

SIMSBURY

Genealogical and Historical Research Library

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The Stanclift Legacy

Gravestones in Simsbury Center Cemetery

One of the early gravestone carvers in Simsbury was James Stanclift Jr. His grandfather James Stanclift, who was born near the town of Halifax in Yorkshire, England, came to Connecticut about 1684. He eventually founded the Stanclift Brownstone Quarry.

For centuries in England the Stanclift family had lived and thrived near a sandstone quarry that yielded a buff to gray colored stone, now called "Millstone Grit." The stone was lowered down the face of a cliff and used to build houses in the valley. In this place the family built and rebuilt a succession of houses that they named Skowte or Scout. "Scout" in archaic British dialect means a cave formed by jutting rocks or a high precipitous rock, and "scouter" was a stone working term for one who, by use of wedges and jumpers, broke off large pieces of stone. Today we would call him a quarryman. These stone working terms, associated with the family from early times, seem almost a prognostication of the heritage of the stone carvers so many years later, in Connecticut.

It was at the Stanclift Brownstone Quarry, one of the largest quarries in the region of East Middletown (now the town of Portland, Connecticut) that James Stanclift Jr. learned the trade of stone carving. The older James Stanclift was near the top of his profession, so his son and grandson, William and James Jr., naturally followed the "ould man" in most essentials. William, James Jr.'s father, was one of the most popular stone carvers in Connecticut in the early eighteenth century. Two stones can be positively attributed to him: Nathaniel Hooker (Hartford, 1711) and Thomas Barber (Simsbury, 1713)

Middletown was a popular place for carvers and James Stanclift Jr. found the competition too great, which may explain his move to Simsbury. The family lived here until about 1763 and graveyards in Simsbury, Wintonbury and New Hartford contain many examples of his work.

James Stanclift Jr. had a style of carving all his own. His lettering never really became precise nor spelling

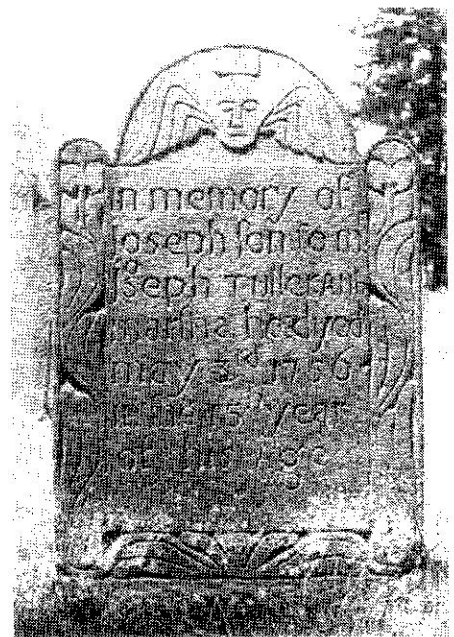


Photo by J. W. Springman

Joseph Tuller 1756
Simsbury Center Cemetery

accurate; however, his stones are wonderfully distinctive, imaginative and unique. He used a stylized death's head, wings and hands to decorate the central arch of his stones. He may be the person who created the rare stone in Simsbury Center Cemetery with a completely abstract design. He probably was responsible for another unusual type of gravestone with a vine depicted on the border in the old Wintonbury (Bloomfield) and Simsbury graveyards and one stone in Granby, two or three in Farmington, four or five in North Canton (once West Simsbury) and at least one in North Canton.

It wasn't until after he had arrived in Simsbury that he developed his distinctive border. One of his earliest stones in the town cemetery (Joseph Tuller, 1756) shows that his finial design also was gradually evolving. A similar stone is in the West Simsbury (Canton) cemetery and six or seven are in Canton.

Hard luck seems to have pursued this James Stanclift throughout life. Although he belonged to a well established family of stone carvers, he was obliged to leave his native town because of some tough competition. He moved to Simsbury, where he made gravestones for most of the important families in town, but he apparently was not financially successful here either. After leaving Simsbury, he encountered a series of real tragedies. During the Revolutionary War his eldest son enlisted in the army and died a month later. A second son enlisted the same day and died three weeks after his brother. Another son enlisted eight months later, was captured by the British and died a year and a half later. James himself died December 27, 1785 in his seventy-fourth year.

The older James Stanclift's descendants retained an interest in the quarry in Portland, Connecticut for almost one hundred years as succeeding generations of Stanclifts worked as stonecutters. Sometime in the 1800s the quarry became a thing of the past.

Bette Shaw, the author of this article, is a direct descendant of James Stanclift from England. Her grandmother on her father's side was a Stanclift and lived in New Hartford until she married Emanuel Stickles. Mrs. Shaw's late brother's name was James Stanclift Stickles and his son is James Stanclift Stickles Jr.

Mrs. Shaw took her information from the series of articles on Connecticut gravestones by Ernest Caulfield, M.D. published in the 1950s and 1960s in the Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin and Dr. Caulfield's articles as they were republished in Markers VIII: Journal of the Association for Gravestone Studies and edited by James A. Slater (Worcester, Massachusetts: Association for Gravestone Studies, 1991). She also used material from The Descendants of James Stanclift of Middletown, Connecticut by Sherry Smith Stancliff and Robert C. Stancliff (Cincinnati, Ohio: S.S. Research, 1995).

The Stanclifts in the 18th Century Simsbury Account Books

Colonial townspeople's account books are yielding some references to the Stanclifts. Doctor Thomas Chase's account in David Phelps's book has an entry in 1760 showing a credit of three pounds and thirteen shillings for "Cash paid to Mr. Stancliff." In February 1762 John Viets credits John Viets Jr. with six shillings and ten pence "by your order from Stancliff."

We hope to discover more references to these gravestone carvers and be better able to interpret them as the research progresses.

Simsbury Builders in the 18th Century

Accounts from John Owen's Account Books

When colonial Simsbury's prosperous tavern keeper and prominent town official John Owen wanted to build a new house, barn, stable or cider mill he dealt with numerous local men in the building trades and their suppliers. Owen's seventh account book records his business transactions from 1767 to 1783, the last sixteen years of his life. He had served as an Ensign in the Simsbury Train Band, as a commissioner on the Committee of Correspondence for Care of Soldiers' Families during the Revolutionary War, and as a representative to the General Assembly and he was Simsbury's Town Clerk, Treasurer and Judge of Probate when he died, just before his 71st birthday. He also held offices in the First Ecclesiastical Society of Simsbury.

The earliest reference in Owen's account book to a building under construction comes in 1768 when Owen credits sawmill owner Ensign Brewster Higley for 921 feet of pine boards and 50 feet of pine plank "for Cyder mill." The same year he bought 2,000 shingles from Richard Hendee and more from Ephraim Wilcock and apparently went to Hartford to purchase two pounds of nails from Mr. Charles Caldwell. His 1768 accounts credit builder Sadoce Willcocks with two pounds and 13 shillings for "part of a frame" and "Warren the Mason" with five shillings and six pence for "masoning."

Owen's accounts in 1771 show that he was buying supplies and hiring labor to build a "little house." The materials recorded include six shillings and four pence worth of nails from his neighbor Elisha Phelps, who seems to have kept a general store; 1,000 white pine boards from both Abraham Case Jr. and Francis Garret; 237 feet of board and 224 feet of plank of an unspecified wood from Thomas Phelps Jr. and more plank from Ensign Brewster Higley. He paid Asahel Strickland that year to "get out shingles" and for "a spell lathing," and he paid Thomas Phelps Jr. and Ezra Pratt to "help plaister."

Evidence in Ezra Pratt's account and his probate record show that he was better known in town as a hatter who made and dressed felt and beaver hats than for plastering, just as Francis Garret was a blacksmith who also sold boards. In fact, it was the rule rather than the exception for colonial townspeople to be engaged in several enterprises. Thomas Phelps Jr.'s account, however, shows that he was skilled in many facets of building. In August of 1773 Owen recorded a credit to Phelps of five pounds sterling for "finishing my cellar" and another credit of 14 shillings and six pence for "pointing etc. cellar."

Jacob Pettibone Jr. was the man Owen called on when he needed work done on a fireplace. Credits to Pettibone in 1773 include four shillings and six pence for "1 day help about Parlour chimney," one pound and ten shillings for "making chimney when Done," and four shillings and six pence for "1 Day masoning." Owen also had Pettibone spend a day in 1777 mending his oven and he paid again in 1780 to have his oven repaired.

In 1774 Owen apparently added a barn. Credits to Elias Vining that year include "2 days barn

floor," "8 Square sash," "putting in," "cheap boards," and "cheap shelves." He credited Theophilus Woodbridge for 547 feet of board, 176 feet of which is described as "poor boards." Capt. Joseph Higley and Benjamin Bodwell also sold Owen board that year and blacksmith Moses Lilley provided a "latch and ketches for gate." The following year Owen paid Elisha Barber two pounds sterling to "frame my stable." He also bought 2,500 shingles from Othaniel Moses and more from Joseph Brace of Hartland.

During the next several years Owen bought a large quantity of nails from blacksmith Daniel Barber and paid Joel Slater for "10 days joinering," probably for doing paneling or some other finishing on the interior of his house. In 1780 Owen had Joseph Brown, the workman who sometimes boarded with him, "wash pallor," which could be interpreted to mean that he whitewashed or painted the parlor. There is no other mention of whitewash or paint in the accounts. Owen sent another handyman of his, Joseph Grimes, to "get some clay," which Grimes most likely dug locally. Owen also records getting brick from Elihu Humphry, but gives no clue as to its manufacture or use.

Pine is the wood most often mentioned in Owen's accounts, but there are references to other woods. Owen paid Ephriam Willcocks for chestnut shingles and Simeon Holcomb for 500 oak boards. He credited Martin Stratton for 45 cherry boards. He also used recycled wood. He paid Elisha Barber for "timber of the old barn" and Thomas Barber 3rd for "50 feet of old boards."

Only once does Owen use the term "slitwork," meaning thin boards; he pays Thomas Barber 3rd in 1773 for 56 feet of them. The term clapboard also appears only once in the account book, when Owen credits Dudley Pettibone for seven shillings and three pence for "clabords." However, his many entries for just "bords" may include clapboards and weather boards. Owen seems to use a great many shingles and two entries in 1779 are puzzling. In his account book he pays Elias Vining for "2 days help shingle my house fore side" and his daybook for the same year credits Joel Slater with "10 days shingling my house." The word "roof" never appears in Owen's accounts, so one is left wondering whether all the shingles are going on top of his various buildings or if some may have been used on the sides.

During the next several years the researchers working on the 18th Century Simsbury Account Book Project will discover more about builders and buildings in Simsbury, as well as a wealth of information on many other topics. We are already being asked by our members and readers to look for particular names and areas of interest in the account books, which we are glad to do. However, the work of historical research is intrinsically slow and time consuming, so we hope that everyone with questions will be patient with us while we go about the business of systematically deciphering the information our early businessmen left for us all.

Mary Jane Springman, Chairman of the 18th Century Simsbury Account Book Research Project, wrote this article from the research she did while writing "A Revolutionary Era Record: The Seventh Account Book of John Owen, Esq., Simsbury, Connecticut." She wrote the paper in fulfillment of a requirement for the graduate course on the history of the Connecticut River Valley taught in 1984 at Trinity College by Professor Kevin J. Sweeney. That paper can be read at the Simsbury Public Library, the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library, and the Simsbury Historical Society. John Owen's account book is in the historical society archives.

In Tribute

Arnold Rogers Storrs

The Trustees of the Simsbury Free Library wish to express their heartfelt sympathy to the family of Arnold Storrs, who died in February. We were fortunate to have had Mr. Storrs as a fellow Trustee for 37 years. "Pug," as he was affectionately known to his many friends, served as both Chairman and Secretary of the Board of Trustees and lovingly cared for every inch of the historic library building.

A long time resident of Simsbury, he was also a Commissioner of the Volunteer Fire Department, a member of the Board of the Simsbury Historical Society and Secretary of the First Building Committee of Simsbury. In his professional life as a Civil Engineer, he was employed by the Water Bureau of the Metropolitan District Commission on the construction of the Barkhamsted Dam and Reservoir. In 1943, he joined Ensign-Bickford Industries in Simsbury as Manager of Plant Engineering, retiring in 1971.

The Board would like to thank everyone who sent donations to the Simsbury Free Library's Archival Room in Mr. Storrs' name.

Woodrow C. Perry

The trustees, staff, volunteers and patrons have greatly missed the quiet presence of Woodrow Perry, who died in February. Mr. Perry spent a great deal of time during the last few years at the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library.

We would like Dorothy Perry, his wife of 49 years, and all his family to know that "Woodie" is fondly remembered here at the library.

Some Recent Acquisitions

Books

Barbour Collection, Vols. 14-18 (Griswold through Hebron), Lorraine White, Editor
Purchased in memory of Mason Noble.

Newgate: From Copper Mine to State Prison by William G. Domonell

Old Gravestones of Dutchess County, New York by J. Wilson Poucher and Helen Wilkinson
Reynolds. Purchased in honor of Bette and Donald Shaw.

Passenger Arrivals at the Port of Charleston, 1820-1829, Brent H. Holcomb, Transcriber.

Settlers of the Beekman Patents, Vol. 1, by Frank J. Doherty

Purchased in memory of James Stanclift Stickles.

Ship Passenger Lists: The South, Carl Boyer 3rd, Editor.

Ship Passenger Lists: New York and New Jersey, 1600-1825, Carl Boyer 3rd, Editor.

Soldiers, Sailors, and Patriots of the Revolutionary War: Maine by Carleton E. Fisher and
Sue G. Fisher.

Continued on page six.

SGHRL PROJECTS UPDATE

Two more volunteer researchers have joined the 18th Century Simsbury Account Book Research Project. Jean Bishop is working in the Connecticut State Archives in Hartford on Isaac Ensign's account book. Ensign was a blacksmith in colonial Simsbury.

Mrs. Bishop has volunteered at the Connecticut Historical Society for the past 15 years. She answers genealogical queries for the society. She is also Registrar for the Abigail Phelps Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution and gives many hours to other Simsbury organizations.

Priscilla "Peg" Bergethon is working at the Connecticut Historical Society on the account book kept from 1759 to 1766 by the partners who operated Goodwin and Bigelow, a general store in Simsbury. Mrs. Bergethon is a retired Special Education teacher who holds a B.A. from the University of New Hampshire and an M.A. and a sixth year credential from St. Joseph College. She taught students with a great variety of disabilities at Bulkeley High School in Hartford.

As the assistant archivist for the Simsbury Historical Society, she created much needed indexes to a number of records and collections there. Her index to *A Record and Documentary History of Simsbury, 1643-1888* by Lucius I. Barber is particularly notable.

Continued from page five.

Vital Records of Sandwich, Massachusetts to 1885 by Caroline Lewis Kardell and Russell A. Lovell Jr. Purchased in memory of Woodrow C. Perry.

Vital Records of Yarmouth, Massachusetts to the Year 1850 by Robert M. Sherman and Ruth Wilder Sherman

Microfiche

Ashfield, Massachusetts Vital Records to 1850

Buckland, Massachusetts Vital Records to 1850

Microfilm

Iowa: Henry (part), Howard, Humboldt, Ida, Keokuk and Kossuth (part) Counties, 1900.

Illinois: McLean County, 1870

Massachusetts: Middlesex County, 1850; Essex (part), Franklin and Hayden (part), 1900.

Vermont: Franklin County, 1870; Franklin, Grand Isle and Lamoille (part) Counties, 1880.

Compact Disc

Military Records: Selected New York Revolutionary War Records, 1775-1840.

SIMSBURY MARRIAGES

Date	Name	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Dec. 19, 1859	Samuel Richardson	25	Mechanic	Windsor
	Sophia L. Boyd	22		Simsbury
Feb. 8, 1858	James B. Hunt	21	Farmer	Hartland
	Phoebe C. Babcock	19		Granville, Mass
Jan. 22, 1860	Eugene C. Alderman	21	Farmer	East Granby
	Ellen E. Holmes	18		Thompsonville
Feb. 27, 1860	Charles Raymond	35	Merchant	Manchester, VT
	Georgie C. Tuller	25		Simsbury
Mar. 13, 1860	Ezra C. Cornelius	23	Farmer	York State
	M. Jane Case	22		Simsbury
Mar. 21, 1860	Charles D. Morgan	28		Southbridge, Ma
	Martha Hale	19		Ellington
Mar. 25, 1860	Niles Pease	22		Enfield
	Cornelia Gleason	22		Enfield
Mar. 15, 1860	John T. Brace	67	Writer	Litchfield
	Louisa Moreau	42		Great Barrington
June 18, 1860	Newton Holcomb	53	Farmer	Granby
	Jane Andrus	25		Simsbury
June 22, 1860	Joseph Hunter	25	Mechanic	Scotland
	Martha Schuyler	24		England
July 18, 1860	David N. Parsons	26	Farmer	Springfield, Mass
	Mary Ann Derwig(?)	19		Germany
June 20, 1860	Thomas N. Wilcox	26	Sawyer	Simsbury
	Amelia G. Allen	21		Simsbury
Aug. 16, 1860	Joseph Patterson	25	Farmer	Ireland
	Delia Scurry	20		Ireland

*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

Walter V. Hickey, Archives Specialist

National Archives & Records Administration
Northeast Region (Pittsfield)
Office of Regional Records Services

Mr. Hickey will present an overview of the records held by NARA
with special emphasis on census and immigration records.

He is an engaging speaker and just the man to answer your questions.

Saturday, June 12, 1999

11:00 A.M.

At the Library

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