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COMMUNICATIONS

The Continuation of Phillip T. Young's Research: a New Article about Asa Hopkins, Jabez M. Camp, and Firth, Hall & Pond Woodwind Making

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We humans have a fascination for beginnings; we like to know how, when, and where things started. Phillip T. Young wrote in the preface to his 1962 Yale Master's thesis: "In 1959, the author was given a boxwood clarinet, which a wife of a colleague on the Taft School faculty had found in an attic in Litchfield, Connecticut . . . their gift has resulted in the present study and all the enjoyment its construction has given me." Phil's study of woodwind making in Litchfield, Connecticut was perhaps the first scholarly investigation of wind instrument making in the United States, and the interest it created stimulated the collection, study, restoration, and display of the products of a significant early American industry that were then practically unknown.

In the late 1960s Phil introduced me to Arthur Graves, a grandson of Samuel Graves, told me about the strange bass clarinets made in Hartford, Connecticut by George Catlin, and thus started me in the field. As studies of other American woodwind makers have been published, it has always been the hope that Phil would publish an article based on the Yale thesis. Unfortunately, he never did, but recently, a study expanding on his work appeared in a publication about watch and clock making: Bryan Vernimb and Snowden Taylor, "The Hopkins Clockmakers of Litchfield and Harwinton, CT; Parts 1A, B. Asa Hopkins, Litchfield," *NAWCC Watch & Clock Bulletin*, June 2011 pp. 278–301 and August 2011 pp. 421–433.

The section of this article, "Asa Hopkins after Clockmaking" detailing his musical instrument making is on pages 424–428 and contains all of the material from the Young thesis as well as additional information Phil discovered since 1962, and adds a lot more about Hopkins' early clock making. It is pleasing to see this information finally readily available in print, and to recognize Phillip T. Young's significance in initiating the study of woodwind making in this country and in mentoring those of us who followed.

What is missing from Vernimb and Taylor's article is an appreciation for the various woodwinds and the quality of workmanship found in

woodwinds by Asa Hopkins, his partner, Jabez M. Camp, and his successor Firth and Hall. Here are photos of selected woodwinds with an abridged account of the firms' activities, according to the research left by Phil Young.

Instruments with this stamp:

A.HOPKINS
LITCHFIELD
CONN

are from the years that this partnership existed and probably from the year or two preceding the partnership while Asa was setting up the new operation, therefore 1827–1837 inclusive (fig. 1).

Jabez Camp succeeded Asa as general partner in 1837 when a new co-partnership was formed to replace the original. The new firm was established for a two-year period only, to 1839, and its investor-partners were Jabez, Asa, Luke Lewis, Oliver Goodwin, Sylvestre Galpin, and new member Elijah Nettleton (Litchfield Land Records, Town Clerk's Office). The firm name and stamp:

J.M.CAMP
LITCHFIELD
CONN

became as shown, and the products differ in no significant way (fig. 2). Although still a partner, Asa's actual on-site participation must have dropped considerably if not yet totally. Jabez Camp was twenty-six, energetic, and knowledgeable about the entire operation. He continued as manager of the factory for at least two further years even after it was sold in 1839 to Firth & Hall, of New York City.

It was apparently Firth and Hall who first gave the name "Fluteville" to the village that sprang up around the woodwind factory during their lengthy ownership. A boarding house for workers was their first addition, but eventually there were individual workers' homes, one or more stores, a school, and even a US Post Office. They probably bought the Hopkins/Camp company in order to transfer their woodwind making from Franklin Square in then-midtown New York City to this new location. Not only did the site boast a flourishing woodwind factory with the latest machinery and technology employing interchangeable parts, but it offered low or no taxes, enough "free" waterpower to meet the needs of a factory many times as large, unlimited space for expansion of the factory, a pleasant environment for workers and their families, and good access to transportation to major cities and shipping centers. An 1845

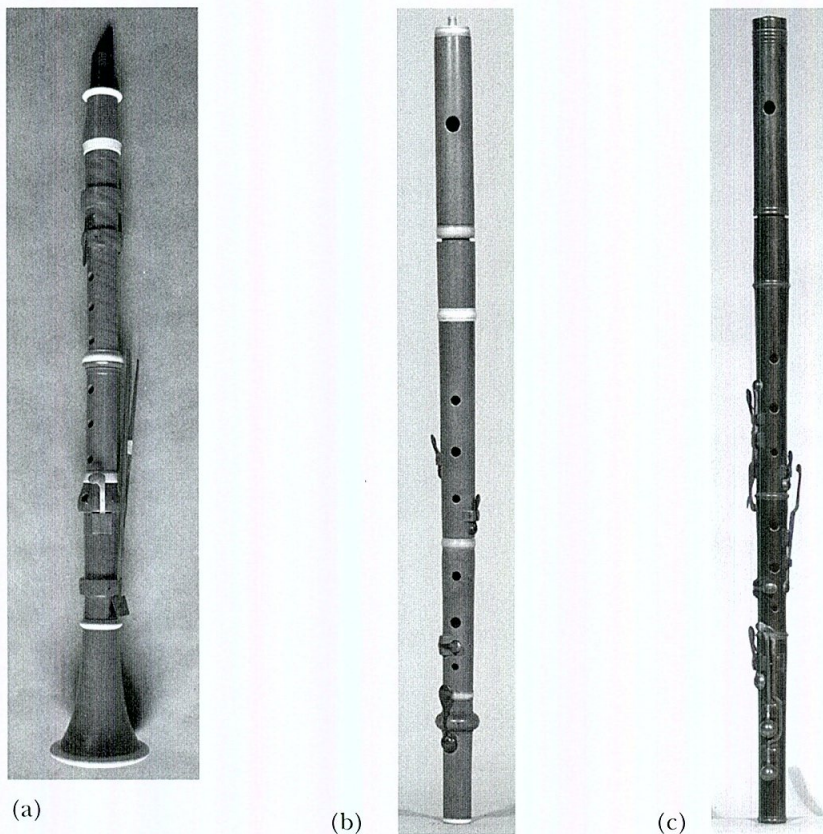


FIGURE 1a–c. (a) Clarinet in C, 5 keys, A. HOPKINS/LITCHFIELD/CONN. Photo courtesy of the Frederick R. Selch Collection, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH. (b) Flute in C, 4 keys, lined head, tuning slide, A. HOPKINS/LITCHFIELD/CONN, DCM 131. Photo courtesy of Dayton C. Miller Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (c) Flute in C, 9 keys, lined head, tuning slide, foot to C, A. HOPKINS/LITCHFIELD/CONN, DCM 901. Photo courtesy of Dayton C. Miller Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Connecticut census reports that the factory had grown to have \$8,000 worth of machinery, \$15,000 in capital, and sixteen employees.

There remains confusion even today about precisely when Firth & Hall became Firth Hall & Pond. Sylvanus Pond, formerly a partner of the Meachams in Albany, may indeed have been a silent partner of Firth & Hall since 1832 or 1833, as reported elsewhere, but the May 21, 1839 deed for the purchase of what was to become Fluteville specifies “John

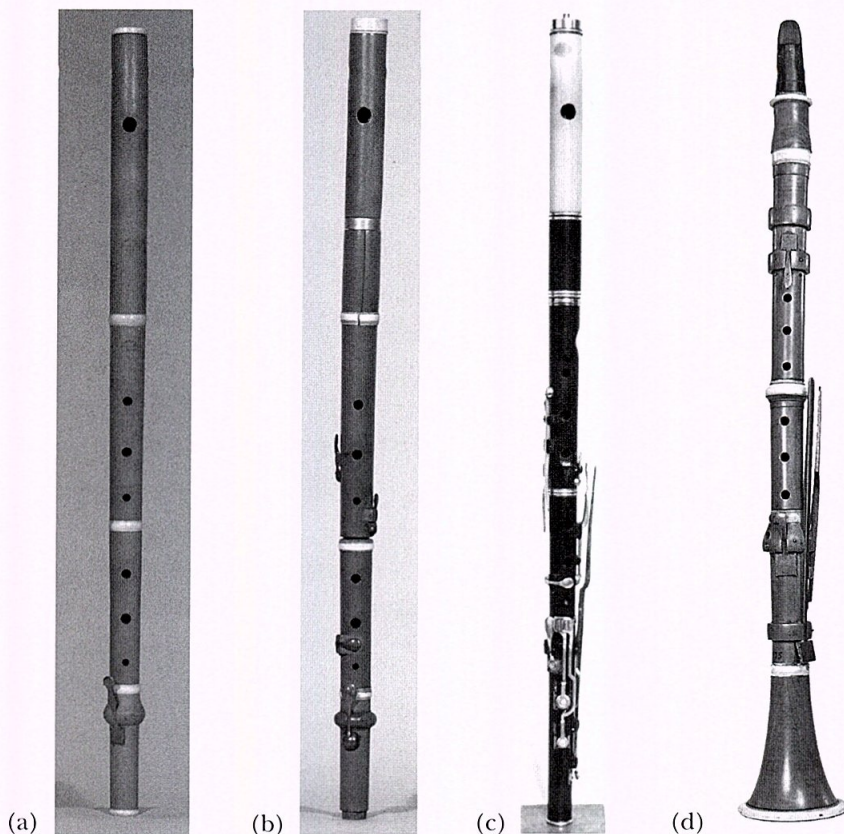


FIGURE 2a–d. (a) Flute in C, 1 key, DCM1155, J. M. CAMP/LITCHFIELD/CONN. Photo courtesy of Dayton C. Miller Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (b) Flute in C, 4 keys, lined head, tuning slide, DCM316, J. M. CAMP/LITCHFIELD/CONN. Photo courtesy of Dayton C. Miller Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (c) Flute in C, 9 keys, foot to B, cocus, lined ivory head, tuning slide. J. M. CAMP/LITCHFIELD/CONN. Formerly in the collection of John Alfredo, Bridgeport, CT. Photo courtesy of John Alfredo. (d) Clarinet in C, 5 keys, NMM 3530, J. M. CAMP/LITCHFIELD/CONN. Photo courtesy of National Music Museum, The University of South Dakota.

Firth and William Hall, partners in the firm of Firth & Hall, of the city and state of New York.” There is no mention of Firth Hall & Pond in the Litchfield land records even as late as 1846, the year before Hall withdrew as a member of the firm, which then became Firth Pond & Co. Comparatively few woodwinds survive today with the FIRTH & HALL

stamp, their New York City shop being of limited size and output. On the other hand, all or virtually all woodwinds produced in Fluteville by the new owners were stamped FIRTH HALL & POND/FRANKLIN SQ/N-YORK (fig. 3 and fig. 4).

Fifty-five instruments stamped thus survive in collections, as of Phil's 1993 research, presumably reflecting the seven or eight year period 1840–1847, as compared with just six surviving FIRTH & HALL instruments from the previous seven years, 1832–1839. It would be difficult to account for such an implied, sudden escalation in production otherwise, and the acquisition of Fluteville is a logical explanation. Despite that simple fact, three woodwinds exist that do bear the stamp FIRTH HALL & POND/LITCHFIELD/CONN, a four-keyed flute (No.1424 in the Dayton C. Miller Collection of the Library of Congress) and two B-flat clarinets in private collections in Litchfield and Newton Center, MA. Possibly more important, Phil owned a portion of a cocus flute barrel stamped (in part) FIRTH HALL & POND/N-YORK, which was dug up in the immediate vicinity of the foundation of the Fluteville factory. If not a deliberate prank, it would seem to prove that after 1839 or 1840, Firth Hall & Pond woodwinds stamped N-YORK were, in fact, made in Fluteville. This flute barrel was unearthed in the 1960s while digging extensively in and around the Fluteville foundation, realizing that no other woodwind shop known to Phil here or in Europe was still accessible for such excavation. He was rewarded by one fragment of the body of a band flute and another fragment with a slim conical bore, certainly not likely the top of an oboe but the right size at least. Ivory rings for mounts and scraps of brass were other treasures, along with rusty handmade nails, bits of files and a chisel, and a short section of a bandsaw blade.

Firth & Pond retreated back to New York in 1867 to concentrate on their thriving music publishing business. The Fluteville factory was purchased and operated by their last foreman, Frederick S. Porter (1810–1885), who in turn eventually sold out to John A. Hall in 1875. A flute by Hall is in the Litchfield Historical Society, but otherwise I am unaware of instruments existing by either maker. Eventually the factory was converted briefly to the manufacture of inexpensive cutlery, having no connection with the Northfield Knife Company, located on the edge of Northfield village itself.

Hopkins and Camp were significant in being among the earliest American woodwind makers, and in establishing a water powered shop that produced fine woodwinds for many years. Examples of these instru-

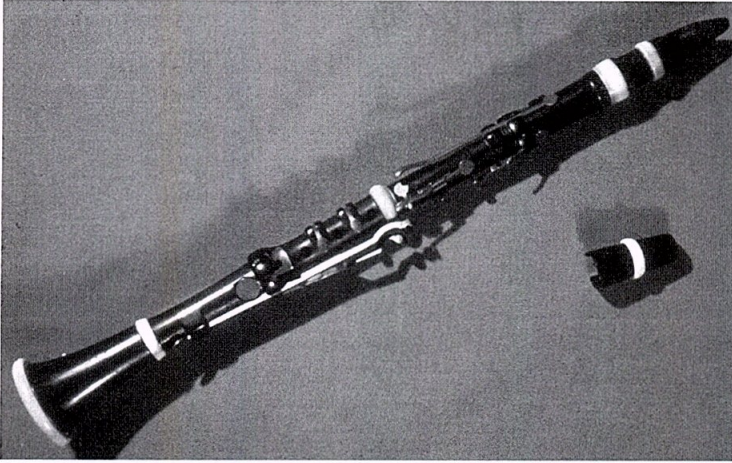


FIGURE 3. Clarinet in C, ebony with ivory ferrules, 12 keys. FIRTH, HALL & POND/FRANKLIN SQE/N-YORK, Henry Ford 71.70.33. Photo courtesy of The Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, MI.

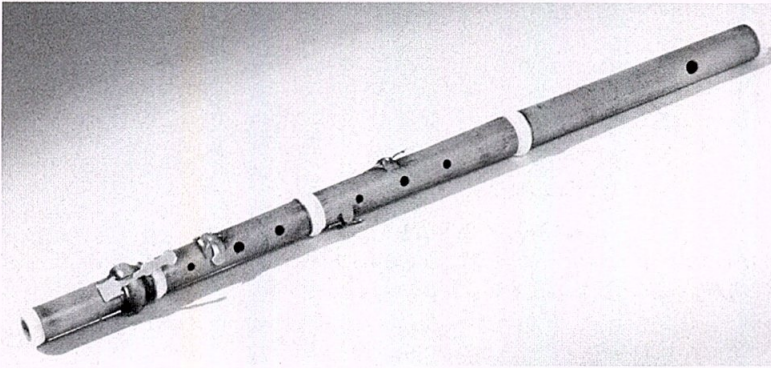


FIGURE 4. Flute in C, stained boxwood, 4 keys, FIRTH, HALL & POND/FRANKLIN SQE/N-YORK, Henry Ford 81.37.1. Photo courtesy of The Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, MI.

ments are found in many museum collections notably the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Library of Congress Dayton C. Miller Collection; The National Music Museum, Vermillion, SD; the Yale University Collection, New Haven, CT; and The Henry Ford, Dearborn, MI.