Emily Zheng

AMST 335

Final Site Study

May 17, 2019

Lot 6: Ideas For Re-contextualizing and Reclaiming

Lot 6, as it was called in the 1750's, is a piece of land nestled on the corner of Main St and North St. As of May 2019, it is the home of The Williams Inn. Most people know the inn as a popular place for alumni and parents to stay when they visit Williamstown, and in many ways it is an iconic and beloved landmark of the College. Indeed, its location makes it one of the first buildings that people see when they enter campus. But what most people don't know is that the lot has had a tumultuous and complicated past, long before the inn was built in 1974. In reviewing the history, I find that the land is deeply entangled with themes of native displacement, colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy. Furthermore, it is important to note that the College is not exempt from involvement with these problematic themes; rather, it is responsible for perpetuating them. Although the Williams Inn is not a college building, the history of the land that the inn resides on is one intimately tied to the history of the college, and thus, is undeniably and unavoidably the responsibility of Williams College to "uncover" and address.

Before continuing, I want to establish that the work that I have done so far should not be viewed as a final, "end all" report, but rather as a first step in "uncovering" the site. My hope is that this paper will be used by future students to further study Lot 6 and examine the history of the College. Also, the facts that I have gathered in this paper are derived from a variety of

primary and secondary sources, and with the generous help of Professor Dorothy Wang, Professor Kevin Murphy, and Sylvia Brown, archivist at Sawyer Library. With that in mind, Figure 1 shows an overview of the events that have happened on Lot 6. In reviewing this timeline, I aim to prove that the land, as well as the College, were and still are deeply entangled in the issues of colonialism and capitalism.

The first point in the chronology is the settling of Williamstown in 1749. In 1751, Lot 6 was owned by a man by the name of William Chidester. Shortly thereafter in 1756, the West Hoosac Blockhouse was built on this land. Its location next to the Hoosic River was a strategic attempt to protect the settlement from French and Indian attacks during the war. It also granted the settlers of West Hoosac easy access to the Mohawk trail (present day Route 2). Once a popular Native American trade route, the Mohawk trail was overtaken by early European settlers who used the path to travel between settlements in New York and Massachusetts. Early contact with these settlers brought disease and death upon the neighboring Native American populations. Once the native populations were considerably weakened by illnesses, the English settlers pitted the Mohawk and Pocumtuck tribes against each other, a bloody conflict that effectively allowed the colonists to continue their expansion and settlement. On July 11, 1756, the blockhouse became the site of a battle between Indians (I was unable to find information on what group) and the English settlers occupying the blockhouse. At the front of the inn is a rock with a plaque on it that "commemorates" this event (Figure 3). The plaque says:

Here Stood the West Hoosac Blockhouse

> Built in 1756 on this house-lot Number Six under decree of the Great and General Court of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay in compliance with urgent appeal from the

homesteaders it served as sole refuge from their allied foes the French and Indians. It was witness on the evening of July 11 1756 of the massacre of Sergeant William Chidester his son James and Captain Elisha Chapin by the enemy in ambush without its northern portal. Here in peaceful assembly were laid the foundations of town government.

To honor the memory of the original settlers of West Hoosac who endured the perils and the appalling loneliness of the wilderness in heroic defense of this barrier township.

Kappa Alpha in Williams College places this stone of remembrance in the year one thousand nine hundred and sixteen.

The language in this inscription is misleading in that it clearly paints the settlers as the protagonists of the story, while the French and Indians are labeled as the antagonists. The white settlers are described as the "original" settlers, even though many Native tribes had occupied the area long beforehand. Furthermore, the Blockhouse is described as a "sole refuge" and and the settlers as great heroes who "endured" and persevered through perilous conditions. Such language whitewashes history by contributing to the narratives of "firsting" while demonizing the Native Americans who lived on the land in the first place, implying that they are savage and unpredictably aggressive. Indeed, there is a feature in the Williams Record that marks the unveiling of this monument (Figure 4). Published in 1916, the article is titled "Location of Old West Hoosac Fort and Work of Original Settler Commemorated" and details the event, which included the reading of letters of appreciation from U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and President of Williams College, Harry Augustus Garfield. On behalf of the College, Garfield expressed his belief in the value of the monument and the "great accomplishment of those soldier-citizens whose memory it perpetuates."

As the article proves, both the College, the town, and the nation at the time clearly endorsed the message inscribed on the plaque. Their support is essentially an endorsement of Native genocide, since it implies that the early residents of Williamstown should be remembered and celebrated for settling on Indian territory. Thus, this rock demonstrates the racist and colonial attitudes that prevailed not only during the founding of Williamstown, but also throughout the early 20th century. The fact that it is allowed to exist today on the lawn of The Williams Inn, without any sort of context or history, is questionable and problematic. Williams College, what message are you sending to your students, to this town, and to the rest of the country by allowing this monument to exist as it is?

Around 1768, the blockhouse is torn down and is most likely replaced by either a private home or a small business. Lot 4, which is right next to Lot 6, is sold to a man named Dr. Jacob Meack in 1768, who is the main physician of the town.[1] In the following decades, he worked out of his practicing office, which he built on the plot of land that he purchased. There is over a one hundred year gap in the timeline before I am able to find more evidence of ownership, but a map of Williamstown made in 1876 shows that both Lot 6 and Lot 4 at this time are owned by a man named J.H. Hosford (Figure 5). Because this area was occupied by homes and businesses at the beginning of the gap and also at the end, it seems reasonable to conclude that in the late 18th century and for most of the early 19th century, Lot 6 was a relatively undisturbed and uneventful place to be and was most likely occupied by private homes and small businesses.

The tone of this area begins to change in the 1830s. At the beginning of this decade, Williams College renovates an old public building across the street into Mansion House (Figure

---

[1] *Origins in Williamstown*, authored by Arthur Latham Perry

6), which became a centerpiece of campus and was used to host many important events within the College and the community (Williams Special Collections). However, in 1872, the house burned down and the Greylock Hotel (Figure 7) was built in its place. Unlike its predecessor, Greylock Hotel was a huge commercial success. A sprawling building with four stories, the hotel was a grandiose and luxurious place that attracted many wealthy visitors. Right around the corner from the hotel, a colonial mansion is built in 1894 for the infamous Harley T. Procter of Procter and Gamble. While a consumer goods company may seem "neutral" and non-political, a deeper dive into Procter's history reveals strong ties with colonialism and capitalism. Procter was considered the father of modern advertising and the company grew enormously in profits under his leadership. He coined P&G's best-selling product, "Ivory Soap", which he sold to the Union Army during the Civil War to make his fortune. While Procter supported the Union Army during the war, there is no evidence that points to him being an abolitionist. It is more likely that Procter saw the Union Army as a market for his product, and decided to capitalize on the opportunity in order to make a profit. In this way, the grandiose Procter mansion can be seen as a literal manifestation of capitalism. Figure 8 also shows an example of an advertisement that was used to market Ivory Soap. In the ad, Uncle Sam is pictured handing out bars of the soap to Native Americans. The ad describes the soap as a tool used to "civilize" the Indians, promising to "change their nature day by day, and wash their darkest blots away." In direct contrast to the Indians, Uncle Sam is centered in the drawing and wears a tall hat and fancy suit. All the people in the picture are drawn to be smiling, which tells a story where Indians are gratefully and eagerly accepting the soap, and thus, celebrating Uncle Sam as their "savior." This advertisement is illuminating because it shows that Harley T. Procter was guilty of participating in Native

American erasure and whitewashing. But perhaps more startling, it shows how even something as supposedly “neutral” as soap can be deeply entangled in a racist agenda.

It may be darkly fitting, then, that the Kappa Alpha fraternity, the first official fraternity at Williams, occupied this location next. The fraternity had actually occupied various other buildings on campus before moving into the Mansion, but at the beginning of the 20th century, the corner of Main St. and North St. was bustling with life. With the extravagant Greylock Hotel and the site’s location at the very forefront of the town, this area was absolutely the central hub of activity. In 1907, Procter Mansion was officially transferred over to the fraternity.

Examining the history and mission of Kappa Alpha reveals many troubling discoveries about the fraternity and its relationship to the College. Before its founding as Kappa Alpha, the fraternity was named Kuklos Adelphon. It was established at the University of North Carolina in 1812 and quickly expanded throughout the Southern United States, but dissolved after the end of the Civil War. The new Kappa Alpha was founded at Washington and Lee University in 1865. But whether Kuklos Adelphon or Kappa Alpha, the fraternity has always had many disturbing ties to slavery and white supremacy. For example, the founder of the Ku Klux Klan has heavily implied that the Klan’s initiation ritual was inspired by the fraternity, stating that the Klan rituals were “modeled on and embraced the leading features of the rituals of an order which has long been popular in many colleges and universities…” During the war, the fraternity openly supported and welcomed people in the Confederate Army (Figure 11). Even today, Kappa Alpha lauds Robert E. Lee as one of its “spiritual founders” (Figure 10). Despite the fact that Lee was a slave-owner and leader of the Confederate Army, Kappa Alpha proudly cites Lee as the “definition of a gentleman.” In this way, Kappa Alpha’s occupation of the house adds a racially

charged dimension to Lot 6, and adds to the whole chronology serious issues of white supremacy and racism. Although the fraternity was clearly emblematic of these issues, Williams College openly embraced Kappa Alpha and regarded the organization with the highest pride and prestige. A 1933 edition of The Record echoes this fact with a short blurb called, "'Kappa Alpha' Centennial" (Figure 12). In it, the Record describes the fraternity as an organization "which has been closely allied with the rising fortunes of the college during the past century. Ever have the members been loyal alumni, contributing their unstinted support to the welfare of the college – whether in varied fields, by bringing renown to the name of Williams or as member of the Faculty, and Board of Trustees, by serving the college directly. May this society continue to prosper in the future as it has in the past: not only for its own sake but also for that of Williams College." In this article, it becomes clear that not only was Kappa Alpha a highly regarded and well respected organization within the College, but also the College had vested financial interests in the fraternity. All in all, despiste the fraternity's obvious and direct involvement with white supremacy and the Confederacy, Williams College openly celebrated Kappa Alpha and prioritized its advancement.

In 1962, Williams College banned greek life on campus and the house was transferred to the college and renamed "Fort Hoosac House." In 1968, the Procter Mansion burned down and a new, 100 room inn was built in its place. This building, finished in 1974, is the present day Williams Inn.

With this chronology laid out, it should be clear now that the land on which the inn resides has a deep history rooted in colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy. Despite this, there is little acknowledgement of the past by the college or the inn. Ironically, the inn seems to

purposely dwell in the past and actively markets itself as a Williams time capsule. Upon entering, it is obvious that the inn is designed to invoke a warm, nostalgic feeling. The lobby is decorated with anachronic furniture, including looming brass chandeliers, armchairs, ornate vases, paintings, and a fireplace (Figure 16, 17, 18). There is also a wooden cabinet in the corner of the room with glass windows, filled with various Williams Inn memorabilia: key chains, matchboxes that say "Treadway Inns", alumni pins from different years, old postcards, newspaper articles, books, and cutlery with embellished engravings (Figure 20). However, the objects are crammed and placed on top of each other in a way that makes no single object in the cabinet completely discernable, which invokes a sense of claustrophobia and clutter. All of these decorations suggest that the inn attracts its visitors and makes its money by purposely invoking warm memories of a rosy past, a past where the genocide of millions of Native Americans, African Americans, and other people of color is erased from the story.

Unfortunately, this simultaneous refusal to address yet longing for the past is not a new theme in today's society. The Williams Inn is similar to other places on campus, such as the Haystack Monument or the Log, in that it is deeply tied to the college and issues of colonialism. However, it is different from these spaces because the inn is able to hide under the guise of "neutrality." Unlike a religious monument or a painting, a piece of land is not often thought of as controversial. But now that we have "uncovered" some of its history and established that the current site is problematic, we must go about the much harder problem of figuring out how to actually redress the situation. Re-contextualization, although a popular approach, is an elusive method. How do we actually re-contextualize something? Before I discuss possible ideas, I want to point out that re-contextualization places the burden of explanation and emotional labor on the

people who already know the history or have to live with it in their daily lives. The people who really benefit from the re-contextualization are usually the ones who knows the least, or are the most privileged. Meanwhile, the victims of Western colonialism are forced to relive the history for the sake of educating the masses. This is not to say that re-contextualization is bad, just that it isn't an "equal and fair" solution for all people. With that in mind, I believe that one first step to take in re-contextualization Lot 6 is to recognize the true course of events that have led up to the present day Williams Inn. Maybe it would be helpful to make a digital sign in front of the Lot that is easily accessible from Main St. The sign could have Figure 1 or something like it, and people could tap any circle on the timeline to reveal another page with more detail about the event that happened. I would also recommend either removing the rock from Kappa Alpha or installing a sign next to it with more detailed information about the fraternity's problematic history and Williams' own involvement in supporting the brotherhood. But at the end of the day, actions must speak louder than words. Our institution cannot truly be held accountable until Williams College openly and publicly acknowledges this history and actively commits to plans for redress. Williams College must commit to admitting more Native American students and hiring and tenuring Native American faculty. The College should also hire an external investigation on their history, and write a similar report to that of Harvard's and Brown's. Additionally, with the new Williams Inn being built on Spring St., we must seize the opportunity to repurpose and reclaim Lot 6. Ideas include a Native American art and history museum, a memorial[2], or a Native American resource center.

[2] See Figure 22 for a memorial that I designed in architecture class for this very purpose!

Whatever is to happen next, one thing for certain is that we cannot leave things as they are now. The current narratives of nobility, generosity, and heroism must be disrupted. The story that we know (which is only a tiny fraction of the entire story) starts from the West Hoosac Blockhouse, which was a small piece in a larger global effort to colonize Native lands and displace millions of Native American people. Afterwards, the Procter Mansion was built, symbolizing the accumulation of wealth that occurs from capitalizing on systems of oppression and inequality. And finally, the land was occupied by Kappa Alpha, a fraternity that embodies white supremacist ideals with clear connections to the KKK and other pro-slavery bodies. Even still, this chronology is still far from complete. Where there is history buried, there is also more history left to uncover. The land underneath the Williams Inn is merely one example, but it is a good starting point and step in the right direction as we continue to have conversations about how to confront and take action in the wake of our troubled histories.