Rodrick Wilsam’s Rocky Hill Life Articles

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# Introduction

Rodrick Wilscam

Rod Wilscam was an active member of the Rocky Hill community. He was active in town politics as a member of the Republican Party. He served as the unofficial town historian and was a major contributor to the growth and will being if the Rocky Hill Historical Society. His obituary in the Hartford Courant is as follows:

WILSCAM, RODERICK A.

ProQuest document link

Abstract (Abstract): Roderick A. Wilscam, 78, of Rocky Hill beloved husband for 55 years of Mollie (Kennedy) Wilscam, died Sunday (June 4, 2006). Born in Galesburg, IL, he was the son of the late Frederick and Lily (Ekstrom) Wilscam and lived most of his life in Rocky Hill. He was a member and very active in the Rocky Hill United Methodist Church, Rocky Hill Historical Society, and the Stepney-Masonic Lodge.

Links: Connecticut State Library

Full text: WILSCAM, Roderick A. Roderick A. Wilscam, 78, of Rocky Hill beloved husband for 55 years of Mollie (Kennedy) Wilscam, died Sunday (June 4, 2006). Born in Galesburg, IL, he was the son of the late Frederick and Lily (Ekstrom) Wilscam and lived most of his life in Rocky Hill. He was a member and very active in the Rocky Hill United Methodist Church, Rocky Hill Historical Society, and the Stepney-Masonic Lodge. Roderick was also very active in local and town committees including Rocky Hill Republican Town Committee, Planning and Zoning, Insurance Committee, Inland and Wetland Commission, and was part of the planning Committee for the Cora J. Belden Library. Mr. Wilscam wrote for many years a monthly column on history for the Rocky Hill Post. He was also a U.S. Army Veteran of World War II. Besides his wife he is survived by three daughters, Janet M. McGee of Manassas, VA, Karen J. McKay of Pueblo, CO, Linda G. Wilscam of Rockville; a granddaughter, Emily McGee of Virginia; two nephews, G. Joseph and Steven Wilscam and many cousins. He was predeceased by a brother, Charles Wilscam. Funeral services will be on Friday at 11 a.m. in the Rocky Hill United Methodist Church Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, with the Rev. Ronald Cox officiating. Interment will follow in the State Veterans Cemetery. Middletown with full Military Honors. Friends are invited to the Giuliano-Sagarino Funeral Home at BROOKLAWN, 511 Brook Street, Rocky Hill, on Thursday from 5-7 p.m. Gifts in his memory may be made to the Rocky Hill United Methodist Church. For online words of sympathy, flowers and directions, please visit www. Brooklawnfuneralhome.com.

About this document:

The articles in this document were copied verbatim from the three ring binder of Rod Wilscam’s writings at the Rocky Hill Historical Society. The pages were scanned and read through Google Drive’s optical character recognition software to produce MS Word files. Some of the OCR formatting mistakes were cleaned up, some obvious typo, which were exposed by MS Word, were fixes, and a few footnotes were added based on thing that have been learned since these articles were written.

The sequence in which articles are presented in this document is the sequence in which they appear in the binder at the Rocky Hill Historical Society Library.

A few articles were written by other authors. For example Mike Martino: while Mike is thought of as the photo guy, two articles in this collection show that he was also an excellent writer.

The titles of some of the articles are misleading in that many of them contain information that isn’t apparent from the title. Try using MS Word’s search feature to look for topics that interest you. Pick the Home menu; then: Find. Type in the character string you want. For example, if you want information on the brigantine Minerva, type Minerva in the Search Document field.

# Early Rocky Hill

## The Dinosaurs and Native Americans

Aug 99 Rocky Hill Life

*By Rod Wilscam*

Rocky Hill, as a town, received its name from the hogback ridge or trap rock, which, at an elevation of 5000 feet, is the most prominent feature of our landscape. All of the surrounding towns seem to have received their names from the Indian names for the area, or the names or other features of their founders. In the prequel of history, going back to the earliest of the Paleozoic Age (sometimes called the earliest of ages), then followed by the Mesozoic Age: the latter of the earliest features, beginning some 25,000 years ago, Rocky Hill was located at the Southern portion of a huge glacial lake, now called Lake Hitchcock.

The lake was formed millions of years ago, when the Connecticut Valley and the Connecticut River began with the melting of the glaciers which coved what is now the Rocky Hill and Wethersfield ea. This glacial natural phenomenon created the lake, and when the lake dried up, the Connecticut River was formed to drain almost all of New England. The river deposited rich alluvial soil on the Rocky Hill floodplain, making valuable soil for the later farming operations in the area. The animals, those which became dominant and ruled their universe were known as dinosaurs and other reptiles that preceded man by many thousands of years. These dinosaurs left their marks on the soils, especially near their watering holes. Rocky Hill is fortunate in having discovered one of the largest number of the tracks left by these dinosaurs in the United States. In August of 1967, a firm was hired to complete a construction project and a bulldozer operator was beginning to remove the vegetation and create a landscape. The operator was Edward McCarthy, who began scraping the site when he discovered the dinosaur tracks. After stopping immediately and consulting with his supervisor, they called in the experts to evaluate his discovery. The results of the experts' advice was the cessation of any further disturbance of the area. The tracks were preserved and the state of Connecticut created a dome-like building covering the area. The Dinosaur State Park facility is now, since 1968, on the National Register of Historic Landmarks. The park, on West Street, contains 63 acres, including the geophysic (geodesic? – RCH) dome covering more than 500 of the 2,000 discovered and preserved footprints. The park has become an important tourist attraction in Connecticut. Following the age of the dinosaurs, man came to this area. The Wangunk Indian Tribe lived in the area from Wethersfield to Middletown, which includes Rocky Hill. The Wangunks were basically a type of Indian who settled in this area and engaged in farming activities. However, the peaceful Wangunks were frequently attacked by more savage Iroquois Indians from New York. The Wangunk leaders hoped they could get the white men to settle in the Wethersfield area, and give them some relief against their predators. The Wangunk leaders sent a delegation to Watertown in the Massachusetts colony, seeking to have their people settle in this location. John Oldham and a party went to the Wethersfield area, in response to this invitation. Oldham and his company liked the possibilities and returned to Watertown and requested permission from the Massachusetts Court to start a settlement on the Connecticut River. When the court delayed a response to this petition, Oldham and his party left Watertown in the spring of 1634 and planted crops, and by the following year the Massachusetts General Court had approved his request to settle in Wethersfield. Following this approval, others came to the new settlement. The settlement of Wethersfield and subsequently Rocky Hill, will be the subject of future writings. In the meantime, do enjoy the history presented at Dinosaur State Park on West Street. Such a visit will be a very memorable and educational experience. RHL

## The Indians Who Lived in Rocky Hill

*Rocky Hill Life June 98*

By Rod Wilscam

It is generally believed that the American Indians originated in Asia and migrated across the Bering straits some 10,000 years ago. There is little remaining evidence of their existence, other than stone vessels, weapons and tools. The wood and leather items have all been lost to the damp climate. Historians have recorded that John Oldham, who arrived in Plymouth, Mass., in the early 1620s, ran into disputes with the religious authorities. He was exiled to Dorchester, where he continued to outrage those authorities. While he was out of favor with the authorities in Dorchester, Oldham still explored the countryside. In his travels he came to a site along the Connecticut River in the Connecticut Colony which the Wangunk Indians called Pyguaug. Thinking that Pyguaug would be a nice area for a new settlement, Oldham returned to Dorchester in the Bay Colony and organized a group of settlers. These settlers then petitioned the General Court—the legal governing authority—for permission to settle at this Pyguaug village area of Connecticut. The Native American Indians, who lived on the land now known as Wethersfield as far south as Middletown, including Rocky Hill, were known as the Wangunk tribe of the Iroquois Nation. The Wangunk Indians made their living by farming in the rich meadows of the Connecticut River and by fishing in the same waters.

While awaiting the approval of the General Court for authority to settle, Oldham, during the winter of I634–1635, gathered a company of some 12 followers and led them to the Connecticut River, then down river to Pyguaug, where they made land claims.

In spring 1835, some returned to Dorchester, where in May the General Court approved their petition for new settlement. They received permission to set up a new church and settlement in Pyguaug, to be named Watertown. The church was organized in 1636 as Wethersfield. Oldham, still the victim of wanderlust, continued his exploration of the region, which eventually led to his death in 1636 by some Pequot Indians near Block Island.

Many settlers from the Bay Colony came to Watertown. Because of religious dissension and the fear of overcrowding, many who were still subject to wanderlust went on to start other settlements in the region, including Stamford and other communities. Also in 1636, Wethersfield purchased some 50 square miles from the Wangunk Indians. While the deed is no longer known to exist, the description of the land area is still known. It is said that the chief or Sachem, Sequasson aka Sowheag, signed the original deed. While the Wangunk Indians were a peaceful tribe, many other tribes were more warlike. The Pequot Tribe was one of the more warlike tribes, and a band of around 100 Pequots in April 1637 attacked the Wethersfield village. There were nine men and several cows killed. Two women were taken captive.

This led to the beginning of the Pequot Wars. The new settlements of Wethersfield, Windsor and Hartford sent a force of nearly 90 settlers after the Pequot tribe and wiped out almost all of them, except for a few who escaped and managed to mingle and settle with other tribes,

The Wangunks had always “owned” their lands from Pyquag, which was located around the center of Wethersfield and south, on both sides of the Connecticut River, as far south as Mattebesetts, now known as Middletown. The Indian natives generally had a very different concept of landownership from how it was understood in English law and practice.

We read of many instances in which the white men literally stole land from the native Indians. However, the concept of landownership was pretty clearly understood by Sowheag and the Wangunks. Adam Stiles, in his history of Ancient Wethersfield, shows quite clearly that the Wethersfield town fathers approached Sowheag asking to obtain another five square miles to the west, and after negotiations, agreed upon a price.

Sometime following this purchase, Sowheag approached Wethersfield leaders and indicated a belief that the tribe did not get a fair price for the land. After renegotiations another sum was paid, and apparently the Wangunks were satisfied with the additional payment.

My feeling is the relationship with the Wangunks must have been trusting and understanding because no complaints were made about the original purchase.

Rocky Hill's Dr. Rufus Griswold indicates that the headquarters of Sowheag, the Sachem or chief, lived near the Beckley Quarter. That was the home of the settler Richard Beckley, who in 1670 purchased some 300 acres of land near Mattebesett and the southwest corner of Wethersfield, which is now west of the Rocky Hill/Berlin town line, in what is now Berlin. It is thought that at this time Sowheag, the Sachem had died, as the deed is signed by Tarramuggus, the successor of Sowheag. In 1672, the Wethersfield Town Meeting, the local legislative body, set aside five acres of land along the Connecticut River in Rocky Hill for a public landing and ship building yard. Following the Pequot Wars, there was a peaceful era in the New England colonies until the early 1700s. The Indians were beginning to become skilled in the metallurgical arts, and had become familiar and proficient in the use of guns and swords as weapons. In recognition of the threat of Indian warfare, in 1703 the Connecticut General Court had ordered each town to prepare forts for the protection of the townspeople. The one houses elected to become fortified was the Jonathon Deming House, located on the northwest corner of what is now the Silas Deane Highway and Parsonage Street. The Deerfield Massacre in 1704 was quite dreadful, but the Rocky Hill area was spared direct loss. Several men from town responded to the call for help from Deerfield. One can only wonder about the relation the early colonists had with the native Indians, but study of the agreements and disagreements can tell quite a story about understanding and cooperation. RHL

## The Pequot War and its Rocky Hill Connection

Rocky Hill Life (date cut off)

By Rod Wilscam

The early colonists in the Rocky Hill area in Watertown, now Wethersfield, Connecticut lived a very hard life to survive. Life was harsh enough, just for survival in the early days of Rocky Hill .Besides the necessity to survive in a wilderness, there was also the fact of Indians living on the land.

The first settlers had the need for survival of themselves and their families. Shelter, food and clothing were challenges they faced each and every day. These challenges were made even more difficult for survival because of the ever presence of the native Indian population. While the local Wangunk Indians were peaceful there were many other Indian predators to keep the settlers on their toes. The early settlers, ever alert to possible dangers, kept their muskets handy in order to protect their homes, families and themselves - even while working in their fields.

One of the biggest and most dangerous tribes was the Pequot Indians. The Pequot Indians were of the Algonquian Nation and its Mohegan Tribe. In the early 17th century they lived in Southeastern Connecticut between the Niantic River and the Rhode Island border. The Pequot Indians were a warlike tribe with an estimated population of 3,000. The Massachusetts, Dutch and Connecticut settlers had made peace treaties with the Pequots. However, the Pequot Indians were warlike and suspicious of the Dutch and English colonists. The Pequot Indians' settlement was located in the Groton area, where they had erected a fort. The chief or Sachem of the Pequots was called Sassacus, who was quite belligerent to both the Dutch in Hartford and the English in Wethersfield and Windsor. The hostilities started in earnest in 1637, when Sassacus and his people killed the first settler of Wethersfield, John Oldham, and two young friends near Block Island, named after the Dutchman, Adrian Block, who discovered the island. This act of war was followed by a war with the Narragansets Indians in Rhode Island in 1634. Then on April 23, 1637 a raid in Wethersfield, in which Abraham Finch and five other settlers were killed, and two daughters of William Swayne were kidnapped in this raid and some 20 head of cattle were also slain. The Indians had thought the captive girls would help them learn to use the guns they had captured as loot. While the Wangunk Indians lived peaceably with the white settlers, there was always concern, on the part of the settlers, for their own lives. Because of the raid, murders and kidnapping in Wethersfield, the Wethersfield settlers called a meeting with the Hartford and Windsor communities to join with Wethersfield to avenge the Pequot raids.

Some Dutch citizens, in the meantime, intervened with the Pequots and managed to rescue the two kidnapped girls who were returned to their Wethersfield home.

The Pequots had asked the Narragansett Indians of Rhode Island to join them against the Dutch and the Englishmen, but the Narragansett Indians, due to their friendship with the English, declined to join the Pequot tribe.

On May I, 1637, the General Court, predecessor of the General Assembly, convened and received a plea to vote to authorize “an aggressive war against the Pequots," and named John Mason as the leader of the Connecticut forces.

Following the authorization of the General Court, Wethersfield had accepted 26 volunteers and a number of Wangunk Indians to join in a task force from the other Connecticut towns and a contingent of 26 Massachusetts volunteers for their revenge against the Pequots, as authorized by the General Court, John Mason, with a force of more than 100 white volunteers and a large number of Wangunk Indians, led his force to attack the Pequots at Mystic from the east, and was quite successful.

Nearly 800 Pequots were killed in the final battle. The English forces suffered two dead and 20 injured. Thus, by July in 1637 the Pequot War was over, with a successful conclusion.

The colonists pursued the remaining Pequots, managed to capture many of the survivors, and parceled among the friendly tribes, thus removing the threat of the Pequot Indians against the Connecticut settlers.

In 1638, a peace treaty was signed between the colonists and the Indians.

One result of the now ended Pequot was the adoption of the Fundamental Orders. These Fundamental Orders were based on the concept that government of the people required the consent of the governed, and this concept was included in the 1662 Connecticut Charter. These Fundamental Orders became the principle governing documents for many of the other American Colonies, from the colonial years and after the Revolution. RHL

## Indian Affairs Here and in Wethersfield

*Rocky Hill Life OCT 99*

**By Rod Wilscam**

When Wethersfield was settled by John Oldham and his company of settlers in I 634, they were like invited guests of the Indian residents of the Connecticut River area. It was called Pyquag by the Wangunk Indians who lived in the area from where Middletown is now, to an area at the south edge of where Hartford is now located. The eastern border included most of the current Glastonbury of today. The Wangunks were a peaceful tribe who lived in small villages with wooden stockades and pole houses, matted boughs and thatched roofs. They were an agricultural tribe that lived in an area until that area stopped producing enough food for their needs. Their choice of Pyquag for settlement seems to have been fortunate, as the settlers in the area enjoyed good production, down to the present. The islands included the land known as Wrights Island, or as Manhannock; also Pennywise Island, as well as Standish's or Cole's Island. John Oldham, leader of the group of settlers, asked the Indians to formally acknowledge that the ownership of the portions of land was changed to the band of English settlers. This original deed is no longer in existence. The original land was six miles north and south, five miles west of the river and three miles to the west. After a short time, the settlers asked the Indians to extend the line to the east to six miles, which was done. After a short time, the Indians contacted the English indicating they did not get enough money for the additional land. Then, after renegotiations, a fair price was agreed upon and paid. This seemed to be a confirmation that the original purchase amount was acceptable. The settlers in this new area named their new community Watertown, in honor of their hometown in the Massachusetts colony. In the year 1671, the Indians and the Wethersfield settlers reconfirmed the original deed, and this deed is filed in Volume 2, pages 202 and 203, of the Wethersfield land records. The Indian tribe was known as the Wangunks, a tribe of the Algonquin Indian Nation, which was a peaceful tribe in New England. As in the Massachusetts colony, the relationships with the native Indians were basically peaceful, unlike the Indian relationships in the other colonies. The Pequots, however, had more of a warlike nature, and in 1637 they raided Wethersfield, killing nine settlers and several cows and taking several prisoners. This raid outraged the settlers, who called on the Hartford and Windsor communities to assist the Wethersfield settlers against the Pequot Indians. The fighting was a massacre, and while some of the Pequots escaped and settled with the other tribes, almost all of the balance were killed, and the prisoners taken were saved. The Encyclopedia of Connecticut Indians outlines the attitude of the British colonists was extreme. With a “tongue in cheek" approach, the Native American Rights Fund, a Colorado-based advocacy group, issued a statement of the American peoples' approach to their relationship with the title “A Brief U.S. Government Guide to Suppress Indians.” This booklet suggests that the U.S. authorities has acted somewhat as follows:

“To suppress Indian cultures and absorb Indian people into white society in a manner according to the law, it is vital to create a body of law that supports this intention. Therefore, the government must move quickly on these five fronts to pass laws and carry out policies that (in part):

* Destroy native economies;
* Take away Indian land;
* Dismantle Indian families and cultures;
* Stamp out Indian religions, and;
* Eradicate tribal powers of self-government and self-determination.

While the attitude seems to agree with the policies of the U.S. government in its relationship with the Native American Indians in general, the Wangunks seem to have been satisfied, at least after complaining about the second land deal. The history of broken promises and treaty violations with our Native American Indians is along and dark part of our history. I do believe that in our past dealings with the American Indians, our local ancestors seem to have been honorable, more so than in many of the treaties with the U.S. government with many other tribes. We can be proud of the early colonists of Wethersfield and Rocky Hill in their dealings with the natives. RHL

## The Wangunks and Early European Settlement of Rocky Hill

**Rocky Hill Life SEP 01 21**

**By Rod Wilscam**

The earliest historical records relating to Europeans in the area now called Rocky Hill date to when the River Indian Wangunk tribe, who lived along the Connecticut River at a place called Pyquag, sent a delegation to the English settlement in Massachusetts, asking the colonists to consider settling in the area. The Wangunk Indians were a tribe related to the Algonquin Indian Nation. The Wangunk name refers to "the bend in the river," which described the section of the Connecticut River near the area of Pyquag, now called Wethersfield.

What is currently the town of Rocky Hill, was part of the town of Wethersfield and called “the lower community.” It later became known a Rocky Hill, because of the hill of trap rock, a prominent feature on the landscape area along the river, located in the southeast comer of town. The Wangunk tribes were constantly bullied by the Iroquois Indian nation, which demanded and received tribute payments from the peaceful Wangunks, who made the payments as required, although resenting the payment of tribute. When they sent their delegation to Massachusetts, they hoped to persuade white residents to settle in the Connecticut River area. Their motive was to get the Europeans protect them from the Iroquois. The first European to explore the Connecticut River was the Dutch fur trader, Adrian Block, who, while sailing his ship in Long Island Sound, decided to travel up the river, getting as far as what is now called the Dutch Point area of Hartford, where he found the native Indians willing to trade goods, and established a trading post there. Meanwhile, in Watertown, Mass., pioneer John Oldham was accused of violating the Colonies laws. While awaiting his sentence, he was sailing in Long Island Sound, where he also discovered the Connecticut River and sailed up the river as far as the area of Pyquag. The authorities in Massachusetts had not acted upon the Connecticut Indians' request, when John Oldham returned and reported that in his explorations in Connecticut, he had come upon the Pyquag area. It was apparently a great place to make a settlement and he asked for their permission to start a new settlement there.

His proposal included a petition signed by10 families. The authorities had not ruled on the petition by 1634, so Oldham and the 10 signers left Watertown for Connecticut and, arriving in the fall, they made crude houses and planted crops in the area that is now Old Wethersfield. Their desire for leaving the Colony of Massachusetts was rooted in religious dissension, which was the cause for several groups striking out to establish new communities. In 1635, another group from Massachusetts received permission to settle Windsor, Connecticut and establish a church, which was done. Thus, the first settlement was established and crops were planted in Wethersfield, but the first church to be established was in Windsor. In Wethersfield, the church was not established until 1636. The issue of which town is oldest is like the old question of which came first, the chicken or the egg. As the perennial question was brought up in the 1640s, the Connecticut General Court charged a committee to study and report back to the Court. In 1650, the Court, now called the General Assembly, voted that “Wethersfield was ye most ancient towne.” It was conceded that the Windsor Church was the earliest established church, but Wethersfield Town was settled, established and crops planted prior to the settlement of Windsor.

The combination of the Connecticut River and the good arable lands along the river made it an ideal place to settle, as is proven by the fact that Wethersfield, Windsor, Hartford, Old Saybrook, and Middletown were the earliest settlements in Connecticut. Following the Connecticut River settlements, New Haven and the southern Connecticut shore towns were settled.

In May, 1636, the Massachusetts General Court finally gave its approval to the petition of Oldham and his 10 adventurers. The name of the settlement was Watertown, later was changed to Wethersfield. In 1650 the residents of Wethersfield began moving to the southern, or “lower community.” That year, the Wethersfield Town Meeting approved a request to establish and build a road to be laid out and built from the Ferry Landing to the main road to the south. This suggests that the ferry was running much earlier than the date of 1655 as the beginning of the ferry in Rocky Hill, This also suggests that the ferry should be considered as having 347 years of continuous service in 2002. It should also be noted that the ferry service in Rocky Hill is the oldest ferry in continuous service in North America. This is quite an honor for our town.

It should be remembered that the land of Rocky Hill was a part of the purchase of land from the Wangunk Indians. The original deed is not to be found in the Wethersfield Town Clerk's Office. In 1650, Samuel Boardman was given a deed for 30 acres of land at the southeast side of the rocky hill along the Connecticut River.

Following this date, many other land grants in the lower community, now called Rocky Hill, were made, and the early settlement began. RHL

## The Wangunk Indians in Ancient Wethersfield

Rocky Hill Life Dec 03

**By Rod Wilscam, Historian**

Representatives of the Wangunk Indians approached the Pilgrims in the Massachusetts Colony in the year 1661 with the request that the Pilgrims send a colony of settlers to the Connecticut River area. The Pilgrims listened to the Indians and replied that they would consider their invitation.

The court did not understand that the Indian delegation's purpose in the invitation was to have the English settlement as a buffer between the Wangunk river tribe and the Iroquois Indian Nation, which was constantly raiding the Wangunk settlement and forcing the Wangunks to pay tribute to them, and the Indians wanted to recruit the Englishmen as their allies for their protection, and it did work. After the delegation of the Wangunk Indians had left to return to their homes, Pilgrim John Oldham led a party of discovery to the area of the Connecticut River they called Pyguaug, they liked what they saw. Oldham returned to the Massachusetts Colony, and recruited a band of followers to go with him to Pyquag.

They went to the General Court, their legislative body, for permission to travel to the Connecticut River territory to start a new settlement. The Massachusetts General Court was slowly deliberating the invitation, and the invitation and the request from John Oldham and his party to go to the Connecticut River area to start a settlement.

John Oldham and his party were getting restless because the winter season was approaching, and the court had not acted on the request. The band of settlers packed up and left for the overland trek to their new homes. On their arrival, the additional settlers found the territory to be what Oldham had described. The band of settlers started at once to get their land divided and planted crops for the spring. While this was going on, they began building shelters and homes. For these activities, the settlers received help and advice from the Wangunk Indians, based on their experiences in the area. There had been a running dispute over which settlement was the first settlement. The general Court decided in the year 1650 to codify the actions of the court. In this codification, the General Court settled the issue by declaring that Wethersfield was, indeed, "ye most ancient towne.”

This is not considered sufficient evidence by the residents of Windsor because they claimed that they had received permission for the settlement and they had come to Windsor with the clergy for the church. This is the basis on which the Connecticut General Court was trying to solve the argument on which town was first settled, and the court's final word was made known over 350 years ago, but is still being debated. The Wangunks aided the settlers to plant crops and build their homes to give them shelter for the coming winter. Thus, the settlement at Pyquag, now called Wethersfield, was, indeed, "ye most ancient towne".

During the winter of 1634, the Massachusetts General Court gave its permission for the settlement at Pyguaug. This gave legal approval for the settlement, which was already a matter of fact. The Wangunk Indian tribe, as well as the other tribes and nations all had a different set of beliefs from the Englishmen and every other non-Indian.

The Indian culture had an entirely different understanding of land ownership from the English and the Dutch, as well as all other European nationals. The Indian culture was based on a worship of things natural – the sun, the moon, the stars and such phenomena as the wind and rain, as well as the sunlight and the moonlight. They had an entirely different concept of land and its use or ownership. The land purchase of the John Oldham settlers with the Wangunk tribe was negotiated in detail. The Indians repeatedly reaffirmed the treaty, or agreement, and at a later date, they came back and stated they were not satisfied.

So the Wethersfield citizens met with their representatives and renegotiated the agreement to their satisfaction, and the new treaty was signed. Interestingly, the original land deed cannot be found, but the second deed is on file and has never been questioned.

The Wangunk tribe of the River Indians, so called due to the fact that they were not a nomadic tribe as were the other tribes of the Algonkian Indian nation, lived in one place the year around and farmed and fished in the area around their homes, while the other tribes lived strictly as nomadic peoples.

The men did the hunting and fishing for food, while the women planted crops and spent their time gathering nuts and berries.

The families made wooden dishes, and fashioned shelves around the walls of the long houses. The men spent their time (Sic – RCH).

The clothes for the entire families were made from deerskins, or from other animal skins. The families made wooden baskets to hold their belongings. These baskets were not unlike the Indian baskets sold as genuine Native American baskets on the markets of today. Their hunting implements were also used in all their tribal warfare. Their tools were made of stones and animal skins. The bow and arrow was another main tool used by the Native Americans, for both hunting and in warfare activities The Rocky Hill Historical Society has exhibits on the Native American tools and culture at the Academy Hall Museum, 785 Old Main St. RHL

## How People in Rocky Hill lived in Ancient Times

Rocky Hill Life MAY 01

**By Rod Wilscam, Historian**

When John Oldham first visited the Indian village in Connecticut called Pyguaug, he found that the area was quite pleasant and well suited for a settlement. He liked the river for transportation and the land seemed to be well suited for agriculture.

At about the same time, in 1631, the River Indian tribe had sent a delegation to the Massachusetts Colony at Plymouth with the thought of getting the white people to establish themselves in the area.

This would provide some sense of protection from the more warlike Iroquois tribe that had been raiding the more peaceful tribe, the Wangunks. The Wangunks generally lived on both sides of the Connecticut River, from the bend of the river in present-day Wethersfield in the north to the lower part of Middletown in the south. They were basically a peaceful tribe who stayed in the Pyguaug area and farmed the meadows for their livelihood and also ate the fish from the river. The Connecticut River was also a convenient source of water for drinking as well as cleansing their clothes and utensils.

The Indians did not keep written records of their past, but relied on word of mouth carried on from one generation to the next. Some anthropologists believe that the American Indians originated in the Asian lands because of similarities in other than skin color. Current scientific thinking indicates that the ancestors of American Indians came to the North American continent over land from the Siberian section of Asia, through what is now Alaska. These people and their descendants have been living in the American continents for over 30,000 years.

The Wangunks generally lived in long houses, rather than the conical shaped teepee used by more nomadic tribes.

The roof of the long house looked much like the Quonset hut-type modern building. The long house was most practical and provided a cozy retreat from the cold New England winters.

The long house featured a stone lined pit in the center of the floor, in which a fire was maintained for heating purposes. The frames were mostly of birch limbs.

It has been stated that the Wangunks' long houses were 60 feet long. The long houses could hold as many as 10 families. People would sleep communally around the fire, using beds of animal skins stretched over poles in the ground.

For tools, such as axes and knives, they used stones chipped to shape, with wooden handles, which had been split on the end, and the axe head or blade would be attached by leather reed thongs.

For their use in eating, wooden bowls were be constructed by grinding them down, and wooden plates made the same way. Reeds were woven into baskets and mats, as well as other shapes. By any modern standards, these instruments were quite crude.

Bark was stripped from elm trees to make canoes for traveling on the river. These canoes were a very efficient and useful means of transportation.

For clothing, the Wangunks fashioned moccasins, as well as trousers, out of deerskins. These were worn during warm summer months. The men wore a shirt and leggings made from animal skins in colder weather.

The women and girls wore a skirt fashioned from the same deerskins or other hides as the men wore. The women wore soft-soled moccasins, which were usually decorated with beads. The diet of the Wangunk Indians was varied. The males were the hunters and the fishermen. The females were the cooks, maintained the gardens, in which Indian corn was the main crop, followed by squash, pumpkins and beans. Acorns, chestnuts and wild berries were plentiful, and easily picked.

Armed with bow and arrows, men had to be most efficient trackers to get near enough to the animals to kill them for food. Males were trained to stalk and to hunt from their earliest days.

Larger game would be baked over an open fire, and with the lack of refrigeration, would have to be consumed rapidly.

The religion practiced by the Wangunk Indians was the religion of nature. The gods of the skies were very important to their lives. The gods of the winds and the rains gave them good hunting days, or bad hunting days.

The early English settlers had a lot to learn from the natives and while the ways of the Indian were thought to be crude, devilish and of the lowest quality of ethics, the Indian was a good friend of the English settlers.

The Indians developed a type of relationship not understood by the early colonists. This strange relationship allowed the two groups a means of living with each other that was not easy to understand.

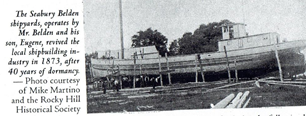
But, they all learned to live in a peaceful way. The Wangunk Indians also taught us a way of peace, and living together. At another time, we can discuss the relationships they had with the Pequot tribe and others. RHL

# Early Settlement of Rocky Hill

## Early Settlement of Rocky Hill

*July 96 Rocky Hill Life*

**By Roderick Wilscam Rocky Hill Historical Society**

The land now known as Rocky Hill was earlier the area known to the Wangunk Indians as Pyguaug, later was known as Watertown in 1634, was changed to Wethersfield in 1636, and then Rockie Hill, Lexington, Stepney Parish in 1722, and by 1843, Rocky Hill. The tribe, a peaceful tribe, used the great meadows along the river as a campground, a farming area, a fishing area, a hunting area, as well as an area with sights of great beauty. Rocky Hill, named for the large hill south of the Connecticut River Great Meadows, was referred to as "Rockie Hill" in the early days of 17th Century Wethersfield. The rocky hill consisted of the "hogback" ridge of trap rock, some 300 feet high, which was known for its prominence in the area. The view of the Connecticut River, from the "rocky hill" of the great meadow and the Glastonbury Hills to the east, was quite spectacular. It has been said that in the early days of settlement, the area had been referred to as the "lower community" or as the “Rockie Hill." When the people of the Rocky Hill area found that attending church was quite different (difficult?- RCH) in inclement weather, they petitioned Wethersfield and the General Assembly in New Haven and Hartford to be granted permission to form a separate parish. This was approved in 1722, and the name was changed to Stepney Parish. Officially, the General Assembly created the Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield. In 1843, the General Assembly granted Rocky Hill separate existence through the incorporation of Rocky Hill as a town, thusly the area ceased to be a part of Wethersfield and became its own town. The early town records of Wethersfield show that the first grant of land, four miles south of the Wethersfield settlement and consisting of 20 acres on the west bank of the Connecticut River, was granted to Samuel Boardman, Jr. in 1649. And, periodically following that year, many other grants were made. Grants of land were made to Thomas Williams, son of Matthew Williams, in I661, of I2 acres on the south side of the Rocky Hill, and, in 1672, for an additional I0 acres. Thomas Williams, in 1668, bought the Samuel Boardman, Jr. land grant. We are indebted to Sherman W. Adams and Henry R. Stiles for compiling and printing the following list of the original Rocky Hill landowners in the 1904, “The History of Ancient Wethersfield" The original landowners in Rocky Hill, including those known to have built homes in town, and those who had purchased land from the original grantees, included: Samuel Boardman, Jr.; Ezekial Buck; Samuel Cole; Jonathan Deming; Joseph Edwards; Philip Goffe; Jacob Goffe; William Morris; Andrew Pyncheon; Joseph Smith; John Taylor; Samuel Taylor; Amos Williams; John Williams; Thomas Williams; and Job Whitcomb.

Shortly after I684, Joseph Butler, Joseph Grimes and John Slead followed, although it is not certain that John Slead had actually settled and built a house on his homestead. There may have been others. Early planning sessions by the Wethersfield Town Meetings had agreed to the basic road pattern in the Rocky Hill area, and most of the growth in Rocky Hill followed these patterns. In 1672, a Wethersfield Town Meeting had set aside a track of five acres on the west side of the "rocky hill” to be used as a public landing area and as a shipyard. This landing area became an important factor in the life of Rocky Hill in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The ship building (text cut off by copier - RCH) which had mostly (three hole punch hole obscures word - RCH) landing, ending the viability of Wethersfield as a port and ship building area.[[1]](#footnote-1) Rocky Hill had therefore become the head of river transportation and the farthest northern port on the Connecticut River for river shipping and overseas commerce. It is said that shipping boats docking in the Rocky Hill port made quite a sight, and there were long lines of horse-drawn wagons waiting to unload and load shipments for Hartford and Wethersfield business firms.

The shipbuilding and the shipping industries helped many local business firms flourish after 1700. The importance of these businesses by 1803 led to the building of Academy Hall, which operated as a staffing outlet for merchants and business people seeking trained personnel, providing ship's captains and sailors. Ships built and owned by Rocky Hill and Wethersfield businessmen sailed to ports in Georgia, as well as to the West Indies and Europe and Africa. Among the exports shipped out of the Rocky Hill port were horses, cattle, hogs, hay, hoop-poles, barrel staves, salted beef (this was before the days of modern refrigeration), pork, fish, potatoes, onions, brick, and more. These products were shipped around the world. From stories, we also learn that the ship captains would leave their goods as per the shippers' instructions, then stop in African ports and pick up a load of Negro slaves. These slaves were then left in ports in Southern colonies, and the boats would return empty to Rocky Hill.

The maritime era in Rocky Hill came to an end in the early 19th Century due to the emergence of steamboat and the railroad transportation industries. Aside from the maritime industries, almost everyone in Rocky Hill was either farming or engaged in some facet of the agricultural processes. Most of the homeowners either owned tracts of farmland, and farmed this land primarily, or worked for other farm-oriented businessmen.

Agricultural pursuits were the mainstay of life in the early days, because of the needs for self-sufficiency. The shipping industries made the daily foraging for food and supplies much easier for the Rocky Hill area, as well as for Wethersfield and Hartford citizens.

The government of Wethersfield was the Town Meeting as well as the Congregational Church. A Wethersfield Town Meeting on Dec. 19, 1720 approved a grant of 60 acres of land to the Congregational Church for parsonage lands. By law, each landowner and resident was required to support the Congregational Church with their tithes, which, in fact, were their taxes. The running of town business was entrenched in the church and in the town meetings.

With the trade generated by the maritime industries, many taverns and inns were flourishing in Rocky Hill. Some of these inns and taverns became quite popular for their dining facilities, drawing guests from Hartford and beyond for the dining and entertainment pleasures offered by the Rocky Hill establishments.

Between 1778 and 1870, the Danforth family carried on a business in pewter and tin ware. Thomas Danforth also carried on this business in Philadelphia, and spent part of his winters there. The Danforth family sent some of their goods by "peddlars" as they called their salesmen, throughout the southern states. No doubt, this was part of the beginning of the familiar term “Yankee Peddlar."

The Danforth family also established other stores in the south, marketing their pewter products. On this basis, the Danforth family of Rocky Hill started some of the earliest chain stores in the country!

In 1826, the Connecticut General Assembly formally accepted the name Rocky Hill as the official name of this community. While this explanation of the early settlement of Rocky Hill is necessarily brief, it is the story of the Rocky Hill heritage, and it should be remembered for future generations. RHL

## Early Life in Rocky Hill under Connecticut Blue Laws

Date of publication cut off by copier – RCH

**By Rod Wilscam**

Wethersfield, the mother community for Rocky Hill, was founded in 1633-34 and from the first settlers, the followers of John Oldham, were primarily guided in their religious freedom as they saw it to be, and following the customs of the mother country, England, were very much religiously oriented. From the very beginning, the General Court was the primary source of the laws enacted for the good of the people of Wethersfield and the Connecticut Colony. The severe laws passed by the General Court system became known as the Connecticut Blue Laws, or the Bloody Laws. As early as in 1638, the Massachusetts Colony had adopted a codification of its General Court rulings, and in 1639, Connecticut had also adopted a similar set of laws. Interestingly, the Connecticut Colony General court had included the right of trial before a jury of one’s peers, but the New Haven settlement could find no mention of a jury system in the Bible and refused to accept the idea of a jury trial.

The Puritan settlers of Wethersfield, and including Rocky Hill in their daily lives, have been said to exhibit a moral and religious character and strength of purpose. Their domestic lives demonstrate a life of healthful toil and a quiet happiness. It has been stated that they rejoiced in their civil liberties, living in the wilderness and serving God by trying to know Him and to do His will.

Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College in 1810, has said, "Every township is an inferior Republic," and “He that would understand the political character of New England must study the constitution of its towns, its schools, and its militia.”

The working day in early Connecticut was 11 hours in the summer and nine hours a day during the winter months. The General Court set maximum wages for summer and or winter months, with the admonition that any person giving or taking larger wages should abide the censure of the Court.

The total list of Blue Laws, mostly from the New Haven General Court, was quite long. Chief among these Blue Laws was the statement that the government and the Magistrates, convened in General Assembly, are the supreme power under God of this independent Dominion, and from the determination of the Assembly, no appeal shall be made.

The Governor is amenable to the voice of the people. The Governor shall have a single vote in determining any question; except a casting vote, when the Assembly may be equally divided. And also that the Assembly of the People shall not be dismissed by the Governor, but shall dismiss itself.

Further conspiracy against this Dominion shall be punished with death, and further whoever says there is a power and jurisdiction above and over this Dominion, shall suffer death and loss of property. Conspiracy against this Dominion shall be punished with death.

The judges shall determine controversies without a jury.

No one shall be a Freeman or give a vote, unless he be converted, and a member in full communion of one of the churches allowed in this Dominion.

No person shall hold any office, who is not found in the faith and faithful to this Dominion; and whoever gives a vote to such person, shall pay a fine of one pound, for a second offense, he shall be disenfranchised.

Each Freeman shall swear by the blessed God to bear true allegiance to this Dominion, and that Jesus is the only King.

No Quaker, or dissenter from the established worship of this Dominion shall be allowed to give a vote for the election of Magistrates, or any officer.

No food or lodging shall be afforded to a Quaker, Adamite, or other heretic.

If any person turns Quaker, he shall be banished,

No Priest shall abide in the Dominion; he shall be banished, and suffer death on his return, Priests may be seized by anyone without a warrant.

No one to cross a river, but with an authorized ferryman.

No one shall run on the Sabbath day or walk in his garden or elsewhere, except reverently to and from meeting.

No one shall travel, cook victuals, make beds, sweep house, cut hair or shave, on the Sabbath day.

No woman shall kiss her child on the Sabbath or fasting day.

When it appears that an accused has confederates, and he refuses to discover them, he may be racked.

Whoever publishes a lie to the prejudice of his neighbor, shall sit in the stocks or be whipped fifteen stripes.

The Magistrates only shall join in marriage, as they may do it with less scandal to Christ's Church.

Would you like to be subject to these types of laws? RHL

## Early Rocky Hill History

*Rocky Hill Life Apr. 00*

**By Rod Wilscam**

We know our town of Rocky Hill by our homes and our institutions as well as items of our geography that we see each day. Our very lives have a center of our homes and the familiarity of our everyday surroundings, whether the path to a neighbor’s home, a place of work, or a place of worship or a place of shopping for our everyday needs.

The land we occupy has a rich and varied heritage. In the past, the landscape we now call Rocky Hill, the Connecticut River and the local streams have made our land richer and more desirable. The lands we now know as Rocky Hill were considered to be rich, because of the Connecticut River and its local tributaries. The waters in the area were rich areas for fish, and the meadow lands were rich in water and nutrients, making the land suitable for agricultural pursuits. Annual spring floods keep the meadow areas well supplied with nutrients. The river also gives the area the benefit of water transportation. All in all, the river is a valuable asset for Rocky Hill.

From earliest of known times, Rocky Hill was the southern part of Lake Hayward, which ran from the south of Rocky Hill northerly to beyond the Massachusetts border. Many geological factors together caused the loss of this ancient lake, and leaving the Connecticut River as a drain, taking the river to the Long Island Sound, and then to the Atlantic Ocean. As a matter of fact, the oceanic tides come up river to the Rocky Hill area.

John Oldham, a Puritan resident of Watertown in the Massachusetts Colony, and a group of adventurers were the first settlers in Connecticut Colony. The name Connecticut comes from the Connecticut River, which was known by the Indians as "the long winding river” by the resident Indians. The first immigrants into Connecticut Colony included John Oldham and his followers: Leonard Chester, John Clake, Abraham Finch, Nathaniel Foote, Robert Rose, Robert Seeley, John Strickland, (names cut off by copier – RCH) Samuel Boardman, who had received a grant of 20 acres of land which was located between the river and the southeast side of the rocky hill. It was in deference to this prominent landmark that Rocky Hill received its current name.

The earliest industries in Rocky Hill included agriculture, manufacturing, shipbuilding and related industries. Agriculture was the basic supplier of food for the settlers; manufacturing the items necessary to carry out farming, and to obtain the materials for their homes, then to make items for export to purchase items that could not be made by the early settlers.

In 1650, the Connecticut General Court, now the General Assembly, had confirmed that Wethersfield was acclaimed as "Ye most ancient of townes” in the Connecticut Colony. This action, by the General Court after a study, has been challenged by Windsor, who also makes a claim to the title.

The rich meadows made an excellent place for crops and also a commons for keeping the animals of the residents. One of the earliest of elected officials in the Wethersfield community were the Herders, who were responsible for the watching of residents' cows in the commons. This was a community benefit for the watching of the family animals, much like the baby sitting services used in our Current age.

As early as in 1650, the ferry service across the river to South Glastonbury was started. Early in this century, the operation of the ferry was taken over by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, which still operates the ferry service. This service is celebrating its 350th anniversary of continuous service this year, and is the oldest operating ferry service in the United States.

Fishing has been carried out as one of the oldest of businesses in the state. The shad fishing is well known as a delicacy in the northeast. Other fish are known almost as well by the customers and users of the products of this industry.

On December 19, 1720, the residents petitioned the Wethersfield Town Meeting to have the benefits of being a separate parish. This was approved on March 5, 1722, and referred to the General Court who approved the petition at its May 1722 session.

The erection of a church and the settling of a pastor, the new name was started as Lexington. Later in 1722, the General Assembly approved a petition from the residents to change the name of the new parish to Stepney, because of the name of the town of Lexington in Massachusetts Colony could cause confusion, and that Lexington "not being so pleasing to some."

The people of Rocky Hill began to build a new church in the middle of Old Main Street, just south of the present town hall. It was considered to be customary to build municipal buildings on town property, and the Old Main Street was considered to be a likely location. The church was made of wood - unplastered, unpainted and not heated. The church did have a gallery and pews, all in the nature of church buildings of the 18th century. It has been stated that the church was never really completed.

The Rev. Daniel Russell was accepted as the first minister and was ordained and installed and the church was dedicated June 7, 1727. Upon a petition for a separate school for Rocky Hill (Stepney Parish), a Wethersfield Town Meeting in 1694 approved that "if the inhabitants south of the land by Sam Dix's house (Rocky Hill) should procure a teacher for themselves, they would be exempt from paying school rates for Wethersfield." After teaching pupils in private homes, from the fall of I699, a new school building was erected in the middle of (old) Main Street. The first school was completed in 1712.

The advantages of the Connecticut River helped make Rocky Hill a seaport. In 1672, the Wethersfield Town Meetings set side five acres of land for a public landing for the purposes of shipbuilding, Rocky Hill has an industry of building ships and sailing them from their home port. Thus began two centuries of shipbuilding and a maritime industry. The shipping and shipbuilding business began to deteriorate with the coming of the railroad in 1872. - To provide trained seamen, Academy Hall was built as a maritime school to train seamen to man the ships built in Rocky Hill. Many products, produced for trade, were shipped from Connecticut (missing text in source document – RCH)

mas with goods form Rocky Hill, then taking goods to African ports for slaves and returning to southern ports then returning to Rocky Hill to celebrate a successful voyage.

It was during the seaport days that Rocky Hill became quite prosperous. Many businesses grew around the Landing in support of the maritime trade. - Many old homes built in this era are still standing and these homes represent an era of fine and comfortable living. The best specimen still standing is the Duke of Cumberland Inn on Old Main Street and the home of Wethersfield Town Crier, Philip Goffe, built in 1655.

Inns were beginning to provide service to the maritime trade. The Duke of Cumberland Inn, built in 1767, and still standing, Shipman Tavern, built in 1780, stood as one of the most refined places of entertainment in the maritime era, still stands in "Far Hills, New Jersey as a wing of a large private home. Several other places, such as the Long Tavern, Aunt Betsy's Kitchen, the Taylor House, Granny Griswold's Kitchen, the DeRyer Hotel and the Rocky Hill Hotel, were other places of note. Many other places have been mentioned over the years. It is a known fact that Rocky Hill had a reputation of providing for refined dining. RHL

## Early Settlers, Shipbuilders and Farmers

*Rocky Hill LIFE OCT 04 43*

**By Rod Wilscam**

When Wethersfield became the earliest colony in what is now Connecticut, in 1634, the Wangunk Indian area had been scouted earlier by John Oldham from the Massachusetts Colony. He determined that the Indian lands called of Pyguaug would be a good area to make a settlement, because of the Connecticut River and the good soils for making a farming area, for colonization. Within the same decade, the Dutch had sailed up the Connecticut River and established a trading post in the area on the River in the southern part of today's Hartford.

Mr. Oldham had returned to the Massachusetts Colony and recruited a group of settlers and requested permission to leave to establish a new settlement at the Pyguaug area, now called Wethersfield, with today's Rocky Hill.

It has been understood that some of the Wethersfield Colony had settled, or poached in the area in South Wethersfield, illegally. By 1649, one settler, Samuel Boardman, Jr. had received the first grant of land in the "Rockie Hill area, and thus was the first legal land owner and settler of the modern day Rocky Hill.

Wethersfield Historian Sherman E. Adams has determined that by 1684, the following first settlers had been allocated lands in today's area: Samuel Boardman Jr., Ezekiel Buck, Jonathan Deming, Samuel Cole, Joseph Edwards, Philip Goffe, Jacob Goffe (son of Philip), William Morris, Andrew Pyncheon, Joseph Smith, John Taylor, Samuel Taylor, Amos Williams, John Williams, Thomas Williams and Job Whitcomb. These first settlers were soon followed by others.

The Town Meeting of Wethersfield had the forethought to set aside five acres of land for public use as a ferry landing and a shipbuilding area for the residents of the lower community.

Shipbuilding soon became very important. In the beginning of the year 1700, a winter storm covered the area to the north for several days, and the river run off had caused sandbars that made the river impassable for all shipping north of Rocky Hill. This effectively stopped all shipping of goods to the north, making Rocky Hill the head of navigation for shipping goods on the River. The ships from the Rocky Hill shipyards and other ships carried out trade with the New York colony and the northern New England Ports.

Products from Rocky Hill, as well as the other river towns and were shipped on Rocky Hill built ships. The goods produced by the local citizens included such products as: Cattle, horses, hogs, barrel staves, bricks, hay, salted pork, fish, onions, and others. The southern states, the Caribbean Islands, England, Europe and even Africa wanted these goods. They were traded for such items as: tobacco from Cuba, Jamaican rum, fruits, coffee and hemp from South America, and from southern colonies, cotton and other items needed by the colonial citizens.

The earliest settlers were simple farmers, who had to build a place to live, raise their families, and eke out a living. They did not have a local grocery store, local drug store, local lumberyard, or any other modern building supply store or any kind of local shop. They also did not have any money.

They only had the same needs of their neighbors, who did not have any money, or a place to obtain any of their needs. Their first activity was to erect a basic shelter for their family. Next, they had to plant seeds for every crop they felt they needed, and for which they had brought seeds.

The new residents had to bring seeds with them, or barter with the Native Americans for any needed seeds for crops and for fruit or nut trees, unless they seeds could be found in the wild state. Can you imagine the frustrations of needing basic needs that you did not carry to a new place?

Even the basic tools and implements were not available to the pioneer settler. However, what is called hard work and Yankee ingenuity helped overcome the need for special implements.

The pioneer farmer planted beans, squash, and peas for vegetables. If he had more fields cleared, from trees and rocks, he would plant Indian corn, oats and barley. If he had additional fields, he would plant onions.

He would pick or harvest the crops, and take them by cart to the town landing along the river to trade his crops with visiting ships' crews for products needed to help make his family's life easier. There was a system of barter, as money was scarce, if there was any.

Every day, every member of the family was charged with specific chores to keep house more livable, and keep fires fed with chopped wood for heat and for cooking. The chopped wood would also be used to create fires for water to wash clothes, make soap and any other hot water uses, such as making jellies and jams.

It was another job, to go to the river and obtain clean sand to be used to sweep the floors and clean them. The trip to the river could be used for fishing; the fish made good meals. The trip to the river gave the pioneer the opportunity for hunting other game to give some variety at the table.

If the farmer had hogs, goats, sheep or cows, he would butcher one of the animals and share some of the fresh meat with his neighbors, and the neighbors would reciprocate when the neighbor did his butchering, so the farmer would have a variety of table meats. And in the fall, the farmer would pack some of the butchered meats in barrels to the rivers to trade with the ship crews for needed items. Sundays were a day of rest, for putting on their favorite clothes to attend church, and visiting with their neighbors. RHL

## The Long and Varied Early History of Rocky Hill

*July 99 Rocky Hill Life*

**By Rod Wilscam**

We all have a deep question in our hearts regarding our background. Historically, the town of Rocky Hill has a long and varied background. Our town of Rocky Hill has a background going back to 1633, when a group of Wangunk Indian representatives came to the town of Watertown, in the Massachusetts Colony and invited the white men to settle in their region.

There were selfish reasons for this invitation. The Wangunk Indians were basically a farm-oriented tribe and were among the "river tribes" of Indians, who were always being hassled by marauding tribes of Iroquois Indians who were warlike Indians who came from upstate New York in the Finger Lake region. The Wangunk Indians, being a peaceful tribe with a permanent home area between what is now the area of Middletown to the areas of the peaceful Podunk tribes, to the north of today's Hartford. The Podunks and the Wangunks lived peacefully with their neighbors, while both tribes were basically an agrarian people, and mostly lived in their own area, and farmed the areas on an annual basis.

The first white men to come to the area of the Indian Village of Pyguaug, which was presumably part of the Wethersfield area, were led by John Oldham of Plymouth, Nantasket and Watertown. Oldham is classified as one with wanderlust as long as he was in the Massachusetts colony.

Oldham had come to Pyguaug in 1633 and traded Indian hemp and beaver skins, which were quite welcomed in Watertown and by its citizens. He described Pyguaug as one of the most beautiful places on the earth, with great views of the forest and hills.

Oldham gathered others to accompany him to the Connecticut River area he had visited, and proposed to the General Court of Watertown for permission to settle this new area, but there was a long time before they had obtained such permission.

Therefore, before the 1634–35 winter, Oldham and his company started out for Pyguaug village. With Oldham were Abraham Finch and his sons, Abraham, with his family; Daniel, with his family; and John Sergeant, Robert Seeley; Nathaniel Foote and his sons Robert and Nathaniel; Sergeant John Strickland; John Clarke; Andrew Ward; Robert Rose and his sons Robert and John; Leonard Chester; and William Swayne. These were the original settlers of modern day Wethersfield.

Wethersfield originally included the areas of Glastonbury, Newington and our Rocky Hill.

The settlement of Rocky Hill, as we know it today began by I680 when John Boardman was granted some 20 acres on the northwest side of the "Rockie Hill," as it was known at that time. Rocky Hill began to be settled very early.

A Wethersfield Town Meeting, in 1650, authorized the building of a road from near the Philip Goffe house to the Ferry Landing. It can easily be shown that an early settlement in the southern community began very quickly near the present day Ferry Landing.

By the year 1720, the people living in the lower community began to ask for separate parish privileges. This was never approved, but when a new petition was presented in 1722, it was approved by the Town Meeting.

The petition was then approved by the Connecticut General Assembly in May 1722, subject to the building of a new church and the settling of a new minister. These requirements were met in I727, with the name established as Lexington, which was not well accepted by the residents of Rocky Hill. Because of the fuss, the General Assembly changed the name of the community to Stepney Parish in the same year. Thus our town became known as Stepney Parish or The Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield.

The relationship of Stepney Parish and the Colony of Connecticut had become very strained, and this relationship had become quite common and prevalent among all of the British colonies in North America. Following the Declaration of Independence in 1776, England went to war with the colonies, and this war continued until peace was established with the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

By March 4, 1789, the United States Constitution was finally adopted, which formally ended the Royal Charter of 1662, as well as the existing Fundamental Orders. Stepney Parish of Wethersfield had become part of the freedom from English Rule.

There was a very strong hurricane that hit New England in 1800, and as a result of the heavy rains, the course of the Connecticut River was altered by making Stepney Parish the head of river navigation, as ships were unable to sail further north to either Hartford or Wethersfield. The shipyards in Rocky Hill then became very important to the shipping industry. [[2]](#footnote-2)

This event made Rocky Hill an important seaport, and created many shipping merchants who owned the ships used to carry our goods to foreign ports, and especially ports along the East Coast of the United States and to the West Indies. Shipyards, shippers, and seamen became an important asset to the Stepney Parish of Wethersfield.

However, at this time, England was very bitter about the United States and ordered its ships to kidnap Americans, and stop the American shipping of goods worldwide.

The abuse by the English navy and their privateers caused the American states to go to war against England, which ended successfully for the United States. Also, the privateers operating Rocky Hill ships enhanced their family fortunes, and helped the local economy significantly.

Stepney Parish residents, wanting their own freedom, petitioned Wethersfield to separate from Wethersfield in 1820. While this was not approved, a later petition was approved on May 16, 1840, and by the General Assembly on June 10, 1843. Thus Rocky Hill became a separate town at that time. Our legacy is long and interesting as our nation. The story and history of Rocky Hill, from its legal separation to the present date will have to be told at a later date. RHL

## Life in Colonial Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill life Aug 98

**By Rod Wilscam**

The colonists who settled in that part of early Wethersfield, now known as Rocky Hill, had an interesting life in merely existing for the maintenance of their own life. This life was considered to be very harsh.

Beginning in the year `1650, when John Boardman received the first known grant of some 20 acres of land on the northeast side of "ye Rockie Hill," he became the first settler in what is now Rocky Hill, and many more followed him.

There is little material of how the early colonists lived, but from descriptions of their lives, we can pretty much determine some of the daily chores that were necessary to maintain their living in a “new” wilderness.

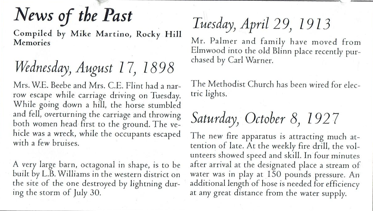
We understand that the proximity of the Connecticut River was one of the reasons the area was chosen by John Oldham and his company, and why so many came to Wethersfield to settle. When these pioneers found the huge population making their community overcrowded, many groups left Wethersfield and settled other communities in Connecticut, including the areas of the western parts of the state, which now includes the northern portions of Pennsylvania as well as the northern half of what is now Ohio.

John Boardman and many of the new settlers of Wethersfield's "Lower Community" made the erection of their homesteads one of their first priorities. The settlement of the Lower Community began in 1650. The way of life for these settlers was governed by the New England slogan: "Wear it out, wear it up, make do, or do without." Everyone in the family had rather specific chores, from which there was no excuse, as their chores were mainly for the purpose of keeping the house warm, cleaning, making clothing, and cooking their meals.

The first consideration was shelter. In I650, these were crude huts made of sticks, boughs and mud, and a fireplace lined with mud, and for the roofs they used pine boughs and grass. This was the style of homes constructed in England. After the first home was constructed, the pioneer started as soon as possible to erect a more permanent log cabin. This entailed cutting trees into the necessary lengths and chopping out clapboards for their permanent homes.

By 1650, the first mansion type of home was built for Philip Goffe, who was the town crier for Wethersfield. Hard work was a requirement for the pioneer in the Lower Community of Wethersfield. This pioneer who was building his “castle" usually had all of his neighbors over for the new house raising It was because of these labor-intensive opportunities that the pioneers in the Lower Community demonstrated their capacities for the hard work that was characteristic of the early settlers in the English Colonies.

The early residents of town were basically farmers who became local entrepreneurs as they eked out a living in their Rockie Hill environment. The husband basically was a hunter who obtained game animals for food and was a fisherman at the banks of the Connecticut River, as well as a farmer raising crops for feeding his family, and with his wife keeping the homestead in operation.

As a farming family, spring was the beginning of the year. The thawing of the fields was the beginning of the maple sugar running, and time to make a cut in the bark and place a wooden bucket by the cut to gather the sap. The maple sugar was the sweetening used by the family for cooking and table use for the year, as cane sugar was almost a rarity until the sailors started their trade in the West Indies. It was time to see to repairing fence damage from the winter so as to keep the animals from roaming. As soon as the thaw was over, fields had to be plowed and seeds planted. The Connecticut River yielded salmon, in the early days of the 17th century, as well as shad, and shad fish was saved for fertilizer. The river brought in trout, pickerel, shiners and other fish. Spring was also time for the sheep to be sheared, for the wool was needed for clothing. Training day for the military was an important time in Rocky Hill; all the men 18 years and older were required to join in military training, with drills and practice with their muskets in make-believe battles. It was not known when the training was used, but with the Indian wars, no one could foresee when the training became reality.

The war of the revolution, and even the Civil War, capitalized on the military training, and everyone took some part in the proceedings. The call in Wethersfield for the Lexington Alarm resulted in many of the residents of Stepney Parish, as Rocky Hill was called at that time.

Summer time was a time of enjoyment for the children. The boys went swimming as often as they could get away from their chores; the girls were deprived of this enjoyment, as the boys never wore suits for swimming. Toys for the children consisted of home-made dolls made out of corn husks or rags, and balls made of leather scraps, and wool ravelings from stockings.

The making of linen cloth from flax was a busy opportunity for the entire family. The flax was spun and woven, and the cloth was fine and strong. The linen sheets, towels and shirts lasted for years. Flax seed was planted like grass, and the plants were ready for picking by early June. All of the family members took part in the processing of the flax, to the spinning of the thread, and, finally, the woven cloth.

Summertime saw the animals let out to pasture. The cows were milked and the milk was used for drinking, eating with cereal, and making butter and cheese.

The hay had to be cut, dried and processed for winter storage around the beginning of July in order to have time for a second crop by September. There had to be enough hay stored for feeding the animals for the winter. In September, foods such as pumpkins and vegetables had to be picked and processed for the winter months.

The fruits had to be picked and processed, apples made into cider, the grains picked and threshed for winter use. Animals had to be processed for their food supplies for the winter.

Thanksgiving time was a big festival in the fall and a period of celebration for all.

Winter time was a period of keeping the family warm and fed. The animals also needed continual care and the family worked in preparation for the coming spring. RHL

## Early Housekeeping Schedules of Yesteryears

*Rocky Hill Life Aug 04*

**By Rod Wilscam**

Wash on Monday.

Iron on Tuesday.

Mend on Wednesday.

Churn on Thursday.

Clean on Friday

Bake on Saturday.

Rest on Sunday.

In the Colonial days before the Revolutionary War, the household chores were taken care of by developing a routine. The everyday demands of household chores were full time. Extra chores, such as gardening, canning foods, making soap, cutting wood, tending the chickens, fishing, gathering nuts and fruits, butchering animals and tending the children kept everyone busy, every day of the year.

A regular schedule began to develop, and the daily chores slowly became a fixed procedure in most households. Clean clothes were needed and the routine developed to wash clothes on Mondays. It became an American custom in the days following the arrival of the Pilgrims in the Massachusetts Colony. The Mayflower landed on a Saturday. After coming on shore, they followed the biblical teachings by resting on Sunday, then on Monday the Pilgrims gathered their clothes and washed them.

Scrubbing and washing the clothes without an automatic washer was a backbreaking task of using a washboard to wash the clothes. The clothes were gathered, a couple of backless chairs were set out to hold two tubs of hot water, one with soap and the other for rinse water. The tubs of water were heated over a hot fire outside in the summer months and carried out from the house or kitchen fireplace in the wintertime. Hands became quite raw and wrinkled from the hot soapy water rubbing the clothes on the washboard. The modern automatic washer really saves time and energy in the clothes washing chores.

Monday evening the clothes would be dampened so they could be ironed on Tuesday. All the ironed clothes must be hung up to dry out, then folded up and put away. The irons were heated in the oven or in the fireplace, then used while quite hot. In the wintertime, the bedclothes were placed on the beds after being ironed.

Wednesday was the day set for mending. Remember that this was a big production, as there was not a store to buy notions, such as threads, buttons and other sewing aids. In the earlier times, the metal items would have to be ordered from the mother country in England, coming by sailing ships, waiting for months for the receipt of the goods. Clothes were mended often. The mended clothes were not the cause for ridicule from the other persons, as they were wearing patched clothing as well. Even the wealthier persons would use patched clothes except in the most formal of circumstances. If a family was fortunate enough to have one or more cows it was necessary to milk the cows daily. It developed that Thursday would be the day for churning butter. The farmer with a cow would have lots of butter for table and cooking uses. The families without a cow had to obtain oleomargarine for both cooking and for table use. It wasn't until the Great Depression of the 1930s that it became available with the yellowing agent that was mixed with the white colored margarine packages, making the margarine look like butter. In earlier years, the margarine was made using cocoa butter, which was a liquid when it was warm or hot, and quickly became brittle and quite hard when it was cold.

On Friday, the day to clean the house became very important to the residents. The importance of a clean house cannot be overestimated. No matter what the status of the homeowner, the house would have to become and remain clean looking to the family members and to their guests. It would be necessary to remove the rugs from the house to hang on a clothesline to be beaten to remove the dust and dirt picked up on the floors. The kitchen with wood floors had to be swept each day.

On Fridays the floors were swept, sometimes after laying a cover of clean sand on the floor to help remove the sand and dirt that was picked up with the sand. All the other rooms were swept on Friday every week.

Every item in the house in the house was put away every day and nothing was left out. Tidying up the house was everybody's job every day. Don't you remember?

Saturday was the day the day bread was made for the entire week. At the same time, cookies and cakes or pies were also baked. The house smelled wonderful. The kitchen turned out pretty good food in those olden times. Saturday night was the time for the people's weekly bath, so hot water was brought into the house from the well and heated for the Saturday night bath ritual. Sunday was a day of rest in all the Christian homes.

After the family attended church and met with the neighbors, they returned home for resting, reading a book, playing games or a quiet discussion with family members. This completes the week in the household of our ancestors. A new week starts anew on Monday. I would not like to have been around in those early Days. RHL

## Supporting the Family in Pre-Revolutionary Times

30 Rocky Hill Life Nov 04

**By Rod Wilscam**

Supporting oneself and family was one of the prime necessities for leaving the comfortable home in England to go to the American colonies to settle and raise a family and have a better life for the family and for the future. Farming was one of the earliest of occupations for the settler in the lower part of Wethersfield, known then as the Lower Community or as "Ye Rockie Hill.”

The Connecticut River was considered an excellent location, because of the river for transportation to and for shipment of crops and the importation of needed goods, which were not locally available. The Connecticut River was a good choice of the Wangunk Indian tribe, but for the first settlers, who followed the earlier path of the explorer and adventurer John Oldham who had earlier bargained with the Indians for the purchase of the land for a settlement location. Today, one would believe that the first three settlements in the Connecticut Colony were located in Wethersfield, Hartford and Windsor.

Later settlements in colonial times were along the shoreline and along the rivers in the wilderness colony along other rivers. One of the main reasons was the excellent growing soils and the water needed to make these areas most useful for the sustenance of life and for transportation.

After the building of a home, for caring for the family, the newcomers next attended for the agricultural pursuits of feeding the family. The Wangunk Indians taught them that Indian corn made a good crop for sustaining the family.

From the very beginning, the settlers found that the soils were very rich and produced good crops with ease, then their thoughts concentrated on trading their excess crops for trade many of the goods the families needed to make their lives more fruitful.

The need for ships became evident and this started the building of ships for transporting their crops to other communities and other ports of the English colonies in America, and even the Caribbean Islands.

Time brought about diversification of crops and soon they were producing such diverse crops as early as 1750 of apples, apple cider, barley, corn, beef, flax, hemp, pear cider, peas, pork, rye, tobacco and wheat. Earlier, by the 1650s, they found that tobacco was a wanted crop, which was valuable in exchange for other needed goods. In the same period, pumpkins were added to the exports.

The trade brought about the need for ships to transport their goods. Ships were initially purchased from England and soon the American colonists found that they had good supplies of timber available locally in order to have the ability to build their own boats for trading their crops, and that their own boats built in Connecticut were much less expensive than purchasing them from England.

This brought about a new industry of boat building locally and the Connecticut River was an ideal location for building locally, rather than importing them. People were needed to operate the boats and Rocky Hill started the Academy Hall on Old Main Street, built for the purpose of training ship captains and the sailors needed to operate the boats in the 17th century.

The ships were mostly built at the Wethersfield Cove. The first boat built in Wethersfield was a ship for John Oldham. Soon, many others followed.

Then a heavy rainstorm on New Year's Day in 1791, possibly the remnants of an Atlantic hurricane, came up to Connecticut from the southeast, caused sandbars to develop in the Connecticut River bed, which effectively blocked river traffic beyond Rocky Hill. This resulted in making Rocky Hill the head of shipping along the Connecticut River, especially blocking boat transportation of ships north of Rock Hill.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Thus, beginning with the 18th century, shipping to and from Rocky Hill became important. Transporting goods by water to or from Hartford and all towns north of Wethersfield became effectively impossible, so goods from Wethersfield and to the north had to be unloaded at Rocky Hill and shipped by wagon.

Some authors have stated that it was common for wagons and horses had to be lined up from the Rocky Hill docks to Old Main Street and then to the north as far as the Cumberland Inn.

These were the golden days for shipping to and from Rocky Hill, which between 1700 until around the middle of the 19th century.

During this period, shipbuilding was also an important industry in town. The boat building and shipping boom lasted until the railroad era was able to make the shipment of goods less expensive. This lasted to around 1860, just prior to the Civil War.

In the years prior to the Civil War, Rocky Hill shipbuilders assisted the farmers and those from neighboring towns in shipment of their goods and services to such ports as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, the southern colonies, the Caribbean Islands and even London, France, Spain as well as African Ports. - It was typical for ship captains to make some three trips during the seasons for shipping and remain in home port over the winter months. Many captains even made side trips to the West African ports and brought shipment of slaves to our southern colonies' ports, then returned home from a profitable trip.

The crews were welcomed home with a special service of welcome in the local churches. I am sure these captains and their crews were quiet about their trip. In any case, the Hartford Daily Courant, and many other papers, noted the sailing and the return of the local ships, and you can be sure that all the crew were not bragging about their stop in Africa on their return.

However, by carefully finding the dates of a ship's departure and arrival home that lasted three month or longer, you can be sure the ship made a trip to West Africa to bring a load of slaves to the Southern ports, and returned to their home port, then rested over the winter. Then in the spring months they would start a new year of trading.

The agricultural trade in food products lasted until the beginning of the Revolutionary War, then from the middle of the 18th century sheep and cattle as well as horses were shipped to the Caribbean ports and elsewhere around the world. At this time, ships from Rocky Hill have been reported as stopping at almost every port in the world. The farmers of Connecticut were known throughout the world and the reputation was usually good for Rocky Hill, and the townspeople profited from their labors, before the industrial revolution. RHL

## Tales of the Early Settlers

*Rocky Hill Life - Publication date cut off by copier - RCH*

**By Rod Wilscam**

That land that we now call Rocky Hill was once called Pyguaug by the resident tribe of Indians called Wangunk. One of the most important differences in the Wangunks was that they were a rural type of Indians who not the usual nomadic-living tribe. "

They built homes and grew regular crops of food and lived next to the river landscapes of permanent homes, next to their crops, staying in the same location year after year. They grew their own crops and fed their families with fish caught in the river and animals caught with their bows and arrows, while the other tribes were mostly nomadic and rarely stayed in one place.

Because the Wangunk tribe was constantly harassed by other tribes, they sent a delegation to the English settlement in Dorchester, Mass., asking them to send settlers to the Pyguaug area to make a settlement, thinking that they would obtain relief from such as the Iroquois from New York and the Connecticut tribe, or Pequot tribe, of Indians.

John Oldham led a group of settlers to Pyguaug and led the group in the area now known as Wethersfield. The Wethersfield settlement flourished as well as the other early Connecticut Colony settlements.

The name Connecticut was an English version of the Wangunk word for the "long winding river.” If you sail on a boat through the present town of Wethersfield or view aerial maps of Wethersfield, the origin of the name becomes apparent.

Of course, it was very apparent that the Indians had a sneaky purpose in asking the English to settle near them, in that they believed that with the English settlement they could get protection from predatory raids of the enemy tribes and have the protection of the English to maintain the peace.

They continued in giving aid, in showing the English settlers instructions in growing Indian corn and other edible foods. They also enjoyed the protection they had sought.

The followers of John Oldham had left the Colony of Massachusetts without the authority from the General Court.

In the meantime, after establishing a community in Connecticut, a group of settlers obtained permission to establish a new settlement along the Connecticut River to be called Windsor.

To settle and argument between the Wethersfield residents and the Windsor residents, the Connecticut General Court ruled that Wethersfield had the honor of being the first town of Connecticut Colony.

The first settlers established Wethersfield by building homes and by planting crops in the fall of 1633, while Windsor town and church officials had obtained General Court permission before they settled the river area of today's Windsor. The argument still is rampant after close to 400 years.

Following the settlements of Wethersfield and then Windsor, the Hartford area was settled.

The necessity of making a living was primary in the minds of the new Wethersfield settlers. Agricultural effort was the first priority after building a home. The first homes were more hovel than buildings and they were caves in some cases.

The settlers made their first crops of Indian corn, also called maize. After the corn crops, the settlers planted peas, barley, flax and raised beef and pigs, along with wool from sheep. From trees, they got apple cider and "parry" (pear cider).

Ship building was an off-growing season occupation and the ships became a vehicle for transportation of the above crops. By the middle of the next century tobacco leaves were also shipped, as well as oats, beans, pumpkins, squash, onions and turnips.

After being able to export their excess crops. They bought the goods and services they needed. They began to manufacture many items, mostly as a home manufacturing operation. Grist mills and saw mills soon followed.

Then a larger production capability was expanded by the use of water power. This increase in production led to establishing larger mills by streams for the use of water power, taking home occupations to larger facilities, making employment opportunities out of the homes, to more capable operations and opportunities for the local farmers to the factory type of production.

Ship building opportunities became more efficient for shipyards, building larger and more efficient boats, thus increasing shipping efforts. In turn, the efficiencies helped improve economic opportunities for the colonists.

Home entrepreneurs like John Danforth, who started a small business in Stepney Parish (now Rocky Hill) making pewter items, hired a new industry of Yankee peddlers. They took their wares by wagon through the countryside, selling to one household at a time.

While this was extremely inefficient, it was the forerunner for today's department stores, which grew out of the peddlers' operations over a short period - into the general store.

The Puritan settlers were brought up to believe that the family was at the top of the social structure. The loving husband to his wife and the children, as well as the respect of the wife to her husband and their children, was the basis of their society.

It was believed by the Puritans that the family was central to society and that the family was socially constituted. The General Court of Connecticut confirmed this concept as early as 1640 when it required espousals for all children.

In 1650 the General Court recognized the error and required publication of marriage, adding further that marriage could not occur until eight days after the contract was published. It was also stated that youth under age and still under control of their parents could not marry without the parents' express consent.

Divorce was difficult to obtain in Connecticut, and then only by the General Court.

Education was considered of major importance to the early residents of the Colony of Connecticut. In 1650 the General Court required that each town with 50 families must hire a teacher of reading and writing.

When a town grew to have 100 or more families, grammar school was ordered to prepare the youths for college.

Then in 1678, the legislature further ordered that every town with 30 families provide a school to include reading and writing, stating that there were many persons who were unable to read the English language.

Free schools were ordered in New Haven and Hartford and these schools were to instruct in reading, writing, arithmetic, Latin and Greek. Each town must also maintain an elementary reading and writing school for six months of the year.

In 1712 the General Assembly set the parish, rather than the town, responsible for the schools. In 1733, the General Assembly ordered that some of the proceeds from the western lands in the Ohio Territory be used for school purposes. RHL

## Colonial Life in Rocky Hill

*22 Rocky Hill Life Jan 02*

**By Rod Wilscam**

I have long been intrigued at the prowess of the English colonial immigrants to Connecticut from the Massachusetts and even from England to the Wethersfield settlement, which also included those settlers to “the Rockie Hill.”

John Oldham and his company came to Pyguaug area, in the fall 1835, along the Connecticut River from Watertown and its immediate area in the Massachusetts Colony. The first activity was to plant crops along the river area for food. This fact gave the Connecticut General Court in 1650 the proof that Wethersfield was indeed the oldest town.

The first act, after planting crops, was to build shelters. The usual shelters consisted of crude log cabins, the first of them being very crude, in that they did not have much in the way of tools, and the need for shelter was quite acute in this climate.

The next item was food. They had planted crops initially, because the need for new food was a main necessity of life. The colonists' breakfasts usually consisted of soup, of beans and salted meat, with spices and herbs, commonly called bean porridge. The herb garden was usually kept near the doorway, to be quite handy for practical and frequent use at mealtime preparation.

At noon, the main meal of the day was called dinner. Dinner usually consisted of an Indian Pudding with a flavorful sauce as the main course, followed by boiled salted beef or pork, as was available (remember, there was no means of preservation other than salt). Alternately, Rocky Hill had the Connecticut River and several brooks that were well stocked with fish, it was also served in the place of meat at dinner.

The evening meal was called supper and was usually the most substantial meal of the day in the early colonial days. Supper was mostly served cold and consisted of cakes made from cornmeal, buckwheat or rye; hominy with samp (coarse hominy); and baked beans.

Colonial food utensils were mainly of pewter or wood in the very early period, and in later years, crockery was extensively used.

The initial name of Watertown was later changed to Wethersfield. Glastonbury was the first daughter of Wethersfield to ask for separate parish rights, citing the difficulty of crossing the Connecticut River every week to attend Sunday services. A Wethersfield Town Meeting approved this arrangement, and the Connecticut Court approved the request, subject to building a church and obtaining and settling a minister. Glastonbury thus became the Second Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield and later became a separate town.

The residents of the lower community of Wethersfield, more commonly called the lower community" or as "ye rockie hill," asked for separate parish rights due to the difficulty of attending church services in the winter months due to snow and ice and due to the swamp area between Goffe Brook and the Valley Brook, causing difficulty of attending services in Wethersfield. While the first attempt resulted in failure, the proposal was finally approved by the Wethersfield Town Meeting and the General Court of Connecticut, imposing the same requirements as it had on Glastonbury. This occurred in 1720, and after the building of the church, and obtaining a minister, Rocky Hill obtained separate parish rights in 1727. Thus its official name became the Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield, called Stepney Parish.

The Reverend Gershom Bulkeley, a Wethersfield minister, was granted 160 acres of land in the south part of Wethersfield, now in Rocky Hill in February of 1677. This grant required that said Rev. Bulkeley erect a corn mill, and maintain it into perpetuity. In the year 1678, the reverend completed his "corne mill" as required under the land grant. His land was expanded by an additional grant of 150 acres in 1720. These two grants totaled 290 acres, and the mill stayed in the family for a total of some 150 years. In 1843, the people of Stepney Parish again petitioned the Wethersfield Town Meeting and the General Court of Connecticut to separate from Wethersfield. That May, after approval by the town meeting, the court approved the petition and named the new town Lexington. The people of the new town felt disappointment at the name because of the Massachusetts town of the same name. RHL

## Thanksgiving in Early Rocky Hill

Dec 98 Rocky Hill Life

By Rod Wilscam

The Puritans of early Wethersfield, and after 1826, in Stepney Parish, and after June, 1843, in Rocky Hill, were conscientious in their worship of God as Christians. And from the earliest days after their settlement, they all gave a day of celebration and thanksgiving to the Lord for all their blessings. From the beginning, Thanksgiving has, since I622, typically been the celebration of the harvest festival.

One of the earliest records about the thanksgiving celebration indicates the Pilgrims held their first day of thanksgiving in October, 1621. The earliest written account of the thanksgiving in 1622 is still remaining in the archives of history. It reads as follows:

*"Our harvest being gotten in, our governor might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week. At which time, amongst other recreations, We exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain and others. And although it may not be always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty."*

The scant records indicate that the annual Thanksgiving was repeated, more or less, up to the present time.

In the early colonial days, the Thanksgiving service was typically three hours long, and consisted of "at least a one-hour sermon, followed by an hour or more of prayer."

After the American Revolution, our first President, George Washington, issued our nation’s first national Thanksgiving Proclamation, and from the very beginning of the United States, Thanksgiving has been an annual festival in November since the 1863 Thanksgiving Proclamation by President Lincoln.

In the early years, in worship services hymns were sung acapella, until the beginning of the 19th century, and beginning in 1817 in the Rocky Hill Congregational Church. Thus, the harvest celebration of the earliest days of our country was based on the religious duty of giving thanks to God for his blessings.

Originally, after the Puritans arrived on the ship Mayflower at Plymouth in Massachusetts Colony on December 21, 1620, they had suffered throughout the cold winter season, with only around one-half of the brave pioneers to our shores surviving that first winter. Thanksgiving was a celebration for the harvest.

Earlier days of the Thanksgiving celebration in Canada was on the second Monday of October and in the United States on the fourth Thursday in November. Many other countries, of various cultures, celebrate thanksgiving, including Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Laos, Liberia, Puerto Rico, Guam, Grenada, and the Virgin Islands.

In early Rocky Hill, the typical Thanksgiving menu consisted of such delicacies as corn soup, sweet potatoes, squash, onions, beans, succotash, fish, meats, various fowl (such as turkey, partridge, or duck), berries, maple sugar candies, corn starch candies, and pumpkin.

Following worship at the Congregational Church, a congregational meal took place, followed by delicacies served in the homes with relatives and friends.

One of the many homemade toys made by Rocky Hill girls was the corn husk doll. This doll, according to Indian legend, was one of many items crafted by the younger Indian girls and the custom was adopted by the settlers. The Indian legend told of one of three sisters, who wanted to make something different. One made moccasins, as well as salt boxes, but she wanted to make other things. She received permission from the Great Spirit to make a small doll. She made little people out of the corn husks. The legend tells of the young maiden with her little people who went into the woods, and after seeing their reflection in a pond and finding that they were indeed beautiful people, and became vain. Thus the Great Spirit warned her to stop being so vain. Still she continued in her vanity, and the Great Spirit punished her by making the faces of the corn husk dolls entirely blank. Her punishment was that she would have no face, and would forever roam all over trying to find her face back again. This is why we do not put faces on the corn husk dolls, which are still popular during the Thanksgiving season. RHL

# Ship Building

## Shipbuilding Important Industry in Old Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life Oct 98

**By Rod Wilscam**

Wethersfield in the I7th and 18th centuries was not only a river town, but also an important seaport for the colony of Connecticut. After a bad storm in I700, the Connecticut River became impassable to the north of Rocky Hill. For this reason Rocky Hill replaced Wethersfield as a shipbuilding community and as a seaport.

The ferry, established prior to 1655, at the landing at the foot of the Rockie Hill became a major means of crossing the river for the traveler and the shippers.

A Wethersfield town meeting in 1650 authorized a road to be built to the ferry. While farming was the major industry of the early settlers, a corn mill was most necessary and in 1677, a Wethersfield town meeting granted a piece of land to the Rev. Gersham Bulkley at Dividend, provided that he build a "corne mill” and maintain it.

There is a natural waterfall in the Dividend Brook, over and through a ledge of rocks. The Indians had used this area as a resort for the trapping of fish from the brook. It has been stated that the Bulkley family had maintained the corn mill for more than 150 years.

Over the years, the Dividend area has been the home for manufacturing of such diverse items as axes, chisels, plantation hoes, "neverslip" horseshoes, hammers, wrenches and so forth. A bakery in this area also made hard bread for sale to the ships engaged in trade with the West Indies and other locations.

Shipbuilding became an important industry in town and these ships sailed, not only to the West Indies, but also to European, African and other ports on the east coast of the colonies in North America.

The goods shipped from Rocky Hill included horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, hay, hoop-poles, barrel staves, salted beef, pork and fish, potatoes, onions and bricks.

From about I778 Thomas Danforth ran a business engaged in the manufacture of items of pewter and tin. He operated his business in Philadelphia, as well as in Rocky Hill, spending a portion of each year in the Pennsylvania Colony, and the rest of the year in his local headquarters. Danforth hired "peddlers" to market his pewter specialties, and these peddlers were able to clear from $60 to $70 monthly. It was reported that one of Danforth's peddlers returned to his headquarters after being out for three weeks and he had $1,200 in sales for this three-week period. Thomas Danforth also showed in his sales records, receipts from local customers for white sand. The white sand was frequently used on the dirt floors of the local homes because it was relatively easy to sweep up, and thus provide "clean" floors. Around 1841, a clock case factory was making cases for clocks, and later, manufactured pewter teapots, block tin tumblers and cups. Later bedsteads were manufactured.

Shad fishing was another important industry in town until the middle of the 19th century. Much of the salted shad was shipped to New York City.

The Center Cemetery at Coles Hill, at Dividend Road and South Main Street, had a need for gravestones, and many of these stones were quarried from the stone yard near the Methodist Church. The footings and the steps of the Congregational Church building also were quarried from the same area.

In 1798, a Mr. Stillman had a tailor shop in the Wait Warner house on Old Main Street, just to the north of the present Town Hall. This house was later moved to 11 Church Street, where it still stands. A hatters shop was located in this area for several years, beginning around 1818.

There were two tanneries, one distillery, two grain mills, one sawmill, one butting mill and a carding machine operating by 1819. In 1835, there were many carriage shops in town, and many of the carriages and sulkies manufactured here were shipped to southern ports.

The manufacture of corn brooms was an important industry in Stepney Parish. In 1845, the records indicate that broom corn was grown here and that around 5,500 brooms were made.

In 1881, an iron foundry was built on the river side, at a cost of $11,000. Bricks were also produced in the Dividend area for many years.

These industries and others developed by local entrepreneurs for goods needed locally and for the sea trade. This town's exports were shipped near and far, and made Rocky Hill an important name around the world in the heydays of shipping from an important seaport. RHL

## Shipbuilding in Early Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life Nov 99

**By Rod Wilscam**

Rocky Hill as a modern community has the fortune of being a river town on the banks of the Connecticut River. We have the foresight of the founding fathers of ancient Wethersfield to thank for the fortune of the location of today's Rocky Hill.

Wethersfield, as a pioneer town, originally consisted of the present day Wethersfield and the towns of Glastonbury, Rocky Hill and Newington.

From the earliest of times the Connecticut River has been of great importance in the life and economy of the area. From the founding of Wethersfield, as the most ancient of towns in Connecticut, people found it necessary to cross over the river for business and for personal reasons. In the year 1650, the Rocky Hill ferry service was established, and a town meeting approved the design and building of a road to connect the ferry landing with the Old Main Street of today.

Ships were used on the river for transportation and for the commerce of the period. In 1672, a Wethersfield town meeting formally established a five-acre area, a part of the ferry park of today, for a public landing and shipyard.

Because of a rather disastrous flood around 1700, sandbars occurred to the south of Wethersfield, and north of the Rocky Hill landing. The local shipyards gained a great prominence when Rocky Hill became the head of shipping on the river at this time, and the local economy was based on building ships, shipping goods to Colonial and international ports for the trading of goods. The academy trained many of the local seaman in the maritime arts in order to man the locally made ships. The good years lasted for more than 100 years until the early 19th century. Then shipbuilding slowed down, for many reasons, to very few ships after the war of 1812.

The academy building, still standing today, houses the Rocky Hill Historical Society Museum. Beginning in 1873, Seabury Belden and his son Eugene carried on a shipbuilding business north of the ferry landing. John Williams also carried on shipbuilding in his yard at the mouth of Hog Brook. The launching of each new ship was a time of festivities locally, and all the workmen and owners joined in on these festivities.

When each ship sailed from Rocky Hill, there was usually a public celebration, including prayers in the Congregational church, and on return to Rocky Hill, prayers of thanksgiving were also offered.

There was also a sail loft business near the landing, which manufactured sails for the new ships. Also of great importance to the shipbuilding activities, a rope walk had been established near the sail loft that produced the ropes necessary for fitting out the ships being built. The sea trade brought to Rocky Hill many goods from all over the world, and nine or more retail stores were located near the landing to handle many of the goods made locally and the good brought back from the foreign ports of trade.

Retail stores were operated by Joseph Bulkeley, Abijah Collins, Asa Deming and William Williams, who were listed as owners of builders of many of the local ships built in Rocky Hill. One list of over 75 ships registered in New London included 35 sloops, 25 schooners and five ships built in local shipyards.

Rocky Hill was the home of some of the first United States Navy ships used for the Revolution, as well as many privateers. Reading old issues of The Hartford Courant, one reads of many privateers being built locally, and reports of their successes against English ships. Piracy was not always a hidden or secret occupation. Barnabus Dean owned the privateer ship "Revenge” which was destroyed by the British at that time.

William Griswold, who became a wealthy sea captain, was the owner of the I08-ton brigantine, "Minerva." Built at the landing, the Minerva carried 16 guns, with a crew of 100 men. The Minerva was instrumental in the war of revolution, as well as the "Defence," and the "Spy." These three ships in 1776 became the nucleus of the United States Navy, and the Rocky Hill owners became quite wealthy from the piracy against English ships. Rocky Hill owners and their crews and ships also became quite important contributors to the success of Connecticut and the other colonies, in the Revolution and also in the War of I8I2.

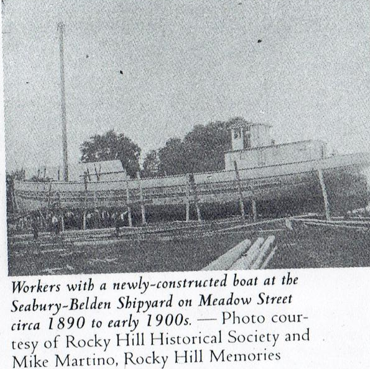
Listed as owners of many of the local ships in the registration of the ships at the custom houses in Middletown and in New London, a review of the ship registrations shows that the owners of these ships were from Rocky Hill, Wethersfield and from Hartford. Most of the registration records that were not burned by the English raids are now housed in the Connecticut River Museum at Essex.

The local ships left Rocky Hill with cargoes of pipe staves, salt beef, salt pork as well as salt fish form the entire region, as well as the regional crops of onions, potatoes, hay and other crops, as well as horses. These ships returned to the river port with loads of goods for local and regional consumption. Our young nation benefited greatly from the shipbuilders and ship owners from Rocky Hill, and this benefit to the new United State helped forge our new nation.

Shipbuilding and manning locally owned and operated ships in trade is no longer carried out for many reasons, almost all of them because of modern forms of transportation, the river no longer the asset it was from the 18th to the 19th centuries, and finally the modern systems of roads. Shipbuilding and the sea trade was an important part of our history, and the story of the sea is an important piece of our history as a seaport and shipbuilding community. RHL.

## Shipbuilding in Rocky Hill -1

*Nov 97 Rocky Hill Life*

John Oldham led the settlement in Wethersfield; the southern part is now called Rocky Hill. The choice of land was based, in part, because of the adjacent Connecticut River.

John Oldham chose the land next to the river because he realized the importance of the river for transportation. From some of the earliest of days, ships were built in Hartford and Wethersfield; but because of the flooding of I700, the river became impassible to ships north of Rocky Hill. Our town became the head of transportation on the Connecticut River and a major seaport for central Connecticut. The ships and shipping caused the economy of Rocky Hill to soar and provided employment and prosperity.

As early as December 1672, a Wethersfield Town Meeting voted that within Rocky Hill, "There shall be five acres of land left for the public use of the town in general, or for any of the inhabitance in particular, for a common landing place, or for building ships, or other vessels." These five acres abutted the river and extended up the hill on the northeast side of the present Shipyard Park on Riverview Road to the Ferry Landing.

Beginning in 1700, shipbuilding became a profitable enterprise - and many taverns, inns and hotels bustled with the activities of a major seaport. Ships docked in the area from the present Ferry Park Landing south to Hog Brook. In addition, there were many additional business enterprises for two shipyards, a sail loft, a rope walk, bakeries, warehouses, and retail stores.

Shipbuilding was quite profitable because there was an abundance of the lumber supplies, and the cost to build ships was around 30 percent less in Rocky Hill than England.

Ships built here sailed to the ports of Europe, the West Indies, and to many other ports around the world. The ships built in Rocky Hill were sailed by local seamen and carried horses, cattle, hogs, hay, hoop poles, barrel staves, salted beef, pork, fish, potatoes, onions and brick.

Many ships used in connection with the revolution were built in the Rocky Hill shipyards. In addition, many of the seamen on these ships also came from local families. The captains of these ships also came from local families and many of the families became the owners of these ships, creating numerous wealthy families. By 1825, the sandbars had been removed and the river dredged, making ships again able to sail to the docks at Hartford. The era of prosperity in Rocky Hill came to an end.

It became impossible to learn of all of the ships built in Rocky Hill shipyards because Benedict Arnold's raid at New London in 1781 when Customs House burned down, including the registries of all the ships. Many of the ship registers in New London show Wethersfield as the location of the shipyards, but based on reports of the owners living in Rocky Hill, we believe the following ships to be built in the Rocky Hill shipyards. The following ships were registered in the 18th century.

* One of the most famous ships built in Rocky Hill was the brigantine "Minerva."
* The sloop "Nancy” registered January 11, 1787, 57 tons, 57.8' long, 178" wide and 6'6" deep, with a square stern. Owner Stephen Griffiths of Chatham.
* Other ships we know of include the sloop "Betsey" in 1787, the New London Register #22, 66 tons, 49.4' long, 18.6' wide and 7.2’ deep, with one deck with one mast. Owners Joseph Bulkley and John Ames, and Master Jacob Milliams.
* The sloop "Nancy” registered at New London on January 22, 1791, 58 tons, 57.8'long, 6'6" depth. There was one deck and one mast, and a square stern. Owner Daniel Dunham and Master Jeremiah Williams.
* The sloop "Augusta" registered August 22, 1791 at New London, 45 tons, 52' long, 17" wide, 6' deep, one deck and one mast with a square stern and a figurehead. Owner Justus Riley and Master Ashbel Wright.
* The sloop "Augusta" built by Asher Miller, December II, 1789, 45 tons, 52' long, 17 wide and 6' deep with one deck and one mast. Owner William Griswold and Master Jonathan Price.
* The sloop "Polly" registered April 17, 1790, 68 tons, 60' long, 19'6" wide and 7'2" deep, with one deck and mast and a square stern. Owner Israel Williams and Master Jacob Williams.
* The sloop "Farmer" registered May 4, 1790, 61' long, 29' wide, 7'3" deep, one deck and one mast with a square stern. Owner Benjamin Butler and Master Ichabod Goodrich.
* The schooner "Mary" registered July 8, 1791, 88 tons, 637” long, 2I'9" wide, 7'9" deep with one deck, two masts and a square stern.
* The sloop “Honor” registered August 29, 1791, 53 tons, 50'3"long, 18'6". Owners Jonathan, Moses, Stephen and Edward Bulkley, and Master John Bulkley.
* The sloop "Nancy" registered August 1, 1792, 52 tons, 56'6" long, 18' wide, and 6'2" depth, one mast, one deck and a square stern. Owner Benjamin Griswold and Master William Webb,
* The sloop "Hero" registered October 17, 1792, 52 tons, 56' long, I7'6" wide, 6'2" depth, one deck and one mast, with a square stern. Owners Oliver and William Goodrich and Master John Marsh.
* The sloop "Nancy" was registered August 1, I792, 52 tons, 56'6"long, 6'2" depth, a square stern with no head and no gallery. Owner Benjamin Webb and Master William Webb.
* The brigantine "Eleanor" was registered October 25, 1792, 98 tons, 65'6" long, 22' wide, 8' deep, with a square stern. Owner Ephraim Williams and Master Elias Williams.
* The sloop "Sally" registered May 4, 1793, 53 tons, 64' long, 20' wide, 7'8"deep, one mast and one deck. Owner Benjamin Griswold and Master Andrew McComb.

There were many other ships built in Rocky Hill, but could not all be listed. RHL

## Shipbuilding in Rocky Hill - 2

*Rocky Hill Life Nov 02*

**By Rod Wilscam**

The community of Wethersfield, in the early days after the founding in 1636, began to be involved in shipbuilding at an early date by the request of one of the founding fathers. John Oldham ordered a ship to be built at the Cove for the purpose of moving goods in trade to Boston. Thomas Deming handled the construction of the next ship to be built, called the Tryal (or Trial)[[4]](#footnote-4); Captain Larrabee was the master of this ship.

In 1672, the Town Meeting of Wethersfield ordered that five acres of land be set aside in the Rocky Hill area for the purpose of shipbuilding by anyone in the community. Any ships that were built were registered at the Maritime Registry at New London. The records at New London were destroyed in 1731 due to the treason of Benedict Arnold in his infamous raid at New London and Groton.

The importance of Rocky Hill in the Revolution became very obvious by the leasing of the ship Minerva, owned by Captain William Griswold and converted into a privateer by the Rocky Hill shipyards. The Minerva was very successful in action against the British fleet and a credit against the British Navy. The ship Minerva is pictured on the seal of the town of Rocky Hill to the current times. Rocky Hill has a right to be proud of the ships made here in our town.

Because the records prior to 1781 no longer exist, and the fact that the town of origin of the ships made at the Rocky Hill shipyards were registered as Wethersfield, some judgment becomes necessary to use the records to determine the ships built in Rocky Hill shipyards. We do know that a severe storm in 1700 left the Connecticut River almost impassible above Rocky Hill, Our community became the head of shipping in the Connecticut River as ships could no longer navigate above Rocky Hill to Wethersfield. Also, Rocky Hill was the home of several shipbuilders and contributed most of the sea captains and crews manning the ships built in the local shipyards.

Following is a list of ships built locally. The owners and the crews were local men and many of the owners were local men.

In 1799, the Sloop Almira was registered at 67 tons, 59 feet long, 191 wide, and 71 deep, with one deck and one mast, with Edward Bulkley as owner, Joseph Dimock Jr., William Williams and Allen Riley as owners, and Joseph Dimock as captain.

The Schooner Archer was registered in 1810, 118 tons, 63 feet-4 inches long and 8 feet-9 inches deep, with one deck, two masts and a square stern. Joseph Bulkeley was owner, and Joseph Butler was captain.

In 1796, the Schooner Ariel was registered with 100 tons, 70 feet-4 inches in width and depth of 8 feet, with 100 tons displacement, one deck and two masts, and no gallery.

The schooner Augusta was registered in 1788 with of 45 tons, one mast and one figurehead, a square stern and no gallery. Owners were William Griswold and Captain William Griswold.

In 1815, the schooner Bolina was registered, with 137 Tons, 71 feet 8 inches in length 22 feet-11 inches wide and 9 feet-10 inches in depth, having two masts and one deck. It was owned by Edmund Bulkley and Justus Bulkley of New York City, with Captain William Webb as Master, and Master Carpenter Richard Belden as builder.

Sloop Charles was recorded in 1809 with 33 tons displacement, 40 feet-8 inches wide and 5 feet-8 inches depth, one mast and one deck. John Williams II of Rocky Hill was the owner, Stephen Abbey was Captain and Joseph Dimock was master carpenter.

In 1796, the sloop Charlotte was registered with 55 tons, 58 feet-2 inches in length and six feet in depth, with one mast and one deck, a square stern, and no galley. Asa Deming and Philan Goodrich were the owners, and Richard Price served as captain.

In 1793, the brigantine Clarissa was registered with 92 tons, 66 feet long, 21 feet-6 inches wide, and 7 foot-6 inch depth. Benjamin J. Griswold, William Griswold and Asa Deming were the owners.

The schooner Comet was registered in 1796 with 76 tons, 65 feet-6 inches long, 17 feet-9 inches deep. It had one deck, two masts, a square stern and no galley. Justus Riley and Isaac Riley of New York were owners, and James Butler was listed as master.

In 1811, the brigantine Constitution was registered with 168 tons, 80 feet long, 24 feet wide, and 10 feet-1 inch deep, and with one deck, two masts and a square stern. Eliakim Hitchcock, Joseph Morton, Talcott Wolcott and Henry Kinborn are listed as owners, with Thomas Warren as master.

The schooner Federal was registered in 1798 with 86 tons, 64 feet in length, 20 feet-8 inches width, one mast and one deck, and a square stern. Elias Williams, William Williams, Benjamin Butler and Edward Bulkley are listed as owners and Elias Williams as master.

In 1793, the schooner Delia was registered with 115 tons, 67 feet-3 inches in length, 22 feet in width, and 9 feet-2 inches in depth. William Griswold is owner, and Eli Goodrich is Master.

The brigantine Dispatch was registered in 1808 with 157 tons, 79 feet-11 inches wide and 9 feet-6 inches deep, one deck and two masts, a square stern and a serpent figurehead. Joseph Bulkeley was listed as owner and Joseph Butler was master.

In 1794, the Brigantine Dolly was registered as having 174 tons, 74 feet long, 22 feet wide and 12 feet-4 inches deep, with one deck and two masts. Joseph Bulkley was listed as owner.

In 1789, the sloop Dove was registered with 64 tons, 61 feet long and 18 feet-5 inches deep, with one mast, one deck and a square stern. Justus Riley is shown as owner and Benjamin Burt as master.

The sloop Elvira was registered in 1813 with 42 tons, 51 feet-7 inches in length and 5 feet-3 inches deep, with one deck and one mast. Roger Williams, John Williams II and James Tisdale are listed as owners and Capt. Wanton Ranson as master. Samuel Dimock was master carpenter.

The schooner Harriet was registered in 1811, with 123 tons, 71 feet long, 23 feet-9 inches wide and 8 feet-10 inches depth, with one deck and two masts. William Williams, Edmond Bulkeley, Ralph Bulkley are listed as owners, and William Webb is listed as master. Richard Belden is shown as he master carpenter.

The ship Enterprise was registered in 1811 with 265 tons, 88 feet long, 24 feet-9 inches wide and 13 feet deep, with one deck, three masts and a square stern. Abijah Collins, Joseph Neef Ralph Bulkley of New York, and Hosea Bulkeley were the owners and Captain Hosea Bulkeley was master.

In 1811 the brigantine Eunice was registered with 146 tons 72 feet long, 20 feet-1 inch wide and 10 feet-5 inches depth, one deck and 2 masts. Samuel Dimock and William Bradford were owners, and Samuel Dimock was master.

In 1791, the sloop Farmer was registered having 76 tons, 61 feet length, 20 feet wide and depth of 7 feet-3 inches, with one deck and one mast, a square stern and no galley. Ichabod Goodrich was listed as owner and captain of the Farmer.

The schooner Friendship was registered in 1805 with 117 tons, 71 feet in length, 21 feet-6 inches wide and 8 feet-11 inches depth, and having one mast and a square stern. William Webb, Eli Goodrich William Williams, John Williams, Samuel Dimock, Hezekiah Whitmore, Justus Robbins, Abijah Collins, Josiah Butler, and Frederic Robbins were listed as owners, with William Webb listed as master.

This list of ships registered at the US Customs house will have to be continued at a later date. RHL

## More about the Ships Built in Local Shipyards

*Rocky Hill LIFE APR 03*

**By Rod Wilscam**

*In the November 2002 edition of Rocky Hill Life, I discussed the beginnings of shipbuilding in town, as well as some of the vessels constructed here. This continues the list of ships believed to have been built in the Rocky Hill Shipyards.*

In 1787, the Sloop Betsy owned by Jacob Williams and the Williams family, was registered with 66 tons displacement, length of 49 feet, width 19 feet, having 7 feet 2 inches in depth with one deck, one mast, a square stern and no galley.

The sloop Hector was registered in 1813, having 76 tons displacement, 60 feet in length, 19 feet 7 inches in depth, with one deck and one mast. Thomas Tryon, Moses Tryon and Joseph Harris were listed as owners and Daniel Whittlesey as master. Richard Belden is listed as the master carpenter.

The ship Henry was registered in 1807, with 356 tons displacement, 96.8 feet in length, 29 feet 3 inches depth, with two decks and three masts and having a square stern and a man figurehead. Joseph Bulkley was the owner, Joseph Butler was master, and Richard Belden was the master carpenter. In

1812, the Henry was registered with 326 tons, 90 feet 6 inches long and 26 feet 6 inches wide with depth of 15 feet 8 inches, and having one deck, three masts and a square stern, Joseph Bulkley was listed as the owner and Joseph Butler as master.

The brigantine Holkar was registered in 1807 having 192 tons displacement, 81 feet in length, and 11 feet 9 inches in depth, having one deck and two masts, a square stern and a billet head. Samuel Dimock was listed as the owner and as the master carpenter and Joseph Dimock as master.

In 1791, the sloop Honor was registered with 53 tons displacement, length of 50 feet 3 inches and depth of 6 feet 10 inches. And with one deck, one mast, and having a square stern and no galley. Jonathan Bulkeley was listed as owner and (there seem to be some missing words here. – RCH)

and one mast. John Williams II was the owner, Samuel Pelton was master, and Abraham Jagger was the master carpenter.

The Sloop James with 76 tons was registered in 1815, 60 feet 9 inches long, 20 feet 1 inch wide and 7 feet 4 inches deep. Owners were Abijah Collins, Stephen Bulkley, James M. Goodwin and James Pitch. Stephen Bulkley was master, and Samuel Dimock was the master carpenter.

In 1815, the sloop James was registered with 76 tons, 60 feet 9 inches long and 20 feet 1 inch deep. The owners were Abijah Collins, Stephen Bulkley, James M. Goodwin and James Fitch. Stephen Bulkley was also master, and Samuel Dimock was the master carpenter.

The sloop Jane was registered in 1819 with 55 tons, 56 feet 9 inches long, 18 feet 8 inches wide and 6 feet 6 inches deep, with one deck and one mast. The owners were Josiah Butler, Wait Williams and William Williams. The master was Josiaj Butler.

In 1796. The ship Maria was registered with 305 tons, 95 feet 6 inches long, 27 feet in width, with two decks, three masts a square stern, galleys and a woman's figurehead. Jacob Riley, owner, and, Frederick Riley, master.

The sloop Markis was registered in 1801 with 94 tons displacement, 67 feet 2 inches in length, 21 feet in width, and 7 feet 6 inches in depth, with one deck and one mast. William Griswold, owner and Abraham Jagger as master carpenter and Abraham Jagger, master.

In 1815, the schooner Martha was registered with 104 tons displacement, 64 feet long, 22 feet 7 inches in width, and 3 feet 8 inches in depth. The Martha had one deck and two decks (sic – RCH). Abijah Collins owner, Richard Price as master with Samuel Dimock as master carpenter.

The schooner Mary, with 88 tons displacement was registered in 1791. The length was 63 feet 7 inches, the width 21 feet 9 inches and the depth 7 feet 9 inches, with one deck and two masts. The owner was Joseph Riley, and the master was John Riley. Joseph Bulkley owned a shop at the Connecticut River Landing at this time.

In 1803, the sloop Mary with 44 tons was registered, indicating length as 52 feet 6 inches, width of 17 feet and depth of 6 feet. Also, one deck and one mast. The owners were James L. Belden, Samuel Buck Jr., and Simeon Brown. Samuel Buck, Jr. was also listed as master, and Benjaliel was the fourth owner.

In 1805, the brigantine Mary was registered with 156 tons displacement, 76 feet 9 inches in length, and 23 feet 8 inches in width and 10 feet in depth. The brig Mary had one deck, two masts and a square stern. Joseph Bulkley was the owner, and Jason Boardman was master.

The schooner Mary Ann was registered in 1814 with 103 tons, 67 feet 2 inches long, 21 feet 9 inches in depth, one deck, and two masts. The owners were Samuel Ellis, Levi Clark and Henry Lyman. Samuel Ellis was the master. All the owners and the master resided in Middletown, Richard Belden was the master carpenter.

In 1816, the schooner Mary Rose was registered indicating displacement of 105 tons, length of 68 feet 10 inches, width of 22 feet 6 inches with a depth of 8 feet 1 inch, with one deck, two masts and a square stern. William Williams was the owner, with Joseph Dimock as master and Richard Belden as master carpenter.

The sloop Merino was registered in 1810, indicating 55 tons displacement, 50 feet 6 inches in length, 16 feet 5 inches in width, and 7 feet 10 inches in depth. The Merino had one deck, one mast and a square stern. John Williams II was the owner. Stephen Abbey was master, and Joseph Dimmock the master carpenter.

The list built, owned or captained by Rocky Hill persons will be completed in the next installment.

As stated earlier, records of ships built before the American Revolution are not available. A Revolutionary War raid on New London destroyed the customs house, where the registry of ships from Connecticut seaports, including Rocky Hill, had been kept.

The records from after the Revolution are found in the Connecticut River Museum in Essex, The records that exist are few, and do not include the earliest ships built in Rock Hill in colonial times. The records that do exist from other sources will be discussed at a later time. RHL.

## Rocky Hill Ships, Captains and Crews Lost at Sea

*Rocky Hill Life Nov 05*

**By Rod Wilscam**

Rocky Hill has a long and interesting history as a maritime seaport and a shipbuilding center, with history of sending its residents off to sea adventures, shipping goods to trade and to return with goods needed by residents of Rocky Hill and regional towns.

This was done in many ships built in town, with seamen and captains, most getting their maritime training at the Academy Hall School, which taught the maritime arts.

Roger M. Griswold, an early physician, practiced in town from around 1852 until his death in 1902. Besides practicing the medical arts for the local residents, he spent a considerable amount of his time studying our local history, writing several monographs and wrote many articles on Rocky Hill lore in the Wethersfield Farmer, the Connecticut Magazine, and a few other newspapers.

Most of the data was obtained from his patient's accounts, cemetery records, as well as other records, not all available to us at this time. The ships listed were either built in town, owned by local citizens, or some of their crews were from Rocky Hill, Stepney Parish or Wethersfield.

Most of the ships and crews, as listed, were lost at sea and never heard from again, captured by the French, the British, or pirates. The Hartford Courant included many of the following ships that were lost.

The brig Commerce was wrecked along the coast of Africa. The crew was captured and held as slaves.

In 1792, the ship Hope, under Capt. John Burnham, was captured by Algerian pirates.

In 1796, the French captured the brig Patty, which was confiscated and sold.

The ship Mary, with Captain Curtis, was captured by the French in 1798.

The ship Chance, with Captain Ichabod Goodrich, was captured by the French in 1799.

The schooner William, under the command of Cap. William Boardman, sailed for Spain in 1799 and was never heard from again.

In 1800, the sloop Ralph was captured by the French on the high seas and confiscated.

In 1804, the British captured the schooner Ann, under the command of Capt. Richard Bunce, in the West Indies. It was taken to Antigua as a prize. None of the crew ever returned home.

The brig Celia was captured off Block Island in 1908 (1808? – RCH) while attempting to run a blockade in the war between France and England.

The ship Marcus was captured and burned by the British in 1812.

The schooner Venus, built by Hezekiah Williams and owned by 11 Rocky Hill men and commanded by Capt. Thomas Webb, was lost at sea around 1812.

Capt. John Williams lost five vessels, with their cargoes, in 1812 and 1813.

At the same time Captain Archibald, on a ship built in town, the ship's name not known, was captured twice by the British in 1813.

The sloop Eliza was lost in Long Island Sound in 1829 and the whole crew was drowned.

Around the same time, the ship J.L. Forbes, a large vessel, was lost at sea while sailing to a foreign port and the brig Scotland was also lost while sailing to a foreign port.

Some of the names of some sea captains and sailors from Rocky Hill who lost their lives or were buried in foreign lands are listed here. Lost at sea and presumed drowned: William Blinn, Butler Boardman, Capt. George Boardman, Capt, John Chester, Joseph Deming, William Dickinson, Capt. Joseph Dimock, drowned at Bermuda with his son Moses Dimock, Gideon Goff, Allen Goodrich, Elizer Goodrich, Henry Goodrich, Isreal Goodrich, Thomas Goodrich, Nathan Grimes, Samuel Grimes (the West Indies has been called the "Grimeses Family Burying Ground"), Capt. Harry Griswold, a celebrated navigator who went around the world several times, Royal Woods, lost at sea on the ship Waverly, Charles Stillman, Capt. Otis Stillman, Capt. Daniel Webb died at sea due to smallpox, Gideon Wells died at sea, Moses Williams, James Woodhouse, Joseph Woodhouse and Levy Woodhouse.

In 1703, Capt. Samuel Boardman was buried in the West Indies.

On July 23, 1778, William Bulkley and his son William Bulkley washed overboard and drowned at Sea.

In 1796, Capt. George Blinn was buried at Cape St. Nicholas Mole.

In 1803, Henry Buck, Francis Bulkley, his son William Bulkley, and Peter Bulkley died.

In 1817 Samuel Warner and Capt. William Warner died at the West Indies.

The name of Rocky Hill has been carried around the world by the seamen of town and was well known in the 16th through the 18th centuries. It is also recorded on memorial stones around the world. The names of the above-mentioned sailors all tell their stories to the whole world. RHL

## A Look at the Town's Maritime History

Rocky Hill Life Sep 02

**By Rod Wilscam**

The Wangunk Indians, a tribe of River Indians, were trying to live in peace in their lands along the Connecticut River, between what is now Wethersfield and southern Middletown. They were mainly an agricultural tribe that was being harassed by roving bands of the Iroquois tribes, and sent a messenger to the English settlers in Massachusetts Colony, inviting the English settle in their area, hoping that an English presence would protect them.

At the same time, John Oldham was exploring the lands along the Connecticut River, and found the land and area quite satisfactory for a settlement. John Oldham gathered a number of settlers to go with him to the area called Pyguaug by the Wangunks before receiving permission to establish a settlement along the Connecticut River. He negotiated with the Wangunk Indians for land on both sides of the river, after finding that the river provided fresh water and rich soil for growing crops.

In fact, the settlement satisfied the desires of both the Wangunk Indians and the English settlers.

The river was ideal for water transportation. There are few records available to prove that John Oldham had actually contracted to have a ship built for him, a boat said to have been docked at the present Wethersfield Cove. While transporting a boatload of corn to the Massachusetts Colony, Oldham was attacked by Indians on Long Island Sound.

There is not a large amount of the history written, most of the data that is available is from the notes of Roger Griswold, M.D., Judge Sherman W. Adams of Wethersfield and Rufus Griswold, M.D.

One of the first ships built at the Wethersfield Cove was the ship Tryall built in 1649 by Thomas Deming. Captain J. Larrabbee was the master. The Tryall was used to transport pipe staves.

In December 1672, the Wethersfield town meeting set aside five acres of land at the ferry landing in the current Rocky Hill area. At the same time, the town meeting gave a grant to Joseph Smith, with a provision that he provide a road to the landing as a condition for his grant.

The above grants facilitated shipyard development in the area now known as Rocky Hill. Due to a hurricane in 1700, flooding caused a change in the Connecticut River, which restricted river traffic below the Wethersfield Cove, while leaving the Rocky Hill landing still navigable. This made it difficult for ships at Wethersfield to get by the new sandbars.

The port of Rocky Hill became the head of navigation and a major seaport on the eastern side of Colonial America.

It, thus, also became an important shipping center. John Webb is credited with the first ship built in Rocky Hill. Webb's ship, called the Fair Trader, was used for shipping pork and beef, packed locally, and bread, baked in a bakery in the Dividend Road area. The crew of the Fair Trader included Seth Belden, Prescott Bulkeley Steven Bulkeley, Luke Fortune, Simeon Griswold and Luke Osborn. Each of these later became sea captains.

The Connecticut River was very difficult to navigate in the 18th century; the passage from the mouth of the river at Old Saybrook to the Rocky Hill Landing took 17 days under the best of conditions. Tugboats were used to pull the ship out and over sandbars, and other obstacles.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Connecticut Courant published a logbook in 1881. The worst obstacles included one in the Cromwell area and the Glastonbury bar, which was so bad that the Connecticut General Court ordered the Hartford Company to remove the sand to a depth of seven feet and establish markers indicating the depth of any obstructions.

In 1768, John Bulkeley operated a sloop between Rocky Hill and Nevis, shipping livestock. In 1772, Luke Deming operated a ship between Rocky Hill and New York City, trading onions. Also in 1772, Tom Kilby, Joseph Smith and Francis Hanmer operated similar ships. Conditions were so bad that only two round trips were attempted in any one-year.

Some 45 ships were still made in the Rocky Hill shipyards.

This includes ships made in the Rocky Hill shipyards between 1700 and 1775, at the beginning of the Revolutionary War. At the same time, the Council of Connecticut safety began looking for ships that could be converted to warships, and selected the brigantine Minerva, which was owned by William Griswold. The Minerva was refitted at the Rocky Hill Shipyards with 16 guns and a crew of 100 sailors. A 10-ton brigantine selected was the Jason, with a crew of 25. The Continental Congress appointed Silas Deane of Wethersfield to head the first Naval Committee, even before there was a naval department. Silas Deane's brother Barnabas was given authority to outfit a privateer. Barnabas selected the ship Revenge, which carried eight guns and a crew of 64 men.

During the Revolutionary War, it has been said that 40 percent of the male population of Rocky Hill was involved in maritime activities, and it took quite a high toll. In one year alone, there were 22 men killed in maritime activities.

The Boardman family at the end of the war began purchasing land, even up to Henry Street, and became an important family in the industry and culture of Rocky Hill. Hotels, taverns and saloons became very popular, and Rocky Hill became a bustling economic area due to the maritime activities' increased popularity, with many stores rising up to meet the increasing activities of shipbuilding and shipping.

Records of ships that were constructed have been lost, due to the raid in New London and Groton by the forces of Benedict Arnold, and the burning of the Customs House, where the new ships were registered. We do have the records available for ships registered after the Revolutionary War.

Elisha Belden started a large shipyard in the Dividend area, and John Williams had established a shipyard in 1797 at mouth of Hog Brook at the Connecticut River. The Shailor Shipyard was located at Sawbrook Road and Dividend Road. The shipyards also attracted other supporting industries. Elisha Callender made sails in the old sail loft on Meadow Road. Samuel Butler made the masts for the ships. Joseph Neff made pumps and blocks. Many others made items supporting the shipbuilders' activities. RHL

## The Rocky Hill Landing

*Rocky Hill Life Oct 03*

**By Rod Wilscam**

The commercial, shipbuilding, shipping and maritime history of Wethersfield's Stepney Parish goes back to December 1672, when its Town Meeting set aside five acres of land for the use of the public for shipbuilding — a boat landing area.

Joseph Smith was granted 20 acres of land in the area of the Connecticut River, with the provision that the area for a road be provided through his grant for the public access to the landing, which was located just north of the Joseph grant. A study of the local history and land records confirms these facts.

Today, the Landing is to the north of this area. The landing area has been expanded since 1672 and is now a part of Ferry Park, including the parking area and the local boat launch, and the roads are public roads. Many ships have been built at the landing over the years. The exact number cannot be found, as the registrations were made at the Middletown Customs Office, which were later transferred to the King's New London Customs Office. During the Revolutionary War, the New London Customs Office was burned during the British raid led by the traitor Benedict Arnold.

Since the Wethersfield Town Meeting established the shipbuilding area for public use, 331 years have elapsed. The Rocky Hill-Glastonbury Ferry has been providing service since 1655, by rowboat, rope power, horse power, sailboat, steam boat and, in modem times, a barge and tugboat. Over the years, the fees were set first by the Colonial Court, and after the Revolution through modem times, by the General Assembly. I

In the early years, ships from Rocky Hill were widely known for trading such items as pipe staves being manufactured locally and shipped to the West Indies and Barbados and traded for such goods as molasses, sugar and rum. The return trips provided barrels made from pipe staves, filled with imported items.

In the later years, barrels filled with local exports as salt beef, pork and fish, kiln dried cornmeal shipped to the West Indies. Even later, timber and lumber were added to the list of exports, and salt was added to the list of imports. After 1700, horses were among the exports, while wheat, rye and Indian corn were imported. The imports were shipped to New York and to Boston. After 1750, ships took their goods to Lisbon and to Mediterranean ports and returned items to other East Coast ports. Later, in 1799, Congress declared Wethersfield (of which Rocky Hill was still a part) and Middletown to be ports of delivery.

Because of a storm (or hurricane), between December, 1699 and January, 1700, the course of the Connecticut River was altered, and Rocky Hill became the head of navigation on the Connecticut River due to the changes in the river course caused by sandbars.

The major sources of employment for the youth of Rocky Hill were the sea and the usual maritime activities. In 1803, the Academy Hall was opened for the teaching of the maritime arts. The jobs created by the shipbuilding activities required numerous persons, and the shipbuilding industries required the activities of many other persons.

Mainly, shipbuilding required lumber for the masts, and for the hulls of the ships; also sails, metal fittings. Sail-making was another industry made necessary for shipbuilding activities.

Rope walks are necessary for rope making for the needs of the sailing ships that were being made at the landing. The facilities needed to make these items filled much of the land in the areas around the landing.

In, addition to the items needed by the shipyards, other needs for the ships sailing from Rocky Hill included bread and other food for the sailors. Bakeries also grew up around the landing.

In the early 1800s, many of the ship captains found it profitable to swing along the west coast of Africa, pick up a shipload of black slaves and leave them at one of the southern ports, before returning back from their successful trips.

Upon each ship's return from a successful trip, the Rocky Hill Congregational Church offered prayers of thanksgiving.

Shipbuilding was a common industry at the Rocky Hill Landing, from 1672 to the middle of the nineteenth century. The coming of the railroad 1872 was one of the main reasons for the demise of river transportation of goods using the Connecticut River.

In today's world, the landing is still an active place, bustling with boaters' cars parked while they launch their boats for the day's activities. Other cars belong to recreation-minded citizen who have come to the landing, now Ferry Park, pause and watch the river for a while, others for picnic and other recreational purposes. Still other citizens come to take advantage of the trails along the river or for a bite to eat at the Pilot House[[6]](#footnote-6) restaurant facility. All the Ferry Park facilities have something for everyone to stop their other activities for recreation, a picnic or to just watch the river go by.

The vision of the Wethersfield Town Meeting back in 1672, in making the landing and the park land available, is an example of foresight that has paid off in the long run. RHL

## Maritime Rocky Hill - Down to the Sea in Ships

Rocky Hill Life – date cut off by copier

**By Nora Howard**

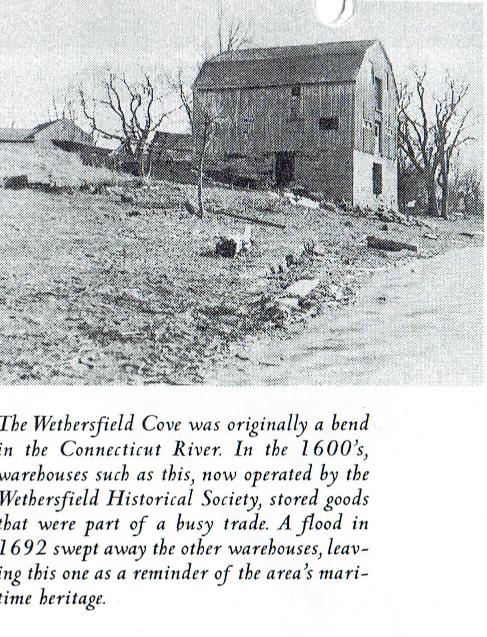
Rocky Hill was originally part of Wethersfield. The Rocky Hill name first appeared in a town vote in 1649. Also known as the Stepney Parish section of Wethersfield, Rocky Hill incorporated in 1843.

Wethersfield, and its southerly section of what is today Rocky Hill, was a place of maritime adventure and commerce from the day it was settled in 1634. Today that history survives in ship's logs, account books, letters, artifacts, local histories, and in the noteworthy buildings that resulted from prosperous trade.

It was the fertility and accessibility of the Connecticut River Valley that first attracted trader and Wethersfield founder John Oldham. He was an experienced seaman, and the owner and master of the first sailing vessel in the settlement. Oldham's life ended in 1636 when he was killed by Indians on his boat off of Block Island.

In 1648, the town gave permission to Thomas Deming, ship carpenter, to build the first shipyard "upon the Common, by the landing place.” This area today is Cove Park. From Deming's yard in 1649 came the first vessel built in Connecticut, the TRYALL. Imagine the incessant hammerings of the shipyard, the excitement of the crew and their families, and the pressure to cut and fashion enough pipe-staves to fill their cargo holds.

Pipe-staves? These were thin, shaped strips of weed set edge to edge to form the wall of containers such as barrels and buckets. As early as 1641, there was a pipe stave inspector in Wethersfield, who approved their dimensions and let the quota of up to 30,000 annually pass through for export. Pipe-staves went to the West Indies, and were made in to casks. Back the casks came to Wethersfield, filled with molasses, sugar and rum. Warehouses were needed to help manage this growing maritime trade. In 1662, Samuel Welles received permission from the town to set up a warehouse near Thomas Deming's shipyard. This was the first of six such buildings; the one that remains is operated as the Cove Warehouse museum by the Wethersfield Historical Society.

Almost 25 years later, in 1672, the town reserved five acres near the ferry landing in Rocky Hill, for (words cut off by the copier- RCH) the inhabitants in particular, for a common landing place, or for building ships, or rather vessels "This proved an excellent move, as by 1700 the Connecticut River had so shifted its position - with the river's bed now almost a mile to the east - as to make today's Cove area unsuitable for a river landing. The river landing at Rocky Hill, therefore, became the principal place for building and landing ships,

The sloop FAIRTRADER, with Master John Webb of Rocky Hill, went to the West Indies on a trading voyage between 1767-70 carrying cattle, potatoes, pigs, bricks, shingles and grain. Part of the toughest sailing for the FAIRTRADER was not plying between the islands, but coming upriver from Saybrook. In 1768, one trip took 13 days.

The history of Wethersfield's commerce, however, is blank in many instances - thanks to one Benedict Arnold. When he burned the Royal Custom House in New London in 1781, during the American Revolution, up in flames went the colonial commercial records.

The war had other effects on shipping, of course. The British took ships hostage and smothered trade. Still, ship captains, "desirous of adventuring" rushed to become privateers. Commanding privately-owned ships, they went out in search of British bounty, with authorization from Connecticut to seize whatever they could.

The ships, the cargo, the trading - all this makes for fascinating reading. So too, the stories of the people whose livelihoods came from the sea. The fantastic tale of Archibald Robbins (1792-1835) of Rocky Hill is particularly intriguing. In May 1815, Robbins was one of I2 crew members aboard the brig COMMERCE when it sailed from Middletown.

On June I, they reached New Orleans, and loaded flour and tobacco. Darting across the Atlantic to Gibraltar, they took on brandy and wine, Heading for the Cape Verde Islands off northwest Africa, in August, they hit the shore. The crew abandoned ship, and landed on shore in small boats. Then, their adventure begins. Natives of what is now Mauritania kept one crew member, and put the rest out to sea again in one of the (text cut off by the copier – RCH) and taken across the Sahara Desert to Morocco. Archibald Robbins was kept prisoner for 19 months. He later wrote "A Journal of the Loss of the Brig Commerce," which became well-known for its descriptions of the seamen's sufferings and of the native culture.

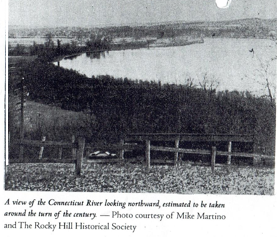
Archibald Robbins was plagued by sea-faring misfortune. Before the COMMERCE incident, during the War of 1812, he had been captured at sea and held prisoner for I8 months in Nova Scotia, Spanish pirates later captured him in the West Indies, and tried to hang him twice. Robbins returned home to Stepney to serve as Postmaster, married in 1823, and had 10 children.

Our towns' maritime history is chock full of drama. The high seas, the changeable Connecticut River, and the landing and ship building places once bustled with industry. Hard to imagine it today, but it's great fun to try. ”.RHL

## Maritime History of Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life – Date cut off by copier - RCH

**By Roderick Wilscam - Rocky Hill Historical Society, Inc.**

Rocky Hill, from the settlement of Wethersfield in I634 up to the time of its separation from Wethersfield, and up to the present day is considered a "river town" by the State of Connecticut, by the Town of Wethersfield and by the Rocky Hill townspeople.

The original deed, from the Wangunk Indian Tribe to the Town of Wethersfield, specified that the land stretched 5 miles to the east of the Connecticut River and 3 miles to the west of the river. The importance of the Connecticut River to the colonists was graced by the water outlet to the Atlantic Ocean. Sailing ships in the 17th century could easily navigate as far as Wethersfield, and even after the floods of I700, the Rocky Hill landing was still considered the head of navigation in Wethersfield.

As a farming town in the Colony of Connecticut, the Wethersfield Town Meeting in December 1672 set aside 5 acres on the river, at the foot of “Ye Rockie Hill," as a public landing and for a shipyard (Ferry Park). This was a wise decision, for one of the main industries through the I7th and I8th centuries was connected with the maritime operations. Ships from Rocky Hill carried goods to ports from New England to the colonies to the south, mainly Charlestown, S.C., and to the West Indies, and occasionally to the East Indies. The profits to the ship owners, especially after the Revolution, were substantial.

Shipbuilding also was an important industry, employing many of the Rocky Hill and Wethersfield families.

The Connecticut River was to play an important role in the Revolution. Some of the first ships of the U.S. Navy were built in Rocky Hill, then called Stepney Parish, including the Sloop of War, Revenge which was commissioned by the U.S. Congress in I776 and built by Silas Deane. The Revenge was built with eight guns for a crew of 64 men. The Revenge was destroyed in the Penobscot River in 1779 by the British.

In 1776 The Ranger built in Rocky Hill sailed from here under Capt. A. Rile (Riley? – RCH), with a crew of 20 and carrying 14 guns. The guns were described as being mounted on pivots, capable of being manned by one sailor and shooting a ball weighing1 pound. Because of the versatility, these guns proved to be quite deadly in close combat. The Snake, a privateer under the command of Captain Riley, left Rocky Hill in 1778. There were many other such ships, captains and crews from Rocky Hill involved in the sea war With England.

Henry Stiles, in his “The History of Ancient Wethersfield," outlines many other such ships of some historic importance.

Items exported from Rocky Hill included horses, cattle, hogs, hay, hoop poles, barrel staves, salted beef, pork, fist, potatoes, onions and bricks for ballast.

Goods imported include such items as rum, brandy, wines, sugars, teas, molasses and salt from the West Indies; and from the west coast of Africa, black people sold as slaves.

Because many of the ships sailing from Rocky Hill employed numerous sailors, the Rocky Hill town fathers determined that a maritime academy should be built to teach seamanship and navigation to provide learned men for the shipping trade.

In 1803 the School Committee employed Abraham Jagger to build a school (now called Academy Hall) to teach the maritime arts. The school was to be paid from public subscriptions as well as tax funds. Mr. Jagger ended up in bankruptcy, many subscribers did not pay their share, and Academy Hall and the builder were ruined financially.

The second floor of Academy Hall was used to teach higher mathematics and navigation science for many captains and seamen of the area for more than a quarter of a century. The Middle School District Committee used the first floor, which contained two classrooms, as an elementary school.

It was in the early morning hours of Jan. I, I840 that the Academy Hall was gutted by fire. The lower floor was rebuilt, and they continued using the classrooms for the Middle School District. The upper floor was not completed. In 1850 the Congregational Church leased the upper floor for a church school classroom, with the provision that they would finish off the building.

Rocky Hill was, indeed, the head of navigation for the Connecticut River, as well as a major port and shipbuilding center during the sailing ship era of the United States. RHL

## Last of Ships Built in Local Shipyards, Including Rocky Hill Owners or Captains

Rocky Hill Life July 03.

**By Rod Wilscam**

*This is the final installment of three relating to the ships known to have been built in Rocky Hill and the ship-captains and ship owners who lived here.*

The schooner Mariner had registered with Captain Samuel Dimmock as master.

The famous brigantine Minerva was built in Rocky Hill by the owner William Griswold. The Minerva was the first ship contracted by the colonial government of Connecticut and the Continental Congress to be refitted as a man-of-war ship and to be assigned as a privateer to protect the new union of states in the coming Revolutionary War with Great Britain. The Minerva was re-outfitted to a warship with 16 guns and a crew of 100 sailors. The action of the Minerva was very spectacular in its exploits against the British fleet and shipping. The town seal adopted by Rocky Hill pictures the Minerva as befitting the new United States. Its story of exploits is a story of pride to the new nation.

In 1807, the schooner Nancy was registered in New London, having displacement of 147 tons, 75 feet long, 23 feet 7 inches in width and depth of 9 feet 8 inches, with one deck and two masts and a square stern. Justus Robbins was captain of the Nancy, built by Elisha Belden as master carpenter and Sampson Horten as master. The schooner Nancy engaged with trade in the South and also with Spain.

The Sloop Nancy was registered in 1802, having 82 tons, 64 feet 3 inches in length, 20 feet 5 inches in depth and with one deck and one mast. The Nancy was owned by Israel Williams, Jacob Williams, William Goodrich, Hosea Bulkeley and Nathan Williams of Hartford, with Jacob Williams as master. Samuel Shaylor was the master carpenter. The ship Neptune, with Master John Hurlburt, was the first American-made ship to sail around the world, another credit to the seaport of Rocky Hill. Records indicate that the ship Olive was engaged in the foreign trade.

The schooner Paragon was registered in 1816 at 123 tons. It was 73 feet long and 22 feet 8 inches in depth, with one deck, two masts, a square stern and a billet head. Abijan Collins and George Clark were owners; Richard Price was master. Charles Williams is quoted in Stiles' "History of Ancient Wethersfield" as stating, “My father built this ship." The brig Patty was registered in 1794 with 146 tons, 75 feet 2 inches in length, 23 feet 4 inches wide and 9 feet 4 inches in depth, with two masts and one deck. The Patty had a square stern, a woman figurehead and no galley. Justus Riley was listed as the owner.

In 1790, the sloop Polly was registered with 68 tons, 60 feet long, 19 feet 6 inches wide, 7 feet 2 inches deep, with one deck, one mast, a square stern and no galley. Israel Williams was its owner.

William Hines was listed as the owner of the sloop Providence.

The sloop Ralph was registered in 1798 with 78 tons, length of 65 feet 8 inches in width, 7 feet 4 inches in depth, with one deck and one mast. Jason Boardman was listed as owner and master, with Joseph Bulkeley as part owner.

The sloop Rambler was registered in 1813 with 41 tons, 50 feet 9 inches long, 16 feet wide and 5 feet 11 inches in depth, with one deck and one mast. Roger Williams and John Williams were listed as owners and Charles Francis as master.

The privateer Revenge, built in Stepney Parish, now Rocky Hill, was commissioned by the Continental Congress. It carried eight guns and a crew of 64 men. Barnabas Deane was the owner. The Revenge was destroyed by the British in the Penobscot River in 1779.

The schooner Richmond, with Captain Moses Tryon and crew, was lost during the Revolution.

The sloop Robin was registered in 1814 with 65 tons, 56 feet 1 inch long, 18 feet 5 inches in width, 7 feet 5 inches in depth, one deck, one mast, a square stern and a billet head. Wait Robbins listed as owner and Joseph Dimmock as master.

The ship Roland, with William Crimes, is listed as lost at sea, with the entire crew.

The ship Rosemary was a privateer during the Revolution.

In 1785, the sloop Sally was registered with 90 tons. The owner listed was William Griswold, one of the wealthiest merchants in Rocky Hill, who owned a store in the shipyard area. This is listed in Stiles' history.

The schooner Sally was registered in 1787, indicating 76 tons, 62 feet long 19 feet 8 inches wide, with Ephraim Williams as owner and Elias Williams as captain. Both the owner and captain are buried in Center Cemetery.

Another schooner Sally was registered in 1802 with 117 tons, 67 feet 3 inches long, 21 feet 3 inches wide and 9 feet 7 inches deep, with one deck and two masts. William Griswold was listed as owner, William Webb as captain.

In 1810, another schooner Sally was registered with 83 tons, 65 feet long, 19 feet wide and 7 feet 9 inches deep. John Williams II and Roger Williams, both of Wethersfield, were listed as owners, and Captain Ebenezer White as master. The Sally was lost the first day after leaving the port of Rocky Hill.

In 1815, another sloop Sally was registered with 67 tons, 58 feet long and 15 feet 2 inches wide, with one deck and one mast. The owner was John Williams II, and Captain Sampson Horton was master.

The ship Sea Island was owned in Rocky Hill and involved in the West Indies trade.

The sloop Selina was registered in 1800 with 82 tons, 59 feet long, 19 feet 6 inches deep, with one deck and one mast and a square stern. William Williams, Joseph Dimock, Edward Bulkeley and Allan Riley were owners. Captain Joseph Dimock was listed as master.

The brig Sampson, with Captain Joseph Dimmock as master was also in service.

The schooner Samuel was registered in 1794 with 98 tons, 67 feet 6 inches long, 20 feet 9 inches in width, and 8 feet deep, with one deck and two masts. Jacob and Israel Williams and others were listed as owners, with Jacob Williams as master.

The ship Thankful with 18 tons was in service.

The ship Two Brothers traded out of Rocky Hill to Pernambuco, Brazil, Barbados and St. Lucia. According to the ship's logbook, after leaving Rocky Hill, they spent several days aground on the Glastonbury bar and the entry in the log ends with "Damn ye Place." On the same trip, one of the crew died, and the log shows that after seaman Noah Willoughby died, "we hove him overboard".

In 1793, the schooner Ursula was registered in New London Customs House at 55 tons, 53 feet 9 inches long, 18 feet wide and 6 feet 9 inches deep, one deck and two masts. The owners were Philip Goodrich John Williams II, Samuel Butler, Jared Goodrich, Justus Robbins, and Captain Barnabas Baker as master. It is believed that John Williams II was one of the owners of the Williams Shipyard and the great grandson of Thomas Williams, who had the original grant for the shipyard, between the Connecticut River and the Rocky Hill.

The sloop Victor was registered in 1815 with 82 tons, 59 feet 9 inch long, 21 feet 6 inches wide and 7 feet 9 inches deep, with one deck, one mast and a square stern. Abijah Collins was the owner, with Thomas Bunce as the master.

In 1806, the schooner Victory was registered with 142 tons, 68 feet long, 23 feet 2 inches wide and 10 feet 9 inches deep, one deck and a square stern and a billet head. Samuel Dimock and John Williams were the owners, and Captain Samuel Dimock was the master.

In 1810, the brig Wanderer with 133 tons, 69 feet long and 22 feet 8 inches wide and 10 feet 4 inches in depth, with one deck, two masts, a square stern, a billet head and a figurehead.

Samuel Wetmore and Josiah Williams were the owners. Captain Samuel Williams was listed as master, and Samuel Dimock was listed as master carpenter.

The schooner Wanton, with Captain Lattimer as master, was involved with the Charleston trade.

The sloop William, registered in 1800 with 78 tons, 63 feet 4 inches long, 19 feet 11 inches wide, and 7 feet 3 inches deep, one deck and one mas. The owners were Israel Williams, William Griswold, Silas Willard and Webb II and Captain William Griswold as master.

The brig William was registered in 1807 with 127 tons, 74 feet 3 feet long, 24 feet 3 inches wide and 8 feet 7 inches deep and with one deck, two masts and a square stern. The owners were listed as William Webb Jason Boardman, Jason Robbins, Levi Goodrich, William Williams and Captain Isaac Goodrich as master.

This ends the describing of ships believed to have been built in Rocky Hill and those with an owner or the master being from town or buried here. RHL

*Rocky Hill Historical Society (563-6704) is seeking any information concerning ships with Rocky Hill connections.*

# Living

## How Rocky Hill Residents Fed Themselves

Rocky Hill Life Aug 00

**By Rod Wilscam**

Did you ever wonder how the residents of Rock Hill ate prior to the year 1900? Before the 20th century began, there were no convenience stores, food supermarkets or food specialty stores available for last minute food shopping. The 19th century did not have the luxury of grocery shops that we enjoy today. The concept of stores selling food products was then just in its infancy. A grocery store was quite crude in todays (that day’s? – RCH) economy.

Almost every home had its own gardens for fruits and vegetables. The food that was not grown at home, was nearly not available, Chicken coops were to be found at almost every home. The hunters did have small game available, if they were good with the rifle. The fisherman had the Connecticut River and many streams as a plentiful source of fish.

Each household was a veritable food production company. Primarily, a garden was the principal provider of vegetables for the home. When the frost left the ground in the very early spring, it was the time for the garden to be prepared for planting, the first plants in the ground; onions, radishes and lettuce. The next stage in the growing season included such items as corn and beans, then every other vegetable the owners could desire for sustenance. During the season, every imaginable vegetable came fresh to the table, and the excess supply of vegetables were prepared for canning and other means of preservation.

Bread and other usual foods required the use of flour. Wheat had to be obtained by growing one’s own wheat, or trading the excess vegetables and fruit with a farmer who had his own excess wheat. Growing wheat requires planting seeds in the early spring, after the land is cleared and plowed. The wheat appeared like some long grasses. The long stems show up, with the top growing pods. The pods dried out in June, and in July were cut and placed to dry, then, after threshing, the wheat is milled for flour. This is actually a long and sometimes difficult procedure, also an important segment in the food process.

After the milling, or grinding of the wheat, the flour is one of the main ingredients of the bread making process. Yeast is another ingredient of the bread making chain. Without yeast, the bread would be quite a hard cake, almost inedible. There are many recipe books containing bread recipes, should you like to try your hand at one of the oldest procedures, that of bread making. I can personally guarantee that the homemade bread is a delight to eat, and fresh homemade bread is quite a treat.

One of the next important items in the food chain included fruit trees and grapevines. Every homeowner planted his or her fruit trees and vines near the house. The production routine included picking the fruit, washing and individual preparation, including peeling the peaches and picking out the pits of the cherries. At the same time, the canning process began, canning jars had to be obtained and washed, jar lids and rubbers had to be prepared. The canning process required much heat to a large vat, usually the process was done outside the house. The process took much fuel (usually wood or coal) and much time. After the food was cooked, the canning process included putting the cooked fruit or vegetables in the jars, placing the jar rubber and caps on and cooking the jars for the winter months. The canning of foods could also cause some serious injuries, and there was a lack of ambulances, hospitals and doctors for the medicine as practiced today.

Jellies and jams also were products of the fruit trees to the 19th century residents of Rocky Hill. Many of the fruits and grapes were good candidates for jellies and jams. Fall was the time that the early residents purchased sugar, not by the one to five pound packages as available today, but in sacks of 25 to 100 pounds.

The ratio for jellies and jams consisted of one measure of cooked fruit for jams and one measure of the liquid fruit juice for jellies and one measure of sugar. The women of the house knew which fruits contained pectin, and could be expected to jell, thus making a good jar of jelly or a jam. Without pectin, the jelly or jam would end up as a gooey mess. The same outside fire place used for canning, as described above, was used for jellies and jams. After the sugar was added to the fruit, in equal measures, and brought to a boil, and boiled until it looked done, as based upon the experience of the cook.

When considered done, the cooked jam or jell was poured into glasses to cool. After being cooled the glasses were covered with a topping of melted paraffin to keep the jelly or jam preserved.

The apple trees provided fruit for eating and the balance of the apples were stored, if they were without blemishes, and the balance of the apples were processed by putting them through and apple press to make cider. With the same vat used for the jelly or jam the apple juice from the cider press was boiled down to one-half the volume. Apple cider is the placed in the vat and peeled and sliced pieces of apples are added and boiled down to the apple butter consistency.

One of the other grains discovered by the earliest settlers was corn. The English explorers and settlers were taught the advantages of corn as a food item, and the use of the native’s corn. Wheat has the importance of use in the making of bread, but the use of corn was important because it was used to feed people and their animals like cows and horses. Corn is also used to feed humans, and the other animals, and the other animals, such as sheep, pigs, as well as chickens.

Like our modern society, corn has been a useful food product, even in our earliest settlements. Corn is a very hard food plant, easy to grow and easy to use as a food product. The farmers used to say that corn should be knee high by the fourth of July. In my own experience driving to the middle of Iowa, where I have seen large fields or corn mile after mile. Another of the farmers' sayings about corn is July for the stalk and August for the ear. This means that the stalks of corn grow in the months of July, and the ears grow in August, and that the corn will be done before frost time in the fall. The corn grows to five and six feet tall, and then starts to tassel, that is, starts to flower. The ears of corn also start to flower, and pollination occurs. When the ears of corn start to dry up, it is time to pick the corn cars. In the world of today, corn is not only used as food, but also is used as an additive to gasoline to make the gasoline more efficient and clean burning. Corn is a grain that keeps well through the winter, and is much better than the other grains for this reason.

The tables in the typical house were filled from the gardens, the orchards, and the fish from the running waters, and also from the small game animals caught by the hunters. Some of the households included a chicken coop, with a supply of chickens to fill the tables, including the fresh eggs, all aimed at making the table quite attractive to the residents.

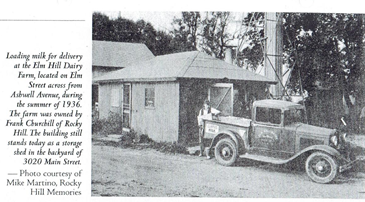
The residents also had reasonable close woods, including nuts, which made a day of nut picking very profitable for members of the household, including a good variety of foods.

The early residents of Rocky Hill managed a good variety of foods for the table, but also had to work full time in the food management and provision to last over the winter months. After all, the residents did not have convenience grocery stores or food supermarkets to pick up items when needed, but they did have to spend much time in management of their food table. RHL

## *Everyone here* used to be a farmer

Rocky Hill Life May 98

**By Rod Wilscam**

Rocky Hill has been called various names over the past 300-plus years. Originally a portion of Wethersfield, it was called by some Lexington, the Lower Community, the Rockie Hill, Stepney Parish, as well as Rocky Hill.

Now, with approximately 13.7 square miles in area, Rocky Hill is bordered on the east by the Connecticut River, south by Cromwell, and north by Wethersfield. The soil is fertile, and it was used by the Wangunk Indians for farming prior to the I634 settlement of Wethersfield by John Oldham and his company.

While the Wangunk Indians were primarily a non-nomadic farming tribe, they had found the meadows here to be a fertile area for agriculture, and the alluvial soil was naturally good for the growth of crops, which included broom corn and beans. While the lower community of Wethersfield was not settled until circa 1650, the land was so fertile that within only a few years it became self-sufficient. Settlers were able to begin exporting crops that were beyond their living requirement needs.

The Connecticut River provided the means of transportation to ship the surplus crops, first to New York, then to the southern colonies, and finally directly to the West Indies. The ship captains returned with the necessary items, some even returning to southern ports with Negro slaves. It was not considered illegal to import slaves until the Civil War years. Shipbuilding to assist the trade became another needed industry for the support of the colonists. - Such farm products as hay, rye, buckwheat, potatoes, onions, flax, corn and beans, as well as carrots, cabbage, parsnips, turnips and tobacco, were some of the town's primary exports. Then, following the I700 floods, the Connecticut River became impassible for shipping north of the sandbars in the river.

Rocky Hill became the northern head of navigation on the river. This lasted until the railroad took over the shipping from shore points.

Thomas Danforth Jr. wrote to his father on March 12, 1811 from Augusta, Georgia: "If you see Justus Robbins tell him that onions are at this time I2 and I/2 cents per bunch; potatoes 62 and I/2 cents per bushel; cheese 12 I/2 cents; and butter, a good price." This information encouraged Mr. Robbins to send out cargo from Rocky Hill.

In the beginning, the life in the colony was quite ordinary. The reason was the lack of commerce, as ships brought only the basic needs. There were no corner markets or shopping malls for the pioneers to make those last-minute purchases that we are used to today.

In the early days, fish and game were readily available. A common dish was bean porridge, which was made by boiling beef or pork with beans until it became mush. Until around 1750, there was only water, milk or home-brewed beer to quench your thirst.

Baking rye bread and brewing beer was part of domestic life. After 1750, apple growing was prominent, and apple cider on the table became quite common. Farmers raised their own beef and salted down what was not freshly eaten. Corn meal was also common food. The farmers frequently traded their provisions between families.

In 1815, the first cook stove was introduced in town. Friends of the owners traveled many miles, without the availability of roads then, to see the new device in use.

Popular entertainment included sedate parties, where young ladies would bring their knitting for conversation and a little gossip. Food served at these parties included apples, cider and cakes.

While everyone who settled in Rocky Hill was a farmer then, by 1870, according to the U.S. Census, only 83 people identified themselves as farmers. And today that number has fallen to only a handful. RHL

## The History of Medicine in Rocky Hill during the 18th and 19th Century

Rocky Hill Life June 04

**By Rod Wilscam**

Our present Town of Rocky Hill has a long and varied history. It began as a part of the oldest town in the Connecticut Colony.

Wethersfield, -first settled in 1634–was the first settlement in the Connecticut Colony. The village of Wethersfield allowed the first settlers in the south part of the village around 1650. The settlers traveled to the area described as ye Rockie Hill due to the high ridge at the east part of the area.

Many settlers followed the first settler and found that without a physician, they were disadvantaged.

*Doctors Who Came to Serve*

We have no precise records of a medical doctor coming to the new settlement. Dr. Rufus W. Griswold has stated that the first known physician to come to Rocky Hill was Dr. Aaron Horsford, followed by Drs. Joseph Higgins, Daniel Fuller. A.W. Barrows, Sylvester Bulkeley, Dr. Ritter, Rufus W. Griswold, Wait R. Griswold, and Frank Louis Burr.

Dr. Aaron Horsford from Marlborough studied medicine with a Dr. Hull who was practicing in Meriden. Aaron Horsford married a daughter of Dr. Hull, and came to Rocky Hill by 1774, where he practiced until he died on April 7, 1804 in his 57th year of life. He died of "suffusion of the lungs" - his last residence in Rocky Hill was located at 666 Old Main Street, in a large house he built for himself.

There is a story, unverified, that one evening a man that was not known (presumably a traveler on the old highway between Hartford and Old Saybrook) reported that while travelling, he had come upon a building in the middle of the road.

The night was very cold and the traveler appeared to be inebriated, and further he was reporting the incident to the good doctor in order that the building could be arrested.

It should be reported that it was a custom in colonial days to build public buildings in the middle of the roads. At that time the Congregational Church was located in the middle of Old Main Street just north of the old Town Hall and Police building (now the Police Building on Old Main Street).

Doctor Joseph Higgins practiced for a period of time in town and died during his ninth year of practicing in town on July 18, 1797.

Dr. Higgins was a member of the Hartford County Medical Society when he died of consumption. He was married to Nancy Williams, daughter of William Williams.

Dr. Daniel Fuller, was born in Columbia in 1774. He started his medical practice in Rocky Hill in 1804 when he was 30 years of age. It is said that he was a jolly man with humorous nature, always jovial, and a practitioner of mime. He received the honorary degree of MD from Yale College in 1831. While practicing in Rocky Hill he married Mabel Robbins, of daughter of Simeon Robbins.

Dr. Fuller taught music and led the Congregational Church Choir from 1805 to 1816. He and Nancy had two boys and one girl. The boys went to New York City, and the girl married a minister of the Gospel surnamed Tyler. Dr. Fuller died on September 16, 1843, of erysipelas[[7]](#footnote-7) in his 69th year of his life.

Sylvester Bulkeley was born in town the son of Hosea Bulkeley, who had practiced in Cromwell and in Berlin for several years before. He returned to practice in his native Rocky Hill. He received a degree from Yale College and from Dartmouth Medical School. His second wife was Nancy Bradford, daughter of William Bradford, Sr. Dr. Wait R. Griswold was born in 1820. He had attended one term of lectures at Yale College, then began practicing in the western part of Connecticut. He served as an Assistant Surgeon during the Civil War.

After the war, he attended Medical Lectures in New York City where he received his degree. He then came to Hartford and later to Rocky Hill where he became involved in the patent medicine business. Dr. Wait Griswold died on in 1887, aged 67 years.

Dr. Rufus Wolcott Griswold was born on February 20, 1825 in Manchester. He was the son of Samuel Griswold. Dr. Griswold practiced in Rocky Hill from 1854 until his death on August 18, 1902. He graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. He married Esther Eliza Hammond, daughter of Elijah Hammond of Vernon. Rufus and Eliza had three sons.

Dr. Frank-Louis Burr, M.D., born 111 Killingworth, graduated from the Medical College of Philadelphia in 1871 and came immediately to Rocky Hill to begin his practice here in 1884. He had spent thirteen years in practice in Middletown.

Dr. Charles E. Stanley, born in Rocky Hill, had graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1876. In 1876 he became the assistant Physician at the Connecticut Insane Asylum in Middletown. Dr. Everrett S. Warner, son of James Warner of Rocky Hill, graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City in 1878. He began practicing in New York City.

Dr. Rufus W. Griswold indicates he was unable to find any records of any earlier physicians practicing in Rocky Hill prior to 1774. The residents of Rocky Hill would go to any doctors in Wethersfield, for any medical treatments they required.

For childbirth's, midwives were the usual source of medical assistance. The earliest midwife practicing, that Dr. Rufus Griswold discovered, was Mercy Griswold, the second wife of Josiah Griswold, who died November 3, 1819 at the ripe old age of 82 years. In the early part of the 19th century, prior to 1850, Mrs. Oliver, the second wife of Captain Oliver Goodrich, Jr., who was affectionately known as Miss Oliver and the widow of Captain Oliver Goodrich, Jr. practiced as a midwife. Another midwife practicing about the same time was Mrs. James Bulkeley, also known as Miss Jim. These two ladies followed Miss Granny Griswold serving as midwives.

From what I can tell, these were the only physicians known to be in Rocky Hill in the 18th and 19th centuries. RHL

# Churches

## The Beginnings of Rocky Hill and the Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield

*Rocky Hill Life MAR 04*

**By Rod Wilscam**

The earliest beginning of the current Rocky Hill is found in the origin of the Town of Wethersfield. As early as 1633, a citizen of Watertown in the Colony of Massachusetts named John Oldham was quite restless to leave the Colony because it was becoming overcrowded. Mr. Oldham had come to Watertown for the same reason. Because of his wander lust, Mr. Oldham was not held in high esteem by the Watertown authorities.

This wanderlust steered him to make an explorative trip to the mouth of the Connecticut River. The river got its name from local Indians, the word means "the long winding river".

Mr. Oldham arrived near the Wangunk tribal area called Pyguaug by the local tribe. Mr. Oldham began to like the area, so he and his crew stopped, and began to explore the area. Liking what they saw, they found the Indian Leader, who had come to Watertown earlier, inviting the Watertown officials to come to their area to settle.

The Indian leaders had an ulterior motive for this request, because their Wangunk tribe had long been harassed and continuously raided by other Indian nations, and they believed that the white men would provide a buffer against the marauding tribes. Mr. Oldham and his crew of explorers believed the Indians invitation to be serious. They returned to Watertown, and organized a group of followers to go to the Indian leader’s area along the Connecticut River. Mr. Oldham petitioned the General Court for permission.

The Court had not approved their petition, so Mr. Oldham and some dozen families started out overland for the Pyguaug area in 1634, leaving Watertown without obtaining approval. They settled in Wethersfield.

(Words cut off by copier – RCH) mission to settle in the area until 1680. By 1682 they had established a five acre portion of land at the River for a landing and a shipbuilding reservation for all its citizens.

Problems started in the late 1600s for the citizens of "Ye Rockie Hill" which prevented them from attending Town Meetings and for their children to attend school during the winter and spring months because of the swampy area between Rocky Hill and Wethersfield. The conditions made it difficult to travel to Sunday Worship, Town Meetings and school classes.

The Fundamental Orders were adopted in Hartford on January 14, 1638. This was the first document formalizing the government of the Connecticut Colony. The Royal charter of 1652 gave the Royal Approval of the Fundamental Orders. In 1722, a petition was presented to a Town Meeting held on December 19. This petition asked for a grant of 60 acres of land for church use.

The petition was approved by a Town Meeting of March 4, 1720-1. With approval, the Town Meeting named the following committee to oversee the bounds of the sixty acres of the so-called Parsonage Land for the new parish. The Committee appointed by the Town Meeting included Jonathon Burnham, Ensign Joshua Robbins and Lt. Robert Welles. The land chosen by the committee was located in West Rocky Hill, near Cold Spring and near what is now Cromwell Avenue, near William Warner's house.

After the work of the committee was completed, a new petition was prepared to give the new parish land, as requested in the General Court, the predecessor of the current General Assembly was given another petition on December 11, 1721 to allow the (words cut off by copier – RCH) this plan, set the name as Lexington Parish, or more specifically the third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield. But a new petition was given asking for another parish name, and upon receipt, the General Court suggested the name of Stepney. Eventually the name of Stepney Parish was approved, subject to building a church and the hiring of a new minister. A search for a Minister was started, and the first Rocky Hill church was begun. The church building was completed in 1727.

Following the war of the Revolution, the Federal Government was established and codified by the adoption of the Constitution of the United States of America on March 4, 1789. Then, the vestiges of the British Government were erased at last, with the Connecticut Constitution of 1618.

The Connecticut Constitution of 1618 was replaced with the modern constitution adopted by the State of Connecticut on December 30, 1967.

So, the government of Rocky Hill has been in existence since the earliest Colonial Years, and has lasted into modem times, with many changes over the years. Rocky Hill qualifies as an old community, with a modern government and can truly be called a modern community. RHL

## Early Ministers of the Rocky Hill Congregational Church

Rocky Hill Life: May 05

*Benefits in Those Days Included 20 Acres of Parsonage land for Personal Use*

**By Rod Wilscam**

The citizens living in South Wethersfield in the year 1721 found it very difficult to attend church services at the Wethersfield church in times of bad weather. They requested by a petition to Wethersfield's Town Meeting that they would like permission to create a separate parish in the lower community.

That was because of the swamp between the Wethersfield church and the area of "ye Rockie Hill” where the handful of settlers had braved the trek into the wilderness to settle in the lower community. It was also due to the swampy area in what is now Valley Brook and the I-91 intersection and Silas Deane Highway.

While the area was usually easily passable, during and after rainy weather the ground became soft and almost impassable, causing travel to church to be very dangerous.

The Wethersfield Town Meeting approved the petition and forwarded the petition to the General Court (now the state legislature) for its approval. The General Court approved the petition and it became the law after the church was erected and a minister was selected. So construction and a search for a minister were started.

Finally on June 7, 1727, the building was completed and the first minister was chosen and ordained. The Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield was formally established in Stepney.

The name Stepney was later changed by the General Court to Rocky Hill.

The first minister was the Rev. Mr. Daniel Russell. He was the son of the Rev. Mr. Nodiah Russell of Middletown. Daniel was the seventh of nine children. He was born on June 2, 1702. He received his education at Yale, with his brother William guiding him with his studies.

The new parish voted him a stipend of 80 pounds per year, very satisfactory for the early 18th century. This sum was to be increased annually by five pounds per year until it reached a total of 100.

In addition to the annual stipend, he was given a choice to take 60 pounds per year and to have use of the parsonage property, and to have an additional settlement of 160 pounds or even the substitution of help in the construction of his house.

The salary stipend was also to be payable in produce at a rate of four pence for corn, five pence for rye and seven pence for wheat. This remuneration was continued until around the year 1750, when the paper money in the colony depreciated because of a depression by one-sixteenth the face amount.

Around 1756, the value returned to what it was in the past. The fluctuations in the value of the coin of the realm were probably as disruptive then as it is today in the 21st century.

On November 13, 1728, he married Lydia Stillman, the daughter of George and Rebecca Stillman.

This marriage produced 10 children and when Lydia died on September 3, 1750, there was still a household of most of their children at home.

Then, on July 29, 1752, Daniel married Catherine Chauncy, daughter of the Rev. Nathaniel and Sarah Chauncy from Durham.

The Rev. Daniel Russell was taken to his spiritual home in his 62nd year of life and his 38th year as pastor in Rocky Hill.

The people of town honored their first pastor with the following tombstone inscription: "Here lies interred the remains of the Rev'd. Mr. Daniel Russell, who wisely and faithfully fulfilled his ministry for more than 37 years with a shining pattern of piety in his Christian and ministerial character and fell sleep (sic) the 16th of September A.D. 1764, aged 62 years."

He was buried in Center Cemetery. His widow Catherine survived him by 13 years and died on January 10, 1777, at the age of 71.

Following Daniel Russell's death, the Rev. Mr. Eliphalet Webster was preaching for a time.

The second minister in Rocky Hill was the Rev. Burrage Merriam of Meriden.

Reverend Merriam was a 1762 graduate of Yale. A longstanding custom of the 17th century and later was to make a settlement upon a new minister at the time he was hired to the ministry. Upon being ordained and installed,

Reverend Merriam also received his settlement of 200 pounds, to be paid in two installments annually beginning on February 27, 1765.

Under the usual custom, he was also given the use of some 20 acres or the parsonage lands, he was furnished with the same salary as the first minister and also got somewhat less than 20 cords of green wood until his needs grew.

After his death, the Revs. Gershom Bulkeley, Fuller, Atkins, Lyman and Wolcott preached for a time. A call to preach was extended to a Mr. Baldwin, who did not accept the call. A call was extended to the Rev. John Lewis of Southington, who did accept, and he was installed in January 24, 1781, at the same salary.

Reverend Lewis graduated from Yale College with the class of 1770. He had been a tutor at Yale from 1773–78. He was considered to be a man of much learning and was married to Mary Hubbard of New Haven.

He also built his house on the corner of Elm Street and Chapin Avenue, a house which is still standing at that same corner.

Reverend Lewis died on April 25, 1792. Following his death, the Rev. Benjamin Boardman and a Mr. Brown preached.

The fourth minister in town was the Rev. Calvin Chapin. Dr. Chapin was a fifth-generation descendant of Deacon Samuel Chapin who came to Massachusetts Colony from England or Wales and died in 1675.

Dr. Chapin was born on July 22, 1763, in Springfield, Mass., the fourth of six sons of Deacon Edward Chapin.

At an early age he served as a fifer in the Revolutionary War.

He entered Yale College as a freshman in 1784 and during his time at Yale distinguished himself as a scholar. He graduated as a prized scholar with many academic awards.

Dr. Chapin continued his studies and obtained license to preach from the Hartford North Association.

In 1791 he was elected a tutor at Yale and carried out his duties until he resigned in 1794 to accept the pastorate at Stepney, where he was ordained and installed as the fourth minister.

He married Jerusha Edwards, daughter of the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Edwards of New Haven at Stepney (Text cut off by copier. – RCH)

## The Rocky Hill Congregational Church a Short History

Rocky Hill Life (date cut off by Copier – RCH)

**By Rod Wilscam, Rocky Hill Historical Society, Inc.**

The Rocky Hill Congregational Church, is a member of the United Church of Christ. The history of the church is quite old and varied. Actually, it is an outgrowth of the Wethersfield First Congregational Church.

The church was the government of Wethersfield when it was established in 1633/1634 in the original settlement. The town government meetings were the same as the church meeting records, and the tithes to the church were the taxes of the town. This was to last until the Connecticut Constitution of 1818 was adopted. Among other things, this constitution literally disestablished the Congregational Church as the government of Connecticut. The opponents of the 1818 constitution were noted for their "antidisestablishmentarianism''. This word was the longest word in the dictionaries since 1818, and represents the basis for the advocates of separation of church and state.

Following the settlement of the southern part of Wethersfield, starting in 1650, the settlers found it to be difficult to attend church in Wethersfield because of the swamplands to the east of the great meadows and to the north of the "rockie hill".

It was because of the large hill, south of the meadowlands that the area in the south part of Wethersfield and east of what is now called Old Main Street came to be known as "Rocky Hill".

Finally, 23 of the residents of the "Lower Community", also known as "Rockie Hill", petitioned the Wethersfield Town Meeting on December 19, 1720 as follows:

"To the inhabitants of the Township of Wethersfield in Town Meeting assembled December 19, 1720

"The humble petition of us Subscribers inhabitants of Rocky Hill part of & appertaining to ye sq. Township of Wethersfield humbly showeth for ye public worship, yet considering our circumstances it is hopeful that we may be in time and how soon, we know not, so that it may not be amiss to endeavour by proper means to prepare Our Selves for so good a Design. Therefore your humble Petitioners Request att this meeting that a parcell of land containing about Sixty Acres might be sett out for a parsonage beginning near the stone pit and so running north.

(Words missing from Wilscam collection – RCH) installed in January 24, installed as the fourth minister. He married Jerusha Edwards, daughter of the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Edwards of New Haven. At Stepney, his settlement was $200, paid in installments over a four-year period. He was given 20 acres of parsonage land for his own use.

Dr. Chapin was a great pastor and leader at Stepney until his retirement in November 1844. He agreed to continue until a replacement could be found. He continued to preach until July of 1850. During his pastorate, he added 594 new members.

Dr. Chapin preached his 59th anniversary sermon on May 5, 1844. He died March 16, 1851, at the age of 87. Jerusha Chapin preceded his death, which occurred just a few weeks after his resignation as pastor. The fifth pastor was the Rev. Mr. Lebbens who was installed in July of 1850. His story will have to wait until a later date, along with the names of the ministers that followed. RHL

## Rocky Hill United Methodist Church: A Brief History of a Dynamic Worship House

Rocky Hill Life (Date cut off by copier- RCH)

**By Rod Wilscam**

The history of the Rocky Hill United Methodist Church starts with John Wesley, an Anglican Priest in London, England, and continues through the history of Wethersfield, then later to the history of Rocky Hill. When John Oldham and his party first came to settle in what is now Wethersfield, they brought with them their ideas of church and government to their Connecticut settlement. From IG33 to 1843, and the separation of Rocky Hill from Wethersfield, the early history of Rocky Hill is a part of the history of Wethersfield. Beginning in 1633, when Wethersfield was first settled, the First Ecclesiastical Society (The Congregational Church), was the government. All citizens were required, by custom and by law, to support the Congregational Church, or leave the area.

With this brief background, typical of the English colonies, the preaching and teachings of John Wesley were quite welcome, but not too practical for many Colonial Connecticut citizens. As early at I740, The Reverend George Whitfield became the first Methodist preacher to visit Wethersfield. He preached under the giant elm tree near Broad Street. This was the first introduction of the Wethersfield, and Rocky Hill, citizens to Methodism in the Colony of Connecticut. The citizens were favorably impressed, and they kept returning to hear the itinerant Methodist preachers. On March 14, 1790, Jesse Lee preached under the great elm tree, and, in July of the same year, Freeborn Garretson came to preach as well. There were other preachers that followed, but the Connecticut Colonials who came to the area to hear the Gospel teachings still were citizens of the Congregational Church, as well as of Wethersfield.

When the Connecticut Constitution was adopted in 1818, the Congregational Church became disestablished from the government. The citizens were no longer required to support the Congregational Church with their taxes. This separation of church and state then made it possible for citizens to support the church of their choice. With the change in constitutional law, and the popularity of listening to the Methodist preachers, prayer meetings became more frequent. By 1721, these Methodist preachers were so popular that a number of area towns became regular stops in their travels, and a circuit was formally established which included Wethersfield, New Britain, and Kensington, with William (Billy) Pease as the regular circuit rider. Because to the Colonial citizens the idea of Methodism was quite different, it was not too well received by some. As a matter of fact, in 1823, the Methodists had been using the Academy building to hold their services, thus upsetting some of the local citizens to the point of confrontation. These grumblings actually caused such a commotion that the "riot act" was literally read to the Methodists, who actually continued their services in the dark, after the candles had been removed from the Academy Hall.

However, many citizens of the Rocky Hill area became involved to the point that they began worshiping at private homes and then in the sail loft at Roderick Grime’s store near the river landing.

In the November Conference in 1828, Rocky Hill was formally set off from the circuit and became a separate parish. By 1829, the Methodists purchased the Bradford store near the ferry landing, and moved it to the corner of Old Main Street and Church Street.

This same store building served as the church until, in 1859, they outgrew the store building and built a new church building at the same site. The Rev. John Lovejoy was the pastor at that time. This building served until it burned down on Feb. I5, I895. The Ladies Aid Society was meeting at the church when the fire was discovered, and they were able to save the pulpit Bible and two pulpit chairs. The pulpit Bible is still displayed in the church's display case, and the pulpit chairs are still used in the present sanctuary.

The loss was devastating to its members, but with the insurance money and the parish's perseverance, they rebuilt the church, which was dedicated on Jan. 29, 1896, less than one year from the date of the fire. The services were held at the Shipman’s Hall, just north of the church, until the new edifice was completed. The minister was the Rev. Henry Trinkhaus.

Rev. Trinkhaus is remembered for his marriage to the organist, Nancy Belden, thus, leaving the parish without an organist when he left for his next parish. We are told by some of the old-timers that the years after 1896 were happy times for the church members. For many years of the early part of this century, student pastors were assigned to the church. The West Rocky Hill parish died out and the proceeds from the sale of the church helped finish the mortgage payments for the downtown church.

The present building was redecorated in 19271928. On May 5, 1996, the 175th year of Methodism in Rocky Hill was celebrated, along with the 100 year anniversary of the dedication of the building.

On the whole, the strength of the Methodist Church is in its worship, but more important is the congregation's witness to the community, and to the world, through its programs.

It is the lay members who have carried out their witness to a thriving congregation and, indeed, the people of Rocky Hill. RHL

## The Early Methodist Church in Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life Nov 00

**By Rod Wilscam**

When Wethersfield was settled it was governed by the General Court in Massachusetts. It gained permission to start the settlement, now called Wethersfield made the trek through the wilderness and made homes in Wethersfield. Later settlement was started in Windsor and Hartford.

Following approval from the General Court in Massachusetts, and precipitated by a Pequod Indian raid at Wethersfield on May 26, 1637, a constitution was set up in 1639 called the Fundamental Orders. Included authorization for establishing the Church of England as Government, and its Congregational Church became the Government. These Fundamental Orders, with the provision of excluding any citizen belonging to any other Church members in Connecticut, became the law in the Colony.

When Connecticut received its Royal Charter from the English King in 1662, the Fundamental Orders were incorporated into the Charter.

After the Revolutionary War, Connecticut continued the Fundamental Orders as its government. Growing pains and time caused problems requiring the modernization of the Fundamental Orders and in 1818 Connecticut adopted a new modernized Constitution, which among other things, ordered a separation of Church and State.

In 1821, Methodist "Circuit Riders" had begun preaching in Connecticut, and new congregations were being established. Some of the early congregations were begun in Wethersfield, and in its lower community, now called Rocky Hill.

On September 13, 1821, at the Quarterly Methodist Conference, a new circuit was established. This new Circuit was comprised of groups of Methodists in Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, Southington, Kensington, Middlefield, Berlin, Meriden and Britain (now called New Britain). The Rev. Samuel Merion was the Presiding Elder, and the Rev. William S. Pease was the Circuit Rider.

The New Haven District Conference was the overseer of the new Circuit. At a regular Quarterly Conference held on Sept. 13, 1823, at Meriden, the Rocky Hill Circuit was included in a list establishing the distribution of collections money. It was established and accepted that the Rocky Hill parish was required to accept payment of 25cents towards the expenses of the Presiding Elder, and $3.37 for the expenses for the Circuit Rider Preacher. At a meeting of the Circuit held at Wethersfield on November 8, 1828 a petition from Stepney Parish (now Rocky Hill) to be set off as a separate parish was approved.

In the early years, meetings were held at the homes of the members. In 1830, the Methodists in Rocky Hill numbered 283, and they began to hold meetings at the "sail loft", which was located over Roger Grimes store at the Ferry Landing. These meetings were held until 1848, when they began meeting at the home of Sylvester Goodrich. The Methodists in West Rocky Hill built a church building near the comer of New Britain Avenue and Maple Street in 1843, at the same time, Stepney Parish was separated from Wethersfield as Rocky Hill.

Beginning in 1849, Rocky Hill again became a separate parish, and the town bought William Bradford's store at the Landing, and moved this building to the corner of Old Main and Church streets. This building served the church for 10 tears. In 1859 the church building was outgrown, and the Methodists sold the building to James Warner, who moved the building to his Parsonage Road farm and used it as a granary for seed corn. At the same time, the Methodists built a new church at the present Old Main Street location. In 1893, the Methodists bought a new Estey Organ for its music service enhancements. To celebrate the new organ, the Methodists in August 1893 held a public recital.

Trouble came on Thursday, Feb. 14, 1895. About three o'clock that afternoon, the Ladies Aid Society was meeting in the basement when a fire started. There was no fire service and the building was soon completely demolished. The women in the church were able to save only the altar Bible and the pulpit chairs. Everything else was destroyed. The Rev. Warren F. Sheldon was the minister. It was determined that the fire had started in the flue of the furnace, and quickly spread.

The old church was insured for $1,250 by the Broadway Insurance Co. of New York, and the new organ was insured for $200 by the First National Co. of Worcester, Mass. The rebuilt church was dedicated on January 27, 1896, less than one year from the date of the fire. The Rev. Henry D. Trinkhaus was the pastor, and he and the organist, Miss Esther Belden, were married. When Reverend Trinkhaus, was transferred, he took his new bride (the church organist) with him.

The history of the Methodist church in Rocky Hill, from the new building to the present, will continue at a later date. RHL

## The Millennium in Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life Feb 00

**By Rod Wilscam**

There has been much hype over the last year of the second millennium, not only in Rocky Hill, but in much of our modern world.

The Egyptian calendar, the earliest calendar based on the solar year, was one of the earliest calendars used in the Pre-Christian era. The Egyptian calendar was started in 4246 BCE (before the Christian era).

The Egyptian calendar year, consisted of 12 months of 30 days each. They made this calendar come out even with the sun. They added five days for holidays honoring the Egyptian Gods and six days every fourth year.

One of the earliest calendars used by many countries of the world was, of course, the Roman calendar, also called the Christian calendar. This calendar was created by Julius Caesar in 527 C.E. (Christian era), which calculated years beginning with March 25, the date of the founding of Rome, or possibly the date of the annunciation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The Julian calendar was adopted by Julius Caesar to make corrections in the Roman calendar. Caesar and his advisors used 12 months of 30 or 31 days, beginning on March I, with New Year's Day being celebrated on March 25. The month of February had only 30 days, and every 4th year would have only 29 days. The Julian calendar had 365 I/ 4 days. This calendar was found to have many errors, based on solar observations. Still keeping March 25 as the New Year’s date, the Julian calendar was the calendar used in ancient Wethersfield, which included the present Rocky Hill.

The Julian calendar was used in the English colonies in America, including Ancient Wethersfield, (as confirmed in 1650 by the General assembly as "ye most ancient of townes”), and which included Stepney Parish, beginning in 1752.

Most countries adopted the presently used Gregorian calendar as approved and ordered by Pope Gregory XIII in the year 1582 by most of the Roman Catholic countries in the world. England, not being a Catholic country, did not approve the use of the modern Gregorian calendar until it was finally adopted by England in 1752. To make corrections agree with the solar year, September 3, 1752 in British colonies, was in. by September 14, I752. The year ended on December 31, 1752, and I753 began on January 1, 1753, the new New Year's Day.

The Gregorian calendar, however inaccurate, assumed the date of birth of Jesus as December 25, and the circumcision date as January 6 and used the central date of January I as the New Year's beginning date. The Gregorian calendar, beginning with January I, contained 12 months, of from 28 to 31 days each, and its 365 and 1/4 days still included a built in error, and has since been corrected to delete the leap year extra day in every year divisible by four hundred. This means that in the year 2000, February will contain 29 days, although the year is evenly divisible by four.

The ancient mathematicians did not have the concept of zero as a number in the ancient years, so it was normal and practical to use the number one (I) as the first number. The ancient Romans used I, V, X, L, C, D and M as numbers, as well as combinations of these numbers in their numbering system,

Rocky Hill, as well as almost all of our civilized world, use a system of mathematics, called base 10, Briefly a base 10 system uses sets of numbers of from one to 10 as the first set, and the second set from 11 to 20, the third set from 21 to 30, and consistently similar until the tenth set of numbers from 91 to 100; and similarly continuing sets up to 1,000 and greater. Similarly, counting one's fingers from number one to number 10, and a like set from one's toes.

When each of my three daughters was born, one of the first things I did was to hold them in my arms and counted their 10 fingers and 10 toes. I did not stop at nine as a total of either or both, and I was very pleased. Note, I did not find a greater number of fingers and toes, either,

The media used a great amount of hype about 1999 as the last day of the second millennium, and that the year Y2K was the beginning of the third millennium. This was a tragic error. The end of the second millennium will occur at midnight, December 3I, 2,000 and the third millennium will actually begin on January 1, 2001, and continue until midnight, December 31, 3000. Note that each decade consists of a full 10 years; each century a full 100 years; and each millennium consists of a full 1,000 years.

The prestigious United States Naval Observatory confirms that the third millennium, as well as the 21st century, will commence on January 1, 2001. The Greenwich Observatory, the official observatory for the British government makes the same declaration, and in its very British observation admits that the celebration started January 1, 2000, and will continue throughout this year.

In conclusion, the third millennium begins on January 1, 2001, and will end on December 31, 3000. The media has some II months to enlighten the readers. I might point out that I have been advised that the manual of style for the Hartford Courant also confirms that the twenty-first century and the third millennium will both begin on January 1, 2001

. Let's plan a great celebration in Rocky Hill for the new century and for the new millennium. RHL

# Business

## Early Business Firms in Rocky Hill

*Rocky Hill Life Oct 97*

**By Rod Wilscam**

Since the first settlement of Rocky Hill, beginning around I 650, business has been a fact of life in the lower community of Wethersfield, later called Stepney Parish, and now, Rocky Hill.

The Ferry is indicated as the first local business, as evidenced by a 1650 Wethersfield Town Meeting, which approved the building of a public road from Phillip Goffe's house to the Ferry Landing. This road is still the old Meadow Road. Tradition indicates that the house of Phillip Goffe was not built until I655. Either 1650 or 1655 still gives this house the distinction of being the oldest house in Rocky Hill.

Tradition indicates that the first Rocky Hill store was built sometime prior to 1750 near the Ferry Landing. The Long Tavern stood where the Railroad Depot was, and later moved across Glastonbury Avenue, to west of the Railroad Tracks, and across from the now-closed Foundry building.

By the year 1819, Rocky Hill could boast of including two tanneries, one distillery, two grain mills, one saw mill, one fulling mill, a carding machine, and eight stores. There were also several shipyards, including at least two sail lofts, and several other ship-making services.

Obediah Dickenson built a saw mill in the west district, south of the west end of France Street. Other mills have been built in the same place over the years. The other businesses have included cider mills.

In 1809, Lewis Hart and Son had a button shop there, and from 1814 to 1826, Horace Porter and John Deming ran a fulling and carding mill operation at the same sight.

Rocky Hill was the site of several brick kilns, the first of which was near the old Goffe Bridge. The first house to use the local bricks in construction was built by Walter Robbins on Old Main Street, and this house is still standing.

Locally-built ships left Rocky Hill with these bricks as ballast to such places as the West Indies. Also of local interest is the stone yard, which was in the area bounded by Old Main Street and Church Street between the Academy Hall and the Methodist Church, and which furnished many of the old brownstone gravestones used in the Center Cemetery. This brownstone was also used as the footings and the steps of the Congregational Church. The silica sand found in this same area was shipped all over the United States and was used as molding sand, as polishing sand, and also as household sand, as it was the custom to sprinkle sand on the floors of houses to keep them clean. This fine silica sand was also used in the manufacture of pewter and silverware.

Another business operation carried out locally was shoemaking. Some of the local shoemakers were so successful that each had several apprentices. A Mr. Stillman operated a tailor shop in the Wait Warner house around I798. There was also, around I818, a local hatter's shop, which was open for several years.

Rocky Hill could also boast of having several distilleries in the early 19th century. In this pre-revolutionary period, the distillation of gin was considered to be quite respectable.

Prior to 1810, a plant was making 200-pound plows. It has been said that it took five yoke of oxen and two horses to plow new land with these plows.

Another industry of Rocky Hill was the making of maple sugar, and many of the Deacons of the Congregational Church made their living by the manufacture of maple sugar.

Around 1835, there were several carriage shops whose sulkies and carriages were used not only locally, but were also shipped to the southern colonies by the local sea captains.

There was a local clock case factory, which was later used for manufacturing pewter teapots, block tin tumblers and cups, and then finally used for the manufacture of bedsteads for the local trade and for shipment to the southern Colonies.

In the same area, there was also a broom manufacturing plant. In 1845, there were 5,500 brooms produced, and many of the local farmers grew broom corn to supply this operation with the needed corn.

The Iron Foundry by the Connecticut River was first built in 1881. The cost of this foundry building was $11,000 at that time. While the building is now empty, it has become a local eyesore and a headache for our town officials. There are questions of environmental problems, as well as ownership and responsibility for the cleanup and use of this property in today's world.

The fact that the river has played an important part in our past development, and even in today's society, cannot be overstated. As a major seaport, Rocky Hill grew and prospered. And this past is important to all of us today. RHL

## For Some Two Centuries, Bulkeley Mill Served the Town

Rocky Hill Life Oct 01

**By Rod Wilscam**

One of the first requirements of the settlers in the early settlement of the Ancient Wethersfield community was mills to grind wheat for flour and to grind corn for food.

In England and the other European communities they had left, mills were in common use, and in the early American communities, the same needs were felt.

When John Oldham and his original group of settlers came to the Wangunk village of Pyguaug to establish a settlement, they must have felt relief to have the river so handy and the soil so well suited for growing crops. With the growing of grains, came the first need for mills to grind their wheat for baking their bread, as well as their Indian corn and other grains. Food was an immediate requirement. Most of the early settlers processed the grinding of their grains in a very crude manner.

The early English settlers in the American continent had enjoyed life in 17th century communities of Europe, where there were established mills of various kinds to grind grains into flour for foods and feed for animals, and also sawmills to process trees for buildings as well as furniture, and fulling mills to process wool into cloth to make clothing.

The early settlers in the Massachusetts colony were mostly fleeing religious persecution in their European cities, although they also included some of the riff-raff of their society, as well as some aristocratic men of adventure. Among this group of settlers with various personal reasons for fleeing the civilization in Europe, most had a background in farming, but there were pioneers with backgrounds in milling and other special trades. The average pioneer was most likely to have a background in farming. The early settlers felt the need for millers, which led them to provide special grants to encourage millers to settle, give them preferred treatment and use their services.

It was the mills that provided a necessary like the early post offices (looks like some text has been cut off by the copier – RCH.)

Wethersfield granted the same Rocky Hill land with the same condition to its minister, the Rev. Gershom Bulkeley. In the year 1678, the Rev. Bulkeley completed the corn mill in what is now the Dividend section of Rocky Hill. It became the first corn mill in ancient Wethersfield, some 42 years after the original settlement. Reverend Bulkeley was granted a further concession of 150 acres, bringing the total grant to 290 acres of land. He sold the 290 acres to his son Edward shortly before his death.

Edward Bulkeley continued the milling operation until he died in 1748. By his will, the concession was left to his sons Peter, Gershom and Jonathan, who continued the milling operation, as the will proved that the mill be used by each of them “by turns, during their lives, and then go to the longest lived of the three." The remaining sons legally disputed the meaning of the terms of the will specifically the meaning of the term longest lived. Did it mean the longest lived in age or the longest lived since the date of death of Edward Bulkeley?

The court ruled the latter possibility, Gershom Jr. (text cut off by copier- RCH) and the local village store, which became the local place of meetings and discussions with one's neighbors, as later pictured by artists such as Norman Rockwell of the Saturday Evening Post.

Ancient Wethersfield gave a concession of 140 acres of land in June, 1661 to then-Governor John Winthrop, with the condition that he erect a "corne mill' in the south part of Wethersfield, in what is now Rocky Hill, and maintain the mill into perpetuity. In 1668, Gov. Winthrop, having failed to erect the corn mill returned the grant of land back to the town: In February 1677, ended up owning the property. He willed the mill to his son Hosea. Around 1812, Hosea Bulkeley rebuilt the mill and erected a new dam for waterpower. Hosea's son, Gershom Bulkeley, came into the ownership and management, and the mill and dam stayed with the Bulkeley family through five generations, covering a span of 150 years.

After 1830, ownership passed to a Mr. Russell of Middletown, who used the mill for the manufacture of axes. Following a short period of time, the property was obtained by Israel Williams, William Butler and others. The use as a mill was ended about this time. Then, the property was obtained by Leonard R. Wells and Alfred Wilcox, who used it for the manufacture of plantation hoes, chisels and other edged tools for many years. This company stayed in business until Leonard Wells died when he was caught and whirled over a shafting in the mill.

During the ownership by Wells and Wilcox, they produced a "never-slip horseshoe,” which proved to be valuable to a Boston-based firm, which bought the rights for the huge sum of about $10,000. Today, seems like a pittance.

The Bulkeley Mill served local interests for a long time, from its beginning until the latter part of the 19th century. It was an integral part of the history of Rocky Hill, from its early history as part of Wethersfield. The mill had served the Middletown and Cromwell area until a mill was built closer to Cromwell.

Other mills in Rocky Hill included the Butler, Curtis & Merriam mill east of the corner of South Main Street and Pleasant Valley Road. This mill obtained the milling business from farmers located around Middletown and Cromwell because it was closer to their farms, and thus, more convenient.

Horace Porter and John Deming operated a fulling and carding mill, making wool cloth, between 1814 and 1826. This mill was located at the end of New France Street.

Lewis Hart and his son Eldad Hart operated a button mill around 1809, south of the west end of New France Street. It was located where the road crosses the stream. Waterpower was obtained without a dam. There was also a cider mill located in the same area. RHL

## Nineteenth Century Businesses in Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life Apr 99

**By Rod Wilscam**

When the Stepney Parish of Wethersfield separated from Wethersfield in June of 1843, the population of Rocky Hill was approximately 1,000 persons, based upon the calculations of Dr. Rufus W. Griswold, Rocky Hill physician.

The estimated population of Stepney Parish in 1779 was indicated as 881 by the Wethersfield town clerk. The 1840 U.S. census shows Wethersfield, which included Stepney Parish, with 3,824 persons, and the 1850 census, without Rocky Hill, with 2,523 persons. The new town of Rocky Hill contained approximately 1,000 persons in 1843. By I900, it showed 1,026 persons. With the populations hovering around 1,000 from 1843 until 1900, with a maximum census of 1, 102 in 1860, Rocky Hill did not have a substantial growth in its early years.

From a review of the 1850 census, most of the heads of households showed their occupation as farmers. Yet there was much commercial activity in connection with the town being the head of navigation on the Connecticut River, a major seaport for the Hartford and Wethersfield areas, and a major shipbuilding area. The Academy Hall was a school teaching the maritime arts, and its graduates filled the manpower needs for the locally-owned ships.

While we do not have a complete census of business firms in Rocky Hill for the 19th century, we do have the names of many of the firms in the files of the Rocky Hill Historical Society's historical library.

After farming activities, which accounted for most of the population, the Connecticut River ferry was one of the major businesses. The ferry began its operation as early as in 1655, according to local records, yet, as early as in 1650 a Wethersfield town meeting authorized the building of a road to the Ferry Landing northeast of the Rocky Hill, from which hill our town was named.

The Connecticut River was a built-in fishing preserve for the young town. Most of the fish was used for home consumption, and when a surplus began to develop the fish was preserved with salt and shipped out by the local shippers. The Connecticut General Assembly got involved by decreeing that: "All pickled shad... intended for market shall be split and pickled in brine, at least fifteen days before they are put up for market, and further that each barrel shall contain two hundred weight, and each half barrel one hundred weight." The statute also set precise rules for grading the shad.

Farmers caught their share of the shad each May, during the season of the high waters, and after preserving the family's needs, shipped the balance by sea. In the latter part of the century, the fish in excess of the family's needs were shipped to Hartford and to New Britain.

The early Wethersfield settlers, in 1672, had set aside an area near the present Ferry Park land as a public shipbuilding area.

Much of the business activity, after farming, pertained to the sea trade to the West Indies, the southern colonies, North Africa, England and even New York City,

The farming activities included such prized crops as onions, which made Wethersfield famous, and also helped the local farmers. The major farm products included horses, cattle, hogs, salted beef, and pork, as well as the famous Wethersfield on onions.

With the Connecticut River, the fishing industry was also an important industry, and there were many local farmers engaged in the fishing industry.

Several businessmen had shops built around the area south of the ferry landing, and bought the produce from the farmers and arranged for the shipment to other ports on consignment or at their own risk. Shipping was an industry that offered considerable risk for the 19th century shippers. Yet, many local businessmen became quite wealthy from the shipping business. Some of the local farmers shipped their products at their own risk, and the successful ones were among the local wealthier businessmen. There were three tanners, as well as several shoemakers in business. Thomas Danforth was a major business operator in pewter items, and one of our most famous citizens.

Much of the manufactured products, such as were, were produced in the local homes. Many small businesses from surrounding towns also shipped their goods directly or sold them to some of the local shop owners for shipments.

Ballast was one of the sea captains' requirements, and the locally made bricks were regulated by the General Assembly in 1685, as to a standard size of bricks were established as being nine inches in length, four and one-half inches in breadth, and two and one-half inches thick. There were penalties for violations. In 1770, the size was modified to “a full eight inches in length, four inches in breadth, and two inches thick." Ship captains used these bricks as ballast, and sold them during their travels.

A button mill was established by Lewis and Eldad Hart around 1809, and around 1824, Belden & Dickenon erected a cider mill at the same site on New France Street. Also in the same area, a fulling mill was operated by Horace Porter and John Deming.

Near the waterfall on the Dividend Brook in the southeast corner of town, the Rev. Gersham Bulkeley erected a "corne mill," which continued to be in use for many years. Many other mills were operated in early Rocky Hill. There were several gin distilleries, which was considered to be a very legitimate business in the early days. The history of business development includes a major portion of our own local history. RHL

## Floods and Hurricanes Prior to 1900

Rocky Hill Life – date cut off by copier - RCH

**By Rod Wilscam**

Rocky Hill, originally a part of Wethersfield until 1843, was from the beginning a port of the Great Connecticut River. The life of the original settlers was greatly affected by rains, the water level and the floods along the river.

The transportation afforded by the river was a main factor in the growth of Wethersfield, now Rocky Hill, by immigrants from England, as well as from the Massachusetts Colony. The river aided the welcome new neighbors to the town.

The river, however, was also a cause of pain and anguish to the settlers because of rains causing flooding along the river and its tributaries. There were annual floods, even until present times, each spring as the melting snows from the northers areas caused the river waters to rise, but the effect of the rise in the waters was alleviated, somewhat, as the meadows help in aiding the absorption of much of the rise in the waters. Like the residents along the seashore, the residents of the area learned to live with the water levels, including the effects of the ocean tides.

The earliest recorded hurricane in the colony on record occurred on Aug. 25, 1635. The journal of Increase Mather indicates that there has been no storm more dismal. In 1638 there were three hurricanes on Aug. 13, Oct. 5 and Oct. 19. It was reported that in Narraganset Bay the tides rose up to 15 feet above normal. There is little doubt that the effects of these hurricanes affected the Rocky Hill area as well. The great flood of March 5, 1639 also affected the area, as recorded by Matthew Grant in Windsor.

"An exceeding great storm which lasted with more or less violence until March 18th.”

Governor Winthrop, in his journal, reported that "there came such a rain withall as raised the waters at Connecticut 20 feet above their meadows."

Floods usually happened each spring, but in 1683, the spring flooding did not happen, however, a storm on July 20 caused extensive flooding.

The next big storm bean (sic – RCH) on Aug. 13, 1683 caused H.R. Stiles to report that at “Wethersfield, the Connecticut River rose 26 feet above its normal level" This was a more dreadful flood. The effects of this flood included the English grain, which was carried away, and the Indian corn, which was spoiled in the meadows, causing extreme suffering. The settlers believed that the devastating floods were caused by the hand of God, and so they all fasted and prayed together.

The next great flood in 1692 caused the river to rise to 26 feet, 2 inches above normal. Beginning on Oct. 14, 1706, excessive rain, accompanied by a hard gale of wind, caused flooding and the loss of nearly 1,000 loads of hay. A storm began on Oct. 19, I770 which produced a barometer reading of 28.96 inches, not quite as low as the 1938 hurricane.

In 1801 heavy rains caused the river to rise to 27 feet, 2 inches above normal.

The great snow hurricane of Oct. 9, 1804 caused Jeremiah Day (president of Yale from 1817 to 1841) to record in his diary that "0000 hard rain in early part, noon heavy black clouds, wild and dark, very heavy rain most of forenoon with considerable thunder - wind highest at SE till about 10:30, round to SW, W and NW and blew very hard with heavy rain-slacked toward noon. 1300–appears to be clearing off 1800 - wild heavy black clouds driving rain. Clouds fly quick. 2100-a high gale of wind this evening and for part of the night. Temperature dropped from 55 in the morning to 38 by sunset."

The greatest hurricane since the great hurricane of I635 happened on Sept. 23, 1815.

The Long Island Hurricane of Sept. 3, 1821 caused William C. Redfield, a shopkeeper in Cromwell, to begin his studies that determined the circular wind pattern of the hurricanes, and added much to the science of meteorology.

The Oct. 6, 1849 hurricane produced a barometer reading of 28.II inches and produced 6.5 inches of rain in 33 hours.

I850 produced two tropical storms, the hurricane of July 19 dropped 3.25 inches of rain in 15 hours, and the Aug. 25 storm dropped 4.43 inches of rain.

The coastal hurricane of Sept. 10, 18545 (sic – RCH) produced fail (gale? –RCH) force winds and a barometer fell to 29.6 inches of mercury.

The Charter Oak hurricane of Aug. 19, 1856 felled the Connecticut Charter Oak 6 feet above the ground. This oak tree was the tree in which the Connecticut charter was hidden in 1680.

The tropical storm of Sept. 14, 1858 produced a barometric reading of 28.87 inches.

The Expedition Hurricane of Nov. 2, 1861 was named after the Union Armada, which set sail from Chesapeake Bay to attack Confederate positions in the Carolinas. Two of the ships were sunk and flooding occurred on the Connecticut coast.

Our history included these disasters and gave the residents of the Colony, as well as the State of Connecticut, a way of life that can be better understood only by a study of the factors of living in Rocky Hill and in Connecticut, RHL

## Hurricanes, Storms and Floods

Life – Date cut off by copier - RCH

**By Rod Wilscam**

The big storm of Sept. 14, 1904 came across Long Island and damage from winds and rain totaled more than $1 million in New England.

The coast of Connecticut was hit hard by the hurricane of July 21, 1916. In 1916 alone, more than 13 hurricanes were formed in the Caribbean. A storm of minor intensity caused little damage in Connecticut as it tracked to the northeast across the mouth of Long Island Sound at Block Island, R.I., on Sept. 8, 1934.

The floods of March 21, 1936, caused by heavy rains brought the Connecticut River to near the giant Elm Tree at the Wethersfield Green. State highway crews, assisted by prison labor, helped to clear the debris along the Silas Deane Highway in Wethersfield.

The Great New England Hurricane of Sept. 21, 1938 has been called the largest natural disaster in the history of Connecticut. The barometer reached a low of 28. 11 inches, as recorded in New Haven on this date. The Connecticut River crested 35 feet over flood stage at Rocky Hill.

The hurricane of Sept. 14, 1944 tracked northeast across Long Island toward Providence, R.I. At New Haven the barometer bottomed out at 28.86 inches of mercury. Wind gusts were measured at 70 miles per hour at New London. Because the hurricane hit as the tides were falling, there was minimal coastal flooding with this hurricane.

The current practice of naming hurricanes using people's names originated in 1954. In the early years only women's names were used; and in more recent years both men's and women's names have been used. It is still the practice to retire the name of the more severe storms for at least 10 years.

Hurricane Carol, on Aug. 31, 1954, came across the eastern portion of Long Island, and came ashore at the Connecticut and Rhode Island border Wind gusts of up to 135 miles per hour were recorded on Block Island. At New Haven, the barometer reading reaches a low of 28.77 inches of mercury.

Hurricane Edna, one of the most powerful hurricanes of this century, occurred on Sept. 11, I954. While Rocky Hill was spared the direct influence of the winds, clocked in excess of 125 miles per hour and the barometric reading of under 28 inches of mercury, both made this one of the most powerful of storms, although it did miss Rocky Hill by tracking offshore to the east.

Hurricane Connie hit this area on Aug. 12, 1955, and Hurricane Diane on Aug. 17, 1955 caused over 27 inches of rain. Much flooding resulted in parts of Connecticut.

On Aug. 18, 1971, Hurricane Doria, with sustained winds of 75 miles per hour, was considered a storm of only minor intensity.

Hurricane Belle came to Rocky Hill on Aug. 9, I976, with sustained winds clocked at more than 80 miles per hour causing a storm surge on the Connecticut coast. The coastal waters from Hurricane Belle rose to 10 feet above normal sea level. The flood of Aug. 10, 1979 was caused by torrential rainfall and winds. Old Main Street suffered the worst damage from fallen trees.

The flood on June 1, 1984 caused heavy rains and winds, was called even worse the 1955 hurricane by Ernest Morgan of Meadow Road.

Hurricane Gloria, on Sept. 27, 1985, crossed Long Island Sound at low tide, causing little coastal damage, but causing mostly wind-related damages inland. Power was out in many areas, including the Rocky Hill Town Hall. Emergency generators provided electricity. Most of the damage caused by Hurricane Gloria was the result of trees falling on utility lines,

Hurricane Bob, on Aug. 19, 1991, resulted in high winds and much rainfall. Old Main Street was temporarily closed, due to power lines being downed by falling trees. Over much of Rocky Hill, heavy rains caused flooding in the basements, 18 being pumped out by the Rocky Hill Volunteer Fire Department. Twenty-four instances of downed electric wires were recorded by Rocky Hill police, and traffic was directed by police due to traffic signals being out of order.

The Blizzard of Jan. 8, 1996, with more than 15 inches of snow, and the drifting of the snow caused by high winds caused most of the state to be shut down to enable the crews to plow.

The importance of weather cannot be overstated. The U.S. Weather Bureau helps the residents with weather forecasts and storm warnings and watches to keep people informed. This century has improved the reliability of forecasts of weather substantially, but our lives are still affected by the day-to-day weather forecasts. RHL

## Connecticut Foundry Site Has Long Been Used for Manufacturing

*Mar 99 Rocky Hill Life*

**By Rod Wilscam**

One of the oldest of the modern manufacturing businesses in town is The Connecticut Foundry. Theirs is an old and distinguished business.

It should be noted that the Connecticut River bank site was a great location for shipping in the 19th century. This site was picked for its shipping advantages, and the coming of the railroad in 1872, the river landing wharf, and a main road or truck carriers enabled them to bring raw materials and coal and distribute their products all over the country.

Besides, the people were a great asset, as there were several old families in town involved in the businesses located at this site.

The site on the Connecticut River as first developed by William Neff and Edward Merriam. These two entrepreneurs built a building just south of the ancient ferry landing, and just north of the old distillery. They produced carriages and sulkies, mostly for the southern states. Mr. Neff sold his share of the business to Mr. Merriam, who continued the business until around 1845. The plant was vacant until around when it was converted into an iron foundry by the Rocky Hill Manufacturing Company. The foundry owners built an engine and boiler room and manufactured small cast iron goods until around 1854.

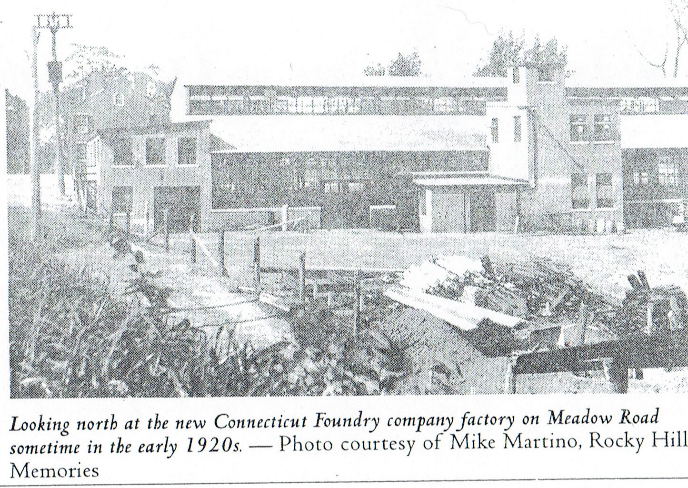
Later, Lewis Whitmore operated a carpenter shop for a short period of time, when he sold the building to Elias W. Robbins and James Warner, who converted the building for the manufacture of champagne cider and vinegar. Then James A. Belden bought the building and used it for a warehouse. Then the building was sold to the shipbuilding partnership of S. & E.S. Belden. Several different business firms used the building for various operations until the railroad was being built, and then the building was used as a boarding house for the construction of the railroad. About 1876, the building burnt to the ground.

By 1881, a number of Rocky Hill persons bought the site from the owner, named Candee. Then a new foundry building was constructed. They sold the foundry, after only 18 months, to Heart & Company. This company manufactured such items as hatchets, door bolts, as well as other cast item goods. They also manufactured blankets. After heavy losses, the business was foreclosed upon by Webster Mortgage.

The building was unused until 1884, when a new firm, The Pierce Hardware Company, took over and manufactured a special kettle that would not boil over, in addition to door hangers, and brackets and then the owners installed an enameling furnace for the lining of the iron kettles. Then, Austin Manufacturing and Supply took over.

In 1895, Rocky Hill Foundry was formed by a New York operator. In 1898, Champion Manufacturing Company was formed by Frank Holmes, who operated the business until 1916. At this time, the Foster Merriam Company operated a machine shop for two years, then, a fire burned the business out. By 1919, The Connecticut Foundry was built and began its operations.

Arthur Enquist, A.O, Knutson, and Ernest Spencer were the principals in the formation of the Connecticut Foundry.

The business hours for the employees by 1920 were 10 hours a day, six days per week. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the workday was shortened to eight hours a day, five days a week. The work day had operators preparing sand molds from the first shift, from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., then the second shift, beginning at 5 p.m., would pour the molten iron, cool the items and bring them to the inspection department, where the items were cleaned and prepared for shipment. This business was well run and lasted until 1983.

The cooling of the molten iron required huge amounts of water. To provide the necessary force, a water tower was constructed in the early years, so that the well water could be pumped into the tower to provide the needed force for the cooling process. In later years, water was furnished by the Metropolitan District Commission.

By the late 1950s, Arthur Enquist modernized the process into a system of continuous molding and melting, with continuous pouring of hot iron. The process of manufacturing was quite efficient. It has been reported that this process was continued until March 30, 1983, when the business ended.

The Connecticut Foundry has been called a good company to work for. The company paid decent wages, good bonuses and provided a good place to work, with good benefits. The company provided buses for the employees from Hartford, East Hampton, Meriden and Middletown. In addition to the founders, some of the leaders included Morris Carey, Perry Cornwall, Tenny Covey, George Dean, Gus Eckland, Arthur Enquist Jr., Franklin (Butch) Enquist, Julius Ferarri, Steve Grigley, Frank Hofman, Jack MacMahon, Jack Quick, Frank Semeraugh, Frank Smith, Hower Smith, Cleon Tyler and Jack Walsh. Some of the larger customers included Bassick Company, Dictaphone, Hersey, Leesona Corp., Jones Motorola, Remington Rand Typewriters, Royal Typewriters, Silent Glow, Smith Corona Typewriters, Sprague Meter, Stanley Works, Taco Company, Troy Built Roto Tiller, and Underwood typewriters. RHL

Rocky Hill Life Aug 03

## Hotels, Taverns, Inns and Ordinaries in Rocky Hill History

**By Rod Wilscam**

The town of Wethersfield was first settled in the year 1634, although the Massachusetts General Court did not give the settlers the authority until May 6, 1635.

On June 3, 1635, the General Court gave permission for the residents to elect constables and swear them in. The new settlement was the site of the Indian village called Pyguaug, then Watertown and, finally, Wethersfield. Rocky Hill was named for the physical description of the prominent hill in the southern portion of the Wethersfield colony.

The first constitution was adopted in 1639, and the General Court was the first legislative body. In 1644, at the June 3 session of the General Court, the following legislation was adopted:

"Whereas many strayngers & passengers that uppen occation have recourse to these Townes, and are streighted for waint of entertainment, It is ordered that these severall Townes one sufficient inhabitant to keepe an ordinary, for pruisio and lodgeing in some comfortable manner, that such passengers or strayngers may know where to resorte, and such inhabitants as by the seuereall Townes shall be chosen for the said searuice shall be presented to two Magistrats, that they may judged meet for that imployment, and this to be effected by the several Townes within one month, under penalty of 40s a month, each month either Towne shall neglect it."

There became several residents of Wethersfield who took advantage of this provision to establish ordinaries, tavern and hotels. Some of them included in the area of the current limits of Rocky Hill will follow. In any event, the Rocky Hill establishments became very popular houses of lodging and Entertainment.

We have to believe that it took a lot of courage for a resident of Wethersfield to leave the serenity and a serene life of a seventeenth century Colonial village to come into the wilderness of the south part of Wethersfield, and begin a new community. It must have been quite lonely living in such a remote area. Today, it is quite different way of life.

One of the earliest taverns in Rocky Hill was called the Duke of Cumberland Inn. The royal background is the fact that King George II of England gave a grant of 2,000 acres of land in what is now Rocky Hill to his son, the Duke of Cumberland, for whom the house was named. The house is and was one of the most conspicuous of all the local houses. The builders used clay from the pastureland west of the house to make the bricks for the three stories plus an attic. It was the finest brick house in New England when it was built and is still imposing today.

The Duke sold the house to John Robbins[[8]](#footnote-8), a gentleman who was one of the wealthiest ship captains in Rocky Hill, as well as a Justice of the Peace, a very influential and highly respected post in the 17th century. Capt. John Robbins was highly respected and quite wealthy, and his house indicates his standing in the community. When it was the Duke of Cumberland Inn, the third floor was used as the slave quarters, and most of the local slaves helped the inn operate. The cemetery or burial plot for the slaves was around the large tree to the north of the house.

Local history tells us that the largest number of slaves held north of the Mason-Dixon Line were employed at the Inn. The large sign indicating the location of the Duke of Cumberland Inn, as erected in 1757, was given to the Connecticut Historical Society around the turn of the last century. It included several bullet holes, presumably the result of the exuberance of young gentlemen celebrating their youth, and it was quite weather-beaten and worn.

In the middle of the 19th century, the first stagecoach stop on the northbound trip from Middletown was Stepney Parish of Wethersfield. Stepney Parish was separated from Wethersfield in 1843 and became the newly incorporated town of Rocky Hill.

The Long Tavern was one of the leading taverns in Rocky Hill. It was located at the east end of the parking lot across from the former Rocky Hill Foundry and across from the railroad station at Glastonbury Avenue, also known as Ferry Street. The Long Tavern was run by Mrs. Abigail Grimes Robbins, and was one of the most popular taverns in Rocky Hill. The Long Tavern boasted of having a bowling alley on the premises, for the entertainment of its guests.

A pre-Revolution tavern in Rocky Hill was the Samuel Shipman Tavern, which gained fame as being expensive and for serving fine food; it was a popular dining place for many prominent people from Hartford. The Samuel Shipman Tavern operated for over a century under various managers, who were all quite popular. Samuel Shipman was known as "Uncle Sam Shipman" in the 1870s. The tavern sign for his inn had the initials "DRTBS.” This was from a "coat-of-arms prepared for Uncle Sam with the explanation that D was for Henry C. Deming, mayor of Hartford; the R for Colonel Russ; T for Henry Trumbull; B for George Brimly, and S for Issac Stuart. Mr. Stuart was the most likely the designer of the Coat of arms, which was given to Uncle Sam Shipman. The southern part of the Uncle Sam Shipman was the original house, which had been expanded several times over the years. The room at the right side was the barroom. The ballroom had a Palladian-type window facing west on the second floor. Around the ballroom on three sides was a bench built-in for seating and also used as a chest for the coats of the guests. The Uncle Sam Tavern was located just north of Church Street on Old Main Street. Following the death of Uncle Sam, the tavern was purchased, shipped to New Jersey and rebuilt as part of a private home.

There is an old story of a sleighing party in January 1788, consisting of a group of 22 sleighs, which included the minister, the local magistrate, a colonel and a captain who assembled at Polly Dickerson's Tavern, near the ferry. They crossed the river on the ice to Glastonbury and stopped at a tavern for a mug of flip, then returned to Crane's tavern in Wethersfield, then back to Rocky Hill for supper at the inn being kept by Simeon Williams.

The other popular inns were kept by "Granny" Griswold and by “Aunt Betsy." There were probably other taverns, inns or ordinaries located in Rocky Hill in the early days of our history. RHL

# Transportation

## The Trolley in Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life Jul 97

**By Rod Wilscam**

*“Clang, clang, clang went the trolley Ding, ding, ding went the bell”— The Trolley song*

Rocky Hill was a rural area near the big city of Hartford, but people still had to get around. The earlier years saw the Connecticut River as the main form of transportation for goods and services, as well as for people and their travels.

Horses were next, followed by the more genteel horse and buggy. Then came the stagecoach; then the railroad.

With the coming of the Valley Railroad in 1879, the river transportation began to decline. The same types of progress of our society developed a new and different type of mobility for the population. When the trolley began running on January 14, 1909, the railroad began a decline in passengers. During the period from 1909 to 1919, it was noted in the Hartford Times that the engineer would wait until the couple of passengers finished their breakfast before leaving Rocky Hill.

The electric traction motor of the trolley and its silence of operation gave the trolley a distinctive pleasure to the rider, especially distinctive was the bell that made a clanging sound to warn the populace of the coming of the silent running trolley along its electric tracks.

The trolley as a means of transportation reached its peak just before and after World War I. The rise was due to the convenience in transportation. The fall was due to the proliferation of the automobile as a means of transportation.

The trolley tracks, beginning on January 9, 1909, were laid from Charter Road and Orchard Street in back of Romanelli's house, straight across the backs of the corner of Parsonage and the present Silas Deane Highway - back of Cathy Hicks' house, then back of Carlsons to go south on Old Main Street by the Congregational Church, then in back of Hillside Avenue coming out to Main Street by the old South School, later the police station on Main Street and Forest Street.

The trolley gave an opportunity for workers to go into Wethersfield and into Hartford for employment. I have also been told that families from as far away as in New Britain prepared picnic lunches and took the trolley and spent the day along the river enjoying their picnic outing. To these families, this picnic outing was considered a treat from the usual routine of their lives.

Clayton R. Spencer, an early resident of Rocky Hill described the first trolleys in Rocky Hill as follows: “When the electric cars first came down here, the people in town were afraid of them and wouldn't let them in. They could come only as far as the car barn where passengers changed to horse cars to come down into the town."

The Rocky Hill Trolley was not without its share of problems. Some 80 years ago, the Hartford Times reported that George O. Andrews, of Rocky Hill, and his wife, Susan A. Andrews, were made defendants in two suits for $800 in damages, each *“*brought by two Connecticut Company workmen in Meriden. They were Apalor Tylesias and Vincenzo Prigistano, who claimed that on the night of January 11, when they were shoveling snow from trolley tracks on Main Street in Rocky Hill, they were struck by the Andrews' automobile, and dragged and severely injured. The lawsuit alleged that the car, which was driven by Mr. George O. Andrews, was owned by Mrs. Susan A. Andrews. This definitely is proof that our present litigious society has a past precedent in Rocky Hill.

The Hartford Times of over 70 years ago told of the death of James Vinchetti, two-and-a-half-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Vinchetti, of Rocky Hill, who was struck by a north bound trolley car and died within a few minutes. The child suffered a fractured skull and internal injuries.

On review of the statements of witnesses of the above accident, the crew of the trolley car, Herman Miller and M. Jeranian, were exonerated by the Rocky Hill grand juror, after an investigation.

During the decade of the 1920s, the Hartford Times also advised that the commuters complained about unsatisfactory trolley services as they were often late in reaching their businesses, resulting in the factory workers' pay being docked. During the winter months, with the heavy snows also making the commuter life difficult. But when spring came, the lure of the soil takes hold and a place of one's own with a garden and chickens were enhanced. Who can resist the temptation of home ownership and the mobility offered because of the trolley? It was left to the lure of private ownership. Today, the trolley can only make some of the oldest residents recall the glorious days of the trolley. RHL

## The Rocky Hill – Glastonbury Ferry: 348 Years of Continuous Service

*Jan 99 Rocky Hill Life*

**By Rod Wilscam**

Everyone has heard that old question: Why did the chicken cross the road? This is reminiscent of why anyone crosses the river. The obvious answer is, of course, to get to the other side.

Travelers in the ancient colonial days could save many days of travel by not having to go to Hartford to get to the other side of the river. Plus many settlements had land in what is now Glastonbury and needed river transportation to visit the other side of the river for work and to play.

Present thinking of the origin of the ferry service runs from 1649 to as late as 1700. The actual date is not clearly defined. At the foot of Ferry Landing on both sides of the Connecticut River, the State of Connecticut has erected a monument indicating ferry service as an historic landmark of the nation's oldest continuing operating ferry service, since the year 1655.

As early as 1636, the Massachusetts General Court gave permission for the settlers in Connecticut to establish their own General Court, which very early referred to the Rocky Hill section of Wethersfield as “South Fields," as "southern farms near the rockie hill," and as the "the lower communities.

Colonial records had indicated that in 1641, Windsor was authorized to establish ferry service, with rates of "three pence a single passenger and two pence a person when they carry more than one at a freight and twelve pence for a horse. This seems to be the earliest authorized ferry service, although the Windsor ferry is no longer in service. This does leave the Rocky Hill ferry as the oldest ferry service in continuous operation.

Adam Stiles, in his “History of Ancient Wethersfield," indicated that the Rocky Hill ferry was established and in continuous service since 1650. A Wethersfield Town Meeting in 1724 had granted Joseph Smith 20 acres of land directly behind and north of the ferry and the shipyard reservation. The Connecticut General Assembly, in 1724, also granted liberty for Jonathan Smith, presumably the son of Joseph Smith, presumably the current ferry service.

However, Volume I of the Wethersfield Town votes for 1647 to 1717 indicates that on Jan. 2, 1649, a town meeting authorized and approved "that there should be a hight, for use of the towne, at the foot of Rockki hill, near beaur medow, unto the great reuer, in the most convanant place, and to the end of the hill into the common; for the use of the towne, and a hight way to Nayog farms". This road was duly surveyed and laid out in 1650 from Mr. Nott's house to the ferry. On this basis, I believe that 1650 is the most likely date continuous ferry service in Rocky Hill was established, although there are other references to a ferry service prior to 1649.

The actual types of boats used in the Rocky Hill ferry service between Rocky Hill and South Glastonbury are not recorded. It is known, however that over the 348 years of service that many different types of vessels have been used. Beginning in the earliest colonial years, canoes were used as the ferry boats. Then some of the early vessels were rafts, powered by poles. It has been thought that cattle and horses were forced to swim across the river, and the rafts were used to carry people, household goods, sheep and other small animals.

In 1783, the Connecticut General Assembly required ferries to be operated by oars, or sweeps, then in 1835 the General Assembly authorized horses to power ferries. This was the beginning of the use of horse treadmills. In Adam Stiles "History of Ancient Wethersfield," he suggests that cable with hand power was used. In fact, a wire cable was laid on the floor of the river, and either rope or cable was used to pull the boat from one side of the river to the other side. This mode was used from 1848 until around 1866, when steam power began to be used. Beginning around 1903, the ferry was a sidewheel steam boat, Nayaug, which was in service until around 1923, when the tow Hollister pushed by a gasoline powered scow “Selden" was placed in service. The Hollister, was named after John Hollister, an early settler of the Glastonbury section of Wethersfield, and an early ferry operator.

Currently, the barge "Hollister III," which is 64 feet long with a beam of 15 feet is in use, with the towboat “Cumberland," which is 32 feet in length, with a beam of II feet, with a 130 horsepower diesel engine. The "Cumberland" is named after the Duke of Cumberland, son of King George II, who had been given a grant by his father of some 2,000 acres of land in the Rocky Hill area. Historically, the ferry service was individually owned and operated under regulations from the Connecticut General Court, and the Connecticut General Assembly. Then, beginning on Oct. I, 1917, the ferry service began operating as a state facility. On June 4, 1973, The Rocky Hill-Glastonbury Ferry was designated a State Historic Landmark. Appropriate ceremonies were held, and markers were dedicated on both sides of the Connecticut River. If you have not had an opportunity to take the four-minute crossing on the historic landmark ferry, please do it beginning May 1, 1999. The season will end on October 3 I next year. You will enjoy the moment of history, still in operation, after 348 years of continuous service. RHL

## Railroad was Important to Rocky Hill

*Rocky Hill Life Apr 97*

**By Rod Wilscam**

The need for the Valley Railroad was important to the people of Rocky Hill. Discussions about the need of a railroad through Rocky Hill and the other river towns were held in the stores and business firms in town as early as in 1850.

In 1854 many discussions caused excitement and meetings began to establish details, but these discussions did not bear fruit; however, because the interest in a new railroad was still at a high pitch, a new firm, the Connecticut Valley Railroad Co. became incorporated on July 17, 1868.

The articles of incorporation included the authority to construct a railroad from Hartford to Westbrook, Clinton or Old Saybrook on Long Island Sound. On Oct. 2, 1869 the new railroad was organized.

Rocky Hill authorized a bond issue to purchase $21,000 in bonds, and many Rocky Hill citizens also bought bonds for the construction of the railroad.

On July 29, 1871 the railroad was completed from Saybrook to Hartford. The formal opening of train service was on Aug. 24, 1871.

In January 1882 200 tickets had been sold for travel from Rocky Hill to Middletown. Manufacturers on both sides of the Connecticut River had started to do all their shipping on the new railroad. Cargoes of onions, cattle, swine, bricks, shingles, stock ownership by that time. On May 24, 1887 the HVCR (Hartford and Connecticut Valley Railroad – RCH) was leased for 99 years to the NYNH&H and on Dec. 21, 1892. The CVR (Connecticut Valley Railroad – RCH) was merged into the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad Co.

The Penny Press on Feb. 3, 1887 reported that a female resident of Hartford, planning to visit a friend in Rocky Hill, started out on Jan. 31, 1887 to catch the first train to Rocky Hill. She missed it and continued to miss each subsequent train that day and again missed the first two trains on Feb. 1. She managed to catch the third train on Feb. 1. The Penny Press reported on Feb. 5 that the lady who missed so many trains wishes to state she is a prohibitionist,

The town of Rocky Hill had built wood sidewalks from the railroad depot on Glastonbury Avenue to the town center near the Congregational Church and along Old Main Street to the Methodist Church. The sidewalk was a popular method to get to and from the depot for many residents.

The last regular passenger train service came to a close in 1933. Freight trains continued for several more years until the 1960s, and there are not trains today, as the rails have been removed. The railroad bed is being changed into a walking trail from the Rocky Hill depot north through Wethersfield. Proposals are being considered to complete these walking trails from Manchester to Hartford and from Windsor to Hartford. The closing of the railroads has left a long and interesting history of an era that has come to a close, except the memories that still live for the railroad enthusiasts. RHL

*NOTE: This text is on the back of the hardcopy of Wilscam’s Article, “Railroad was Important to Rocky hill, Rocky Hill Life Apr 97, at the RHHS Library. Its source isn’t identified. I’ve included it because it contains interesting information about the railroad. – RCH*

grain, pipe staves and manufactured (unreadable – RCH) were shipped out of Rocky Hill. Incoming goods included barrels of sugar, rum, molasses and salted cod fish.

The distance from Hartford was 7.5 miles, and Hartford to Saybrook Point was 43.5 miles, thus Rocky Hill to Saybrook totaled 36 miles. The line followed the west side of the Connecticut River, and touched all of the important towns along the river. It has been reported that the passengers enjoyed spectacular scenes from the train windows all along the 24 towns along the river. The railroad tracks totaled I4.57 miles of curved track and 29.89 miles of straight track, with 26 upgrades and 29 downgrades.

With the beginning of railroad service through Rocky Hill, there was an economic boom. As many as 40 new homes were built in Rocky Hill; these homes can be distinguished by their nearly flat roofs. However, the good times had several problems. The Connecticut River traffic transportation began to decline, and the commuters used the railroad for transportation. The manufacturers continued to use the railroad for most of their shipping needs.

The Penny Press from Middletown in September 1887 reported that Rocky Hill was the third highest town on the railroad in business furnished. With the changes caused by the railroad and the decline in the river as a means of transportation, by June 29, 1876, the railroad defaulted on the payment of the bond interest payments.

On March 28, 1879 the bondholders incorporated as the Hartford and Connecticut Valley Railroad Co. and organized on March 10, 1880.

In June 1880 the Connecticut state treasurer foreclosed on the Connecticut Valley Railroad Co. On June 30, 1880 the treasurer deeded the railroad to the Hartford and Connecticut Valley Railroad Co. In July 1882 the Connecticut Valley Railroad opened from Saybrook Point to Fenwick. On Oct. 1, 1882 the trains started using the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad station in Hartford. THE NYNH&H held a majority of the (Text ends here – RCH)

## On the Streets Where We Live a Look at History of the Roads and Streets of Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life – Date cut off by Copier - RCH

**By Rod Wilscam**

Transportation is one of the most important activities of today's citizens. Roads and streets become of primary importance for all of the citizens of our town, state or nation. Rocky Hill and its mother town of Wethersfield have an interesting history of the establishment of its roads and streets.

A Wethersfield Town Meeting authorized the first road in Rocky Hill in 1650 to be built from the Phillip Goffe house to the ferry slip.

The first grants of land in the southern part of Wethersfield were made beginning in 1650, with a grant of 30 acres of land to Samuel Borman (Boardman) on Jan. 2, 1649 through 1650. Then in 1661 the Wethersfield Town Meeting granted 12 acres to Thomas Williams, south of the Boardman grant. Also in 1661 there was reserved 5 acres of land for shipbuilding, triangular in shape, at the location of the ferry landing. The land grants were made quite frequently after this date.

There is no factual record of this first road, Ye Olde Meadow Road, now known as Meadow Road, actually being built in the Rocky Hill area, but roads were considered a necessity from the very beginning, even though there were no homes on this road.

The main roads in Rocky Hill became outlined late in the 17th century. These main arteries included Peat Farms Road, now Brook Street; West Street; and Elm Street, as well as Old Main Street and Main Street. Other roads were authorized near the Connecticut River connecting the building lots to the major roads, then called Kings Highways.

The old roads were never maintained with the thought of helping the travelers. Actually, travel was quite difficult, and the townspeople were usually suspicious of travelers.

The first roads were quite different from those of today. First of all, they were quite wide. Actually, there were authorized to be up to 20 rods (330 feet) wide, although they were also used as church and school sites.

One road through Newington, next to the Rocky Hill town line, the Twenty Rod Highway, authorized by the (text cut off by copier – RCH) feet wide today. Our courts upheld these rights of way, based on the town ownership of the land, originally by actual purchase from the Indian natives.

The first turnpike through Rocky Hill, the Hartford-Saybrook Turnpike, opened in 1802 followed the current Old Main Street, then called Main Street, past the Town Hall and the Congregational Church, then south on Main Street, to the Toll House at the south border at the Middletown line, now the Cromwell town line. Travelers usually went out to Cromwell Avenue, then called the shunpike, to avoid the payment of the turnpike toll. Along the Old Main Street was another road called High Street east of the turnpike and west of the rocky hill that our town is named after.

The first Congregational Church was built in the center of the turnpike just north of the present town hall. The schools were also built in the middle of the roads. Secondly, the roads finished in the 17th and 18th centuries were not paved streets as we are familiar with today, but mostly grassy areas used for common pasturage for the residents, and sometimes with a narrow gravel path for the traveler.

Many of the old town roads now have rather new names. The I650 Ye Olde Meadow Road is now Meadow Road. Pratt Street, named after Rocky Hill's General Pratt and also as State Representative Pratt was earlier known as Waterside Hill, Bradford Hill and Railroad Row. Main Street was earlier named the Hartford-Saybrook Turnpike, as Route 9, as Route 99 and as the Silas Deane Highway. Old Main Street, was earlier known as High Street, as North Main Street, and also as Main Street. As a part of the turnpike, Old Main Street still boasts a highway marker near the Philip (te4xt cut off by copier. Next word is almost certainly Goffe – RCH. …ford 6-M. Turnpike Runs to Saybrook 35 Miles. Granted 1802.”

Church Street was formerly known as the Hartford-Saybrook Turnpike after the General Assembly authorized the shortcut. There were many other early roads - to the Ferry Landing, such as Ferry Street, now known as Glastonbury Avenue; New Street, then later Mudd Lane, and now known as Washington Street; and also Prospect Street became Fairview Street and is now known as Riverview Road.

Russell Road, named after the Rocky Hill minister, became Bailey Road. Parsonage Street was set up as the main road from the turnpike to West Rocky Hill through the parsonage lands. Peat Farm Road became today's Brook Street. New Farms Road became New France Street and is now France Street, and Quarry Road is today's Esther Road. Maple Avenue became known as Grimes Road.

Through the same passage to time, the roads that were earlier specified as up to 20 rods wide have been summarily encroached upon to the point that the right of way is now around 50 feet wide in many areas.

The Hartford-Saybrook Turnpike came to an end when the Connecticut Valley Railroad began its operations around 1870. The turnpike land was given to Rocky Hill and the other towns in the path by the General Assembly. It is ironic that the same type of forces that caused the railroads to supersede the highways later caused the new super highways to supersede the railroads.

Interstate 91 now provides some 15-minute passage from Rocky Hill to Hartford, and some 40-minute passage from Rocky Hill to New Haven. One can only wonder what the future will hold for today's super-highways RHL

# Wars

## The Revolutionary War in Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life July 02

**By Rod Wilscam**

In the 18th century, the Rocky Hill portion of Wethersfield had only a few residents, who were living in the lower community, also called The Rockie Hill by some, the Lower Community of Wethersfield or Rocky Hill, in the Connecticut Colony of England in North America.

The residents of the present Rocky Hill community were living in the maritime port of a farming community.

The tempo of its residents living was quite serene and peaceful, though there was beginning the rumble of resentment against the taxes being imposed by the mother country, England. Then in 1763, the stamp act was passed by Parliament.

The Connecticut General Court, the predecessor of the current General Assembly, passed resolutions naming a committee of three to oppose the tax in London, and issued an order of compliance, all on March 22, 1765.

The response of the citizens included the organization of several opposition groups, mainly the Sons of Liberty. Another voice of opposition to the Stamp Act was the clergy, who preached in opposition to the new taxes.

The united members of the Sons of Liberty watched the ports for the newly appointed Stamp Master, Jared Ingersoll. When the Stamp Master Ingersoll was reported to have arrived at New Haven, with a commission of Stamp Master, several members of the Sons of Liberty escorted Ingersoll on his way to Hartford.

The contingent was stopped by around 500 riders, under the leadership of Major John Durkee of New Haven, at the Broad Street Green in Wethersfield.

Here he was forced to sign a letter resigning his appointment, and to give cheers in the name of liberty and property, which he did. Then, he was escorted on a white horse to the Assembly Hall in Hartford, where he was asked how he felt on the ride from Wethersfield to Hartford. He responded that he had never before understood the Bible Verses in the Book of Revelation that discuss death on a pale horse, with all the hell following. He was forced to read his resignation to the audience.

In 1774, Connecticut General Assembly appointed Silas Deane of Wethersfield, Eliphat Dyer of Windham and Roger Sherman of New Haven as delegates to the Continental Congress. The militia was called into a state of higher organization and preparedness. Leadership was changed by the appointment of the governor as Captain General, the Deputy Governor as Lieutenant General.

The train bands were organized into military companies under the command of a colonel, a lieutenant colonel and major, all to be appointed by the General Court.

The militia was organized into six brigades under the command of a brigadier general and two major generals, in command of 13 regiments, each under the command of a colonel, lieutenant colonel and two majors.

Every regiment was to include a company of horse troops. Every male aged 16 years to 60 years of age was to be included, unless excused by law. Connecticut Colony, like the other American colonies, was preparing for war.

When the alarm was received from Lexington was received, the Connecticut military was well prepared, and the response was quite effective.

Connecticut was able to meet every call for troops or other support from Gen. George Washington. The Connecticut troops were credited with assisting in most of the engagements as called upon.

Rocky Hill, officially called Stepney since 1726, was credited with support for the war effort. The many volunteers responded to the call from the Lexington alarm, and the maritime assistance and shipbuilding campaign all supported the war efforts of a new nation.

Some of the military volunteers from Stepney Parish included: John Atwood\*; Elisha Belden\*; Edward Bulkeley; Roger Bull\*; Thomas Bunce\*; the Rev. Calvin Chapin; Gideon Cole Jacob Gibbs; Jonas Clark Gibbs; Gideon Goff, Sr. David Goodrich; Elizur Goodrich; Hosea Goodrich; Ichabod Goodrich; Isaac Goodrich; Jacob Goodrich; Jared Goodrich; Ozias Goodrich\*; 1st Lt. Stephen Goodrich\*, Capt. William Goodrich; Constant Griswold.\*; Thomas Holmes; Moses Kelsey\*; William Kelsey\*; John Miller; Benjamin Morton\*; Lt. Oliver Pomroy, Jacob Rash\*; Aukley Riley\*; Ashbel Riley; Roger Ripner; Frederick Robbins; John Robbins; Col. Josiah Robbins; Asher Russel; Nathaniel Russell\*; Thomas Russell; Gershom Smith\*; James Stanley; Ens. William Warner\*; Elias Williams; Israel Williams; William Williams; Ashbel Wright\*; and possibly others.

These names were taken from the list of Wethersfield veterans of the Revolutionary War. Those whose names are asterisked were among the volunteers attending the Lexington alarm.

Also note that the Rev. Calvin Chapin is included, He was not yet a resident of Rocky Hill, or the minister of the Congregational Church.

He resided in northern part of Cromwell before coming to Rocky Hill, and had volunteered as a fifer in Capt. John Pratt's company, beginning at the age of 10 or 12. Reverend Chapin served Rocky Hill most of his life, and was deeply involved in our history.

During the Revolution, Connecticut became known as the Provision State, for supplying its share of the total colonial force of both men and equipment, as well as supplies of food and equipment.

As a seaport, Rocky Hill was the home of the shipyard building the first ship of the new navy, and supplied many of the privateer ships that helped protect the interests of the new nation. The town played an important part in men, ships as well as food supplies. RHL

## Colonial Military History in Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life – Date cut off by copier - RCH

**By Rod Wilscam**

When John Oldham and his company settled Wethersfield in 1634, besides the activities of planting crops, the colonists also had the immediate task of Preparing their living quarters. The next major activity was in the preparation for defense. Because of their Puritan heritage, the wilderness of Colonial America, and the question of the treacherous Indians, the settlers followed the English heritage and tradition of trainbands, as established by the Parliament.

The Assize of Arms, established in II8I, provided, "Let each and every freeman ... swear that ... he will possess these arms and will bear allegiance to the Lord King Henry ... and he will bear these arms in his service according to his order and in allegiance to the Lord King and his realm.”

The militia in their home country, England, consisted of each able-bodied male between the ages of 16 and 60, were required to form a train band for military training. The early settlers of Hartford, East Windsor, and Wethersfield, all followed their Puritan tradition and did establish trainbands for their defense.

The required training day was traditionally on one Saturday each month. Training Day traditionally included drilling and training to handle any emergency that might befall the community. Each Training Day following the drills would include a roll call of each male citizen. The General Court prescribed fines for any person missing three consecutive training days. In the May 1680 session of the General Court, fines of three shillings were set for neglect of training, and the military officers were authorized to fine up to 20 shillings for other training offenses.

The training of these early trainbands was quite fortunate for the settlers, given the Pequot raid on Wethersfield in the spring of 1637.

Some 200 Pequot Indians approached the Wethersfield settlement, and were seen by one of the settlers, who immediately went to the center to sound the alarm. Tradition indicates that on his way, he met some women settlers, and explained the problem to them. They seemed to be doubtful of his sincerity, and instead of quickly running for safety, questioned him in detail. Át this time, some of the Indians appeared and captured three of these women. The eldest of the women struggled with the Indians, and they beat her to death. Then the Pequots continued their raid on the settlers, killing two other women and six men, 20 cows and destroying much property, before taking the two girls they had captured earlier. Then they took flight.

The General Court met on May 11, I637 to take action because of the raid and the killing of the people of Wethersfield, and the taking of the two girls as hostages. The General Court, the predecessor of our General Assembly, ordered a levy of 90 men, 42 from Hartford, 30 from Windsor and 18 from Wethersfield, under the command of John Mason of Windsor, as commander in chief, and with Samuel Stone of Hartford as chaplain.

On May 20, 1637, the Army took after the Pequots, and at Saybrook was joined by friendly Indians under their Chief Uncas. John Mason and his citizen soldiers, and the friendly Indians under Chief Uncas ran the Pequots down and successfully attacked them. The results were about 400 Pequots killed and Mason's force lost two men and some 20 were wounded. When the balance of the Pequots attacked Mason's army, most of the balance of the Pequots were killed, although a few escaped and joined some other tribes for safety. The settler militia had saved the day for the colonists, and avenged their losses. The French and Indian wars were another series of almost continuous military actions from 1689 through 1763. The Wethersfield Trainband (including, of course, the settlers in what is now the Rocky still part of Wethersfield) took some part in this long-term series of wars. Generally, these wars included King Williams War in 1689; Queen Anne's War in 1702; King George's War in 1744; and the French and Indian War, from 1755 to 1763. It as the later date of 1763 that literally ended the French presence in North America.

In the year 1720, the Connecticut Legislature set up Stepney Parish as the Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield, which included almost all of the present town called Rocky Hill. The Wethersfield Trainband was still the military organization of Stepney Parish. The Trainband organization of Wethersfield, including Stepney Parish, was an important source of trained manpower for the colonial life in America.

The Revolt of the British colonies in North America was successful in the separation from the mother country, England, mainly because of the trainband preparations and their purpose in the revolution resulting in the establishment of the United States as a free nation.

The revolution in the American colonies was one of the most severe tests of the trainbands as a part of the military organizations, as well as the people's purpose of freedom, in successfully establishing our historical freedoms. The military organizations, supported by the people, is and was one of the most powerful forces in the world.

The slogan, "What is past is Prologue" in front of the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. seems to be most appropriate in studying the military history from the trainbands of our colonial way of life to our modern National Guard, the historic, now ceremonial, Governor's Footguard, as well as the United States military organizations. RHL

## Rocky Hill in the Spanish American War

Rocky Hill Life Mar 00

**By Rod Wilscam**

By the year 1898, Rocky Hill and the other villages were still enjoying the freedom earned as a result of the Revolutionary War of I776 and the so-called second war of Revolution, as the War of 1812 was called. The pleasant life was still being challenged by England and other European countries, and in 1823 the Monroe Doctrine was instituted by President James Monroe.

Mainly, the gist of the Monroe Doctrine was a statement of policy of the new United States toward the Latin American countries, including Cuba and Mexico. The Monroe Doctrine stated that it is against the interests of the United States for a foreign nation to establish a new settlement in the American continents or to exert undue influence on any American nation.

Cuba had been in a revolution against Spain from the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the Monroe Doctrine was specifically aimed against Spain and the other European countries, but the strength of the statement also applied to Russia, which was thinking of establishing Alaska as a Russian settlement.

Even while the United States was fighting the Civil War, the dissidents in Cuba were still causing trouble in Cuba against Spanish rule, and this continued until 1898 when the United States sent its battleship Maine to Havana Harbor, and when the Maine was sunk in the Harbor, the entire United States became enraged against Spain. The blockade against Spain in the Harbor at Havana was not successful, but the fighting cry "Remember the Maine" made a great rallying cry in the United States. It was not known until many years later that in actuality, the Maine was sunk as the result of an accident on the Maine, not as the result of Spanish action.

Most of the action in the Spanish American War took place at sea, and the military action was also quite short. The naval losses in this war were quite low, as well as the military land forces.

Rocky Hill's involvement began with the first call for troops dated April 23, 1898, by the President. The first Regiment of Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, Company F, under the command of Captain Charles W. Newton of Hartford, included Arthur H. Hale, who was mustered into Company F, then into the service of the United States Army on June 18, 1898, which was after Company F was formed.

In addition to Arthur H. Hale, Anthony F. Schuster of Rocky Hill was also mustered into Company on June 18, 1898, after Company F was mustered Anthony F. Schuster was sick and furloughed October 28, 1898 until Company F was mustered out on October 21, 1898.

In Company K of the First Regiment, Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, Eugene T. Marvel, who born in Rocky Hill, enlisted at the age of 18 years from Hartford in Company K on May 18, 1898. He was sick and in the hospital from May 28 until June 1, I898. Company F was located at Camp (illegible – RCH) New Haven, Connecticut, from May 4 1898, until May 23, 1898, then on May 23 they went to Fort Preble Maine, until July 16; then they went back to Camp Haven, Connecticut. On July 18, they went to Camp Alger, Virginia. On July 19, they returned to Camp Haven, Connecticut. Then they were given furlough until October 21, when they reported at Hartford, Connecticut to be mustered out on October 3 I898.

While the First Regiment of Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was not called to fight or go to action in Cuba, they were a part of the reserve for (text missing – RCH) and carried out their military objectives. Charles L. Burden has indicated that he was thankful for all the support he received from the civilian organizations, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, who provided services and - good wishes, as well as money and uniforms for the servicemen.

. Colonel Burden also pointed out that when they arrived at Camp Alger, Virginia, the well. They had arrived on three trains from Camp Haven in Niantic, Connecticut; there were 48 officers and 1,279 enlisted men. They had taken the train to New York, and a ferry boat took them to the railroad station in Jersey City. Now Jersey where they entrained to Washington, DC, and marched across the District to the Southern Railroad depot

They then took the train to Dunn Loring, Virginia. C Alger was about a mile from the depot, and the troops were quite worn out, coming from Maine and Connecticut, where it was quite cold, to Virginia, where it was very Warm and humid.

Camp Alger was an old corn field which was overgrown with ragweed. Camp Alger was the same camp where the First Connecticut was camped during the Civil War.

The final discharge was on October 21, 1898. The Spanish American War was of a short duration, but was a great victory of the United States. The American Army losses were 279 dead and 1,465 wounded; and for the Navy, 16 dead and 68 wounded.

Arthur H. Hale is buried in Center Cemetery in Rocky Hill. He died June 9, 1916. Also buried in Center Cemetery is Sylvester Morse who died on April 30, 1907 at the age of 74 years. He served with the Fifth Massachusetts Regiment. Also buried in Center Cemetery is Nathan E. Guile who died in October 1929 at age 52 years.

While records do not show any others buried in Center Cemetery, there could be others who served from other States, or who were in the regular army or navy and also served their country. The Rocky Hill Historical Society would like to know their names, service, and place of death, and any other information you might have.

The Society has attempted to develop a list of veterans of all wars, who either lived or died in Rocky Hill. If you have information, please give me a call at 529-1438. RHL

## Rocky Hill during the Revolution

*Rocky Hill Life Sep 00*

**By Rod Wilscam**

During the seventeenth century, Rocky Hill life was pleasant and serene. Rocky Hill was also known as Stepney Parish of Wethersfield in the Connecticut Colony. More officially Rocky Hill was known as the Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield, and was better known as "Rockie" Hill, or Rocky Hill.

The residents were still officially known as those residents of the Rocky Hill section of Wethersfield. Stepney Parish was then also known in Wethersfield as “The Lower Community.” So many names might cause confusion, and I am sure confusion resulted, but everyone knew what you meant. The residents, mostly farmers, didn't know, or didn't care what was going on in the Connecticut Colony. They were even more isolated from the other English Colonies in America, and even though they resided in one of the major seaports in the English Colonies in America, the English trade was of great significance in their daily lives. Almost all of the items needed for everyday life, except those items they were able to grow, or produce themselves, were dependent on the English trade. English taxes were a necessary fact of life, and for the most part were tolerated. But these serene times were beginning to be questioned by the Colonial residents.

There were many discussions, amongst the Colonists, as to the amount and fairness of many of the English Taxation, and the lack of Colonial representation in the enactment of the English laws. The unrest in all the English becoming more and more disturbing, with taxes being one of more importance as time went on. At the same time, in Rocky Hill there were rapidly growing two separate classes; first, the farmers, and secondly the seamen and merchants. The farmers were becoming more comfortable, economically, and the shipbuilders who took advantage of the shipbuilding facilities in the vicinity of the Ferry Landing. The Wethersfield Town meeting (The New England Town Meeting was the main governing institution in almost all of the small towns in the Connecticut Colony).

The Colonial English Government ruled in the Connecticut Colony, as was the same for the Massachusetts and Rhode Island colonies. How the government ruled was described in the Corporate Constitutions from the General Court, now called the General Assembly. The Governor and the Legislature mostly upheld the English edicts, but being controlled by the electorate, they did allow some dissension into their activities.

Edmund Burke, speaking on this facet of Revolutionary times stated in 1775: “The temper and the character which prevail in our Colonies are, I am afraid, unalterable by any human art... An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery."

On July 4, 1776, at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Colony, the final draft of the Declaration was officially signed by the Continental Congress. Copies of the Declaration of Independence were expedited to all the Colonies.

With this brief background, the Stamp Act enacted in England was the crowning blow to the American Colonies. The talk of succession became even more open than before. It was common dinner time talk to talk against the actions of the mother country. Even the sea trade in Rocky Hill began encouraging talk of taking exception of the English taxation. These were the times of the tea tax imposed against the colonies. When the good people of Boston took action against the taxation, they were generally supported by almost all of the American Colonies. As soon as the word "The British are coming" was received in Wethersfield, troops were immediately dispatched to repel the English Armies attack in Boston. Many of the initial Freedom Fighters from Wethersfield included Rocky Hill residents. Throughout the War of Independence, the people of Rocky Hill were an important factor in the success of the American Colonies. The local farmers furnished much food for the American Freedom Fighters. They supplied the initial ships for the infant nation’s fighters. They furnished men and supplies for the new nation, and they also suffered the effects of the British blockades. The farmers did their best to help supply food and other goods for the war effort. The ship owners gave their ships to the new United States Navy, and many were lost, but the young nation prevailed over the British forces. The new American nation obtained support from many of the European countries, who were also opposed to the British power and past successes.

The British, hoping to overcome the opposition in Boston and the other American Colonies, were making headway in almost all of their battles for a year and a half, and at sea the blockades were a nuisance to the shippers. But General George Washington began to prevail with victories. General Washington and his troops eventually prevailed, and the new United States of America was established. On October 19, 1781, British General Charles Lord Cornwallis, after a series of defeats, surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia. With this surrender, the fighting with Great Britain was ended.

Rocky Hill residents did yeoman’s service in support of the new nation. - However, there was still some support for the British King, and suspicions were felt for travelers from other states. Those moving into Connecticut were required to furnish statements from their former town leaders without delivering to the local committee, a statement that such person was friendly to the rights and liberties of America. Without such statement, any unknown traveler could be jailed except those persons known and members of the military were exempted from this requirement. The Connecticut Courant published the names of anyone violating such rules. Those residents who supported the English cause were subject to fines and their property seized. The committees set maximum prices for imported goods from the West Indies, to avoid overpricing of imported goods. There was also talk of avoiding purchase of goods produced or shipped from England.

At Versailles, France, on January 20, 1783, a treaty of peace with Great Britain was signed, and the news of the treaty of Paris was received in Hartford on March 27, 1783. The receipt of this news gave much reason for joy to the Rocky Hill households. Thus, officially the United States of America became a free and independent nation.

The effects of the new United States was happily received in Rocky Hill, however, it would take the Second War of Independence in 1812 to actually finalize the independence of the new United States of America. The continuation of British seizure of seamen was finally stopped, and the seamen and Sea Captains of Rocky Hill enjoyed a freedom of the sea. RHL

## The Civil War Comes to Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life Dec 97

**By Rod Wilscam**

The seeds of war in the middle of the nineteenth century caused little disturbance to the citizens of Rocky Hill and the State of Connecticut. Sentiment against separation of any of the United States was not an acceptable option. Yet the seeds of war seemed almost beyond the areas of possibility in the young town of Rocky Hill, which had an 18 year history since separation from Wethersfield and incorporation as a town in 1843.

On April 15, 1861, President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 troops, for three months service, which was enthusiastically answered. On May 3, 1861, there was a second call for 42,000 men. Rocky Hill, as well as all the other towns of Connecticut, had many of its young men volunteer for service in the Civil War.

The volunteers, and the paid substitutes who reported Rocky Hill as their home town are listed, as well as their regiments, companies, and engagements.

Private James P Hamilton from the First Connecticut Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Rifle Company A, and Corporal George Goodrich was a volunteer member of the First Squadron of the First Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers. Private Eugene E. Lovejoy was a volunteer in Company B of the First Regiment of Connecticut Volunteer Calvary from Nov. 10, 1863 to August 2, 1865. This cavalry took part in some 65 different engagements during this war of rebellion.

The First Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers Heavy Artillery attracted seven volunteers and two draftees (or paid substitutes) from Rocky Hill. The volunteers included Cpl. Franklin H. Lee and Pvt. James Driscoll, who enlisted in Company A on Jan. 2, 1864 and deserted Jan. I6, 1864; First Sgt. James Boardman volunteered for Co. E on May 23, 1861; Pvt. Martin L. Gardner volunteered Co. G Sep. I6, I864; Pvts. Lewis C. and William H. Lockwood volunteered Co. G on Dec. 23, 1863; Pvt. William M. Kellogg volunteered Co. I on May 16, 1854; and Pvt. Michael Nolan (a paid substitute) on Aug. 23, 1864, and Pvt. William Stevens was drafted on Aug. 2, 1863 into Co. M. This regiment took part in seven engagements in 1862, three in 1863, and two in 1864, including the siege of Petersburg and Richmond, VA from May 1864 to April 1865.

Pvt. Eugene Lovejoy on Nov. 20, 1863 joined Co. B of the First Regiment Connecticut Voluntary Cavalry. He was discharged on Aug. 2, 1865.

Corporal George Goodrich volunteered and reported on Aug. 29, 1861 to the First Squadron Connecticut Volunteer Calvary, Co. B. Cpl. Goodrich was captured Oct. I2, 1863 during the engagement at Brandy Station, VA and died on Aug. 1, 1864 at the infamous prison at Andersonville, GA.

First Sgt. Charles W. Williams enlisted on April 23, 1861 in the Second Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry Co. H and First Lieutenant Lemuel H. Boardman; Sgt. William L. Webb and Pvts. John H. Deming reported on May 7, 1861, as did William Holden and Albert A. Tryon.

The Fifth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry included Cpl. Thomas J. Montgomery in Co. F on July 29, 1861; and in Co. 1, Pvts. William Evans (paid substitute) on Sept. 2, 1863, who deserted on Sept. 17, 1863 and James O'Connor (a paid substitute) on Aug. 28, 1863.

The Sixth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry included draftees (or paid substitutes) Pvts. Patrick McCarty and Peter G. Smith in Co. G, beginning on Dec. 6, 1864. Pvt. McCarty was captured at Brunswick, NC on March 6, 1865 and paroled on April 20, 1865. He was furloughed on May 4, 1865 and never returned. The Adjutant General's office in Washington, D.C. has no further record on Pvt. Patrick McCarty.

Corporal James B. Henderson volunteered Sept. 21, 1864 and reported June 23, 1865 to Co. A, and Pvt. James Moore reported to Co. C of the Seventh Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry. Pvt. Edward Goodrich volunteered on Feb. 26, 1862 and was not assigned. Pvt. James Moore never reported for duty on Nov. 14, 1864, following the engagements of Oct. 1, 1864 at New Richmond, VA; on Oct. 7, 1864 at New Market Road, VA; on Oct. I 3, 1864 at Darbytown Road, VA; and on Oct. 27, 1864 at Charles City Road, VA. Major General Joseph R. Hawley was one of the leaders of this regiment. Major General Hawley of Hartford later became the editor of the Hartford Courant.

Rocky Hill volunteers to Company E of the Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry included Cpl.s. Charles T. Deming and Jerom Evans, who both volunteered on Sept. 23, 1861 Pvts. Frederick Boardman on Sept. 23, 1861 Donald Levaughn on Sept. 25, 1861; John Shipmaker on Oct. 7, 1861; Gilbert H. Stow, on Sept. 30, 1861; Henry W. Taylor on Oct. IO 1861; John A. Waterman on Sept. 25, 1861; and William Whitmore also volunteered on Sept. 25. 1861, Pvt. Donald Lavaughn was wounded on Sept. 17, 1862 on the first day of the Battle of Antietam, MD. Cpl. Jerome Evans was wounded on May 7, 1864 at the battle at Walthall Junction, VA, Pvt. Gilbert H. Stowe died on April I 3, 1862.

The Eleventh Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry included Pvt. Henry Ladue on Nov. 29, 1862 in Co. G; Pvts. Otis Culver on Dec. 17, J863; Williams Funny (a paid substitute) on Nov. 26, 1864, and Hosea Omonco (a paid substitute) on Nov. 26, 1864.

First Sergeant Charles W. Williams was first mastered on Feb. 1, 1862 in Co. F in the Thirteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry; Sgt. William L. Webb on Jan. 29, 1862 and musician Edgar W. Webb; Pvt. Norman Kellogg on Jan. 22, 1861; and Pvt. Erbin K. Sanford were also in Co. F. Pvt. William L. Webb was transferred to Co. A of the Thirteenth Infantry Battalion on Dec. 29, I864. RHL

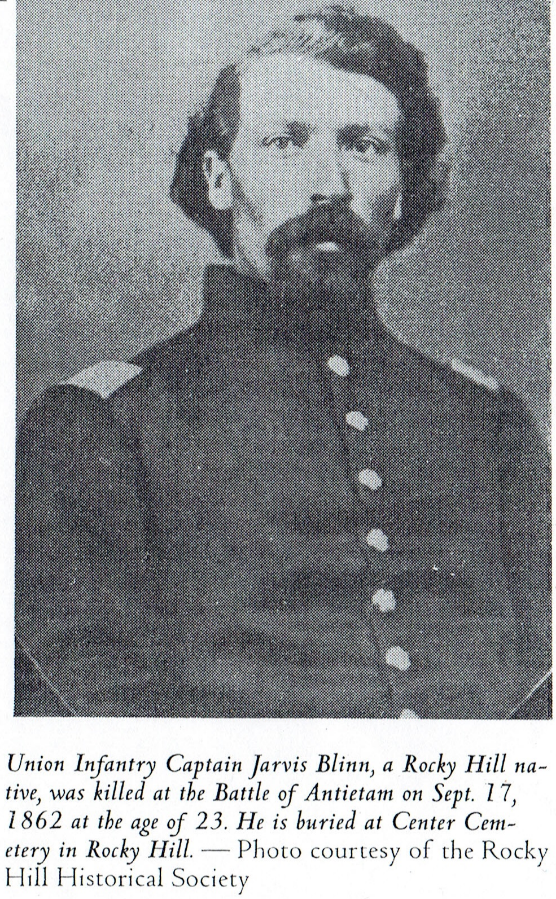
## Civil War Comes to Rocky Hill (Part II)

*Rocky Hill Life Jan 98*

**By Rod Wilscam**

*This is a continuation of last month’s article.*

The Tenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry Company B included Private James Walsh of Rocky Hill, who volunteered on Dec. 6, 1864, and reported for muster on the same date. Private Walsh took part in five engagements, all in Virginia, until he was discharged on Aug. 25, 1865.

The Fourteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry included Private John A. Waterman in Company C on Aug. 18, 1863.

Private John Richardson was wounded on May 24, 1864, at North Anna River, Va., then deserted April 18, 1865. Sergeant John L. Thompson was mustered as a paid substitute in Company I on Aug. 7, 1863, promoted to sergeant on Nov. 3, 1863, and then deserted on Nov. 7, 1863.

Company 1 also included Private John Lynch and John Thompson I as paid substitutes, who were both mustered on Sept. 7, 1863. Private John Lynch was wounded Feb. 6, 1864 at Morton's Ford, Va., and then deserted on March 27, 1864. Private John Thompson I transferred to the U. S. Navy May 5, 1866, and served on the USS Brooklyn. He died on Feb. 28, 1866.

Private William Thompson II was wounded Feb. 18, 1864, at Morton's Ford, Va., and then transferred to the U.S. Navy on May 5, 1864 and served on the USS Chicopee until he was discharged on April 26, 1866.

The Fifteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was under the command of Col. Dexter R. Wright of Meriden, who resigned Feb. 13, 1863 and was succeeded by Col. Charles M. Upham, also of Meriden. Private James B. Henderson was mustered on Sept. 2, 1863, and was transferred June 23, 1865 to Company A, Seventh Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry.

Private Otis Kellogg was mustered in Company B of the Twenty-Second Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry on Sept. 20, 1863.

The Sixteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was under the command of Col. Frank Beach of Hartford. Company A was under the command of captains Henry L. Pasco and Thomas F. Burke, both from Hartford.

First Sergeant Roland Levaughn was captured April 20, 1864, at Plymouth, N.C., and died Sept. 22, 1864, at Charleston, S.C. Corporal Albert S. Hatch, mustered on Aug. 24, 1862, was wounded on Sept. 17, 1862, at Antietam, M.D., and wounded again on May 3, 1863, at Providence Road, Va. He was promoted to corporal on Dec. 28, 1862. He was reduced in rank and discharged on Sept. 23, I864, due to sickness.

Privates Daniel R. Hopkins, Franklin Peck, Henry G. Sage and William Sugden were mustered in Company A on Aug. 24, 1862. Private Peck was captured April 20, 1864, at Antietam, M.D., and paroled on Nov. 30, 1864, and mustered out on June 24, 1865. Private William Sugden died Nov. 6, 1862. In Company B was Private Burritt Goodrich, who was captured April 20, 1864 at Plymouth, N.C., paroled on Nov. 20, 1864, and discharged June 30, I865. Company C also included First Sergeant William O'Levaughn, who was captured April 20, 1864, at Plymouth, N.C., and died Sept. 5, 1864, at the infamous Andersonville, Ga., prison.

Musician John White was wounded Sept. 7, I862, at Antietam, M.D., and discharged Dec. 21, I862. Also in Company C were corporals William C. Williams and Horace Williams, and privates Elizur D. Belden, Daniel C. Griswold, George Smith, Horace M. Warner, and Henry C. Williams.

Private Elizur D. Belden was captured April 20, 1864, at Plymouth, N.C., and died Nov. 2, 1864 at Plymouth. Daniel C. Griswold was also captured April 20, 1864, at Plymouth, N.C., and paroled Feb. 26, I865.

Henry C. Williams was wounded April 24, I863, at Suffolk, Va., and was captured April 20, 1864, at Plymouth, N.C.

Company F included privates John E. Deming, Leonard A. Green, Charles H. Waterman, and George W. Wright. Private John E. Deming was captured April 20, 1864, at Plymouth, N.C., and died March 9, 1865. Private Leonard A. Green died Dec. 20, I862. Private Charles H. Waterman was wounded Sept. 17, 1862, at Antietam, M.D., and died Nov. I, I862.

The Twentieth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry included in Company C First Lieutenant Horace Williams, who was promoted from corporal from the Sixteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry.

The Twenty-Second Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry included Private Otis Kellogg in Company B, who was mustered on Sept. 20, 1863.

The Twenty-Fifth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry included Privates Ferdinand E. Sage, Davis D. Sage, Henry D. Stevens, Martin Whaples and Henry B. Whitford, who were all mustered in Company B on Nov. II, 1862. Private Henry B. Whitford deserted on Nov. I 3, 1862.

Musician Henry Hotchkiss was mustered in Company D on Nov. 11, 1862. Private Henry D. Stevens was wounded April 14, 1863, at Irish Bend, La. Sergeants William Holden and Thomas H. Robbins both reported for muster in Company H on Nov. II, 1862. Sergeant Holden deserted on Nov. 28, 1862. Corporal Justus H. Stevens, who reported on Nov. II, 1862, was wounded on April 14, 1863, at Irish Bend, La.

Privates George E. Belden, Henry C. Holmes, William W. Kellogg, William H. Pelton, Thomas G. Porter, Marshall J. Warner and Lewis F. Wright also reported for muster on Nov. II, 1862. Private George E. Belden went AWOL on Nov. 21, 1862, but returned under President Lincoln's pardon.

These Rocky Hill Volunteer residents all took part in engagements at Irish Bend, La., on April 14, 1863; Port Hudson, La., on May 25 and 26, and also June I4 and I5, 1863; at Brashear City, La., on June 23, I863; and at Bayou Beuf, La., on June 24, 1863.

The Twenty-Ninth (Colored) Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry included privates Nathan Camp and Edward Peters, who both reported on March 8, 1864. Private Nathan Camp was wounded on Sept. 8, 1864, at Petersburg, Va., and discharged on Nov. 28, 1865. Private Edward Peters was wounded Oct. 27, 1864, at Kell House, Va., and died Nov. 7, 1864.

The Thirtieth (Colored) Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was later known as the Thirty. First Regiment United States Colored Infantry Company B was commanded by Capt. William C Williams of Rocky Hill, who enlisted Aug. 8, 1862. RHL

## Rocky Hill Black Soldiers in the Civil War

*Rocky Hill Life Feb 99*

**By Rod Wilscam**

The insurrection of the Confederate states of America against the United States, called by some the War of the Rebellion, more popularly called the Civil War, began with the attack by Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutand Beauregard against Fort Sumter in the harbor at Charleston, S.C. at 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861. After only 34 hours, the remains of the fort were surrendered to the forces of the Confederate States of America (CSA). The records of this attack indicate that the only casualty of this attack was a horse belonging to one of the CSA attackers.

Major Anderson, commander of Fort Sumter, reported to the U.S. War Department that, with his loyal defenders, he had defended the fort for 34 hours, until the quarters had been entirely burned, the main gates and the gorge wall destroyed by enemy fire. The food supply had been destroyed, except for some pork, and his magazine, which only contained four cartridges and four barrels of powder, remained. Finally, he was forced to surrender to General Beauregard's offer to evacuate the fort.

The attack on Fort Sumter was a wake-up call to the citizens of Rocky Hill, as well as the citizens of the northern states. With the attack on Fort Sumter, the Civil War had begun. Just as the rallying cries of later wars, such as “Remember the Maine,” or “Remember the Alamo" or “Remember Pearl Harbor.” the rallying cry became "Remember Fort Sumter.” The people were unprepared for the evacuation of Fort Sumter, even though serious trouble was anticipated in Charleston Harbor. The USA flag had been insulted, and the national pride became outraged.

The news that the CSA flag was now over Fort Sumter was then likened to a cup of humiliation, filled to the brim. In the southern states, the yell of rebellion was felt, just as a national pride began in the northern states. The cause of slavery was considered the main cause of the rebellion. President Abraham Lincoln immediately issued a call on April 15, 1861 for 75,000 troops to suppress the rebellion and to support the national cause.

The call for troops was accepted for the state of Connecticut by Governor Buckingham on April 15, I86 I. The First Connecticut Volunteers had been previously enlisted and by April 16 most were immediately organized, and on April 20, left Hartford for New Haven, where they were quartered at Yale College and some private homes.

By May 10, 1861, the First Connecticut Volunteers were deemed trained and left New Haven on the steamship "Bienville.” They landed on the Potomac River at Washington, D.C. on May 13. There, they were further trained at Camp Glenwood in federal service under West Point graduate Brigadier General Dan Tyler, of Norwich.

Only white recruits were called initially, but, beginning on August II, 1863, black recruits were accepted, and, by the end of 1863, the 29th (Colored) Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was formed and trained. Colonel William B. Wooster, of the 20th Connecticut Volunteers was assigned to the 29th. The 29th was then assigned to the U.S. Ninth Corps. They embarked from Washington, D.C. on two transports to Hilton Head, S.C., arriving on April 13. Following further training, they were transported to Bermuda Hundred, VA on August. I4, 1864. Most were then assigned to the 10th (Colored) Corps, under the command of General William J. Birney.

This unit included colored Privates Nathan Camp and Edward Peters in Company C, Eli Rodman in Company G, John Smith in Company H, as well as Charles Depth, unassigned, all from Rocky Hill.

They were included in an advance under General Butler at Deep Bottom, VA on August 16 and 17, I864, and repulsed a rebel attack. On August 24, they relieved the 18th Connecticut Volunteer Regiment during the siege at Petersburg, VA. Private Nathan Camp was wounded on July 5, 1864 at Petersburg, and was discharged on November 28, 1864. The Regiment was at Petersburg until September 24, 1864. They were given only four days for rest and relaxation, and received new uniforms and weapons. Then on September 28, they marched to Deep Bottom, VA and were part of General Butler's attack on Fort Harrison, VA. They then took part in the attack on CSA Fort Gilmore.

On September 29, 1864, they took part in the engagement at Chapin’s Farm, near Richmond, VA. On October 13, they took part in the engagement at Darbytown Road, VA.

On October 27 and 28, 1864, the 29th took part in the fighting at Kell House, VA. The 29th Colored Regiment was then given duty guarding the 20,000 rebel prisoners of war at Point Lookout, MD, Finally, on June 10, 1864, they were sent to Brownsille, TX until they were ordered sent to Hartford to be discharged on October 24, 1865.

Governor Buckingham ordered another colored regiment, the 30th (Colored) Regiment, Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, to be recruited on January I2, 1864. On June 4, 1865, the Regiment had been formed with four companies and trained and was then sent to Virginia, where they were transferred into the 31st Regiment, United States Colored Infantry. They were assigned to the Third Brigade, Fourth Division, Ninth Army Corps.

During June and July, they were a part of the siege on Petersburg, VA. Then, the rebels counter-attacked on July 30, 1864. The 31st Regiment lost 136 officers and men. Major Ross, in his report, cited the "bravery and enthusiasm" of the officers and colored troops, saying they went into action with a determination to earn to respect of white troops, which they knew could only be obtained by hard fighting.

The 31st included Captain William C. Williams, of Rocky Hill. They took part in engagements at Fort Sedgwick, VA in October, 1864; Bermuda Front, VA from November 18 to December 30, 1864; then at Petersburg, VA from March 29 to April 2, 1865; and at the surrender of Lee on April 9, 1865, thus ending the Civil Wars, still the bloodiest of all U.S. wars.

There were many heroes in these two "colored" regiments of Connecticut Volunteers and we should never lose sight of the bravery of all the volunteers in the Civil War. RHL

## Rocky Hill and its Heroes

*Rocky Hill Life Mar 01*

*Medal of Honor recipients deserve recognition at town hall*

**By Rod Wilscam**

It has been said that everyone loves a hero. Rocky Hill is no exception, and has even produced its own share of heroes. Starting in Colonial times as a part of Wethersfield, the settlers of the present-day town of Rocky Hill should be considered heroes for leaving the Wethersfield civilization and pioneering into a new area.

The first settlers must have been quite brave in their ventures into a new place to make their livelihood and fortunes. They had to clear the land to make their homes. No local lumber stores were available. There were no stores that had the items that are now so easily obtained.

They faced the hardships of the weather and frequent Indian raids. When local Indians raided any of the early settlers' farms, the entire male community was alerted and the trainband, or militia, immediately began defensive procedures. There was one home that was made into a fort for protection of the women and children.

Since the early days, the entire male population comprised the trainband. In the later years, males under 16 years of age and those 65 or older were excused from this duty.

The members of the trainband were often the heroes of the day. Through the French and Indian wars, and even after the Revolutionary War, the trainband was at the core of American military forces, with the duties now entrusted to the National Guard. It was called upon more often than the National Guard of today.

For example, the trainband provided the first response in the American Revolution, answering Paul Revere's famous cry, "The British are coming." It was the members of the trainband who faced the powerful British army at Lexington, in the first battle of the war. In my humble opinion, these civilian soldiers were the first heroes of the new nation.

It has been said that there were 20 men from Rocky Hill who answered the call, but we can only find two from two who are so identified, Oliver Pomeroy and Ackley Riley. There were many Rocky Hill family names in this group, listed as being from Wethersfield. Dr. Rufus W. Griswold identified 48 Rocky Hill residents who served in the Revolution. General George Washington on August 7, 1782 issued orders for a Badge of Military Merit. This award was given to officers and enlisted men alike. It recognized the military heroes of the Revolution for acts of unusual gallantry. The badge went out of use after the Revolutionary War.

In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln asked Congress to authorize a Medal of Honor to be given by the authority of Congress to members of the military, both enlisted men and officers, who have distinguished themselves by gallantry at the risk of their own life above and beyond the call of duty.

Congress adopted the proposal in 1862, and the award has continued to the present time. There have been fewer than 4,000 recipients out of the nearly 36 million total American service personnel in the nearly 140 years since that time.

The number of Connecticut Medal of Honor heroes from the Civil War was 42; from the Indian Campaigns, six, including Charles Sheppard, who was born in Rocky Hill; from 1871 to 1898, two; Spanish-American War, one; Philippine Insurrection, one; Boxer Rebellion, one; the Philippines (1911), one; World War I, three; 1920 to 1940, two; World War II, eight: Korean Conflict, three; and the Vietnam Conflict, four, including John Levitow of Rocky Hill. The number of medal recipients born in Rocky Hill totals two.

Little is known about the early life of Charles Sheppard. What is known comes from the article entitled "Indian Campaigns," from a report of the 90th Congress, Second Session, entitled Medal of Honor, 1863 to 1960. We are actively researching Charles Sheppard, his parents and his life in Rocky Hill. If you have any information, please write to me in care of the Rocky Hill Historical Society.

The information that we have indicates that Sheppard was born here and enlisted as a private in Company A, 5th United States Infantry in St. Louis. Company A was commanded by Col. Nelson A. Miles and Lt. Frank D. Baldwin. Sheppard was stationed at Fort Peck, near Cedar Creek in northeastern Montana, from October 21, 1876 to January 1877. Their mission was to capture Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Laughing Deer. After the defeat of Gen. George Custer, Sioux leaders Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, together with the Arapaho and the Cheyenne Indians had defied orders to return to their reservations. The US Army was chasing them down, with orders to bring the Indians back to their reservations.

The Montana winter of 1876 was bitter cold with temperatures of 35 degrees below zero, deep snow and high winds. On Dec. 18, Lt. Frank Baldwin, with Sheppard, attacked Sitting Bull in his camp. With Baldwin's skill and the element of surprise, they managed to drive off and capture most of Sitting Bull's supplies.

Colonel Miles chased Chief Crazy Horse, who was ill-equipped for the bitter winter and short on supplies. Miles caught up and managed to run Crazy Horse and his braves off into the cold and capture most of the women and children.

On Jan. 8, 1877, Chief Crazy Horse attempted to recapture the women and children. Attacking the US troops at breakfast time, Crazy Horse trapped them with over 600 braves. Colonel Miles counter attacked with his machine guns, and Charles Sheppard, with his Company A with Capt. James S. Casey, cleared out the snipers, causing Crazy Horse to flee in panic under the cover of snow squalls.

The U.S. losses included one dead and four wounded. Crazy Horse was captured the same month, and Chief Lame Deer was captured on May 8, 1877, thus avenging the defeat of Custer. On April 27, 1877, Sheppard was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery in action with the Sioux Indians at Cedar Creek, Montana.

John Lee Levitow, Airman 1st Class in the US Air Force, was serving as a Loadmaster in an AC47 Gunship in Vietnam. On Feb. 24, 1969, Levitow was in his 181st combat sortie circling over U.S. ground troops near Long Binh, Vietnam. His duty was to drop flares to illuminate their positions to help the ground troops. His work was to remove flares from the racks and the gunner would drop them to light the enemy positions for the US troops.

The ship was hit by mortar fire, and Levitow was hit by 40 pieces of shrapnel in his legs and back and stunned by the blast. Levitow said: "It felt like a large piece of wood struck my side." The other four crewmen in the cargo compartment were injured as well. The pilot struggled to keep the plane up.

The gunner had been ready to drop a flare out the door at the time the plane was hit. The flare had been armed with a 20-second fuse and had the ability to burn through the metal skin of the plane if ignited inside the cargo area. Levitow reached for the 27-pound, three-foot-long flare, but his wounds seemed to cause him to let the flare loose in the plane. Ignoring his injuries, he finally caught the armed flare, dragged it to the open door, and thrust it out the door. The flare exploded about one second later, far enough from the plane to allow the pilot to regain control and safely land at Bien Hoa Air Base, with more than 3,500 holes in the fuselage from the mortar hit.

After being treated for his injuries, Levitow flew an additional 20 combat missions. He was promoted to sergeant and was finally discharged in August 1969. On May 14, 1970, President Richard Nixon presented him with the Congressional Medal of Honor at the White House. The citation indicated that he “saved the aircraft and its entire crew from certain death and destruction."

Another honor for this hero was given on January 1998, when the Air Force honored Levitow in a ceremony at Long Beach, Calif., where the Air Force named a C47 Globemaster "The Spirit of Sgt. John

Levitow." He was further honored as a hero, by naming a street at the Rocky Hill Veterans Home and Hospital, John Levitow’s Memorial Lane. I believe that these two Rocky Hill heroes, Levitow and Sheppard, should be further honored by an appropriate plaque at the Rocky Hill Town Hall, If you agree, please let me know. RHL

## A Memorial for the Town's World War II Veterans

*Rocky Hill Life Dec 04*

**By Rod Wilscam**

Even before December 1941, the United States already had a war-time economy and our armed forces were preparing for the possible entrance into active warfare to protect the country and to help our allies, mainly Great Britain, against the German and Italian and Japanese war machines.

The Italian government was also involved with Russia and Hitler was running roughshod over Europe and Africa. After December 7, 1941, with the attack on Hawaii, the United States was immersed with the rapid period of arming for the massive war effort which was to come during the next four years.

Many of the young men of Rocky Hill, as well as many of the youths from all over the United States, were drafted into military service.

Many of the young women had joined the armed forces in this effort.

Today, many of our citizens who came to Rocky Hill to make their homes here were also veterans of the World War II effort, but are not included in this list, as compiled in 1945 by the Rocky Hill War Council.

First of all, I would like to mention the names of the seven known town residents who paid the ultimate price of the World War II activities. Those who lost their lives should be honored forever, in our hearts and minds, as well.

We should remember those who lost their lives in the war effort and support from our citizens in those war efforts.

We should also remember those who lost their lives in the home front effort, not only those from town, but also those who gave up their lives from all over, and also not forget those who served our country in the other wars in which we have been involved.

We should always remember those from Rocky Hill who gave their lives in support of our country. These people include: Ellis A. Beck, Frank J. Bennino, Horace J. Bennino, Armand Chapron, Richard W. Dexter, Albert Goss and Henry G. Maxham.

The honor roll of those who served includes: Charles J. Adams Jr., George L. Adams Jr., Edgar T. Adler, Donato A. Aliprandi, Audry C. Arnold, Wallace L. Ashe, Clfford T. Avery, Gordon E. Avery, Kenneth G. Avery and Stanly H. Avery.

Also, Austin S. Backe, Edward C. Bacon, Elliott C. Banfield, Peter Baron, Robert D. Barr, Alfred Bartosiak, Henry Bartosiak, V.W. Bates, Ellis A. Beck, Robert Beck, William H. Beck Jr., Theodore Belanger Jr., Frank J. Bennino, Horace J. Beninino, Carl H. Berg, Arthur F. Best, Herbert Best, Kurt E. Bilo, Alfred R. Bisaillon, Joseph E. Bogus, Pete Bogus, Leonard Brenski, Lawrence F. Brier, Jame Burditt, Joseph L. Butler, Richard Button, Kennet E. Burke, Carlton E. Burke and Gilbert E. Burke.

Also, Osgood H. Cader, Cliffofd R. Canfiel. Frank R. Canfield, Herbert W. Carlson, Francis Carpentier, Anthony Caruso, James W. Caruso Josepe E. Caruso, Nicholas E. Caruso, Alton W Chapman, Albert J. Chapron, Alfred J. Chapror Armand L. Chapron, Frank Chowanic, Andrew H Christensen, Robinson A. Churchill, Lawrence E Clinton, Nicholas Conashevick, Joseph Conlor Robert I. Conroy, Peter J. Corna and Williar Corcoran Jr.

Also, Edward J. Dalenta, Arnold G. Davis, Dant D. DeGiovanni, Alfred DeJohn, Anthony J. DeJohn Benjamin DeJohn, David A. DeJohn, John J. DeJoh Raymond DeJohn, Frank A. Del Monte, Louis Del Monte, Adrian Demers, Robert Detweile Edward W. Dexter, Richard W. Dexter, William Dexter, Raymond C. Dickenson, Brandy DiMartin Sebastian DiMauro, Thelma Dimock, Jams \ Donovan, John Donovan, Arthur J. Dorey Jr., Arth Dorman, Alexander A. Dounouk, Charles Downey, Robert R. Doyle, Wilfred W. Duchesne. Robert W. Duffy and Leo J Dusseault Jr.

Also, Allan D. Elwell, Elizabeth M. Enquist, Frederick Kreidel, Charles Krawka, Louis P. Kwoka, Vernon L. Lanou, Walter F. Lawrence, George Ledder, Robert Ledder, Warren N. Levick, Evan Libera, Maynard F. Lydiard Jr., Charles MacKean, Richard L. MacLean, Thomas W. Macy, William V. Magaldi, Manuel Mandreauraf, Angelo Marino, Milton A. Marino, John F. Markett and Salvino J. Markett.

Also, Charles H Martin, Jr., Albert Martino, J. Martino, George L. Mason, Gardiner R. Maurice, Henry G. Maxham, Jane E. McCarthy, Marjory F. McCarthy, Eugene V. McClure, Leo J. McClure, Bernard J. McMahon, Bernard J. McNamara, William E. Meehl, John A. Mellen, Oliver C. Mellen, Paul R. Merrick, John L. Mangrill, Joseph J. Mikosky, David L. Milliord, Donald M. Ming, Richard H. Morse, David W. Moser, Wallace Moyle, Wallace Moyle Jr., Frank J. Muckor, Francis V. Murphy, Donald C. Murray, Lorraine M. Murray and James A (lst name missing – RCH).

Elsie G. Rhodes, Harry T. Rhodes, Orest J. Rigoletti, Donald M. Roberts, Kenneth F. Roberts, Henry G. Roessler, Alexander J. Rosick, Alex Roman, George Roman, Michael Roman, Dwight Roy, Edna L. Russ, George Russ, Robert Russ, Alden T. Russell and Henry Rust Jr.

Also, Edward F. Saxby, Louis W. Schaefer, Albin M. Schultz, Anthony Schultz, Joseph T. Schultz,

Edward Segar, Elwood P. Shanaman, Leon A. Shaw, Thomas C. Shirley, Richard D. Silverman, Carl D. Smith, William H. Smith, Edward Socha, John Socha, Charles L. Soelch Jr., Robert W. Soelch, William Soelch, Jams Spadaccaini, Charles A. Spencer, John H. Spencer, Robert G. Spencer, Walter B. Spencer, Karl H. Steding, Donald J. Stevens, George E. Stevens, Joseph P. Stewart, Ralph W. Stickels, John Stoneburner, Sidney W. Stone, Edward J. Sullivan, John H. Sullivan, Charles W. Sweezy and Robert E. Sweezy.

Also, Joseph Tarquinio, Robert C. Tatum, Clifton E. Taylor, Donald A. Taylor, Merton W. Taylor, George I. Tennyson, Sterling G. Tooker, William R. Enquist, Charles 0. Eurto, Herbert Margaret A. Aay, Santiago Fernandez, Thomas E. Eurto, Leonard E. Eurto, Forrest E. Evans, Flannigan, Jared K. Fletcher, Francis P. Fox and Roy W. Freeburq.

Also, Howard F. Gallup, Sebastian J. Gogi, Raymond F. Gates Jr., Richard M. Gemme, John T. Ghagan, Herbert Gifford, Jarvis C. Gilbert, Earl G. Glahn, Arthur J. Gleave, Benjamin M. Gold, Samuel Gold, Allison V. Goodine, Franklin M. Goodine, David K. Goodwin, Albert Goss, Robert J. Gould, Henry J. Goulette, George H. Green, Warren A. Greene, John D. Gregory, Lawrence E. Grimes, Robert J. Grimes, Thomas C. Grimes, Walter N. Grimes, Albert D. Griswold, Wilbur R. Griswold, Chester Grover, Carl L. Kenneth M. Gustafson, LeRoy C. Gustafson and William Gustavson.

Also, Henry G. Hale, Oscar E. Hall, Albert A. Hanson, Ralph A. Harbour, Calvin A. Harlow, Robert W. Hart, Norman L. Herrick, Allan H. Hick, Edward A. Holmes, Harold L. Hoyt, Francis Hughes, Kermit D. Hughes, Robert M. Hughes, William Hughes, Alvin G. Hummel, Gordon M. Humphrey, John K. Humphreys, E.J. Hunnicutt, Richard S. Hunt, William Jackson, George K. Javis, Raymond C. Johnson and Myron W. Jones. Also, Joseph Kaczynski, Alexander C. Kean, Donald G. Kean. Kenneth Kean, Ruby L. Kean, George P. Kelley. Herman Klatt, Julius Klatt, Stanley Klewicki, Adolph Kozak, Frederick Krauskopf, Mutch.

Also, Stephen F. Nagy, Walter P. Leymann, Angelo Nevico, Anthony Nevico, Felix Nevico, James M. Nevico, George Newberg, Randolph T. Neilson, Roy Nelson, John M. Ollari, John Orfiteill, Donald E. Oryell, Andrew J. Pacholski, Anthony S. Pacholski, John J. Pacholski, Walter J. Pacholski, James C. Palmer, Vo...gent J. Pantanella, Nichael A. Pasek, Donald E. Peck, Chester Peltier, Roy C. Perkins, Oliver H. Perry, Everett G. Peterson, George A. Peterson, Andrew M. Pierczyk, Freda E. Pierson, E. Allen Plucker, Mark 0. Poisson, Warren M. Pomroy Jr., George W. Prentice, Alfred F. Quintiliano and Michael A. Quintiliano.

Also, Edward K. Ramette, Baldo J. Raschi, Mary Rauert, Stephen Rauert, James J. Trapp, Richard A. Twaddle, Adrian J. Tyler Jr., Cleon A. Tyler, Eugene Tyler and Walter F. Tyler.

Also, James L. Warner, Donald Webster, Stephen L. Weymouth, George G. Wilson, Alan J. Wind. Lester A. Woolley, Norman E. Woolley, Thomas J. Yeager Jr., Lawrence W. Young, Ferdinand A. Zancke, Leonard W. Zanke, Edgar M. Zanke, Floyd R. Zancke, Dr. Constantine Zariphes, Edward J. Zavaski, Henry Zavaski, Stephen R. Zavodjancik and Michael J. Zdeb. If any errors, or omissions appear here, please let me know at 529–1438.

We would appreciate the names, service and war of any other Rocky Hill veterans of any other war for completion of the veteran’s files at the Rocky Hi11 Historical Society. RHL

## Memorial Day in Rocky Hill

*Rocky Hill Life May 00*

**By Rod Wilscam**

We all like to celebrate Memorial Day as a peaceful day. But, the holiday began as a celebration of the soldiers in the War of Rebellion, also called the Civil War.

During the Civil War, the ladies of several towns in the southern states spent one spring day in decorating the graves of the fallen soldiers, both Confederate and those of the Northern Yankees. The spring day chosen was on a separate schedule in each town. The custom did not follow in many Northern States during the war. Ladies in the northern areas found out about the custom of the ladies of the south decorating their soldier’s graves, and reciprocated accordingly. The New York Tribune carried a story from the southern towns, and indicated its appreciation.

This custom of decorating the graves of the soldiers received a boost from John A. Logan, Commander in Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, who issued a general order designating May 30, 1868 as a day for placing flowers, or otherwise, and the decorating the graves of comrades, who died in defense of their country, during the late rebellion.

From that time, May 30 was accepted as the Decoration Day in the North. Today, the name of the holiday is Memorial Day. Today, the Memorial Day holiday is dedicated to the honor of all the veterans from all of our wars, and Congress has set the date of Memorial Day as the last Monday in May.

Memorial Day in Rocky Hill, is usually celebrated by a parade and public ceremonies at the town green north of Center Cemetery, and usually, the Air Force sends a plane to fly over the cemetery near 11:00 a.m. on Memorial Day. For the last several years, the Rocky Hill Chamber of Commerce has taken charge of the parade and the ceremonies. The hour of 11:00 a.m. is symbolic of the time the armistice was signed which signified the end of the World War I on November II, I9I8. The Rocky Hill Center Cemetery has a long and proud history. As a part of Wethersfield, the residents to the south buried their dead at the Wethersfield Cemetery. When the Stepney Parish was officially established in 1726, this area of Rocky Hill was officially known as The Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield.

At a Town Meeting in Stepney Parish, the Congregational Church Registers include the following entry:

"At a meeting of ye inhabitants of Stepney Parish held by adjournment on ye 19 day of Jan'y I730:31, which meeting began on ye I2 day of said Jan y once was continued by adjournment until ye 19 day as aforesaid, "At ye said meeting it was Voted and agreed that we would have a burying Yard to bury our dead in, one that will be known by ye name of Coales Hill: a little south of that place where Andrew Atwood erected a Coopers shop; and by vote made Ahoys of Capt. Ephraim Goodrich, Secy:Thom's Deming and Sam's Williams to be a committee in behalf of ye Society. To apply themselves to ye Town of Wethersfield, at a Town Meeting in March next for a Confirmation of ye aforesaid burying yard, and to desire ye town to send a Committee to lay it out to this society for the use of aforesaid.”

At a meeting of the inhabitants of the Town of Wethersfield, on the 3rd of March 1730-31, Joseph Treat, John Chester and Jonathan Belding were chosen as a Committee to act upon the petition of Stepney Society: After action, as appears upon records of the Town, they submitted a report:

"We the subscribers appointed a committee by the Town of Wethersfield, at their meeting on the 3rd day of March 1730 to lay out a burying yard of a suitable bignes, for the use of Stepney Parish, at a place called Cole Hill, did, on the 4th of said March perform said service as follows:

"Viz. Having measured six rods east from the south east corner of Samuel Smiths land, we set down a stone; from which we measured 12 rods eastward, at the end of which I 2 rods we set down a stone; we then measured southward 20 rods, where we set down a stone from which we measured I2 rods westward, where we set down a stone, from which we measured 20 rods northward, which brought us to the stone first mentioned.

/s/Joseph Treat,

/s/John Chester

/s/Jonathan Belding

Center Cemetery was enlarged around 1785 by Burying Yard of a four rods to the south and around four rods, in a triangular form at the north side.

Center Cemetery was enlarged around [800 around 20 feet to the west, which allowed space for two rows of lots the entire length.

Until 1881, the Town of Wethersfield was responsible for the care and control of public burying grounds. In 1881, the General Assembly changed control to the School Societies. Rocky Hill Records for this period are missing, and presumed lost forever. In 1856 the School Societies were abolished by the General Assembly, which gave The Town of Rocky Hill the control of the Cemetery. In 1894, Dr. Rufus Griswold has estimated a total of 3,000 burials have been handled by Center Cemetery.

The veterans in Center Cemetery that are known, include more than 50 graves from the Civil War; 42 from the Revolution; three from the war of 1812; four from the French and Indian wars; and many more from World War II, Korean Conflict and more from the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War.

Rose Hill Cemetery also includes more than 214 veterans. We do know of nine veterans buried in foreign graves. Many honored veterans have stones that do not indicate their military service, or are not known to be veterans.

Visit our Rocky Hill Cemeteries on the last Monday in May, and see the flags decorating the graves of our honored Veterans. RHL

# Schools

## Schools in Ancient Rocky Hill

*Rocky Hill Life Feb 05*

**By Rod Wilscam**

From the beginning of the Wethersfield community, schools were considered very important in the life of the community. Children were taught in homes and school buildings were erected as needed.

The Wethersfield Town Meeting had approved the hiring and wages of the school teachers and the superintendent. The fees were set, as well as the amount of the salary.

In the coldest weather, children were taught in various designated homes, and in more moderate weather, in the schools. Of course, the families all pitched in to help.

The families living in the Rocky Hill area, or the Lower Community, or South Wethersfield (it was known by all these names) paid taxes to include the cost of the schools.

One of the worst problems for the children was the swampy area around the Valley Brook, which was prone to be very swampy after a rain, or the height of the river rising up and making it very difficult to cross the area.

A petition was presented to the Wethersfield Town Meeting to consider their wishes, as follows: "At a town meeting, the inhabitants of Rocky Hill, ye is the south part of the inhabitants of Wethersfield, laying before this town their conclusions to set up a school for the education of children amongst ye; and did also pray that ye town would allow their part of yecuntry money this last year past to help them in building their schoolhouse.

“At this meeting, ye town did, by vote, approve of the afforded conclusions of ye South inhabitants and did also, by vote, agree that they should have their portion of ye cuntry money it appointed for ye maintenance of schools, it is to say, for this year past, to help them in building their schoolhouse.

At this meeting ye town did, by vote, approved of this and did agree they should have their portion for ye maintenance of schools; it is to say, for this year last past, provided that they build their school house this winter.”

In 1720, the town started to choose the school committee members on an annual basis for each school district.

The following October, the school committee recommended that two schoolhouses were needed, one on the hill near Grimes and the other by Coles hill near the cemetery. In 1729 the General Assembly received a report that there were 77 children in the Rocky Hill part of the district and approved a tax of 10 shillings per year for each 100 pounds of land-assessments for the Rocky Hill citizens.

With the incorporation of Rocky Hill in 1843, new school districts were approved for the new town. In the May session of the General Assembly, Rocky Hill was separated from Wethersfield and was incorporated as a separate town. At this time the school districts were again realigned.

The General Assembly made the effective date of the incorporation to be final upon the passage of the establishment of the town officers. This was done in 1843.

When Stepney Parish of Wethersfield was authorized and approved in 1720, the effective date was set as the date a church was erected and the minister seated. When Rocky Hill was approved as a separate parish of Wethersfield, it became known formally as the Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield.

In practice, it became known as Stepney Parish of Wethersfield, or more commonly known as Rocky Hill.

The first parish committee consisted of Lt. Richard Robbins, Abraham Morris and Samuel Belding (Belden). The school districts remained the same until 1782, when the districts were realigned.

The four school districts were established over the years, the first district being the North School on North Main Street. The Center District was in the center of town and there were many schools in this area over the years.

The South District, also located over several locations, and the South District, also had schools located in various areas.

Today there is one school district with several schools.

In 1803, another school was established as a school for the arts in seafaring taught to make crewmen and captains for the ships built in the local shipyards. It is called Academy Hall, located on Old Main Street.

This location in the center of our town has been used in numerous ways over the years. While starting out as a school for the maritime arts, as well as the meeting rooms for the Sons of Temperance organization, public uses, such as concerts, have been held there, as well as lectures, other shows, fairs, festivals and-lyceums.

The Episcopal Church has used its hall for services and the Catholic Church has used its hall for services. The town of Rocky Hill has used the upstairs rooms for town meetings.

The World War II draft board used the hall, and the roof was used for a spotter's location during the war to protect our skies against an enemy attack.

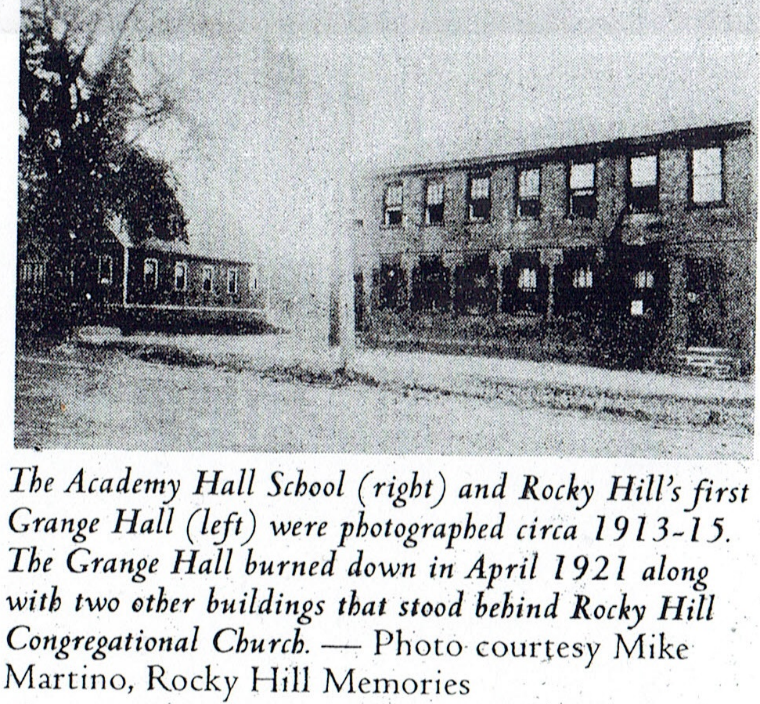
The American Legion has used the facility as a hall for its meetings and its latest use is as the Rocky Hill Historical Society Museum. There must have been other uses of which I am not aware. One other thing does come to mind — it was also used as an elementary school.

The Academy Hall building celebrated its 200th anniversary of providing services for our community in 2003. Because of the historical background of this fine school, it is our fond hope that the Academy Hall building will be preserved as a monument of our past for the people of the future. RHL

## The Long and Varied Life of Academy Hall

Rocky Hill Life Apr 98

**By Rod Wilscam**

The early history of Wethersfield, the mother town of Rocky Hill, includes the beginning of the Stepney Parish in what is now Rocky Hill. Stepney Parish in 1726, more affectionately called "The Lower Community" and also known as "Ye Rockie Hill," all a part of Wethersfield in its early days, was officially recognized as the Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield, as well as Stepney Parish, beginning in 1726.

Community leaders of Wethersfield in December 1672 set aside five acres of land for "the public use of the towne in general, or for any of the inhabitants in particular, for a common landing place, or for building ships, or other vessels." Judge Sherman W. Adams, in the History of Ancient Wethersfield, pointed out that this landing had been used as a shipyard, a common landing place ferry-way and now belongs to (sic) the legislative body of Wethersfield in 1694 held a town meeting which approved an exception of the school taxes for the lower community if residents procured a teacher for the education of their children. This was done.

The use of the river for transportation of people and goods became even more important after the 1700 flood created sandbars and limited the use of the river for ships and shipping north of Rocky Hill; thus, the landing at Stepney Parish became the head of navigation on the Connecticut River.

Many Wethersfield and Rocky Hill business firms became involved in shipbuilding and sailing from the local landing to ports up and down the East Coast, and even across the Pacific and to the West Indies and many African ports. The many ships built here needed a large supply of seamen and sea captains to man and sail them.

The Rocky Hill community, around 1802, agreed to build a two-story school in the center and near the shipyards and public landing for the purposes of not only being a central school, but also as a maritime academy for the training of maritime crewmen to sail the ships of the local builders. This resulted in many businesses being established for the purpose of outfitting the new ships and offering the sail (sale? – RCH) of sea-going supplies. There was a sail house, a rope walk, as well as a few bakeries and many other shops, all for the purpose of supplying the goods necessary for shipping.

The Academy Hall was built in 1803 and financed partially by public subscription, in part by taxation, and also by the sale of public stock. The building contractor was Abraham Jagger, who ended up in bankruptcy because many of the shares were subscribed, but Mr. Jagger did not receive the payment promised. He was ruined financially over the construction of the building.

The Academy Hall Middle School District used the first floor for the elementary school. The school was in session with a male teacher for the five-month winter session and a female teacher for the six-month summer session. The Academy held foreign language, navigation and higher math, as well as practical arts classes.

On the evening of December 31, 1839, the Academy Hall was gutted by a fire, with only the brick walls surviving. The school was repaired and completed with only the first floor being finished.

The Town of Rocky Hill was separated from Wethersfield in 1843 and became an incorporated town. In 1860, a town meeting authorized the town to provide a perpetual lease of the second floor to the Congregational Church, providing that the Church Ecclesiastical Society should "finish and furnish the upper floors" and forever support the room, and do all necessary repairs on the upper floor, while they continue to occupy it.

This floor became known as the conference room and was used by the church for prayer meetings and other church purposes until 1881. The room had also been used as a meeting room for the Sons of Temperance, as a church by the Grace Episcopal Church Mission from 1873–81, and to Saint James Catholic Church from 1779-1880 when its Chapin Avenue Church was dedicated. Town meetings were held on the upper floor and many entertainment events were held there also.

In 1885, the upper floor was leased to the Library Association, which moved its book collection to the Academy Hall for the local library service. A town meeting held on March 22, 1889, approved naming a committee to confer with the church in regards to procuring the hall. In 1921, another fire caused a blockage of the front doors, and by 1924 the alterations had been completed and new equipment was purchased to make the Academy Hall suitable for grades I-4. The building was used for classes until 1940.

In 1940, the Academy Hall was leased to the American Legion for a term of 25 years. At the beginning of World War II, an aircraft spotter's tower was added to the building. This was used until a new tower was completed on Quarry Hill. Academy Hall became the center for war-time civilian activities, including Draft Board and Rationing Board activities.

The Rocky Hill Garden Club held its annual bazaars from 1951-56 at the Academy Hall. In 1963, the Selectmen leased the building to the Rocky Hill Historical Society, subject to repairs being made by the society to make the hall usable for a museum. The Academy Hall was named to the National Historic Register of Historic Places in 1977. The Rocky Hill Historical Society invites the public to visit the facility and view its various exhibits outlining the ancient and modern history of our town. RHL

## Education in “Rockie Hill” from the 17th to 19th Centuries

Rocky Hill Life June 99

**By Rod Wilscam**

**The earliest settlement of the "Rockie Hill" section of Wethersfield began in 1680 when Samuel Boardman was given a grant of some 30 acres of land between the Connecticut River and the Rocky Hill, a most prominent landmark. Additional settlers followed in a slow, but steady pace.

The first settlers, mostly from England, had been educated in the English school system, and had a high regard for the merits of a good education. They brought with them this need for the education of their children to the North American Colonies of England.

The children of the first settlers in the “Lower Community" as the area was also called, attended school in the Wethersfield school system. The long walk to the schools caused the Rocky Hill residents to become concerned because of the difficulties in attending Wethersfield's schools.

The first schoolhouse in Rocky Hill, was authorized and built in the middle of Old Main Street in 1712, moved to the area of Center Cemetery by 1726, then to the area near the present Town Hall. This one-story school building was 20 feet long, and I6 feet wide. School was in session in the school buildings for only a few weeks each year. In part of the winter season, classes were held in one of the pupil’s homes in very bad weather. The school houses were not as well built as our modern buildings, and they became quite cold.

Beginning in 1720, the town began naming a school committee to oversee the education of the children. The practice of the school committees ended in 1904, when the state of Connecticut began overseeing the education of the children in Rocky Hill.

In 1741, Deacon Benjamin Wright, Mr. Josiah Churchill, and Lieutenant John Warner were named as a committee to receive the Colonies Bounty to the Schools in the parish and to expend the funds for schools under the direction of the General Assembly. In the year 1880, Stepney Parish received $208.70 as its share of this fund. It can only be assumed that these funds are still being received, from the "Colonies Bounty" which began in 1741.

In 1756, there were two schools constructed, the North School and the South School. These schools were open for a total of I5 weeks each year. Then it was voted to build a West School, provided the school was built by the residents of the west end of Rocky Hill, at their own expense, and further provided that the West School was kept open for two and a half months a year.

In the South District, a new brick school was built in 1849. This South School building was located at the southeast corner of Main Street at Forest Street, and it is still standing.

The recorded census taken in I779 during the midst of the Revolution resulted in a count of 881 persons, but without an enumeration of children. This census was made during a period of depression. The business firms began to grow and prosper following the Revolution, and there was an increase of population, along with the post-war growth.

The West School was located on the top of the hill on Elm Street extension, behind the shopping center at the corner of Cromwell Avenue. The marker marking the geographic center of Connecticut is located near this school. The one-room wood school house was completed in 1791, and replaced with a brick school house in I871. This second West School was replaced by a new wooden school house in 1912. This third West district two-room school house was located on the northeast corner of Cromwell Avenue and Elm Street.

In I779, the first Center District school house was built. This Center District School was used until I803.The town centerpiece of schools was replaced by the Academy Hall building.

This two-story school house was built partly by real estate tax, for the first time, and partly by private subscription. People purchased shares for a part of the costs. The building contractor went bankrupt on this project. The second floor of the school house was used as an academy to train sailors to man the ships being built in the Rocky Hill Shipyards.

Many of the ship captains were taught the maritime sciences at the Academy Hall. Things went quite well for a time, then on December 31, 1839, a fire gutted the Academy Hall. The brick walls were left standing. The school rooms on the first floor were rebuilt with two classrooms, and opened for classes the following year, however, the second floor was not finished until later. The upper room was finished off and used for many purposes, including private schools, and a high school. The second floor was used, among other things, for town meetings, lectures, concerts, shows, debating societies, as a library and church prayer meeting room for the Congregational Church, the Catholic Church, and many other organizations. In 1916, a new four-room Center School was built next to the Academy Hall, but the use as a school was still needed due to the increase in local pupils. RHL

## Schools in Rocky Hill – the North School

Rocky Hill Life – Nov 96

**By Rod Wilscam**

Education of children was one of the primary things in the minds of the Colonial citizens. In the legislative code of 1650, we read of the obligation of each town to appoint a schoolmaster for the purpose of educating the children. In I677 the legislature provided that a penalty of fine pounds would be imposed on any town convicted of neglecting to maintain a school for at least three months of any year.

The legislature, in 1678, required that towns with 30 or more families appoint a teacher to teach reading and writing. In 1690 the school year was established as six months, and in 1700 school was required year round in towns with at least 70 families and for six months in towns with fewer than 70 families. In 1702 school committees were required to receive the school taxes plus 40 shillings per pupil from the Colonial treasurer.

The Rocky Hill youths attend school in the south district of Wethersfield. By 1694 the problems of the distance to the schools of Wethersfield, and of the weather causing difficulties for attendance caused the Rocky Hill residents to appeal to the Wethersfield Town Meeting for relief.

This relief was granted at a Town Meeting held on Dec. 25, 1699, which provided that if the Rocky Hill families, south of the lane by Sam Dix' house, procure a teacher for themselves, they should be exempt from paying school rates in Wethersfield.

At a Town Meeting of Dec. 28, 1701 in Wethersfield, "The town grants unto Rocky Hill a proportion of the country money due to the school, viz: that being as near as the Towne can come at, considering the time they have been supplyed with a schoolmaster for ye year past."

"Michael Griswold & John Frances were chosen collectors to collect the share of the school rate which is coming, or due from the youths for their being taught, or might have been taught ye year past."

While a schoolmaster had been provided by Rocky Hill families, little is known of the schooling, other than that shown above. Classes were held for three months during the winter months, in private homes, as previously authorized. The other three months, required by the legislature were also held in the homes of the residents.

A Town Meeting of Dec. I8, I7I2 authorized a building committee, consisting of Sgt. Jonathan Smith, Benjamin Deming and John Wright to erect a wooden building of 20 feet long and I6 feet wide, with 6.5 feet between joists and provided that the building be constructed between Samuel Dixon's house and Joseph Butler's house. This was directly in front of the DeRyer Hotel, in the middle of the road. The meeting also authorized the Rocky Hill residents to provide for the hiring of a schoolmaster and to provide for the setting of the tax rate to pay for the building. Records indicated that there were 77 children of school age in 1718.

By 1876 Mrs. Fanny Warner was the teacher, with a salary of $33 for the winter term of 18 weeks, with 31 pupils registered, and average attendance of 25 pupils; and $30 per month for the summer term with 35 pupils registered and average attendance of 30 pupils. Other expenses that year included $250 for repairs and $24 for fuel and incidentals. There were 43 school aged children in the enumeration of the North School district on Jan. 1, I876.

On Dec. 5, 1726 the Congregational Church in Rocky Hill was organized, and took over the operation of the schools and also chose the first School Committee, charged with overseeing the school operations. The first committee consisted of Richard Robbins, Abraham Morris and Samuel Belden.

A committee composed of Deacon Benjamin Wright, Josiah Churchill and Lt. John Warner was appointed in 1741 to receive the Colony School Bounty, a portion of money obtained by the Colony from the sale of lands in Litchfield County.

By sometime between 1750 and I782, the North School house was becoming obsolete and a new brick schoolhouse was built. The bricks for the new North School were said to have been made in Rocky Hill, near Goff's bridge.

In 1796 the supervision of schools was in the hands of the school society. By 1857 the towns were given supervision of the schools.

In 1904 the state took over the supervision of the schools. This brick North school was used as a school until 1916. The school building still exists as the first floor of the house at 348 Old Main St., with a wooden second story added. RHL

## Fifth-grader's Paper from Decades Ago Offers Historical Insight

*Rocky Hill Life Nov 01*

**By Rod Wilscam**

The following comes from a paper about town history found in the library of the Rocky Hill Historical Society at the Academy Hall, located at 785 Old Main Street. It was written by Bessie (Warner) Webster when she was 10 years old in the fifth-grade.

The original document was written in pen and ink on colored paper, and includes five local photos and a hand-drawn local map, and bound with a ribbon. This paper is an excellent piece of work, and, being it was written nearly 100 years ago (1901 – RCH), it is an excellent document of Rocky Hill History.

*Rocky Hill*

The town received its name from a great ridge of trap-rock that extends upwards a few rods South of Goff Brook. \*m a striking feature in the landscape, as seen from the settlement at Wethersfield, it came to be called “the rockie hill.” This name in olden times was confined to the hill itself.

*Church*

The people first went to the Mother Village of Wethersfield to church. But soon they wanted to be in a parish of their own, so they were set off in 1727 and were known as the "parish of Stepney.” Previous to this it was called Lexington.

The first church was the Congregational Church, which was built in 1727 in front of the house now owned by Mrs. North.

The first Methodist meetings were held in the sail-loft in the upper part of the house which is now Mr. Ellis's store. Services were held here eight years then they bought the William Bradford store and moved it from the river bank to a place just north of the present Methodist Church.

*Schools*

The first school house was built in 1712 north of Ryers Hotel.

The first center school was built on the triangular piece of land in front of the house now owned by Mr. Joseph Batchelder,

*Land Grants*

The first grant of land was given to Samuel Boardman of thirty acres. Later grants were given Thomas Williams and James Smith.

The places that were on the Boardman Grant are the Foundry, the Station House, the Freight House, the Plan-Roy House, and Collins House.

Later a grant was given to Phillip Goff and from Phillip came the names of Goff's Bridge, Goff's Springs, Goff's Brook and Meadow Brook.

*Trade*

They had fifteen places of mercantile trade. These fifteen places were in the three towns Newington, Wethersfield and Rocky Hill.

In the parish of Stepney on the banks of the Connecticut River there were not only stores but importing and exporting houses.

The things that were imported are sugar, molasses, salt, brandy, rum, wine, silks and woolens.

The things that were exported are potatoes, onions, apples, staves, horses, cattle, hay, corn and Rye.

*Census*

The population of the town has grown a great deal since then, from about one- hundred-twenty people to twelve hundred.

*Life*

The life then was different then from that at present by means of travel, communication, manufacturing and education.

*Houses*

About the oldest house was built in 1767, that is now owned by Mr. Robert Lenox. Another old house is the house now owned by Mr. George Picard. Which was built in 1721.

In the Congregational Church which was built in 1808 there is a small room that the people then used to put their slaves into when they went to church. This is a door about two yards and one-half feet wide. They could see the minister but no one else. The pulpit then was very high. Around the Congregational Church there was a fence. This fence was torn down a few years ago.

*Epilogue*

But after being Lexington and the parish of Stepney it became known as the town of Rocky Hill, Connecticut in 1843. The Rocky Hill Historical Society is accepting any items of Rocky Hill history to include in our collection of historic items, Please call 529–1438, and we will arrange to pick up the historic items. RHL

# Miscellaneous

## The History of Medicine in Rocky Hill during the 18th and 19th Centuries

*Rocky Hill Life Jun 04*

**By Rod Wilscam**

Our present Town of Rocky Hill has a long and varied history. It began as a part of the oldest town in the Connecticut Colony.

Wethersfield, -first settled in 1634–was the first settlement in the Connecticut Colony. The village of Wethersfield allowed the first settlers in the south part of the village around 1650. The settlers traveled to the area described as ye Rockie Hill due to the high ridge at the east part of the area.

Many settlers followed the first settler and found that without a physician, they were disadvantaged.

*Doctors who came to serve*

We have no precise records of a medical doctor coming to the new settlement. Dr. Rufus W. Griswold has stated that the first known physician to come to Rocky Hill was Dr. Aaron Horsford, followed by Drs. Joseph Higgins, Daniel Fuller. A.W. Barrows, Sylvester Bulkeley, Dr. Ritter, Rufus W. Griswold, Wait R. Griswold, and Frank Louis Burr.

Dr. Aaron Horsford from Marlborough studied medicine with a Dr. Hull who was practicing in Meriden. Aaron Horsford married a daughter of Dr. Hull, and came to Rocky Hill by 1774, where he practiced until he died on April 7, 1804 in his 57th year of life. He died of "suffusion of the lungs” - his last residence in Rocky Hill was located at 666 Old Main Street, in a large house he built for himself.

There is a story, unverified, that one evening a man that was not known (presumably a traveler on the old highway between Hartford and Old Saybrook) reported that while travelling, he had come upon a building in the middle of the road.

The night was very cold and the traveler appeared to be inebriated, and further he was reporting the incident to the good doctor in order that the building could be arrested.

It should be reported that it was a custom in colonial days to build public buildings in the middle of the roads. At that time the Congregational Church was located in the middle of Old Main Street, just north of the old Town Hall and Police building (now the Police Building on Old Main Street.

Doctor Joseph Higgins practiced for a period of time in town and died during his ninth year of practicing in town on July 18, 1797.

Dr. Higgins was a member of the Hartford County Medical Society when he died of consumption. He was married to Nancy Williams, daughter of William Williams.

Dr. Daniel Fuller, was born in Columbia in 1774. He started his medical practice in Rocky Hill in 1804 when he was 30 years of age. It is said that he was a jolly man with humorous nature, always jovial, and a practitioner of mime. He received the honorary degree of MD from Yale College in 1831. While practicing in Rocky Hill he married Mabel Robbins, daughter of Simeon Robbins.

Dr. Fuller taught music and led the Congregational Church Choir from 1805 to 1816. He and Nancy had two boys and one girl. The boys went to New York City, and the girl married a minister of the Gospel surnamed Tyler. Dr. Fuller died on September 16, 1843, of erysipelas[[9]](#footnote-9) in his 69th year of his life.

Sylvester Bulkeley was born in town the son of Hosea Bulkeley, who had practiced in Cromwell and in Berlin for several years before. He returned to practice in his native Rocky Hill. He received a degree from Yale College and from Dartmouth Medical School. His second wife was Nancy Bradford, daughter of William Bradford, Sr.

Dr. Wait R. Griswold was born in 1820. He had attended one term of lectures at Yale College, then began practicing in the western part of Connecticut. He served as an Assistant Surgeon during the Civil War.

After the war, he attended Medical Lectures in New York City where he received his degree. He then came to Hartford and later to Rocky Hill where he became involved in the patent medicine business. Dr. Wait Griswold died on in 1887, aged 67 years. Dr. Rufus Wolcott Griswold was born on February 20, 1825 in Manchester. He was the son of Samuel Griswold. Dr. Griswold practiced in Rocky Hill from 1854 until his death on August 18, 1902. He graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. He married Esther Eliza Hammond, daughter of Elijah Hammond of Vernon. Rufus and Eliza had three sons.

Dr. Frank-Louis Burr, M.D., born 111 Killingworth, graduated from the Medical College of Philadelphia in 1871 and came immediately to Rocky Hill to begin his practice here in 1884. He had spent thirteen years in practice in Middletown.

Dr. Charles E. Stanley, born in Rocky Hill, had graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1876. In 1876 he became the assistant Physician at the Connecticut Insane Asylum in Middletown. Dr. Everrett S. Warner, son of James Warner of Rocky Hill, graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City in 1878. He began practicing in New York City.

Dr. Rufus W. Griswold indicates he was unable to find any records of any earlier physicians practicing in Rocky Hill prior to 1774. The residents of Rocky Hill would go to any doctors in Wethersfield, for any medical treatments they required. For childbirth's, midwives were the usual source of medical assistance. The earliest midwife practicing, that Dr. Rufus Griswold discovered, was Mercy Griswold, the second wife of Josiah Griswold, who died November 3, 1819 at the ripe old age of 82 years.

In the early part of the 19th century, prior to 1850, Mrs. Oliver, the second wife of Captain Oliver Goodrich, Jr., who was affectionately known as Miss Oliver and the widow of Captain Oliver Goodrich, Jr. practiced as a midwife. Another midwife practicing about the same time was Mrs. James Bulkeley, also known as Miss Jim. These two ladies followed Miss Granny Griswold serving as midwives.

From what I can tell, these were the only physicians known to be in Rocky Hill in the 18th and 19th centuries. RHL

## 50 Years Ago in Rocky: Hill the Plane in the Meadows

Rocky Hill Life Sep 97

**By Mike Martino Rocky Hill Memories**

It's 6 p.m. Saturday, September 6, 1947, a lone P-47 Thunderbolt airplane is flying over Rocky Hill. The pilot is experiencing very poor visibility and has to make an emergency landing in the meadows about a mile northeast of the Ferry Landing. Pilot Herbert Fisher was testing a new high speed propeller and new instruments for the Propeller Division of the Curtiss-Wright Corporation of Caldwell, N.J.

“I had 45 minute’s worth of fuel left and a very high frequency radio, but no directional or range finding sets. If I had known Brainard Field was so close I would have naturally landed there," Mr. Fisher later explained to reporters.

Mr. Fisher was able to land the plane in the rough meadow land without injury to himself or damage to the plane. After the landing he was taken to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Roessler of 17 Riverview Road. He then notified his plant of the forced landing and arrangements were made with the Rocky Hill Police Department to guard the plane until it could be removed. Mr. Fisher decided he could fly the plane out of the meadows because there was no damage to the plane and the flat terrain of the Rocky Hill land.

At 4 a.m. Sunday, September 7, Mr. Fisher's ground crew arrived with a conventional-type propeller. They got a few hour’s sleep at the home of Police Officer Paul Merrick on Main Street and then went down to the meadows to clear a makeshift runway and change the propeller on the P-47.

While cutting tall grass and weeds the ground crew discovered a hidden tree trunk which Mr. Fisher narrowly missed when he made the forced landing. On Sunday afternoon hoists were borrowed from the Connecticut Air National Guard at Brainard Field to change the propellers.

At 6: I0 p.m. Tuesday, September 9 with the conventional propeller installed and a makeshift runway constructed Mr. Fisher started up the Thunderbolt, lined himself up on the makeshift runway and took off. The two-way radio in Rocky Hill's Police Cruiser was used to alert the Rentschler Field tower in East Hartford of the take off because the radio in the plane had a short range.

As a crowd of about 100 people watched the P47 head skyward Mr. Fisher circled the meadows three times. After the third time, he dipped his wing to thank the people of Rocky Hill for their help and hospitality to him and his crew members. He then headed to Bradley Field to be refueled and have the plane engine checked. RHL

## For Some Two Centuries, Bulkeley Mill Served the Town

Rocky Hill Life – Date cut off by copier - RCH

**By Rod Wilscam**

One of the first requirements of the settlers in the early settlement of the Ancient Wethersfield community was mills to grind wheat for flour and to grind corn for food.

In England and the other European communities they had left, mills were in common use, and in the early American communities, the same needs were felt.

When John Oldham and his original group of settlers came to the Wangunk village of Pyguaug to establish a settlement, they must have felt relief to have the river so handy and the soil so well suited for growing crops. With the growing of grains, came the first need for mills to grind their wheat for baking their bread, as well as their Indian corn and other rains. Food was an immediate requirement. Most of the early settlers processed the grinding of their grains in a very crude manner.

The early English settlers in the American continent had enjoyed life in 17th century communities of Europe, where there were established mills of various kinds to grind grains into flour for foods and feed for animals, and also sawmills to process trees for buildings as well as furniture, and fulling mills to process wool into cloth to make clothing.

The early settlers in the Massachusetts colony were mostly fleeing religious persecution in their European cities, although they also included some of the riff-raff of their society, as well as some aristocratic men of adventure. Among this group of settlers with various personal reasons for fleeing the civilization in Europe, most had a background in farming, but there were pioneers with backgrounds in milling and other special trades. The average pioneer was most likely to have a background in farming. The early settlers felt the need for millers, which led them to provide special grants to encourage millers to settle, give them preferred treatment and use their services.

It was the mills that provided a necessary service, like the early post offices and the local village store which became (text cut off by copier – RCH.)

Wethersfield granted the same Rocky Hill land with the same condition to its minister, the Rev. Gershom Bulkeley. In the year 1678, the Rev. Bulkeley completed the corn mill in what is now the Dividend section of Rocky Hill. It became the first corn mill in ancient Wethersfield, some 42 years after the original settlement. Reverend Bulkeley was granted a further concession of 150 acres, bringing the total grant to 290 acres of land. He sold the 290 acres to his son Edward shortly before his death.

Edward Bulkeley continued the milling operation until he died in 1748. By his will, the concession was left to his sons Peter, Gershom and Jonathan, who, continued the milling operation, as the will proved that the mill be used by each of them "by turns, during their lives, and then go to the longest lived of the three." The remaining sons legally disputed the meaning of the terms of the will specifically the meaning of the term longest lived. Did it mean the longest lived in age or the longest lived since the date of death of Edward Bulkeley?

The court ruled the latter possibility. Gershom Jr. ended up owning the property. He willed the mill to his son Hosea. Around 1812, Hosea Bulkeley rebuilt the mill and erected a new dam for waterpower. Hosea's son, Gershom Bulkeley, came into the ownership and management, and the mill and dam stayed with the Bulkeley family through five generations, covering a span of 150 years.

After 1830, ownership passed to a Mr. Russell of Middletown, who used the mill for the manufacture of axes. Following a short period of time, the property was obtained by Israel Williams, William Butler and others. The use as a mill was ended about this time. Then, the property was obtained by Leonard R. Wells and Alfred Wilcox, who used it for the manufacture of plantation hoes, chisels and other edged tools for many years. This company stayed in business until Leonard Wells died when he was caught and whirled over a shafting in the mill.

During the ownership by Wells and Wilcox, they produced a "never-slip horseshoe," which proved to be valuable to a Boston-based firm, which bought the rights for the huge sum of about $10,000. Today, this seems a pittance.

The Bulkeley Mill served local interests for a long time, from its beginning until the latter part of the 19th century. It was an integral part of the history of Rocky Hill, from its early history as part of Wethersfield. The mill had served the Middletown and Cromwell area until a mill was built closer to Cromwell.

Other mills in Rocky Hill included the Butler, Curtis & Merriam mill east of the corner of South Main Street and Pleasant Valley Road. This mill obtained the milling business from farmers located around Middletown and Cromwell because it was closer to their farms, and thus, more convenient.

Horace Porter and John Deming operated a fulling and carding mill, making wool cloth, between 1814 and 1826. This mill was located at the end of New France Street.

Lewis Hart and his son Eldad Hart operated a button mill around 1809, south of the west end of New France Street. It was located where the road crosses the stream. Waterpower was obtained without a dam. There was also a cider mill located in the same area. RHL

## Ancient Trees are Silent Witnesses to History

*Rocky Hill Life Jul 98*

**By Rod Wilscam**

*Trees*

*I think that I shall never see*

*a poem as lovely as a tree*

*A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed*

*against the earth's sweet flowing breast;*

*A tree that looks at God all day and lifts her leafy arms to pray*

*A tree that may in summer wear a nest of robins in her hair;*

*Upon whose bosom snow has lain, who intimately lives with rain,*

*Poems are made for fools like me, but only God can make a tree.*

*—Alfred Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918)*

There are a handful of trees in Rocky Hill which are remaining witnesses to the era of the United States Declaration of Independence, the American Revolution, and more than 200 years of our history. While that history is varied with times of peace, war, public pride and public sorrows, a few trees remain as (text cut off by copier – RCH) tree, (Quercus Alba) in town, said to be more than 315 years old. It is located near the historic Duke of Cumberland Inn off the top of Matteson Road. Donald G. Watson, a resident of Old Main Street, has stated that this tree has been inspected by five independent arborists who all agreed that this tree is between 300 and 400 years old.

The circumference of this white oak tree has been established at 190 inches, with a recorded height of over 70 feet and a spread of over 70 feet. This tree has been left untouched near the inn and near the edge of fields, once cleared for agricultural purposes, and as the reported burial site for slaves prior to the Civil War.

Dr. Constantine Zarephes, the current owner of the historical Cumberland Inn, has indicated that he remembers seeing the gravestones around this old white oak tree. The site of this special tree, behind (text cut off by copier – RCH)

There are two other white oak trees that are also quite old and majestic. One is located on private property on West Street near the Raintree Condominiums; this tree is I62 inches in circumference, 60 feet tall and has a spread of 70 feet. It is estimated to be 305 years old.

The other one is located at 296 New Road, near the intersection of New Road and France Street. It measures 186 inches in circumference, 66 feet high, with a spread of 80 feet, and is estimated to also be 305 years old.

These two trees are also silent witnesses of the historic events since the early years of the settlement of Rocky Hill as the "Lower Community” of Ancient Wethersfield, and before the establishment of the United States government in 1789, when the Constitution was completely adopted. At the Veterans Home & Hospital on West Street, there is also an old swamp white oak (Quercus Bicolor) that has a circumference of more than 114 inches.

Other old trees in town include a red maple (Acer Rubrum) on Old Main Street that is 208 inches in diameter, measured at 54 inches above ground level. It has a spread of 85 feet and is 100 feet tall, and is thought to be more than 300 years old. It is said to be the largest of its kind in all of New England.

A red maple tree at Dinosaur State Park on West Street measures 112 inches in diameter. These trees bear silent witness to a long and varied history, both locally and nationally.

Historically, there is an off-shoot of the famous and historic "Constitution Oak" planted at the Town Green at the intersection of Main Street and Dividend Road. The marker for this scion of Connecticut history reads as follows "This is a Constitutional Oak Presented to Rocky Hill May 1952. This Marker Placed Here By the Rocky Hill Garden Club, 1953”

There are many other tree specimens all more than 100 years old located in town. If you have such a tree, the Rocky Hill Historical Society would be most interested in hearing from you. Please write to the Society at PO Box 185, Rocky Hill, CT 06067-0185. The society will include such trees in our list of notable trees in town. RHL

## Local Monuments Say Much about Town's History

Rocky Hill Life Jan 01

***By Rod Wilscam***

Did you ever wonder about the monuments seen in our daily travels in Rocky Hill? There are many true monuments in our town, each placed in position for a specific reason, to keep in our minds the specific remembrance of a person, event or place.

We are all aware of the monuments that exist in our cemeteries. Center Cemetery has row upon row of such monuments, as the families burying their deceased relatives wish to memorialize their lives.

Also, Rocky Hill was originally a part of Wethersfield from 1634 to 1726 when it became a separate parish, known as Stepney Parish, The Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield. Stepney was the name of a section of London, England, and because the southern section of Wethersfield had long been called Rocky Hill (on account of the long ridge of trap rock just west of the Connecticut River), the new parish of Stepney was still popularly called Rocky Hill.

The first postmaster of the United States was Benjamin Franklin, one of the early advocates of the revolution. When the Connecticut Legislature approved the Hartford-Middletown-Old Saybrook Highway, which ran through Rocky Hill, Franklin recommended that mile markers be placed along all highways to help travelers know how far they'd traveled, as well as how far they had to go. Stagecoaches were authorized to carry the mail in addition to passengers. One should keep in mind that it took the stagecoach from Hartford to Old Saybrook an entire day to make this trip. Today, with our modern highways, it is a ride of less than an hour.

Many of the markers along the Hartford-Saybrook Highway have been lost due to the ravages of time, vandalism and construction along the highway. In the north end of Rocky Hill near 74 Old Main St., there is still one of the original mile markers from the beginnings of the United States of America. This mile marker is of sandstone, five inches thick and 28 inches wide. It reads "Hartford 6-M Turnpike runs toSaybrook-35 miles. Chartered 1802".

Mile marker seven, located on the west side of HELCO light pole at the corner of Old Main and Church streets is made of red sandstone, four inches thick and eighteen inches high. The inscription reads 7M - Hartford.”

Mile markers eight and nine do not seem to be still standing. Marker number eight should be on the west side of Main Street, near the Westgate Apartments, just south of West Street. Marker nine was also on the west side of Main Street at the corner of Pleasant Valley Road, near the HELCO light pole number 179. It was inscribed: "9-Hartford. As early as 1650, there was a Ferry operating in the north section near the present landing. On both sides of the river, near the landings, are markers to commemorate the ferry. The marker on this side, placed in 1974, reads as follows:

ROCKY HILL. This area was first settled in 1650 as part of Wethersfield and became known as Rocky Hill because of the ridge that rises in the northeast. In 1722, the village became Stepney Parish of Wethersfield attained but attained separate town as Rocky Hill in 1843. Early growth was linked with the Connecticut River. The ferry to Glastonbury, still in operation, was begun about 1655.

Floods in 1700 hindered travel upstream so that Rocky Hill became the head of navigation for large vessels. Around the present ferry landing was busy shipyard and chief port of the region.

Trade was extensive with the West Indies; privateers sailed from Stepney during the Revolutionary War. Many old-time sea captains houses are still standing. Maritime activity declined when the river was dredged in the 1820's and ships could sail on to Hartford.

Agriculture has always been important in Rocky Hill, where the Connecticut River Meadows have been farmed since the 17th century. The Connecticut Valley Railroad began service in 1871, ushering in the modern era. Erected by the Town of Rocky Hill and the Rocky Hill Historical Society and the Connecticut Historical Commission.

Also at the Ferry Landing, is the memorial placed in 1973 by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, with the Connecticut Historical Commission. This marker reads:

*STATE HISTORICAL LANDMARK - Nation's oldest continuously operating ferry. Since 1655, public transportation across the Connecticut River has been provided (on this) site, connecting towns of Glastonbury and Rocky Hill, both formerly part of the town of Wethersfield. Motive power has been supplied by poles, oars, a horse treadmill and a steam engine. Privately operated for 260 years, this ferry became a state facility in 1915. It is now operated by the State Department of Transportation, Crossing time - 4 minutes.*

At Shipyard Park, east of 55 Riverview Road, there is a plaque commemorating the Rocky Hill landing and shipyard. The Rocky Hill Garden Club installed this marker in 1954. This marker reads:

HISTORIC GROUND, On this and adjoining land in 1860 Thomas Williams, Sr. established “a ship landing and ship building center upon the river", by 1872 the site consisted of 52 acres and 5 acres (were) given to the town for public landing and public park space.

At the Rocky Hill Green, between Main Street and Dividend Road, north of Pratt Street and just north of the flagpole, are the Veterans Markers for Rocky Hill. The center boulder contains the World War I marker, which reads:

IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF THE, MEN AND WOMEN OF ROCKY HILL WHO SERVED IN THE WORLD WAR 1917 – 1919[[10]](#footnote-10)

C.A. Abramson; H.W.N. Beaumont; C.F. Beaumont; W.N. Beaumont; W.N. Belden; A. Benino, W.E. Bittner. \*A. Campino, R. Chandler, D. Colto; R.H. Collins; B. Davis, M. D'Beradino; N. Giovanni; A. Dijohn; G. Epstein; R.E. Evans; B.J, Fagan; A. Gammero; H. Geannett; S. Gilman. B. F.B.S. Grant; R.S. Grant; H.S. Grant; G.C. Green; A.S. Griswold, H.L. Griswold; R.R. Hale; C.F Halligan; W.B. Halligan; D. Hayes; H.R. Hick; R.M. Hick. W.E. Hick; H.H. Hills, D. ^C.L. Holmes; E.E. Holmes; W.J. Holmes; T.W. Jordan; S. Juliano; W.J. Kelley; R.L. Klatt. E. W.A., Klatt; F.C. Matteson; M. Martino; A.B. Millerick; W.J. Millerick; R. Mooradian. F. G. Muljer, S. Nazzaro; C.H.G. Neuman; A.0. Brien; W.H. Peck; J. Puskarz, W.E. Quill. G. A. Reducker, E. Rhodes, F.M. Rhodes; W. Robbins; H.M. Scudder, H.I. Shepard; R.C. Shepard. H. C.E. Simmons; D. Spadacinni; A.W. Spencer; H.C. Spencer; A.W. Sprague; R.E. Sprague. . . I. S.S. Templeman, A.F. Warner, C.L. Wright; G.A. Yeager, and J.M. Zeiser.

At the flagpole on the Town Green, there are also plaques commemorating other wars, as follows:

"In Memory of all Rocky Hill Veterans who served their country in the Viet Nam era." and: "In Memory of all Rocky Hill Veterans who Served Their Country in World War II 1941-1945" and also: “In Memory of all Rocky Hill Veterans Who Served Their Country in the Korean Campaign 1950–1953.”

Also at the Town Green is a marker in the northwest corner that reads: "This is a Constitution Oak presented to Rocky Hill - May 1902." RHL

## A Look at Some Historic Places in Town

Rocky Hill Life Jan 01

**By Rod Wilscam**

Several historic places existed in the southern portion of Wethersfield prior to the inception of Stepney Parish, also known as the Third Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield, or as Stepney, until the name was changed by the Connecticut General Assembly.

The name of Rocky Hill referred to the ironstone hill, which is prominent in the area. Early travelers on the Connecticut River were guided to our parish and town by the existence of this hill. Some of these places existed when the southern community of Wethersfield first was started.

The legal deeds of persons buying land in the present Rocky Hill include January 2, 1649. The legally filed deed shows that on this date, Samuel Boardman obtained 20 acres of land on the southeast side of "ye rocky hill,” which was near to the present Ferry Landing.

It is believed that Samuel Boardman began living on this piece of land previous to the date of the deed, and there were others living on lands in the Rocky Hill area of Wethersfield.

We are all aware of state Route 3. This highway runs from the comer of New Britain Avenue south to the Cromwell town line. In the early days, when the highway from Hartford to Old Saybrook was built, the highway ran along Old Main Street, then south on Main Street to become a part of the highway.

There was a toll house in the south part of Rocky Hill with a pike blocking travelers and a toll was paid by the users of the toll road. Travelers began going out Elm Street to Cromwell Avenue, which was then called the Shunpike.

This was because the travelers could avoid payment of the tolls required by the state. The Shunpike was also called Main Street in the early years, but now is called Cromwell Avenue to the Cromwell town line.

The Rocky Hill-Glastonbury Ferry has been celebrated as being in continuous service since 1655, yet a review of minutes of town meetings in Wethersfield shows that approval was voted and given to lay out and build a road to the ferry in 1650. On this basis, the ferry must have been in operation prior to 1655, as I cannot believe that the voters in Wethersfield would have given approval to build a road to nowhere, unless ferry service was in fact existing in 1650 and earlier.

The Wethersfield Town Meeting in 1672 set aside five acres of land next to Samuel Boardman's land fit use by the public for shipbuilding. This piece of five acres includes the ferry landing site, as well as most of the current Ferry Park land.

The parking area is now used for public parking, holiday festivals and the annual Labor Day festival.

Another historical arena known yesterday and today is the churches. In 1722 the Connecticut General Court, the General Assembly of today, approved a petition from many of the residents of the current area to have separate parish rights.

This petition was next approved by the Wethersfield Town Meeting and forwarded to the General Court. The General Court approved this petition, subject to construction of a church building and the installation of a minister.

The new minister, Rev. Daniel Russell, was ordained and the church building was dedicated in 1827. The first church building was dedicated and Reverend Russell fulfilled the requirements of the General Court, and Stepney Parish became a separate parish in Wethersfield after the dedication of the church building.

The first church building was built in the middle of the old Hartford-Old Saybrook Turnpike, now Old Main Street, just in front of the new police headquarters building.

This second church building served the needs of Rocky Hill until after the beginning of the 19th century, when the present land was purchased, and the present church was dedicated in 1808. This church has been expanded over the years and is still serving the needs of the membership.

The Methodists in town began as a small parish in 1828 and held their meetings in a store building at the landing. They moved the store building, then known as the sail loft. Then in 1645 the church bought the old building, known as the William Bradford store building at the landing, and moved it to the present site.

The United Methodist Church on Old Main Street at Church Street, another old church group in Rocky Hill, exists to modern times. A small group of Methodist adherents began meeting together after listening to the Rev. Jesse Lee in Wethersfield and was followed soon by the Rev. George Whitefield.

They continued to meet in the members' homes and finally in the sail loft building at the landing, beginning in 1823, and by 1818, Connecticut disestablished the Congregational church as the governing body. Citizens were allowed to practice religion as their hearts desired. By 1830, this group of Methodists were holding their meetings at Roderick Grimes' store. Then the Methodists purchased the store building from Mr. Grimes and hauled the building to their new lot on Old Main Street at Church Street.

This building soon became too small, and by 1859 they had their new building dedicated, sold the store building and moved it to Parsonage Street. They continued to meet in the new church until February 14, 1895, when the church was destroyed by a fire. The new church was dedicated on January 29, 1896. The church has been remodeled and is still being used today.

There are around 60 homes that were built more than a 100 years ago that are still being used today, but the story of these homes will have to wait until a future date. RHL

## Susan Webber Recalls How She Survived the Sinking of the Titanic

*Rocky Hill Life March 98*

**By Rod Wilscam**

On April 19, 1912, the titan of the sea, the unsinkable White Star Line steamship so aptly named the Titanic, on its maiden voyage, hit an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean and sank. Its sinking has been described as one of the greatest disasters of the 20th century and is also listed as one of the worst non-wartime sea disasters in recorded history.

Miss Susan Webber, born July 2, 1874, daughter of Richard Webber, in Cornwall, England, was leaving her family home in Holsworthy, Devonshire, England, and was one of the fortunate passengers who survived. She was coming to Rocky Hill to help her brother, Charles E. Webber, born in 1883 in England, to raise his child.

The Titanic, launched on May 31, 1911, was completed in February 1912. The super ship was 882 1/2 feet long, and was 175 feet from the bottom of the keel to the tops of the four stacks (the fourth stack was a dummy, not used for the ship, other than for appearance.) The Titanic was one of the largest ships ever built prior to 1912. On its maiden voyage, the ship sailed from Southampton, England at noon on Wednesday, April I2, 1912, where thousands gathered to see the passengers and ship start out. It stopped at Cherbourg, France on the English Channel, and at Queenstown, Ireland for additional passengers before heading out in the North Atlantic for New York.

The captain was E.J. Smith, a veteran and the admiral of the White Star Lines. The list of first class passenger read like a Who's Who of the wealthy of the 19th century. There were 1,293 passengers with a crew of 860, making a total of 2,143 people on board. Some 1,635 of them were lost in this disaster of the sea.

The publicity stated that the Titanic was unsinkable, so even after the iceberg collision and the alarm sounded, the passengers, many of them in the dining room, continued with their activities of fun, dining, dancing and singing.

Susan Webber had enjoyed dinner, music and singing hymns on that fateful Sunday evening before returning to her cabin around 10 p.m. She was awakened around 11:40 p.m. “by a slight shock" and wrapped her robe around her and went on deck, but the officers told her it was nothing.

She returned to her cabin, but she could not get back to sleep. A short while later she heard a ship's officer shouting, "All hands on deck—put your life belts on." Susan Webber slipped on a traveling coat over her night dress, and shoes and stockings. The steward fastened a life-belt around her as she went out on Deck E, five decks down. Below her were six more decks.

She crawled into lifeboat I3, and "... saw in the next boat the ship's officers trying to raise or lower the boat, but it was jammed." "Cut!” ordered the captain. The ropes were severed and the boat fell six floors to the water, righted itself, and was rowed away.

“We sat there for what seemed hours, watching the boat settle. The steam sirens were blowing, men and women were swimming in the water, grabbing at the sides of the boat and being pushed away. Five of our boats were lashed together but were cut loose before the liner sank. "Above it all the loyal ship's band was still playing on the bridge. Across the waters into the black beyond and seeming to dim the suffering came the strains of Autumn'[[11]](#footnote-11).

"Deck by deck the lights went out as the water reached them. We couldn't hear the explosion when it came, but the boat was torn apart near the middle. Hundreds of people were clinging to the sides when it went down. “

We drifted for six hours. It was bitter cold. I counted five icebergs. The sea became rough and we often found ourselves between waves, mountain high. And just as dawn came we saw the steam of a vessel that turned out to be the Cunard Lines 'Carpathia.’ They slowed down, so as not to swamp us, stopped a long way from us, and we rowed up to them."

"Before we sailed the Carpathia's chaplain conducted a funeral service. Their passengers doubled up, shared their staterooms and clothes. I, with a great many others, slept on the dining room tables - and it wasn't soft wood, either. We didn't get much sleep, for the dinner hour lasted until nearly midnight, and they called us up before daylight to set the tables.

"For four days I lived in a nightgown, my hair trailing down my back and blowing around my face. Just before we reached New York on Thursday, a terrific thunderstorm broke. It was night-and pouring.

“What did I think of New York? Well, I didn't much think of what I saw-I was in sort of a daze. In all that rain all we could see was a sea of faces. Anxious faces waiting for news of their friends. It was silent-you could have heard a pin drop. In all the rain there were ambulances, doctors, nurses, the Red Cross and everything to make us comfortable- clothes and food galore.

“I stood on the dock, waiting. When asked what I wanted most, I said 'a comb'. I don't know why, when I was still hungry and didn't have a thing in America but a nightgown.

"For three days I stayed at a Junior League House near the Battery. I didn't realize the horror of everything until I reached Hartford. When the mental strain told on me-I couldn't go out in the street or face anybody.”

For days before the Carpathia arrived in New York with the survivors, her brother had been waiting at the White Star Line office for news. He was told “I don't see her name on the list."

The Cunard Line, owners of the Carpathia, was the first to issue a complete list of the survivors, and later offered to take any of the survivors back to England for free.

Susan Webber was 36 years old when she sailed from England on the ill-fated Titanic. One can only wonder how old she felt at the time of her arrival in New York.

She said, "One experience like that is enough for a lifetime." Susan Webber died in Hartford Hospital on January 29, 1952, of heart trouble, and is buried in Rocky Hill’ Center Cemetery.

The Rocky Hill Historical Society is continuing an exhibit on Miss Susan Webber and the Titanic disaster at the Academy Hall Museum for the 1998 season, opening around Memorial Day. We invite all interested to visit this exhibit. RHL

## The Underground Railroad in Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life – Date cut off by copier - CH

**By Rod Wilscam**

Black Africans were first brought to the Virginia Colony in America. As early as 1619, 20 Black Africans arrived as indentured servants. It has been estimated that these first 20 were followed by a total of 430,000. By the year 1790, there were approximately 750,000 African-Americans, or 20 percent of the entire U.S. population in the first census.

By the year 1651 forced black slavery was recognized by the local and Colonial laws. The black slaves were legally considered as chattels, or as private property, not citizens. By the year 1750, all of the English colonies in America had legally recognized slaves as chattels. While slavery was said to be an economic necessity in the southern colonies, there were slaves held in such northern colonies as Massachusetts and Connecticut, including Stepney Parish, now Rocky Hill. The first Congregational Church building in Rocky Hill constructed in 1727 and the present one built in 1808 included a slave gallery.

Many religions became concerned with the exploitation of human beings as slaves and began to protest the system. The Quakers and the Methodist Episcopal Church and other religions preached against the evils of slavery. In Rocky Hill there were many slaves. The most known were at the famous Cumberland Inn on Old Main Street.

Rocky Hill ship captains took part in the slave trade, mostly clandestinely, by returning from Africa with a boatload of slaves left off in the southern states, then returning to the Rocky Hill seaport to await their next trip.

The most serious offense of slaves was attempting to run away. The slave owners offered rewards of varying amounts for the return of runaway slaves. It is unknown how may rewards were ever collected, if any. The Hartford Daily Courant carried many advertisements seeking the return of runaway slaves and offering rewards for the return of such slaves. The abolitionist movement supported the Quakers and other religious leaders in opposing the institution of slavery. Mostly in the northern states, this movement started by antislavery meetings, with testimony of runaway slaves and others opposed to the holding of humans of slaves.

As early as in the year 1804 many abolitionists were helping runaway slaves to escape into Canada, where they obtained their freedom. In 1831 the system of help for runaway slaves in 14 northern states from Nebraska to Maine was called the Underground Railroad. The "railroad" was so called because of the system of "conductors" being the ones who transported the fugitive slave "passengers" from one "safe house" to the next such safe house. The safe houses were called "stations" along the way to freedom for the runaway slaves.

Congress helped the cause for slavery in 1793 and as late as in 1850 by passing the runaway slave laws. These laws provided for the capture and return of runaway slaves; and were generally resisted in Connecticut and most of the northern states. The southern states, however, had hired agents to seek out and return the runaway slaves who were caught.

Rocky Hill was one of the main stations along the Underground Railroad. The secret password used by the conductors was to reply to the question "who's there?" with "a friend with friends." From Rocky Hill the runaway slaves were given food and water and a place to rest and were transported, by the conductor, to the next station, Springfield, Mass.

While the laws of the land forbade helping such runaway slaves, the people were mainly opposed to slavery and offered help to the runaway slaves in every way possible. The stations were well known to the conductors, and the station operator offered food and water to the runaway slaves, as well as a place to sleep. This help, being illegal, was always done in Secret.

Secrecy was also necessary to elude the agents seeking the runaway slaves. For this reason the station owners had their secret rooms in their homes for hiding the slaves from the agents on the prowl for runaways.

Some of the stations in Rocky Hill included Captain Riley House on Riverview Road, Robbins House on Old Main Street and the Shipman Hotel.

Some reports from the descendants of the owners of the Toll House at the south end of Rocky Hill, indicate that there was an old tunnel from Ferry Landing to Old Main Street, near the 500 block area. It is doubtful that such a tunnel ever existed since the rocky hill was, for all practical purposes, solid rock very close to the surface. Recent stories are that the old Shipman Hotel had two rows of elm trees, making an arbor, from the hotel to a popular picnic grove near the landing. This may have been the tunnel.

With the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln in September 1862, effective Jan. I, 1863, there was a promise freedom to all slaves. Congress passed the 13th Amendment giving citizenship to all former slaves and with the end of the Civil War, former slaves became freemen and citizens. The Underground Railroad became an institution of the past. It was end of an era of man's inhumanity to man. RHL

## The Rocky Hill Quarry Supplied Trap Rock to the Region

*May 99 Rocky Hill Life*

**By Rod Wilscam**

The most prominent physical landmark in Rocky Hill is the Ironstone Hill on the west portion of town, which gave our town its name.

It has been said that this town should have been named Ironstone Hill, after this large prominent hill. However, its location was called the "Rockie Hill" by the early Wethersfield residents. Besides being called the Lower Community, the Rockie Hill, Stepney Parish and later Shipman's Hill, the name that prevailed was Rocky Hill.

There was a need for large amounts of trap rock in connection with the construction of the Connecticut Valley Railroad from Hartford, through Rocky Hill, and south along the Connecticut River to Saybrook Point and to Fenwick on the shores of Long Island. The railroad was incorporated on July I7, 1868 and was first organized on October 2, I869.

The trap rock quarry was originally cut out of the long ridge which was the origin of the town's name of Rocky Hill. The location of the quarry was the area to the east of Old Main Street and west of the railroad tracks. The quarry consisted of almost one-half of a mile, north to south, but was fairly narrow in width. Near the north, the land height is some 60 feet, and at several different levels in the southern part.

Trap Rock is a term more formally known as being from the German word "teppen" or steps. As a matter of fact, the steps at the front of the Rocky Hill Congregational Church were quarried locally in the area to the east of the Cora J. Belden Library, and south of the United Methodist Church. In the late 1800s, there were many quarries operating in Connecticut. The Connecticut Trap Rock Company owned some 40 acres of this land in 1899. In 1935, through a merger, the quarry became owned by the New Haven Trap Rock Company.

The local records indicate that William Manchester was the plant superintendent. Later, William Quinn, the new superintendent and six other men, were engaged in clearing the surface of the quarry to bare rock until around 1907. In the beginning, steam drills were operated by steam pipes laid from the quarry to the top. Sidney Lussen, husband of Stella Kelley, was the plant engineer. Because of the condensation from the steam operations, the method of power was changed to compressed air operating the drills.

The procedure for mining the trap rock consisted of drilling and blasting. Then after the initial preparations, the air compressors were again used to drill holes of 10 feet or more, about eight or 10 feet apart. These holes were then filled with three-fourths of a stick of dynamite and electric caps were then inserted. Then, 30 holes were wired together and blasted.

The quarry furnished rip rap for river dikes, as well as construction jobs in Connecticut and surrounding states. The ground fine stones were used in concrete, which was used in the construction of the Veterans Home and Hospital in town, and throughout the area.

There is a record that Fousta Rigoletti, the foreman, was severely hurt in an accident while repairing the rock crusher. Foreman Rigoletti had lost his right arm and three fingers of his left hand, Dr. Oran Moser was called, and then rented a horse and wagon from Ed Wright to take Mr. Rigoletti to the hospital. Superintendent William Quinn followed Dr. Moser, with the doctor's horse to return to Dr. Moser's home.

In its hay day, over 1,000 tons of trap rock was shipped from the quarry. In one 19-year period ending in 1944, over I.5 million tons of trap rock were shipped from the quarry.

Many local residents were employed at the quarry, including Joe Caruso, Tony Caruso, Tenny Covey, Tony DeMarko, Dominic DeNunzio, Sid Lussen, Joe Marino, Harry Martin, Charles Pawlich, Warren Pomeroy, Lewis Shamback, Edward Sullivan, Carmen Sylvester, Same Sylvester, Fred Tolli, Charles Vavaci, James Vinchetti, and Charlie Yeager.

Railroad spur tracks were laid into the quarry, and there were as many as 10 or 12 empty railroad cars, which were changed at 11 a.m. each day, from Monday through Saturday, To help ship trap rock by truck, a right-of-way was obtained by Freeburg (changed to Esther Road in 1922) to Riverview Road,

The seven three-man crews received $1.75 per day for loading railroad cars, the basic rate for 22.5 tons, and with additional incentive pay of six cents per ton, after 22,500 tons.

Today, the quarry is a part of Quarry Park, owned by the state of Connecticut and managed by Rocky Hill. The park has a spectacular view of the Connecticut River, Hartford and the Glastonbury hills. RHL

## A History of the Postal Service in Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life Sep 98

**By Rod Wilscam**

The world has seen some type of mail service since before 2000 B.C. There was a very primitive mail service since Colonial Connecticut was first settled. One of the earliest actions of the original U.S. Congress in 1794 was to establish a Post Office Department for the orderly and efficient delivery of mail in the new United States.

The Post Office was kept mainly under the same departmental format until the Postal Service was overhauled in 1971 into the present United States Postal Service, as a private, for-profit corporation. The mail service to Ancient Wethersfield most certainly existed in some form since the early colonial days, mostly on an informal basis. Mail service to Wethersfield was formally established by the United States in 1794, including the lower community, or the "Rockie Hill” area.

Before formal mail service was instituted by the new Congress, the local mail was mostly handled by carriers on horseback from Hartford, three times a week, both ways. As one of the main shipping ports on the Connecticut River, it is also most probable that sailing captains also carried mail to domestic ports.

Mail service to the Rocky Hill, or the Stepney Parish section of Wethersfield, was formally established on August 6, 1802, with the appointment of Isaiah Butler as the first postmaster. The mail was delivered by horse and rider, on the schedule of every three days, to and from Hartford.

After the Hartford-Saybrook Turnpike was built in 1802, stage coaches were used to carry mail, still using the same every three-day schedule. Beginning on August 24, 1871, transportation was by horseback or horse and buggy; the mail was hauled by rail on the new Connecticut Valley Railroad.

We have to thank Dr. Rufus Griswold, in Adam Stiles' “History of Ancient Wethersfield," for much of the known history of the post office service in Rocky Hill.

The postmasters appointed in the 19th century included:

Isaiah Butler (1802), Justice Robbins (1803), Russell Bull (1804), Eli Goodrich (1806), William Robbins (1821), Walt Robbins (1827), Ralph R. Robbins (1831), Archibald Robbins (I 832), Ebenezer Goodale (1836), Henry Whitmore (1841), Francis W. Shipman (1845–46), Henry Webb (1847), Henry Whitmore (1849), Henry Webb (1853), Albert G. Parker (1860), William H. Webb (1868), Henry J. Smith (1870), Henry R. Taylor (1881) and Martin J. Griswold (1882-1906).

The post office around 1843 was located in one room of the house of Henry Whitman, then in a separate building at the corner of Old Main Street and Glastonbury Avenue on the Merriam property, where the Hope family lived. There was an unfortunate fire on December 9, 1944.

The post office moved to Frank Warner's Store, then to Glastonbury Avenue in the office of the dry cleaning shop, next to the Grange building, then to Bolduc's store. In 1946, an addition to Grosso's Supermarket on Main Street at Garden Street was built for the post office by George R. Grosso, the owner.

In 1967 a new building, located at 32 Church Street with 5,235 square feet of space, was announced to be built on Church Street to handle modern electrical equipment to help process the distribution of mail, including the new zip codes. This building is still in use, but its use does appear to be stretched to the point of needing expansion. The postmasters in the 20th century include:

Walt R. Griswold (1897), William E. Pratt (1906), Edward A. Peck (1915), Frank C. Warner (1916), Arthur W. Dickinson (1921), Elizabeth B. Morgan (1924), Anna T. Harding (1934), Charles H. Yeager (1935), Joseph P. LeVasseur (1956), Donald F. McSweegan (1985), Donald Pelletier (1992) and Robert A. Jinks (1997).

The following is a list of postal rates for first class letters over the years:

in 1847, $0.05 per I/2 ounce for less than 300 miles, and $0.10 per ounce for more than 300 miles; in 1885, $0.02 per ounce for any distance; in 1917, $0.03; in 1919, $0.02; in I932, $0.03; in 1958, $0.04; in 1963, $0.05; in 1968, $0.06; in 1971, $0.08; in 1974, $0.10; in 1975, $0.13; in 1978, $0.15; in 1981, $0.18; in 1985, $0.22; in 1988, $0.25; in 1991, $0.29; and in 1995, $0.32.

The Postal Service is looking for a change in first class postage to be effective January 1, 1999.

The population of Rocky Hill was more than 880 and less than 1,200 until after World War I, and in 1920 was 1,633. By 1930 the town had grown to 2,021; in 1950, to 5,108; in 1960, to 7,404; in I970, to II, 103; in I980, to 14,559; and in the last census, in 1990, to 16,417.

From the beginning of mail delivery, until after I950, mail was delivered to rural mail boxes at the side of the roads in town. Beginning in 1944, mail began to be delivered to the door. The mail was delivered by walking routes. Now there is a system called "park and loop," where the letter carrier delivers by foot, and uses a vehicle and by foot (sic).

In 1946, with a population of around 5,000, the staff at the post office consisted of Postmaster Charles Yeager, Rural Carrier Raymond Evans, Clerk Elizabeth Hunt and Substitute Clerk Elizabeth Wright. By 1960, with a population of 5,108, the staff consisted of Postmaster Charles Yeager, an assistant postmaster and one rural delivery carrier, Raymond Evans. There is a much larger staff today. RHL

## Early library history in Rocky Hill - 1

Rocky Hill Life Dec 96

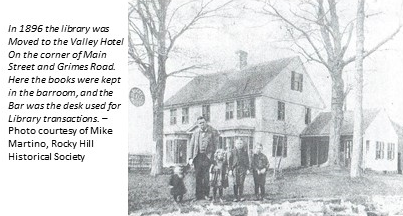
**By Rod Wilscam**

*Books are keys to wisdom's treasure;*

*Books are paths that upward lead, Books are gates to lands of pleasure;*

*Books are friends;*

*Come, let us read.*

A library means many things to many different people. In the early days of Wethersfield, the colonists did not have much time to read, and the number of books available in the colony was very few in number. Reviewing the wills and estate papers of some of the earliest residents, we find very few of these colonists had many books in their homes at the time of their deaths. At least this is true, based on the inventories made at the time of their deaths. But, even in a society where most of the day was taken up with the process of making a living, those with a few books were considered to be wealthy, indeed.

This was the status of the Wethersfield citizens from the very beginning of the settlement in 1634 until the library needs began to be met. Rocky Hill residents organized "The Social library" and adopted a constitution and 29 bylaws on Dec. 11, I794. The Rev. Dr. Calvin Chapin, pastor of the Stepney Parish in Wethersfield, was the guiding force in the establishment of the social library organization, resulting in from 11 citizens of the rather new United States of America, and the first membership drive which had enrolled some 68 subscribers. These initial subscribers aid an annual fee of $1.50 and became eligible to borrow from the initial purchase of 68 volumes. The initial subscriptions paid an annual fee of $1.50 and became eligible to borrow from the initial purchase of 68 volumes. The initial subsrip- (text cut of by copier – RCH)

ship requirements, such as applicants for membership having to be approved by a board of three members. This requirement was a hot issue in the turbulent times following the American Revolution. The fees for the Free Library were 75 cents per year. After a period of time and some discussions, both organizations voted to merge, with the merger becoming effective on March 8, 1820.

By 1829 the catalog of books totaled around 200 volumes, after some of the outdated and damaged volumes were disposed of by sale.

The last book purchased in 1837 was numbered 508. The Rev. Lebbenus Burton Rockwood, following discussion of a Bible class held in him home, organized the Social Library Association of Rocky Hill.

From collections and donations they had gathered a collection of books, and they purchased the inventory of some 200 volumes from the old library. This new library stayed in existence until 1866.

*NOTE: The second page of this article in the Wilscam folder seems to be the same as information on the first page. I’ve included it because so much of the text was cut off by the copier. – RCH)*

Text cut off by copier – RCH – Wethersfield was the guiding force in establishment of the social library organization, resulting from 11 citizens of the new United States of America, and the first membership drive which had enrolled 68 subscribers. These initial subscribers paid an annual fee of $1.50 and became eligible to borrow from the initial purchase of 68 books.

The initial subscribers paid an annual fee of $1.50 and became eligible to borrow from the initial purchase of 68 volumes. The initial subscription of $1.50 was approximately the value of between six and eight bushels of potatoes. Dr. Chapin became the first librarian. The books were housed in his home the first year, and in the home of various librarians in the following years. The number of books owned by the library society, while it was mover (sic) than 235. They never had a permanent home for the library.

In January 1795, just one month after the social library became established, a. new organization, objecting to the bylaws, established the Free Library. The Free Library founders objected to the member (Text cut off by copier – RCH).After a period of time and some discussions, both organizations voted to merge with the merger becoming effective March 8, 1820.

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In January 1860 the Rocky Hill Lyceum was organized, with the stated purpose of forming an association for the enhancement of literary culture. The Rev. G. Muir Smith was the first president. The Lyceum had committees promoting concerts, literary pursuits and debate. The Lyceum came on quite strong for a few years but began to diminish in intensity, but they had around 60 books in the Lyceum association. These volumes were turned over to the Rocky Hill Library Association.

In 1877 the Social Library Association and the Rocky Hill Lyceum were merged into the Rocky Hill Library Association, and the new group became the combining force to continue the tradition of maintaining continuous library services to Rocky Hill since 1794.

In 1886 the Rocky Hill Library Association moved into the upper floor of the Academy Hall school building (now the Historical Society Museum) on Old Main Street.

In 1896 the library was moved to the Valley Hotel on the corner of Main Street and Grimes Road. Here, the books were kept in the barroom, and the bar was the desk used for library transactions. From the Valley Hotel, the library was moved into a new library building on Church Street, built in 1899. RHL

## Later Library History in Rocky Hill - 2

*Rocky Hill Life Jan 97*

**By Rod Wilscam**

We have seen the story of the early providers of library service in Rocky Hill, beginning with the Social Library of Stepney Parish in 1794, the Free Library Association in 1795. The Social Library Association of Rocky Hill organized in 1855 and merged into the Rocky Hill Library Association Jan. 5, 1877.

The Rocky Hill Library Association provided library service to the community, from such places as the second story of the Academy Hall, beginning in 1886, and in the former barroom of the Valley Hotel in 1896.

The Wethersfield Union Library was established in 1783, however by 1850, because of a lack of support, this library was disbanded and the book collection was sold. Then, in 1866, the present Wethersfield Library was established. The Rocky Hill Library Association, and its earlier organizations, has provided longer continuous library service than Wethersfield, and possibly longer service than any other library system in Connecticut.

After 1875 there began a movement for a library building to house the library books in Rocky Hill, as well as a social center. The Rocky Hill Library

Association, after serious study by a five-man committee, appointed on Feb. 10, 1899, charged with development of building plans not to exceed $2,000 in cost, purchased land on Church Street. They also appointed a five-woman committee to raise funds to cover the costs by subscription. These committees completed the new library building at by 1979 the population had increased to more than 14,000, and the library building was again feeling the strain of providing for a growing population. An addition doubling the space to some 13,000 square feet was built.

Adelaide Williams Wright was librarian from I886 to 1918. Nellie Warner was librarian from Feb. 22, 1918 to 1959. Helen Hitchcock was the next librarian, from 1959, Peter Hanson was librarian from 1970 to 1978. Michelle Marshal was library director from 1978 to Sept. 1, 1995. The current library director is Betsy Wilkins, who began her duties on Jan. 22, 1996.

The library reached its 200th year of continuous service in Rocky Hill on Dec. 14, 1994. This event was formally celebrated by a big open house birthday bash on April 12, 1995. Rocky Hill has grown to appreciated (sic) more than 200 year of continuous (Text cut off by copier – RCH)

tees completed the new library building at 60 Church St., and it was formally dedicated on Dec. 8, 1899. Adelaide Wright was named librarian in 1886 and began a long tenure into the 20th century providing local leadership for library services.

A meeting of the Rocky Hill Library Association of Jan. 11, 1924 appointed Charles W. Boardman and Mrs. E.F. Belden[[12]](#footnote-12) as a committee charged with investigation and preparing a report upon the procedure necessary to form a public library. The Rocky Hill Library Association on Sept. 25, 1925, voted that the association offer to the Town of Rocky Hill the land, building and contents for library purposes.

On Oct. 17, 1925 a Town Meeting accepted the operation of the library Ž as a free library, beginning on Sept. 1, 1926. At a special town meet library building and the book collection and began the library was officially named the Cora J. Belden Library, in honor of the former librarian[[13]](#footnote-13), who in more than 30 years had done so much to make the library a truly accepted friend to the people of Rocky Hill.

 In 1966 a new modern library building was approved by a town meeting to be built with 6,500 square feet of space, at 33 Church St., across from the existing building. This new library facility was dedicated on April 12, 1995. Rocky Hill has grown to appreciated (sic) more than 200 years of continuous library service, from many places and organizations over this long history of service. RHL

## Ancient Place Names in Rocky Hill

Rocky Hill Life Jan 04

**By Rod Wilscam**

I often wonder where some of the place names of Rocky Hill originated and why. Some of these place names sounded like a person's name and some have a descriptive name that I do not recognize or understand in today's world.

However, recognizing that these names would be understandable to persons living in yesterday's world, I have tried to find out some reasonable explanation in our history books.

Take, for example, the place name of Dividend Road. I found the ancient meaning and after finding the origin, I had a better understanding of not only of the name, but also the original meaning. Some of the earliest documents shows the spelling is divident. I now know that this referred to the area between Hartford-Saybrook Turnpike and the Connecticut River.

Dividend Road begins off Main Street, leading to the south between the Center Cemetery and Main Street.

Dividend Road was a most descriptive road dividing Main Street, formerly called The Hartford Saybrook Turnpike and the highway, as well as the as The George Washington Highway. The earlier residents also called the area Divident.

Dividend Road, and the area included a tract of 30 acres granted in 1668 by the Connecticut General Court, the predecessor of the current General Assembly, to the Reverend Gershom Bulkeley which required that he and his heirs erect a "corne mill" and keep it operating into the future.

The Reverend Bulkeley had opened his corn mill, north of the Hog Brook[[14]](#footnote-14), by 1678, and his descendants kept the mill open there for around 190 years.

My sources did not indicate that the General

9Text cut off by copier – RCH)

the requirement that the corn mill be perpetually operated. I will need further research on this point. In any case, the Dividend Road was approved in 1677 to run south from the widow Goffe's house to the landing and thence to the Dividend area of the corn mill. Dividend Road now goes further south. Another place name was called Sodom, after the biblical city of that name.

In 1673, the records indicate a place near the lot of John Robbins was located at the north end of Fearful Swamp. One can only wonder whether Fearful Swamp was located near the house built by Squire John Robbins, and called “The Duke of Cumberland Inn” on Old Main Street is also at the north end of Fearful Swamp. This is another site name for further research.

Another place name is Cabul, or Cape Bull and also Coobill in Rocky Hill.

Cape Bull refers to some hills in west Rocky Hill north of the Cromwell town line and west of Cromwell Avenue. The name has reference to the early settlers who left their animals to graze on common lands. When the local farmers went looking for their animals, the call sounded like "Coo Bull,” but after nightfall, the calling echoed a sound like "coobull, coobull, coobull.” The name Cape Bull or Cabull became a common name for this place called Cape Bull.

Yet, another site is called Hang Dog, and this location, to the northwest from the old West Rocky Hill Methodist Church just north of the corner just north of New Britain Avenue on Cromwell Avenue to the north of the CVS Drug Store. The name derived from the farmers in the area having their small animals killed by a vicious dog. They finally caught the dog, and after executing the dog, hung him from the "Hang Dog" area. This is now adjacent to Hang Dog Lane. The name has continued to modern times.

Vexation Hill is the area that as late as 1815 was described as Vexation Hill[[15]](#footnote-15). The ancient custom was to pierce the body with a wooden stake and bury the body at a road crossing on the top of a hill. This was done and the hill is still known as Vexation Hill.

Fearful Swamp, or Fairfield Swamp, was located on the north side of Rocky Hill. It was called either Fearful or Fairfield Swamp, but fearful seems to be the most appropriate.

In the Rocky Hill meadows along the Connecticut River, and north of the Ferry Park and around the mouth of Goff's Brook, the river floods and the water rises quickly in this area. The swamp maples and swamp oak trees became flooded every year, causing tangled roots and much underbrush plants to thrive among the tree roots. Judge Adam Stiles cites that these roots are quite frightful, and that fearful is the most accurate description of this area.

Amobesset refers to the section of sandy plain land between Old Wethersfield and the Middletown border. In today's world, this is along the southwest border between Rocky Hill and Cromwell. Years ago the name was shortened to "Bssett," and today it is more properly referred to as Bishops Plain. This is where the Mattebesett follows this area in the south portion of Rocky Hill.

There are many other such odd names throughout Wethersfield and Rocky Hill, many of which are local family names used for the road or area where they lived. All of these family names are quite familiar to a student of history. However, the family names will have to wait for another day. RHL

## Rod and Mollie Wilscam Keep the Peace at Home: The 2nd Iraq War

Rocky Hill Life May 03

**By Joyce Rossignol**

There are those who are fervently supportive of America's invasion of Iraq and there are those who are fervently opposed to it. It's not easy for them to talk to each other about it without losing their cool, or their friendship.

Sometimes, those two sides are husband and wife. Take Rod and Mollie Wilscam, for example.

She is a peace activist who believes the nations of the world have got to learn how to get along without Wars.

He is a World War II veteran who believes that when a nation is endangered war is the right response.

This is not their only political difference.

He is a Republican, a member of the town committee and former member of the Finance Board. She is a Democrat. She was a Republican, too, "at first,” she said, "But then I changed.” What changed her? "Ronald Reagan. Before his second term I changed to Democrat."

In election seasons, signs from both parties coexist peacefully on the Wilscams' lawn.

That's not really a problem in a small town like Rocky Hill, Rod Wilscam said: “All the candidates from both parties are your neighbors."

This spring Mollie Wilscam set out a sign that said No War in Iraq. That sign disappeared, and she was troubled by that theft of her right to freedom of speech. So was her husband. They both believe that others, including each other, have the right to say whatever they think is true.

Rod and Mollie Wilscam are truly equal partners, and the license plates on their two cars announce that. One is RodMol, the other MolRod.

They met when they were students at Knox College in Illinois. He was a little older, going to college after the war. They were married Aug. 4, 1951. What they liked most about each other was, he said:

“She was personable." She said: "He was easy to get along with." Those qualities have served them well as their points of view emerged and diverged.

Rod Wilscam comes from a military background. His father fought in World War I, his brother Charles in World War II and he himself served in the occupation of Japan at the end of that war. In addition to that, he is an historian and a student of military tactics.

Mollie Kennedy Wilscam's brother is a retired Methodist minister who was a strong voice in the peace movement in Waterloo, Iowa, during the Vietnam War. She said, "Our family didn't have anybody in a war so my experience is different from Rod's.

Both Wilscams are active in the United Methodist Church of Rocky Hill, where she first became involved in the anti-nuclear and peace movement, and he didn't.

She gets her news of the world through University of Hartford radio and other public broadcasting stations. He gets his from Channel 3 and the daily newspapers.

They say the way they keep the peace at home is they don't discuss their differences. When they were being interviewed for this story and he was explaining why he believes this is a justified war, she turned her head, closed her eyes, and said nothing, "I don't try to change his mind," she said, and he doesn't try to change hers.

Their three daughters, Janet, Karen and Linda, tend to side with their mother, particularly Linda who lives in Rockville. Mother and daughter go together to peace demonstrations. They were part of this spring's demonstration in Boston. Mollie Wilscam said this daughter does attempt to win her father over by presenting facts to rebut his arguments. But he responds with long-standing facts of his own.

He studied military tactics in college and has seen them change with each armed conflict from the American Revolution to World War II to today. “Further down the line, the next war we get into — and I hope it's a long time off," he said, “is not going to be like it is today."

Does he believe America would not be America if those wars had not been fought? “Without the Revolution, you mean?" he asked. “The second war with England: World War II? If we hadn't had them I don't think we would have the country that we have become.”

What about this war in Iraq’ “I think it is absolutely necessary. This was a direct attack on the United States. More people died in New York City at the Twin Towers and the Pentagon than died at Pearl Harbor. It was reported recently that Saddam Hussein has called on all of the terrorists to attack the United States everywhere. Look at his background. He gassed his own people. You start putting all that together and Hitler looks like a gentleman in comparison.

Mollie Wilscam can't quite let that go by: "There has been no connection made between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein,” she says quietly. "I don't think we should be in there killing people. Half the people in Iraq are under the age of 15. They have suffered enough under Saddam Hussein and also the fact that we haven't allowed medical supplies and food to get in. They haven't had what they need to take care of their kids or anybody else."

He said: "They've had supplies but they haven't gotten to the people."

She said: "The embargo has not helped. If we had been spending money on helping the people in Iraq, they would be much more receptive to the United States. We made a lot of enemies.”

He said: “We offered to help them if they would revolt. But we were attacked and we have to fight. No question about that." She said: “I think we've got to learn to not use war as a way of solving problems. That's not going to happen overnight, but we have to keep trying. We just have to learn how to get along with people. Our war technology has gotten so inhumane. War itself is inhumane and it is immoral, period. We have to spend money and time — the $71 billion we are spending over there. If we could have spent that on peace efforts … I think we need to pursue diplomatic methods and just keep talking. If it were up to me...if somebody said I had to carry a gun and go into Iraq and shoot a child or a woman or a soldier, or anybody, I couldn't do it. I would go back to the bargaining table and keep talking and keep talking and keep talking."

He said it is in the American nature to dissent: “It’s a common thing in our country, all the way back to World War I and the Spanish-American War,” and even World War II.

She said: “There were people before that war, like Charles Lindbergh, isolationists who didn't want our country to involve itself with other countries' problems. It's not quite that simple. I don’t think there was any peace movement. I always felt we belonged in the Second World War. I don’t know how to resolve that in my mind.

He said: "In the World War II (sic), we had people who have never shot a gun before, never done anything violent.” And here's your gun and your $21 a month and here is the enemy. Your job is to kill that enemy and deprive him of his real estate.' That's the primary job of the military. No question war has a terrible price."

He said: "in the service I talked to a lot of guys who told me those were people out there and I had to shoot them.' My brother told me (that) on Guadalcanal he got to be close as 20 feet to the person that he was supposed to kill. And this is not something we do in America.”

She said, “We have to work toward getting away from war.”

He didn’t disagree with that, saying, “My first answer would be education, but both sides have to last two pages missing – RCH)

## News of the Past

*Rocky Hill Life Sep 98*

**Compiled by Mike Martino, Rocky Hill Memories**

*January 1891*

The rise of water around Rocky Hill made sport for the muskrat hunters. Last Friday, F.L. Welles shot 30 and on Saturday Mr. Welles and E.N. Warner captured 59, including three mink.

*Thursday, October 5, 1899*

James Cooke of Plainville was in town on Tuesday taking preliminary steps toward opening the stone quarry on Shipman's Hill. Once satisfactory arrangements were made a gang of Italians would be located here for the winter and begin work at once.

*Monday, March 23, 1903*

There was a boom in real estate circles after the trolley project was put into operation. Several pieces of property changed hands. Rents were very scarce. New York parties bought Mrs. James Bulkeley's place on West Street. W.F. Beebe purchased the C.E. Flint place, S. Dimock disposed of one of his houses on Pratt Street. A purchaser from New York contemplated buying the T. McNamara place. Dr. Warner's lace on High Street was under consideration by a Hartford family.

*Friday, March 1, 1929*

The house at Main and Elm Street, formerly occupied by Dennis McNamara, was torn down in preparation for the new highway. RHL

1. A double oxbow in the river slowed the water and created a deep backup in Wethersfield. In 1698 a flood washed the double oxbow away and caused the river to silt up north of Rocky Hill. This made Rocky Hill the new navigational head of the river. - RCH [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This date is wrong. The year of the flood that rerouted the river was 1698 or 1700. Wilscam consistently cites 1700 as the year, - RCH [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In other papers Wilscam cites a flood in 1700 as the cause of Rocky Hill becoming the head of navigation. - RCH [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Trial was an early spelling of the name Tryon, an early Wethersfield family [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Actually rowboats. Kedging, and ropes pulled along the shore by crewmen were also used. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The name of this eatery changes frequently. It is the Shad House in 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. An acute, sometimes recurrent disease caused by a bacterial infection. It is characterized by large, raised red patches on the skin, especially that of the face and legs, with fever and severe general illness. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This suggests that the Duke of Cumberland Rather than Esquire John Robbins built the mansion. Is this true? [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 1. An acute, sometimes recurrent disease caused by a bacterial infection. It is characterized by large, raised red patches on the skin, especially that of the face and legs, with fever and severe general illness.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A study, WWI in Rocky Hill, was done in 2016 which uncovered 20 more WWI veterans from Rocky Hill. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Songe D’Automne. Several Titanic passengers specifically remembered this song. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Cora J. Belden [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. According to sources at the Rocky Hill Historical Society, Cora J. Belden was never actually the librarian. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The ruins of the Bulkeley Mill are in Dividend Park, well south of Hog Brook. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Vexation Hill seems to be associated with witchcraft. This needs more research. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)