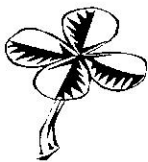

SIMSBURY

❖ Genealogical and Historical Research Library ❖

Volume 4 Issue 1

MARCH 1997



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SEMINAR ON
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HISTORY**

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THE SEARCH FOR SHAMROCKS IN SIMSBURY

A stroll through the old cemetery across from St. Bernard's Church in Tariffville is a step back in time to the days when ambitious emigrants from Ireland came to the Simsbury area in search of work and new home in America. Although the Famine Years of the 1840's and 50's have received tremendous attention, there were earlier periods of heavy Irish emigration. The construction of canals in America drew large numbers of Irish laborers. The Farmington Canal which existed in Simsbury from 1828 to 1848 attracted the workers and many stayed on to work on the subsequent railroads which replace the water based transportation.

In Simsbury, the Ensign-Bickford Company (as it is now known) led the technology for removing the massive amounts of earth by blasting with its safety fuse. Without this device the expansion of canals, railroads and metal and coal mines would never have occurred to the extent that it did in America. Records from that time show the employment of many with Irish surnames.

Area mills at the time employed both male and female workers. Often time the close of a mill due to fire or poor business practices, necessitated the move to a more prosperous manufacturing area such as Holyoke or Worcester, Massachusetts. Since the economy of Simsbury was largely agrarian and land cost money, which most immigrants lacked during their initial years in the U.S., many Irish emigrants made Simsbury a stopover on the way to better opportunities.

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THE WAYWARD WOMEN OF TURKEY HILLS

The members of the Congregational Church in the 18th and early 19th centuries believed fervently in being "their brother's keeper" and they watched carefully over all the "sisters" too.

The town of Turkey Hills (now East Granby, Connecticut) became a separate Ecclesiastical Society in 1736. At that time, both Granby and East Granby were part of Simsbury. Because of the difficulty of attending church in distant Simsbury Center, the towns were granted permission to build their own meeting houses.

In 1738, the citizens of Turkey Hills built their church on Main Street, a short distance south of the present Route 20 intersection. It was an unpainted wood structure on a stone foundation, without heat and lacking a bell tower. It served the people of East Granby nearly a hundred years, until the present church was built in 1830.

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The Wayward Women. . . cont.

The Records of the Congregational Church in East Granby 1776-1858 transcribed by Albert Carlos Bates, reveal the struggles to keep straying members securely in the church and to direct wandering feet back to the "strait and narrow" path. Errant behavior was reported to the congregation and the proper course of action was decided upon. Chosen members counseled with the transgressor and repentance invariably assured forgiveness.

However, several cases involving some of the women of Turkey Hills, show a decided spirit of rebellion. According to *East Granby, the Evolution of a Connecticut Town* by Springman and Guinan, all of East Granby had a rather dubious reputation by 1814.

Reverend **Bennet Tyler** wrote that the town was a "waste place" and that "the moral condition of the people was exceedingly deplorable." Another minister, **Jonas Clark**, declared that Turkey Hills was "Satan's chief seat" and that "sin in every form abounded."

A religious re-awakening flowered in New England after a period of "free thinking and free drinking." Evangelist **Asahel Nettleton** came to Turkey Hills and inspired many conversions. Thirty-three people joined the church in 1815 including **Mehitabel Basset**, **Cynthia Thrall**, **Eliza Robbins** and **Deborah Thrall**. These four young women, and several other, later appeared in the Church Records, having severe problems with the strict standards of the congregation.

In 1817, the religious re-awakening evidently faded back into somnolence, and the above mentioned Mehitabel (probably in her 20's), Eliza 20, Cynthia 25 and Mrs. Sally Buck 28, were accused of *dancing*. A committee was sent to "converse with the offending sisters" and after ten days a written confession was accepted by the church.

The confession is a rather curious document. The language is so overblown and melodramatic that it almost appears to be written satirically. Despite the litany of faults and sins confessed to, dancing is *never* mentioned. "We...acknowledge the depravity of our hearts, and lament that by reason of our corrupt inclinations, our practice is unholy...before angels and men we confess our numerous faults, our sins public, private and particular...hope kindness and true charity will reign in the hearts of our dear bretheren and sisters...grant us that forgiveness for every transgression as they hope to be forgiven of God."

Two of these young dancers were definately not serious sinners and their later years were exemplary. **Cynthia Thrall** was born in 1792, the daughter of **Luke and Deborah Thrall** (a different Deborah Thrall than the one mentioned above.) In 1825, she went to Dwight Station in Arkansas as a missionary to teach Cherokee Indian children. She died there in 1834, at the age of 42. She was much loved by the Indians and had raised several Cherokee orphans, naming them after East Granby people.

Young Eliza Robbins also led a blameless life after her fling at dancing. She was born in 1797, the daughter of **Chloe and Appleton Robbins**. Her father had the first store in Turkey Hills in 1790, in

Genie Hint: It is tempting to rely heavily upon compiled records when doing your genealogy but to assure accuracy in your own work look to original and primary sources to prove your links.

TURKEY HILLS...

back ell of 1 North Main Street. Eliza married Reverend **Calvin Yale** in 1818 and moved to the wilds of Vermont.

The life of **Mehitabel Bassett** was not quite so pure. She gave birth to an illegitimate baby in the summer of 1819. However, on July 2, she "came before the church and confessed fornication and was restored to the communion and fellowship of the church." On July 11, 1819, her son **Cornelius Newell** was baptised. After that, Mehitabel kept her name out of Church Records and in 1836 she moved to Hartford.

The fourth dancer was **Sarah (Sally) Warner Buck**. Her husband, **Charles Buck**, owned an inn north of 9 South Main Street, where dances were held. Sally was accused of intemperance in 1835 and ordered to appear at the school room to defend herself or confess. She blithely ignored the summons. Next she was sent a letter of admonition which she also disregarded. After a second letter of admonition without a response, appearance or confession from Sally, she was excommunicated from the church.

Of all the "wayward women" of Turkey Hills, the most rebellious by far, was **Deborah Thrall**. She was born in 1800, the daughter of **Worthy** and **Sarah Thrall**. She was only 15 when she joined the church during the religious revival. It did not take her long to regret her impulsive decision.

In March, 1816, there was list of complaints against young Deborah. She played cards, did not attend church, avoided meeting to converse with church members and she had a "disorderly walk!" That is a phrase that stimulates the imagination. A committee of three pious churchmen met with Deborah and had a long talk showing their "Brotherly love." Despite this concern with her present conduct and the future of her eternal soul, Deborah gave no evidence of penitence or reformation.

When asked if she lived without prayer, Deborah defiantly answered "Yes." Then the devout elders queried her reason for joining the church "during the late awakening." They received a flippant and typically adolescent reply, "because everyone else did" Finally, Deborah was asked if she wanted to stay in the church and she answered with a resounding "NO."

The disheartened committee then sent a lengthy and sanctimonious letter of admonition to Deborah, detailing the terrors of hellfire and damnation that awaited her. The letter warned that "you must one day appear before the judgement seat of Christ." She was also ordered to appear before the congregation here on earth to answer charges.

The firm resolve of Deborah to live without religion was not swayed by these arguments and she flatly disobeyed the order. Despite being under age (only 16) she seemed to be handling this confrontation alone. No mention of her parents was found in the record of her insubordination. Perhaps the reason for this tacit support of Deborah's independence can be found in the fact that her father, **Worthy Thrall**, joined the Quakers in Enfield in 1785.

In 1816, both the parents of **Deborah Thrall** died and in November, the church excommunicated the young rebel. Her excommunication notwithstanding, the following year in September, the record book noted the marriage of **Deborah Thrall** and **John T. Knox**. Knox was a blacksmith who had a shop behind 115 Hartford Avenue.

The most astonishing aspect of these small vignettes of church surveillance and intervention into private lives, is not that it was done, but the extent to which it was ignored. A century earlier few would have had the temerity to defy the power of the church. The Revolutionary War, however, incited a spirit of independence which inevitable permeated all aspects of daily life, including the church.

JOHN DRAKE (?-1689)

Genealogists have labored over the genealogy the Drake family for many years and various compiled records insist that the patriarch of the Connecticut family was the John Drake who was a passenger on the John and Mary during its 1630 voyage from Plymouth, England to Massachusetts Bay. Robert Charles Anderson, F.A.S.G. in his NEHGS *Register* article in Volume 147, April 1993, does not include this John Drake in his synthetic passenger list. (A synthetic list is one developed from specified contemporary records when actual lists do not exist.) His research determined that another John Drake, who subsequently returned to England, has been confused with the John Drake I (?-17 Aug 1659) who settled in Windsor, CT and appears in town records in 1640. In his book, *The Great Migration Begins*, Anderson writes that John Drake derived from Hampton in Arden, Warwickshire, England.

The son of John Drake I, John Drake II, is granted land at Massacoe (Simsbury) in 1667. There has also been some confusion as to him being the true recipient of this grant. The grandson of John Drake II, John Drake III, recorded the birth of a child in Simsbury in 1674 while no record appears to place John Drake II as a resident of Simsbury except the registration of his children's births in Windsor Town Records which puts "Simsbury" after his name. To determine the correct John Drake it is necessary to look at the land records and bear in mind that men had to be 21 years of age to own land. In 1667, John Drake III born 14 Sept 1649, would have been 18 years of age and unable to contract for land ownership. This legal requirement would place John Drake II as the Drake who received the land in Simsbury.

Much research and study went into the preparation of this month's early settler article and has been retained in the *Family Files* of the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library. While it has been proved to our satisfaction that John Drake I was not of the John and Mary party, his actual origin in America is not easily proved. An interesting clue exists in his probate file and refers to trips his son, Job made to "Pascataway" on his behalf. At the time of this probate in 1659, it appears that this refers to the New Hampshire area of Piscataqua where several Drake families resided. No obvious links were uncovered by our researchers in New Hampshire State or Town records. To confuse matters more, Drakes also founded the township of New Piscataqua or Piscataway, NJ in 1666. These "problems" might intrigue some current day Drake descendants enough to research the original records in these areas.

This series on the early settlers of Simsbury will continue in our next issue with -
Maj. Talcott & Capt. Newberry

**ARE YOU A DESCENDANT OF ANY OF THE ORIGINAL PATENTEES OR
 SETTLERS OF SIMSBURY? WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU.**

JOHN DRAKE (cont.)

John Drake II married **Hannah Moore** 30 Nov 1648 in Windsor, CT. They had the following 11 children:

1. **John** b. 14 Sept 1649 m. **Mary Watson** (Weston?)
2. **Job** b. 15 Jun 1651 m. **Elizabeth Alvord**
3. **Hannah** b. 8 Aug 1653 m. **John Higley** [see December 1996 newsletter]
4. **Enoch** b. 8 Dec 1655 m. **Sarah Porter**
5. **Ruth** b. 1 Dec 1657 m. **Samuel Barber**
6. **Simon** b. 28 Aug 1659 m. **Hannah Mills**
7. **Lydia** b. 26 Jan 1661 m. **Joseph Loomis**
8. **Elizabeth** b. 22 Jul 1664 **Nicholas Buckland**
9. **Mary** b. 29 Jan 1666 m. **Thomas Marshall**
10. **Mindwell** b. 10 Nov 1671 m. **James Loomis**
11. **Joseph** b. 26 Jun 1674 m. 1. **Ann Foster**; 2. **Sarah Fitch Stoughton**

Librarian's note:

It has been the good fortune of the Library to receive a gift from the Abigail Phelps Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Simsbury which has allowed the purchase of a new and sorely needed microfilm reader/printer. Now copies can be made easily and with "positive" image.

Still on the "wish list" are a microfilm cabinet, library table and a computer and monitor for additional reading capabilities and of course, published genealogies of Simsbury families.

With the continued growth of the library and increased numbers of users, the need for additional workspaces and resources becomes more apparent. Only through the generosity of the many "friends" can we hope to keep current with the ever expanding fields of genealogy and family history.

Do you like to garden?

Volunteers are needed to tend the flower bed in front of the building.

**Note:**

Our e-mail address is:
"genehist@miracle.net"
Give it a try and let's hope this sorts out the problems we have been having with it.

SHAMROCKS cont.

In 1848, there was a large enough population of Irish born immigrants in the Tarrifville region to begin a mission church. This 20 x 40 building on Mountain Road managed with the services of a traveling priest supplied by the Diocese. St. Paul's Mission Church (sponsored by St. Mary's, New Britain), as it was called, exists today as a private residence. It was auctioned off and moved to Collinsville, CT near the railroad station.

As the numbers of Irish-Catholics grew a larger Mission Church was built at the top of the cemetery across from the present day St. Bernard's in 1867-8. By 1881 an independent church was established and a full time pastor assigned. In 1891, the building in the cemetery burned and by 1892-3 the present edifice was constructed. The parish of St. Bernard's was almost 98 % Irish.

By the 1900's a mission church, Immaculate Conception, was established in Simsbury. It was not until 1921 that the present day St. Mary's Church was constructed. By this time, the Irish population had begun to decline as the mills fell upon hard times and employment in them began to dry up. The Irish were succeeded by Eastern European immigrants who came to the Simsbury area in search of the American dream.

The U.S. Federal Census is a good place to begin the hunt for Irish ancestors. The Library has all of Connecticut microfilm up to the 1920 census. The stacks contain many helpful books on Irish history and genealogy including *The Famine Immigrants* vols. 2-7, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, *Irish Records*, *Return of Owners of Land of One Acre and Upwards*, and *General Alphabetical Index to the Townlands and Towns, Parishes, and Baronies of Ireland*. *The Index to Griffiths Valuation* is in our microfilm collection.

Because of the civil unrest that has plagued Ireland for centuries, many records have either been destroyed or perished in unfortunate calamities. The search for substitute evidence need not be a fruitless one. Many genealogical guides have been published that deal with this problem. These difficulties should not dissuade anyone from searching.

The connection from the ancestor in America to his or her townland in Ireland can be aided by various sources. Among the common sources that are used in genealogical research such as vital records, probate and landownership one can find hints. One source that is often overlooked or ignored is newspapers because of the time consuming nature of the search. John Doyle, who has done so much on the history of the St. Bernard's Parish and the Cemetery, found microfilm copies of *The Connecticut Catholic 1870-97* a great help in establishing relationships among Simsbury area families as well as their next destination upon moving from the area. Within easy driving distance, The Connecticut Historical Society and The State Library in Hartford and the Connecticut Valley Historical Society in Springfield offer a wealth of information on the Connecticut Irish.

TO LEARN MORE PLAN TO ATTEND AN INFORMAL SEMINAR ON "SEARCHING FOR SHAMROCKS" TUESDAY, MARCH 18TH 1-3PM AT THE LIBRARY.

1723 SIMSBURY LANDOWNERS LIST *(cont. from Dec. 1996)*

“At a town meeting of the inhabitants of Simsbury regularly convened January the second 1723 the said town granted to the several persons hereafter named the quantities of land hereafter exprefsed.”

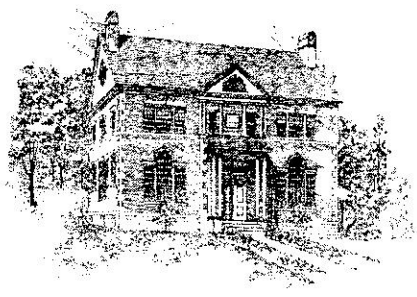
<i>Name</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Acres</i>
John Hoskins	100	William Rice	100
George Hays Sen	135	Nathan Gosard	156
Daniel Holcomb	100	Widow Slater for John Salter's heirs	200
Thomas Holcomb Jr	103	Thomas Stephens	75
Ebenezer Hablord	50	Elias Slater	110
Joseph Lamson	80	Samuel Strickland	100
John Lues	50	Widow Sextone's heirs	111
Josiah Lomis	93	John Sextone	182
Thomas Gleson	09	Widow Strickland	39
Widow Helyer	19	Edward Strickland	64
John Moses	140	Ephraim Grifen	108
Joshua Moses	150	John Terre	200
Caleb Moses	100	Samuel Terre	200
William Moses	74	Stephen Terre	100
John Matson Senr	200	John Tuller	130
Thomas Marten	80	William Tuller	140
John Mils	150	Jacob Tullor	118
William Case	150	John Ueat	78
Benjamin Mils	100	William Willcoxson	200
William Mittlefson	30	Widow Willcoxson	78
William Moore	100	Joseph Willcoxson Junr	100
Issac Owen	120	Samuel Willcoxson	100
Simon Mils	100	John Willcoxson	80
Joseph Mils	100	Jonathan Westover	250
John Owen	60	Widow Westover's heirs	250
Lieut. Pettibone	250	Stephen Wintchel Senr	110
John Pettibone Junr	100	Stephen Wintchell Junr	50
Samuel Pettibone/Johnson	100	Thomas Wintchel	50
Joseph Pettibone	220	John Eno	110
Stephen Pettibone	200	Samuel Adams	131
Ensign Pettibone	250	Deacon Humphris	280
Ensign Phelps	300	Samuel Case Senr	266
Joseph Phelps junr	136	Samuel Case Junr	100
Andrew Robe	200	Joseph Segar	150
Jacob Read	100	Peter Rice's heirs	60
John Robards Senr	300	Timothy & John Rice	50
		Timothy Phelps	160

Continued on next page

1723 SIMSBURY LANDOWNERS LIST *continued from page 7*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Acres</i>
Samuel Humphris John's son	280	Joseph Mefsenger	80
Andrew More	102	Nathaniel Higley	100
Jonathan More	100	Daniel Porter	100
Thomas Bacon	198	Samuel Higley	90
Caleb Holcomb	64	To the Heirs of Daniel Adams	150
Prany Coset	60	Gillet's heirs	100
Widow Tuller and Saml Tullers heirs	100	Margaret Willcockson's heirs	20
Henry Pettibone	120	John Matson Junr	100
Joseph Alderman	105	Widow Barber's heirs	201
Samuel Hays	060	Joseph Willcoxson Senr	150
Nathaniel Phelps	040	Thomas Moses	54
Ephraim Adams	100	To the Reverend	
Samuel Slater	80	Mr. Woodbridge	300

"January the second 1723 the above sums to the men there named was voted in the affirmative and the remaining land to be divided by the same proportions. A true Copy of Records Examined by Benjamin Ely Town Clerk Simsbury Nov 19th 1810 Book 3rd page 24th & onwards. Fees - 40 Cents"



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