

# SIMSBURY

## Genealogical and Historical Research Library

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### Melvin Hathaway Hapgood (1859 -1899)

#### The Architect Who Designed the Simsbury Free Library Building

A seventh generation descendant of Shadrach Hapgood who arrived in Massachusetts from England in 1656 at the age of fourteen, Melvin Hathaway Hapgood and his architectural firm designed several significant Simsbury buildings.<sup>1</sup> Hapgood was born February 11, 1859, in a log cabin in the pioneer settlement of Minneapolis, Minnesota, where his parents had bought a forty-acre claim shortly after their marriage. They established a farm and eventually erected a more permanent house; but the Indian problem, culminating in the Sioux massacre of August 1862, convinced them to return east.

The family settled in Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1866 after Hapgood's father found a permanent position as a machinist in Boston. Hapgood attended Prescott Grammar School and Charlestown High School, where he demonstrated an aptitude for drawing and design.<sup>2</sup> During his last three years of high school he spent his afternoons and evenings studying at the Massachusetts Normal Art School and the Lowell Institute Drawing School. After graduation from high school in 1877, he became a student in the Boston architectural office of William Gibbons Preston and continued evening classes at the art school. He also took classes in industrial drawing at the Appleton Street School, attended architectural lectures at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and taught drawing at the Bird School in South Boston.

In 1880 he spent a year abroad studying European architecture, specializing in interior decoration.<sup>3</sup> On his return he went back to Preston's office, which was then handling such projects as the Mason Building at Liberty Square and the William Read house at Hull, Massachusetts.

Hapgood came to Hartford, Connecticut, in 1882 to work for the prominent architect and builder John C. Mead, whose office was at 141 Trumbull Street.<sup>4</sup> Material in one of Hapgood's personal scrapbooks shows that while he worked for Mead he designed many stained glass windows, including thirty for the Hartford County Courthouse. He also designed the interior of the library in the Ebenezer Roberts house (now called the Isham-Terry house) and the music room in the Charles Dudley Warner house at Nook Farm. He assisted Mead with designing the Connecticut Fire Insurance Company's office building.<sup>5</sup>

Hapgood left Mead's firm in 1884 and went into business for himself at 234 Asylum Street. It was at this juncture that he received the commission to design the Simsbury Free Library. In fact, the library may have been his first independent commission of importance. A portrait photograph in his scrapbook shows that at twenty-seven he was a slim, clear-eyed, short-haired bachelor with a neat mustache. A friend once wrote of him, "Probably the first impression from his personality was that of physical exuberance. He was indefatigable, quick, eager, impetuous, with a kind of elemental or even untamed vigor."<sup>6</sup>

Nothing in the minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Simsbury Free Library indicates how its building committee happened to choose Melvin Hapgood to design the library building, and his name is never mentioned. The one pertinent entry is dated September 5, 1887, “Also voted the Trustees accept the plan submitted by the Building Committee for a Library building, provided the estimates come within the appropriation made by Mr. A.R. Eno.” The small book *Report of the Proceedings at the Dedication of the Simsbury Free Library* reveals that Ralph Hart Ensign, who was the president of the board, was chairman of the building committee. It says “In the summer of 1887 Mr. Eno placed in the hands of a building committee selected from the board of trustees, consisting of Mr. R. H. Ensign, Mr. W. H. Whitehead, and Mr. J. B. McLean, the sum of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000), with instructions to select, plan, and erect such a building as would be appropriate for the Library. Mr. M. H. Hapgood of Hartford was employed to furnish the design from which this building has been constructed.”<sup>7</sup>

While the library was under construction, this description of the building was published by the American Library Association:

SIMSBURY, CONN. Free Library. – A brick building, costing \$10,000, the gift of Amos R. Eno, will be completed in July. The extreme dimensions are 51 x 36 feet. For the bookroom, 20 x 48 feet, wall cases will be used for the present, and later alcoves, with the capacity of 8,000 volumes. In the second story are living-rooms for the librarian. The building is in the Colonial Style, and was designed by Melvin H. Hapgood, of Hartford.<sup>8</sup>

That same year an article on an architectural exhibition in New York City said, “a frame of drawings of Simsbury (Conn.) Free Library, by Melvin H. Hapgood of Hartford [is] also worthy of notice, evincing careful study of good models.”<sup>9</sup> Hapgood had become a member of the American Institute of Architects by 1882 and in 1894 he was elected a member of the Architectural League of New York.

By the time the library was dedicated on January 28, 1890, John C. Mead, Hapgood’s former employer, had died and left the business to his superintendent, Charles C. Cook. Cook, who was a builder and Hapgood, the architect, formed the firm of Cook, Hapgood & Co. at the address on Trumbull Street. In December of that year, Hapgood married Mary Morgan Smith, daughter of James Allwood Smith, whose ancestors included the founder of Hartford, Thomas Hooker; a founder of Springfield, Massachusetts, Miles Morgan; and Mayflower passengers Priscilla and John Alden. Within nine years the Hapgoods became the parents of five children.

While a partner in the firm Cook, Hapgood & Co., Melvin Hapgood designed the first two phases of the Erwin Home for Worthy and Indigent Women in New Britain. This Queen Anne style building is one of his buildings that are now on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>10</sup> In Hartford the partners designed and built the Board of Education building at 6 Atlantic Street and a large addition to the Northwest School.<sup>11</sup> In addition to public buildings, the partners designed and built or modified many private residences.

In 1893 Charles Cook withdrew from the partnership, but continued his building company.



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Hapgood's cousin, architect Edward Thomas Hapgood, had recently joined the group, and they formed the architectural firm Hapgood & Hapgood. Both Cook and the Hapgoods stayed at the same address on Trumbull Street.

Edward Hapgood, who was seven years younger than Melvin, had received training in New York City similar to Melvin's in Boston. He studied under Lyman Tuckerman in the art school at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and in the office of architect George Martin Huss and traveled in Europe before opening an office of his own at 1285 Broadway. Just prior to joining his cousin's firm, he married Elizabeth M. Smith, daughter of G. Fredrick Smith of Hartford.

After his success with the Simsbury Free Library, Melvin Hapgood continued to receive commissions for work in Simsbury. The most ambitious of these was the design for the Simsbury Casino, erected in 1896. This wooden building on Hopmeadow Street, nearly across from the library, served the people of the town as a social and cultural center until it was torn down in 1931 to make way for the Eno Memorial Hall. The shingle style Casino has been compared architecturally to the Casino in Newport, Rhode Island, which still stands.<sup>12</sup>



**A. E. Lathrop Postcard of the Simsbury Casino • Richard E. Curtiss Collection**

Hapgood designed an office building for the Ensign-Bickford company and did work on the Wilcox/Pattison General Store (now modified to be the Fiddler's Green complex). There are indications that he did work on Amos R. Eno's house and one of the churches and a school in town.<sup>13</sup>

In 1898 when they were entered into their family's genealogy, the two Hapgoods stated that they had designed about three hundred buildings, both public and private, from Maine to Colorado. In Hartford they had designed the major part of the Asylum Avenue Baptist Church and the Theodore Lyman House at 22 Woodland Street, which is now the Town and County Club. Another of the buildings now on the National Register of Historic Places is "Esperanza" in New Hartford. This was a farm house that Melvin Hapgood remodeled and enlarged for his distant cousin, Julie Palmer Smith. She was a feminist and romance novelist and in this house she and her family entertained luminaries including Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Gillette, George Inness, Louis Comfort Tiffany, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Walt Whitman and H. G. Wells.<sup>14</sup>

This seems a good place to mention the Hapgoods' cousin Isabel Florence Hapgood, who also was a contemporary of theirs. Miss Hapgood completed her formal education at Miss Porter's School in Farmington and proved to be an extraordinary linguist. By the time she made her first trip to Russia,

accompanied by her mother in 1887, she was noted for her translations of *Epic Songs of Russia*, the Tolstoy trilogy *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* and Gogol's *Taras Bul'ba, Dead Souls* and other works. During repeated trips abroad, she became a close friend of Tolstoy and his family and solicited American donations for his campaign to help peasants during the Russian famine of 1891-92. The literature that she translated from Russian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and Polish makes too long a list to cite here, but it includes Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* and Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*.<sup>15</sup> Melvin Hapgood apparently took an early interest in his cousin, as he presented her with a copy of *Melodies of the Epic Songs of Russia*.<sup>16</sup>

Melvin H. Hapgood died of cancer on July 4, 1899, when he was forty years old. His obituary describes him as "one of the best known citizens of Hartford and one of the foremost citizens of the day."<sup>17</sup> A friend wrote this summation of his skill as an architect, "Aesthetically, he surely had a strain of high genius. His exquisite sensitiveness to nature and all its manifestations, his instinct regarding outlines and proportions, his altogether remarkable sense of color and its artistic applications, his incessant impulse to construct and create, to invent new appeals to the eye for beauty and to work them out with most laborious minuteness, and thus to find ways of expressing through form and color his own overflowing individuality—these were the traits of a born artist. His professional work, much of the best of which was outside Hartford, always bore the mark, not only of technical expertness and fertile ingenuity, but of a certain insistent and even passionate fervor that is too rare in architectural work."<sup>18</sup>

After Melvin's death, Edward Hapgood continued the business. He designed the brownstone Simsbury High School building on Hopmeadow Street, which now serves as the Simsbury Town Hall. His best known projects were done in collaboration with New York architect Donn Barber—the Connecticut State Library and Supreme Court building and the Travelers Insurance Company building, the latter completed after his death. Like his cousin, Edward Hapgood died at a young age. He was just forty-eight in 1915 when he succumbed to complications of heart trouble and Bright's disease.<sup>19</sup>

By Mary Jane Springman

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## Notes

Except where otherwise indicated, the information in this article has been taken from the following three sources. "The Founding and Construction of the Simsbury Free Library" by Mary Jane Springman, an unpublished paper written in 1984 for American Studies 501 at Trinity College in Hartford, is available in the Simsbury Free Library. The second is *The Architecture of Melvin H. Hapgood and Edward T. Hapgood: Catalog of the Exhibition* published by the Stowe-Day Foundation in Hartford in conjunction with the foundation's exhibition of the architects' work April – September, 1992. Both of these sources rely on the genealogy compiled by Warren Hapgood, *The Hapgood Family: Descendants of Shadrach, 1656-1898*, and published by him in Boston in 1898. The text of this book is available through Heritage Quest. If you have a valid card at any Connecticut public library, you have free access to this Internet site through [www.iconn.org](http://www.iconn.org).

Evidently Melvin Hapgood worked closely with Warren Hapgood, a much older man, on his family's genealogy. In the front of the book the compiler wrote, "Any persons discovering errors or omissions will kindly report them to Melvin H. Hapgood, Hartford, Conn., who, we trust, will live to issue a new and improved edition." However, Melvin Hapgood was fated to die the year after the genealogy was published.

1. Hapgood's school records give his name as Melvin P. Hapgood. Sometime in the 1880s he began to use Hathaway, his mother's maiden name, as his middle name.

2. Hapgood's early skill and training in developing motifs from nature can be seen in a study he did

SGHRL SPRING TALK  
**Genealogy 101: Beginnings & Review**

Janet Pestey, Speaker

**Saturday, May 2, 2009**

**10:00 A.M.**

**At the Library**

If genealogy is new to you, Janet Pestey's presentation will help you get started. If you have begun to research your family history, but have gotten stalled, you will benefit from learning about some new resources, especially on the Internet. Your questions are welcome. She also will distribute useful handouts.

Mrs. Pestey, a retired educator, is on the board of the Connecticut Society of Genealogists. She volunteers at the Woodbridge Family History Center and has taught many family research courses in community colleges and adult education programs.

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when he was seventeen at Charlestown High School and preserved in one of his scrapbooks at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center Library (formerly the Stowe-Day Foundation). He did a botanical analysis of a violet plant and its adaptation to commercial design, such as, a capital, tiles, cloth, wallpaper, lace and so forth.

3. Mary P. Morris, "Scrapbooks of Clippings from Hartford Newspapers: 1877-1923" (Collection at the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut), 35:34.

4. Elihu Geer, *Geer's Hartford City Directory, 1883*, 106. This early directory says that Hapgood is a draughtsman. In later directories he is called an architect.

5. Hapgood's scrapbooks; Morris, 35:33. The Isham-Terry house at 211 High Street in Hartford is now operated as a historic house museum by the Connecticut Landmark Society.

6. *Hartford Courant*, July 12, 1899, 10. From a letter to the paper signed W.S.P., Hartford. (All references from this newspaper are from a search of the Historical Hartford Courant using [www.iconn.org](http://www.iconn.org).)

7. *Report of the Proceedings at the Dedication of the Simsbury Free Library, January 28, 1890* (Hartford, Conn.: Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1893), 3, 8-9. Melvin Hapgood drew the picture of the library that appears facing page thirteen in this book. (The same drawing is reproduced on pages two and eight of this newsletter.) The book also includes his sketches of the interior of the front door and the fireplace. His framed rendering of the plan for the building now hangs over the fireplace in the library.

8. Addison Van Name, "Report on Library Architecture" in *Papers and Proceedings of the Tenth General Meeting of the American Library Association Held at Saint Louis, May 8-11, 1889* (Boston: Library Bureau, 1889), 27. (Located during an Internet search for "Melvin Hapgood" on Google Books.) It should be noted that no librarian ever lived on the second floor of the Simsbury Free Library building.

9. *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts*, vol.12 (n.p.: Good Literature Publishing Co.,

❧ SGHRL Updates ❧

Heartfelt thanks from the board and staff...

To Richard Wagner Jr. for the gently-used copying machine that has replaced one that failed beyond repair.

To Celia Ann Roberts for her donation of *Forgotten Patriots: African American and American Indian Patriots in the Revolutionary War* edited by Eric Grundset and published in 2008 by the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution.

To Jackson Eno for his donation of *The Loveliest Woman in America: A Tragic Actress, Her Lost Diaries, and Her Granddaughter's Search for Home* by Bibi Gaston. In November Mr. Eno brought the author to visit the Simsbury Free Library. Ms. Gaston is the granddaughter of the subject of the book, Rosamond Pinchot Gaston, and a descendant of Amos R. Eno, who donated the library and its building.

To Richard Curtiss for allowing us to use the picture of the Simsbury Casino, one of the scores of postcards in his amazing collection of historical images of Simsbury. And to his wife Lorraine for her gracious help with making arrangements no matter how busy their office is.

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1889), 220. (Google Books search)

10. "New Listings on the National Register of Historic Places" *Connecticut Preservation News*, July/August 2002, vol. 25, no. 4; 6-7.

11. Anne Crofoot Kuckro, *Hartford Architecture, Volume One: Downtown* (Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1978), 110, 118; *Hartford Courant*, August 22, 1890, 5; September 30, 1890, 1.

12. Reverdy Whitlock, *By Grit and Grace: The First One Hundred Years of Westminster School* (Simsbury: Westminster School, 1988), 59.

13. *The Architecture of Melvin H. Hapgood and Edward T. Hapgood: Catalog of the Exhibition*, 31-32. As of this writing, the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center Library (successor to the Stowe-Day Foundation) is undergoing an extensive climate control project and the Hapgood papers are in storage and unavailable to researchers until 2010. *Hartford Courant*, May 18, 1891, 3.

14. "New Listings....," 6. A detailed account of this project was published in *Arts Interchange*, March 1895, vol. 34, no. 3; 88.

15. "A Linguistic Bridge to Orthodoxy: In Memoriam Isabel Florence Hapgood" by Marina Ledkovsky, Professor Emeritus of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Barnard College, Columbia University, 4,6. A lecture delivered at the Twelfth Annual Russian Orthodox Musicians Conference, 7-11 October 1998, Washington, D.C., accessed through Project Canterbury at <http://anglicanhistory.org/women/hapgood/ledkovsky.pdf>

16. Somehow this volume, with its notation that it was a gift from Melvin to his cousin Isabel, found its way into the vast collection of books amassed by bibliographer and librarian Wilberforce Eames. See *Catalogue of the Library of Wilberforce Eames...For Sale at Auction...by the Anderson Auction Company* (New York: D. Taylor & Co., 1905). (Google Books search)

17. Mary P. Morris, 35:34.

18. *Hartford Courant*, July 12, 1899. 10.

19. "Sudden Death of Edward T. Hapgood" *Hartford Courant*, September 11, 1915, 18.

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The Simsbury Free Library Presents

# Teddy Roosevelt: Mind, Body and Spirit

Our 26th President Brought to Life by Author and Actor  
Ted Zalewski

Wednesday, April 29, 2009  
7:00 P.M.

**In Eno Memorial Hall**

(across Hopmeadow Street from the library)

A soldier, naturalist, big game hunter, historian, political maverick and global statesman who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Teddy Roosevelt was a multi-faceted man. He came from a wealthy industrialist family and rose through the Republican Party, yet he became a fearsome "trust buster" of big business. As a crusading politician he held a wide range of offices, including New York City Police Commissioner and Governor of New York. He served with gallantry in the Spanish American War and helped to create the U.S. National Park System. His visage is enshrined on Mt. Rushmore.

From the first moment that *Hail to the Chief* is played and "TR" appears, you will feel that President Theodore Roosevelt is once again on the stage of American history. Much of the presentation uses Roosevelt's own words. The First Act takes place at the White House on March 3, 1909, the last full day of Roosevelt's term. Act Two takes place ten years later on the night of January 5, 1919 at Sagamore Hill, Roosevelt's home in Oyster Bay, New York. The show combines history, drama and fun.

Ted Zalewski has performed his nationally acclaimed one-man show at the White House, Smithsonian Institution, National Archives, National Theatre and Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.; the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, McKinley Memorial and John F. Kennedy Library; the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Mohonk Mountain House, Bretton Woods Mountain Resort, Yellowstone National Park and many other sites throughout the United States. He has also appeared on NBC's *Today Show*.

**General Admission \$20, Students & Seniors \$10, Patrons \$50**

**Patrons will be seated in a special section and have their pictures taken with the president.**

**Tickets may be purchased at the Simsbury Free Library  
or at the door.**

**For information please call the library at 860.658.5382.**

## An Open Forum Discussion on World War II....

Featuring Local Members of "The Greatest Generation"  
Both Veterans and Those Who Were on the Home Front

Saturday, March 28, 2009

10:00 A.M - 12:30 P.M.

Simsbury Free Library

World War II - which ended more than sixty years ago - was one of the most significant events of the 20th Century. Join us as local veterans and people who experienced the war on the home front share their thoughts and experiences.

For the past several years local veterans have visited Simsbury High School to give students their firsthand accounts of widely varying experiences during the war. These sessions have proven to be highly beneficial to all involved.

Now the Simsbury Free Library welcomes the opportunity to give the broader community a chance to hear from and interact with the veterans and home front civilians in an informal, open discussion.

**Free Admission - Audience Participation Welcome**

★ Please see pages 5 & 7 for programs in April & May ★

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Thurs.-Sat. 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Allison B. Krug, Library Director

Mary Jane Springman, Newsletter Editor

