



# MEAD

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of the Friends of Mead Hall  
Drew University

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## Brick by Brick: A Personal History of the Mead Hall Bricks

by **Marta McDowell**

Connections are the building blocks of history. When I learned from John Cunningham's *At the Crossing of the Fishawack* that the Mead Hall bricks came from the Lum Avenue brickyard in Chatham, it was a revelation. I had something in common with William Gibbons. My first school was built of the same brick.

My family moved to Chatham Borough in 1959 with my father's transfer from California. I had my third birthday in a small house on Center Street. My parents quickly registered my older brother and sisters in St. Patrick School where I started a few years later. Fledgling Catholic schoolers in Chatham attended (and still attend) kindergarten in the "little church."

Built in 1887, this small Gothic revival building faces Washington Avenue on the north corner of Oliver Street. Growing up in the parish, there were two stories about the supply of construction materials for the little church. One was that the Irish brickyard workers smuggled the bricks, one a day, in their lunch boxes, under the nose of management. The other

was that the owner, Charles Kelley, allowed workers to take as many bricks as they could carry each day. We may never know which of these stories is true and which is blarney.

Fifty years earlier, William Gibbons had started buying brick from Benjamin Pierson Lum. "Squire" Lum had opened for



*The author at the little brick church, St. Patrick's kindergarten, Chatham, New Jersey, 1963.*

business in the 1830s. On his farm spanning Fairmount Avenue, he hit a deep deposit of clay. This astute businessman turned a remnant of Chatham's geological history into a steady income that lasted for 60 years.

*continued on page 6*





## A Message from the Friends of Mead Hall Advisory Board

Our primary **purpose** is to ensure the continuing preservation of Mead Hall. The Friends of Mead Hall annual newsletter and program are our means of sharing information and research on this building with the wider community. This in turn helps to not only inform and guide its preservation, but also to generate interest and support. In choosing topics about and related to Mead Hall each year, we attempt to deepen our understanding of the 19th century American experience. We believe Mead Hall is a unique treasure, and that there are still many people who would like to be awakened to its significance.

This uniquely preserved Greek revival building was built from 1833 to 1836 by William Gibbons as a family home. In 1867, "the Forest" was purchased by Daniel Drew for the founding of a Methodist seminary and was renamed Mead Hall in

honor of his wife, Roxanna Mead. Today, with administrative offices, meeting, and reception rooms, Mead Hall is an excellent example of adaptive re-use in historic preservation.

A disastrous fire in 1989 turned into an opportunity to restore the building to its original splendor. This near-loss and renewed historical appreciation of the building led to the founding of the Friends of Mead Hall in 1999. It also inspired the founding of Drew University's Certificate of Historic Preservation program. This program's connections with the historic preservation community in New Jersey, and the educational opportunities it provides on our doorstep, are valuable resources that well complement our goals. The many courses and workshops are accessible and available to you as well (see [www.drew.edu](http://www.drew.edu) – Continuing Education).



*Friends of Mead Hall advisory board members with Anne Peters (center), speaker at the spring fundraiser (see page 4).*



Our **goal** this year is to widen our audience and to expand our membership and volunteer base. We welcome all people who feel that preserving outstanding buildings of the past makes a difference and enriches our communities.

The articles in these pages represent gems of original research that add to growing knowledge and understanding of Mead Hall in its historical context.

This year's program offers three opportunities to gather in Mead Hall for talks by instructors right here on Drew campus. This series will illuminate the arts of the period that the Gibbons family enjoyed.

Receptions following our events are opportunities to meet and to stay in touch with a community of people from many perspectives but with a common goal in preserving historic buildings.

You, reader, are cordially invited to visit Mead Hall, to experience for yourself its architectural beauty, to participate in our program, and to become a member of the Friends of Mead Hall (see back page). Your membership supports our mission and public programs, to ensure that this building is preserved for and shared with future generations.



## An Invitation to Visit Mead Hall

**January 25, 2009, 4 p.m.**

*Nineteenth Century Music for the Country Home*

A piano and harp are among the musical instruments mentioned in the Gibbons Family Papers archived in the Drew University Library. How would music sound in Mead Hall spaces? The decades preceding the Civil War saw the full development of the Romantic musical tradition. Robert Butts, conductor of the Baroque Orchestra of New Jersey and New Jersey Concert Opera, and familiar with period music, will present and inform us about the kind of music the Gibbons family would have enjoyed. Reception and informal tours following. Program is free for the public.

**March 8, 2009, 4 p.m.**

*In High Spirits: Drinking Wine and Liquor in the 1830s*

Drinking a different wine with every course of your meal was considered the height of elegance during the time the Gibbons family lived in Mead Hall. Mr. Gibbons had a notoriously well stocked cellar, and from his accounts, it is clear that he enjoyed many of the popular wines of the times: from Claret to Madeira to "Champaign." He also seems to have consumed beer—quite different from the kind we drink today—and alcoholic cider—which in those times people sometimes had for breakfast! Jennifer Scanlan discusses the many kinds of wine and spirits that might have appeared on the table at Mead Hall. Talk followed by a wine-tasting. Program is free for Friends of Mead Hall members. (See back page—sign up today!)

For updates and more information, please see the Friends of Mead Hall website:

[www.friendsofmeadhall.org](http://www.friendsofmeadhall.org)

RSVP at 973/408-3201 or FoMH@drew.edu





## Highlight of the Spring 2008 Fundraiser

by Cathy Messmer

*“Fashion was right here ... that’s why I’m here.”*

With that sentence, Anne Peters, thoroughbred historian and pedigree adviser at Three Chimneys Farm in Kentucky, launched her talk at the annual Mead Hall benefit held on a beautiful Sunday afternoon last March.

Fashion was the famous racehorse of the 1840s owned by William Gibbons, whose former country home is now Mead Hall. In the course of telling Fashion’s fascinating story, she introduced us to William Gibbons as a sportsman and a horse lover who bred and raised race horses on his Madison farms. She also brought alive the context of early 19th-century horse racing, a time of spirited competitions pitting the best horses from the North against those of the South. Fashion was to become one of the most celebrated of the horses involved in these North/South competitions. Ms.

Peters transfixed the audience with her lively account of Fashion’s renowned victory in 1842 over Boston, representing the South, before a crowd of nearly 70,000 at the Union racecourse on Long Island. With this victory and the others that followed, Fashion earned national acclaim and the title Queen of the Turf.

Joining us for Ms. Peters’s talk were members of the Laird family, descendants of Samuel Laird who trained Fashion, and his son, Joe Laird, Fashion’s jockey. The Laird family still operates America’s oldest distillery, Laird and Company, established in 1780 and located in Monmouth County. Other special guests included Mrs. Helen Platt and her daughter, Hartley DuPont. Mrs. Platt’s grandfather purchased Gibbons’s 1847 brick barn and farmland 100 years ago (see “The Year 1847,” page 5).



Laird family members of Colts Neck, New Jersey, as descendants of Sam Laird, Gibbons’s horse trainer, are special guests at the spring 2008 fundraiser. From left: Cathy Messmer, Mr. and Mrs. Larrie Laird on either side of daughter, Lisa Laird.





## The Year 1847: William Gibbons's Brick Barn and Landscape Painting in New Documents

by Alice Glock

In the year 1847, 11 years after moving into “the Forest” with his young family, Gibbons is a widower of three years. He is left with three teenaged daughters, Sarah, 18, Caroline, 14, and Isabel, 12. From many of Gibbons’s letters, we know his only son, William Heyward Gibbons, is attending the University of Virginia.

### Brick Barn

A major project initiated in the year 1847 is seen in a series of documents that describe the details of constructing a new brick barn on one of William Gibbons’s nearby farms.

Today, this brick barn is wonderfully preserved in its near original state and setting. It is located on Loantaka Way in Chatham Township, still on part of the original farm now privately owned and used for horses. Its historic significance has been recognized in its listing on the state and national register of historic places in 2005.

In 1847, Gibbons—well known by this time as the owner and breeder of the national champion racehorse Fashion—must be anticipating her retirement. Son William Heyward Gibbons, who avidly followed the races of Fashion as a student in Virginia, pleads with his father in letters to retire her gracefully. (Fashion ran her last race in 1848.)

Since shrewd planning seemed to be a hallmark of his successful

life, Gibbons must have given thought to his life beyond Fashion. Letters of 1847 and 1848 from Fashion’s trainer, Sam Laird, answer Gibbons’s question, Do we have any other promising race horses? It seems not.

With the ground thawing and spring around the corner on March 12, 1847, we can picture Gibbons comfortably occupying his home office in Mead Hall—the room just left off the grand entrance hall—as he composed the “Memorandum of an Agreement.” Written as an employment contract, it is addressed to a local mason named Silas Corey. The document describes Gibbons’s vision of the new brick barn, giving instructions on digging and laying the field stone foundations, the structure’s dimensions (40 by 100 feet), and a description “... the sides and ends of brick with the necessary arches after a plan furnished by Gibbons.”

*continued on page 10*



*Mrs. Helen Platt, an artist whose grandfather purchased Carter Farm in 1908, stands in front of the brick barn built by William Gibbons in 1847.*



## Brick by Brick

*continued from page 1*

William Gibbons may have been inclined to use brick for his new home in New Jersey for safety reasons as well as aesthetic. Coming from Savannah, Georgia, he would have seen the devastation of the Great Fire. On January 11, 1820, most of the downtown burned. An ordinance following the fire required that new buildings be in brick.

Unlike Savannah grey brick, Chatham brick fired to a rich red, due to the high iron content of the raw materials. The clay for Squire Lum's brickyard was deposited in Chatham when it was under water. Lake Passaic covered the area for thousands of years. The next time you drive west on Route 24 past Hobart Gap Road exit and see the river valley spread out below you, imagine instead a vast body of water. The wave action and siltation left clay behind.

If you walk down Lum Avenue and look east toward the school building, you will see a steep drop from the sidewalk to recreation fields. The change in grade from street level is a sort of vertical bar graph representing, in 100 percent scale, the bricks manufactured from Chatham clay. At its peak, the brickyard produced three million bricks a year, an astounding number given the manufacturing process.

To make the bricks that Gibbons bought, men with shovels dug out the thick red clay, chunk by chunk. More men lugged it to the soaking pit to mix it with sand and water. Oxen drove a mechanism that worked the clay into the proper consistency for molding. The master brickmaker molded the tempered clay by hand. After the bricks dried, workers unmolded them and stacked the "green" bricks into an arched structure of about 4,000 units, forming its own kiln. Workers lit a fire

inside and stoked it with wood or coal, firing for about two weeks.

After the firing, the workers, or perhaps the builder himself, sorted the cooled bricks into grades. Receipts from the Gibbons archives show that he bought three varieties of brick: hard, salmon, and soft. The quality was determined by the bricks' distance from the fire. The hard brick were typically used for exterior masonry with the lighter colored, less durable (and cheaper) salmons and soft bricks used for inner walls. The St. Patrick's façade also includes some shiny tan bricks glazed accidentally in the center of the kiln from a combination of wood ash and vaporized sand.

Growing up in town, I rode my bike down the hill of the former brickyard in summer. In winter, an aluminum "saucer" gave a terrifying ride down the snow-covered slope. Earlier generations of Chathamites also used the brickyard for recreation: ice skating on the deep pond and at least one prize fight. Today there are Astroturf-covered playing fields, actively used by the Chatham recreation teams. The sweat generated at various sports is a vague reflection of the hot, heavy work of the laborers at the Lum brickyard.

The brickyard shaped the town in other ways as well. A wave of Irish men settled in the town to work for the yard. As decades passed and Squire Lum's only son died without heir, the brickyard passed out of the Lum family, though the street still bears his name. Executors of the estate parceled the land to the south and west of the brickyard into 105 small lots, the town's first major subdivision. On a map, with an aerial perspective, the rectangular lots resembled bricks. Irish immigrants bought most of the lots, sold at auction in 1871.





Wagons carried brick from Lum's yard to the Gibbons property. Drawn by horses or oxen, these wagons were the construction vehicles of the day and must have been slow moving, pulling up the steady incline from Chatham through Madison. The wagons probably used the Morris Turnpike, then a toll road.

The Chatham Irish took this same road to Mass on Sunday. St. Vincent the Martyr

Church in Madison was their parish before the St. Patrick's mission church was built a block from the brickyard. The toll was waived for churchgoers, though how one proved one's destination is a mystery. By the way, William Gibbons owned shares in the turnpike, over 2,000 shares by 1850. I wonder if the tolls he paid on transportation of bricks inspired his investment.

But that is another story.



*A tour of Mead Hall, led by Alice Glock, for the Morris County Visitor's Center. Contact us (see back page) for tour dates or for volunteering opportunities with the Friends of Mead Hall.*

## Contributors

**Alice Glock** ("Year 1847," page 5), C'76 and 2003 graduate of the historic preservation program, is former curator of the Drew University art collection and current coordinator of the Friends of Mead Hall.

**Cathy Messmer** ("Highlight," page 4), 2005 graduate of Drew's historic preservation program, is a Friends of Mead Hall advisory board member. She is on the staff at Castle Tucker, a historic house museum in Wiscasset, Maine.

**Marta McDowell** ("Brick by Brick," page 1), is an instructor in landscape design in the historic preservation program, published *Emily Dickinson's Gardens* in 2004 and *A Garden Alphabetized* in 2008. She can be found at [www.martamcdowell.com](http://www.martamcdowell.com).

**Marlene Raedisch** ("Zuber Wallpaper," page 8), C '87, has worked in the fields of painting conservation and gilding. She restored damaged Mead Hall wallpaper in 2007.

*Published annually, the Friends of Mead Hall newsletter needs writers and editors. If interested, please contact Alice Glock at [FoMH@drew.edu](mailto:FoMH@drew.edu).*



## Zuber Panoramic Wallpaper: The Horse Races

by Marlene Raedisch

As part of the 1992 restoration of Mead Hall, the decorating committee looked for a wall covering for the Founders' Room, originally the Gibbons family dining room. It needed to be sufficiently elegant for formal receptions while reflecting the origins of William Gibbons' Greek revival mansion and surrounding estate. Construction of the mansion had finished by 1836, as Gibbons was establishing himself as a breeder and racer of thoroughbreds on his growing estate of farms and stables.

The committee decided that an ideal covering for the Founders' Room walls would be the panoramic wallpaper, *Les Courses de Cheveau*/the Horse Races, which depicts four varieties of European horseracing. Jean-Julien Deltil, formerly a pupil of neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David, designed the paper for Zuber et Cie, located in Rixheim, France, since 1797.

When Mead Hall was transformed into a seminary in 1867, the dining room was stripped of its opulence in its new use as a chapel. Not only were all traces of wallpaper removed, but only in this room were the black marble fireplaces removed. Evidence of wallpaper found elsewhere in Mead Hall, plus the numerous receipts for wallpaper and hanging found among the Gibbons papers dating from 1838 and all throughout the 1840s, made it more than likely that wallpaper originally decorated the dining room walls. The choice of the exquisite 1837 horseraces is therefore both

historically as well as thematically plausible.

Wealthy Americans of the early 19th century looked to Europe for style, and many had chosen French papers for their homes through New York, Boston, and Philadelphia importers. Panoramic, also called landscape, wallpapers were in vogue.

Unlike patterned wallpapers that repeat a closely spaced motif, panoramic papers address the muralist's task of presenting 360 degrees of landscape around a room. Wooden block-printed panoramic wallpapers were produced in France in the early



*Berber horses racing from the Piazza del Popolo to the Piazza San Marco during Carnival in Rome*

19th century, when several companies began producing landscapes based on travel destinations mixed with a splash of idealized fantasy.

Standing in the room, the viewer looks out through the deep shade of trees into sweeping sunlit scenes of horsemanship stretching into the distance. There are four scenes: a high-speed carriage ride, thoroughbreds racing on a flat course, a countryside steeplechase, and riderless horses rushing through the streets of Rome. No workhorses depicted here; each scene showcases a form of horsemanship cultivated for sport.





*Countryside  
steeplechase*

The largest scene depicts the start and finish of the frenzied run of Berber horses along *Via del Corso* in Rome, a part of *Carnevale*, until the race was prohibited in 1882. Horses would be assembled without riders at *Piazza del Popolo*, be goaded into stampeding past cheering costumed spectators, and be recaptured near a cloth hung in either *Piazza San Marco* or *Piazza Venezia*.



Carriage horses in the adjacent scene are driven by a driver seated on the outside of a wide Italian *caratella*, intended for long journeys or leisure excursions. Five well-dressed women and a child are comfortably seated, with room for an entourage of musicians packed into the rear, while the footman clings to the outside as the carriage raises dust and speeds by. In the next scene, thoroughbreds pass the grandstand at Goodwood Racecourse in Sussex, England, which in 1825 had resumed the annual run for the Goodwood Cup.

Beyond an interval of trees, the end point of a steeplechase is in sight. Races of endurance over the open Irish countryside had developed into the steeplechase in Ireland, England, and France. These routes over fences, hedges, and ditches were open to owners of hunting horses (i.e., aristocrats and military officers).

The sinuous road that appears in each scene ties them into a continuous landscape. Trees provide restful transitions between the energetic venues, and enhance depth by periodically bringing the viewer into the foreground to join the printed

spectators. The tree vignettes also provide versatility for installation. Spanning more than one strip, they are seamed to be partially interchangeable, so installers can adapt the layout order of the scenes, or omit a scene altogether.

To distinguish itself from its competitors, Zuber developed—and still produces today—a hand-brushed sky that gradates from a deep tone at the top to a pale horizon. While other designs employed color, *Les Courses de Chevaux* is a grisaille landscape, composed of 18 shades of grey. Thirty-two unique strips provide 15.26 meters of nonrepeating sporting scenes, two of which occur twice to complete the circuit of the room.

The same wood blocks carved for the paper's original debut are still used at Zuber today. And there are many! The scene is printed from pale background to dark foreground, but all the shapes that use a particular grey are not printed at the same time: Highlights must be applied over darker greys and so require separate blocks. *Les Courses de Chevaux* requires 767 hand-applied wooden blocks.

The intricate, handmade quality of Zuber wall papers make them expensive, but use of the Founders Room throughout the year ensures that many see the results of a craft perfected over the past 170 years.



## The Year 1847

*continued from page 5*

Gibbons's 1847 records, including receipts for many bushels of lime (for brick mortar) delivered to the site, name the new structure the "barn on Carter Farm," or frequently "Force's Barn." Carter Farm was evidently occupied by a tenant farmer by the name of Sylvester Force.

Built in a mere six months, a concluding statement dated September 2, 1847, documents the payment for work promised in the March agreement, and completed by Silas Corey, along with the detail that he laid "133,665 bricks."

The purchase of more than 100 heads of cattle within weeks of its completion indicates that Gibbons is not only thinking of a place to retire Fashion but of other pursuits typical of a gentleman farmer, such as raising prized cattle.

### Mead Hall Landscape Painting

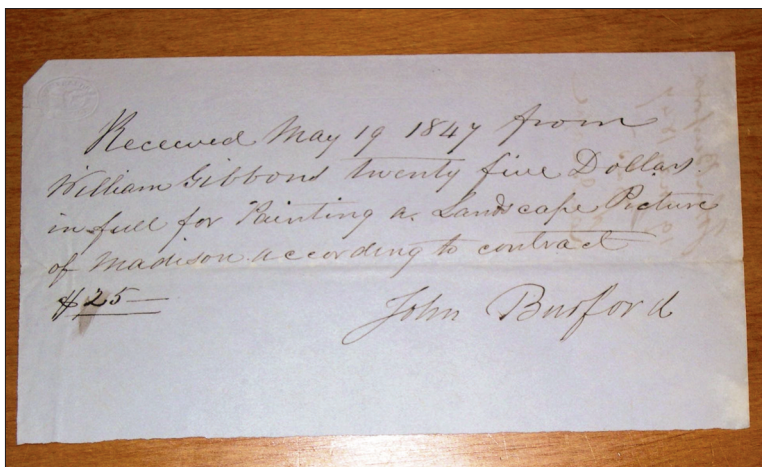
Another surprising discovery among Gibbons's papers was a receipt for "a landscape picture of Madison." This find suggested a new look at the one landscape painting now hanging in Mead Hall. In the absence of this evidence, a previous newsletter had posed the question of whether, based on subject matter and style,

this painting could possibly be a "Gibbons original" (see [www.drew.edu/uploadedFiles/depts/Friends\\_of\\_Mead\\_Hall/winter2007.pdf](http://www.drew.edu/uploadedFiles/depts/Friends_of_Mead_Hall/winter2007.pdf)).

Further inspection and research into the architecture depicted in this landscape painting now show that the buildings are indeed the architectural landmarks of 1840s Madison.

Sketched in tiny strokes on the left and center of the painting's horizon are the two major public buildings standing in the 1840s along Ridgedale Avenue. The largest or tallest structure depicted from the left is the old St. Vincent the Martyr (Catholic) Church, built in 1839. The foundation of a private home on Ridgedale Avenue is all that is left of the original church. The details of a tower, the façade pediment, and pillars in the painting precisely match its rendering in an early drawing.

The two-storied red-brick building depicted in the center cluster of structures on the painting's horizon (originally located at the beginning of Ridgedale Avenue at Park Avenue), is likewise no longer extant. From a 19th century drawing, its distinctive features—a strong pediment and tall spire—easily identify the building as the Madison Academy, erected in 1809.



*Receipt for a landscape picture of Madison from Gibbons papers, University Archives*

At the far right side of the painting is the third architectural landmark—a red-brick building with a squat white tower. It is recognizable as the old Presbyterian Church of 1825, which is today well preserved as





*Detail of landscape painting showing Ridgedale Avenue, 1847*

the Masonic Lodge at 170 Main Street.  
(Not shown in details above.)

Remarkably, the painting's viewpoint is from the hill upon which Mead Hall stands. A Google Earth view, however, would show the old Presbyterian Church—where Gibbons rented a pew and in whose hilltop cemetery he is buried—as the furthest in perspective distance, not the closest and largest building, as shown in the painting.

But neither might we see the corn field and cattle of the painting's foreground in front of Gibbons' country home (though they were nearby). These elements—including the cattle that were on the mind of Gibbons that year—were painted from sketches, the parts arranged into a pleasing composition in the artist's studio, as was the custom of early-mid-19th century American landscape painters.

The receipt for the landscape painting is dated May 19, 1847, just as the bricks of Gibbons's new barn were being laid. In commissioning a painting with a panoramic view of Madison, the southern born Gibbons seems to be embracing Madison as his adopted hometown, committed to the life he created for himself in New Jersey.

Although our Mead Hall painting is not signed, the receipt identifies the painter as John Burford. He is a British born immigrant, an obscure painter who nonetheless found his place in the newly established art world in New York City, which was centered around institutions set up to promote American art and artists. Burford was an active member of the American Academy of Fine Arts and the American Art Union where he exhibited.

*Friends of Mead Hall**Drew University*

## Friends of Mead Hall Website: www.friendsofmeadhall.org

Please visit our website for the most current news and information about program events and tours. Historical information and previous newsletters are also posted. Membership registration and other contributions can be handled online. If you would like to volunteer with guided tours, program planning, or writing for our newsletter, please contact us.

Questions, comments, feedback, and suggestions are welcome. Write FoMH@drew.edu or call 973/408-3201. Thank you for your interest and support!

### Friends of Mead Hall

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