

SIMSBURY

Genealogical and Historical Research Library

Volume 14 Issue 2

Summer 2007

The Simsbury Free Library

The Original Trustees: Part 4

When Amos Richards Eno was assembling a ten-member board of trustees for the Simsbury Free Library in 1874, it is not surprising that he looked to the staff of Toy, Bickford & Company, now Ensign-Bickford Industries. Two of the trustees he named had managerial positions in the company: Ralph Hart Ensign and William H. Whitehead.

Ralph Hart Ensign (1834-1917)

Ralph Hart Ensign's life began in Simsbury on November 3, 1834, in his family's home which was where the Maple Tree Inn stands today. He was the youngest of his parents' six children and a member of the seventh generation in America in both his paternal and maternal lines. His father, Moses Ensign, was descended from James Ensign who sailed from England to the Massachusetts Bay Colony and joined the company under Rev. Thomas Hooker as they set off to settle the town they named Hartford. His mother, Martha Tuller Whiting, was descended from William Whiting, also one of the founders of Hartford.¹

Ralph Ensign was just two years old when Richard Bacon became a partner in the English firm that made safety fuses for blasting explosives. Mr. Bacon was the superintendent of the Phoenix Mining Company that had reopened the colonial-era Simsbury Copper Mine that had been converted into Newgate Prison. In 1831 William Bickford of Cornwall in England had patented the safety fuse and formed a company to manufacture them. In January 1837 Richard Bacon formed its American subsidiary, the Bacon, Bickford & Eales Company, with the help of a foreman of the Cornwall plant, Joseph Eales. They built a small factory in the East Weatogue section of Simsbury and began to manufacture safety fuse for the American market.²

In 1839 the English partners sent Joseph Toy, a bookkeeper and Methodist preacher, to oversee the business. He arrived in Simsbury with his wife Jane and three young children, Mary, Joseph and Susan. The one-year-old Susan would later become Ralph Ensign's wife.

As a youth, Mr. Ensign attended the Hop Meadow District School, the Connecticut Literary Institute in Suffield and the Wilbraham Academy in Massachusetts. When he was twenty-one he was hired as an assistant foreman by Samuel Austin, a Suffield cigar manufacturer. About 1858 he joined his older brothers, Isaac Whiting Ensign and Nathan Raleigh Ensign, who had a mercantile business in Georgia. Before the start of the Civil War, Ralph Ensign returned from the South and became a clerk for Tariffville merchant D. C. Hayes. Before long he was running a business himself.³

Ralph Hart Ensign and Susan Toy married on July 21, 1863, while the Civil War raged. His brother Nathan Ensign had joined the Confederate army and served as a quartermaster in Ross's

Battery A. 11th Battalion, Georgia Light Artillery.⁴ His wife's brother Joseph Toy Jr., who had served in the Connecticut House of Representatives in 1860, had raised a company of troops for the Union army, Company H of the Twelfth Connecticut Regiment.⁵ He had gone as their captain to join General Benjamin F. Butler's campaign in Louisiana. After the capture of New Orleans, Joseph Toy Jr. succumbed to typhoid in camp in June 1862.

Returning from their honeymoon in August 1863, Mr. Ensign went to work for his father-in-law, who was by then head of the fuse manufacturing company which had been renamed Toy, Bickford & Company. Fifty years later on August 1, 1913, afternoon and evening receptions with nearly a thousand people attending marked Mr. Ensign's Golden Jubilee with the company, by then called the Ensign-Bickford Company. After succeeding Joseph Toy Sr. when he died in 1887, Mr. Ensign had been named president of the company in 1907 when it was incorporated. His oldest son, Joseph Ralph Ensign, was vice-president. Describing the company in 1913, a *Hartford Courant* reporter wrote,

From one of the smallest industries this company has grown to be the principal industry in Simsbury. Its plant in Simsbury alone covers more than twenty acres, the buildings, owing to the nature of the business, being built of brownstone, one story in height, and scattered, so as to minimize the danger of explosions. Miles of fuse are manufactured every day, 200 miles being shipped [by rail] in a carload.

Following the English style, the company maintains its own model village for its employees, more than 100 homes in the town being owned by the company. These are thoroughly modern in every respect, and the employees fortunate enough to live in them count themselves lucky, indeed.⁶

When Amos Richards Eno appointed Mr. Ensign to the board of trustees of the Simsbury Free Library in 1874, he was forty years old and merely a partner in Toy, Bickford & Company.⁷ That year he was given the task of having a hundred posters printed to advertise the library, which was on the second floor of the Hop Meadow District School. He served briefly as secretary of the board and then as treasurer in 1874 and '75.

From the beginning, he and Horace Belden were appointed an investment committee "to look up proper security in which to invest the fund."⁸ The 1874 deed of trust, by which Amos R. Eno established an endowment fund for the Free Library with an initial sum of \$3,000, required the trustees to spend half of the money immediately on books and to invest the other half "either in bonds and mortgages secured in the County of Hartford, State of Connecticut, worth double the sum loaned, exclusive of buildings or improvements thereon,...and to keep the same so invested always, and to apply the interest thereon yearly in the purchase of books for the said Library."⁹ Simsbury had no bank before 1917 and wealthy individuals commonly made loans secured by property in the town, a practice soon adopted by the library.

Simsbury land records show that in 1879 Wilson Gillette turned to the library for a loan of \$1,500 secured by his farm of more than fifty-six acres known as the "Stebbins farm." The Gillettes



Simsbury Free Library Board of Trustees

James P. Flynn
Chairman

Tara D. Willerup
Vice-Chairman

Paul F. McAlenney
Secretary

Martin Geitz
Treasurer

Richard Schoenhardt

Mary Jane Springman

Arthur House

Thomas J. Donohue

Melissa McKeen

Richard D. Wagner Jr.

paid interest on the promissory note once a year until it was redeemed in 1896 by his widow Laura E. Gillette. Fanny Winslow Smith and her husband William borrowed \$500 from the library in 1896, securing the loan with a parcel of about twenty acres that had been given to her by her mother. Frank C. Stoddard also borrowed from the library in its early days.¹⁰

Mr. Ensign's favorite library job must have been the book committee because he served on it from the time the library was organized until 1909, when he ceased to take an active role in the library's governance. This committee selected the books that were bought for the library. Mr. Ensign also was on the 1874 committee to draft bylaws and the 1875 committee to solicit funds for erecting a library building. That project did not succeed, of course, until Amos R. Eno pledged land and funds to erect a library building.

Mr. Ensign was elected the fifth president of the board of trustees in 1889, thus he was president when the library was transferred to its own building on Main Street, now Hopmeadow Street.¹¹ He served on the committee that arranged for the dedication exercises on January 28, 1890, and on the committee that prepared the text of the commemorative dedication book. The engraving of the library that appears in the sidebar on page two is from the dedication book and it was taken from a drawing by Melvin H. Hapgood, the Hartford architect who designed the building.

As president of the board and chairman of the building committee, Mr. Ensign presided during the dedication ceremonies. After a prayer by trustee Rev. Charles P. Croft, William Phelps Eno, youngest child of Amos R. Eno, read a letter from his father in which Amos Eno reflected on his childhood in Simsbury and the practical and formal education he had received there, especially at the academy run by Rev. Allen McLean. The letter made public Mr. Eno's gifts of land valued at \$2,000 and \$10,000 for the erection of the building. He also increased his gift to the book fund by \$5,000, stating that \$500 should immediately be used for the purchase of books and the rest put at interest to generate income for the purchase of books.¹²

In his address to the townspeople assembled in the library, trustee John B. McLean mentioned that, in addition to the endowment and building, Mr. Eno had given "elegant and valuable paintings to furnish and adorn its walls..."¹³ The *Hartford Courant* reported that these amounted to fourteen oil paintings and engravings.

The reporter also pointed out that "the books and the building were given by Mr. Eno, but the running expenses are to be borne by the town."¹⁴ The *Courant* reported several days after the dedication that "an annual charge of 50 cents is to be made for the use of the library, but any one who is too poor to subscribe will be allowed the free use of the library."¹⁵ This fee was anticipated by Mr. Eno when he wrote in his deed of trust, "This trust is made for the inhabitants of the Town of Simsbury for a Free Library, but a majority of the Trustees shall have the right to make such charges to the persons who may use the same as may be necessary to pay the insurance, taxes, and other necessary expenses for conducting the said Library, but they shall not charge for discharging their duties."¹⁶ There had, in fact, been an annual fifty-cent membership fee since the bylaws were adopted in September 1874.¹⁷ The town began contributing to the running expenses of the library in 1892, coincidentally the first year that library trustee William H. Whitehead was elected to the board of selectmen, as first selectman.¹⁸ The amount varied from \$113 to \$300 during the early years and was only paid when the library had a deficiency in running expenses.

Ralph Hart Ensign remained president of the board of trustees long enough to see his son Joseph Ralph Ensign elected to the board in 1908 to replace Aaron Lewis Eno, who had died. The next

year he relinquished his place on the book committee to his son and the presidency to Alexander T. Pattison. He continued to be a member of the board until his death.

Mr. Ensign is mainly remembered for his leadership of the Ensign-Bickford Company and his philanthropy, especially toward the Simsbury Methodist-Episcopal Church, now the Simsbury United Methodist Church. A wooden church building had been erected in 1840 on land given by Mr. Ensign's father. In 1908-09 the wooden church building was taken down and replaced by the red sandstone building that now stands on the corner of Plank Hill Road and Hopmeadow Street. It was designed in the late English Gothic style by Hartford architect George Keller.¹⁹ The building committee was headed by Mr. Ensign, who was the principal donor.²⁰ He also contributed to the building of the high school (now the town hall building) and Central School.

Ralph Hart Ensign died on March 22, 1917. On April 29, 1919, Mrs. James K. Crofut (Charlotte Phelps Crofut) and Mr. Joseph R. Whitehead were elected by the trustees to fill the seats vacated by the deaths of Burton Grove Case and Mr. Ensign. Most likely Mr. Whitehead, son of the late William H. Whitehead and a superintendent at Ensign-Bickford & Company, was the one elected to replace Ralph Hart Ensign.

William H. Whitehead (1837-1905)

By serendipitous chance, Joseph Eales from the safety fuse plant in Cornwall met Samuel Whitehead of Derby in 1837 on the boat to America. Mr. Whitehead abandoned his plans to be a potter in Philadelphia and agreed to be the foreman of the Bacon, Bickford & Eales Company fuse factory about to be built in Simsbury.²¹ Mr. Whitehead brought with him his wife Mary, their small daughter (who died within a few years) and their infant son William, who had been born on January 30. The Whitehead family was the first to welcome the Toy family when they arrived two years later and the Toy children grew up calling Mary "Auntie Whitehead."

The Federal census enumerated in September 1850 shows that the thirteen-year-old William was living in the Bacon household, probably as an apprentice. His father had died earlier in the year. The following year the partnership of Bacon, Bickford & Eales was dissolved, with Joseph Eales emigrating to join a German firm and Joseph Toy forming Toy, Bickford & Company. The Whiteheads, now including William's seven-year-old brother Samuel, severed connections with Richard Bacon and joined Joseph Toy, who built his factory on Hop Brook in Simsbury center. Early records show that Mary, William and Samuel Whitehead all worked for Toy, Bickford & Company, along with the Toy children.²²

William Whitehead's formal education was in the Simsbury district schools and he spent a term at William L. Humison's select school in West Weatogue.²³ After that William completed a four-year apprenticeship as a machinist with Woodruff & Beach in Hartford and worked for a time for W. & E. T. Fitch in New Haven. He returned to Simsbury and Joseph Toy's fuse factory for good on July 1, 1860.²⁴

In 1868 Mr. Whitehead was sent to California to assist with setting up a factory to manufacture safety fuse for the company's branch that Joseph Toy's son-in-law Lemuel Stoughton Ellsworth was establishing in the vicinity of Oakland. By the end of his long career, William H. Whitehead was the general superintendent of the Ensign, Bickford & Company's fuse works.²⁵

William Whitehead worked through the years in enterprises that modernized the infrastructure

in Simsbury. In the *Manual of American Water Works* Mr. Whitehead was named as the superintendent of the Simsbury Water Company, which was formed in 1868 under Horace Belden's leadership and had by 1888 two miles of mains serving fifty taps and ten hydrants fed by gravity from stream water collected in a reservoir.²⁶ This was the second attempt at piping water in town and it used iron pipes rather than the earlier wooden ones. In 1903 Lemuel Stoughten Ellsworth set up the Village Water Company and Mr. Whitehead served as one of its six directors.²⁷ When the Simsbury Electric Company was incorporated in 1899 Mr. Ellsworth was president of the board and Mr. Whitehead was vice-president. At first this company generated its own power with a water wheel supplemented by a gasoline engine, but later it distributed power supplied by the Ensign-Bickford Company, which drew it from the Hartford Electric Light Company.²⁸

Mr. Whitehead also became active in politics. As a Republican he was elected Simsbury's representative to the 1889 General Assembly, the session during which a resolution was passed that allowed the Town of Simsbury to retire bonds issued in 1870 "in aid of the Connecticut Western railroad" by issuing new bonds at four percent.²⁹ He was elected to the board of selectmen as the first selectman in 1892, a post that he held until his death. During his fourteen-year tenure he became noted for building iron bridges (including the present "flower bridge") and for improving the roads. Historian John E. Ellsworth wrote, "He also constructed the first genuine 'McAdam' road [in Simsbury] on the highway running to Tariffville just north of the Terry's Plain bridge about 1905."³⁰

William Whitehead was born and raised a Methodist. He served as a trustee of the Simsbury church and was best remembered for being superintendent of the Sunday school for forty years.³¹ Unfortunately he did not live to see the stone church erected.

William Whitehead was thirty-seven when Amos R. Eno named him to the Simsbury Free Library board. Like Mr. Ensign, he served on the bylaws committee, both building committees and the committee that managed the rental of the building's top floor. He did a stint on the book committee from 1885 to '87. He held the office of assistant librarian from 1875 to '78, secretary of the board from 1877 to '84 and vice-president from 1890 through 1904. After Mr. Whitehead died on May 31, 1905, he was replaced on the board by Alexander T. Pattison.

by Mary Jane Springman

Notes

1. William DeLoss Love, *The Colonial History of Hartford Gathered from Original Sources* (Hartford: by the author, 1914), 32. Ralph H. Ensign's grandfather Isaac was the first Ensign to settle in Simsbury. He was the subject of the article "A Hartford Blacksmith Moves to Simsbury: Isaac Ensign (1747-1816), Grandfather of Ralph Hart Ensign" in the Spring/Summer 2002 issue of this newsletter. His father, Moses Ensign, was a farmer and tinsmith.

2. John E. Ellsworth, *The Ensign-Bickford Company and the Safety Fuse Industry in America: A Record of One Hundred Years of Achievement, 1836-1936* (Simsbury: The Ensign-Bickford Company, 1936), 8-27. Tradition holds that the partners manufactured their fuses in the former Newgate Prison and copper mine in present-day East Granby for a short time while constructing a factory building in East Weatogue to replace one there that was destroyed by fire.

3. *Commemorative Biographical Record of Hartford County* (Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1901), 868-69.

4. Joyce A. Cahill, comp., *Simsbury Cemetery Gravestone Inscriptions, Simsbury, Connecticut, 1688-2000* (Simsbury: Simsbury Free Library, 2001), 150.

5. *Ibid.*, 207.

6. "Fifty Years with Simsbury Company," *Hartford Courant*, August 2, 1913, 11.

7. Two years later Mr. Ensign was elected to represent Simsbury in the 1876 session of the General Assembly. He was a lifelong Democrat, yet he openly supported Republican George P. McLean of Simsbury in 1900 when he ran for governor, as did other trustees. See the *Hartford Courant* September 10, 1900, 5; October 27, 1900, 10; March 24, 1917, 5.

8. *Original Minute Book of the Trustees' Meetings of the Simsbury Free Library* (photocopy), 5, 15.

Jean Nudd to Talk on Genealogy in the Spring

Jean Nudd, Archivist for the National Archives and Records Administration in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, was unable because of illness to come to the library in June. We all apologize for the inconvenience caused by the cancellation. Ms. Nudd will present the previously scheduled talks **Using Pre-1850 Census to Find Family Relationships** and **Using Canadian Border Crossing Records** next spring. The date and time will be announced in this newsletter and on our Web site at www.sghrl.org.

For more information please call 860.658.5382; write to P.O. Box 484, Simsbury, CT 06070; or e-mail to: info@simsburygenealogy.org

9. "Amos R. Eno's Deed of Trust," *Report of the Proceedings of the Simsbury Free Library, January 28, 1890* (Hartford, Conn.: Press of The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1893), 19-20. The trustees also were given the option of investing in "the bonds of the State of Connecticut, Massachusetts, or New York, or in bonds of the City of Boston, New York, Hartford, or New Haven or in the Town of Simsbury...." In today's dollars the \$3,000 initial endowment would be worth almost \$49,000, according to the Inflation Calculator at www.westegg.com/inflation.

10. Simsbury Land Records, (Gillette) 50:176, 55:46; (Smith) 53:396-97, 55:306, 54:269; (Stoddard) 61:139, 66:379, 417.

11. He followed presidents Amos F. Eno (1874), Horace Belden (1874-1876), Alonzo Grove Case (1876-1884) and John B. McLean (1885-1888).

12. In 1894 Amos R. Eno made a third and final gift to the library of \$10,800 for a total of \$30,000. See the *Hartford Courant*, June 21, 1894, 1.

13. *Report of the Proceedings*, 10-11. Rev. McLean predicted that "Our great-great-grandchildren, about the year two thousand, will have more than thirty thousand (30,000) volumes to select from."

14. "The Simsbury Library" in the *Hartford Courant*, January 30, 1890, 1.

15. *Hartford Courant*, January 31, 1890, 6.

16. "Amos R. Eno Deed of Trust," 21.

17. *Original Minute Book*, 12.

18. *Statement of the Town of Simsbury for the Year Ending September 30, 1892....* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1892)

19. *Hartford Courant*, March 14, 1908, 15.

20. *Comprehensive Church Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church In Simsbury*, 2 vols. (New York: Hunt & Eaton, n.d.), 1:n.p.

21. Ellsworth, 27.

22. *Ibid.*, 48.

23. *Commemorative Biographical Record*, 880.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Hartford Courant*, June 1, 1905, 14.

26. Moses Nelson Baker, *The Manual of American Water Works* (New York: Engineering News, 1892), 57. The 1880 census reported that Simsbury's population was 1,830. By 1890 it had grown by forty-four people.

27. John E. Ellsworth, *Simsbury: Being a Brief Historical Sketch of Ancient and Modern Simsbury, 1642-1935* (Simsbury: the Simsbury Committee for the Tercentenary, 1935), 168-69.

28. *Ibid.*, 169. *Hartford Courant*, February 7, 1915, 2.

29. *Hartford Courant*, January 9, 1889, 3; February 28, 1889, 3.

30. Ellsworth, *Simsbury....*, 178.

31. *Hartford Courant*, June 24, 1908, 12. *Comprehensive Church Record....* 1:n.p.

Correction: On page five of the Spring 2007 newsletter the date of the completion of the library's addition is given as 1824. It should be 1924. The editor regrets the mistake.

Some Recent Acquisitions

The following texts were donated by our members. We at the library thank them for their generosity.

Donated by Mavis Davis:

A is for Avon by Jan Brennan

Avon, Connecticut: A Brief Informal History by Alice H. Thompson

Avon Sesquicentennial, 1830-1980: A Short Pictorial History of Avon Featuring Main Street

The Connecticut Quarterly, January, February March, 1898, vol. 4, no. 1

Folk Tales of Connecticut edited by Glenn E. White

From Wintonbury to Bloomfield compiled by the Wintonbury Historical Society

Gems of American Architecture by William Royal Greer

Genealogy of the Hill, Dean, Pickney, Austin, Barker, Anderson, Rhoades and Finch Families by Franklin Couch

On Common Ground, Farmington Savings Bank: A Commemorative History of Its First 150 Years

The Paul Crunden Journal by the Hartland Historical Society

A Short Summary of Colebrook's History by the Colebrook Historical Society

Sketches of the People and Places of New Hartford in the Past and Present by Sarah Lucia Jones

The Town of New Hartford, Litchfield Co., Conn., in 1775 and 1852 by Eileen Creevey Hall

Donated by Mary Lou Patrina:

The City of New York by Thomas E.V. Smith

History Preserved: A Guide to New York City Landmarks and Historic District by Harmon H. Goldstone and Martha Dalrymple

The Legend of Barkhamstead Lighthouse by Lewis Sprague Mills

New York's Gracie Mansion: A History of the Mayor's House by Mary Black

Seal and Flag of the City of New York by John B. Pine

The 1776 Guide by Ellen B. Sweet

Donated by Celia Ann Roberts:

A Manual for Field Workers by Edward D. Ives

Oral History: An Introduction for Students by James Hoopes

Oral History for the Local Historical Society by Willa K. Baum

Oral History from Tape to Tale by Cullom Davis, Kathryn Back and Kay MacLean

Transcribing Without Tears by Mary Jo Deering and Barbara Pomeroy

Window on America: The Growth of a Nation as Seen by New York's First Bank, 1784-1959 by Edward Streeter

DAR Cookbook To Go On Sale

The Abigail Phelps Chapter National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution has a new cookbook hot off the press. In keeping with the DAR objectives of historic preservation and education, the proceeds from this DAR project will benefit our library, the Simsbury Public Library and the Simsbury Historical Society. The chapter's previous cookbook was published in 1907.

The 2007 cookbook includes interesting items about the chapter and its charter members, history of Simsbury around 1907 and little-known facts pertaining to our culture, especially regarding food and cooking. The result: a history-cookbook. Many recipes are entered "In Memory of" or "In Honor of" important figures in Revolutionary War history, chapter members' family history or DAR history. Many include a brief historical fact about the person or the time. The cookbook is not limited to heirloom recipes; many reflect the tastes of the 21st century. The cookbook truly lives up to its title:

Then and Now: 1907-2007, The Daughters Cook

Beginning August 29 cookbooks will be available at SGHRL for \$20.00

SGHRL Open-Close Changes

The library will be **open** Wednesdays August 22 & 29 in addition to regular hours.

The library will be **closed** Saturdays August 25 and September 1.

FIRST CLASS

SIMSBURY FREE LIBRARY

749 Hopmeadow Street

P.O. Box 484

Simsbury, CT 06070

860 658-5382

E-mail: info@simsburygenealogy.org

Web site: www.sghrl.org

Thurs.-Sat. 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. (See below.)

Allison B. King, Library Director

Mary Jane Springman, Newsletter Editor

