

SIMSBURY

Genealogical and Historical Research Library

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Your Simsbury Ancestors in Town Reports Supplementing Vital Records and Census Information

If you're looking for information about an ancestor to add to the sketchy facts that vital records provide, you might be successful in town reports. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries town reports published by the Town of Simsbury listed the name of every resident the town paid for goods or services, except teachers. Out of a population of 2,410, as reported in the 1860 Federal Census, 117 individuals are named in the 1862 town report. Only three of them are women. The title of this publication states its purpose: *Report of the Finances and Expenditures of the Town of Simsbury for the Year Ending September 30th, 1862.*¹

That year Alfred L. F. Thurston, the proprietor of the Thurston House hotel in Tariffville, was the first selectman. Tariffville was a booming manufacturing village, and—thanks to the carpet mill on the Farmington River—it was the only part of town gaining in population.² The board of selectmen just had been increased from three to five members, probably to deal with the added responsibilities that came with the beginning of the Civil War.

For his year of service as first selectman A. L. F. Thurston was paid \$80, or about \$1,700 in today's dollars.³ Three other selectmen were paid \$50, but one of the men elected during the annual town meeting in October 1861 was not paid so he may not have served.⁴ First Selectman Thurston was also paid for spending a day in Hartford in September to get printing done, probably this town report, which was handled by the Calhoun Printing Company at 66 State Street.

Moses Ensign served as the town treasurer, for which he was paid \$12. In addition he collected a dollar a day for meeting two days with the selectmen and \$5 for entertaining them. For another \$14 he took care of "paying school money" (probably teachers' salaries) and paying bounties of \$100 dollars to each of the families of the forty-three men who volunteered that year to fight in the war. [See the list on page four for their names.] These were the first of over 200 soldiers who eventually left from the town.

Three men were paid for their services as assessors, but Ebenezer G. Curtiss was the one who made out the abstract in a book which he had purchased for that purpose. He and Jeffery O. Phelps lived in Simsbury and Abel C. Adams lived in Tariffville. According to the 1860 Federal Census, all the assessors were prosperous farmers.

Henry W. Ensign had the job of making up the rate bills, that is, the tax bills, for which he received \$10.25. Townspeople had four tax bills to pay—town, state, school and highway. If you thought you were being taxed unfairly or you were unable to pay, you could seek help from the Board of Relief, consisting of William C. Mather, Edward Pease and Watson Wilcox.

John Carpenter was paid for “abatement of taxes of Orlin Seager” and “abatement of school taxes of Mrs. Shepard, John F. Butler and William Stickles.” He was awarded a total of \$10.66. Several more men were paid for abating taxes involving others.

Town Clerk and Registrar Dudley B. McLean recorded seventy-eight births, nineteen marriages and forty-one deaths during the fiscal year. In April he recorded the surveys between Simsbury and the neighboring towns of Avon, Bloomfield, Granby and Canton and he made an abstract for the state librarian. He also spent three days with the Board of Registration and prepared and printed a list of voters.

The Board of School Visitors was similar to today’s Board of Education. Five men were paid for their work as school visitors. Oliver S. Taylor received the most because he took on the extra responsibilities of buying “one record book for school board, class books for teachers, blank reports, paper and pencils for examination of teachers and 13 ½ days visiting schools.” Rev. Taylor was the minister at the Congregational Church. Each of the other school visitors seem to have visited schools five to seven times during the fiscal year at the rate of about \$1.25 per day.

Dudley B. McLean, the town clerk, was one of the people paid for taking care of an indigent person. He received \$7 for keeping one Mary May for three weeks. Who would be a more compassionate caretaker than the son of the late revered pastor of the Congregational Church, Rev. Allen B. McLean? Mr. McLean was himself a deacon of the church. Also, the former selectman Decius Latimer was given \$27 for keeping Susan Robinson. But the man most involved with the care of indigents was Tariffville physician George W. Sanford, who had a contract with the town for their care. Over the course of the fiscal year, he was paid \$948 for “keeping paupers.” The 1860 census names six people designated “paupers” living in Dr. Sanford’s household. Four were men between the ages of fifty and eighty-one, two of whom were black men, and the remaining two were a seventy-two-year-old woman and a fifteen-year-old girl.

The only person who received more money that fiscal year than Dr. Sanford was the lawyer, prosperous farmer and assessor Jeffrey O. Phelps. He was paid back for loans he had made to the town for a total of \$2,300, or about \$49,041 in today’s dollars. There was no bank in town until December 1917, when the Simsbury Bank and Trust Company opened. A moneylender like Mr. Phelps provided a necessary service.

The repair of bridges, especially the Weatogue bridge across the Farmington River, cost the town a great deal during this fiscal year. Seventeen men were paid for bridge work and the use of their teams of

Names in the 1862 Town Report

Selectmen:

A. L. F. Thurston,
Justus M. Case
Henry J. Noble*
Charles L. Roberts

Town Clerk/Registrar:

Dudley B. McLean

Treasurer:

Moses Ensign

Assessors:

Abel C. Adams
E. G. Curtiss
Jeffrey O. Phelps

Rate Bill preparer:

Henry W. Ensign

Board of Relief:

William C. Mather
Edward Pease
Watson Wilcox

School Visitors:

Joseph L. Bartlett
Moses Ensign
W. H. Goddard*
Seymour Pettibone
Oliver S. Taylor

School tax matters:

John F. Butler
John G. Carpenter
Thomas R. Case
T. Holland
Amon Latimer
Decius Latimer
Virgil Pettibone
James Rogers
Orlin Seager
Lydia Shepard
Thomas Steele
Wm. Stickles
John Turnbull

Sheep owners:

Jerome B. Bacon*
Lester Buel
Asa Hoskins
Daniel Mason
Ira Terry

Jeffrey Wilcox

Weatogue bridge work:

Hiram Case
John V. Case
Benajah Humphrey
Frank A. Latimer
Virgil Pettibone

Other bridge work:

James F. G. Andrews
Dwight Bacon
Joseph L. Bartlett
Zerah Brown*
Asahel L. Case*
Chester Case
Milton N. Case
Henry W. Ensign
Edward B. Goodwin
Trumbull Humphrey
Henry J. Noble*
George H. Seymour
Sylvester Tuller
Gillett Wilson

Timber, lumber, plank:

James F. G. Andrews
Joseph L. Bartlett
James C. Brockett
Asahel L. Case*
Chester Case
Elam Case
John V. Case
Henry W. Ensign
Edward B. Goodwin
Henry J. Noble*
Thomas N. Wilcox

Keeping persons:

Decius Latimer
Dudley B. McLean
George W. Sanford

Persons kept:

Mary May
Susan Robinson

Road /highway work:

Joseph L. Bartlett
Aaron Chapman
Chauncey Goodrich
William Reed
Robert Siddell*
Seymour L. Spelman

animals. Ten men provided timber, lumber or plank. Joseph L. Bartlett supplied the most plank—871 feet—for which he was paid \$26.13, or about \$557 in today's dollars. In this way the town's farmers profited from their woodlots and the sawyers from their mills.

That the Weatogue Bridge was sorely in need of repair is apparent by the fact that Selectman Justus M. Case was awarded \$8 "for damages paid for cattle falling through the Weatogue Bridge" and James Prosser was awarded \$150 for damage to a horse that also fell through that bridge. Mr. Prosser wasn't from Simsbury. He may have been the James Prosser of West Hartford who was a licensed horse dealer.⁵

Zerie B. Brown built a bridge near his house, apparently a small one as he charged only \$4.50. Justin A. Bradley was paid \$6.50 for "putting up railing south of centre bridge," probably along a highway embankment, and Amon Latimer also put up a railing.

The town highways were dirt, but they required work to keep them free from ruts, stones and other impediments; and in winter snow had to be spread on the floor of covered bridges so that they could accommodate sleighs. Occasionally a new stretch of road was developed. William Reed was awarded \$125 for a "road contract," Joseph Bartlett was paid for supplying men and teams for highway work and five other were paid for working on or repairing highways.

The Connecticut General Assembly had long been promoting the raising of sheep, particularly merino sheep, since wool was important for a growing textile industry. [See more on this subject on page five.] Because dogs were an ever-present threat to sheep the legislature passed lengthy and strict regulations concerning their registering and control. It was not a crime to kill a dog that was attacking sheep⁶ The 1862 report lists six men who were compensated for sheep killed by dogs. With eight sheep killed, Daniel Mason collected the most, \$16.

One cow was mentioned in the report, but no explanation is given why the town owed Richard Bacon a fee for keeping Newton Holcomb's cow. The town refunded a fine paid by Michael McCarty. Town meeting minutes state that he had been fined for selling liquor.

The Civil War had just begun, so this report contains the names of the first forty-three men who volunteered for the Union Army from the town. The town voted them a bounty of \$100 each, which was paid to their families and duly noted in the report. Eventually more than 200 men were sent off to the war from Simsbury and the reports of each subsequent year note how much the town paid its soldiers.

by Mary Jane Springman



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Notes

1. This report, the earliest extant, is in the Connecticut State Library in the stacks, level 7A. The Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Library has a copy of it along with indexes alphabetized by name and by the reason for payment.

2. The *Hartford Courant* of January 22, 1861, reported that Simsbury had lost 12% of its population since the 1850 census.

3. See westegg.com/inflation for conversion of 1862 dollars to 2008 dollars.

4. The selectman who was not paid, and whose name did not appear in subsequent years, was Timothy M. Curtiss.

5. See U.S. IRS Tax Assessment List for 1862 on Ancestry.com.

6. For the law in force at this time, see "An Act for the Protection of Sheep Culture" in *Public Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, May Session, 1856* (New Haven: Carrington & Hotchkiss, 1856), 97.

Jeremiah A. Tuller*

Civil War volunteers:

Samuel W. Allen

Owen Bacon

John Bare

Marcellus Barrett

William Barton

Wilber Blare

Eugene Brown

Alonzo G. Case

Hosea Case

John E. Case

Lucius G. Clemans

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Felix Main

Francis Mann

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Marcus Moses

Morton Sanford

John Shanhensy

Ezra Smart

Edward Sperry

Moses E. St. John

John Sydenham

George B. Thurston

Laroy Tuller*

Julius Weed

George M. Wells

James Wells

Ebenezer Whitcomb

John F. Wilson

O. M. Wilson

* The spelling of the name has been altered to conform to the spelling on his tombstone.

Do You Enjoy Indexing?

Some people just like to alphabetize and organize. If you would like to help with indexing early Simsbury Town Reports like the one that was the basis for the article in this issue, Publications Chairman Mary Jane Springman would like to hear from you.

The library hopes to develop a database of names in the reports to aid our patrons with their genealogical research. Knowledge of Microsoft Excel or willingness to learn the program is necessary. You can work on the library's computers as part of a work group or at home on your own computer. Our many members in far away states are more than welcome to participate.

The indexing project is slated to begin in January 2010, but we would like to hear from you now if you are interested. Please contact the library or send an e-mail to Mary Jane Springman at this address: mj_springman@yahoo.com.

Col. David Humphreys and Merino Sheep

Son of Simsbury Man Was First to Import Breeding Stock

Revolutionary War soldier Colonel David Humphreys was a fifth-generation descendant of one of Colonial Simsbury's first settlers, Michael Humphrey, who emigrated from Lyme Regis, Dorset, England.¹ Numerous descendants of his, including Col. Humphreys' grandparents Deacon John and Sarah (Pettibone) Humphrey lived out their lives in Simsbury and are buried in Simsbury Cemetery, just north of the library.² His father, Rev. Daniel Humphreys, moved to Derby (to a part that is now Ansonia, Connecticut) where he was minister of the Congregational Church for fifty-four years. In Derby he married the widow Sarah (Riggs) Bowers and David, their fifth and youngest child, was born there in 1752

Like his father, Col. Humphreys graduated from Yale College (Class of 1771), where he later earned a masters of arts degree. After the outbreak of the Revolutionary War he served on the staffs of Generals Parsons, Putnam, Greene, and, finally, as aide-de-camp to General Washington. Immediately following the war George Washington invited Col. Humphreys, who had become his friend and confidant, to live at Mt. Vernon and serve as his private secretary. In 1784 the new nation's government sent Col. Humphreys to France and England as secretary of legation to assist Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, who were to negotiate treaties with these countries. Later Col. Humphreys became the United States' first minister to Portugal and to Spain.

It was during his tour of duty as minister to Spain that Col. Humphreys encountered merino sheep. The long, soft fleece of this breed was superior to any in his own country, so he shipped a herd of twenty-five rams and seventy-five ewes to Derby in 1802. He is credited with setting up the first mill to successfully produce woolen cloth in the United States. The mill was in Humphreysville in what is now Shelton in the Naugatuck River Valley. Col. Humphreys persuaded an Englishman from Manchester who had a complete knowledge of textile manufacture to come to run his mill. Among the many who favored coats made of broadcloth from the mill were Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. The former wore one to his inauguration.

During his many-faceted career, Col. Humphreys represented the town of Derby in the Connecticut legislature. He was also a poet and playwright and he became part of a celebrated group known as the "Connecticut Wits" (sometimes called the "Hartford Wits"). This group, which included Timothy Dwight, John Trumbull and Noah Webster among others, promoted the development of American literature. Col. Humphreys died in New Haven in 1818.

The Derby Historical Society now preserves the 1698 house in which Col. David Humphreys was born. It is at 37 Elm Street in Ansonia, Connecticut. Web site: derbyhistorical.org

1. Frederick Humphreys *The Humphreys Family in America* (New York: Humphreys Print, 1883), 97-111.

2. One hundred forty people interred in the old section of Simsbury Cemetery have the last name Humphrey, Humphreys or Humphry. See Joyce A. Cahill, comp., *Simsbury Cemetery Gravestone Inscriptions, Simsbury, Connecticut: 1688-2000, Vol. 1: The Old Section* (Simsbury: Simsbury Free Library, 2000), 163-167. Also, many Humphrey families lived in parts of Colonial Simsbury that are now Canton, Granby, East Granby and northern Bloomfield

SGHRL Updates

Heartfelt thanks from everyone at the library to:

Pam McDonald, the librarian at the Westminster School, for donating *The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Simsbury: Summers of 1944 and 1947*. This loose leaf binder contains materials that Ms. McDonald has gathered over many years as an aid for researchers.

Robert M. Ellis for donating "The Farmington Canal: Expectations Never Realized." Mr. Ellis wrote this thesis in 2008 as a requirement for a masters degree in history from Trinity College.

Jackson F. Eno for donating the genealogical study "Descendants of David Wood, Jr." This Wood line includes Charles Boughton Wood, husband of Antoinette Eno Wood, who built the 1924 addition to the Simsbury Free Library and bequeathed the money to build the Eno Memorial Hall.

James P. Flynn, chairman of the Board of Trustees, for a new printer. For the first time we can print in color. The new printer also has a flatbed scanner.

The library has acquired *A Sense of Place: First Church Records, Simsbury, Connecticut, 1682-1930*, compiled by Thomas Dunmore Ayres and published in 2009 by the Simsbury Historical Society. The book contains the index to the Congregational Church records already in our collection, published as facsimile reproductions under the supervision of the First Church historian Donna M. Hopkins. Mr. Ayres dedicated his book to our late trustee Robert H. Lindauer, Sr. (1921-2005), noting that he was a "Veteran, Educator, 'Hometown Hero.'"

Thank you to Town Clerk Carolyn Keily and her assistants Anita Schwager and Janet Brady for their help with locating early maps and town meeting minutes. This greatly facilitated the writing of the article in this issue on the 1862 Simsbury Town Report.

Looking for Holiday Gifts?

SGHRL has many books on genealogy and local history for sale. Please come in or check the "Store" on our Web site for a complete list and order form.

Books for sale include *John Case and his Descendants* by Ruth Duncan, the cookbook *The Daughters Cook* by the Abigail Phelps Chapter NSDAR, *Footprints Across Connecticut From Simsbury 1930 Census* by Jean Perreault and many books on the history and lore of the towns of Granby, East Granby, Canton, Bloomfield and of Granville, Massachusetts.

Holiday Closings

During the weeks of Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years, SGHRL will be Closed Nov. 26-28, Dec. 25-26, Jan. 1-2, 2010.

During Thanksgiving Week the library is hosting the Gingerbread House Competition sponsored by Simsbury Celebrates! 2009. Please check the back cover for event hours. We hope to see you there!

Who Remembers Martin Luther King Jr. Living in Simsbury?

A long honored tradition in our community going back to the 1800s was the chance during the summer for our young people ages fourteen and up to work the local tobacco fields. It was an opportunity for them to earn some extra money and experience the independence that comes with responsibility. It also taught them the value of hard work especially given that the scorching heat under the shade tents could reach upwards to 130 degrees. Still, most of these young workers looking back on their experience have fond memories despite the hard work and less than ideal conditions. They had a chance to meet new people and perhaps experience a different way of life from what they knew at home.

This was no different for one of the most famous persons who worked alongside our kids during the summers of 1944 and 1947. During those summers Martin Luther King Jr., arguably America's most important civil rights leader, came up from the South to work for Cullman Brothers in Simsbury. "Tweed," as he was nicknamed for the better-than-average clothes he wore, spent two summers here, first working in the kitchen and then in the fields picking tobacco. The first summer he was just fifteen years old and was about to be admitted as the youngest person to attend Morehouse College in Atlanta, one of the top African-American colleges.

Dr. King's first experience in the non-segregated North was profound. He was exposed to "nice" white people who allowed him for the first time in his life to attend a non-segregated church, watch movies at Eno Memorial Hall while not being confined to the back of the theatre, eat with whites at the counter of Simsbury's Doyle's drug store, and go to the "finest restaurants in Hartford," he boasted in one of his letters sent home.

His stay was so profound that later, in responding to the question on his application form for seminary school "Give your personal reasons for the decision to study for the Gospel Ministry," Dr. King chose to answer, "My call was quite different from most explanations I've heard. This decision came about in the summer of 1944 when I felt an inescapable urge to serve society. In short, I felt a sense of responsibility which I could not escape."

The Simsbury Free Library wants to recapture what Dr. King may have experienced when he worked here for two summers. We know only a little about his stay from the four letters he wrote his parents as well as the brief mention of it in later writings by himself and his contemporaries. But there are probably people in our community who can add a lot more to our knowledge base as they either worked alongside Dr. King or just knew of him or even just knew of the social and work environment in which he toiled.

If you know of someone who can help us to recapture these memories, we ask that you contact Rick Wagner by either e-mailing him at rick@wagnersimsbury.com or by calling him at (860) 878-5005 or just contacting the library. Eventually, the Simsbury Free Library plans to have an exhibit commemorating Martin Luther King Jr.'s stay in Simsbury.



The usual telephone number for the Simsbury Free Library / SGHRL is presently out of service. Please use 860.408.1336



Come to the Simsbury Free Library
to see the display of
Gingerbread Houses

Simsbury Celebrates! 2009 is having its
first annual Gingerbread House Competition!



Sunday, November 22, from 3-5 P.M. the **Open House Reception & Judging** is open to the public. More than 25 edible pieces of art created by local residents and businesses are entered in the competition.

Monday, November 23, from 3-5 P.M. and **Wednesday, November 25**, from 4-6 P.M. the exhibit is open for viewing and bidding on the houses in a **Silent Auction**. Some houses will offered in a **Tea Cup Auction**, at \$1 per ticket or 12 tickets for \$10.

Saturday, November 28, all the gingerbread houses will be on display during Simsbury Celebrates! 2009. For more information visit www.simsburycelebrates.com.

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