

February 28, 1998

The 1790 Melatiah Bingham House

200 Lovers Lane.



The house featured this week stands in an ancient section of the old town of Windham, at the corner of Lovers Lane and Plains Road. It represents important events in local and national history. Plains Road was a prominent east-west Connecticut route in colonial days, and General Rochembeau marched along it in 1781 with his French army en route to Yorktown.

In the early 19th century Plains Road became an important turnpike. It was slightly rerouted (hence Old Plains Road) in the mid 19th century due to the arrival of the railroads. The origins of the name, "Plains Road" is evident, as the road crosses the Windham plain, the flattest section in town. Windham's municipal historian, Ruth Ridgeway recalls that when she first arrived in town more than 60 years ago, Plains Road was totally undeveloped and traveled through rich farming land.

Plains Road crosses the Shetucket River at Bingham Bridge, and Lovers Lane turns to the left, or northeast, as travelers head eastwards. And here, at 200 Lovers Lane, stands a well preserved early American home built by Melatiah Bingham in 1790. The remains of the Bingham grist mill lay directly across the road from this house, which is owned by Ira Ruschmann. It has a cut granite base, and nailed wooden clapboards. The ell on the building's eastern side was added in 1957. Mr. Ruschmann recalls evidence of an older ell when he was building the extension. The main house has a five bay main facade, and half of the 15 windows have "Windham style" flared board heads decoration. The stylish houses in nearby Windham Center, such as Eliphalet Dyer's house, probably influenced Bingham's architect. The front door is enclosed in a plain pedimented frame and entablature and three-light transom. There is a central brick chimney, part of which is still the original. The gable ends of the main house overhang, and 10 of the windows are original double-hung nine over six sash. The remaining windows are six over six sash. Mr. Ruschmann's house is one of Windham's finest examples of a colonial box house with a central hall. It reflects the affluence of the Bingham family, which owned much local land, and operated saw, grist and cider mills, and an axe-handle manufactory, all powered by water from the nearby Potash Brook. The builder of the house, Lieutenant Melatiah Bingham was fourth in command of Windham's regiment of 159 men who fought the British at Bunker Hill. There is a large

room on the second floor, which was used in the early 19th century as a ballroom and for other social occasions. The house has eight rooms and stands in five acres of land. The land and house remained in the Bingham family until 1866, when the owners of the Ponemah mill in nearby Baltic purchased vast tracts of land and water power to prevent any local competition, and with long term plans to expand, which never materialized.