

SIMSBURY

Genealogical and Historical Research Library

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The Connecticut Historical Society and Its Collections Part One: An Overview

On May 25, 2003, the Connecticut Historical Society celebrated its 178th birthday. CHS is the seventh oldest historical society in the nation and it is believed to be the oldest in Connecticut. It is an institution that can take pride not only in its own history, but also in the role it has played in chronicling the history of Connecticut and its people.

In 1825, thirty-one citizens—roughly half from Hartford and the rest from towns throughout the state—formed the Connecticut Historical Society to preserve the history of a new state in a fledgling nation, as well as the history of its colonial predecessor. The Act of Incorporation passed by the Connecticut General Assembly made the Society responsible for collecting “whatever may relate to the civil, ecclesiastical and natural history of the United States, and especially the State of Connecticut.” However, active collecting didn’t really begin until fourteen years after its founding, when the Society acquired a home in the rooms above the Humphrey and Seyms store at 124 Main Street in Hartford.

Four years later CHS moved across the street into Daniel Wadsworth’s new structure. The Society remained in the Wadsworth Atheneum for almost 107 years, growing into a prestigious organization with significant collections.

By the late 1920s, CHS was facing serious space problems at the Atheneum. The Society purchased a plot of land on Buckingham Street but, because of poor economic conditions, it was unable to finalize plans for a new building on the site. The space problem wouldn’t go away, though. After World War II the Society pursued a new location and, in 1950, acquired its present home, the Curtis Veeder house at 1 Elizabeth Street, a site which was thought to have unlimited room for expansion. For the next 20 years, additions were made to the building to accommodate CHS’s growing collections and staff.

By the late 1980s, CHS was again facing space problems, so throughout the next decade the board and staff looked at several redesigns of the current location. Because of flood plains, the site proved to be much more limited than initially thought, and options for further expansion were deemed minimal. For this reason, the Connecticut Historical Society must again consider relocating at a time when economic conditions may hinder the progress of such a plan.

So why is the Society plagued with space problems? The answer is simple—Connecticut’s history is richly documented and many of its citizens have served as careful guardians of its

historical records and artifacts. For 164 of its 178-year existence, the Connecticut Historical Society has acquired published materials, manuscripts and objects that chronicle the society, politics, religion, domesticity, industry and creative genius of the state and its people. In its early years, the Society and its collections were homogenous, but time and growth resulted in departmentalization, and today the collections are divided into two categories—museum and library.

Museum Collections

The museum collections contain objects created or used by Connecticut citizens, businesses, agencies and organizations. They are objects that range in size from very small to very large, and include clothing and needlework; portraits, paintings and photographs; furniture; memorabilia; military items; machinery; toys; and even kitchen appliances. All of them have some connection to Connecticut people, and the stories behind each item, when known, are fascinating.

The museum collections are separated by major category into furniture, paintings, graphics and textiles. Items in smaller collections not falling into one of these divisions are grouped in a general collection. The members of the museum staff are very knowledgeable and willing to share their expertise. Questions can be directed to the appropriate staff member by letter, phone, or email and anyone is welcome to make an appointment to view objects in the collection.

Library Collections

The library collections of the Connecticut Historical Society comprise a broad range of printed, manuscript and microform materials. Printed materials are subdivided into the general collection and special collections. The special collections include the Robbins Collection (rare books), World and Connecticut Imprints, the Bates and Hewins Collections (children's books); newspapers, maps, broadsides and ephemera. The general collection includes just about everything else relating to the history of Connecticut and her people—bibliographies; biographies; periodicals; sermons; histories of churches, schools, companies, and organizations; trade catalogs; state, county and local histories; and genealogies. In addition, there are publications relating to the general history of the remaining New England states, New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

With the exception of newspaper microfilms, the library's microform collection contains materials that are used principally for genealogical research. Foremost among these are microfilms of the United States Federal Census for Connecticut from 1800 through 1930 (the 1790 census is available in book form); indexing for the censuses, excepting the 1930, is available in the library in several formats—book, soundex, or online. Indexes only for the 1790 through 1850 censuses are also available for the New England States, New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

The CHS Library has microfilm copies of the Barbour Index (Connecticut Vital Records to 1850), the Charles R. Hale Headstone Inscriptions and Newspaper Death Notices Index (through approximately 1934), and Connecticut city directories (incomplete as yet). It has microfiche copies of the Boston Transcript Genealogical Column and the Holbrook Collection of Massachusetts Vital Records (an ongoing acquisition).

The manuscript collections in the Connecticut Historical Society Library are divided into two major categories—genealogical and historical. Genealogical manuscripts are further divided into town and family manuscripts. The town manuscripts collection includes abstracts of vital, church, cemetery and probate records in degrees of completeness dictated by the compiler's

purpose or level of interest. The family manuscripts are grouped by surname and contain reports compiled by professional genealogists, copies of bible records, ancestral records, and data ranging from notes on scraps of paper to complete genealogies. Like the town manuscripts, the information contained in the family manuscripts is limited by the compiler's purpose, but the compiler's purpose might bring to light material about an otherwise undocumented family.

The historical manuscript collection is the prize collection of the Connecticut Historical Society Library. Numbering upwards of 3,000,000 manuscripts, this collection is the most significant in the Society and constitutes well over three hundred years of hand-written history. The bulk of the collection is from the 18th and 19th centuries; there is a fair representation of items from the 17th century; and one of the library's current collecting priorities is the acquisition of materials from the 20th century.

Again, there is a very broad range of materials in this collection. Similar to the genealogical manuscript collection, a very small portion of the historical manuscript collection reflects research that is limited by the interest of a compiler or scholar. For the most part, however, the historical manuscript collection is the raw data upon which research is based, and while each item in the collection is a particular type of document, most of the documents are sources for many levels of interpretation.

Researchers looking for military information will find records from the French and Indian War, American Revolution, War of 1812, and Civil War. There is as yet little from the Spanish-American War and from the wars of the 20th century, although there are some World War I and World War II letters, and a collection of oral histories from Vietnam veterans.

Day-to-day life is chronicled in letters, diaries and journals that reflect the lives of ordinary as well as upper-class citizens. Through these manuscripts the researcher can step through a "doorway" into a different time and learn about the social mores, political philosophies and religious attitudes of other generations.

The historical manuscript collection includes a significant number of account books, produced by individuals or corporations, through which a researcher can gain an understanding of 18th, 19th, and early 20th century economics. In the accounts of simple farmers or laborers the system known as bartering is made very clear to any 21st century scholar unfamiliar with the concept.

Keeping scrapbooks was a popular pastime in the late 19th and early 20th century, and the CHS library has a number of them. Invariably thematic, these scrapbooks provide contemporary glimpses of local society, international travel, community services or just personal interest.

Although in most cases they are not large collections, the CHS library does own some manuscripts of town records dating from the 17th through the 20th centuries. These include a variety of tax records, some land and court records, and voting records. Most governmental records fall under the purview of the Connecticut State Library, but over the years, some of those records have found their way into the CHS collections. In the case of land and court records, those in the CHS collections are the copies given to the principals in the legal action.

Church records also can be found in the Connecticut Historical Society's manuscript collections. Like government records, most of Connecticut's early church records will be found in

the collections of the Connecticut State Library, but some records, Canterbury and Suffield, for example, are housed at the Society.

The library collections at the Connecticut Historical Society are stored in a combination of open and closed stacks. Reading room materials (reference, local history and genealogy) can be used by library patrons at will. All other materials must be retrieved from closed stacks, and patrons can find materials through a combination of library catalogs. The genealogical manuscript collection has its own card catalog; historical manuscripts and printed materials are in the main catalog. The historical manuscript catalog is cross-referenced by author, title, and subject; the catalog of printed materials is divided into two sections: author-title and subject.

In 1985, the Connecticut Historical Society Library joined OCLC, a national online library catalog. In 2003, the Library launched its own computerized catalog. In time, all of the CHS library collections will be accessible through the online catalog, but until then, patrons need to understand that materials cataloged before 1985 will not be found in the online catalog, and materials cataloged as of January 2003 will not be found in the card catalog. Confusing as this may be, patrons can at least access everything cataloged after 1985 (approximately 25% of the library's holdings) through the Connecticut Historical Society's web site.

The Connecticut Historical Society is located at 1 Elizabeth Street in Hartford. The library is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, except, of course, for major holidays. The Society is a membership organization, so there is a daily admission fee for non-members. The library does not participate in interlibrary loan, but does maintain a lending library of duplicate local histories and genealogies for CHS members and members of the Connecticut Society of Mayflower Descendants.

The Connecticut Historical Society web site (www.chs.org) provides basic information about the organization as well as updates on exhibitions and programs and access to the library's online catalog.

By Judith Ellen Johnson

Judith Ellen Johnson is the genealogist at the Connecticut Historical Society. This article is based on the presentation she made last spring at SGHRL. She is planning another article or two that will discuss how the CHS collections can be used to help people doing family history research. She will tell SGHRL readers about the genealogists who contributed to the genealogical manuscript collection and point out the benefits and drawbacks of the collection. She will also go into detail about CHS's historical manuscripts, which most people searching for family history overlook.

Richard D. Wagner to be SGHRL Membership Chairman

After ten years as SGHRL Membership Chairman, Mary Jane Springman is leaving that post in order to devote more time to the library's publications.

Richard Wagner, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Simsbury Free Library, has agreed to assume responsibility for Membership. He will be assisted by Cathy Salter. The transition will take place during August.

Summertime 1875 for the Eno Family

SGHRL recently received the much appreciated gift of eight handwritten personal letters to add to its archives' growing Eno Collection. Marian D. Griswold of Rochester, New York donated these letters written to Orpha Amanda Eno, a native of Simsbury who also lived in Bloomfield, Connecticut and Morristown, New Jersey. Three letters came from Amos R. Eno, her first cousin once removed, in 1846, 1847 and 1869. Two came from his wife, Lucy Jane Eno, in 1873 and 1875; two from their daughter Mary Eno Pinchot, mother of Gifford Pinchot, about 1877; and one from their daughter Antoinette Eno Wood in 1884.

The following is an excerpt from Lucy Jane Eno's letter dated July 13th 1875. When she wrote it she was in the Eno summer residence on Hopmeadow Street, the house that had been her childhood home and is now the Simsbury 1820 House. She acknowledged a letter that Amanda (as she was called) had sent her from Sorrento, Italy, and then said,

Your letter reached New York during a short absence, and I fully intended to have answered it before, but after being at home a short time, my husband, with Mr. Pinchot decided to go to the West. I had previously refused an invitation to accompany them, but when the inducement of a visit to my only brother in South West Missouri was held out, it was quickly accepted, although the season was too late to enable us to travel leisurely, it being about the 10th of June before our return & consequently time to migrate to this our quiet country home.

Well, I know you wish to know of us all,....first my husband is quite well, and enjoying the country very much. Mary and family are quite well, are keeping house in Milford occupying Mr. Pinchot's mothers house, will remain there until first Sept, when they are all to come here for a month - Annie [her daughter Anna] is paying my sister a visit in Saybrook - Henry and family are here, without them we should be very lonely, as none other of our children are with us excepting Willie - Johnnie vibrates between Saratoga (where is his fiancee) and New York not finding much spare time for Simsbury - Nettie [Antoinette] and Mr. Wood as usual are residing in Bridgeport for the summer -

Simsbury is lovely, never more so - I do not know that I ever appreciated more fully the quiet, and feeling of restfulness, one never fails to find here - We do not see very much of the people, but as there is a superabundance in New York, the average is about Eight -

A few days since we called upon your sister in Tariffville, found herself, husband and twin sister well - Mrs. S. looks much better than last year -

As yet I have not seen Mrs. Wilcox since coming here, nor have I seen Addie since we parted on the steamer, one year since. She is as much of a recluse as ever, seldom seeing any visitors at her father's house, and rarely going out to church or any where else -

But our little town is improving slowly as we now have quite a flourishing library and water carried through the village, the latter has been fully appreciated this summer, as we have had but a few showers since May -

More family news followed. The library she referred to is, of course, the free lending library that had been established in the second floor of the old Center School on Hopmeadow Street. Fifteen years later it would move into the Simsbury Free Library building that her husband built and endowed, now the home of SGHRL. Mrs. Eno did not live to see this building, as she died in November 1882. The 1884 letter from Antoinette Eno Wood expressed how much she was missed.

When Amanda Eno received the letter she was the widow of Alfred Vail, a Presbyterian minister who had become the chief assistant to the telegraph inventor Samuel F. B. Morse. ♦

Some Recent Acquisitions

- 1812 Ancestor Index, Volume II, 1970-1992* compiled by Patricia Scruggs Trolinger, National Society United States Daughters of 1812
- African American and American Indian Patriots of the Revolutionary War* published by the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (donated by Peg Bergethon)
- Ancestral Line for Eight Generations of Capt. Lemuel Bates, 1729-1820, with Some Records of his Descendants* by Albert Carlos Bates (photocopy) (donated by Betty Guinan, East Granby Public Library History Room)
- Facts About American Immigration* by David M. Brownstone and Irene M. Franck
- Genealogy of Thomas Stephens of Turkey Hills, Simsbury, Connecticut* by Lester J. Stevens (donated by the author)
- The Grange, 1867-1967: First Century of Service and Evolution* by W. L. Robinson (donated by Barbara Behrens)
- The Grange—Friend of the Farmer, 1867-1947* by Charles M. Gardner (donated by Barbara Behrens)
- Great Migration Newsletter, Volumes 1 through 10 (1990-2001)* 2 vols., published by the New England Historic Genealogy Society (donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR)
- Guide to the Manuscript Collections of the New England Historic Genealogy Society* edited by Timothy Salls (donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR)
- History of North Brookfield, Massachusetts, Preceded by an account of Old Quabaug, Indian and English Occupation, 1647-1676; Brookfield Records, 1686-1783, with a Genealogical Register* by J. H. Temple (donated by Tom Ayres)
- The Holcombes, Nation Builders: Their Biographies, Genealogies and Pedigrees* by Mrs. Lewin D. McPherson (Elizabeth Weir McPherson) (donated by James Holcombe)
- Locating Your Roots: Discover Your Ancestors Using Land Records* by Patricia Law Hatcher (donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR)
- My Farewell to the World and All It Contains* by Allen McLean, Minister of the Congregational Church, Simsbury, Connecticut 1809-1861, copied from the manuscript by the Rev. George McLean Milne Gilead (donated by Martha D. Austin)
- The Settlement and Story of Oakham, Massachusetts* by H.B. Wright and E.D. Harvey
- Soldiers of Oakham, Massachusetts in the Revolutionary War, The War of 1812 and the Civil War* by Henry Parks Wright

Book Available

Dielheimer Familienbuch, 1648-1900 mit Horrenberg, Balzfeld, Unterhof und Oberhof by Klaus Ronellenfitsch. SGHRL member Muriel Winzer owns this German genealogy and will make it available to patrons in the library by special request.

SIMSBURY MARRIAGES

Date	Name	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Dec. 24, 1871	James W. Pinney	21	Mechanic	Simsbury
	Elisabeth Forsythe	20		Simsbury
Jan. 1, 1872	Samuel T. Bolls	23	Merchant	Spencer, Mass.
	Ida S. Loomis	20		East Lyme
Dec. 27, 1871	James O'Brien	28	Farmer	Ireland
	Johannah O'Neil	26		Ireland
Feb. 7, 1872	William J. Case	23	Farmer	Barkhamstead
	Julia E. Gates	17		Simsbury
Feb. 12, 1872	James Nolan	31	Farmer	Ireland
	Elisabeth Clark	26		Ireland
Nov. 21, 1872	Huron V. Hawley	52	Farmer	Wilbriham, Mass.
	Mary R. Evarts	52		Colebrook, Ct
Apr. 10, 1872	Frank J. Bacon	26	Merchant	Simsbury
	Louisa A. Butler [?]	23		Simsbury
Nov. 23, 1872	Joseph McNulty	24	Laborer	New York City
	Jane Davis	24		Ireland
Nov. 28, 1872	Charles E. Hunter	20	Farmer	Wethersfield
	Maggie Donovan	22		South Glastonbury
Nov. 7, 1872	Archibald L. Mills	33	Farmer	Canton
	Mary S. Loomis	22		Coventry
Dec. 12, 1872	Edgar M. Case	27	Farmer	Canton
	Julia S. Gains	24		Avon
Jan. 1, 1873	Joseph Pinney	21	Upholsterer	Simsbury
	Belle E. Bacon	20		Simsbury
Jan. 30, 1873	Samuel F. Cadwell	30	Clerk	Hartford
	Laura M. Ensign	26		Simsbury
Mar. 16, 1873	George Burbank	59	Farmer	Warren, Mass.
	Mrs. Catherine Adams	49		Simsbury
Apr. 3, 1873	Moses D. Humphrey	24	Farmer	Simsbury
	Nellie J. Segar	25		Simsbury
May 13, 1873	William N. Case	21	Farmer	Simsbury
	Jennie E. Andrus	18		Simsbury

This continuing series on Simsbury's early marriage records has been copied by Stephen E. Simon from microfilmed records at the Connecticut State Library.

SGHRL UPDATES

Richard Roberts, head of the History and Genealogy Unit at the Connecticut State Library, spoke to an enthusiastic audience of more than thirty at the library on May 31. While showing many slides, Mr. Roberts explained a host of materials that are available for researchers at his library.

The Simsbury Free Library Board of Trustees thanked SGHRL volunteers at a luncheon in their honor on June 3. Twenty-three attended. Trustee Robert Lindauer, Chairman of Library Operations, coordinated the event and Margaret Donohue, Chairman of the Simsbury Free Library Board, spoke to welcome and thank everyone.

Kerstin Levin has joined the ranks of volunteers as our Swedish translator. This winter she assisted our patron Jennifer Vazquez with deciphering documents and letters of an ancestor from Sweden. Muriel Winzer, a longtime volunteer who has been a journalist and fact checker, has taken on the job of proofreading this newsletter. The services of both are much appreciated.



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