

SIMSBURY

Genealogical and Historical Research Library

Volume 5 Issue 4

Winter 1998 - 99

A Treasure-Trove from the 18th Century

Extensive Research Project Begun

Some of us at the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library have long been aware of the existence of numerous account books kept by Simsbury citizens in the 1700s. After analyzing one for a graduate school paper, I realized that these ledgers, written with quill pens in quaint scribbles and flourishes, are an almost untapped source of much information about the town's colonial citizens. Now SGHRL researchers under my direction have begun a formal study of these invaluable relics of the 18th century.

My earlier study of the account book that John Owen kept between 1767 and 1781 revealed that he dealt with nearly 600 patrons, mostly Simsbury townspeople. The majority of his customers paid him with goods and services and this record of barter sometimes indicated the customer's primary occupation or an income producing sideline. Almost all of the men in the town were farmers, of course, but through Owen's accounts I was able to identify individuals who also made hats, tanned and curried leather, made shingles, hooped barrels and more. He also dealt with women, who tended to be school teachers, spinstresses or domestics, but one was a tailor.

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SUSANNAH PHELPS'S DOWRY

In an account book kept by David Phelps Jr. the entry headed "Susanah Phelps to things" and dated 1795 is almost certainly a list of the items that Phelps gave his twenty-two-year old daughter Susannah for her dowry at the time of her marriage. Only the looking glass, a luxury for the time, is assigned a value. It is worth twelve shillings, he notes. Susannah was fortunate that her father could afford to provide her with a mirror, so much furniture and many pewter items.

The items listed are: one pair [cosy drawers?], 1 chest, 1 frying pan, 1 kettle, 1 tea kettle, 1 pot, 1 knife, 1 pair of tongs, 1 trammel, 3 pewter quart basins, 3 pewter pint basins, 3 porringers, 6 Windsor chairs, 6 other chairs, 3 tables, 1 pair andirons, 1 bed and bedding, 3 pewter [?], one cow, 1 little wheel, 1 great wheel, 1 looking glass 0-12-0, 2 bedsteads, 1 frying pan [hole in page], 1 pewter quart cup, 1 pewter pint cup, 1 earthen pint cup, 6 knives and forks, 6 large spoons. There may have been more items, but the rest of the page is torn off.

Members of SGHRL who would like a 4x6 color photograph of the account book page containing this handwritten list may send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to this library or stop by to get one. David Phelps Jr.'s account book can be seen in the archives of the Simsbury Historical Society.

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Another characteristic that makes these early account books so interesting to historians and genealogists is that, since the people keeping them were not professional accountants, they often recorded things that would never appear in a financial statement today. In the back of his ledger, John Owen laboriously copied several letters that he wrote to Oliver Ellsworth and Governor Jonathan Trumbull at the height of the Revolutionary War. In them he told of his efforts to carry out the governor's order for safe conduct to New York City for an Episcopal missionary in the face of anti-Tory feeling or "misguided zeal," as he puts it, of other, unnamed Simsbury men.

David Phelps Jr., whose account book is presently under review, sometimes notes personal expenditures, such as his 1795 listing of articles that almost certainly comprise the dowry that he bestowed on his daughter Susannah at the time of her marriage. (See page one.) Also, men who held church or town offices kept records of their official dealings with townspeople. Others have left between the pages of their books sheets of paper on which they jotted notes or practiced their penmanship. We researchers have learned to expect the unexpected.

Ruth Duncan, who is well known to genealogists as the compiler of *William Bunnell and his Descendants*, *John Case and his Descendants* and other works, has agreed to be Vice Chairman of the SGHRL 18th Century Simsbury Account Book Research Project. Our first researcher to receive a book to analyze is Dr. Thomas Sharpless, who is retired from the Chemistry Department at the University of Hartford and who recently helped on the SGHRL Center Cemetery Project. Former Judge of Probate Glenn Knierim has agreed to be our consultant on 18th century laws and legal matters.

So far we have located more than thirty 18th century Simsbury account books in the archives of the Simsbury Historical Society, Connecticut Historical Society, Connecticut State Library and other repositories. We expect to find more and encourage people to lend us any ledgers their families have preserved. We expect that the project will take a number of years to complete and that it will generate a series of occasional articles for this newsletter. We feel sure they will be enjoyable reading for all who are interested in the townspeople of early Simsbury, especially those who are descended from them.

Mary Jane Springman, Chairman
18th Century Simsbury Account Book Research Project

JOHN ELLSWORTH'S DISCOVERY IN AN ACCOUNT BOOK

While he was writing *SIMSBURY: Being a Brief Historical Sketch of Ancient and Modern Simsbury 1641-1935*, John Ellsworth made an interesting discovery in an account book. This is how he tells it on page 107 of his book:

In an old tattered account book, presented to the Historical Society by Mrs. A. E. Schultz, occurred this reference: "Do (ditto) to Cart one lode of Durt to the Salt Peeter work." Apparently in every community from the earliest time up to 1800 there was a central plant where the refuse from farm animals was collected for the purpose of extracting valuable nitrates and Simsbury was no exception.

He adds that this is the only evidence that he has ever found of a saltpeter works in town.

Terrace Restoration is Complete

Thanks to the good services of the House Committee headed by Dick Wagner, the balustrade, steps and bench of the front terrace have been cleaned and restored. Jerry Hannebury, Inc., a stone restoration company based in Maine, made molds of the original balustrade spindles and railing in order to cast replacements. Forty-eight missing or broken spindles and four top rails were replaced and the marble seat of the bench was reinforced. Installation was completed last fall. A much appreciated grant from a civic-minded corporation defrayed the cost of the work. This is one of the final steps in the restoration of the entire library property that was begun after the Simsbury Public Library moved to its new home.

The terrace with its decorative balustrade was added to the front of the Simsbury Free Library building in the winter of 1923-24 through the generosity of Antoinette Eno Wood. At the same time, Mrs. Wood also paid for adding the light and airy first floor room, which included a modern bathroom, at the back of the library building. After this construction and some repairs to the main building were completed, the book racks from the front room were moved to the new rear room and Mrs. Wood had the front room decorated as a reading room.

Simsbury contractor William M. Ketchin built the rear addition and front terrace in 1924. The main Simsbury Free Library building was designated by Hartford architect Melvin H. Hapgood. The building and its grounds were given to the citizens of Simsbury in 1890 by Mrs. Wood's father, Simsbury native and New York City entrepreneur Amos Richards Eno.

Trustees Mark 125 Years as a Board

The Simsbury Free Library was created in 1874 when, in answer to an appeal by a group of public spirited citizens, Amos R. Eno established a trust fund for the support of a library to benefit all the people of Simsbury. The library opened in September of that year in the second floor of the Hopmeadow School, about two blocks north of the present library building.

Mr. Eno named ten trustees and stipulated that "each trustee shall be enabled to appoint his successor in case of death or resignation." The original trustees were Ralph H. Ensign, J. Logan Tomlinson, Alonzo G. Case, Charles Croft, William H. Whitehead, Amos F. Eno, Horace Belden, Aaron L. Eno, John B. McLean and George C. Eno.

The present board is comprised of Margaret M. Donohue, Chairman; Richard D. Wagner, Vice Chairman; Robert H. Lindauer, Secretary; Harvey G. Moger, Treasurer; Mary-Jane Guerry; Judith S. Latin; Paul F. McAlenney; Emanuel Psarakis; Richard E. Schoenhardt and Mary Jane Springman.

SOME RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Books

- *Burials in the Granby Center Cemetery, Granby, Connecticut, 1740 - 1997*, by Carol Laun
- *The Genealogists Address Book* (4th Edition), by Elizabeth Page Bentley
- *Nova Scotia Immigrants to 1867*, by Leonard H. Smith, Jr., and Norma H. Smith

Periodicals

- *American Genealogist*: July 1998
- *Berkshire Genealogist*: Spring, 1998, Summer 1998
- *Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*: May 1998, August/September 1998
- *Genealogical Helper*: July/August 1998, September/October 1998
- *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy*: February 1991 through February 1992
- *National Genealogical Quarterly*: March 1988 through June 1998
- *Vermont Genealogy*: April 1998, July 1998
- *Windsor Historical Society News*: July 1998

Microfilm

- Census:
 - Maine (Aroostook County, 1880-1920), New York (Queens and Dutchess Counties, 1830 and Putnam County, 1850), Pennsylvania (Luzerne County, 1920), Wisconsin (Columbia and Crawford Counties, 1880; Clark and Columbia Counties, 1900)
- Hale Collection of Connecticut Vital Records:
 - Headstone inscriptions for the following towns: Norwich, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Orange, Oxford, Plainfield, Plainville, Plymouth, Pomfret, Portland, Preston, Prospect, Putnam, Salisbury, Saybrook, Scotland, Seymour, Sharon, Shelton, West Haven, Weston.
- Histories:
 - History of St. Lawrence County, New York, 1749-1878
 - History of Suffolk County, New York, 1683-1882

Compact Disc

- Virginia Vital Records #1, 1600s-1800s (Family Tree Maker)

Other

- Records from the papers of Rev. Charles R. Fisher, Rector, St. Paul's Church, 61 Market Street, Hartford, Connecticut
 - Marriages of Soldiers in the War of 1861
 - Burials of Soldiers in the War of 1861
- Vital Records from the pages of Nathaniel Clark Lewis' Diary (1841-1856)
 - Marriages, Baptisms, Funerals

Special thanks to the following people for their recent donations of materials to the library: Ruth C. Duncan, Marilyn Lee, Margaret Lindauer, Pat Mathews, Woody Perry, Bette Shaw, Harold E. Showalter, Tom Thompson, Mary A. Williams.

SGHRL PROJECTS UPDATE

Cemetery Research Extended To Old Section

After completing the survey of the new section of the Simsbury Center Cemetery, as reported in the SGHRL Fall newsletter, Joyce Cahill looked through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) inventory of the old section, done in the 1930s, and decided more work needed to be done. She is now doing a completely new survey and cross referencing it with the one done by the WPA. Elaine O'Leary is assisting her.

Simsbury Town Reports Studied

For the last several months, Margaret Lindauer and Delores van Doornewaard have been abstracting information from the Simsbury Town Reports that the library owns. The reports are from the year 1914 to 1941. The research team has now completed gathering information on births, marriages and deaths during those years.

Materials for New Archival Room Organized

Librarian Stephen E. Simon is now working as our archivist to clean, inventory and shelve all the records to be kept in our new archival room. He is being helped by Elaine O'Leary. Catharine Sherman faithfully continues to keep our acquisition records in order in the main library.

(Continued on page six)

QUERIES

Seeking marriage record for James Barber (born 1767/8 in Barkhamsted, CT) and Lovina (Lovinia) Humphrey (born 1768 in Simsbury, CT). James and family resided in Canton, CT; Addison County, VT; and New York State. Also need birth record of Israel Barber (son of James and Lovina), who was born about 1794 in Canton, CT and died in 1881 at Rensselaer Falls, NY. Please write: Nancy S. Kridel, 3989 Woodville Hwy, Lot 58, Tallahassee, FL 32311-7453. ☉

Seeking information on Affiah Holcomb (born 1759), daughter of Ozias and Rachel Holcomb of Simsbury/Granby, CT. Seaver's *The Holcomb(e) Genealogy* lists Affiah's husband as Benjamin Gibbons. *The Giddings Family* (1882) lists the wife of Benjamin Giddings as Affiah Holcomb. They resided in Hartland, CT and had several children. Can anyone clarify this Gibbons/Giddings confusion? Please write: Jane Bently, 136 Windsor Lane, Grass Valley, CA 95949. ☉

Please direct all queries to Stephen E. Simon, Librarian.

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Obituaries Abstracted

A team of researchers led by Peg Donohue is continuing its work of abstracting the weekly obituaries published in the *Farmington Valley Herald* from 1920 on. Thanks are due to Betsy Cathles, Dottie Cathles, Bette Shaw, Catharine Sherman, and Margaret and Bob Lindauer.

Our Contact in Granby

We are all indebted to Carol Laun, Director of the Salmon Brook Historical Society and SGHRL member, for helping our librarian Steve Simon with research on Granby families.

Fall Open House / Opening Night

On the Saturday after Thanksgiving SGHRL held an Open House and participated in the Simsbury Arts Council's Opening Night. Eleanor Werle deserves our thanks for providing sandwiches for our guests and Bette and Don Shaw for showing them around our genealogical collections. Trustees and several of their spouses also were hosts at the events.

INTRODUCTION TO GENEALOGY COURSE

Do you have any friends who want to start researching their roots? Our library is again hosting the Simsbury Department of Continuing Education course "Introduction to Genealogy." It begins March 3 and runs for four weeks. Dawn Bobryk will be the instructor. Please call the Department of Continuing Education at 658-3870 for more information.

NEW GRANBY PUBLICATIONS

The Salmon Brook Historical Society in Granby, Connecticut wants SGHRL members to know about two new publications: *The Holcomb Collection* by Carol Laun and *Burials in the Granby Center Cemetery* published by the Granby Cemetery Association.

Thomas Holcomb came to the New World in 1630, and was the progenitor of a large and prolific family. *The Holcomb Collection* has stories about some of the Granby Holcombs. These stories were gleaned from old account books, newspaper clippings, faded letters, official documents, tiny scribbled diaries, and memorabilia - all belonging to the Salmon Brook Historical Society

The Holcomb Collection is a soft-cover, spiral-bound, 122 page book with more than 20 illustrations. The cost is \$25 plus \$2 postage.

Burials in the Granby Center Cemetery records burials, with or without headstones, from 1740 to 1997. It has a map of the entire cemetery and maps for each section. The 187 page spiral-bound booklet costs \$25 plus \$2 postage. (Postage is \$3 if ordering both books.)

Contact the Salmon Brook Historical Society, 208 Salmon Brook Street, Granby, CT 06035.

SIMSBURY MARRIAGES

Date	Name	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Feb. 4, 1859	William Broughton	24	Farmer	Ireland
	Mary Hayes	25		Ireland
Mar 5, 1859	Mortimer Holcomb	22	Farmer	Canton, CT
	Margerit A. Jones	20		Berlin, CT
Mar. 7, 1859	Reuben L. Evarts	24		Guilford neck
	Helen M. Humphrey	21		Simsbury
Apr. 10, 1859	William G. Green	22	Mechanic	Pomfret
	Elvira M. Bacon	20		Simsbury
Apr. 7, 1859	James W. Bissell	24		Bridgeport
	Eliza J. Thurston	23		Shelbourne, MA
June 30, 1859	George Pettibone	49	Mercantile	Simsbury
	Chloe M. Tuller	27		Simsbury
Aug. 31, 1859	Daniel M. Hoskins	25	Farmer	Simsbury
	Hilpah St. John	25		Simsbury
Aug. 7, 1859	William W. Hague	30	Laborer	England
	Mary Ann Kenwerthy	29		England
Aug. 14, 1859	John Toel	40	Laborer	Ireland
	Catherine Butler	38		Ireland
Oct. 18, 1859	Chancey D. Holcomb	29	Farmer	Granby
	Hannah J. Buel	22		Simsbury
Oct. 19, 1859	Alonzo G. Case	25	Farmer	Simsbury
	Julia S. Chaffee	20		Simsbury
Oct. 29, 1859	Duane S. Barnard	30	Farmer	Windsor
	Margaret S. Waldorf	24		Red Hook, NY
Dec. 19, 1859	Spencer H. Seymour	27		Hartford
	Harriet E. Adams	23		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

FIRST CLASS

Open Thurs-Sat 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Stephen E. Simon, Librarian & Genealogist
Mary Jane Springman, Editor

<http://www2.miracle.new/~genehist>

E-mail: genehist@miracle.net

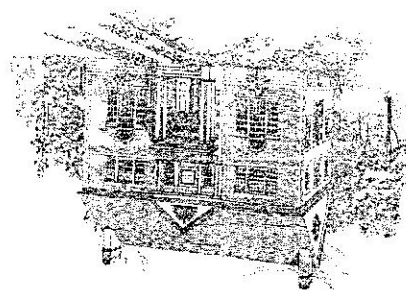
860 658-5382

Simsbury, CT 06070

P.O. Box 484

749 Hopmeadow St.

SIMSBURY FREE LIBRARY



SGHRL will be closed or have a delayed opening if the Simsbury Public Schools do. Please call ahead if you have any doubt that the Library will be open. Dates for make-up days will be announced in the spring.

Winter Closing Policy

Walter V. Hickey, an archive specialist from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Northeast Regional Records Services Facility in Pittsfield, MA will come to speak about what is available there for everyone who researches family history.

Save This Date
Saturday, June 12, 1999
11 a.m.

The Connecticut State Library has requested a complete list of all the periodicals owned by SGHRL by the end of the year. These holdings include magazines, journals, newsletters and bulletins. Volunteers are needed to assist with this important project. Please call Librarian Stephen E. Simon at 658-5382.

Volunteers Needed