



# The Brothers Field

CELEBRATING THE LIVES AND LEGACIES OF ONE OF  
WILLIAMS' EARLIEST PROMINENT FAMILIES

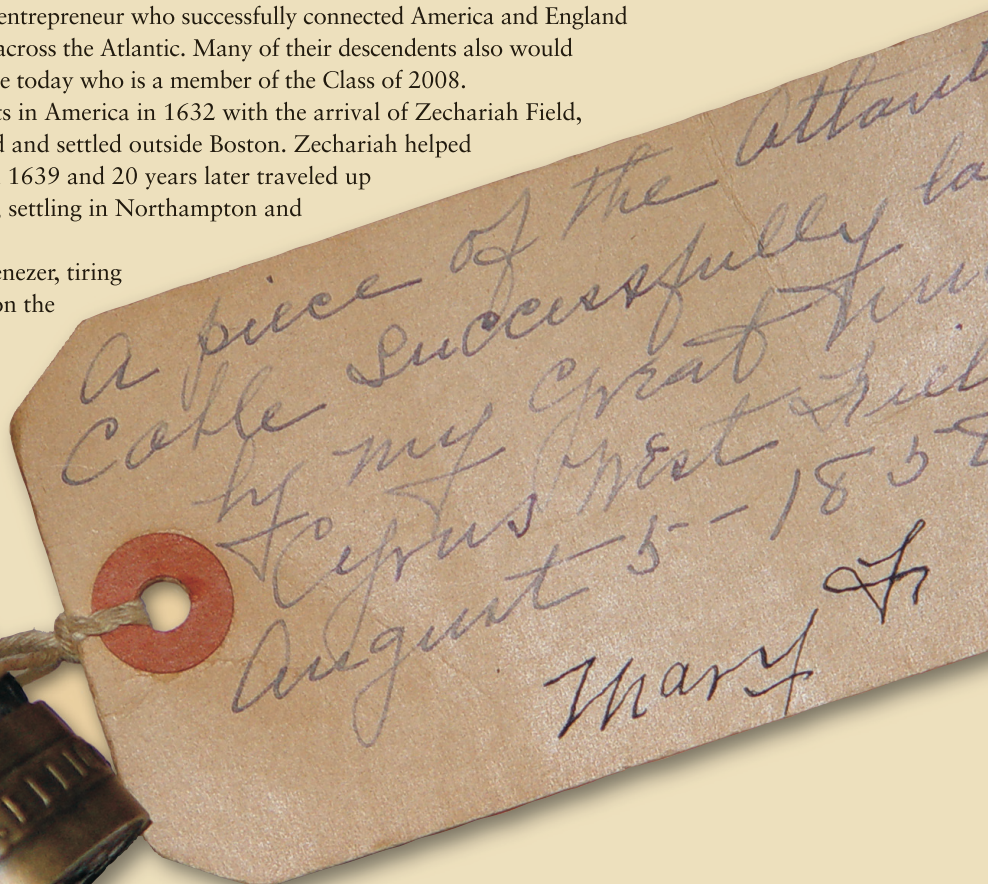
By Russell F. Carpenter '54

**T**heir histories are as much a part of the College as they are of 19th-century America—five brothers of the Field family who held among them a total of 10 academic and honorary degrees from Williams.

They were an accomplished group that included a prominent lawyer who codified the laws of states and nations, a four-term senator in the Massachusetts State Legislature and its president for three years, a U.S. Supreme Court justice, a minister who traveled the world speaking and writing about his experiences for a national audience and a financier and entrepreneur who successfully connected America and England with the first telegraph cable across the Atlantic. Many of their descendents also would attend Williams, including one today who is a member of the Class of 2008.

The family planted its roots in America in 1632 with the arrival of Zechariah Field, who emigrated from England and settled outside Boston. Zechariah helped to found Hartford, Conn., in 1639 and 20 years later traveled up the Connecticut River Valley, settling in Northampton and Hatfield, Mass.

Zechariah's grandson Ebenezer, tiring of constant Indian raids on the



A piece of the telegraph cable laid across the Atlantic by Cyrus West Field, successfully connecting America and England.



Six Field brothers in 1859 (from left): Henry Martyn, Cyrus West, Jonathan Edwards, David Dudley, Matthew Dickinson and Stephen Johnson. Siblings not pictured: Timothy Beals (lost at sea at age 27), Emilia Ann and Mary Elizabeth.

frontier in Deerfield, moved downriver around 1696 to southern Connecticut, where three generations of Fields prospered, participated in the American Revolution and produced 26 children. One of the youngest was David Dudley Field, born in 1781. A Yale graduate with highest honors, he began his life's work as a minister and, with his wife, Submit Dickinson Field, raised seven sons and two daughters in Hamden, Conn., and in the Parsonage in Stockbridge, Mass.

Williams College was just up the road, and the family's connections to it were plentiful. David's predecessor, Stephen West, was a founding trustee and the College's first treasurer. The Fields were neighbors of Mark and Albert Hopkins—the future Williams president and astronomy professor, respectively—who were school and college classmates of eldest son David Dudley Field Jr. Another neighbor was the father of the ill-fated French and Indian War colonel, Ephraim Williams Jr., whose will provided for the College's founding. And the Field children attended Stockbridge Academy, where the headmaster, also a Williams family relative, sent many students to the College.

This story of the richly active and productive lives of the five Field brothers is limited to snapshots of their time at Williams and their many and lasting contributions to the history and achievements of the 19th century.

**D**avid Dudley Field Jr., Class of 1825, was a member of the first class to matriculate at Williams following the departure of President Zephaniah Swift Moore and half the students to Amherst in 1821. At the time the campus consisted of East College and its first building, West College, where all the undergraduate Fields probably lived for their first two years at Williams and joined in the daily trek for water down the path to the spring, now covered, that still flows at the foot of Spring Street.

David's class numbered 15 of the College's 49 students, including his friend, Mark Hopkins, Class of 1824. Admission requirements for those years were specific: knowledge of English, Latin and Greek grammar; ability to construe and parse Virgil, Cicero and the Greek testaments and to write true Latin prose; knowledge of arithmetic and geography; and testaments of good character.

Discipline, controlled by the faculty, was equally rigorous. "Punctual attendance" was required at church, plus twice daily prayers and recitations. The ledger of delinquencies was open to inspection by parents and the trustees. Fines were levied and chapel confessions required.

As a freshman David and 27 other students each were fined \$2 (term tuition was \$7) for "bringing ardent spirits to the college without leave." Younger brother Jonathan Edwards Field, Class of 1832, also was fined in his first year "for firing a pistol on July 4th" and "having and drinking wine." Brother Stephen Johnson Field, Class of 1837, was put on probation for four months for "injuring a College building" and "blowing a horn in the halls," a punishment later rescinded after he presented his case and apologized publicly.

David left Williams near the end of his junior year over a point of principle, a character trait that governed his life. A friend had been suspended for leaving campus without permission, albeit for health and financial reasons. The students responded by tarring the tutors' doors, removing faculty firewood and ringing the College bell. Faculty minutes state that David "was doomed to be sent home ... for the leading part [he] took in the late riot" for a six-month suspension.

He did not return to Williamstown, writing later: "If resistance to college authorities is ever justifiable, so offensive had been the conduct of the Faculty, it was so then." Of some 50 rioting students, only he and one other were punished.

David would ultimately reconcile with Williams in the 1830s, when three of his brothers were students and Mark Hopkins was College president. By then David also was married to a Hopkins cousin, Lucinda, who had become a member of the Hopkins household upon the death of her parents.





He started his career reading for the law in the New York offices of his prominent Stockbridge neighbors, the Sedgwicks, and soon became a partner. His professional life in the law was guided by his belief that: “The only men who make any lasting impression in this world are fighters,” a characteristic that earned him both respect and fear.

He fought for legal reform in New York for almost 50 years, writing and promoting new codes for civil and criminal procedures and law that eventually were adopted. California, through the influence of his brother Stephen, adopted these plus David’s political and administrative codes. Versions of his civil code were adopted in Idaho, Montana and the Dakotas. His civil procedure code, the earliest and most influential of these, was adopted in more than half the states and had a significant influence on similar reforms in England and the British dominions overseas.

In his later years David prepared an outline for the codification of international law and traveled extensively in Europe to promote it. He was elected the first president of an international association of jurists formed in Brussels in 1873 to codify the laws of nations. One of the group’s chief objectives was to substitute arbitration for war.

David represented a range of clients, most notably in corporate, political and civil liberties cases. He defended New York’s corrupt Boss Tweed and represented Erie Railroad barons Fisk and Gould, subjecting him to editorial condemnation, cartoon mockery and an unsuccessful attempt to censure him by some members of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, which he had helped found. An author of one memorial to David wrote: “He always held that even the guiltiest man had certain rights still left to him which it was the duty of his counsel to protect.”

David kept a 50-year diary on a very irregular schedule, but on his birthday and the New Year he would lament how little he had achieved. Often he would note that he “saw the president yesterday.” A Feb. 27, 1863, entry states: “Went to Washington to get my brother, Stephen, a place on the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States [to fill a seat created by Congress to serve the new Pacific Coast states]. I did what seemed necessary to secure [his] appointment.” The nomination was Abraham Lincoln’s, and Stephen was chief justice of California.

David’s association with Lincoln began in early 1860, when he and William Cullen Bryant, Class of 1813, escorted him to the Cooper Union stage in New



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York for Lincoln’s first eastern speech that gained him national attention. David’s influence among delegates at the 1860 Chicago Republican Convention is said to have assured Lincoln’s nomination.

Although constantly involved in political action and controversies, David made two early runs for political office—one for the state assembly to advance the cause of law reform and one for Congress as a Free Soil candidate—which were unsuccessful.

He was elected to a vacated New York Congressional seat for four months, allowing him to represent the interests of Democrat Samuel J. Tilden in the 1876 presidential election with Rutherford B. Hayes, contested over the allocation of Florida’s electoral votes. David appeared before a special commission appointed to recommend a decision to Congress; brother Stephen was one of its five delegated Supreme Court members.

David defended civil liberties in two precedent-setting cases in the Reconstruction period following the Civil War. Presented successfully to the Supreme Court, again with his brother seated on the bench before him, one affirmed that a citizen could not be tried by a military court when the civil courts were open. The other invalidated loyalty oaths that Missouri had required of public officials, teachers, the clergy and others in order to work.

He was a leader of the young Williams Society of Alumni as it was organizing to support the College after President Moore left for Amherst. He also gave and raised funds in response to President Hopkins’ needs, including a professorship in astronomy in his son’s memory and an equipped observatory for his friend and astronomy professor Albert Hopkins. (It was built of cast iron and rattled in the wind, which made accurate measurements difficult.)

David led efforts to erect Williams’ monuments: at Ephraim Williams’ battleground gravesite near Lake George (refurbished this past fall), in front of Griffin Hall honoring alumni lost in the Civil War, in Mission Park and in the College cemetery for Williams’ founding leaders. He gave a record \$40,000 to Williams (current value is estimated as \$880,000). His unrecorded gifts, as well as the ones he motivated from others, increase that sum substantially.

He presided at an alumni meeting in New York in 1871 at which Congressman James A. Garfield, Class of 1856, responded to criticism by Professor John Bascom, Class of 1849, with the statement that developed into the aphorism: “The ideal college is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other.” He presided again at the founding meeting of a New York



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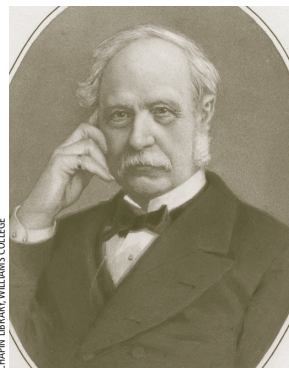
alumni club in 1885, when he was elected the organization's first president. He is described in the book *Mark Hopkins and the Log* as "one of the first professional college alumni." The College awarded him honorary master's and law degrees.

David was no less concerned with ensuring Williams' basic foundation and future abilities to address the changing needs of the nation and its youthful aspiring leaders. He advocated Civil War military training (it happened), suggested attending to gymnasium needs (a first gym was built), urged the end of fraternities (it took a century), supported alumni trustees elected by their fellows (they were) and recommended with Bascom in a minority report of an appointed committee that Williams become coeducational, because "it is a good and progressive work, and it has been our wont to seek and perform such labors" (accepted 100 years later).

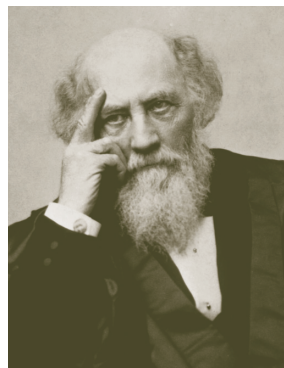
An early College historian remarked, "No alumnus of the College had a more romantic affection for his Alma Mater," citing parts of David's oration at the alumni meeting during Commencement 1875, the 50th reunion of his class: "The sight of these faces, of the old roofs and halls, of these meadows and streams and these encircling hills so quickens the inward sense that it sees forms that have vanished, and hears voices that are silent."

In Stockbridge he was an early conservationist, purchasing land to preserve its natural habitat that remains public today. He exclaimed about the delights of Stockbridge and the Berkshires to whoever would listen, inviting them to visit to enjoy for themselves. One such gathering in August 1850 assembled Oliver Wendell Holmes, Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne, among others, for walks, a picnic on Monument Mountain and a long dinner at his home.

As stated on his tomb in Stockbridge, David "devoted his life to the reform of the law: To codify the common law; To simplify legal procedure; To substitute arbitration for war; To bring justice



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Opposite page: (top) Cyrus West Field (left) and Jonathan Edwards Field; (bottom) David Dudley Field's diary. This page: (clockwise from top left) David Dudley Field, Henry Martyn Field, Stephen Johnson Field and the 1860 Republican National Convention site, where David's influence among delegates is said to have assured Abraham Lincoln's nomination as president.

within the reach of all men." His work brought him renown and wealth, public acclaim and scorn, association with major figures and events of the nation and abroad, extensive travel and the recognition and satisfaction that his life's efforts would have a major impact on his nation and beyond. He died in 1894, two days after he caught pneumonia after returning by ship from Rome. He was 89.

Jonathan Edwards Field, Class of 1832, named for the second minister resident in Stockbridge, entered Williams at 16 as a qualified sophomore. He gave the salutatory address at his commencement and immediately started reading the law in his older brother's New York office. Not wanting to practice in his "brother's shadow,"

he moved to Ann Arbor, where he opened an office, was elected county clerk of court and became one of the secretaries of the convention that formed the Constitution of Michigan for its admission to the Union.

Poor health, chills and fever caused him to return after five years to Stockbridge, where he became a prominent member of the Berkshire County legal community and led the initiative to construct a system to bring pure water to the town from the surrounding hills to eliminate dependence upon unhealthy well water and the annual occurrence of "Stockbridge fever."

A Democrat, he was elected in 1854 as a senator to the state's General Court for a single term and was at once appointed to a commission of three by Gov. Emory Washburn, Class of 1817, to prepare plans for a revision and consolidation of the state's general statutes (undoubtedly with David Dudley Field Jr.'s advice). He became a Republican during the Civil War to support the Union and was elected to the Massachusetts House for the 1862 term. He returned the next year to the state Senate, where he was elected president by his peers for three terms, a record at that time, particularly for a member from the





westernmost county in the state. He became president of the Williams Society of Alumni in 1864.

Following the death of his wife and daughter within a year, leaving him with four young children and a new wife, his attention moved to state and national politics. He attended James A. Buchanan's 1857 inauguration and shortly thereafter asked friends to recommend him to the president and cabinet members for a chief judgeship in the western territories of Nebraska, the Dakotas and New Mexico. Nothing became of this effort, and in 1862 he returned for the first of his four consecutive terms in the state legislature.

Information about his personal and political life during this time is sketchy. It is unclear how he managed the long travel between Boston (where his housing was) and Stockbridge (where he returned often during the January-April session)—particularly for a man suffering from illness since his days in Michigan. His health was further complicated by the “National Hotel Disease”—viral dysentery—he incurred at Buchanan's inauguration, for which Jonathan termed himself “one of the last survivors.” Jonathan died in 1868 at age 55.

His colleagues in the Senate at the close of his final session stated that, “By his dignity, his impartiality and his courteous manner, he rendered himself so popular with men of all parties that he was elected [president] three times.”

Before entering Williams, Stephen Johnson Field, Class of 1837, spent more than two years in Turkey with his sister Emilia Field Brewer, whose minister husband was a missionary in Smyrna. There Stephen learned Greek, French and Italian and gained an appreciation of differing cultures and classes. After graduating from Williams as valedictorian, he also studied law with his brother David Dudley Field Jr., who encouraged him to relocate to California, not yet a state, and offered to fund his travel and purchase of property.

Though Stephen resigned his partnership with his brother to return to Europe, he came home within a year upon learning of the discovery of gold in California. After crossing Panama



Secret session of the 1887 Electoral Commission set up to decide the result of the presidential election between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel J. Tilden. David Dudley Field, representing Tilden, appeared before the commission; His brother Stephen was one of its Supreme Court members. At right: David's diary mentions meeting with President Lincoln.

on land between two ocean voyages, he arrived in San Francisco in 1849 with \$10 in his pocket.

He practiced law for a time in San Francisco before moving inland up the Sacramento River to the site of a new town in the gold territory to be named Marysville. He immediately purchased 65 returnable lots on credit, owning enough land to be considered wealthy. Within three days of his arrival he became

mayor and judge of the new town; he was 33.

Government and justice were volatile and rough in those forty-niner days. Disputes were often settled by guns and duels, and Stephen carried a pistol in each coat pocket, but there is no record of him ever firing them. Land ownership was a constant source of conflict between existing Mexican law, settlers' claims and miners' stakes. Stephen's reputation grew as a knowledgeable, fair, articulate and strong-willed judge whose conduct and decisions were principled and informed. Within a year he was elected to California's first state legislature, where he founded the state's judicial system and prepared the codes of civil and criminal procedure (with help from brother David). Seven years later Stephen was elected a justice of the State Supreme Court and in two years was appointed its chief justice.

In 1863, President Lincoln nominated the 47-year-old Stephen as a U.S. Supreme Court associate justice; he served for 34 years (a record broken a century later when Justice William O. Douglas served 36). Stephen's tenure spanned the last years of the Civil War through the chaos of Reconstruction, the post-war rebuilding of the country and the explosive growth of the nation's population and politics, economy and foreign involvements. He is described in one history of the court as “the pioneer and prophet of our modern constitutional law” and “one of the seminal influences in our judicial history.”

At a railroad stop on a trip west, he survived an assassination attempt by a disgruntled plaintiff who earlier had appeared before Stephen's California bench. (Stephen's bodyguard marshal fired first.) He was proposed as a presidential candidate in 1880, and Williams awarded him honorary master's and law degrees. Stephen died in Washington, D.C., in 1899 at 83.



Cyrus West Field determined not to attend college but to start work as soon as possible, so at 14 he went to New York, boarded with his older brother David Dudley Field Jr. and clerked in a major dry goods store, a position that his brother arranged. After five years he started his own business as a paper merchant and was so successful he retired in his early 30s. He was introduced by older brother Matthew Dickinson Field to a telegraph engineer seeking capital to construct a cable line across the Newfoundland wilderness to a shore point where ships could carry mail quickly across the shortest ocean distance to England. (Matthew, who also did not attend college, was a self-taught engineer who had built railroads and the first suspension bridges in the Midwest.)

Cyrus at first dismissed the idea. But, upon studying a globe, he wondered why not lay the cable across the ocean between the two continents? That thought galvanized his vision, entrepreneurial and managerial abilities and persistence for the next 13 years. The first cable was attempted in 1857 after several years of preparation; it parted 350 miles from Ireland. Attempts to snare the cable from the seabed and splice it to new cable were successful, and the next year solemn messages were exchanged between Queen Victoria and President Buchanan (his took 67 minutes to arrive), and public celebrations occurred in both nations. A telegraph in brother Jonathan's law office brought the news to Stockbridge.

But in three weeks the signal died, not to be revived, and Cyrus determined to start once again. Although the Civil War intervened, he organized a new company, obtained new capital, built an organization and found a ship large enough to carry the entire supply of new cable. The second Atlantic attempt took place in 1865; the cable broke after 1,200 miles. But a try a year later was successful, the first cable was retrieved also, and the world was suddenly and permanently smaller.

Cyrus received the adulation of the world for his triumph. Congress awarded him a special medal, and Williams gave him honorary master's and law degrees. Celebratory dinners were held and fireworks displayed. His brother David was his legal counsel and close adviser during the project, operating from their adjacent New York homes on Gramercy Park with a door cut between them. (Matthew was a cable project manager.)

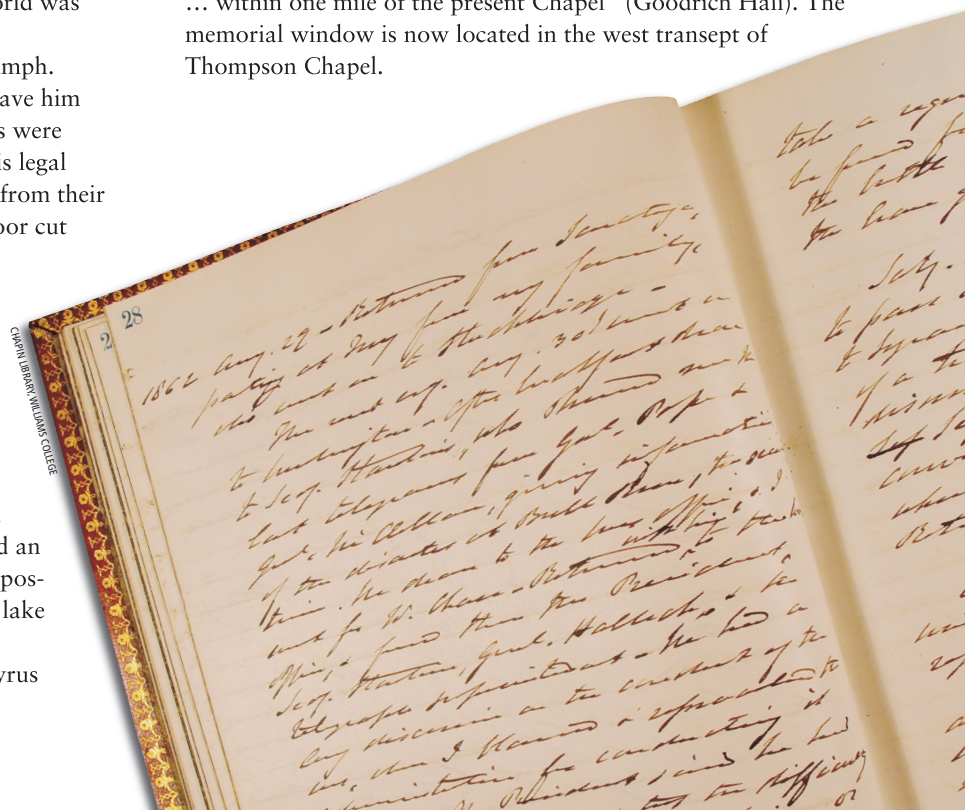
Cyrus' direct involvement with Williams seems to have started in the 1850s, when he commissioned a student and a faculty member to conduct a geological survey for the cable line in Newfoundland. At commencement in 1875—when the oldest of his two Williams sons graduated, he received an honorary law degree and David celebrated his own 50th reunion—he mentioned to President Paul Chadbourne his interest in providing a lake for Williamstown. Though Cyrus hired an engineer from the Hoosac Tunnel project to survey the possibilities, he later was told building a dam to create the lake would “cost a fortune to build and keep in repair.”

Apparently having allocated funds for the project, Cyrus

offered the budgeted \$10,000 for specific improvements for Williams and Williamstown. Among these were straightening and raising the Hoosac River sufficiently for crew races, with a carriage road and walkway along the shore; painting some college buildings; restoring Christmas Lake (across from Weston Field) to its original design by Albert Hopkins; and removing the fences (and animals) in front of the houses on Main Street so that “the buildings may appear as if situated in a grand park.” It is reported that the students built a record bonfire with the fences.

Cyrus also funded a landscape gardener, selected by him, to advise “what is best to be done to improve the village.” With funds added by the College, plans for the campus and town landscape were developed that led to the formation of the Village Improvement Society in 1877. Its work included development of the park at the western end of Main Street, where two successive meeting houses had served the town and Williams before the last one burned in 1866. The alumni at their annual meeting in 1878 voted to name the area Field Park in recognition “of his generous contribution towards the improvement of the College grounds and the village of Williamstown.”

Cyrus' Atlantic cable fame brought him association with the nation's leaders, including President Garfield, whom he had encouraged to attend his 25th reunion in early July 1881, four months after his inauguration. The president and his party were to travel by private rail car to Williamstown, stopping at Cyrus' home in Irvington, N.Y., but Garfield was shot at the start of the trip in Washington's Union Station. Within days Cyrus had committed funds to provide a “suitable memorial window in the College chapel” if the president died from his wounds; if he survived the funds were to be used for “keeping in order the grounds about the College Buildings and the Parks which I have improved ... within one mile of the present Chapel” (Goodrich Hall). The memorial window is now located in the west transept of Thompson Chapel.







The illustration "General Gordon raising up General Barlow on the Battle-Field" from Henry Martyn Field's book *Blood is Thicker than Water: A Few Days Among Our Southern Brethren*, published in 1886.

Henry Martyn Field, Class of 1838, was the youngest brother and the only one to choose his father's ministerial calling. He qualified to enter Williams at age 12 with the understanding that his older brother Stephen would look after him; they were roommates for two years. He gave his class Commencement Oration, "Effect of Music on the Feelings," and immediately began his studies for the ministry. At age 18 he received a license to preach and during the next 12 years served as the pastor of a Presbyterian church in St. Louis, a change from his father's Congregationalism, the religion Henry later returned to at a church in West Springfield, Mass.

During extensive travel in Europe between ministries, he wrote a long series of travel letters for a New York newspaper as well as his first book, *The Irish Confederates and the Rebellion of 1798*. This was the start of a speaking and writing career that was to bring Henry fame over the next 40 years, as he produced 18 popular books, including 11 in a 15-year span, that all helped to make the world smaller and more understandable. His final book, *Bright Skies and Dark Shadows*, following a journey through the South, was one of the first to reflect on the racial concerns ahead for the region and the country.

He also was the ever-faithful historian and chronicler of the Field family, recording and publishing *The Story of the Atlantic Telegraph*, *The Life of David Dudley Field* and the genealogy of the family. For more than four decades he was publisher and editor of *The Evangelist*, a Presbyterian periodical in New York. Williams gave him an honorary Doctor of Divinity. His house in Stockbridge was built on the foundation of the Williams' home.

The Fields of this generation were an extremely close and supportive family personally and professionally throughout the many tragedies and successes of their lives. David Dudley Field Jr. was their leader and mentor, watching over their parents and each brother and sister and their children with care, sharing expertise and associations, lobbying on their behalf and always ready with financial and emotional help. They corresponded, collaborated and

visited with each other frequently and returned faithfully to their old home in Stockbridge.

In 1853 the entire family but Stephen (in California)—37 people in three generations in all—assembled in Stockbridge to celebrate the parents' golden wedding anniversary. The children had added a new room to the old parsonage just for that event. Six years later all living family members, now numbering 46, including "Uncle Judge" Stephen Johnson Field and his new wife and a new generation's two great-grandchildren, once again gathered together in Stockbridge for the last time.

By 1907 the generation of the five Fields of Williams was gone, but they are still together in the Stockbridge Cemetery just down Main Street from the parsonage and across from their father's church and the memorial tower with the "Children's Chimes" given by David. Typically, he had the last word for them all; his gift instructions were that the "ringing of the chimes at sunset [would] give pleasure to all ... in this peaceful spot." He backed his words with a generous endowment to ensure that it happened "from apple blossom time until frost." It still does. ■

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*Russell F. Carpenter '54, a descendant of the Field family and retired Williams administrator, lives in Williamstown. He appreciates the resources and help of the Williams Archives, Chapin Library and the Stockbridge Historical Room and the advice and comments of Frederick Rudolph '42, Professor Emeritus of History, and Philip Bergan, whose biography of David Dudley Field Jr. is in progress. The author welcomes additional information or questions about the Field family.*