Ketchin's older sister) Elizabeth, 14, and her cousin Christina, 14, are among the eight young women named on the monument in Simsbury Cemetery.
5. *Hartford Courant*, August 9, 1894, 8.
6. For an article on log dams, go to [www.exege.com/mill-dam-construction/soft-sandy-bottoms](http://www.exege.com/mill-dam-construction/soft-sandy-bottoms)

7. In an account of this job that he wrote some years later, William Ketchin said the log dam was three and a half miles downstream from Tariffville and that the rock ledge that his father found was trap rock in the woods east of the "Old Scotland Church," another name for Old St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.
8. *Hartford Courant*, May 30, 1908, 15. This article lists William Ketchin among the men with bass voices in a musicale given by the Chandler Club in the Simsbury Casino.
9. This building at 47 Church Street is now a private home.
10. In his book *Examples of Success by Correspondence Training* (n.p., International Textbook Company, 1912), Thomas J. Foster wrote of William M. Ketchin, "While earning \$15 a week as a stonemason, at the age of 23, on October 10, 1894, he enrolled for a Complete Architectural Course, and afterward for a Course in Civil Engineering. He is [in 1912] manager of the firm A. J. Ketchin & Son and also manager, secretary, and treasurer for the Ketchin Tobacco Co., having 100 to 150 men at work under his control."
11. "The Steerer Fainted: Shocking Double-Ripper Accident at Tariffville," *Hartford Courant*, February 11, 1893, 8. The article says that no one but Archie Ketchin was hurt. A double-ripper consists of two bob sleds fastened together with a board, one before the other.
12. Obituary, *Farmington Valley Herald*, November 11, 1926, 4.
13. "Ketchin, William Mansfield: Builder, Tobacco Grower" in *Encyclopedia of Connecticut Biography: Genealogical-Memorial, Representative Citizens*, 4 vols. (Boston, New York, Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1919), 4:338.
14. Ibid.
15. In 2010 dollars, this sum is \$8,814.06, according to [www.westegg.com/inflation](http://www.westegg.com/inflation).
16. The *Hartford Courant* reported that the west end of this bridge was a few feet over the town line into Bloomfield, so that town and East Granby would bear the cost of the bridge. See *Hartford Courant*, December 22, 1891, 6.
17. *Hartford Courant*, June 3, 1892, 6.
18. The contract for the iron bridge over the Farmington River in the center (now the Flower Bridge) went to J. E. Buddington of New Haven. (*Hartford Courant*, June 21, 1892, 6). A. J. Ketchin & Son may have had the sub-contract for the abutments for that bridge, too. The bridge is now on the National Historic Register.
19. *Simsbury Annual Report for the Year Ending October 1, 1892*, 13.
20. *Hartford Courant*, May 11, 1894, 8. The town paid the Ketchins \$324.00 for the stone work. As of this printing, the exact location of this quarry has not been determined.
21. *Hartford Courant*, June 9, 1897, 11; June 17, 1897, 11.
22. On the occasion of Melissa Phelps Dodge's ninetieth birthday, the *Farmington Valley Herald* published an article honoring her. It stated that three of her sons had summer homes in Simsbury: D. Stuart Dodge, Norman White Dodge, and Arthur Murray Dodge (deceased). Two sons of D. Stuart Dodge, Walter and Frank, also had summer homes in town, it said. (See the *Farmington Valley Herald*, March 1, 1899, 2) The combined Dodge estates covered more than 600 acres in the Weatogue and Bushy Hills sections of town. The Ethel Walker School now occupies part of this land.
23. William Ketchin is probably referring to Walter Phelps Dodge's uncle William Walter Phelps. As a diplomat he had handled negotiations with the English regarding Samoa, but he was the U.S. ambassador to Austria-Hungary and to Germany, not to England.
24. *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 11, (New York: James T. White & Company, 1901), 393 (Google Books).



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### Library News

Librarian Allison Krug has completed an index of the *Simsbury Free Library Quarterly* (previously the SGHRL newsletter) from 1994 through 2010. The index is stored in the library's computer, so come in or call and she will assist you with finding names of people or the title, date and subject of articles.

Jeanne Perreault's new book *Footprints Across Connecticut From East Granby & Granby 1930 Census* is now for sale in the library. The soft cover, 410-page book costs \$29.95.

Mary Mitchell will give a workshop, "The Art of Recording Life Stories." Details on the back cover.

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## On Walter Phelps Dodge

The people of Simsbury were acquainted with Walter Phelps Dodge from the summers he had spent at his parents' grand country home, Bell-Hurst, in Bushy Hill, just down the road from the house he had the Ketchins build. It had been his mother's family's country place. She was the daughter of John J. Phelps, a native of Simsbury who had gone to New York and amassed a fortune. His father, Rev. D. Stuart Dodge, an heir to the Phelps-Dodge fortune, was well known for his missionary work. He had helped establish the school that is now the American University in Beirut, Lebanon, and was for many years the president of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions. In the late 1800s and early 1900s he often preached in Simsbury's churches and quietly aided civic projects.

In the fall of 1887 eighteen-year-old Walter Dodge went off to his freshman year at Yale, his father's alma mater. Over the winter break, accounts of a foolish escapade began appearing in the New York and Hartford papers. He had planted in several New York newspapers a false announcement of a marriage between himself and a young woman of his social set. As a result, he left Yale and went abroad. He had been in England a few months when he became enamored of a young equestrian, sixteen-year-old Ida Cooke, who performed in her father's traveling circus. Stories of their elopement appeared in newspapers here and abroad. They married in Edinburgh on July 21, 1888. Their daughter, Ellen Ada Phelps, was born on October 26, 1889, and their son, Stuart Phelps, was born on February 19, 1891. Walter Dodge served for a time as secretary of the American Legation in Greece, where he wrote three short stories that were published in the *Hartford Post* and, in 1893, published as the 178-page book *Three Greek Tales*.<sup>1</sup> He continued to publish books and articles throughout his life.

By 1890 Walter Phelps was enrolled at Oxford University. He sent an article to the *Hartford Courant* describing the student life there, including his good opinion of the young Disraeli. He concluded with the statement, "The undergraduate life is pleasant and more manly than in the American colleges."<sup>2</sup> Three years later he hired A. J. Ketchin & Son to build his house. As noted in the previous article, Walter Phelps later became an English barrister. He married three more times and had another daughter, Rosemary Phelps Dodge. He died at the age of sixty-one in 1931 in Paris.

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1. This book can be read online on Google Books.

2. "Notes on Oxford: Sketches of Life in the English University" *Hartford Courant*, September 11, 1890, 3.

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### We gratefully acknowledge the gifts that the library has received in the past several months:

- A fine new computer donated by our member Charle Smith.
  - Color copies of nine documents dated between 1756 and 1790, including military commissions for David Phelps and Noah Phelps and a license to trade with the native tribes awarded to Charles Case and Noah Phelps. They are signed and sealed either by Thomas Fitch, William Pitkin, Jonathan Trumbull, Samuel Huntington or Oliver Wolcott. The copies were donated by Peter Eno by way of Jackson F. Eno. They are from a collection held by Eno family members in England.
  - Repair of two books in our collection through the good services of Bill Haslun.
  - A small map of mid-20th Simsbury, with notable places labeled, drawn by John E. Ellsworth. The donor, Linda Quagliaroli, found the map in the attic of her house, which was once the Sluzinski farm.
  - *King's Photographic Views of New York*, published in 1895 in Boston by Moses King. Newbold LeRoy sent this book of 450 buildings in New York City and advertisements for the companies housed in them.
  - *Ensign-Bickford: 1836-2011*, published by Ensign-Bickford Industries, Inc., to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the company's founding. This hardcover, full color book was written by Lary Bloom, designed by Peter Good and privately published. The company has donated two copies to the library.
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# The Art of Recording Life Stories

## A Workshop with Mary Mitchell

Saturday, October 1, 2011  
1:00 P.M.  
At the library

Mary Mitchell believes in the value of recording your life story and the stories of others in your family. In this workshop she will help you explore the use of journals, genealogy methods, oral history, e-mail, and audio and video recorders. She also will share experiences she had while writing and self-publishing books of her own life story, her husband Walter's, and a workbook to guide others through the process. If you want to start a life-story project or to return to one you have put on hold, this workshop is just the boost you need.

Among the places Mrs. Mitchell has given workshops are the Indian River Genealogy Society in Vero Beach, Florida; Avon Free Public Library; and the McLean Home. She is slated to give one at the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work. A lifelong resident of Simsbury, she produced and hosted the Simsbury Community TV series "The Prime of Your Life." Mrs. Mitchell holds an M.A. in Human Development and Gerontology from Saint Joseph College in Hartford and is a member of the International Reminiscence Society.

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