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THE FLUTIST QUARTERLY

Connecticut Connections *of the* Dayton C. Miller Collection

Library of Congress: Flute Central

Bach's Badinerie: A Spoof on his Rondeau

Collaborative Play: Flutist-Composer Commissions

2015 Annual NFA Convention in Washington, D.C.

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DEPARTMENTS

Cover image by Bill Morgan, courtesy Barbara Hopkins.

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FEATURES

Connecticut Connections *of the* Dayton C. Miller Collection

The center of flutemaking in the early 1800s was not Boston but Connecticut, and many of the flutes created there are now housed in the Dayton C. Miller collection at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.—the site of the 2015 Annual NFA Convention.

by Barbara Hopkins

The collection of the acoustician Dayton C. Miller (1866–1941) is an invaluable source of information for flutists. This collection's five major sections contain 10,000 pieces of music; books on flutes and woodwind instruments; portraits and autographs of flutists; artwork featuring the flute; and more than 1,700 woodwind instruments, mostly flutes. Shortly before his death, Miller donated this collection to the Library of Congress, a great gift for flutists everywhere.

Included in this collection are many 19th-century American flutes. In the 20th century, we came to regard Boston and Elkhart, Indiana, as the country's leading centers of flutemaking, but in the early 19th century, Connecticut was an important center of instrument making, producing makers who spread their influence by moving to Pennsylvania and New York.

Hartford

In the early 19th century, Hartford was a busy, prosperous city. Its location at the end of the navigable section of the Connecticut River made it a desirable place for commerce and invention. Among the companies founded in Hartford in this era were the firm now known as The Hartford, established in 1810 and the nation's oldest insurance company, and *The Hartford Courant* (est. 1764), the nation's oldest continually published newspaper. The owners of the *Courant* also published West Hartford native (and life-long amateur flutist) Noah Webster's "blue-backed speller" in 1806, establishing a standard for American English.

Into this entrepreneurial environment was born George Catlin (1778–1852), considered by many to be America's first important woodwind instrument maker. Born in the Hartford suburb of Wethersfield, he opened his first shop in Hartford in 1799 and is thought to have worked in the city until about 1815. Orphaned at age 4, his training origins are a mystery, although the style of his instruments was English. His early instruments were considered the best of their time and on a par with European instruments. Catlin advertised his instruments as being "30 percent cheaper" than imported, although he used "best Turkey box" (boxwood imported from Turkey) in their construction.

Known in Hartford as "the ingenuous George Catlin," he made a large assortment of instruments: flutes, fifes, pianofortes, harpsichords, cellos, guitars, bassoons, clarinets, oboes, tenor clarinets (basset horns), and even a pipe organ. A multi-talented mechanical genius, he also made mathematical and measuring instruments and dabbled in publishing, selling the compositions of Timothy Olmstead, an East Hartford native and composer of psalms who got his musical start as a fifer in the Revolutionary War.

Catlin was also a skilled teacher and valued business associate. Many respected instrument makers worked in his shop as either partners or apprentices. This served to spread the influence of his style to other Connecticut makers and, when they relocated, on to Pennsylvania and New York. Among his apprentices were John Meachum, Jr. (1785–1844), Uzal Miner (1785–1822), and possibly Asa Hopkins (1779–1838). His business partners included fellow Wethersfield native Allyn Bacon (1789–1864) and William Bliss (dates unknown).

Members of this group were very heavily entwined in each others' businesses, swapping shop locations like a game of musical chairs. Meachum was a native of Enfield, Connecticut. In approximately 1807, after serving an apprenticeship with Catlin, Meachum bought Catlin's original shop on Prison Street in Hartford, while Catlin moved to larger quarters on Main Street. The following year, Catlin, Meachum, and Miner, along with two other investors, bought property on Front Street in Hartford. This partnership lasted only five months,

PHOTO BY BILL MORGAN

Left: Barbara Hopkins; the wood flute is an Asa Hopkins instrument.

Asa Hopkins flutes, collection of the author. Hopkins began his career making clocks with wooden gears. Later he moved from wooden gears to wooden flutes.

dissolving in September 1808. Miner, the maker most closely associated with Catlin's teaching, then took over Catlin's former shop on Main Street in 1811. He became successful enough to hire a journeyman wood turner and two apprentices. Catlin, meanwhile, formed a new partnership with Bacon in 1812.

The War of 1812 brought with it a trade embargo starting in 1807 and then a stiff tariff of 20–30 percent on imports that drove the city into decline—devastation reflected in the careers of Hartford's musical instrument makers. By 1814, Bacon had moved to Philadelphia; Catlin formed a short-lived partnership with Bliss but in about 1816 followed Bacon to work in his shop. Catlin struck out on his own again by 1818 and worked in Philadelphia for the rest of his life.

Despite his continued achievements—he won approval from judges at three Franklin Institute exhibitions in the mid-1820s, and the price of one of the flutes he exhibited in 1826 is listed at $75, very expensive when compared to the flutes of Asa Hopkins of Litchfield—Catlin never recaptured his Hartford success. A contributing factor to his decline, in addition to Hartford's economic downturn, might have been his failure to keep up with new developments. Of the last flute he exhibited at the Franklin Institute, in 1846, the judges noted, "This instrument presents nothing new; but its tone is so good that it is deserving of a third premium."[1] Catlin died in 1852 and is buried at Old Fellows Cemetery in Philadelphia.

Of the other Hartford makers, John Meachum and his brother Horace (1789–1861) moved to Albany by 1810, taking advantage of that city's position on the Hudson River. By 1828 they had partnered with Sylvanus Pond, who would later join Firth & Hall at Fluteville in Litchfield, Connecticut.

Miner stopped making instruments in 1814. Little is known about his life after that; he died at age 37 in 1822.

Litchfield

While Hartford was in decline, Litchfield, Connecticut, 27 miles to the west, was gaining in importance. The fourth largest town in Connecticut, it had become a "safe town" during the Revolutionary War, prompting people to move there from coastal and river towns, including Hartford. The main roads from Hartford and southern Connecticut to the Hudson Valley in New York ran through Litchfield, making it a good base for merchants.

Litchfield in this era bustled with manufacturing; craftsmen working in the town included goldsmiths, carpenters, hatters, carriage makers, cabinet makers, saddlers, blacksmiths, and of course, flutemakers. Litchfield also boasted the country's first law school—Tapping Reeve's Litchfield Law School, established in 1784—and a fine school for girls, Sarah Pierce's Litchfield Female Academy, which emphasized academics to a degree unusual for girls' schools of that era.

One of those prosperous Litchfield merchants was the woodwind instrument maker Asa Hopkins. The son of Harris Hopkins, a spinning-wheel maker and farmer, Hopkins started his career as a clock maker in 1809 or 1810. His specialty was clocks with wooden gears marketed to the middle class. Hopkins could sell a clock with wooden gears for four to five dollars, as opposed to $25–$60 for clocks with brass gears. In 1825, after Eli Terry had invented a way to make brass gears cheaply, Hopkins, a sharp businessman, sold his clock factory.

Hopkins started buying land for a musical instrument factory in 1827. His woodwind instrument shop, a water-powered factory on the Naugatuck River, opened on June 1, 1829. One might think that this was an abrupt change of career, but in fact the tools and skills used in making wooden gears and wooden flutes were similar. The major difference was that the instruments had to be "tuned" after they were made, by undercutting a tone hole to sharpen a note, filling a tone hole with shellac to flatten a pitch, or slightly adjusting the bore or length of the joints.

Several references in the literature suggest Hopkins may have studied with Catlin, but this is unlikely. Catlin left Connecticut by 1816, when Hopkins was still a clockmaker. While it is possible that Hopkins studied with Catlin before opening his clock shop, he likely learned his wood-turning skills from his father, who made spinning wheels. As an instru-

PHOTO BY BILL MORGAN

The village of Fluteville thrived in the 1830s before changing times and its flood-prone location eventually ended it. Map by F.W. Beers and Co., 1874.

ment maker, Hopkins made flutes, piccolos, clarinets, fifes, and flageolets at prices ranging from two-and-a-half dollars a dozen for maple fifes to more than $30 for an ebony flute with eight silver keys and all the trimmings: a silver-lined headjoint, silver plates under the keys, and silver rings at the tenons. By comparison, Hopkins, as general partner, was paid one-and-a-half dollars a day. Ever the practical businessman, he had instruments at price points affordable to most people.

Hopkins's choice of woods was more adventurous than those of the Hartford makers; in addition to boxwood, he also used cocoa wood and ebony. The standard material for his rings was ivory, but one could also upgrade to silver or German silver or downgrade to no rings at all. Although we think of Indian elephant ivory as being very expensive today, in Hopkins' time it was cheap and easily available. German silver, a blend of nickel, zinc, and copper, was considered a more expensive upgrade.

Although Asa Hopkins is remembered chiefly as a flutemaker, his career was relatively short. In 1832, he brought in Jabez McCall Camp (1811–1890) as a limited partner. Camp was the 21-year-old son of the Rev. Joseph Camp, a good friend of Hopkins'. It is not known why Hopkins brought in a partner so young; perhaps he was doing a favor for his old friend. In 1837, Jabez Camp became general partner and manager, and Hopkins retired to New Haven, never to return.

Hopkins had been well respected in Litchfield; he had served the town as constable, grand juror, assessor, selectman (town legislator), and representative to the state legislature. In addition, local townspeople were investors in his business. It is a matter for speculation as to why he would leave the town where he was so respected. Perhaps he knew his time was running short. Asa Hopkins died 17 months later, in 1838, of "apoplexy," probably a heart attack. He is buried in the Grove Street Cemetery in New Haven.

Jabez McCall Camp successfully weathered the financial panic of 1837 and in 1839 sold 39 percent of the business (his share, essentially) to Firth & Hall. Camp would have been only 26 when the financial panic hit; perhaps he valued the experience of the older John Firth (1789–1864) and William Hall (1796–1874). Firth and Hall, instrument makers based in New York City, were brothers-in-law; they had both apprenticed in New York with Edward Riley, and each of them married one of Riley's daughters. Camp continued to work for Firth & Hall until 1841.

Firth & Hall expanded the Litchfield operations. By 1833, they added Sylvanus Pond (1792–1871)—who had been a partner with the Meachum brothers in Albany—as a third partner, becoming Firth, Hall, & Pond. They brought in skilled workers, built homes and a school, and named the place "Fluteville." An 1852 map shows 10 buildings on the property.

The development of railroads in the 1840s diminished the importance of Litchfield as a manufacturing center, as the railroads bypassed Litchfield. Camp left the Fluteville factory in 1841, buying a grist- and sawmill. Hall left in 1847 to make pianos with his son, James Hall, as Hall & Son in Williamsburg, Long Island. Firth & Pond ceased making woodwind instruments by 1867 to concentrate on music publishing; one of their biggest clients was Stephen Foster. Frederick Porter (1810–1885) bought the Fluteville factory in 1867 and ran it until 1875, when he sold it to John A. Hall (no relation to William Hall). John Hall made flutes for a few years and then converted Fluteville into a cutlery factory; the factory burned to the ground in 1912.

The land that Fluteville sat on was in the floodplain of the Naugatuck River and thus subject to heavy floods. Villagers managed to rebuff repeated efforts to disband Fluteville and build a dam on the site—until the Flood of 1955 killed more than 100 people and injured 200. The remaining building foundations of Fluteville are now in the floodplain behind the Thomaston Dam.

Playing Qualities of the Instruments

Music in early 19th-century America was experienced live. With no recordings or radios yet, music was either performed live or played in the home with family and friends. The flute was a popular amateur instrument; many publications offered tutors for self-instruction and music for home use. The sounds of flutes from this era reflect the sizes of the rooms

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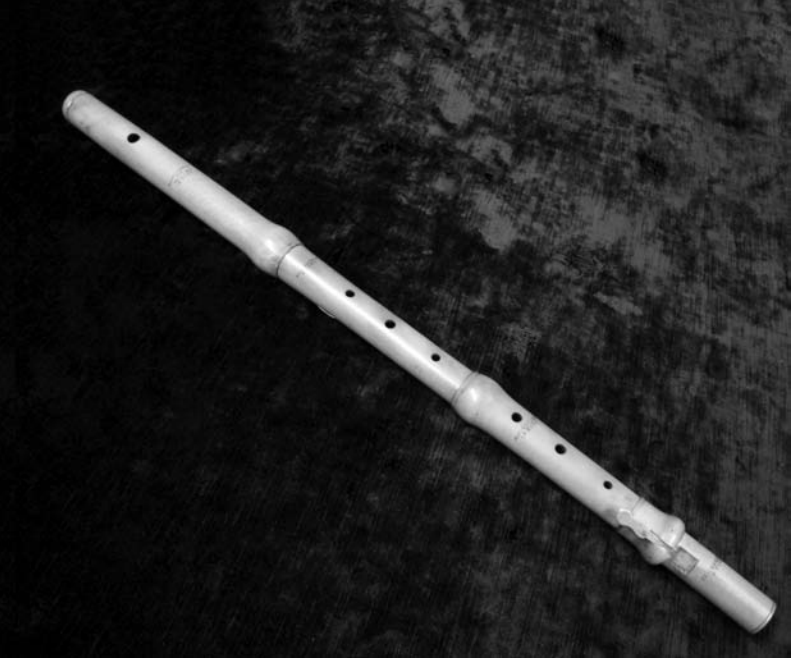

This flute is marked "Firth & Hall, N. York." Firth and Hall essentially inherited Hopkins' company after the flutemaker retired and his partner sold it to them.

Fife marked "Firth Pond & Co., New York." Many of the flutes of this era, designed to be played in people's homes, more closely resembled Baroque flutes than modern Amercian flutes.

they were played in. Made to be played in people's homes, they have a much quieter sound quality than the contemporary flute designed to project in large concert halls. The early 19th-century American flute is closer to the Baroque flute than to the modern flute in design, fingering, and sound quality. It is ideally suited for playing the airs and dances popular in this era; it is less well suited for playing European classical music.

Many of the one-keyed American flutes from this period play best in the keys of D major and G major. The fork-fingered notes, particularly F natural, can be extremely difficult to play in tune on a one-keyed American flute. Fortunately, many of the flute tunes published in this era are in D or G. For pieces in flat keys, a flute with at least four keys is a better option and was fairly common. Even with a four-keyed flute, tonalities such as B flat major can still be problematic, since it is not possible to slur from D to F or from E flat to F without using the problematic "fork F" fingering.

For full chromatic playability, a flute with six, eight, or more keys works best. These were, of course, the most expensive flutes. Fewer multikeyed flutes have survived, and probably fewer of them were made originally.

The American flutes from this era range in pitch from A=430 to higher than A=450; the pitch standard of A=440 is a construct of the 20th century. The intonation can be quite uneven; Asa Hopkins's flutes, for example, tend to have a very large whole step from low D to low E, flat F sharps, and a very sharp high D. The high register plays easily but not particularly well in tune. Nevertheless, they are charming instruments that bring the music of early America to life. ❋

The author thanks independent curator Ann Y. Smith for her assistance in researching this article.

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ENDNOTE

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