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14 ALBUM, the Chronicle, Saturday, April 14, 2001

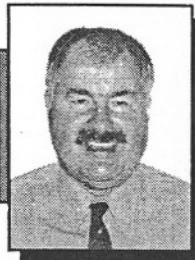
History

The house on Zion's Hill changes hands

Part four of six

During the revolutionary period, Windham's zealous patriots hounded Eleazer Fitch out of the community he loved. Fitch had built Windham's finest house on Zion's Hill in 1763. The Fitch family remained in Windham until the end of the Revolutionary War, but the boycott, business failures, legal costs and the war had almost wiped away Colonel Eleazer Fitch's considerable fortune.

He left Windham in 1783, and relocated to Nova Scotia. However, Fitch's old neighbors had been demanding the confiscation of all Tory property, and laid claim to his extensive Windham property. Fitch returned to Windham in 1791 in an attempt to hold onto his farm and fine mansion on



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Zion's Hill. But whilst he was planning to fight the confiscations in court, the British government awarded Fitch and several other Tories 4,000 acres of land in Quebec.

Fitch left his beloved Windham for the last time, and resettled in Quebec, making his portion a refuge for the Tories who he claimed, had had their land stolen by the American Revolutionaries. Fitch died in Quebec in

1796, age 70. Shortly afterwards, his fine mansion became the property of Judge Zepheniah Swift.

John Morison Duncan encountered the house on Zion Hill in 1818. Duncan a Scottish philosopher and member of Edinburgh University's Speculative Society, was visiting Windham as part of a tour of the northeastern United States, and he was invited to Col. Fitch's old mansion by its new owner. Duncan described the experience.

"Windham is the county town of the county of Windham; and its principal village if it were not built of wood, might be said to bear the general appearance of a small English market town. It contains a court house, gaol, grammar school and congrega-

tional church ... Judge Swift possesses a very handsome residence, a little out of the village. The house stands in the middle of a lawn, and in that and other aspects bears more resemblance to an English gentlemen's country residence than any other I saw in Connecticut."

Duncan's host was Judge Zepheniah Swift (1759-1823), a significant figure in late Colonial and early American history. Swift was a 1778 Yale Law School graduate, and the author of "Swift's Digest" (1796), one of America's earliest collections of laws, which is still a standard work.

Swift represented Windham in the state House of Representatives from 1787 until 1793. From 1793 until 1797 he served in the United States Third and Fourth

Congresses. Swift was a judge of the Connecticut Supreme Court in 1801 and its chief justice from 1806 until 1819. He was an influential member of the aristocratic Federalist Party, whose members scorned the new nation's democracy. He was a founder in 1799 of the Episcopalian Church of Windham.

The next significant owner of the house on Zion's hill was Elisha Burnham, a wealthy saw mill owner, miller and merchant from the nearby Windham parish of Scotland.

Continued next week

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