

SIMSBURY

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Some Services in 18th Century Simsbury

David Phelps Jr.'s Profitable Sidelines

If a newcomer to Simsbury in 1775 had asked David Phelps Jr. what he did for a living in addition to farming, he would have told the man about many enterprises that brought him extra income. "Oh, I do a lot of fetching and carting," he might have begun. His account book, inherited from his father David Phelps Sr. in 1760, records an active transport business.* Townspeople relied on Phelps to haul all manner of things for them and they also rented his team of oxen, sometimes with a cart or sled, to do their own hauling.

The largest part of this business by far was carting wood, mostly firewood. In 1769 he fetched thirteen loads of wood for Caleb Moses Jr. alone. Some of the wood came from a place that Phelps dubbed "Wild Swamp."

In addition to his own labor, in 1766 Phelps paid Jonathan Alderman for "teaming." By 1769 his eldest son was twelve and old enough to handle the ox team. The Moses account has a charge in February of that year for "Ozias and my team one day to Sled 3 Load of Wood." Sledding wood over smooth snow was actually easier than carting it over often muddy, dusty or rough roads in warmer weather. In later years, Phelps benefited from the labor of his younger sons: David, Roswell, Alexander and Oliver.

In addition to wood, David Phelps and his boys also transported many types of farm products. Corn, rye, wheat, turnips, flax and hay they usually hauled around the town; hogs, pork and beef they often took to Hartford, where the shipment could be sold or loaded aboard ship for export. Several times they made trips to gristmills, as in 1783 when he charged Reuben Moses for "half one Day to Sufred to carry Rye to John Sagers mill." (By "Sufred" he meant the village of Suffrage that was in the southern part of the present town of Canton, which used to be part of Simsbury.) Several times in the spring they delivered dung for fertilizer.

* David Phelps Sr. was fifty years old and one of Simsbury's most distinguished citizens when he died in December 1760 of smallpox. He was a lieutenant in the militia, having recently served in the French and Indian Wars. He also had served as a representative for Simsbury in the General Assembly many times, including at the May session the year of his death. He had the highest tax assessment on the town rate list of 1759, followed by Lt. John Case and Lt. Jonathan Humphrey. His wife was Abigail Pettibone.

The account book, which he began in 1755, records sixty-four accounts brought forward from a previous book. With a few notable exceptions, these accounts remained dormant until after his death. Then his eldest son, David Jr., reckoned accounts with his father's customers during the settlement of his estate. The bulk of the transactions in the ledger, recorded between 1761 and 1795, were made by David Phelps Jr. The book contains accounts for just over two hundred people and it now rests in the Simsbury Historical Society archives.

Construction materials made up a significant part of Phelps's freight, too. By the 1780s he had acquired a wagon, which must have made it easier to haul boards. An entry in 1785 shows a charge to John Hoskins for "fetching a thousand of Bords from your mill to Capt. Humphrey Jun." Elias Vining sent Phelps to the saw mill in Suffrage for boards and Reuben Moses had the team of oxen and Roswell fetch a load of boards from Captain Buel's mill. Abner Pinney, on the other hand, hired them to draw his logs to a mill. When Abel Clark needed a load of rails delivered to Hartford, he hired Phelps.

The Phelps men also hauled brick, stone and clay. They apparently moved a whole building in 1768 for William Andrus. He was billed for "taking your Shop Down and Cary [carrying] it Down to your house." They also served as moving men, carting businessmen and families' goods from one place to another.

Sometimes what Phelps hauled gives an indication of his client's current business enterprise. For instance, between 1764 and 1773, he carted 347 bushels of ashes for his younger brother Elisha Phelps. During the same period he carted more than six barrels to Elisha from a cooper named Brown. From these facts it seems likely that Elisha was running a potash works on his property. Potash was made from lye that was leached from wood ash and then boiled in iron cauldrons until the water evaporated, leaving potash, or "black salt," on the bottom of the pot. Potash was one of the few products that the British government encouraged the colonists to make and export to the mother country. It was used in the manufacture of soap and glass.

In January 1781 Phelps charged his relative Jonathan Phelps for "going to Francis Loomis after your anvil with my slay and horse." Later that year he fetched a load of charcoal for Jonathan. Again in 1783 and '84 he charged him for days spent fetching charcoal. So, Jonathan was probably a blacksmith. Phelps also fetched several loads of charcoal for Daniel Merrell and sent his son David to work for two days in Merrell's shop. Merrell may also have been a smith. Sometimes David Phelps sold charcoal as well as hauling it, which means that he either produced it himself or took it in trade for something. Austin Phelps bought a hundred bushels from him; Caleb Case and William Hickox each bought two hundred. What these men did with the charcoal is unclear.

The fact that David Phelps fetched barrels of cider from Amasa Case for delivery to other men indicates that Case had a cider mill. Phelps also fetched cider from Jonathan Adams. David Phelps himself had a cider mill and delivered numerous barrels of his cider all over town. And local farmers, like Bartholomew and Roger Case, brought their own apples to be pressed at the Phelps mill.

Store Uses Phelps Wagon

Farmington merchant Reuben S. Norton established a store in Simsbury in October 1787. The advertisement he placed in the *Connecticut Courant* says:

"Have just opened a neat and general assortment of Goods at the House of Widow Bird, in Simsbury, one mile and a half south of the meeting house.

The goods will be sold on the most reasonable terms, for Cash, Wheat, Rye, Corn, Flax-Seed, White Beans, Pork, Checked Flannel, Lawrences Certificates, Bees-Wax, tallow, clean cotton and Linen Rags."

The store, known as Norton & Cowles, paid David Phelps three times for the use of his wagon to go to Farmington. For each trip he charged one shilling and one pence

Services in Addition to Fetching and Carting

Sometimes, instead of using his oxen, Phelps hitched his horse to his sleigh to transport loads, but more often he rented his horse to people who wanted to ride it somewhere. (Phelps may have had two horses because he refers to "my Horse" and to "my Mare.") Hartford, Farmington and Scotland (now the northern part of Bloomfield and then a part of Simsbury) were the most popular destinations, but the riders went to all the nearby villages and towns. David Phelps himself journeyed as far as Albany and Boston, but no one hired the horse to go that far.

Customers arranged to ride the horse to elections, military training and other events. Wait Lattimore rode the horse to a wedding and in 1771 Ithiel Pettibone was charged for the horse "when you was married" and "to fetch your wife in." On the darker side, a couple of times people hired the horse to get a doctor. Doctor Jonathan Bird took the horse in 1771 to ride to the "Pox House." Several entries between 1771 and 1781 indicate that there was smallpox in town then. Elizabeth Phelps, David Jensen, Captain Charles Case, Job Case and unnamed others, totaling about forty, were involved.

David Phelps hired out his oxen to plow and he also kept the bull that inseminated the cows on nearby farms. Twenty-one farmers' accounts show charges for the bull's services, at one shilling per cow. Jonathan Humphrey had the most cows; he had seven.

Boarding and pasturing sheep was another service Phelps offered. The sheep usually would stay through the summer, but he kept one for Elisha Cornish through the winter. Caleb Moses Jr.'s flock of twenty-one was the largest entrusted to him. On some occasions Phelps kept people's horses, oxen or other cattle for a few days or weeks. Samuel Talcott Jr. left his mare to be cared for when she was ready to foal.

Occasionally David Phelps, his sons and his hired men worked for other farmers. They would shear sheep in the spring and plow, harrow, drag and sow a field or garden. They mowed, hoed, harvested and set fence. Noah Humphrey hired Ozias to fan twelve bushels of rye, that is, to separate the grain from the chaff. He also hired Alexander to pick apples. Noble Phelps hired the boys to pick corn. A number of times the Phelps men slaughtered a hog or a calf for someone. In short, they were skilled and ready to do any sort of agricultural work.

It should be noted at this point that other farmers, their boys and hired men came to work on the Phelps farm to pay off their debts and settle their accounts. Elisha Harrington sent both Elisha Jr. and Stephen to work for a day. Epharim Wilcockson Jr. came with his son to reap. Josiah Case sent George Brown to hoe an acre of corn. Case and one of his boys also helped the Phelps's to dress flax; Case sent Ezra for a day to cart dung and for twelve other days to do unspecified work.

For the specialized work of ditching, or draining land, Phelps hired the services of Corrill & Curtis. He paid them in 1774 for "ditching in nine acres 12 and a Halfe Roods at Six Pence pr rood." Between 1768 and 1771, Phelps also had a succession of five hired men who boarded with the family.

From time to time other people came to board with the family, but it does not appear that Phelps was running an inn for travelers. In 1759 David Phelps Sr. had two sets of boarders. He charged Jonathan Couch for boarding his wife and her horse for one or two nights at a time throughout the summer and fall. Couch's son also boarded during that time and Phelps notes that the younger Couch made trips to Farmington and Hartford.

In November a Thomas Chase began to stay with the family for longer periods of time. Phelps noted in 1760 that Chase rented his mare to go to the West Society, now Canton, and that he prepared "16 meals of vitels" for Chase's workmen. Benjamin Farnham boarded for four weeks in 1765 and brought his brother with him for a week the next year. Benjamin Farnham was eventually appointed Town Clerk, so his fine handwriting can be seen in deeds and other legal documents in the Simsbury Town Clerk's Office today. The exact purpose of these boarder's stays is not stated.

In October 1768, however, Phelps charged John Pettibone one pound for "living in my house the time of your wife Lyings in and the trouble of her." John and Susannah Adams Pettibone's first child, S. Lorinda Pettibone, was born on October 29, 1768.*

Twenty men's accounts show charges for legal services. Phelps served numerous writs and summonses and executed many court judgments. He records participating in arbitrations, giving evidence and taking inventories of their husbands' estates for Widow Hester Case and Widow Mercy Moses. Likewise, he charged Lt. Dudley Pettibone and "subscribers" in 1774 for serving writs on seven men and for appraising seven other men's land. Phelps gives no hint about the nature of Pettibone's lawsuit; neither does he indicate how he became empowered to perform this sort of work. He possibly was working for the Sheriff of Hartford County or a local court.**

David Phelps also served as a quasi-banker for his customers. Since specie was in short supply, men often came to him when they needed coins. He noted the amount of the cash in their accounts, but he did not charge them interest for, in effect, buying legal tender from him. The few transactions for which he records interest involve notes of hand. Of all of those who came to Phelps for cash, his younger brothers Elisha and Noah ran up the biggest bills by far.

In addition to supplying their fellow townspeople with services, David Phelps, his wife and their sons and daughters produced products that they sold. These ranged from farm produce to shirts to shoes. The accounting of these articles will be the subject of a future article.

This article was researched and written by Mary Jane Springman, chairman of SGHRL's ongoing research project on 18th century Simsbury's account books. A list of about 350 names mentioned in the David Phelps account book is now available for researchers at the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library. Anyone with information about the 18th century people on the list is encouraged to share it with Mrs. Springman.

*I. Fayette Pettibone, comp., *Genealogy of the Pettibone Family* (Chicago: Brown, Pettibone & Kelly, 1885), p. 20.

**Hon. Dwight Loomis and J. Gilbert Calhoun, eds., *The Judicial and Civil History of Connecticut* (Boston: The Boston Company, Publishers, 1895) pp. 167-169.

Internet Sites of Interest

Librarian Stephen E. Simon recommends a Web Site he saw mentioned in the *Welsh-American Genealogical Society Newsletter*, Winter 2000: <http://www.genealogyportal.com>

The Genealogy Portal Web Site has useful links to historical sites, names and personal sites, archives and libraries, guides to research, primary records, research supplies, specific locations and software/utilities.

Ruth Duncan, compiler of *William Bunnell and his Descendants*, has called our attention to a list of twenty-three Web Sites published in *The Bunnell/Bonnell Newsletter*, November 1998. You can read both of these newsletters at SGHRL. If you have any favorite sites to recommend, please let us know so that we can include them in future newsletters.

New Books for Sale in the Library

Genealogy Information for the Town of Roxbury, Connecticut, compiled by Linda J. Pepin.
Published by the author.

The family data in this book covers the years 1746 to 1934. It is taken from vital records, cemetery inscriptions and the 1850 census. It is spiral bound with a soft cover.

Price: \$30.00 at the library, \$33.00 by mail.

The Browns of Wintonbury: Makers of Brown Drums by Frederick A. Hesketh.
Published by the Wintonbury Historical Society of Bloomfield, Connecticut.

Anyone curious about the history of American-made drums or anyone researching the Brown family will be interested in this book. It is spiral bound with a soft cover.

Price: \$10.00 at the library, \$13.00 by mail.

As reported in our fall 1999 SGHRL newsletter, the library is also selling the latest edition of ***A Record and Documentary History of Simsbury*** by Lucius I. Barber, published by the Abigail Phelps Chapter DAR. This is the first edition to include a complete index and a chronology of significant events in the history of Simsbury. It is a hard cover book and costs \$30.00 in the library, \$33.50 by mail.

Some Recent Acquisitions

Books

- Arza Adams: Chronicle of a Pioneer* by Effie W. Adams with Dale W. Adams
(donated by Dale W. Adams)
- The Browns of Wintonbury: Makers of Brown Drums* by Frederick A. Hesketh
(donated by the author)
- A Family Odyssey: The Connecticut Churchills and the Settling of America, 1635-1900*
by Malcom H. Churchill (donated by the author)
- Guide to Quebec Catholic Parishes and Published Parish Marriage Records*
by Jeanne Sauve White
- In Search of Your Canadian Roots: Tracing Your Family Tree in Canada* (3rd Edition)
by Angus Baxter
- The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy* by Val D. Greenwood (3rd Edition)
- A Record and Documentary History of Simsbury* by Lucius I. Barber, M. D. (3rd Printing)
(donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution)
- Tracing Your Cork Ancestors* by Tony McCarthy & Tim Cadogan

Periodicals

- Berkshire Genealogist*: Fall 1999
- The Dutchess*: Winter 1999-2000
- Family Chronicle*: January/February 2000
- Genealogical Helper*: September/October 1999
November/December 1999
- Genealogy Bulletin*: November/December 1999
- The Godfrey Quarterly*: January 2000
- Heritage Quest*: November/December 1999
- The SAR Magazine*: Winter 1999
- Shropshire Family History Journal*: December 1998
March 1999, June 1999, September 1999
- Susquehanna County Historical Society Journal of Genealogy & Local History*:
May 1999, November 1999
- Windsor Historical Society News*: November 1999

SIMSBURY MARRIAGES

| Date | Name | Age | Occupation | Birthplace |
|----------------|----------------------|-----|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Nov. 24, 1861 | Terence Mann | 26 | Laborer | Ireland |
| | Mary Bohannah | 19 | | Ireland |
| Dec. 17, 1861 | George F. Abels | 27 | Farmer | Framingham, Ma Simsbury |
| | Mary E. Pease | 22 | | |
| Dec. 29, 1861 | Apollas Wilcox | 23 | Farmer | Simsbury Barkhamsted |
| | Sarah M. Babcock | 20 | | |
| Mar. 6, 1861 | Jay W. Tuller | 25 | Teacher | Simsbury |
| | Lizzie Pollard | 25 | | |
| Aug. 8, 1862 | William McCarty | 26 | Farmer | Westfield, Ma Canton, Ct |
| | Ann Marie Latimer | 21 | | |
| Jan. 2, 1862 | Edward T. Wilcox | 24 | Joiner | Simsbury Canton |
| | Frances A. Stockwell | 20 | | |
| Feb. 5, 1862 | Charles R. Waterman | 23 | Harness maker | Bloomfield Simsbury |
| | Susan F. Andrus | 24 | | |
| Feb. 3, 1862 | Henry J. Nobles | 42 | Farmer | Simsbury Stonington |
| | Susan M. Babcock | 29 | | |
| April 27, 1862 | Jairus B. Spring | 28 | Farmer | State of Ohio Simsbury |
| | Annette Humphrey | 20 | | |
| May 15, 1862 | William P. Case | 26 | Lawyer | Granby Simsbury |
| | Margarett Turnbull | 24 | | |
| June 11, 1862 | James Tong | 50 | Mechanic | England Ireland |
| | Mary Ann Flynn | 45 | | |
| June 16, 1862 | Thomas Allen | 33 | Mechanic | England England |
| | Betsey Smart | 40 | | |
| July 5, 1862 | James Forsyth | 35 | Laborer | Ireland Ireland |
| | Jane Allen | 20 | | |
| Aug. 16, 1862 | James McCaully | 23 | Laborer | Northampton East Hampton |
| | Ann Tauslon(?) | 20 | | |
| Sept. 2, 1862 | Riley L. Sizer | 24 | Laborer | Blanford, Ma England |
| | Sophia C. Stanton | 21 | | |
| Sept. 14, 1862 | William H. Merrow | 42 | Farmer | Weathersfield Granby |
| | Mary Case | 42 | | |

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

SPEAKER ON GENEALOGY

Nancy Doane, Executive Director
Godfrey Memorial Library
Middletown, Connecticut

Nancy Doane will conduct a verbal tour of the Godfrey Library and explain the resources that you will find there. She will pay particular attention to the **American Genealogical-Biographical Index**, which is published by the library and is now on compact disc, and she will have handouts and answer your questions.

Ms. Doane will be a featured speaker at the National Genealogical Society 2000 Conference in the States in Providence, Rhode Island, this spring. Come and hear her at SGHRL first.

Saturday, May 13, 2000
11:00 A.M.
At the Library

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Stephen E. Simon, Librarian & Genealogist

Mary Jane Springman, Editor

FIRST CLASS