



# Textiles, Teachers, and Troops

GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA 1880-1945

## **Mary Hobbs Hall History**

by Morgan Myers, Guilford College, 2013

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Mary Hobbs Hall has been part of Guilford College for over a century. It has gone through many physical and social changes throughout this time. In 1907, Mary Hobbs Hall was built due to the fundraising of the Girls' Aid Committee. This was a committee dedicated to raising money for the education of girls. Mary Mendenhall Hobbs provided the backbone to the idea, fundraising activities, and structure of Mary Hobbs Hall. Upon construction, the building was named New Garden Hall. Following the death of Mary Mendenhall Hobbs, the name was changed to Mary Hobbs Hall in 1933.

Initially the building housed fifty girls with two in each room. This building was designed to help women who struggled with finances, to be able to attend school, by living in a cooperative dorm. This meant the girls had to perform daily chores like cooking and cleaning, and in return the living cost was lower. The establishment of a co-op dorm was essential to enhancing the education of women, which was the heart of Mary M. Hobbs legacy. Different classes were taught in Mary Hobbs to help women with these tasks such as cooking and sewing classes. For about ninety-three years Mary Hobbs remained a cooperative dorm creating a strong community of women, like no other dorm on campus.

In 1911, there was a small fire in New Garden Hall that caused a scare. In 1935, Mary Hobbs was refurnished for the first time since its construction. During the centennial

year at Guilford in 1937, Mary Hobbs Hall, which was previously operated by the Girls Aid Fund and New Garden Friends, formally became the responsibility of Guilford College's administration. Emily Levering, the matron of Mary Hobbs resigned and was replaced by a matron chosen by the administration of the college. Two years later the college spent around \$5,000 changing the third floor into suites and expanding living spaces in Hobbs. Shortly after, a formal garden was planted to the north of Mary Hobbs to further improve the facilities and surrounding area. An extensive renovation took place in the 1950s that was almost as much as the cost to build Mary Hobbs. The third floor was redecorated and 19 rooms were repaired. During the fifties, a full-time cook was hired in Mary Hobbs to provide oversight and coordination with residents serving as assistants.

"The 1960's were to be years of change and transition for Mary Hobbs Hall and her residence."<sup>1</sup> Changes of membership within Guilford College and the Girls Aid Committee, as well caused the leadership of the numerous responsibilities to be nebulous. For the first time the future of Mary Hobbs Hall was uncertain. Finally in 1971, there was a clarification of the college's role of responsibility. The Girls' Aid Committee changed to the Mary Hobbs Hall Advisory Committee. There were major plans for an extensive renovation in Mary Hobbs, which was almost halted when an arsonist set fire to the third floor of Hobbs. The dorm was greatly damaged but luckily the firefighters restricted the fire to the third floor and Hobbs was saved. Residents were moved to various rooms around campus until the following fall. After much consideration, the extensive renovations began in Mary Hobbs in 1977 and were completed in 1979. Some of these improvements included moving the kitchen to the

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<sup>1</sup> Linda M. Mercer, comp., *Mary Hobbs Hall: A Century of Friendship* ([S.l.: S.n.], 2009), pg. # 9.

basement, new heating and furnishings, the moving of the stairwell, added rooms, making the porch concrete, and adding a ramp for handicap accommodations.

Up until 1997, Mary Hobbs remained one of the few cooperative dorms in North Carolina. Girls would share cooking and cleaning chores in order to receive about an \$80 dollar discount on their boarding fees. Unfortunately, with great opposition from the students, the kitchen in Mary Hobbs was shut down due to financial constraints. The fire marshal deemed the kitchen to be unsafe and the cost of repairs was well over the college's budget. Many alumni and undergraduates who lived in Mary Hobbs were heartbroken because they felt the kitchen was a crucial aspect of what built the community in Hobbs. Even without the kitchen, Mary Hobbs Hall remained a cooperative dorm, sharing all other duties like cleaning. However, with the new millennium, a janitorial service was instated and Hobbs became a regular dorm on campus.

Later in 2004-2005, there were more renovations in Mary Hobbs. One of the most popular additions to Mary Hobbs, that continues to be support today, is the Greenleaf. This co-op establishment is run by the students in the basement of Mary Hobbs. It is essentially a cozy coffee house that provides some snacks, coffee, tea, and a nice environment to relax and socialize. There are also many events on campus held here.

In April 2009, Mary Hobbs held a 100th anniversary reunion. Everyone who lived in Hobbs was invited to attend. Many women from all over came back to Guilford to revisit their past and shared many memories. After learning about the modification of Mary Hobbs Hall some alumni were concerned about the future of Mary Hobbs. "The former residents of Guilford's landmark women's cooperative began making plans to

renovate the 103-year-old building.”<sup>2</sup> These renovations are estimated at 1.8 million dollars consisting of “infrastructure upgrades to the electrical, plumbing, and HVAC systems”<sup>3</sup> Also, they would improve the accessibility while at the same time restoring Hobbs’ historical look. The renovations to Hobbs would be the second time, after Archdale Hall (an 1888 campus building original used as a men’s dormitory but now serving as faculty offices), that Guilford College has attempted a green historic preservation project. For over a hundred years, Mary Hobbs Hall has played a pivotal role in the lives of many women at Guilford College. Through this project and the many donations received, it is shown how important the future of Mary Hobbs is to the alumni and many others.

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### Bibliography

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<sup>2</sup> Guilford College, "Points of Light Building Community at Home and Around the World," Guilford College Magazine for Alumni and Friends, Fall 2010, pg. # 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.