



FYLER HOUSE

Windsor Historical Society News

VOL. III, No. 1

February 1985

President's Comments

One of our winter projects was the creation of an exhibit of old farm implements and equipment in the basement of the Wilson Museum. Most of the items exhibited were already in our collections. Grouping them together on a background of old barn boards gives a unified picture of things used in the muscle-power era of Windsor agriculture.



March 29th Meeting

WILSON MUSEUM---BLAKE ROOM
FRIDAY - 8:00 p.m.

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CONNECTICUT CLOCKS AND CLOCKMAKERS

DANA J. BLACKWELL

AMERICAN CLOCK & WATCH MUSEUM

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1985 Volunteers

This year, instead of selecting one day a month for Work Day as we did in 1984, we are asking volunteers to sign up for a specific project and then work as your schedule permits. Some of the projects being planned are:

1. Guide or docent training.
2. Continue updating our accession files.
3. Transferring all our family genealogical records to acid free file folders.
4. Transferring our collection of photographs to acid free folders and enclosing the photos in mylar sleeves.
5. Sorting, preserving, recording and properly storing our costume and textile collection.
6. Continue the sorting and filing of the Hayden and Shelton manuscript collections.
7. Organizing and identifying our collection of photographic negatives and slides and filing in mylar sleeves and holders.

Anyone interested in helping with one or more of these projects may do so by calling the Director, Bob Silliman, at home at 688-2756 or at the Society after April 1st.





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Commerce, Trade & Stores: Mid 17th to Mid 19th Centuries

FROM HENRY R. STILES HISTORY OF ANCIENT WINDSOR, 1891. VOL. I

(Underlined portions added for identification purposes)

Windsor, in the early colonial days, was a leading commercial town and port of entry. This position it held until subsequent to the revolution, when its neighbor, Hartford, "took a start" and left poor Windsor quite in the background. The Wolcotts were probably the first and most extensive merchants here, especially Henry Wolcott, Jr. Josiah Wolcott was a large merchant in 1681. He had land "laid out by Samuel Grant, Town Measurer, 20 feet square, on which to set a warehouse, on the hillside adjoining Wid. Marshall's fence, being on the North end at the West side of the grant--where an old cellar stands that was built by Geo. Phelps by (i.e. near) the Wid. Marshall, her warehouse".

Captain Newberry and George Griswold had warehouses here in 1679 on the north side of the Rivulet, near the ferry: and, about the same time, George and Christopher Saunders were traders to England and the West Indies.

In 1720 Matthew Grant, on the east side of the river, was assessed L40 "faculty and vessell"; Captain Timothy Thrall was assessed L40, and Captain Daniel White L20 for "trading". Both resided north of the Little River.

Timothy Loomis makes the following entry in his Common Place Book: "1739, I sent 221 weight of tobacco to Barbadoes in the sloop, The Windsor, whereof 20 pounds was my son Timothy's." Half a mile below Hayden's Station was Master John Hayden's ship-yard; and another at the Rivulet ferry (at the foot of North Meadow Road).

Still later, Captain Roger New-

berry was a prosperous merchant in Windsor, on the place now owned by Dr. Preston, of Hartford (razed for Old Windsor Mall, corner of Bloomfield Ave. & Broad Street). After his death in the Cuba Expedition, in 1740, his widow received a pension from the English Government, which she had transmitted to her in goods instead of money, and so continued the store many years after her husband's decease.

Prior to and during the revolution, the Palisado Green was the "commercial center" of Windsor. Here was the great firm of Hooker & Chaffee, known through the length and breadth of the country for its extensive dealings and its high mercantile honor.

The Chaffee and Hooker houses are now standing on the eastern side of the Green; the former retains much of its pristine appearance; the latter has been somewhat remodeled and modernized, and is occupied by Deacon Woodford (now known as Sill House). North of this, and a little back from the street, stood the old store, packing houses, etc. Their trade was large. From every portion of the country there was constantly pouring in large supplies of horses, beef cattle, wheat, and produce of all and every sort. The Green was often heaped with goods of all kinds which had been received, or were being shipped. An eye-witness assures us that from her window she has counted as many as thirty teams in the road waiting their turn.

Under the bank of the Little River near by, lay many--sometimes six or seven--coasting vessels, and generally some larger English or West India vessels. A letter from



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Oliver Welles to Mr. Peter Verstelle, merchant at Boston, dated Windsor, 12 April, 1773, says: "Ezra Webb is not yet heard of; the rest of our sea vessels are all returned, and it was really a pleasant sight to see seven (from our steeple) coming up thro' the meadow at once, all near at equal distances". Their trade to Liverpool and the West Indies was at that time very extensive, and during some parts of the year the Little River was quite full of vessels, loading and unloading, and the Green was lively with hearty sea captains and bronzed and jolly sailors. Several of these captains resided here, among whom was Capt. Nathaniel Howard father of the late Major Howard and of William Howard. He always brought home a little stock of fine silks and choice goods from various voyages, and his wife kept store in the building now occupied by the Misses Stiles (now Fyler House). It is related of her that she was remarkable for dressing well, which excited the envy of some of her less fortunate neighbors; and that when on one occasion she sported an umbrella, which the captain had brought from 'furrin parts', and which was the first article of the kind ever seen here, she was followed by several of her fellow-citizen-esses, in a spirit of derision, carrying 'sieves' elevated on the tops of broom-handles, etc! William Howard afterward traded here, and kept the post-office. The business had previously been carried on under the name of Howard & Alford.

At Matson's store, which stood a few rods from Pickett's Tavern (now corner of Hayden Station Rd. & Center St.), a comparatively large business was done, down to about the beginning of the century. A few years before this the amount of business was \$40,000 per annum. They dealt largely in Turk's Island salt, which, during high water in the Connecticut, was landed direct from the West Indies and exchanged for north-

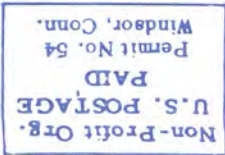
ern produce. The old salt-room of the store is still cold and damp (burned--1946).

There was also a store (built by Major Ellsworth) on the site of Dr. Wilson's former house. Lieut. Jonathan Ellsworth, son of Josiah and grandfather of Judge Oliver, born in 1669, and died 13 Sept. 1749, in the 81st year of his age, resided in an old house (which had been pulled down before 1802), and upon the spot afterwards occupied by his grandson Lieut. David Ellsworth (restored at 773 Palisado Ave. in 1984). He kept there a tavern for many years, and also a small store of West India goods, rum, etc. He was an enterprising man, and much concerned in public affairs. He was a man of very sound sense, and also noted for his sharp wit, which gained him the name of "Hector" Ellsworth. His death was caused by being thrown from his horse while riding in Windsor street. In person he was very tall, large, and of strong constitution.

One Strong traded on the site of the second house south of the Misses Stiles (now 14 N. Meadow Road).

But the palmy days were destined to pass away from Windsor. In addition to the failure of the Hookers, the erection of a bridge across the Connecticut at Hartford also damaged the interests of Windsor, and she gradually fell behind in the race.

Few vessels came up above Hartford after 1820. An amusing story of the last days of the quarrel between Windsor and Hartford to which this bridge gave rise, is still told. It seems that the first bridge erected there had a draw in its center, but, being destroyed by a freshet, it was replaced by another bridge having its draw (a drop draw) at the western end, next to the city. Just below the draw, Lyman's wharf extended into the river, at which



The Windsor Historical Society, Inc.
96 Palisado Ave.
Windsor, Conn. 06095

New Members

Mr. Wayne C. Hart

Mr. & Mrs. Lester L. Dean

COMMERCE, TRADE AND STORES, cont'd..

vessels were always loading and unloading, so that Windsor vessels were much hindered in getting through the gap. On one occasion Mr. Alford, of the firm of Howard & Alford, was dropping down the stream in one of his vessels, and, coming to the bridge, was refused passage by the bridgemaster, on the ground that the way below the bridge was blocked up by vessels at Lyman's wharf. Alford, however, insisted on the draw being raised, saying that he would look out for a passage, HE could get along. Finally, up went the draw--Alford dropped down the stream, but just as he had got in the gap under the bridge, he slipped an anchor, and loudly declared he couldn't go any further--even if he did go through the draw--that the way was obstructed by the vessels below. The bridge keeper swore and fumed, the draw could not be dropped so long as the vessel was under it--the current of teams and passengers across the bridge was obstructed, and becoming every moment more impatient and numerous--but imperturbable skipper Alford, as cool as a

cucumber, held his place--protesting his willingness, but his inability to budge an inch further. Finding him firm, the Hartford folks made it convenient to move some of their vessels out into the stream, and the Windsor captain floated down the river exulting.

In 1859 the only stores in Windsor center were H. S. Hayden's (formerly Loomis & Sheldon's--and originally Col. James Loomis') on Broad Street Green (see copy of Osbert Burr Loomis' painting in the lobby of Conn. Bank & Trust Co., Broad St.), and a little shop in the southwest corner of the Palisado Green, kept by Mr. Fenton (now 76-78 Palisado Avenue).



FYLER HOUSE AND WILSON MUSEUM

10 to 12 a.m. and 1 to 4 p.m.

Tuesday through Saturday

April 1 through November 30

Genealogical Research in Library
By Appointment

203-688-3813

President: Alexander B. Hooker
Director: Robert T. Silliman