

SIMSBURY

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A Revolutionary Era Record

John Owen's Seventh Account Book

In February 1767 John Owen, Esq., of Simsbury opened a new leather-bound ledger and set his quill on the first of its unlined pages, each elegantly watermarked with royal symbols paying tribute to King George III of England. By the time Owen died sixteen years later, he would record his business transactions during the years immediately preceding and during the Revolutionary War.¹ These transactions reflect much that was happening in Simsbury during this crucial period of the town's history.

Owen was the great-grandson of John Owen of Windsor, a Welshman who held one of the first grants of land in the Massaco Plantation, before it was incorporated in 1670 as the Town of Simsbury. The John Owen who owned the account book was born in this town in 1712.²

At the age of thirty-three John Owen was made Ensign of the Simsbury train band (or militia). When he was forty-five, the Connecticut General Assembly made him a Justice of the Peace, an office that he continued to hold for the rest of his life and which qualified him to use the title of Esquire. He and the other seven or eight Justices in town were empowered to try cases up to forty shillings in value. A year later, in 1756, John Owen became Simsbury's sixth known town clerk. He also held this office until his death. As clerk he recorded in the town's books the townspeople's births, marriages, deaths, guardianship bonds, indentures, deeds, inventories, and strays. He also kept the minutes of each town meeting.

In 1769 he became the town's first Judge of Probate; again he was appointed for the rest of his life. By 1777 he was the perennial Town Treasurer. Also, Owen was one of two representatives to the General Assembly sent by Simsbury in October 1766, October 1767, May 1768, May and October 1770, and May and October 1771. He was a member of the Congregational Church and held responsible positions in the First Ecclesiastical Society.

When the town selected a Committee of Correspondence at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, John Owen was one chosen. He also served on the Commission of Correspondence for Care of Soldiers Families during the war. The account headed "Simsbury to John Owen" has about sixty entries between 1776 and 1779. It shows charges for dealing with matters in the "Small Pox affair," for "a Journey to Hartford to advise with Committee of Captives," "2 Days Spent with the Civil Authority of this Town to Consult how to Save y^e Grain for y^e use of y^e State," and similar war time concerns.

When he began his last account book in 1767, John Owen was fifty-four, married for twenty-eight years to Esther Humphrey, and the father of seven daughters ranging in age from twenty-seven to five years old and an infant son. There are nearly 600 accounts for individuals in Owen's ledger at a time when there were fewer than 4,000 individuals living in town. With large families the rule, it is safe to say that Owen did some business with the head of almost every household. People came to his house in the center of town from all corners of colonial Simsbury, including the areas that are now Granby, East Granby, Canton and northern Bloomfield.

Whatever service they required of his multiple offices, he could also provide them with the hospitality of his tavern. Along with each person's legal fees, Owen carefully noted charges for mugs of flip, bowls of grog, gills of rum and the like. He also served them dinner when they needed it and occasionally lodged a traveler or a visiting minister and his horse. Owen's ledger and day books record tavern bills run up at several town meetings and freemen's meetings.

Patrons also bought barrels of cider, which he made in his own mill, and bottles of rum and brandy, which he purchased by the barrel in Hartford. He sold sugar and molasses, paper by the quire and an occasional almanac, map or sermon. In 1767 he sold seven men a total of twelve pounds of gunpowder.

Besides dealing in a limited number of commodities himself, Owen traded with three identifiable shopkeepers in Simsbury. Elisha Phelps' shop was the most convenient for Owen since it was just a short walk south along the highway that is now Hopmeadow Street. (The house Elisha Phelps built is now the Phelps Tavern and Homestead owned and operated by the Simsbury Historical Society.) The hundreds of debits and credits in Phelps account speak of many visits to each other's establishments over the sixteen years. Phelps ran up a bill of £153.4.0 (including £12.10.6 brought over from Book 6) and Owen credited Phelps with £107.0.4. Phelps died about a year before Owen; the commissioners of the Phelps estate balanced the account with Owen's executor.

The two other shopkeepers' accounts are a bit sketchy. Ozias Pettibone, who lived in the section of town that is now Granby, sold Owen twenty pounds of steel, a brass cock (possibly a weathervane), a singing book, a skein of silk, indigo and a stone cup. This man is probably the Pettibone of the account Owen lists as Pettibone & Hillyer. Owen received eight yards of checked linen from these partners for his services in one case as Justice of the Peace. The third shopkeeper, Jonathan Humphrey Jr., sold Owen calico, tea, and "shop goods" between the years of 1773 and 1780.

John Owen lists accounts for eight doctors. Josiah Topping had the most enduring and active account; his balance was brought forward from Book 6 and he ran up a debt of £6.15.3, which he paid apparently in cash, when Owen called in his debts in 1781. Dr. Jonathan Bird, who lived near Owen and sometimes employed Owen's hired man Joseph Grimes, has entries in his account between 1770 and 1782. Dr. Bird died in 1786. Owen also dealt with Dr. Daniel Hooker of Hartford, Dr. Hezekiah Chafee of Windsor, Dr. Asa Hillyer, Dr. Josiah Hulburt, and Dr. Enos Cande. The only fee he paid for medical treatment was to a Dr. Hemsted, who cared for his wife's broken leg in October 1782. This was probably Dr. Joshua Hempsted, who was

well known locally as a bone setter.³ (Please see the article on page five for more information on medical treatment in this era.)

Owen's accounts mention several people in connection with teaching school, but the entries are too vague to give a complete idea of what formal education was like in the town at this time. The earliest reference is to collecting money for the Hopmeadow Country School in 1760. Then in 1770 he noted that, in payment to him, Elisha Phelps had paid school money to Widow Hoskins and Abigail Adams, who probably were teaching Owen's younger children to read and write. In 1771 Owen credited Brewster Higley Jr. "for schooling five weeks at 30 shillings per month" and he alluded to a school on Terry's Plain.

The next year Higley was paid for another month of teaching and John Noble, called "the schoolmaster" by Owen, received £2.18.0 for teaching Hopmeadow school seven weeks and four days. Owen also mentioned schools in the Weatogue West and Meadow Plain sections of town. In 1773 Elizabeth Chick was paid £4.10.0 for keeping school in Hopmeadow and Seth Case, Brewster Higley Jr., and Perminio Adams were paid lesser amounts for teaching. That year he also recorded a charge for a "Singing School."

After a hiatus of a few years, Owen noted in 1778 that he was sending his twelve-year-old son John Calvin (whom he calls Calvin) to Mr. Benjamin Farnham's school. In 1781 Calvin took instruction from Reverend Samuel Stebbins of the First Society, for nine weeks; later that year Calvin went to board with the minister to be taught for fourteen more. The same year Owen's daughter Therese taught in the Weatogue West School.

In addition to the schools, Owen alludes indirectly to a subscription library in town. The earliest reference is in 1769. The men mentioned either for owning a share in the library or contributing a book were Oliver Adams, Daniel Humphrey, Noah Humphrey, Elisha Moses, Jonathan Phelps and Elisha Tuller.

The man named Jacob Tyler who came to work for Owen in 1774 apparently was a scrivener. He boarded with the Owens from May 9 until August 6, writing for Owen and others in town. Among them was the tanner Jonathan Montague who had an "alphabet" made, probably an index for his account book. Owen also called on local men Benjamin Farnham, Elisha Barber and shopkeeper Elisha Phelps to do small writing jobs for him. Phelps and Brewster Higley Jr. helped Owen with making rates for both the town and the society. Hezekiah Holcomb and Dudley Pettibone served a writ now and then and Noah Phelps and Wait Latimore each made a land survey.

The townspeople mentioned in Owen's ledger who worked in various construction trades were the subject of the article in the Spring 1999 newsletter "Simsbury Builders in the 18th Century: Accounts from John Owen's Account Book." The accounts also tell of the men who helped him furnish his house and tavern. Daniel Burlison, a joiner who lived in Simsbury, made Owen eighteen chairs and three stool frames. Josiah Holcomb bottomed eighteen chairs and a great chair. Asher Frank also bottomed chairs and Ebenezer Linkon sold him a great chair. Asahel Strickland made him a bedstead and Joel Slater made him an oval table leaf from cherry. Stephen Foster "the Joiner," as Owen called him, came to board with the family for

several weeks throughout 1772. During these stays he made at least five chairs and rungs for chairs in the schoolhouse. Aaron Clark of Windsor was credited with providing a round table.

When Owen's daughter Hannah married Jonathan Pettibone Jr. in 1769, Owen ordered furniture for her dowry from Captain William Manley of Windsor.⁴ Manley made her a case of drawers, a dressing table, a square table, six framed chairs, a great chair, and two bedsteads, at a total cost of £15.7.6. Eleven years later he made pieces for Owen's daughter Rosetta.

By Mary Jane Springman

More on the businessmen, tradesmen and officials mentioned in Owen's account book will appear in future articles. Most of this article has been excerpted from "A Revolutionary Era Record: The Seventh Account Book of John Owen, Esq., Simsbury, Connecticut" written in 1984 by Mary Jane Springman. Copies of the complete manuscript are located at SGHRL, the Simsbury Public Library and the Simsbury Historical Society. Owen's account book is in the Society archives.

Notes

1. This account book, owned by the Simsbury Historical Society, is the only one of Owen's seven account books known to exist today. Three of his daybooks related to this account book are in the Connecticut State Archives.
2. MS Owen Genealogical Notes of Mary G. Burr and Fannie G. Darrow, n.d., passim.
3. Background on medical men of the time can be found in *Early Medicine and Early Medical Men in Connecticut* by Gurdon W. Russell, M.D., published by the Connecticut Medical Society in 1892.
4. Although Owen recorded "Capt William Manley of Windsor" he may have been referring to the William Manley who is generally associated with Wethersfield and who was one of the most successful furniture makers of the time. In his article "Furniture" in *The Great River: Art & Society of the Connecticut River Valley, 1635-1820*, Philip Zea says that William Manley was among the first cabinet makers to move from the Boston area to Connecticut. He had such a good reputation that he received orders from wealthy patrons as far away as Hadley, Massachusetts.

SGHRL UPDATES

Clavin Fisher has given SGHRL his thirty-five year collection of two magazines: *American History* and *American History Illustrated*. Why not come in and settle down in our comfortable front reading room to peruse these fascinating issues? We appreciate Mr. Fisher's thoughtful gift and congratulate him on the recent publication of his second historical novel for young adults *Three Spies for General Washington*.

Janet Pestey delighted an audience of about forty on May 12 with her hour and a half talk on researching Irish ancestors. She had brought along very helpful transparencies and other supporting material. Thank you to those of you who called to say that you enjoyed and benefited from the afternoon.

A handsome copper-roofed portico now graces the entrance to the Simsbury Chamber of Commerce, on the south side of the Simsbury Free Library. Richard Schoenhardt, AIA, our trustee, is to be complimented for creating a design that blends so well with our fine 1890 Colonial Revival building.

A Man of Many Talents Some of Elisha Cornish's Extra-Legal Work

Most of the Revolutionary-era ledgers that have been studied thus far in the 18th Century Simsbury Account Book Research Project have recorded accounts with local doctors. David Phelps and Elisha Cornish's ledgers show the names of most of the same doctors that John Owen dealt with and a few more, like Doctors Benjamin Farnham, Asa Jonson, Isaac Phelps, Alexander Wolcott of Windsor and several who are recorded with only a last name (Chase, Dunham, Hitchcocks, Hull, Smith, and Willcox).

Both Phelps and Cornish record that they went to fetch doctors for ill people; Cornish had many doctors as clients. And, although the vast majority of Cornish's entries are for legal services, sometimes to serve writs and orders on a doctor, he occasionally billed people for tooth pullings and blood lettings that he himself performed.

In *Early Medicine and Early Medical Men in Connecticut*, Gurdon W. Russell, M.D., says that blood letting was a very popular treatment in the 18th century and that "it was a common idea that it was necessary every spring." According to Russell, "in many places there were convenient men who not infrequently extracted teeth, and some who used the lancet in bleeding." Physicians usually charged one shilling for bleeding, he says, and adds "What the layman charged for the use of his turnkey or the lancet is unknown, probably only a sixpence."

Between 1752 and 1793, Elisha Cornish recorded pulling teeth for Jedidiah Case, Joseph Case, Joseph Weed, Elisha Willcox's son, Ashahel Andrus' wife, Hezekiah Humphrey's son Samuel, and David Phelps' daughter Abigail. His typical charge was four pence a tooth but he seemed to charge extra if he had to travel a distance to render the service. In Joseph Weed's case he clearly combined two jobs in one trip in 1762 when he charged three shillings and nine pence "for assisting you in your action with Josiah Case & pulling a tooth."

In 1780, he charged Dr. Jonathan Bird £2.5.0 "for my surgen Tools or instruments" and then went to the doctor's house in 1785 to pull a tooth for someone. In 1782 Cornish recorded that he bled Jonathan Lattimore Jr. and Joseph Tiff. He charged the latter one shilling and sixpence "for going to Noah Millers to bleed you." The only instance of dealing in medicine was a 1791 entry that charged James Simett two shillings "for salve for your children, etc."

Elisha Cornish's medical services included treating people's animals, too. He delivered at least four colts and many more calves. He usually charged six shillings or less for this service, sometimes noting that he had to go out at night or in a storm. He also tended sick and injured animals; on several occasions he had to set an ox's hip. Like Owen and Phelps, he regularly provided other farms with a bull for stud and he had a stallion, too. This and more he did while running his legal practice and his own farm.

This feature was written from research done on the Elisha Cornish account book by Dr. Thomas Sharpless and the David Phelps book by Mary Jane Springman. Previous articles about Elisha Cornish appeared in the Summer 2000 and Winter 2000-01 newsletters. Articles about David Phelps appeared in the Winter 1998-99, Fall 1999, and Winter 1999-2000. Both account books are preserved in the Simsbury Historical Society archives.

Some Recent Acquisitions

- The Barbour Collection of Connecticut Vital Records: Middletown - Part I, A-J 1651-1854; Middletown - Part II, K-Z and No Surname 1651-1854; Milford 1640-1850; New Canaan 1801-1854; New Hartford 1740-1854; New Milford 1712-1860; Norfolk 1758-1850; North Stonington 1807-1852; Newtown 1711-1852; North Branford 1831-1854; North Haven 1786-1854, Norwalk 1651-1850; Norwich 1847-1851; Orange 1822 -1850; Oxford 1798 - 1850; Plainfield 1699 - 1852; Plymouth 1795 - 1850; Pomfret 1705 - 1850; Preston 1697 -1850, Parts I & II, Portland 1841 - 1850; Prospect 1827 -1853; Redding 1767 -1852, Ridgefield 1709 - 1850* edited by Loraine Cook White (All volumes donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR)
- County Marriage Registers of Ontario, Canada, 1858-1869, Volume 12: Index to Simcoe County* compiled and edited by W.E. Britnell; *Volume 23: Lambton County* compiled and edited by Elizabeth Hancocks, C.G.; *Volume 27: Middlesex County* compiled and edited by Elizabeth Hancocks, C.G. (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- Dating Old Photographs: 1840-1929* published by Family Chronicle Magazine (donated by Stephen E. Simon)
- Descendants of Richard and Mary Sisson: Ten Generations from 1608* by Joan and David Sisson (donated by the authors)
- Discover Your Irish Ancestors* by Dwight A. Radford and Kyle J. Betit (Donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR)
- Emigrants From Ireland, 1847-1852: State-Aided Emigration Schemes from Crown Estates in Ireland* by Eilish Ellis (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- Index to the 1871 Census of Ontario: Brant, York* Bruce S. Elliott, General Editor (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- Interviewing Elderly Relatives...* by Eve McLaughlin (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- Irish Relatives and Friends: From "Information Wanted" Ads in the Irish American, 1850-1871* compiled by Laura Murphy DeGrazia, CG & Diane Fitzpatrick Haberstroth, CGRS (donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR)
- Irish Records: Sources for Family and Local History* by James G. Ryan, Ph.D. (donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR)
- Local History: How to Gather It, Write It And Publish It* by Donald Dean Parker (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- An Osborne Treasury: Collected Letters of Wilbur F. Osborne & Family, 1859 - 1911* edited by Ann M. Prokop (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- Passenger Lists From Ireland* by J. Dominick Hackett and Charles Montague Early (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- Researching Armagh Ancestors: A Practical Guide for the Family and Local Historian* by Ian Maxwell (donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR)
- Richard Griffith and His Valuation of Ireland with An Inventory of the Books of the General Valuation of the Rateable Property in Ireland* by James R. Reilly (donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR)
- The Senator From Simsbury: George P. McLean* by Ellsworth S. Grant (donated by the author)
- Surrogate Court Index of Ontario Canada, 1859-1900, Volume I: Norfolk County* (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- A Survey of American Church Records, Volume II: Minor Denominations* by E. Kay Kirkham (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- Their Own Voices: Oral Accounts of Early Settlers in Washington County, New York* collected by Dr. Asa Fitch, 1847-1878; edited by Winston Adler (donated by Celia A. Roberts)
- Transcribing and Editing Oral History* by Willa K. Baum (donated by Celia A. Roberts)

SIMSBURY MARRIAGES

Date	Name	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Nov. 24, 1866	Harrison Woodford	25		Avon
	Mary E. Case	23		Simsbury
Nov. 13, 1866	Frank McAuliffe	24		Chicopee, Mass.
	Bashia(?) Thurston	23		Simsbury
Jul. 19, 1866	Albert J. Hart	27		Farmington
	Ella N. Barnard	18		Bloomfield
Aug. 5, 1866	Justin H. Winchel	28		Granby
	Katie C. Fulton	20		Simsbury
April 27, 1866	David H. Holmes	26		Simsbury
	Sarah P. Barnes	18		Thompsonville, Ct.
Oct. 31, 1866	Royal Robbins	65		Hartford
	Evcline L. Bueff	41		Simsbury
Feb 18, 1866	Seneca A. Carpenter	23		Savoy, Mass.
	Agnes E. Beckwith	33		Burlington
Oct. 17, 1866	Lemucl S. Elsworth	26		East Windsor
	Annie J. Toy	24		Simsbury
July 27, 1866	William Hamilton	30		Scotland
	Annie McJob	22		New York
May 29, 1866	Charles H. Buck	24		Easton, Mass.
	Julia O. Toy	20		Simsbury
Dec. 25, 1866	James Rutherford	35		Ireland
	Mary Ann McLish	22		Ireland
Oct. 17, 1866	Wm. H. Bishop	21		West Hartford
	Clara Adams	21		Simsbury
Nov. 28, 1866	Henry C. Smith	28		North Haven
	Nancy C. Chidsey	32		Simsbury
Nov. 3, 1866	Albert A. Collins	27		Saugerties, NY
	Amena Johnson	22		Barkhamsted
Dec. 26, 1866	John R. Frazier	25		Scotland
	Mary Whilelow	27		Granby
Dec. 23, 1866	George Maddocks	21		England
	Elizabeth Beard	19		England

This continuing series on Simsbury's early marriage records has been copied by Stephen E. Simon from microfilmed records at the Connecticut State Library. The first three records repeat the last three on the list in the Winter 2000-01 newsletter. The year of those marriages was incorrect.



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