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# Second Nature: Hamilton College and the Natural Environment

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# SECOND NATURE

Hamilton College and the Natural Environment



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Hamilton College and the  
Natural Environment

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## FOREWORD

This place, which six years ago was in a state of nature, a mere wilderness should so suddenly appear like the garden of Eden, the fields around us whitening for harvest or clad with verdure.

Samuel Kirkland<sup>1</sup>

A person with a clear heart and open mind can experience the wilderness anywhere on earth...The planet is a wild place and always will be.

Gary Snyder<sup>2</sup>

THE FOLLOWING HISTORIES explore the boundaries between the human and natural environment on Hamilton College's campus. They were written for the Environmental Studies course "Interpreting the American Environment" and incorporated site visits and consultations of the historical record in order to better understand familiar places on Hamilton's

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Kirkland diary, 17 July 1793, in *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland: 18th Century Missionary to the Iroquois, Government Agent, Father of Hamilton College*, ed. Walter Pilkington (Clinton, NY: Hamilton College, 1980), 258.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Snyder quoted in John Markoff, "The Lost Art of Getting Lost," *Week in Review, New York Times*, 18 September 1994, 6.

campus. Through this research, the contributors identified the human imprint on natural places and located nature in the built environment. Such a project is a step toward following historian Bill Cronon's advice, invoking Wallace Stenger and Wendell Berry, to see wildness as humane and natural so that "we can get on with the unending task of struggling to live rightly in the world—not just in the garden, not just in the wilderness, but in the home that encompasses them both."<sup>3</sup>

Peter Simons

<sup>3</sup> William Cronon, "The Trouble with the Wilderness; or, Getting Back to Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 90.

## *A Naturally Unnatural Landscape*

Sabrina Boutselis

THE KIRKLAND GLEN at five in the morning appears desolate apart from the infrequent passing of an early morning runner. It seems that only squirrels and birds are around to experience dawn. The glen will remain this way until around seven, when college faculty and staff begin to arrive with their dogs. For the next two hours or so, dogs and their owners will roam the trails—the dogs sniffing out scents and chasing squirrels, their human owners greeting one another and making small talk. Then they disperse and return to their offices, their cars, their sofas by the television. Visitors to the glen become more sporadic throughout the afternoon; occasional walkers pass through, gossiping and walking together in stride, while a few individuals seeking solitude and space seat themselves on a rock or tree stump. Depending on the season, the cross country or Nordic ski team may glide through the trails for their practice in the late afternoon. Sometimes a nature photographer pauses to capture the changing foliage or a bird in flight. As night approaches, some students may make their way through hidden trails from campus to light bonfires, drink, and smoke. When they finally make their way back to their dorms, the glen is once again left to the squirrels and birds.

Each of the subjects from this scene values different aspects of the Kirkland Glen. The runners and Nordic skiers appreciate its recreational potential for exercise while the solitude-seeker appreciates its “pristine” separation from the pervasive human influence on Hamilton’s campus. The ways in which humans perceive the glen as a landscape are subjective and varied, and the ways in which they interact with the area shape those perceptions.



“In the Apple Orchard, facing northeast toward the Hamilton campus, with young trees starting in the foreground. The grain growing throughout the orchard was part of Elihu Root’s plan to get the most productivity from every inch of arable land,” Root Farm album, Photograph Collection, Hamilton College Archives.

Before the opening of Kirkland College in 1968, the land that later became known as the Root Woods and eventually as the Kirkland Glen was farmland. Captioned photographs from a collection compiled by Grace Root illustrate what the land where Kirkland College was built had looked like in the early twentieth century. The collection's first photograph is captioned "When the acres of Kirkland College were part of Elihu Root's farm..." The images that follow illustrate the landscape that now consists of the Kirkland side of Hamilton College's campus, including the land that is currently referred to as the Kirkland Glen and the Root Glen. Part of this farmland included an apple orchard, in which Elihu Root planted wheat "to get the most productivity from every inch of arable land." Root viewed this farmland as a unit of production, a perspective from which geographer D.W. Meinig states viewers "are wont to look upon every scene with the eyes of an appraiser, assigning a monetary value to everything in view."<sup>2</sup> A 1921 photo of the Hamilton College campus taken from the west and another photo from the Root Farm photograph collection illustrate the extent of this cultivation and nearly complete absence of the trees and buildings that occupy the Kirkland side of campus today.

Today, the glen hosts great natural and recreational variety. Beech, maple, hemlock, ash, and some black cherry trees inhabit the landscape. The ground consists of a heavy clay soil conducive to variety in flora. The beech trees, however, are currently suffering from beech bark disease and are predicted to decline in the coming years. A wide path called Bridle Trail weaves through these trees. The path reveals some larger rocks where the dirt has been worn away, indicating many years of human tread. It is also fairly wide—approximately nine to ten feet—probably

<sup>1</sup> Root Farm album, Photograph Collection, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>2</sup> D.W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D.W. Meinig and J.B. Jackson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 33–48, 41.

meaning that humans have expanded the trail by walking outside the original path. Some blatant indications of human development and presence also exist: the ropes course, posted signs, and an occasional beer can detract from any sense of a pure and unsullied natural environment.

Hamilton College biology professor Ernest Williams divides the recent history of the glen, which he contends should be called the Kirkland Woods because it lacks a stream, into four stages. The first stage unfolded after the Roots stopped farming and a dense stand of trees grew, making the glen “cathedral-like” and ostensibly a wilderness.<sup>3</sup> The second historical stage was the loss of the glen’s cathedral-like feel when, in the 1980s, a group of foresters recommended felling seventy trees without consulting any biologists about the possible repercussions. Professor Williams refers to this action as a mistake; the loss of trees allowed more sunlight to pass through the canopy, which facilitated the growth of more vegetation, such as stinging nettles. The third major event that shaped the Kirkland Glen’s history was a large windstorm that occurred around 1999 and blew down a number of trees near the middle of the glen, leveling the height of most treetops. A red painted tree just off the main path in the glen demarcates the site of this “blow down.” The final stage in the glen’s recent history was the construction of the high ropes course. This project has led to more common use of the glen along with the equally recent creation of bike trails by faculty and staff.

Today, the glen is a liminal space: neither urban park nor rural wilderness. Although Hamilton College is far from a city, the glen serves a similar purpose to urban green space because it’s designed for a specific group of people.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it similarly provides existential value for the college and local community as well as a neutral ground for the “focus of

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Williams in discussion with the author, 4 December 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Bradshaw, “Viewpoint: Greenspace in Cities: What and Where?” *Town Planning Review* 62, no. 2 (1991): 147–150, 147.

community spirit” and social interaction as well as the opportunity for environmental education.<sup>5</sup> Although the Kirkland Glen functions less as a means of facilitating the social interaction of varied social classes and groups than an urban park might, due to the lesser degree of diversity on Hamilton’s campus, it does bring together townspeople and other visitors to campus.

The glen also provides an escape from the commotion of life on campus and a place for recreation. Individual experiences with the glen and personal backgrounds influence our subjective perceptions of the glen as landscape. The glen’s trees, ferns, and wildlife juxtapose the college’s brick and concrete residential and academic buildings, creating a perhaps exaggerated perception of the glen as “wilderness.”<sup>6</sup> This phenomenon creates the potential for romanticizing the glen as a wilderness separated from humans and the rest of Hamilton’s campus. This alienation of wilderness and humans is limited, however, by evidence of human development and human presence in the glen. Runners or Nordic skiers, for example, might view the glen as a place specifically designated for recreation, where humans and nature coexist—what Meinig would refer to as landscape as habitat.”<sup>7</sup> Although people with this view of the landscape still appreciate the glen’s natural beauty, their appreciation for the natural environment and its potential for human use differs from the appreciation of those who subscribe to a view of landscape as nature.

<sup>5</sup> Carys Swanwick, Nigel Dunnett, and Helen Woolley, “Nature, Role and Value of Green Spaces in Towns and Cities: An Overview,” *Built Environment* 29, no. 2 (2003): 94–106, 103f.

<sup>6</sup> Wilderness is not something separate from humanity but rather a human idea, according to William Cronon in “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69–90.

<sup>7</sup> D.W. Meinig, “The Beholding Eye,” 35.



Campus map, 1959, showing the Root Wild Gardens and an early reference to the Kirkland Glen, Hamilton College Archives.

The subjectivity of interpreting landscapes becomes clear in the case of a friend who grew up in Queens, New York. He refers to the glen as “the forest” because he had rarely seen so many trees or, in his eyes, such “extreme wilderness” as the glen at home. As historian Roderick Nash explains, wilderness is a notion rather than a definition, so one person’s idea of wilderness may be another person’s metropolis.<sup>8</sup> What my friend sees as extreme wilderness may hardly fall into what someone else categorizes as wilderness at all. In this sense, not only do those who appreciate the glen for its natural value subscribe to Meinig’s view of landscape as nature, but they also subscribe to Bill Cronon’s belief that we should explore a middle ground of viewing wilderness in which we allow humans and nature to coexist.<sup>9</sup> In their eyes, the ropes course and the glen’s proximity to campus buildings need not detract from the value of its trees and birds. Humans can use wilderness for recreation while also appreciating its natural value. This point of view is integral to understanding the glen. Although we all perceive landscape in different ways and value different aspects of what the glen has to offer, the truth of the matter is that the Kirkland Glen, although natural, has human influence embedded in its history and present existence. Its early existence as farmland demonstrates the use of landscape for prosperity or material wealth and the current formation of trails and a ropes course demonstrates its use for recreation. This implies that, rather than regarding humans and nature as completely separate entities, landscape can involve the integration of humans and nature. According to Cronon, embracing this integration creates an “environmental ethic that will tell us as much about using nature as about not using it.”<sup>10</sup> Idealizing a notion of wilderness that is isolated

<sup>8</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 81.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

and distinct from humans allows us to avoid responsibility to care about and look after everything within this far-removed conception of wilderness. Embracing an integrated understanding of the natural environment as something that humans are part of renders a more compassionate way of viewing the world.

## *Stubbins's Brutalism and Burke Library*

Jack Hay

THE DANIEL BURKE LIBRARY at Hamilton College stands out from the other buildings on the north side of campus. When I first visited Hamilton, a cursory stop at the library did not lead me to consider its role on campus or the factors that influenced its construction. Why, for instance, is it a strikingly different architectural style than the rest of the buildings? Why, too, is it one of the northernmost buildings at Hamilton when it is one of the most significant structures for research and study? At the time of my visit, my only observation was that it was different than the surrounding buildings. I did not yet understand the complexity of its design and function.

The history of Burke Library is far more significant than its variation from the campus status quo, and the principles behind its construction were based on more than aesthetic choices. The college's anticipated expansion, Central New York's climate, and changing data-retrieval technology all shaped the building's siting and design. From architect Hugh Stubbins's vision of how hematite stone weathers to librarian Keyes Metcalf's prediction for the future of library use, the story behind the Burke Library describes its environmental context as well as the social, architectural, and academic thought of the era.

Designed by Cambridge, Massachusetts-based architect Hugh Stubbins, Burke Library was named for Hamilton alumnus and longtime trustee Daniel Burke. It was built in 1972 on the site of Truax Hall—the philosophy building designed in 1900 by Hamilton alumnus Frederick Hamilton Gouge and demolished in 1970—to replace the James Library located in



Daniel Burke Library showing overhang above entrance,  
Hamilton College Archives.

the Christian Johnson building.<sup>1</sup> Described as an architect who “emphasizes the functional, planning and structural aspects of architecture as well as the aesthetic,” Stubbins was influenced by Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto, and Marcel Breuer and is well known for the Citicorp Center in New York City and the MM21 skyscraper in Yokohama, Japan.<sup>2</sup>

Rand Carter, Hamilton professor of art history and architecture, states that the college had budgeted for an expansion in the early 1970s that would have created a cluster of colleges. But by the mid-seventies it was decided that this plan wasn’t economically viable. According to Carter, the administration realized that increased enrollments due to the baby boom would not last indefinitely, and it was likely that the planned additional colleges would not be required. Nevertheless, it was the planned cluster of colleges on campus that influenced the siting of the Burke Library.<sup>3</sup> Instead of building the library where the bookstore currently exists (a logical central location), the library was built at the north side of campus, where it would have been centrally located if a third campus was constructed to the north of Hamilton.

Keyes Metcalf, a retired Harvard librarian who served as a consultant for the project, influenced the design of the interior. He recognized the need for a flexible space and suggested that the interior of the library should have very few load-bearing walls and use loft-style floors that could be used for “information retrieval” once books were obsolete. For Metcalf, this meant microfilm, although the space would later be used for the expansion of Information Technology Services. The vacant space

<sup>1</sup> “Campus Building and Renovation Chronology,” Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Pile, “Hugh Stubbins,” in *The Grove Encyclopedia of American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); James Stevens Curl and Susan Wilson, “Hugh Asher Stubbins,” in *Oxford Dictionary of Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Rand Carter in discussion with author, 8 December 2015.

in the basement was then converted into compact shelving, which would have been too heavy to be supported by the third floor.<sup>4</sup>

The climate of Central New York, as well as the library's compass orientation, further influenced its structure. Skylights provide natural daylighting for the center of the structure, which can penetrate all the way to the central first-floor atrium and consequently limits the electricity needed for comfortable levels of light. But because southern light tends to be harsh, the extensive use of glass in the front of the library required a large overhang to preserve an optimal level of light, according to Carter. Windows on the east and west facing sides are short and horizontal and the cubicles and bookstacks prevent this light from penetrating deep into the mass of the library, although the windows do light the study spaces on the extremities, which are "behind a 'buffer' of bookstacks." According to a 1973 article published in *New England Architect*, the structure is an "efficient rectangle, based on a modular stack-bay that is 25'-6" square. The elements containing vertical circulation and services are located at the perimeter, leaving the internal structure and building systems open-ended for expansion to the north."<sup>5</sup>

Structural concrete with "a round column head and a flat-slab floor construction" and a sand-cleaned finish comprise the building's structural system.<sup>6</sup> The construction of the library was such that the floors do not require load-bearing walls. The extensive use of load-bearing concrete allows the library space to be flexible, as Keyes Metcalf intended. While concrete can sometimes be a difficult material to work with (as a masonry mass, it can trap heat and hold it for a long time), Stubbins's design reflects a climate-conscious approach. The use of daylighting strategies improves natural light quality, and the open plan of the building allows

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Burke Library, folder 2, Architecture Collection, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



Daniel Burke Library interior at night, Hamilton College Archives.

airflow and circulation. These can respectively lower electricity and heating and cooling use.

The changes in a building's intended use demonstrate the quality of the design, which in Burke Library's case meant remaining useful once books became obsolete. Keyes Metcalf's prediction of the book's demise has so far proven false, but its effect on the library's design has allowed it to accommodate the rise of personal computing and multiuse spaces. Metcalf therefore effectively, if unwittingly, future-proofed the library by recognizing a trend and allowing the library to be reorganized in a fluid way.

The library, though seemingly incompatible with the Collegiate Gothic and Georgian buildings on the north side of campus, was nonetheless designed to fit into its campus context. Its height is consistent with the rest of the north side of campus, as Professor Carter noted, suggesting that the scale is consistent with its surroundings. Stubbins also intended the exterior to match the surrounding buildings. According to *New England Architect*, "the entire upper structure is surfaced with buff-colored limestone panels with shot-sawn finish. Glazed areas are bronze-tinted, glare-reducing glass, set in dark, prefinished frames."<sup>7</sup> Professor Carter explained that Stubbins had selected Clinton hematite so that the library's façade might weather along with the rest of the buildings around it, although this hasn't happened to the extent of Stubbins's vision.

I had expected the building material of the Burke Library to be concrete, not hematite. The library is a classic example of Brutalist architecture built on university campuses in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it is clear that Stubbins wanted consistency of material with surrounding buildings, even if its form was wildly different.<sup>8</sup> Brutalism has had a

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> F. Ching & M. Jarzombek, "1950," in *A Global History of Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011), 796.



Daniel Burke Library, lower right, in its architectural context, Hamilton College Archives.

contentious history in the United States. It often lacked public support and was not universally accepted. Michael Lewis, when describing “New Brutalism” said that “the truth is that Brutalism never caught on with the public, who could not be made to see that the problem with modern architecture was that it was insufficiently surly. Nor did commercial or corporate clients embrace it. Only institutional clients in the academy and in government—clients inordinately susceptible to the authority of expert opinion—take Brutalism to heart.”<sup>9</sup> Because of its limited presence, the most notable cases of Brutalist architecture are mainly on college campuses, like the Cornell Museum of Art designed by I.M. Pei, and government buildings like Boston City Hall. Lewis points to Louis Kahn’s Yale Art Gallery from the early 1950s as one of the first examples of Brutalism because of its exposed concrete ceilings but notes that this period was short-lived, saying that “public enthusiasm for Brutalism, never keen, waned over the course of the 1960s. It flickered on with diminishing vigor for another decade or so, but as the great run of government-sponsored urban renewal projects trickled to a halt, it dropped from sight, along with the overweening confidence and swagger that marked the North American version of Brutalism.”<sup>10</sup>

While Burke Library was built during the decline of Brutalism and the supposed decline of the written word, its functionality has allowed it to outlive the foundations of its construction. And although the library’s modernism might look out of place on a classically styled campus, its façade reflects an effort to integrate the building with the rest of campus while its overall structure provides insight into Hamilton College’s history and U.S. history more broadly.

<sup>9</sup> Michael J. Lewis, “The ‘New’ New Brutalism,” *New Criterion*, December 2014, 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

## *Artificial Wilderness*

Noelle Connors

IN THE FALL, the Kirkland Glen appears to be an ideal northeastern forest. As you walk along its dirt path, the fallen leaves crinkle under your feet. The trees become a sea of yellow, red, and orange as the leaves change colors before they fall. The woods are alive with birds as well as chipmunks and squirrels collecting food for the winter. Here, immersed in such a natural place, it is easy to forget that you are still on the campus of Hamilton College.

However, the Kirkland Glen has not always been a forest. In its recent history it has been farmed, logged, and made into a place to enjoy nature—an idealized wilderness.<sup>1</sup> In July 1773, six years after Clinton had been founded and four years after Samuel Kirkland moved into a cabin at the foot of College Hill, Kirkland described in his journal, “this place, which six years ago was in a state of nature, a mere wilderness should so suddenly appear like the garden of Eden, the fields around us whitening for harvest or clad with verdure.”<sup>2</sup> As Amos D. Gridley, a student of the class of 1839 summarized in his *History of the Town of Kirkland, New York*:

To a traveler passing through the Oriskany Valley in the year 1785, the country presented all the indications of an unbroken wilderness. His path was an Indian trail. If he ascended the hill on the west, he looked down upon a sea of forests undulating over the knolls and slopes which diversify the valley, and up the amphitheater of hills which rise on the east and

<sup>1</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 3; William Cronon, “The Trouble with the Wilderness; or, Getting Back to Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69.

<sup>2</sup> Kirkland quoted in Maurice Isserman, *On the Hill: A Bicentennial History of Hamilton College* (Clinton, NY: Hamilton College, 2011), 2.

south. Here and there he saw little wreaths of smoke curling up from Indian wigwams.<sup>3</sup>

While it was not the pure wilderness that Kirkland described in his journal, the area was mostly forested with occasional Native American trails and settlements when Kirkland arrived. However, the area quickly became more populated and dedicated to agriculture.

In the early nineteenth century, “the surrounding forests [of Hamilton College] were cut down...and replaced by fields and orchards” as many parts of New York State were settled and agriculture spread west.<sup>4</sup> By 1885, what would become the Kirkland Glen was mainly agricultural land with only a few trees. While it is unknown exactly what was grown in these fields, it is probable that wheat and corn were the main crops. It is also likely that the land was used for pasture and apple orchards. As early as 1844, the heirs of David Comstock, a neighbor of Hamilton College, donated eighty-nine acres to the school, which included the land around the present-day reservoir.<sup>5</sup> But it wasn’t until 1971, when Grace Root donated the Root Glen, that the Kirkland Glen also became part of the college.

Then, beginning in the 1980s, the Kirkland Glen was selectively logged. According to a 1988 memorandum, selective logging was intended to “increase the health of the entire forest and provide maximum growth in the future.”<sup>6</sup> However, the overpopulation of deer in the Kirkland Glen caused the seedlings to die, so the forest did not grow back in the way planned. In 1985, the logging on campus began in stand 14, with an

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>5</sup> Bethany O’Meara, “The Distribution of Invasive Plants in Relation to Historic Land Use and Management in Hamilton College Forests” (bachelor’s thesis, Hamilton College, 2012), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Terry Hawkridge interview in O’Meara, “The Distribution of Invasive Plants,” 15.

average of eighty-two trees per acre. In 1986, Norway spruces were harvested from stand 6, and in June 1987, 221 trees, mostly white ash, were harvested from stand 7. In 1988, stands 9 and 10, which contained the most diseased trees, were logged for white ash, white pine, and red pine. In stand 9, fifty feet of trees were left unharvested along both sides of the trail that existed there. The fact that the only section of these stands left unharvested was along the trail presumably relates to American ideals about wilderness and the desire to give visitors the sense that they were in a separate place away from human impact.

Today, much of the glen's history is visible in its trails, many of which follow former property lines and logging roads. These property lines were often visible in the transition between different land uses, such as between fields and trees. Other trails were formed along the boundaries of the forest stands that were surveyed in 1983 by Kenneth Williams. While the forest stands do not identically map onto old property lines, they were based off the general type of trees present. This means that the land was probably used for a different purpose in each stand, so at least some of the stands were different property lines, or the boundaries between different ways people used the land. Other trails were based directly off roads that were used for logging. According to Tony Hawkrigde, "Some trails...were built in the 1980s to act as skidding trails and roads to allow entrance of logging equipment and removal of trees."<sup>7</sup>

Another example of the way that the glen's history is made visible is through plant growth. In her study of the growth of invasive species throughout the glen, Bethany O'Meara concludes, "There are clearly patterns of invasive plant distribution in relation to historical agricultural land and logged areas, however what's most interesting is how these land use and management practices combine to affect the plant populations."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> O'Meara, "The Distribution of Invasive Plants," 29.

One area she made specific conclusions about was the pasture that was subsequently logged and made the native species too weak to fight back the invasive species.

The fact that the Kirkland Glen exists today as a wooded area also reflects the history of the 1960s. That era's growing environmental movement demanded a dramatic shift in the way that people related to the environment. This was especially true on college campuses, where there were calls for environmental legislation but also efforts to preserve natural areas.<sup>9</sup> On College Hill, this effort coincided with the broader rights revolution and the founding of Kirkland College in 1967. Kirkland was "an example of a number of 1960s era experiments in higher education that shared a utopian vision of students freed to learn at their own pace and in their own way."<sup>10</sup> The college contributed to the movement to provide a space that would fulfill individual needs, and the glen still embodies this ideal today.

Despite the glen's popularity, little information on its history exists, and there is often conflicting data about what should be simple facts. This odd discrepancy—a place enjoyed by many but with a largely unknown history—reflects the American ideal of wilderness. If people on campus are unaware of the history of the glen, and especially people's historical influence on the glen, then they can believe that it is a wild place that largely exists outside of the impact of humans.

<sup>9</sup> Henry M. Jackson, "Ecological Crisis," in *The Troubled Campus: Current Issues in Higher Education*, ed. G. Kerry Smith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1970), 34–35.

<sup>10</sup> Isserman, *On the Hill*, 279.



Kirkland College with Kirkland Glen at far left, Hamilton College Archives.

## *Admission to Siuda House*

Emma Raynor

WHEN HAMILTON COLLEGE welcomed the Sigma Phi fraternity's beta chapter—its second establishment—in 1831, the brothers of the fraternity had no idea of the journey they would face to secure housing. After forty years in boarding houses and private homes, the Sigs built their first chapter house in 1871 on College Street in the village of Clinton.<sup>1</sup> Because this house was located down the hill from the college, the fraternity felt disconnected from not only each other but also the college as a whole. Moreover, the brothers' only dining option was on campus, so they had to dedicate large amounts of their daily schedules to traveling back and forth between the college and their house for meals.<sup>2</sup> Eventually the fraternity decided to relocate.

After the College Street house was rented out and eventually sold to the town to become the Kirkland Town Library, Sigma Phi, wanting to be more a part of college life, moved to a more centrally located position. In 1900, the fraternity had a new building constructed for forty-thousand dollars, which was paid for by Sigma Phi alumni.<sup>3</sup> Situated at the north end of campus, the house looked out over the entire campus as well as the Oriskany Valley below. Finally, the brothers felt fully immersed in college life. Although they still could not eat in their house due to college policy, the walk was significantly shorter for meals and they could eat together as a fraternity.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Walter Pilkington, *Hamilton College, 1812/1962* (Clinton, NY: Hamilton College, 1962), 126.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Grinnell Petri, "The Sigma Phi House—Past, Present, and Future" (bachelor's thesis, Hamilton College, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Undated typescript, SIG folder M, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Petri, "The Sigma Phi House."

Unfortunately for the Sigs, the cedar walls of their new house were not fireproofed, and the building burned down just fifteen years after its construction. Due to a defective furnace or faulty wiring, everything was lost except the lives of the four students living there at the time.<sup>5</sup> After the fire, Sigma Phi needed a new house, which Clement R. Newkirk, a Sigma Phi alumnus from Cornell, funded in 1917. Newkirk wanted the building to be the ideal fraternity house, so although its construction was based on the original house, it had significant changes made as well. The house was fireproofed and had a large stone patio facing the valley, from which the Sigs could enjoy the quiet of nature, while the other side of the building regally faced campus.<sup>6</sup> Newkirk wanted to ensure that the fraternity house blended with the original architecture of the college more so than any fraternity house before built at Hamilton. In order to do so, he decided to construct the second Sigma Phi house out of Herkimer dolomite, a type of stone available at local quarries that was used to make most of the early campus buildings.

Although its materials matched surrounding campus buildings, the Sigma Phi house's architectural style was a departure from the colonial style that dominated the college. The Collegiate Gothic style had existed almost a century before the Sigma Phi house was built, but it did not become popular in the United States until the late nineteenth century. Pointed arches are essential to the Gothic style building, so to honor this tradition, the front door was framed by a pointed arch, surmounted by the fraternity's crest. This style was also reflected in the building's tall, narrow windows and steep triangular dormers.

The Sigma Phi house remained largely as it had been built until 1995, when the college banned on-campus Greek housing in an attempt to re-

<sup>5</sup> Undated typescript, SIG folder M, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>6</sup> "Work on New Sig Hall Finished by May 15th," *Hamilton Life*, 8 May 1917.



The first on-campus Sigma Phi chapter house, Hamilton College Archives.

pair Hamilton's increasingly bad reputation.<sup>7</sup> What followed was a court case that affected colleges and fraternities throughout the country. Four fraternities at Hamilton, Sigma Phi included, sued the college with the claim that it was "...monopolizing the market for student housing."<sup>8</sup> Then, in 2000, U.S. District Judge Norman Mordue found that the fraternity had no grounds on which to sue the college.<sup>9</sup> This court case set a precedent for colleges throughout the United States by giving them the right to eliminate privately owned housing from their campuses. As a result, the Sigma Phi house today serves as the college admissions building. It was sold to the college in 2003 and was renovated, beginning in 2006, to better suit both the twenty-first century and the required office space. The architects maintained the old-fashioned feel of the building, however, by including three replica chimneys from the original building as well as what remained of the porch after the 1915 fire.<sup>10</sup> Bill Huggins, the associate director of physical plant, further maintained the building's architectural legacy by using the original Herkimer dolomite. Although the quarries used in the original construction had been diminished, the college had built a stockpile of the stone so that it could be used in future renovations.<sup>11</sup>

During the 2007 Reunion Weekend, the building was dedicated to Joy and Chet Siuda. Both have been highly involved in the admissions pro-

<sup>7</sup> Mark D. Bauer, "Small Liberal Arts Colleges, Fraternities, and Antitrust: Rethinking Hamilton College," *Catholic University Law Review* 53, no. 2 (2009): 347-412, 348.

<sup>8</sup> Karen W. Arenson, "Trust Suit Reinstated Against College's Curbs on Fraternities," *New York Times*, 29 October 1997, B11.

<sup>9</sup> Associated Press, "Federal Judge Tosses Out Fraternity Lawsuit," 11 July 2000.

<sup>10</sup> "Siuda House (Former Sigma Phi Chapter House)," March Associates Architects and Planners, <http://www.marchassoc.com/projects/higher-education/siuda-house-former-sigma-phi-chapter-house/>.

<sup>11</sup> Tucker Keren, "Hill's Construction Chief Leaves No Stone Unturned," *Hamilton Alumni Review*, Fall 2001, 141.

cess, with Chet serving as the chair of the trustee committee on admission from 1994 to 2001 and Joy setting up an endowed scholarship. This was also the year that the Office of Admission and Financial Aid moved from a house on College Hill Road to the new Siuda House.

While the people who work in the admissions office are nothing but kind, warm, and welcoming, the building is often filled with feelings of anxiety from prospective students. The stiff and professional behavior of these students directly contrasts with what I imagine was the overall feel when the building served as a fraternity house. Even though the admissions process can be stressful, the hominess from Siuda House's past as a residential building provides students with some sense of ease. When I was going through the process, I remember walking in the door and thinking that the house looked like it belonged in a fairytale. As nervous as I was waiting for my interview to begin, I could already sense that Hamilton was a good place to be based purely off the feel of Siuda House and the people working there. Now, as a tour guide, I meet a wide range of prospective students, some so nervous they can hardly speak and others who have already fallen so in love with the school that they cannot stop talking about it.

Siuda House is just one building among many on Hamilton's campus, but it speaks clearly to the history of the college. It demonstrates the evolution of the college's social history and even draws on the impact of fraternity houses on colleges throughout the country.

## *Along the Shale Paths*

Leigh Preston

TUCKED AWAY ON Hamilton College's campus, the Root Glen keeps a low profile. It is essentially invisible until you're within it and then find yourself surrounded on every side by woods and high hedges. In the spring and summer months, the Root Glen is a beautiful oasis of colors and sounds found nowhere else on campus. From the raised beds of flowering herbs to the blooming peonies to the mat of wide leaves branching out to the towering trees, the glen is an eclectic scene full of mostly non-native species. On a quiet spring day, you can stand by the creek in the lowest part of the glen, sheltered from the wind, and hear the faint rustling of leaves overhead, chipmunks and squirrels darting in the underbrush, and the soft, consistent rushing of the stream. The paths are made of red shale—originally collected from a quarry behind Bundy residence hall and formerly extending across all of campus—but only continue their existence today in the Root Glen. Several short footbridges zig-zag across the stream, giving walkers the option to spend more time at the stream than if they had stayed on the path. On warmer days, I have traversed this route barefoot with friends, seeking what I believe to be the most immersing sensory glen experience. A history of human involvement is evident in the benches, bridges, paths, retaining walls, gutters, and signs along the walk. Both entrances to the glen are from parking lots, further exemplifying the dichotomy between the landscape outside and that awaiting in the woods.

The Root Glen's history stretches back through three generations of the Root family to Oren Root, father of Elihu Root. In 1837, Oren Root married Nancy Buttrick, and together they had seven children. In 1850, Oren



Aerial view of campus showing the Root Glen and its ravine at center left, Hamilton College Archives.

paid \$2,600 for one and a half acres of land and a former tavern, which he later named the Homestead.<sup>1</sup>

The land was largely bare, having previously been used for grazing. The ravine behind the house, subsequently purchased in 1854, had long served as a college dump, so Oren set out with his children to clear out the trash in hopes of completely altering the land's appearance.<sup>2</sup> Oren Root, along with his wife Nancy, immediately began to transform their large backyard from a precipitous and bare ravine into an aesthetically appealing landscape. Nancy set to work planting her own vegetables, herbs, and flowers, while Oren devoted his time to planting trees that would be visible from the Homestead. Their children—Elihu, Oren Jr., and Edward—were all assigned the task of collecting saplings from around Hamilton's campus to diversify their backyard. The earliest trees for which we know the Roots were responsible were two tulip trees planted the same year that the Homestead was purchased and now tower over 125 feet tall.

Root's landscaping philosophy was inspired by the work of Andrew Jackson Downing, a renowned Hudson River landscape architect who sought more casual and "softer" landscaping practices than those used in England and France. More specifically, he sought to escape the rigidity and structure of European gardens with their stone walls, fountains, and perfectly aligned trees and instead construct gardens better suited to the natural landscape of places like the glen. Oren especially wanted a landscape that demonstrated his geologic, historical, and horticultural appreciation in an awe-inspiring way.

In 1937 the glen was passed down to Elihu Root's son Edward and his wife Grace, who made it into the horticulturally unique place it is today. Edward was the pickiest and most dissatisfied of all the glen's owners.

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Isserman, *On the Hill: A Bicentennial History of Hamilton College* (Clinton, NY: Hamilton College, 2011), 36.

<sup>2</sup> "The Root Glen Story," William Palmer Papers, Hamilton College Archives.

1905

S. E. cor.  
looking  
North  
along  
Sist bed  
Yuccas +  
gap. in  
in fore-  
ground.



S. S. cor.  
looking  
West  
along  
South  
border.  
Caryopsis  
+ some  
Ptilos in  
bloom.  
Beetles  
in front  
of Ptilos.



Root Glen Inventory, 8 August 1905,  
Hamilton College Archives.

He was known for complaining about certain flowering herbs Grace had planted, the orange and yellow shades in the irises and daffodils, and the thick canopy of the trees. Specifically, Edward worried that the glen was “too dark” and that lack of light created a “Gothic setting” that limited the growth of shorter flowering plants and therefore diminished the glen’s showiness.<sup>3</sup> To brighten up the glen, Edward turned his focus to daffodils. Imported from Ireland and England, these *Narcissus* varieties were banned by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) because of blight and the pests they carried. Edward had to promise the USDA that he would keep his daffodils in encasements and cages to prevent disease transmission.<sup>4</sup> He also spent a large portion of his life at the Homestead hybridizing irises in order to achieve “true red” and “true blue,” but these varieties have since disappeared from the glen. Continuing with his interest in non-native species, Edward commissioned a friend to collect alpine plants from the Rockies to be planted in the glen.

In 1956, Edward died of a heart attack, leaving the glen under Grace’s control. Grace moved into what is presently the Glen House and continued the Root family’s dedication to having a “gentle, loose, and charming” property to “brighten one’s life” for another twenty years.<sup>5</sup> In 1971, Grace founded the Root Glen Foundation in order to maintain the glen as a tool for education and public enjoyment, to encourage conservation efforts for rare and threatened plants, to promote the study of birds, and most importantly, to inspire others with like interests and passions.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Putala, “The Root Legacy: Homestead, Glade, and Glen,” 29 September 2007, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*; see, for example, Oregon State Agricultural College, “Disease of *Narcissus*,” Station Bulletin 304, June 1932.

<sup>5</sup> Putala, “The Root Legacy.”

## *This is an Intervention*

Emma Morgan

ON A SUNNIER DAY, I would expect to see many more runners and walkers out and about, but today it is just me. As I follow the loop of the Kirkland Glen I notice that on a damp day like this one, the landscape before me is dominated by two colors: green and purple. The green comes from the leaves on the trees that have not yet changed while the leaves that have already made their descent add to the deep purple of the muddy ground. The lighting within in the glen varies widely. At the entrance to the trail the sky is visible and the path is well lit by the natural light, but soon after it becomes so dense and dark that it is hard to make out details on the ground.

The path curves through the glen and I'm both dwarfed by gigantic beech trees and standing at the height of some saplings. Old and new growth on the forest floor seems to change as the path pushes forward. In the final stretch of the loop, the trees lining either side of the path lean toward each other to create a canopy. I am only minutes from my dorm, my classes, and my responsibilities, but within the comfort of the glen, I feel miles away. For most of the walk, I can't hear anything from the college or the cars on the access road. As I approach the end, however, the sounds of campus seep back in. I step out into the parking lot and it starts to rain.

The relationship between Americans and the environment has changed multiple times over the country's short history, but one thing has remained constant: Americans have valued the natural environment. They have valued it for the resources it has provided, for the profits it has generated, and for the solace it could bring them. In a world where

deadlines and daily responsibilities loom, natural spaces provide a place for relaxation or recreation where people can take a quick pause.

Not everyone is an outdoorsperson, though, and the wilderness can be an intimidating place. To many, going completely off the grid and heading into the unknown wilderness is incomprehensible or impractical. Natural spaces that are partially developed and are close by, however, provide people, regardless of outdoor expertise, a way to experience, appreciate, and benefit from nature. Human intervention in nature, therefore, facilitates an appreciation for natural spaces in a variety of ways. Intervention may not start out with the goal of fostering an appreciation for the land in its visitors, but in many cases it allows for an appreciation in the land to occur.

By the 1870s, agriculture in New York State was in decline, and some farmland was reforested with saplings in order to allow for future logging. An economic downturn, as well as his son's decision to leave farming, led Lyman Schumway Harding to sell his land to his neighbor Elihu Root in 1903. After many more decades of farming, Elihu Root's daughter, Grace Root, donated the land to Hamilton College. This land parcel then became both the Root Glen and the Kirkland Glen.<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1990s the Kirkland Glen transitioned from being land used for material gain—either through farming or logging—into land used for recreation. The trails within the glen opened up to Hamilton College students and community members. The most prominent trail, the Bridle Trail, or what is more colloquially known as simply the Kirkland Glen Loop, existed from the time that the land was owned by the Harding family. Newer trails were laid out starting in 1997 to accommodate differ-

<sup>1</sup> Beth O'Meara, "The Distribution of Invasive Plants in Relation to Historic Land Use and Management in Hamilton College Forests," (bachelor's thesis, Hamilton College, 2012), 13.

ent types of visitors to the area. In 2007, for example, Hamilton College student Nate Brewster created the mountain biking trail within the glen.<sup>2</sup>

Visitors to Kirkland Glen come to seek some kind of escape into nature. Whereas a visitor to an urban park may consider the setting natural by comparison, most visitors to the Kirkland Glen live in an area that city dwellers would consider wild. So in order for Kirkland Glen visitors to feel that they have left civilization to be immersed in the natural world, the glen has to feel more obviously wild. Kirkland Glen nonetheless benefits from maintenance. The trails within the glen, for example, are periodically weeded and managed in order to keep the path well marked and to keep less desirable plants, such as poison oak and poison ivy, from bothering visitors. By keeping these poisonous plants off of the paths, the caretakers of the Kirkland Glen, namely Andrew Jillings, mitigate some of the risk involved with walking in the woods.<sup>3</sup> The less risk there is, the more people are willing to engage in an activity.

By creating trails through the glen, the original builders have opened the land up to the community and made it more accessible. The paths are an invitation into the wilderness because they indicate that not only are humans allowed to walk there, but that many have done so already. They also encourage visitors to let their minds wander, because as long as they stick to the trail, they won't lose their way. Of course, it's still possible to get lost in the Kirkland Glen; I definitely have, but the paths are your marker, so if you can find your way back to a path, you'll be fine. That kind of assurance is comforting to people who are not at ease in the woods but want to enjoy the natural environment.

Environmental purists might scorn human intervention in wilderness spaces, but intervention can actually foster an appreciation of that land in a more varied cross section of society. It makes the land accessible to

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 8.



those who cannot venture very far outside of their community or their comfort zone to enjoy the natural environment. By mitigating risks and providing a diverse set of ways to interact with the land, developments in these green spaces allow for people of all ages, regardless of mobility, interests, socioeconomic level or anything else to benefit from time spent outside. They make places like the Kirkland Glen into places that are good for families, for students, and for anyone in need of a short break from everyday life.

## *Hamilton's Antiquated Museum*

Elise LePage

BORDERED BY A SCRAGGLY LINE of conifers, the Hamilton College cemetery has a feeling of solitude, one degree removed from everyday life on campus. It is the final resting place for most of the college's presidents as well as faculty, trustees, students, alumni, and others including Elihu Root, Samuel Kirkland, and Skenandoah.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, headstones appear randomly distributed throughout the cemetery, but upon closer investigation it becomes clear that the cemetery expanded outward from a central spot and that families are always buried together. The vast majority of the stones are simple granite, although a significant portion are marble, many of them from the latter half of the nineteenth century. With the exception of the recently placed headstones, all of the stones exhibit weathering and moss growth, rendering some unreadable. The marble stones show the worst weathering and appear predominantly dark gray.

In August 1820, the trustees of Hamilton College designated a small tract on the periphery of the college's land as the grounds "for the interment of the officers of the College and their families, the students of the College, and others attached there."<sup>2</sup> The spot was bordered by pasture and fairly far removed from the center of campus.<sup>3</sup> At the same meeting, the trustees decided that the bodies of Samuel Kirkland, President Azel

<sup>1</sup> David Maldwyn Ellis, "Giants in the Earth," Lecture Transcript, 9 May 1984, H.C. Misc. Files, Cemetery: Notes for Talk, Hamilton College Archives; A.A. Santucci, Inventory for Hamilton College Cemetery, June 1984, H.C. Misc. Files, Cemetery, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Board of Trustees, July 1820, H.C. Misc. Files, Cemetery, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>3</sup> "Plan of the Campus in 1850-1853, from a Sketch by Oren Root," in *Documentary History of Hamilton College* (Clinton, NY: Hamilton College, 1922), 254.



Hamilton College Cemetery, ca. 1880, Hamilton College Archives.

Backus, Professor Seth Norton, and Oneida Chief Skenandoah, Kirkland's friend and supporter, should be exhumed and moved to the new cemetery.<sup>4</sup> It was not until 1856, however, that Kirkland and Skenandoah were actually transferred.<sup>5</sup>

In its first century, the Hamilton College Cemetery seemed to attract considerable effort and attention to upkeep. In 1853, various donations totaling six thousand dollars went towards the improvement of the college land, which included landscaping, and presumably, the cemetery.<sup>6</sup> Ten years later, Professor Edward North donated a piece of land adjacent to the cemetery for its expansion. The Board of Trustees, while accepting North's donation, called to "enclose [the donated land] within the bounds of the cemetery...and improve the whole cemetery in an appropriate manner."<sup>7</sup> Under North's encouragement and example, the college faculty planted evergreens throughout the cemetery and elms along the entrance path.<sup>8</sup> In 1871, Utica businessman Samuel Munson donated one thousand dollars for improvement of the cemetery, and shortly thereafter, Hamilton alumnus and son-in-law of Azel Backus, Gerrit Smith, donated eight hundred dollars for Backus's new headstone.<sup>9</sup>

As campus expanded during the twentieth century, so did the cemetery. As late as 1970, Raymond Boggs, a student writing a report on the cemetery, observed, "The cemetery has been well-planned, and rather than look like some eclectic chaos, the over-all impression is one of order. There are more trees than graves in the cemetery, and a common

<sup>4</sup> Ellis, "Giants in the Earth."

<sup>5</sup> Walter Pilkington, *Hamilton College, 1812/1962* (Clinton, NY: Hamilton College, 1962), 174.

<sup>6</sup> Ellis, "Giants in the Earth."

<sup>7</sup> Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 22 August 1863, quoted in Raymond Boggs, "The Hamilton College Cemetery," May 1970, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Pilkington, *Hamilton College*, 177.

<sup>9</sup> Ellis, "Giants in the Earth."

denominator for all the stones is the natural setting.”<sup>10</sup> But in a 1998 letter to Hamilton president Eugene Tobin, alumnus John C. Calder wrote, “Our Hamilton cemetery needs a considerable amount of help and sooner rather than later.”<sup>11</sup> He identified the overgrowth of vegetation and the sad state of particular stones, such as those of Alexander Woollcott, Elihu Root, and Percy Saunders. He even offered to fund the replacement of Woollcott’s deteriorating stone. Finally, he proposed the formation of a monument commission tasked with suggesting repairs and collecting donations. There’s no written evidence suggesting that anything came of Calder’s letter.

The original motivation for Hamilton having a cemetery followed national trends. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the United States experienced what became known as the rural cemetery movement in response to changing attitudes about death. Prior to the nineteenth century, graveyards were the principal place of burial. They were dirty, unattractive, and “frequently little more than stinking quagmires” that were not intended to be visited by the living.<sup>12</sup> In response to social pressures from a growing population and a need for sanitation, this attitude gave way to the idea of the rural, or garden, cemetery, a burial place combining nature with art, intended to be visited as a sort of cultural attraction. Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts was among the first and most prominent examples of this phenomenon. Founded in 1831, it provided “a pleasant botanical tour, a local and national historical museum, and an arboretum, all on grounds that provided space for

<sup>10</sup> Boggs, “The Hamilton College Cemetery.”

<sup>11</sup> John C. Calder to Eugene Tobin, 30 July 1998, H.C. Misc. Files, Cemetery, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis O. Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America,” in *Death in America*, ed. David E. Stannard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 74.

the burial of generations of area residents.”<sup>13</sup> Harvard professor Jacob Bigelow envisioned the new cemetery as a way to solve public health problems stemming from Boston’s unsanitary graveyards. With approval from Boston’s leaders, Bigelow located suitable land, enlisted the help of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, and designed Mount Auburn Cemetery as a beautiful garden in order to entice Bostonians to purchase plots there.<sup>14</sup> The cemetery was a success, and countless cities and small towns imitated Mount Auburn. By the end of the 1850s, rural cemeteries were so widespread that, in the words of one commentator, “there is hardly a city or town of any size in the union which does not possess its rural cemetery.”<sup>15</sup> However, soon after the transition from graveyards to rural cemeteries a new type of cemetery, known as park cemeteries or lawn cemeteries, began to appear.

In light of this brief history, it becomes evident that the rural cemetery movement heavily influenced the Hamilton College Cemetery. David Maldwyn Ellis, former professor of U.S. history at Hamilton, noted that this movement most affected the college cemetery in the middle of the nineteenth century when community members’ monetary donations and time were directed toward its improvement.<sup>16</sup> By looking deeper at specific headstones, one can extrapolate even more about the cemetery’s evolution and its relationship to larger trends. The eclectic variety of headstones is typical of a rural cemetery.<sup>17</sup> The earliest stones were either simple, plain rectangles or tall, monumental obelisks pointing skyward. For example, Theodore Weld Burnett, who died as a first-year student,

<sup>13</sup> David Charles Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 44.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind,” 85.

<sup>16</sup> Ellis, “Giants in the Earth.”

<sup>17</sup> Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind,” 81.

was commemorated by a stone obelisk inscribed with a hand pointing straight up in a circle, “as though it were showing the poor lad’s soul the proper direction to take.” Later stones began to take on a “chess-piece-type” appearance, resembling “rook and bishop pieces,” which provided more challenge and artistic freedom for the stonemason. Furthermore, many early epitaphs were written exclusively in Latin, notably that of Professor of Languages Seth Norton. Towards the later part of the nineteenth century, the stones drew more influence from nature, utilizing rough, unpolished surfaces in an attempt to “capture the spirit of the cemetery, which even then exemplified beauty and peace.”<sup>18</sup> The stones of Ruben Leslie Maynard and his wife are separated by a stone tree stump with the inscription “this tree bore fine fruit,” another attempt to create harmony with nature. John and Mildred Terrett’s stone exemplifies unpolished faces as well as carved leaves on the corners, alluding to a connection to nature. In contrast to the stones influenced by romanticism and the rural cemetery movement, many twentieth-century stones, such as those of President Robert McEwen, Ulysses S. Grant III, and Elihu Root, Jr., are small and unobtrusive markers with short epitaphs.

When the trustees chartered the cemetery as a place for the burial of college employees and students, they were striving to distinguish Hamilton as its own place. Much like cities with their own cemeteries, giving Hamilton a cemetery served to increase the prestige of Hamilton and set it apart as a self-contained entity. It was also a way to immortalize Hamilton’s history in an outdoor museum. The historical aspect of cemeteries was important in the rural cemetery movement, and one can conclude that the trustees saw the cemetery as a way to build Hamilton’s heritage.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Boggs, “The Hamilton College Cemetery.”

<sup>19</sup> Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind,” 89.



Detail, aerial photograph of campus, 1934, Hamilton College Archives.  
The cemetery is visible at center.

## *Aesthetic Discernment: The Seasons of the Root Glen*

Chloe Keating

TO THE UNOBSERVANT EYE, the distinction between the Root Glen and the surrounding forest is muddled, a border that fades out gradually with signs that read NOW LEAVING ROOT GLEN providing the only clear indication of separation. The species of trees and frequency of paths remain relatively similar throughout a trek between the Root Glen, the adjacent Kirkland Glen, and the woods beyond. However, the lawn and gardens behind the Elihu Root house are another matter entirely. Here, the level of devotion to flora is undeniable. This collection of trees and flowers is not only diverse and well cared for, it can also provide insight into the complex relationship between humans and the natural environment. In the Root Glen, the landscape has been cultivated to facilitate the relationship between humans and nature. The red shale paths are manicured and maintained for safety, the identifying plaques below trees and flowers encourage an atmosphere of learning, and visitors are allowed on the property from dawn until dusk virtually every day.

The Root Glen as we know it today has undergone dramatic shifts in appearance since Oren and Nancy Buttrick Root first acquired the Homestead and its adjoining pasture in 1850. Today, visitors encounter a hand-cut stone pagoda that was purchased on a 1957 trip to Japan as well as blue steel benches and species identification plaques that make the glen more accessible.<sup>1</sup> Here, the human relationship to nature is based on recreation and education. And while the actual gardening and maintenance are performed by Hamilton College staff members, the burden of keeping this section of nature pristine is placed on everyone who enters.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Photograph of Florence Parker, n.d., Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln and Timmy Foster, "Maintenance Notes on the Root Glen," 1975, 2, Hamilton College Archives.

The principles of education and conservation that guided the Root family are still upheld today. But the glen also has a deeper appeal, which draws couples there to be married and led to a policy regarding gifts made to the glen in memory of loved ones.<sup>3</sup> Although the trees and flowers grow as naturally here as anywhere else, there is a clear distinction between what has become a cultivated place and the unkempt woods beyond. The Root Glen has acquired a sense of place because of our desire for beauty, order, and a carefully controlled relationship with the natural environment. It embodies the values toward nature held by the Root family and Hamilton College but also reflects shifting attitudes toward the natural environment in the United States.

The practice of systematically collecting, growing, and labelling trees and other flora (as well as calling these collections arboretums) was relatively commonplace by the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The horticultural journalist and landscape architect John Claudius Loudon significantly altered the way in which large scale gardening was practiced; namely, he advocated for irregular, picturesque gardens which were also havens for botanical study (the forerunner of arboretums). The influence of Loudon can still be seen in the organization of some of the Root Glen's gardens today. Oren Root was also known to have "eagerly followed the writings of Andrew Jackson Downing," the Hudson River landscape architect who promoted the natural English landscape style of gardening.<sup>5</sup> In 1844, six years before Oren Root purchased the Homestead, Downing published A

<sup>3</sup> Foster, "Maintenance Notes," 3; Anne Kinnel and Eugene Putala "Report: A Policy Regarding Memorial Gifts," n.d., Hamilton College Campus Correspondence, Hamilton College Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Elliott, Charles Watkins, and Stephen Daniels, "Combining Science with Recreation and Pleasure: Cultural Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Arboretums," *Garden History Society* 35, no. 2 (2007): 6-27.

<sup>5</sup> Audrey H. O'Connor, "I Planted Me a Garden, After the Manner of the Ancients," *Cornell Plantations* 21, no. 1 (1965): 9-13, 10.

*Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, which details many of the methods and practices that eventually came to characterize the Root Glen. Through careful planning and record keeping, the Root family developed planting schemes for every new acquisition. The growing popularity of arboretums throughout Europe, and eventually the United States, further shows that the desire to combine scientific study with recreation and pleasure was a new way through which people sought to trace the line between humanity and nature and become closer to the environment physically while intellectually sustaining their control over it.

While the Roots' hemlock hedge was developing its first branches in the mid-nineteenth century, another broader phenomenon was at work in the United States. The conservation movement pushed to preserve the country's wildlife, wild lands, and other natural resources. A combination of factors fueled the movement, such as newly available nature photographs, a rise in urbanization that led people to seek retreats into the countryside, and the influence of writers such as Henry David Thoreau and later, John Muir. On a small scale, its influence can be seen at the Root Glen. Although Hamilton College had been organized only thirty-eight years before the glen began to take shape, its inhabitants welcomed the introduction of new landscaping, implemented by the conservation-minded Professor Root.<sup>6</sup> Today the glen is seen as a haven, an escape from the world of classrooms, although we are surrounded by the rural environment at every turn. The glen was likely viewed in much the same way a century ago. Elihu Root's journal demonstrates the influence of the conservation movement on the way in which we view the natural environment and place value on it, considering the multitude of nature photographs pasted to its pages.<sup>7</sup> When Oren Root purchased the Homestead and adjoining college dump in 1850, he may not have realized

<sup>6</sup> O'Connor, "I Planted Me a Garden," 12.

<sup>7</sup> Journal, 1905, Elihu Root Papers, Hamilton College Archives.



*Southeastwards from Prof. Root's lawn.*

“Southeastwards from Prof. Root’s Lawn,” ca. 1890,  
Hamilton College Archives.

his involvement in the wider practice of conservation that was about to revolutionize the human-nature relationship. Since the first colonists settled in New England, people had maintained the belief that no amount of reckless waste could overcome the great abundance of the environment. Although in some ways this attitude has not yet faded from the collective American consciousness, the conservation movement was an exhilaratingly new approach to the landscape. The idea that humans and nature are completely separate entities began to wane in the face of unprecedented environmental concerns. The foundation, enhancement, and preservation of the Root Glen was one small example of how attitudes toward the natural environment were shifting during this time period.

Today, the Root Glen boasts over sixty-five species of trees and myriad shrubs, ferns, and flowers. Although nature is most often defined by its separation from humans, it is difficult to draw this distinction within the Root Glen. The red shale paths themselves serve as the main division between the people who visit and nature; the Root Glen is primarily a look-don't-touch environment. Such care has been taken to ensure that nature here remains as pristine as possible, even though this is something of a paradox: nature that has truly never been altered by human hands looks nothing like the carefully laid garden beds and hybridized irises woven throughout the lawn. However, the Root Glen remains just as much of a litmus test for attitudes toward the natural environment as it did when Oren and Nancy first selected the spot.

## *Rogers Glen*

Laura Kwasnoski

ON THE MARGIN of an expanse of academic buildings, dormitories and athletic fields, Hamilton College contains an island of “natural” land. Located behind the Woollcott House and next to the community farm, a wall of trees delineates a typical college campus from nature. This tree line and the forest beyond, called Rogers Glen, is the largest and least-documented of Hamilton College’s three glens. Unlike the Kirkland Glen and the Root Glen, Rogers Glen has no formal trail maps, despite the vast network of walking and mountain biking trails that exist. Farm fields that border the forest and no trespassing signs are the only things that mark the boundaries of Rogers Glen.

In 1976, Hamilton biology professor Philip Rogers sold Rogers Ravine and the Rogers Estate to the college, but the area that is now called Rogers Glen had already been used by students, faculty, and community members for years before that.<sup>1</sup> In the 1950s, Hamilton College started an above ground landfill for large waste items in the glen. To this day, discarded items litter the streambed and floodplains in Rogers Glen, having washed downstream from the landfill over time.

Prior to 1930 (and the construction of the Rogers Estate), parts of the glen must have been harvested for lumber as evidenced by plant succession patterns. While some parts of the glen contain old-growth forest preserved by, others are home to intermediate succession forest patterns signifying that trees were likely cut for lumber. The glen serves as a case study to examine how human activity has shaped seemingly untouched parts of nature. For example, visitors to Rogers Glen can observe trash in

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Madonia correspondence with Vige Barrie, 20 August 2012; Stacy J. Himmelberger, “The Alumni,” *Hamilton Alumni Review*, 2006, 20–21.



Aerial view of campus showing Rogers Glen at bottom,  
Hamilton College Archives.

the streambed, old chain link fences near Rogers Estate, and patchiness in plant succession.

Two thousand years after the glaciers covering Upstate New York receded, the spruce, a conifer tree with tolerance for the cold, took root. Fir trees appeared shortly after followed by broadleaf trees: aspen, paper birch, and alder. As the region's climate began to stabilize, about nine thousand years ago, oak, maple, ash, white pine, and hemlock arrived. Then, about two thousand years ago, hardwoods such as American beech, sugar maple, and yellow birch began to grow in the valley regions of Upstate New York.<sup>2</sup> Native Americans of the Nipmuc, Pokanoket and Narragansett tribes were the first people in New York to use trees. The Native Americans cut trees near the edge of their settlements for fire and to clear space for agricultural practices. When colonists arrived in New England in the 1600s, the Native Americans believed the reason they sailed to America was to find more trees to cut down. In America, the colonists had easy access to hardwood trees.<sup>3</sup> Between 1630 and 1800, colonists used over 260 million cords of firewood. Clear cutting forests made room for agriculture and provided lumber for trade. There was a problem, though, in the method with which colonists used to chop down trees. Instead of avoiding smaller trees that did not have market value, colonists chopped down larger trees, using smaller trees to cushion the fall of the larger tree. The larger tree would then be sold while the remaining stumps of smaller trees were burned.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Marchand, *Nature Guide to the Northern Forest: Exploring the Ecology of the Forests of New York, New Hampshire, and Maine* (Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club Books, 2010), 1–3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

<sup>4</sup> William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 108–15; 120–21.

Looking at the historical context of Upstate New York, documented history of Rogers Glen and Hawthorn Farm, and the current state of the forest, Rogers Glen has been shaped in many ways by humans. Millions of New England and Upstate New York trees were cut down during the deforestation between 1630 and 1800 and again between 1895 and 1925. It is extremely likely that at least part of the land that is now Rogers Glen was logged and allowed to grow back. Logged land that was converted to agricultural land was deprived of nutrients due to late 1800s burning techniques.<sup>5</sup> As with the previous example of logging, it is highly probable at least part of Rogers Glen woods underwent burning techniques associated with logging and agriculture. More recently, the forested land of the glen was utilized as an above ground landfill for Hamilton College. Plant successional patterns changed with the building and removal of tennis courts as well as with the logging and allowance for regrowth. Rocks were imported and placed next to a pond to prevent stream erosion of the trail. Now, it is a recreational destination as well as an area for scientific study. As humans needs have changed, they are reflected in how they interact nature. Today, the glen is important to the study of the history of humans and the natural environment. It's easy to see how the decisions humans made in the glen have continued to impact the environment long after the decisions were made. The fact that people are asking why trash is still in Rogers Glen or what created the successional patchwork of trees signifies people are becoming aware and are seeing the direct impact of previous decisions.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 11.









Panoramic Photograph of Hamilton College by H.M. Beach, ca. 1911, Library of Congress.