

SIMSBURY

Genealogical and Historical Research Library

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Genealogy and Historical Manuscripts

Second in the Series on the Connecticut Historical Society Collections

The prize collection of the Connecticut Historical Society Library is the historical manuscript collection. It was instituted in 1839 when CHS established quarters over the store of Humphrey and Seyms on Hartford's Main Street and began actively collecting historical materials. The collection comprises manuscript materials from the 17th through the 20th centuries generated by Connecticut citizens as they went about their lives.

The Society's acquisition records show that among the earliest donations it received were the papers of Samson Occum, the Mohegan clergyman, missionary and leader of the Brothertown movement. Other early manuscript acquisitions included sermons, Revolutionary War militia records, and "ancient" deeds.

The historical manuscript collection of the Connecticut Historical Society richly documents the history of the state and its citizens, yet library patrons doing genealogical research rarely use this collection. For some unknown reason many people still view history and genealogy as independent entities, instead of recognizing that each is an integral part of the other. Historical manuscripts are not always as obvious a source of genealogical information as other materials, but they provide details that allow a genealogist to "put flesh on the bones" of his ancestors or place his ancestors in their proper historical context. Researchers may not find records of their particular ancestors in manuscript collections, but they will find records of the societies and the times in which those ancestors lived.

Today there are over three million manuscripts in the CHS library. There is not enough space in this article to describe more than a small portion of those in the historical manuscript collection, but there are some that stand out as useful to the genealogical researcher.

Church Records. Church records are a key source of vital records information, that is, births (or baptisms), marriages and deaths. Although most of Connecticut's early church records are housed at the Connecticut State Library, CHS holds a number of original church records. Among these are records (with limitations, of course) for Canterbury, East Hampton, Enfield, and Suffield. In addition, there are many copies of church records, most of which are in the genealogical manuscript collection, but some of which remain with the historical manuscripts.

What are often overlooked, however, are the records of church affairs (including minutes of meetings and committees, pew rentals, treasury records, and building records), many of which can

be found among the Connecticut Historical Society's manuscripts. While not specifically sources of vital records, these records reflect the activities of various churches and name the members involved, one of whom might be a researcher's Connecticut ancestor.

Tax Records. They say there is nothing certain but death and taxes. During the 18th century, both the state and federal governments imposed taxes on Connecticut citizens that generated two document collections with definite genealogical application. The state assessed many of its citizens' taxes by their occupations, and CHS has the 1797 and 1798 assessment lists for approximately 102 towns. Some assessors carefully grouped people by occupation—other towns simply listed the taxpayer by name and occupation in random order.

In 1798, the United States government imposed a direct tax on dwelling houses, on land and on slaves between the ages of twelve and fifty. The end product is a listing of landholders and homeowners for sixty-three towns in six of the eight Connecticut counties. (Unfortunately, Fairfield and Litchfield counties are missing.) The Society holds the lists for the same counties for the U. S. Direct Taxes of 1814 through 1816. In addition to these, there are other tax records scattered throughout the collection that don't have the detail of the two previously mentioned, but which nonetheless provide a list of taxpayers for the town and serve as a form of town census.

Account Books. Account books constitute one of the library's major manuscript collections, and include the records of many businesses as well as those of individuals. These books are difficult to work with because they are often hard to read and most don't have handy indexes, but they can provide wonderful insight into the daily life and economics of past society and can sometimes supply helpful personal information. At a minimum, account books provide a list of some of the residents in a given town at a given time, and they give insight into the occupation of the owner.

For example, Abraham Tyler of Haddam kept a ledger of his business accounts from 1776 to 1804. Begun while Tyler was a captain in the Revolutionary War, his first page contains brief references to the deaths and discharges of several men in his company. Since paper was expensive and not to be wasted, the book was passed on to Abraham's son Archelaus, who continued to keep business accounts, but also used the account book to record his marriages and the births of his children.

In like manner, Jabez Warner of Woodbury kept a record of his family in his account book, and also noted at the beginning of the book that on May 22, 1754 he moved his family to Woodbury from Middletown, thus leaving a clear trail of migration for his descendants.

Joseph Webb of Wethersfield was a very successful merchant who had the misfortune to die at the age of thirty-four. Despite his youth the settlement of his estate generated at least two ledger books and thirty years or more of record keeping. In the ledger documenting the 1761 inventory of Webb's estate, there are ninety-one pages listing debtors to the estate, their places of residence, the date they incurred the debt and the current situation of the obligation. Among the lists of debtors are names of African American and Native American residents.

The account books of physicians and midwives, when they exist, are sources of vital records information that may not be found in either civil or church records. Samuel Mather was one of five physician sons of Dr. Erastus Mather of Old Lyme. His account book covers the period from 1773 to 1799. Not only did he list whom he treated, but where he treated them, and often in reading

through his entries, one finds interesting and often genealogically helpful details. For example, in his April 1799 entry for Mr. James Wells, Dr. Mather described Mr. Wells as “from Long Island, now of Lyme”; his March 11th entry for the Widow Smith identified her as “Elisha Ely’s mother”; in June he entered an account for “widow Jenna Hacket, Louis DeWolf’s daughter”; and on May 2nd, 1780 he made an entry for Mr. George Wilson and noted that Wilson “Mer’d Susa Wood, David Wood’s daughter.”

The record of Rebecca Hobart Rogers, a Branford midwife, is one of three such items in the CHS manuscript holdings that list birth information not found in public records. Rebecca’s entries are brief, do not name the child, and are often poignant. The journal chronicles what Rebecca described as her “calls to her office” from 1775 to 1801 and records the births of more than 1,350 children, most of whom, by the way, were born to men.

Diaries and Journals. Diaries and journals provide a very personal look into the lives of their writers and of the communities in which they lived. Some of them are brief, some focus on one very specific period in the writer’s life, and others go on for years as the writer documents the activities of his life. All of them provide a unique opportunity for the modern researcher to view “first hand” the society of another time.

One of the best examples in the CHS collections is the Elisha Niles Diary. Elisha Niles was a Colchester native born in 1764 who died in Middle Haddam in 1845. In his early years, Niles was a schoolmaster, but as time went on he became a farmer and jack-of-all-trades. From 1790 until his death, he kept a diary that chronicled not only his daily activities, but also recorded the events of his community as well. He noted births and marriages within his family and his community; when he mentioned deaths, he often listed the cause of death, or some detail about the deceased, like character traits or Revolutionary War service; he gave an annual mortality list for the community; he talked about people who had moved out of the community; at one point he went back and listed as many of his “scholars” as he could remember and whether or not they were still living. Niles’s seven-volume diary is a wonderful record of a small town in the early 19th century.

Letters. Letters can also provide very personal details about the writer or the recipient, and there are thousands of letters in the Connecticut Historical Society’s manuscript collections. However, letters are probably of more interest to the historian than to the genealogist, unless the genealogist spots the correspondent hanging on his family tree.

Scrapbooks. Scrapbooks were very popular in the late 19th and early 20th century, and the Connecticut Historical Society historical manuscript collection includes a number of them. Scrapbooks tend to be thematic and vary widely in content, depending on the interest of the compiler. One of the manuscript collection treasures from late 19th and early 20th century Hartford is a collection of scrapbooks compiled by Mary Pamela (Felt) Morris, the wife of John Emory Morris, an Assistant Secretary at the Travelers Insurance Company. Both of them were very interested in genealogy.

In 1877 Mrs. Morris began collecting social and obituary notices from the Hartford papers and the *Springfield Republican*, housing them in a sort of self-stick scrapbook invented by Mark Twain. She continued collecting these notices until shortly before her death in 1924. The collection includes fifty-three volumes of social notices and 131 volumes of obituaries. The social scrapbooks are filled with details of weddings and anniversaries, local celebrations, architectural achievements, scandal and gossip, and provide a wonderful perspective on the social mores and customs of the

time. The obituary collection is the more heavily used of the two and includes not only obituaries, but also follow-up articles, such as personal tributes and details of sizeable estates. In the earliest volumes of the collection, Mrs. Morris included many national and international figures and tended to focus on the upper classes of Hartford society, but as the years went on, she concentrated more on the Hartford area and often included information on average citizens.

In describing the gift of these scrapbooks in his 1925 Librarian's Report, Albert Carlos Bates made the prophetic statement that these volumes would "grow increasingly valuable as the years pass." This collection has proven invaluable in documenting late 19th and early 20th century Hartford.

Multiple Birth Study. One of the hottest topics in genealogy today is the relationship between genealogy and genetics. Family associations are recruiting their direct-line male members for Y-chromosome DNA studies, while females are tracing their mitochondrial DNA through their direct-line maternal ancestors. While not a DNA study *per se*, one of the more interesting collections at CHS, created by Dr. Ernest Caulfield, is an extensive study of multiple births in colonial society. His notes include family group sheets and genetic charts.

Military Records. Military records are often an important source in genealogical research, especially for anyone attempting to document an ancestor's military record for admission into a service-related hereditary society. Among the collections are muster rolls, journals, diaries and letters from the French and Indian War, the Revolution, War of 1812 and the Civil War. There are small collections of materials from World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict and Vietnam.

Published Records. There are a number of items in the historical manuscript collection that can be found in CHS publications, either as individual books, articles in *The Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin*, or as part of the Connecticut Historical Society *Collections*. Matthew Grant's Record (early records of Windsor), for example, was transcribed and published as a book by the Society in 1930; the Samuel Mather Account Book was the subject of a 1973 *Bulletin* article; and the muster rolls of the French and Indian and the Revolutionary Wars were published in the *Collections*. The *Collections* also contain the printed transcripts of a number of military journals and some political figures' papers. These publications are available at the Connecticut Historical Society Library, as well as in many other locations.

For the most part, though, the historical manuscript collection contains unpublished material that can be found only by visiting the library. Harriet Stryker-Rodda, C.G., in her suggestions for gathering family information, stated that "family history seeks...to put each generation into its own environment, period, and relationship with others. They are to be dressed in the clothes of their time, examined concerning their beliefs and reactions to the period in which they lived, and re-created accurately insofar as possible...." For the patient and persistent genealogist, the CHS historical manuscript collection may provide just the context he needs to accurately portray his Connecticut ancestors.

By Judith Ellen Johnson

Judith Ellen Johnson is the genealogist at the Connecticut Historical Society. This is the second article of three based on the presentation she made in the spring of 2002 at SGHRL.

Refurbishing the Simsbury Free Library Building

The Simsbury Public Library moved out of the Simsbury Free Library building on November 20, 1985 and opened about two weeks later in its new building half a block away. The Board of Trustees of the Simsbury Free Library had long been investigating new uses for the Free Library building that would be in keeping with the terms of the trust set up in 1890 by Amos R. Eno. The trust specified that the building must be used as a library, so after much investigation and discussion the board chose to establish the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library.

First, however, the building had to be refurbished. The Town of Simsbury agreed to make some modifications bring the structure up to code, particularly the fire code. The trustees immediately had the public library's bookcases and other impediments cleared from the front office so that they could resume meeting there, having been meeting elsewhere for fifteen years. New lighting was added to the parking area.

Richard Wagner headed the Restoration Committee, which was made up of trustees who met almost weekly to plan for the restoration of the building. Along with Dick, Peg Donohue and Ted Morris were especially involved. Dick Wagner visited many buildings of similar age and purpose in Connecticut and Massachusetts seeking ideas, and local architect Roger Galliher donated his services as a consultant, as did Russ Stecker.

Early in 1987 the trustees hired Sarah Chase of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in Boston to make a study of the building, which included analyzing the paint to determine original colors. The next year the board retained interior designer Nan Hemingway of Litchfield, Connecticut, to advise them on furnishings, carpet, additional lighting and the like. The Codgers painted the walls in the basement of the building so that the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library could open in temporary quarters there on March 6, 1988. By the spring of 1990 the trustees were ready to hire the Master's Construction Corporation to refurbish the main floor.

In addition to the building, protecting the paintings and artifacts that had long ago been donated by members of the Eno family concerned the trustees during the renovation. The paintings had been appraised by Paul Cooley, founder of the Cooley Gallery in Old Lyme, and in 1980 by Robert C. Vose, Jr. of the Vose Galleries in Boston. Charles Schwartz of Hadlyme had valued the artifacts and Mr. Sam Molod, Deputy State Librarian, had appraised some valuable books. All these things were put out of harm's way.

The renovation of the first floor was completed in the spring of 1991. Among other things, distinctive iron gates had been installed in the archways that separate the main reading room from the 1924 annex that the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library was to occupy. SGHRL moved up to the first floor and reopened in June. The next year the Eno Foundation for Transportation of Washington, D.C., moved furniture, artifacts and the library from William Phelps Eno's former office in Westport and placed them the north alcove of the main reading room. The William Phelps Eno Memorial Center was dedicated in May 1992; the foundation's directors occasionally return to the Simsbury Free Library to hold their annual meeting.

The Farmington Watershed Association began renting the second floor of the building in 1986. Along with its office, this non-profit group has installed an Audubon library collection. The

Continued on page six.

Some Recent Acquisitions

Connecticut Yankees at Gettysburg by Charles P. Hamblin (donated by Ruth and Ken Duncan)

The First Seven Generations of Higley Descendants by Leroy E. Higley (donated by the author)

Genealogical Research in Ohio, 2nd edition, by Kip Sperry

The Joseph Gillet/Gillett/Gillette Family of Connecticut, Ohio and Kansas by Wilma Gillet Thomas (donated by the Salmon Brook Historical Society)

The Phelps Family of America and their English Ancestors...2 vols., compiled by Judge Oliver Seymour Phelps and Andrew T. Servin (facsimile edition) (donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter DAR in honor of Jean Bishop)

A Research Guide to the Massachusetts Courts and their Records by Catherine S. Menand (donated by Ruth and Ken Duncan)

Titles Available For Sale In The Library

The Barns of East Granby: Our Architectural Heritage by Betty Guinan and Ted Holly

Beneath These Stones: More Granby Cemeteries by Carol Laun

Bloomfield (Images of America series) by the Wintonbury Historical Society

The Browns of Wintonbury, Makers of Brown Drums by Frederick A. Hesketh

Burials in the Granby Center Cemetery, Granby, Connecticut, 1740-1997 by Carol A. Laun

East Granby: The Evolution of a Connecticut Town by Mary Jane Springman and Betty Finnell Guinan

From Wintonbury to Bloomfield published by the Wintonbury Historical Society

History of Simsbury, Granby and Canton, From 1642 to 1845 by Noah A. Phelps

John Case and His Descendants compiled by Ruth Cost Duncan

A Record and Documentary History of Simsbury, 1643-1888 by Lucius I. Barber

Simsbury Cemetery Gravestone Inscriptions, Vol. I: The Old Section compiled by Joyce A. Cahill

A Tempest in a Small Town: The Myth and Reality of Country Life, Granby, Connecticut, 1680-1940 by Mark Williams

"...To Settle Ourselves in Gospel Order...": A History of First Church of Christ at Massaco, Simsbury, Connecticut by Lyman G. Potter

Continued from page five.

Simsbury Chamber of Commerce moved into its renovated basement quarters in 1992. More furniture for the reading room and other improvements would come later, but by 1992 the major part of refurbishing and reoccupying the building was complete. Today it is the House Committee that works diligently to maintain and polish this 1890 Colonial Revival gem.

This is the second article that marks the 15th Anniversary of the founding of the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library. It was written by Mary Jane Springman.

SIMSBURY MARRIAGES

Date	Name	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
June 22, 1873	Charles Daugherty	24	Farmer	Ireland
	Elen Conolan	17		EastGranby
June 18, 1873	Frank M. Lampson	21	Farmer	Simsbury
	Anestatia Maher	17		Simsbury
June 10, 1873	Orlando H. Miner	26	Farmer	Saybrook, Ct
	Anna M. Higley	27		Simsbury
July 20, 1873	James Kelly	50	Farmer	Ireland
	Mary Ann McGarrity	30		Ireland
July 3, 1873	Albert R. Wheaton	23	Cabinet maker	Simsbury
	Ruth Jenkins	17		Simsbury
Sept. 17, 1873	Franklin Frary	22	Music teacher	Hinsdale, Mass
	Chloe A. Brockway	19		Simsbury
Sept. 24, 1873	Charles A. Bradley	24	Farmer	Simsbury
	Adella M. Hodge [?]	22		Simsbury
Nov. 17, 1873	Wm R. Latimer	33	Farmer	Bloomfield
	Frannie M. Lane	29		New York
Dec. 2, 1873	Patrick Dwyer	25	Farmer	Ireland
	Johannah Doan	22		Ireland
Mar. 25, 1874	Hoyt Moses	50		Simsbury
	Frances H. Phelps	42		Simsbury
Feb 15, 1874	John V. Mahoney	25		Ireland
	Sarah O'Hara	23		Ireland
April 9, 1874	Justin H. Winchell	37		Granby, Ct
	Alvirce Hayes	26		Granby, Ct
April 7, 1874	Albert R. Shepard	22		Simsbury
	Evie Mary Brown	20		Canton, Ct
April 7, 1874	Elliott H. Latimer	27		Canton
	Amelia L. Shepard	20		Simsbury
April 22, 1874	Howard F. Case	20		Barkhamsted
	Adella L. Brown	18		Simsbury
June 10, 1874	Roderick S. Smith	21		New Haven
	Wineferd F. Hamilton	21		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.

Case Genealogy Now For Sale

John Case And His Descendants, compiled by Ruth Cost Duncan, is now for sale in the library. The genealogy begins with John Case who was born in Aylesham, England and who died in Simsbury on February 21, 1703/4. It records eight generations of his descendants and some of the ninth and tenth generations. The text is well indexed.

The 290-page book is soft covered, spiral bound and costs \$32.00, plus \$3.00 for shipping and handling.



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