North Adams Normal School

Buildings, Campus Garden and Training Schools
An aerial view of the Normal School, c.1897

In this photo you can see Smith House (originally Principal Murdoch’s home) and the Boardman block.

The houses at the bottom of the hill in front of Murdock Hall (known for many years as College Hall) have all been razed and replaced by the townhouses.

Notice the terraced land on the slope in front of Murdock.

It’s very hard to see, but there is a set of stairs leading into Murdock Hall at the top of the terraced land. This staircase was removed some time before 1938.
The Normal School – newly opened

This view of College Hall (Murdock Hall) and the principal’s residence (Smith House) was taken from the current location of Berkshire Towers. The photograph must have been taken shortly after the normal school opened, certainly before the fall of 1902. The grounds look newly landscaped, while still showing some rough areas on the right, left over from the construction. Also, the dormitory, which opened in 1903, is not in the picture and would have been visible in the background between the two buildings.
Art Classroom

This view of the art classroom was taken immediately after the normal school opened. The adjustable sloping desktops were used for drawing.
Chemistry classroom
Library
We still have one of these tables. It’s in the director’s office in Freel Library.
The Normal School campus

This picture is undated, but may date from the normal school years (1897-1932). The building on the left is Taconic Hall, the dormitory, which was razed in 1978. The dormitory was opened in 1903. Before it opened, students from out of town rented rooms locally.
Dining room

The dining room was located in Taconic Hall (the dormitory).
The music room

The music room in the dormitory.
The kitchen in the dormitory.
Social hall
The social hall in the dormitory.
View of North Adams

This is the view north from College (Murdock) Hall. The building with the clock tower slightly to the left of the middle of the photograph is the original Mark Hopkins training school. Built in 1889, it was doubled in size in 1897 to accommodate the training school program in the normal school. The school belonged to the city of North Adams, not to the normal school. By the 1930s it was in poor condition and was replaced by the current Mark Hopkins school in 1940. The small building to the left of Mark Hopkins was the gymnasium, built at the time of the school's expansion in 1897.
Mark Hopkins classroom

Students in Mark Hopkins were of elementary school age.
Another Mark Hopkins classroom
The school gardens of one urban and three rural training schools are conducted with the general purpose of satisfying the personal and social needs and interests of the children. The personal aim is to have children learn by practical experience with living plants the laws of growth, the responsibilities of gardeners, and the characteristics of certain food and flowering plants. The social aim is to train children to be helpers to their families by the production of food and beauty, to be foresighted and economical as to efforts and products, and to respect the gardens and rights of others.

The desires of the children, the needs of the family, and the weather and soil conditions determine the kind of plants grown. The instructive activities peculiar to each phase of development from four to fourteen years determine the kind of instruction given. The processes taught conform to the standards set by agricultural departments and colleges.

All elementary pupils are instructed as to bulbs, seeds, seed-testing, seed-beds, garden plans, planting, potting, transplanting, and care of the soil. During the spring pupils observe manuring, plowing, harrowing, and study the implement attempt is made at scientific knowledge or agricultural information.

The gardening of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades is definitely purposeful. The preparatory instruction of the schoolroom is intentionally and accurately practiced in the garden according to agricultural standards. Every pupil plants and cultivates his plot within the class area, and is held responsible for forethought and persistent care. The fourth grade pupils grow a dozen or more grasses and several other forage crops. Each fifth and sixth grade pupil grows both flowers and vegetables. These three years of growing grasses, flowers, and vegetables in an orderly sequence result in much definite, first-hand knowledge of agriculture, in considerable motor skill, and in an intimate acquaintance and appreciation of plants and their uses.

Pupils of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades conduct gardening for commercial purposes. The seventh grade garden may be a class effort or consist of several group plots, and on occasion, of individual plots. One-fourth of the products are used to pay for seed and fertilizer furnished by the school. Three-fourths are sold and the money is turned into the class fund for school
Preparing the land for the gardens

Practical skills were part of the curriculum for the young students in the training school. In the days before supermarkets, although there were several small grocers in North Adams, gardening was considered a valuable skill and many families would have raised at least some of the food they ate. This view is to the north, looking down Church Street toward the old Mark Hopkins school. The team of horses would have been used to remove tree stumps and large boulders, such as those seen in the front left of this photograph.
Working in the gardens

This group of students is being supervised by either their regular teacher or one of the normal school student teachers. She can be seen in the white blouse on the right. By today’s standards, the clothing they are wearing seems highly unsuitable for the dirty task, but these girls wouldn’t have owned long pants and some would have had only one coat and one pair of shoes.
The end of the growing season

These students are being taught by Roland Guss, a member of the faculty from 1897 to 1914. He taught courses in the natural sciences and nature study.

Students in the Mark Hopkins school and in the other training schools associated with the normal school would have been of elementary school age.
Planting seeds

This photograph is dated 1913. The house in the background did not belong to the normal school. The view is looking toward the corner of Church and Blackinton streets. The dark building on the left edge is Mark Hopkins.
An early view of the gardens

This view, looking toward Mark Hopkins and downtown North Adams, gives the viewer some idea of the extent of the gardens. Students looked after the gardens from the spring, through the summer and into the fall, when the final harvest was collected. Today, you would see Freel Library, Eldridge Hall, the new Mark Hopkins and, of course, the Feigenbaum science building on this land.
More gardening.

In the background you can see Mark Hopkins and the gymnasium
Building the forge

Although we haven’t found a description of the uses this building was put to, we believe that it including a forge for metalworking. And, yes, those are students at work, although the second person from the right looks to be an adult giving instruction. Look at the cars in the background.
Carpentry

This is another shot of students hard at work, building either the forge or the shed.
New buildings

In this view, you can see the shed (on the right) and the forge (to the left).