

# SIMSBURY

## Genealogical and Historical Research Library

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### By Subscription Only: The Union Library A Predecessor of the Simsbury Free Library

*Libraries did not begin with the idea that books would circulate. In ancient and medieval times a library's major function was to preserve scarce texts for the use of scholars; the fabled Egyptian library at Alexandria and the collections in the monasteries of Europe are well-known examples of this type. An engraving done in 1600 clearly shows that the books in the library at the University of Leyden were chained to the shelves.<sup>1</sup> Nearly two hundred years later when future Connecticut educator Henry Barnard entered Yale College, he found that its library was not open to underclassmen and that the only way he could gain the access he wanted to books was to join the Linonian, a debating society, and to serve unpaid as an assistant to its librarian.<sup>2</sup>*

*From colonial times, however, adults who could afford to pay fees joined subscription libraries, sometimes called social libraries, in order to draw books to read in the privacy of their own homes. The first subscription library on this continent was the Library Company of Philadelphia founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin and his associates. The first in Connecticut was the Book-Company of Durham founded in 1733 by eight men of that town who wished to enrich their "minds with useful and profitable knowledge by reading [but who] were unable to do so for the want of suitable and proper books."<sup>3</sup> Subscription libraries were tried repeatedly in almost every town throughout Connecticut with varying degrees of success.<sup>4</sup> By the start of the Revolutionary War the subscription library had served three generations in some places.*

*Simsbury had a library of this type as early as 1769, as shown by notations in John Owen's account book in the Simsbury Historical Society archives.<sup>5</sup> Displayed in a frame on the wall of the Simsbury Free Library today are three documents dated as early as 1800 from the Hopmeadow Library, another subscription library. But no extant record of early libraries in Simsbury is as complete and revealing as that of the Union Library.*

On November 19, 1797, nineteen Simsbury men affixed their signatures in a brand new record book to the Constitution of the Union Library.<sup>6</sup> This document, consisting of seven articles, was followed by a set of seventeen bylaws. The library that these men founded was privately owned and its owners were called, in the parlance of the day, proprietors. The third bylaw tells just how private and excluding the library was. It states, "Every person who shall lend a book belonging to this Library to any except his own family, or those living in the same house, or to a proprietor, shall incur a penalty of three shillings."

The proprietors included some of the wealthiest and most influential men in Simsbury and their younger relatives. A record made for the first direct Federal tax on wealth in 1798 lists all 255



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Simsbury houses, including their house lots of two acres or less with outbuildings, that were valued at \$100 or more.<sup>7</sup> Only eight of these homesteads were valued at \$1,000 or more. Four of them belonged to proprietors of the Union Library. Col. Jonathan Humphrey's primary residence was the most valuable in town at \$1,400.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that he was also the head assessor for the 1798 valuation. Dudley Pettibone, Esq., and Col. Jonathan Pettibone both had houses and house lots valued at \$1,200. Bartholomew Case's homestead was valued at \$1,050. In addition, all of these men owned more than one homestead.

Many of the proprietors who attended the first meeting in January 1798 had served in the Revolutionary War. Col. Jonathan Humphrey was a veteran and the son of the Col. Jonathan Humphrey who had commanded Connecticut's 18th Regiment of Militia. Amasa and Amaziah Humphrey, Jedediah Case Jr., Elisha and George Cornish, Wait Latimer, and Dudley and Col. Jonathan Pettibone were also veterans. Most of the others were sons of veterans.<sup>9</sup>

Four of the proprietors eventually held the office of Town Clerk. Dudley Pettibone was elected in 1800 and served until Amaziah Humphrey took over in 1805. He was replaced by Benjamin Ely in 1809. Then Jonathan Pettibone Jr. served from 1818 until 1824.

Dudley Pettibone served as a Justice of the Peace from 1783 to 1809. John Bestor was a Justice between 1810 and 1818 and William Mather from 1810 to 1834. The office of Justice of the Peace carried with it far more responsibility than it does today and entitled the men to append the honorific "Esquire" to their names.

Jonathan Pettibone represented Simsbury in twenty semiannual sessions of the General Assembly, his last appearance being in May 1809. Dudley Pettibone was there for four sessions, as was Amaziah Humphrey. William Mather represented Simsbury during three sessions and John Bestor, two. Toward the end of the library's existence Jonathan Pettibone Jr. began serving regularly and George Cornish and Wait Latimer Jr. were there several times, too.<sup>10</sup>

All the proprietors had family ties. To give a few examples, the elder Pettibones were cousins. John Bestor was married to Dudley Pettibone's daughter Rosetta and Benjamin Ely was married to his daughter Polly. Asa Humphrey was Jonathan Bird's uncle on his mother's side. Horatio Gates Case was the younger brother of Jedediah Jr. and their sister Elizabeth was married to Elisha Tuller Jr. Elisha and George Cornish were cousins.

The Cornish men and William Mather were deacons of the First Society's Congregational Church.<sup>11</sup>

All the men must have farmed to some extent, but they had many other occupations. Tax lists in the early 1800s show that John Bestor was a physician and that he was a partner in a gristmill, as were Benjamin Ely and Elisha Tuller Jr. Mr. Tuller also had a saw mill. Jedediah Case Jr. was a carpenter and Wait Latimer was a joiner. Austin Phelps was a blacksmith and William Mather was a merchant. Jonathan Pettibone and his son also had a store. Cols. Jonathan Humphrey and Jonathan

Pettibone were both tavern keepers.<sup>12</sup> The 1827 inventory of Col. Pettibone's estate reveals that he was a distiller since he had a large still valued at \$250 and a small one plus other equipment for a distillery valued at \$99.50.<sup>13</sup>

Twenty-two individuals became proprietors in January 1798. In subsequent years several of the original proprietors died and seven new names were added. Any proprietor who wished to sell his share to another man needed the approval of two-thirds of the others and no share could be divided. Only one such sale is recorded and that was in January 1804 when, shortly before his death, Wait Latimer sold his share to Jedediah Case Jr., whose name was added to the record.<sup>14</sup>

A share could also be purchased outright and in 1809 the proprietors voted to accept Giles Latimer Jr. into their ranks. He paid \$3.00 upon admission, which would be almost \$35.00 today.<sup>15</sup>

A share could be inherited, too. When Col. Jonathan Humphrey's estate was settled in 1813, his right in the library, valued at \$3.00, was given to his two unmarried daughters, Lydia and Nancy.<sup>16</sup> Their names were not added to the record. Although there was nothing in the bylaws prohibiting women, there was the stipulation that no share could be divided. Perhaps the three men who made the distribution of the estate, Rev. Samuel Stebbins, William Mather and Aseph Tuller, thought that the women would find a buyer for both their halves.

The proprietors provided capital for the library in installments. They agreed to pay into the treasury one shilling, six pence every other month for the first year, beginning in January 1798, and afterward any other fees agreed upon by two-thirds of the proprietors. The following year they assessed themselves "Four Pence, half Penny" every other month. In later years they voted fees of as much as fifty cents, to be paid on the first Sunday evening of March or May.

Their organizational meeting in 1797 was on a Sunday, and their annual meetings were to be held on the first Sunday evening in January. However, four of them were on a Monday and the meeting in 1804 was on a Friday. It is tempting to speculate that bad weather on the Sunday forced the changes.

A librarian, who was expected to serve also as secretary and treasurer, was elected at each annual meeting. The post was invariably given to William Mather. In 1800 the others voted to pay him \$1.50 a year for his services. It is interesting that each year he recorded his pay in the library accounts not in dollars but as nine shillings.

#### Proprietors of the Union Library 1797-1816

Andrus, William Jr., 1797-1814

Bestor, John, 1798-1810

Bird, Jonathon, 1797-1809

Case, Aaron 2nd, 1797-1814

*Aurora, 1813 only*

Bartholomew, 1797-1811

Giles, 1797-1803

*Horatio G., 1808-1814*

*Jedediah Jr., 1804-1816*

Cornish, Elisha, 1797-1815

George, 1797-1812

Ely, Benjamin, 1797-1811

Humphry, Amasa, 1798-1800

Amaziah, 1798-1804

Asa, 1797-1803

Col. Jonathan, 1798-1813

Lattimer, *Giles, Jr. 1809-1813*

Wait, 1797-1804

Wait Jr., 1797-1814

Mather, William, 1797-1806

Moses, Michael, 1797-1813

Pettibone, Dudley, 1797-1813

Col. Jonathan, 1798-1810

Jonathon Jr., 1797-1804

Phelps, Austin, 1797-1804

Pinney, Azariah, 1799 only

Tuller, Elisha Jr., 1797-1814

*Ezekiel, 1801-1803*

*John, 1804-1814*

Ward, *Jabez, 1804-1813*

The names of the seven men who joined after the first full year are in italics.

The Constitution of the Union Library stated that “it shall be the duty of the Librarian to keep an accurate account of all Books taken out and by whom, describing each Book by its number – together with the time of taking it out and returning it.” It did not state, however, who would be in charge of selecting and buying the books. That responsibility seems to have fallen mostly on a committee consisting of between three and five members chosen from among the proprietors.<sup>17</sup>

The committee also settled any disputes over the defined fines or penalties for returning a book late (two pence per day), folding down a page (one penny), failing to register a book before taking it (one shilling), failing to pay the bimonthly bill or a fine for more than two months (barred from the use of the library) and so forth. Five times the librarian noted damage to a book, the first being, “Gillies History of Greece 2<sup>d</sup> Vol page 383 Greased. The damage assessed & paid – ”

The sixth article of the Constitution states that “the Library shall be kept in the District of Weatogue West side” and there is one mention of a “Library Room,” but there is no further hint about the location of this subscription library. Naturally it had to be a location relatively near to the proprietors’ homes. While a few lived as far away as Meadow Plain, most of them lived in East or West Weatogue near the Farmington River, which was spanned by “the great bridge,” as it is called in the land records of the day.

A convenient place for the library would have been in librarian William Mather’s house, or perhaps it might have been in Col. Pettibone’s Tavern.<sup>18</sup> Col. Pettibone’s library account was, in fact, the first to be recorded in the book. Another Union Library formed the same year in Pine Plains, Dutchess County, New York, was organized and kept in a public house.<sup>19</sup>

The reason subscription libraries were sometimes called social libraries was that drawing books was a social occasion. As clearly explained in the Union Library bylaws, the proprietors met every other month. They all brought the two books they were allowed and selected two others. The ninth bylaw describes the process used:

Each proprietor shall receive his books by drawing, to be performed in the following manner (viz.) each man’s name shall be written on paper and put into a proper box and from thence shall the Librarian draw each man’s name; the first drawn shall be first served. The drawing to commence each evening at seven o’clock from the first Sunday evening in September to the first Sunday evening in March in each year, and eight o’clock from and after the first Sunday Evening in March to the first in September.

If a man chose a book that someone else wanted, bidding commenced. The sixth bylaw set restrictions:

When any one shall claim a particular book, it shall be delivered to the highest bidder, except a book that will break the connection of a set that the proprietor has commenced the reading, such as History, Travels and Novels.

That the men did bid on books is reflected in the accounts kept by the librarian/treasurer. Bids at one meeting totaled a mere eleven pence, but at another they rose to six shillings, eight and a half pence.

The library’s collection consisted of eighty-three volumes, some of them parts of sets. The books were listed in categories. The first and largest category was “Divinity,” which contained thirty-one volumes. There were collections of sermons by Backus, Davies, Fordyce, Watts, Walker, Trumbull and Smalley. Other titles included, as the librarian recorded them, “Herveys Meditations, Newton on the Prophecies, Strong on Benevolence and Misery.”<sup>20</sup>

The next category was "History" which had thirteen volumes: "Ramsay's American Revolution, Goldsmith's England [4 vols.], Goldsmith's Rome, Gillies Greece [3 vols.], Winterbotham View of China [2 vols.], Trumbulls Connecticut, Dupan Helvic Union."

Under "Voyages & Travels" were "Cooks Voyage [2 vols.] Carvers Travels, Maritis Travels [2 vols.], Brydones Tour."

"Cowpers Poems" was the only title under "Poetry," but there were three under "Novels": "Coquette, Vicar of Wakefield, Evelina." The eight volumes of "British Plutarch" were they only books under "Biography" and "Morse's Geography" in two volumes sufficed for "Geography."

"Miscellanies" covered eighteen additional volumes: "Sturmes Reflections, Baron Trenk, Farmers Letters, Bennets Letters, Franklins Life, Zimmerman on Solitude, Mirror, Beccaria on Crimes Punishments, Citizen of the World, Four Years Residence in France, Buffons Natural History, Bisset on Democracy, Senecas Morals, Lavaters Physignomy" and one title that seems to be "Hive."

Each book was assigned a number and the numbers of the books that each man drew at each meeting was carefully noted in the record book. Most men drew as many books as they could every time they could, but a few showed little interest.

Activity in the library began to diminish about 1806, which was the last year that the librarian/treasurer was paid. However, Horatio Gates Case bought a right in the library in 1809 and Giles Latimer Jr. bought one in 1810. William Mather set down the last record of bids paid in 1812. At the last recorded annual meeting of the proprietors on January 3, 1813, the only business was choosing William Mather to be librarian again and adjourning to "the first Sabbath evening in March next." Eight men drew books through 1814. Elisha Cornish drew books in 1815 and Jedediah Case Jr. took the last in 1816.

There is no accounting of the disposition of the books, but one of the books listed in the 1828 inventory of Col. Jonathan Pettibone's estate is "1 Morse Geography .25" and in the 1862 inventory of William Mather's estate one item stands out: "Library of Books \$20.00."<sup>21</sup>

By Mary Jane Springman

## Notes

1. William Isaac Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, Columbian Knowledge Series, no. 2 (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894), 11.

2. Amoy Dwight Mayo, "Henry Barnard," *Report of the Commissioner of Education for 1896-97* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1898, 772; and Robert Bingham Downs, *Henry Barnard* (Boston: Twane Publishers, a division of G. K. Hall & Co., 1977), 95.

3. Jesse Hauk Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 32-33.

4. In 1737, the citizens of Guilford, Saybrook, Killingworth and Lyme established a joint library, and two years afterward twelve men of Lebanon and vicinity established the Philogrammatical Library there. Both of these libraries benefited from gifts of books sent by the British theologian Isaac Watts. In 1739 thirty-four individuals in the Pomfret area formed the United English Library for the Propagation of Christian and Useful Knowledge. See Shera, 33-34.

5. Mary Jane Springman, "A Revolutionary Era Record: The Seventh Account Book of John Owen., Esq., Simsbury, Connecticut" (Unpublished manuscript, 1984, copy in the Simsbury Public Library), 8. The men mentioned either for owning a share in the library or for contributing a book were Oliver Adams, Daniel Humphrey, Noah Humphrey, Elisha Moses, Jonathan Phelps and Elisha Tuller.

6. "Record Book of the Union Library" (Manuscript in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Xerox copies in the Simsbury Public Library and SGHRL). A notation made by the librarian/treasurer William Mather shows that the record book cost three shillings. Also, many similar libraries were named Union Libraries in this era. A search on Google for Union Libraries in the 1790s brought up references to libraries in Philadelphia; Hatborough, Pa; Deerfield, Mass.; Wethersfield, Conn.; New Brunswick, N.J.; Rahway, N.J.; Pine Plains, N.Y., and more.

7. "1798 Direct Tax, Simsbury, General List of Houses" (Manuscript in the Connecticut Historical Society Museum archives.) By this time Simsbury no longer contained the Societies of Salmon Brook and Turkey Hills, which had in 1786 formed the town of Granby. It did still cover the area that is now the town of Canton and the northern part of Bloomfield, including the Scotland section.

8. 11 East Weatogue Street. See Abigail Eno Ellsworth, comp., "A Record of the History of Some of the Old Homes of Simsbury," (Typed manuscript prepared for the Abigail Phelps Chapter, DAR, 1936), 11-15. Xerox copies at SGHRL and the Simsbury Public Library.

9. See listings in *Simsbury Soldiers in the War of the Revolution* (Simsbury, Abigail Phelps Chapter, NSDAR, 1982).

10. For the lists of town officers and other officials, please refer to the appendixes at the end of Noah A. Phelps' *History of Simsbury, Granby and Canton from 1642 to 1845* (Hartford: Press of Case, Tiffany and Burnham, 1845; reprinted by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, for the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library, July 2001).

11. Rev. Allen McLean, *A Discourse on the Fiftieth Anniversary of his Ordination as Pastor of the Church in Simsbury, Conn., Delivered August 16, 1859* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood and Company, 1859), 7.

12. Priscilla Bergethon, comp., "Names and Occupations of Simsbury Taxpayers Assessed on the Basis of Non-Agricultural Business and Trades, 1798-1812, Based on Simsbury, Connecticut Tax Lists Copied and Bound in the Collection of the Simsbury Historical Society." Typed manuscript, 1993, in the Simsbury Historical Society archives.

13. "Estate of Col. Jonathan Pettibone, 1828" Town of Simsbury, Granby Probate District, No. 2178; manuscript in the Connecticut State Library History and Genealogy Unit archives.

14. It is curious that the 1810 inventory of Wait Latimer's estate includes a right to a library. See Simsbury Probate Records, 6:294.

15. See [www.westegg.com/inflation](http://www.westegg.com/inflation)

16. Simsbury Probate Records, 6: 529, 335.

17. Benjamin Ely served on the library committee for nine of the recorded years; George Cornish served seven; Elisha Cornish, five; Dr. John Bestor, Dudley Pettibone Esq. and William Mather, four; Aaron Case 2nd, Jedediah Case Jr. and Michael Moses, three; Jonathan Pettibone Jr. and William Andrus Jr., two; Amaziah and Amasa Humphrey, Giles and Wait Latimer, one each.

18. William Mather's homestead was on the east side of what is now Hopmeadow Street (Route 10). According to land records quoted by Abigail Eno Ellsworth (227-29), the property was bordered on the north and east by property of Dudley Pettibone. On the 1798 tax report it was valued at \$500. It included "48 perches" (three-tenths of an acre) of land, as did Col. Humphrey and Col. Pettibone's house lots. Pettibone's Tavern still serves as a restaurant today at 4 Hartford Road in the Weatogue section of Simsbury.

19. Isaac Huntting, *The History of Little Nine Partners of North East Precinct, and Pine Plains, New York, Dutchess County*, 2 vol., (Amenia, New York: Charles Walsh & Co., Printers, 1897), 1: [?], as quoted on <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ny/town/pineplains/library.htm> 9/9/06

20 The titles were abbreviated. For example, "Baxters Saints Rest" is *The Saints Everlasting Rest: or, A Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints in their Enjoyment of God in Glory* written by Richard Baxter in 1653. The library most likely had the 1790 edition which was edited by John Wesley and published by Prichard and Hall in Philadelphia. For information on most of the books, see the Web site of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers: [www.ilab.org](http://www.ilab.org)

21. See note 13 for Pettibone. "Estate of William Mather, Esq., 1863" Town of Simsbury, Simsbury Probate District. No. 1880; microfilm in the Connecticut State Library History and Genealogy Unit.

## Allison Krug Named Library Director

The Trustees of the Simsbury Free Library welcome Allison B. Krug, who has recently accepted the position of Director of the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library. Mrs. Krug majored in history as an undergraduate at William Paterson College and became certified in Secondary Education. She holds an M.A. in Social Sciences from Montclair State College and an M.S. in Library and Information Science from Simmons College. She is also a member of the Society of American Archivists and the New England Archivists. She resides in Suffield.

## We Have Ancestry.com!

So many of our members needed to use the Ancestry genealogical Web site we signed up for the library version. It's proved to be a great help to all.

## Some New Acquisitions

*300th Anniversary Celebration of the Settlement of Quaboag Plantation, 1660/1960* by Louis E. Roy (donated by Tom Ayres)

*Memorial History of the County of Cuyahoga and City of Cleveland, Ohio* by Genealogical Committee, Western Reserve Historical Society (donated by the Abigail Phelps Chapter, NSDAR, in memory of Alix Paull Schultz)

*Milford, Connecticut, Telephone Directory, April 1947* issued by the Southern New England Telephone Company (donated by Sir Richard Saltonstall Chapter, Colonial Dames XVII Century, Maria L. Carr, Historian)

*The Simsbury Garden Club, 1934-2004: We Are 70 Years Young* by Lina F. Wagner (donated by the author)

*Supplement to: The Descendants of Chauncey Pomeroy of Bristol, Connecticut, and his Wife Harriet (Brown) Pomeroy Goodwin* by Seth Pomeroy Holcombe (donated by the author)



On April 17, 1800, "the former Bond Sined by the Proprietors of Said Library to Oblige them to Comply to the Rules and Regulations and Laws of S<sup>d</sup> Library being Lost or mislaid," these men signed a new agreement to reorganize the Hopmeadow Library in Simsbury.

Barber, _____	Enos, Jonathan	Cambel	Priest, Asa
Barnard, Samuel	Ensign, Isaac	Joseph	Robe, Walter
Samuel, Jr.	Farnham, Benjamin	Joseph _____	Slater, James
Buttolph, Benoni	Grimes, Joseph	Michael	St. John, Elijah
Case, Amasa	Moses	Mason, Robert	Terry, Stephen
Amasa Jr.	Griswold, Alexander V.	Mitchelson, John	Thrall, Ezekiel
Ariel	Harington, Henry	Pettibone, Dudley	Wilcox(e) Aaron,
Charles Jr.	Higley, Isaac	Jacob	A_riah
Israel	Hoskins, Robert	Pinney, Butler	Roger
Jacob	Humphrey, Abraham	Phelps, Elisha	
Jedediah	Ashel	Noah	
Jedediah Jr.		Nobel	
Jese			

This framed document is displayed on the wall of the Simsbury Genealogical and Historical Research Library.

## Union Library Records Were Found in England Bought by Huntington Library in California

The record book of the Union Library that William Mather wrote in so carefully with pen and ink is preserved in the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California. How it happens to be there and how Mary McLean Daniells, who was a longtime Simsbury resident, was able to see and read it is told in an article by Caris Carr in the *Farmington Valley Herald*, October 23, 1975. Mrs. Carr reported that Mrs. Daniells' son-in-law, James E. Thorpe, was at that time the director of the Huntington Library. A photograph shows her holding the manuscript.

According to the article, in 1969 "the original record was found in England by a Huntington representative who saw it listed in a catalog published by the English firm of Grimpe and Rodgers. After attesting to its authenticity, he bought it for 60 pounds." Later the Simsbury Free Library was able to buy from the Huntington the Xerox copy that is in the SGHRL files and that was a primary source for the article in this issue of the newsletter.

FIRST CLASS

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