

SIMSBURY

Genealogical and Historical Research Library

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The Story Behind the Story

Footprints Across Connecticut From Simsbury 1930 Census

Electric lights were being installed on the west side of Hopmeadow Street from the Simsbury Free Library toward the north.¹ The Simsbury Bank and Trust Company disclosed their “gaudy” earnings of \$59,185 for 1929, which was about three times the amount earned the preceding year.² Antoinette Eno Wood had just died and her will was being probated in the courthouse in Simsbury, with her brother William Phelps Eno, her nephew Amos R. Eno Pinchot, the Honorable George P. McLean, and the Hartford National Bank and Trust Company named by Mrs. Wood as co-executors. Her will provided for the erection of a building in town at a cost not to exceed \$350,000 in the colonial style of architecture, as a memorial to her parents, Amos Richards Eno and Lucy Jane Phelps. The building was to be “suitable for the purposes for which a town hall is ordinarily used, and also for the social, recreation and educational activities of said town.”³ You and I know this edifice today as Eno Memorial Hall.

The year 1930 was indeed one of considerable progress in our town. At its annual meeting the Simsbury Cemetery Association announced that it had secured an option on George C. Eno’s twenty-three-acre lot known as the “hill lot.” It deemed this piece of property “admirably adapted for cemetery purposes, being high, level and of a sandy soil.” Eno’s land on Church Street, what is now Plank Hill Road, was located north and a little to the west of the cemetery on Hopmeadow Street. The stated price for this piece of property was \$30,000.⁴ “For the consideration of ten (10) dollars and other valuable considerations” George C. Eno sold his property to the Simsbury Cemetery Association. This deed was dated and recorded the 13th day of February 1930.⁵

In March the town tax rate was fixed at eleven mills, ten for current expenses and one for the

About the Author

Jean E. Perreault is a member of the Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council. She is listed with the Connecticut State Library as a researcher qualified by examination, which enables her to assist others with genealogy searches in the library’s History and Genealogy Unit.

Mrs. Perreault has recently published *Footprints Across Connecticut From Simsbury 1930 Census*, a research book which supplements and sometimes corrects data in the 1930 Federal census. She is currently at work on a comparable volume that will include the towns of Granby and East Granby. She has been requested to consider Bloomfield and Avon as candidates for future studies.

Mrs. Perreault has been a supporter of SGHRL for many years and she serves as a substitute librarian when needed. Copies of her book are available for purchase at the library. You can find additional information online at <http://jean.e.alogy.googlepages.com> and you can contact her at jean.e.alogy@gmail.com.

Tariffville School bonds. This was a *decrease* from the 1929 rate by two mills.⁶ In those days Simsbury enjoyed one of the lowest tax rates of any town in the entire state. However, Simsbury's budget set a new record, totaling \$161,629 for the fiscal year beginning in October, requiring an increase in the rate to eleven and a half mills for current expenses and one mill for school bonds for a total of twelve and a half mills.⁷ Evidently the earlier reduction was overly optimistic.

The 1930 Federal census was conducted in Simsbury during the first week in April that year. This decennial enumeration is the most recent one currently available for public use since by law data on individuals counted in Federal censuses cannot be accessed for seventy-two years following its recording. This census is the basis of my genealogical reference book *Footprints Across Connecticut From Simsbury 1930 Census*. A quick comparison of headcounts from earlier census records for Simsbury show a rather dramatic population decline during the last half of the 19th century but a steady increase beginning around 1900.⁸

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>
1850	2738	1900	2094
1860	2410	1910	2537
1870	2051	1920	2958
1880	1799	1930	3624

Indeed, this data shows that by 1930 Simsbury's size had nearly doubled in just three decades, probably in large measure due to the growing number and popularity of American-built automobiles, which provided easier access to suburban and rural areas.

In April of 1930, four elementary schools were designated for closure that fall, located in the Meadow Plains, Terry's Plain, East Weatogue and Firetown sections of town. The only small grade school to remain open was located in West Simsbury adjacent to the Tuller Farm, and it would continue as a practice school for the New Britain Normal School student teachers. The students from the closed schools were to be transported to the existing Tariffville, South and Central Schools.⁹ This move signaled the end of the decentralized lower school structure as it had developed in town since the late 1700s. Also, in 1930 students were still coming to Simsbury from Avon, East Granby, and Granby to attend high school.¹⁰

During July the mercury sizzled. The *Farmington Valley Herald* reported that for several days the thermometer readings in town topped 100 degrees and on July 21st the reading at Isaac Tetro's had reached a lofty 114 degrees.¹¹ That thermometer must have been in full sun, however, because official records for Connecticut temperatures indicate that the highest temperature ever recorded in the state was 106 degrees on July 15, 1995.¹²

As though the temperatures were not bad enough, housewives even claimed that moss and



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small fish were coming through the water main supplying some of the houses at the south end of town. Evidently, the condition was so bad that some of the ladies could not wash their clothes satisfactorily. The Village Water Company was supposed to maintain a strainer over the pipes at the reservoir, but with debris coming through the pipes something was not working right. The condition was not general throughout town, but confined to the south end, which had been in use for too many years.¹³ By the end of July work had commenced on the construction of a new filter plant at the water company's reservoir in the west part of town. In the end, the company made every reasonable effort to provide its patrons with a satisfactory supply of water.¹⁴

In August the weather continued giving residents trouble. Just nine days after a severe hail storm hit the north part of town, another even more severe storm visited the same section, and spread additional destruction. Crops that were slightly touched by the previous storm were badly damaged this time. Cloth over shade-grown tobacco was ripped to shreds, charcoal fires in sheds were blown hither and yon, and lightning claimed three valuable cows of the prize-winning herd belonging to John Stoughton Ellsworth. The greatest storm damage was at the Hoskins Station plantation of Senator Alexander Thomas Pattison, whose loss was placed in excess of \$10,000.¹⁵

In December the selectmen erected signs that set speed limits. Entering town from the north along what is now Hopmeadow Street, they allowed forty miles per hour until shortly above the high school building (today's town hall), where they reduced the speed limit to thirty miles per hour. At the Curtiss garage motorists were to slow down to twenty miles per hour as far south as the Congregational church parsonage. From there to below the Ensign-Bickford fuse factory, they could again go thirty miles per hour, and from that point to a short distance below Kane's garage forty miles per hour was the limit. Also, at about the same time the state highway department replaced many of the old wooden guardrails along the highways with new cable railings. Finally, at the foot of Mitchelson's Hill on the Tariffville road, the state widened the road, cut down trees, lengthened the culvert and erected railings.¹⁶

Data in the 1930 Federal Census

I encountered many obstacles while assembling genealogical data for my book about these 1930 Simsbury inhabitants. While comparing census names in the popular Heritage Quest and Ancestry electronic databases, I found that both sets of indices had many names misspelled. Their transcribers undoubtedly had difficulty interpreting the handwritten census names. Some were only slightly in error and the correct name could be found by using the Ancestry soundex system. Others were much more difficult to decipher. Following are a few examples of the more flagrant errors I encountered in these commonly referenced online sources:

Leala for **Viola**, Jorge for **Joseph**, Bennie for **Bertha**, Durey for **Dewey**, Kline for **Helen**, Cece or Cass for **Case**, Grove Lame for **Grace Lamb**, Liller for **Tuller**, Leyman for **Seymour**, Steckler for **Stickles**, Hua for **Shea**, Lenon Kanlwin for Simon Kasulis, and Braitley for **Bradley**.

As you can see, both first and last names were subject to butchering. Out of 3,624 Simsbury residents, I corrected 1,159 names that were either misspelled or entirely omitted from the indices, or nearly one-third of those enumerated in the census.

An added challenge was figuring out the name changes which frequently occurred among

recent immigrants, particularly those from Poland and Lithuania. Sometimes the people themselves made changes simply to Americanize their names. In other cases, these people could not read or write English well, so the census taker just spelled the name the way it sounded. I relied on the 1928 and 1932 Simsbury city directories and the Simsbury annual reports, as well as newspapers, to help decipher the proper spellings of names in order to provide proper linkage to as many of these immigrants' ancestors as possible.

Another problem arose when I found that seventeen surnames had been blocked out by a piece of paper that had been unintentionally left on the top left corner of page 112A when the original Simsbury census was microfilmed. Once a census is microfilmed the original is destroyed. By comparing past census indices, using city directories, and with some sage advice from former SGHRL librarian Steve Simon, I was eventually able to identify all but one of the "mystery" individuals. Finally, I discovered that Ancestry's database was missing pages 114B and 115A altogether, a total of *100 individuals or about 3%* of the residents in the Simsbury census. I hope that this gives you some understanding of the scope of my project and why it took three full years to complete.

In conclusion, I found it interesting that in 1930 nearly 20% of Simsbury's population was foreign born, including 158 Poles, 120 Lithuanians, 91 Italians, 64 Irish and 57 Canadians. Of the American born, 70% were born in Connecticut and most of the remainder in other New England states and New York. Some other interesting demographic data gleaned from the 1930 census tells us about the working lives of the individuals who called Simsbury their home: 1,790 of the 3,624 residents, or 49%, were female; fifty-six of these women worked at Ensign-Bickford and thirteen were tobacco workers. By contrast, 203 men worked at Ensign-Bickford and sixty-eight worked in the tobacco industry. There were 830 heads of households in the census.

by Jean E. Perreault

Notes

1. *Farmington Valley Herald*, January 9, 1930, 1:3.
 2. *Ibid.*, January 16, 1930, 1:4.
 3. *Ibid.*, January 23, 1930, 1:3.
 4. *Ibid.*, January 16, 1930, 1:4.
 5. Simsbury Land Records, 69:7-8.
 6. *Farmington Valley Herald*, March 6, 1930, 1:4.
 7. *Ibid.*, October 9, 1930, 1:3.
 8. Ancestry census indices.
 9. *Farmington Valley Herald*, April 17, 1930, 1:4.
 10. Records of 1930 Simsbury High School graduates, Simsbury Historical Society archives: 1930 Federal Census for Connecticut.
 11. *Farmington Valley Herald*, July 24, 1930, 1:4.
 12. National Climatic Data Center, http://ggweather.com/climate/extremes_.htm
 13. *Farmington Valley Herald*, July 24, 1930, 1:5.
 14. *Ibid.*, July 31, 1:5.
 15. *Ibid.*, August 21, 1930, 1:5.
 16. *Ibid.*, December 11, 1930, 4:2.
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Simsbury Free Library Borrowers from 1939-1958

In September 1939 the Simsbury Free Library began to re-register all its borrowers and assign them numbers. The typescript document that resulted is, in effect, an unofficial census of the readers in this town and those people in other towns who used the library. Marjorie Worthington of Tariffville was the first to come in on September 1, so she was assigned the number 1. Charles Pincombe of Simsbury, whose name is the last entry in the library register, was given the number 5511 on January 10, 1958. The approximately eighteen-year period between these two entries is well after the 1930 federal census, so the library record yields names of some people who moved to the town or were born after that census. The 1940 federal census returns will not be released to the public until 2012.

The library register has six columns of data: Date of Registration, Library Number, Name of the Borrower, Residence of the Borrower, Phone, Memorandum. After a few months, the library staff stopped recording people's phone numbers, but they did continue for quite awhile to make undated notations in pencil in the memorandum column, such as, "married & moved," "left town," "died."

In the Residence column townspeople are recorded as living in Simsbury, West Simsbury, Weatogue or Tariffville. Apparently it was still easy for the post offices in the various sections of town to deliver mail without a complete address because street names are often omitted and street numbers are even more rare. If people had a post office box number, they gave that. Some said that they could be reached in care of another person, presumably a relative or employer, or gave the name of an identifiable place, like the Belden House, the Maple Tree Hotel or Holly Farm.

As might be expected, many of the borrowers identified their residence as Westminster School or Ethel Walker School. On April 4, 1940, 113 students at the Tariffville Grammar School were given library numbers. Since there was a branch of the library in the Tariffville School, they may have been registered there or they might have been taken on field trip to the main library building on Hopmeadow Street, as many classes were, to learn how to locate books on the shelves. At this time the Simsbury Free Library was still providing library books to for pupils in the district schools.

Julia E. Pattison, the librarian until 1938, knew how much the library had changed over the years. In a brief article published in the *Farmington Valley Herald* on January 29, 1931, she wrote,

The first time as a child I ever went to the library I asked for "The Arabian Nights." I did it with fear and trembling and felt myself to be demanding too great a favor. At that time the librarian and the books were exiled behind a beautiful railing through whose gates none but a chosen few might pass. That first day I was rather tartly informed "'Arabian Nights' is out." The librarian, whose friendship I later valued, resumed her tatting and I went home bookless.

The railing with its mahogany gates has long since gone. The book shelves are open to the public and it's hoped no newcomer has reason to feel awed or nervous. You patrons who come asking for books are doing us the favor in giving us a chance to share with you our book treasures.

Miss Pattison's welcoming attitude and that of her successor, Miss Elna Hall, along with an ever-increasing collection of books and programs, may account for the fact that so many people from surrounding towns registered. The 1939-1958 registration record includes scores of names from Avon and Granby, with a fair sprinkling of names from Bloomfield, Canton, East Granby, East Hartland, New Britain, Suffield and as far away as Little Compton, Rhode Island.

The 1939-1958 register is in the SGHRL archives and you are invited to come to search it for your family members.



★★★ Upcoming Events ★★★

★ **The Simsbury Free Library Celebration of Leaders**

Tickets are now on sale for the Simsbury Free Library Brunch on Sunday, March 16, 2008, at 11:30 A.M. at Hopmeadow Country Club in Simsbury, Connecticut.

This gathering will specifically honor past trustees of the organization, including Peg Donohue, Dick Wagner, Harvey Moger, Linda Dotson and the late Bob Lindauer.

We look forward to all of our friends joining us to recognize great leadership. An exhilarating short program will outline the history and mission of the library and celebrate the honorees. Tickets are \$35.00 per person and \$60.00 per couple.

Call Trustee Missy McKeen at (860) 651-1066 early to reserve your place at this exciting event.

★ **Simsbury and The Great Depression Exhibit Opening and Symposium**

Please join us for a free program to open the *Simsbury and The Great Depression* exhibit, designed by Donna Hopkins, at the Simsbury Free Library on Saturday, March 29, starting at 1:00 P.M. The exhibit includes articles and artifacts from Simsbury during the depression period.

A symposium will include a panel discussion with local residents sharing their experiences during this culture-shaping period from 1929 until the late 1930s. It will be a fascinating afternoon with many people sharing their insights on Simsbury's history. Refreshments will be served.

★ **Spring Talk With Jean Nudd**

Jean Nudd, Archivist for the National Archives and Records Administration in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, will return for a third time to our library on Saturday, May 10, to speak on two topics of interest to genealogists and family historians.

11:00 A.M. *Using Pre-1850 Census to Find Family Relationships*
12 Noon Break. Refreshments will be served.
12:30 P.M. *Using Canadian Border Crossing Records*

There will be a question and answer period after each talk. The program is free and open to the public.

Advance notice of your intention to attend one or both of the talks would be appreciated.

Call: (860) 658-5382 • Write: P.O. Box 484, Simsbury, CT 06070
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Upcoming Events

March 16 - The Simsbury Free Library Celebration of Leaders

March 29 - Simsbury and The Great Depression Exhibit Opening and Symposium

May 10 - Spring Talk with Jean Nudd

Check inside on page 7 for details.

FIRST CLASS

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