



PORTER-PHELPS-HUNTINGTON FOUNDATION, INC.

FORTY ACRES • 130 RIVER DRIVE, HADLEY, MASS. 01035 • 413-584-4699

April 29, 1992

To: Participating scholars, Porter-Phelps-Huntington Reinterpretation Initiative
From: James Boylan, president; Greg Farmer, vice-president
Subject: Foundation objectives

The Porter-Phelps-Huntington Foundation is committed to a major reinterpretation effort that will present its buildings, artifacts, and documents in the context of modern scholarship. As the first step in a multi-year effort, the Foundation has invited a select group of scholars from various history-oriented disciplines to explore the Foundation's collections, identify the potential for scholarship, and to suggest issues that could be explored by the museum in its programs.

The directors recognize that the traditional "house museum" themes of ancestor worship, Yankee pride, and New England's golden age(s) are not sufficiently challenging or informative to meet the educational needs of today's audiences. Instead, the museum would like to focus on broader, community-based themes. Among those that appear to deserve exploration are the development of rural capitalism and its impact on New England agriculture; the changing role of religion in defining family and community; the significance of gender, class, or race-specific roles in rural households and communities; the influence of kinship and trade networks on regional material culture; the roles of home labor and consumption in furnishing and altering the domestic environment; the philosophical roots and visual aesthetics of the historic preservation movement.

This list does not foreclose the development of other themes, or other directions for scholarly exploration. We are interested primarily in fitting the themes into a broad chronological span (1750-1950) and focusing them on the experience of the Porter-Phelps-Huntington households and their counterparts in Hadley and the Connecticut River Valley.

The comments and discussion of the initial team of scholars will be used in various ways:

1. To educate the Foundation's board of directors, staff, and supporters about the untapped potential of the institution; and to begin the task of public education as well.
2. To permit the Foundation to foster new forms and new content for its public presentations.
2. To interest historians, teachers, and scholars in using the resources of the Foundation for primary research and the development of new avenues of exploration.
3. To provide a base for financial and logistical support for continued research and reinterpretation.
4. To raise the public profile of the museum, to give it enhanced opportunities to appeal to new audiences and to find funding sources.

FORTY ACRES: A BASIC CHRONOLOGY

1752: Moses Porter, descendant of three successive Samuel Porters of Hadley and brother of another, built a house on the family tract north of Hadley called "Forty Acres and its skirts." This was the first house built outside the stockade. The roof was raised on May 27 and the family moved there in December.

1755: Moses Porter was killed in the Battle of Bloody Morning Scout, near Lake George, during the French and Indian War, leaving a widow, Elizabeth Pitkin Porter, and a five-year-old daughter, also named Elizabeth.

1763: On October 16, Elizabeth Porter started a diary that she was to continue for 53 years.

1770: Elizabeth Porter married Charles Phelps of Hadley on June 14, and he undertook a years-long program of expansion and remodeling.

1777: John Morison, a Highlander captured in the Revolution, became gardener and laid out grounds.

1779: Elizabeth Whiting Phelps, third child (second to survive) of Elizabeth and Charles Phelps, born on February 4.

1782: Barn raised south of the house on May 27.

1799: Remodeling and expansion of the house completed.

1801: Elizabeth Whiting Phelps married Dan Huntington, a Connecticut clergyman, and went to live in Litchfield, Connecticut, where six children were born to them, and in Middletown, Connecticut, where three more were born.

1816: After the death of Charles Phelps, Elizabeth and Dan Huntington returned to Forty Acres, where two more children were born, for a total of eleven.

1817: Elizabeth Porter Phelps died at the age of 77; her daughter, Elizabeth Huntington, inherited the house and its contents and a share of the land. Her brother, Charles Porter Phelps, gave up his banking career, returned to Hadley, and built the farmhouse south and across the road from the large house.

1819: Frederic Dan, the Huntingtons' youngest son, born at Forty Acres.

1843: Frederic Dan Huntington married Hannah Dane Sargent of Boston on September 3.

1844: George Putnam Huntington, their first child, born.

1847: Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington died at the age of 68, and Forty Acres became the property of the seven surviving children.

1848: Arria Sargent Huntington, the Huntingtons' first daughter, born; she died in 1921.

1854: James Otis Sargent Huntington, second son, born; he became an Episcopal priest and reformer, and in 1881 founded the first Episcopal monastic order, the Order of the Holy Cross; he died in

1855: Frederic Dan Huntington obtained the shares of his siblings, became sole owner, and used Forty Acres as a summer residence while his father and sister Bethia lived there year-round.

1859: Ruth Gregson Huntington, the Huntingtons' second daughter, born.

1861: Frederic Dan Huntington resigned a teaching position at Harvard and became rector of Emmanuel Church, Boston.

1865: Dan Huntington died.

1869: Frederic Dan Huntington was elected Episcopal Bishop of Central New York, based in Syracuse.

1893: Bishop Huntington obtained the Phelps farm as a summer and retirement home for his daughter, Ruth, and her husband, Archibald Sessions. The farm later passed to their son, John, and his wife, Doheny Hackett. Another son, Roger, became a noted composer.

1903: Frederic Dan and Hannah Dane Sargent Huntington observed their sixtieth wedding anniversary at Forty Acres.

1904: Bishop Huntington died on July 11, 85 years old; his eldest son, the Rev. George Putnam Huntington, died hours later, and a service for both was held in the Long Room of the house.

1910: Hannah Dan Sargent Huntington, the bishop's widow, died, and ownership passed to George Huntington's six children. The eldest, (Henry) Barrett, sought to maintain Forty Acres as a dairy farm and summer home until 1918.

1921: Dr. James Lincoln Huntington, another son of George Huntington, supervised rehabilitation, electrification, and heating of the house to make it possible for his mother to live there and for the rest of the family to use it in the summer.

1926: Dr. Huntington's mother, Lilly St. Agnan Barrett Huntington, died.

1929: Dr. Huntington bought out the interests of the other heirs and became sole owner.

CHRONOLOGY OF MUSEUM/FOUNDATION HISTORY

1929-1930: Dr. James Lincoln Huntington took full ownership of Forty Acres from his brothers and sister. He rebuilt the 1795 chaise house to serve as a home for caretakers and later for himself and his wife. He gave the barn at the south end of the grounds to be moved to center Hadley to house the Farm Museum. The barn cellar was converted to a sunken garden and the surrounding outbuildings pulled down.

1931: The Farm Museum May 27, the 149th anniversary of the raising of the old barn's roof.

Dr. Huntington and Homer Eaton Keyes, editor of Antiques, made an inventory of furniture in the main house.

1932: Dr. Huntington built the garage south of the drive.

1943: Dr. Huntington moved to Hadley permanently.

1949: In April, Dr. Huntington's book, Forty Acres, was published by Hastings House.

On May 27, the Porter-Phelps-Huntington House was incorporated "for antiquarian, historical, literary, educational, artistic and monumental purposes; to preserve for posterity buildings, places, objects of historical and other interest; to provide for exhibiting or making accessible suitable material of historical interest; to promote historical study and research and to print historical publications; the special purpose of the association is to preserve the Porter-Phelps-Huntington Homestead located in the town of Hadley, Mass." Dr. Huntington was named president and curator, and William E. Dwyer clerk and treasurer. The first project announced was the rebuilding of the basement of the main house and installation of a new heating unit.

The house had 219 paying visitors in the first season under the corporation.

1951: With advice of Professor H. Russell Hitchcock of Smith College, the contents of the house were rearranged "so that our rooms are more authentically furnished as to periods and give a much more vivid picture of colonial days."

1953: At the annual meeting, Dr. Huntington announced that the corporation would be dissolved and the house sold after May 1, 1954, because "we must face the reality that this house and its contents has no future; no one wants its perpetuation sufficiently to make the future possible."

1954: Dr. Huntington announced that, with more family sharing of expenses, the house had been saved.

1955: The Huntingtons auctioned their private belongings in May and rented the chaise house to a private tenant, but later reclaimed three rooms and the laundry as a separate apartment. Later in the year, Dr. Huntington received an award from the American Association for State and Local History for his preservation efforts.

On October 10, the corporation was granted tax-exempt status.

1956: In December, the Board of Incorporators met for the first time and voted (1) to accept the deed of gift of the Huntingtons of the 1752-1799 portion of the house and a surrounding acre and (2) to change the corporation's name to the Porter-Phelps-Huntington Foundation, Inc.

The house started a series of Sunday afternoon teas.

1960: Homer G. Perkins joined the board of directors and headed the committee on ways and means.

The museum had 612 visitors on Hadley "Open House" Tercentenary Day.

1961: Doheny Hackett Sessions became associate curator. During Dr. Huntington's illness, other guides conducted house tours for the first time.

The Huntingtons presented to the foundation the "shed" and land from the embankment out to the highway.

The foundation received its first gift of stock—50 shares of Smith, Kline and French from an anonymous donor.

1963: Glenn E. Clark elected a director and treasurer.

1964: Publication of the Elizabeth Porter Phelps diary began in January in the New England Historical and Genealogical Register.

1966: Dr. Huntington, 86 years old, resigned as curator and president. The new president was Donald F. Fenn; the new curator was Doheny Sessions. The house had 332 paid visitors, a record.

1967: Directors presented statement of policy mandating that no structural change was to be made in the house after this date; that the grounds should remain as they were in 1967; that the inventory of ancestral furniture should remain as it was in 1967, although pieces with an actual connection to the house might be added; that the arrangement of pieces in the house should stay as they were in 1967; that historical authenticity should be considered in making repairs; that no research materials should be removed from the house without permission; and that the directors might set aside rooms of the house for the use of a resident curator.

1968: Dr. Huntington died on May 5.

Allister F. MacDougall succeeded Donald F. Fenn as president.

Because of the number of people trying to capture ghosts on film, the executive committee prohibited photography inside or outside the house without permission.

Elizabeth H. Wheeler became a director.

1969: Number of visitors set a record, 1,354.

1974: Benson H. Harvey elected president.

1975: Mildred L. Howell elected president; Diane Nettles, curator and resident manager.

1977: Glenn E. Clark elected president; Genevieve Huntington, curator. Susan J. Lisk succeeded Genevieve Huntington in September.

1978: Elizabeth H. Wheeler elected president; she announced goals of expanding the program to support a full-time curator, of improving maintenance and renovating the Ell for year-round activities, and of improving management of the foundation's financial resources. She also submitted a background paper to assist the foundation in defining its mission, which included the following goals: "To preserve the buildings, grounds and contents of the Foundation and to make them available to as well as to interpret them for the public; To serve as the archives of the Porter, Phelps and Huntington families, to preserve these archives and to make them accessible to students and scholars; To encourage cooperative

activities among the educational and cultural institutions in the area; and To demonstrate ways of enhancing the educational, cultural and family life of small, often, rural communities."

"Perfect Spot of Tea" series started, as well as Sunday chamber concerts in August.

1980: Installation of a museum security system, made possible by the Frank Stanley Beveridge Foundation, was completed.

Assistance to the August concert series by the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities (now the Massachusetts Cultural Council) inaugurated continuing support of the museum by state and federal agencies, as well as non-government funding sources.

1981: Porter-Phelps-Huntington family archives transferred to Amherst College.

1982: Wednesday Folk Tradition concerts inaugurated.
The museum was rewired.

1983: The Foundation raised \$10,000 in response to an anonymous \$20,000 challenge donation and purchased the Catharine Huntington tract lying north and west of the house.

1985: Several objects, including the Samuel Porter board chest and the Elizabeth Pitkin Porter 1742 wedding gown, were lent to the Wadsworth Atheneum exhibition, "The Great River: Art & Society of the Connecticut Valley, 1635-1820."

1987: Catharine Sargent Huntington, last of Bishop Huntington's grandchildren and last of the founders of the corporation, died on February 27.

Ruth McNicholas submitted her study, "Report on the Restoration of the Historic Grounds."

1988: On May 6, in connection with preparation of the historic structures report, four feet of 1799 clapboards were temporarily removed from the south side of the house, revealing the original red-and-white rusticated boards.

In June, Adams and Roy Consultants, Inc., completed their Historic Structures Report on the museum buildings.

Kari Federer completed her finding aid to the family archives.

1989: The Foundation purchased items from the Phelps farm at a public auction in January.

The Foundation received payment of \$124,500 from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction program.

1990: Directors adopted a new mission statement, preliminary to initiating a long-range planning process.

1991: Directors provisionally adopted a new collections management policy.

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