In 1900, Elson Marston was a boarder and day laborer at the Center Harbor, New Hampshire farm where sixteen-year-old Cora May Hawkins lived with her parents, George and Mary Hawkins. Two years later Cora and Elson married, and their first child, Philip Mason Marston, was born in 1903 with sisters Evelyn and Ariel following in 1909 in 1911. The growing family remained on the Hawkins farm until Elson, who worked as a sawyer in a local steam mill, died unexpectedly in 1915. Cora married Norman Parsons in 1916 and moved to his Ashland, New Hampshire home with her children. Philip attended the town high school and after graduating he never looked back: on September 20, 1920 he entered what was still called the New Hampshire State College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts in Durham, part of the largest incoming class to date. Durham would remain his home until his death in 1966.

Marston completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1924, and immediately entered the graduate program at the newly renamed University of New Hampshire, earning his Master’s in History, Education, and Psychology in 1927. He began teaching at the university in 1926 as a graduate assistant, steadily moving up through the academic ranks to full professor over the course of his career. In 1962 he was named the official University Historian with the task of writing a book on the university’s first century that he was not able to complete before his death. A memorial to him in the 1967 yearbook, written by one of his students, honored “this man who gave 42 years of his life to the service of the University as Professor of History, chairman of the History Department, and as University Historian. Not only was he a scholar and fine intellect, but he was a friend of the student.” Marston’s papers containing his notes, book drafts, preparations for courses taught, and articles written are housed at the Milne Special Collections and Archives at the UNH Library.

In addition to his more formal academic work, Marston gave public lectures on various historical subjects and worked extensively with the Durham Historical Society, which had been founded in 1915 by Katherine Douglas Lansing Paine, who also donated
items to the Bowen Collection. She, Marston, and two other Historical Society members were also part of a rather eclectic short-lived venture in 1935, the Stable Shop, so named because it was situated in now-defunct stables on the corner of Main Street and Madbury Road in Durham. The shop displayed its wares inside the old horse stalls, and the student newspaper, *The New Hampshire*, reviewed its opening in glowing terms. It had “a complete line of gifts, imported antiques from France and Spain, an extensive lending library, and everything from roller skates to real estate.” There were tapestries, designer handbags, items from the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, and it even served tea “between the hours of four and six on special tables arranged among the quaint surroundings of the old shop.”

A new Home Economics instructor named Irma Bowen had arrived at UNH the same year Marston had first enrolled. She began gathering garments and textiles as teaching aids for her classes, and at some point between 1920 and 1939, Marston made a major donation of over two hundred objects to the growing collection — according to the 1939-1940 inventory, more than half of the collection at that time! These were mostly women’s items and included dresses, blouses, skirts, jackets, petticoats, drawers (pantaloons), aprons, bonnets, shoes, gloves, belts, decorative combs, umbrellas, fans, and knitted socks. There were a few men’s suits and baby clothes as well, along with unfinished clothing and materials such as “odd pieces of cloth,” laces, braided straw, feathers, and artificial flowers. There were even a few brooches and a fur muff, as well as more random items such as hair pins, a nail file, a pair of glasses and a boot or button hook (a tool for lacing boots or fastening buttons).

By 1966 the total number of objects in the collection had swelled to 903. Because no objects had unique individual identification numbers at this time, and because many of the descriptions are general, it is difficult to compare the two lists for correlations, but confusingly there appear to be slightly fewer Marston items in 1966 than in 1940, while at the same time several items are present that are not mentioned in 1940. Without additional records there is no way to know for certain whether Marston gave gifts after 1940, whether the 1939-1940 inventory is missing pages, or whether errors were made. However, what is certain is that almost all the Marston objects were present by 1940.

Many objects were deaccessioned during the transition of the collection from Home Economics to the University Museum in the late 1960s, and the 1970 inventory, the first official listing done by the museum after the transfer and the first to assign unique item numbers, has just sixty-three Marston objects remaining. The actual number is likely higher; many of the original identification tags once attached to each object had become separated by the time the collection was physically transferred to the museum, and matching objects to the often vague and extremely brief descriptions of the early inventories is an ongoing process. Some items simply cannot be differentiated from each other for donor identification — which “white cotton blouse” came from which donor?
It is possible that Marston was an avid collector of clothing, perhaps found in connection with antique buys for the Stable Shop, or while locating items for the Durham Historical Society. Still, a case can be made that his donations came from his own family:

The nature of the objects
- The range of objects, including such banal things as hair pins, a button hook tool, unfinished garments, knitted socks, eyeglasses, and a nail file, are more typical of the dissolution of a household than of a selection of items deliberately curated by a collector or enthusiast.

The dates of the objects
- The earliest records rarely included date information on the objects and with so many things no longer in the collection, independent assessment for their dates is not possible. However, nearly half of the Marston gifts are noted as being part of a collection sub-set (now defunct) called “Gay 90s,” a nickname for the 1890s, which provides at least a starting point for placing their chronological context even if it cannot be verified. This decade fits with the Marston family timeline.

The likely source
- Marston’s maternal grandmother, Mary Plaisted Hawkins, was born in 1859 and so would have been in her thirties during the 1890s.
- She and George Hawkins had lived on their farm in Center Harbor since their 1878 wedding, allowing for fifty years of accumulated possessions by the time of their deaths.
- The Hawkins home was familiar to Marston, who had lived with his grandparents for his formative years and had retained his connection to them after his mother remarried and moved him and his two sisters to Ashland.

The donation timeline
- Mary passed away in 1932 at age 83. George remained on the farm for at least three more years, though by the 1940 census he had moved in with his daughter Blanche and her new family in Northfield. A year later, in 1941, George followed his wife. He was 84.
- None of the Hawkins children took on the farm, their lives were established elsewhere. Cora had divorced her second husband and married her third; Cecil Gordon was a machinist in his fifties and had no interest in farming. Roscoe Hawkins owned his own home in Gilford and was a fireman. Blanche lived in Northfield with her husband, Guy Huckins, and their ten children who ranged in age from 3 to 21. Guy had been a drayman in his youth but at 48 was not about to leave his office job to run a farm. George and Martha’s home of more than fifty years had to be cleaned out.
- The Marston donations were present in the collection by 1940, which fits George’s move to Northfield between 1935 and 1940. It would have been clear that he was
not going to be going back to life alone in Center Harbor and not unreasonable for the process of dispersing his possessions to have begun before his death.

• All of the Marston siblings had a connection to UNH as both Evelyn and Ariel had received their Bachelor's degrees there as well, but Philip’s ties were ongoing. By the end of George’s life, Marston was an Assistant Professor in the History Department at UNH. He had an appreciation of objects and experience with collections through the Durham Historical Association, and established friendships with others who were donating to what would become the Bowen Collection.

Without further information this can only remain conjecture, and more research is needed. However, if these are indeed objects from the Hawkins farm, their likely owners were as follows:

• **Museum Number 433** is a pair of toddler’s red kidskin shoes in a style common between the 1860s and the 1890s. This range means that Mary herself might have worn them as a young child, though it is more likely that they were used by one or all of her children. Her only child from her first marriage, George, was born posthumously in 1877. Her children with George Hawkins were Cora (born 1883), Roscoe (born 1891) and Blanche (born 1894).

• **Museum Number 491** is a c.1870s brown straw toque trimmed with brown velvet, very appropriate for the young matron Mary Hawkins, then in her twenties at the time.

• **Museum Number 527** is a c. 1870s sage green bonnet, suited to a woman in her twenties as Mary was then.

• **Museum Number 400** is a c. 1880s pair of white cotton stockings with black embroidery, possibly worn by Mary around the time of her wedding to George Hawkins in 1878.

• **Museum Number 105** is a c. 1880 tan silk dress with a barege overdress. It is quite slender and would have looked lovely on a twenty-year-old Mary. Its style is too late for her to have worn it at her 1876 wedding to George Buck, but she could have worn it when she married George Hawkins in 1878. Regardless, this certainly would have been a best dress.

• **Museum Numbers 15.1 and 15.2** are c.1880s bustle pads and would have been Mary’s during her twenties and early thirties.

• **Museum Number 525** is a c.1890s blue velvet toque with rhinestones and iridescent feathers, stylish but better for an older woman than a young one. Mary would have been in her forties and this would have been a perfect choice for her.
• **Museum Number 221** is a c.1898 mauve and cream striped dress with dove gray velvet accents. Given its styling and measurements, it was more likely worn by Cora, who would have been in her late teens, than by her forty-year-old mother.

• **Museum Number 3** is a c. 1898 green dress with a sheer leaf-patterned black overlay. With a 76.2 cm / 30 in. bust, a 59.7 cm / 23.5 in. waist, and fashionable styling, it was more likely worn by Cora rather than her mother. Fashions did shift rapidly at this time but not so much that the dress couldn’t have been worn into the first few years of the 1900s.

• **Museum Number 486** is an early 20th century black velvet hat with egret plumes, from a milliner in Laconia. Either Cora, in her twenties, or Mary, in her forties, could have worn it, though it is a somewhat matronly hat and more suited to someone of Mary’s age than Cora’s.

• **Museum Number 509** is a c. 1910 raffia hat with large roses. Its youthful styling makes Cora, then in her thirties, or her sister Blanche, in her late teens, more likely owners than their mother.

• **Museum Number 501** is a c.1900-1915 hat with purple ostrich plumes and a brightly patterned lining on the brim. Given its bright colors, it probably belonged to Cora, in her twenties or thirties, or Blanche, in her late teens or early twenties. Mary would have been in her forties or fifties and without knowing her personality or tastes it is difficult to judge whether she would have felt this hat to be too young for her or not.

• **Museum Number 508** is a stately c. 1910-1920 black velvet toque with ostrich plumes, appropriate for either Cora or her mother to have worn. Blanche, who married in 1913 and soon began to have the first of her ten children, could possibly have worn it toward the end of the 1910s but is not likely to have left it behind at her parents’ home. Cora still lived at the family farm until 1916.

• **Museum Number 113** is a c. 1912 green wool suit, and with its 71.1 cm / 28 in. waist it probably belonged either to Cora, twenty-nine, or Blanche, eighteen.

• **Museum Number 512** is a c. 1920s yellow silk cloche, and this was probably once owned by Evelyn Marston, Cora’s daughter, who was in her late teens by the end of the decade and who lived nearby.