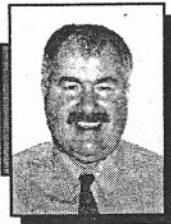


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History

The end of an era, the end of a mansion



Tom
Beardsley

On the afternoon of April 27, 1923 Mary Rood was horrified to see smoke pouring from the ell of her Windham Center house.

The alarm was quickly raised and a bucket brigade manned by locals and members of the South Windham Fire Department made little headway against the rapidly growing conflagration.

A fire wagon arrived from the Bank Street firehouse in Willimantic, manned by Henry J. Kelley and Michael English. Kelley and English entered the ell when the flames were brought under control.

They tragically re-emerged with the lifeless body of 3-year-old Mildred Rood.

Mildred Rood was the second youngest of George and Mary (Cooper) Rood's nine children consisting of four sons, Howard,

15, George 13, Burton 11, Francis 10, and four daughters, Leona, 17, Evelyn, 7, Edith, 5, Mary, 3 and Doris, 1. It was understood that Mary had been playing with matches.

Coroner A.G. Bill was notified and he stated that no inquiry would be necessary.

The fine, historic Colonial mansion that stood on Zion's Hill, at the junction of Ballamahack Road in Windham Center, was burnt to the ground.

It had witnessed many important events in American and Connecticut history, and had housed some outstanding individuals, including Col. Eleazer Fitch (1726-1796), Judge Zepheniah Swift (1759-1823), Alfred Avery Burnham (1819-1877) and George S. Moulton (1829-1882).

The Rood house was built in 1763 by Fitch, a man with an impressive pedigree. It was remarked "in his veins flowed some of the best Puritan blood in New England."

Eleazer Fitch's father, Joseph Fitch (1681-1741), a wealthy Lebanon farmer, was the son of the Reverend James Fitch (1622-



The historic mansion on Zion's Hill.

1702), the first minister of Norwich.

Eleazer's Fitch's great-grandfather, Major John Mason, (1600-1672) was infamous for his role in the Pequot Wars.

When the Pequots had threatened to wipe out the new English

colonies on the Connecticut River, Mason, Capt. John Underhill, along with Mohegan Chief Uncas and Narragansett Chief Miantonomo, led an expedition in 1637 against them and virtually annihilated the Pequots.

Eleazer Fitch's mother Anne Whiting was the grandson of the

Rev. Samuel Whiting (1670-1725), Windham's first minister, and a direct descendent of the Mayflower's William Bradford (1590-1657). Whiting's wife, Elizabeth Adams (1680-1766) was Bradford's great granddaughter.

The Rev. Whiting was described as "a man of uncommon fervor in the pulpit, who mingled greatly with the people in their everyday transactions.

He also had large interests in real estate, his name appearing with great frequency in the early transfers of property in the town."

Samuel Whiting's oldest daughter Anne Whiting (1698-1778) married Lebanon's Joseph Fitch in 1723.

Their second son, Eleazer, was born in Lebanon on Aug. 29, 1726. He grew to be a giant of a man for his times, and when Eleazer entered Yale University in 1742 he was already a commanding 6 foot 4 inches tall.

After graduation Fitch became a merchant in Lebanon, but soon afterwards he moved to neighborhood Windham.