

From the Archives

Summer Boarders



Contributed by
Jim Douglas

One of the true pleasures of doing research is the discovery of unexpected connections. Take for example, something that I came across while looking for information on Roger Conant Hall in preparation for Nichols' 200th anniversary:

The Great Cthulhu Slept Here?

Roger Conant Hall, often known as just Conant Hall, was built at the behest of Hezekiah Conant in 1885 as a boarding house for Nichols Academy students and named for a family ancestor. As James L. Conrad, Jr. notes in his *Nichols Academy: The Spring on the Hill 1815-1931*, "This structure contained a dining hall and kitchen in its basement, suites for the preceptor and steward on the first floor, with at least ten sleeping rooms on each of the upper floors for student boarders."

During summers the building also served for many years as a boarding house for vacationers. According to one newspaper it offered "a healthful and cool retreat from the city in the most delightful hill town where all the charms of outward nature may be used to advantage." Advertisements were enthusiastic about the "high elevation, always a breeze; refined patronage; beautiful drives and views, good auto roads; pure



Nichols Academy buildings (Conant Hall/Dudley Inn on right) around the time the Lovecrafts vacationed on the Hill.

water, home cooking, fresh fruits and vegetables: rates low." And, according to one short history of Dudley, "many prominent personages gathered at the Inn in its early days."

No one could know it at the time, but perhaps the summer boarder who would become one of the most prominent was a two-year old boy who would grow up to write stories that in the words of Joyce Carol Oates would, along with those by Edgar Allan Poe, exert "an incalculable influence on succeeding generations of writers of horror fiction" (including Stephen King).

When he was 34, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, better known to fans of horror and weird tales as H.P. Lovecraft, wrote that his first memories were "of the summer of 1892 - just before my second birthday. We were then vacationing in Dudley, Mass. & I recall the house with its frightful attic water-tank & my rocking horses at the head of the stairs." (Joshi, S.T., *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H.P. Lovecraft in His Time*, p. 11). We'll probably never know for sure, but it is highly likely the "house" Lovecraft recalled was The Dudley Inn.



Conant Hall/The Dudley Inn c. 1905

Great Cthulhu is a cosmic character created by H.P. Lovecraft, which first appeared in "The Call of Cthulhu," published in *Weird Tales* magazine in 1928.