

January 25, 1997

## The Hatch Connection to Windham Hospital

**George Hatch (1855-1939), a benefactor of Windham Hospital, was described as a "gentleman of the old school, possessed of qualities and kindness, understanding, courtesy and benevolence."**



In 1986, Don H. Ladd of Hampton purchased a 1812 family bible from the Stiles family estate auction. He subsequently donated it to the Windham Community Memorial Hospital. This bible is now part of a small exhibit on display in the atrium near the Alma G. Hatch Women's Health Center at Windham Hospital. The hospital's development director, Mrs. Walsh, a keen local historian, kindly invited me to the November 20 unveiling of this exhibit. In researching a subsequent Hatch family bible, and old cuttings, the life of Alma Hatch emerged, and an integral episode in the history of Windham Hospital.

Alma Armstrong (1826-1906) was born in Colchester. She married Jonathan Hatch in Franklin in 1845. The couple moved to South Windham in 1849 to live in a newly built house on Machine Shop Hill Road, now known as the "haunted house." A mansard roof and a second story on the ell were added to this basic federal-style building in the late 1880s.

Alma Hatch gave birth to six children. Charles Winchester Hatch died in infancy, and a second son, Walter, died in a shooting accident, aged 16, in 1877. Clara Hatch (21) died in a small pox epidemic in 1888. Mary Hatch (1854-1923) never married and became a leader in the spiritualist church. George Hatch (1855-1939) also never married, but built up a sizable fortune in an active public and private life. Alma's other daughter Helen, married George E. Stiles (1843-1927) and the couple lived for many years at 103 Windham Road. Stiles was a leading Willimantic grocer, a partner in the grocery firm of Stiles & Harrington, and was the Willimantic Chamber of Commerce's first President (1887). George and Helen's daughter, Mary Elizabeth Stiles (1882-1984) had kept the historic family bible until her death.

George Hatch made out his will in 1924, and left instructions for a trust fund to be set up for the future health care of Windham's citizens, including the desire to build a maternity hospital. Hatch died on August 18, 1939. When his will was made public, it revealed that his estate was worth \$115,000. It primarily called for the immediate establishment of a Jonathan and Alma Hatch memorial convalescent or recovery home on his 300 acre South Windham estate, and the appointment of five trustees for the administration of the monies. They were Dr. Fred Smith, Clarrie Stiles, Helen Wilmot, George Hinman and H. C. Lathrop. Hatch had also left \$1000 for the Card home on Pleasant street.

In 1954 the Hatch trustees purchased land at the junction of Valley Street and Mansfield

Avenue, the old site of the Vanderman plumbing company and an ancient iron foundry, and intended to build the small convalescent hospital called for 15 years earlier. But, like the plan to build in South Windham, this did not materialize. Several years later the Hatch trustees combined with the directors of the Windham Hospital. In 1964, a convalescent and rehabilitative care facility, called the Hatch unit and named for Hatch's parents, Jonathan and Alma, was planned. It cost almost \$600,000 and was opened on October 1, 1967. The remainder of the funds were left as a permanent endowment for operations and future programs.