

History

The Hon. A.A. Burnham makes Windham home

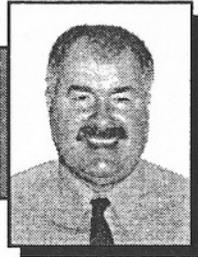
Part five of six

Elisha Burnham (1794-1866), a prosperous miller, blacksmith and merchant from the nearby Scotland parish, purchased the Judge Swift mansion in mid-century. Burnham, a veteran of the War of 1812, was a direct descendent of Deacon John Burnham of England, who settled in Ipswich, Mass., in 1635.

Elisha built a large fortune and was able to finance an excellent education for his son, Alfred Avery Burnham, who became a significant figure and national and state politics.

Alfred Avery Burnham was born in Windham in 1819. At age 17, he studied for one year at Trinity College, and read law under Chauncey Cleveland of Hampton, who was Connecticut's governor from 1842 until 1844.

Burnham subsequently mar-



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ried Cleveland's daughter, Delia. He was admitted to the Connecticut Bar in 1843 and commenced practice in Windham. In 1844 and 1850, Burnham represented Hampton in the House of Representatives, and represented Windham in 1845 and 1858, and was clerk of the Senate in 1857.

Alfred A. Burnham was a keen supporter of the development of Connecticut's railroads, and was active in the anti-slavery movement. Burnham was chosen Connecticut's lieutenant governor in 1857. In 1859 and 1861, he was



The house on Zion's Hill pictured at the end of the 19th century.

elected to Congress, and served as a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs during the Civil War.

In 1870, Burnham returned to the Connecticut General Assembly, and served as chairman of the Committee on Judiciary, and later became Speaker of the House.

In March 1863, Alfred A. Burnham, on returning from Washington, D.C., where he had served two terms in the House of Repre-

sentatives, purchased the old Judge Swift mansion from his father.

The Willimantic Journal correspondent reported that the "Hon. A.A. Burnham has decided to make Windham his permanent abode, having purchased of his father his residence on Zion's Hill. ... the house was built a hundred years ago, by Colonel Eleazer Fitch, the Royalist or Tory, and was one of the finest and most aristocratic residences in Connecticut. It is delightfully situated, and here our ex-Congressman, away from the turmoil of political life, can enjoy the domestic felicity of home. This, as most of our readers are aware, was the home of the late Judge Swift, and is truly, like Zion of old beautiful for situation. Mr. Burnham proposes to greatly improve and modernize it, and then bring to Windham his amiable and

accomplished wife to reside. A long and happy life to them!"

Alfred A. Burnham lived in the Fitch mansion for only six years. He sold it to George S. Moulton in 1869. Moulton was born in the Chaffeeville section of Mansfield in 1829.

He came to Willimantic in 1847 and was hired by Samuel Lee as a clerk in the Windham Manufacturing Co.'s store on Bridge Street. The Willimantic Linen Co. hired him shortly after it was formed in 1854, and Moulton was sent to New York City as the sales agent for its thread.

Thanks to the phenomenal success of Willimantic cotton thread, and his investment New York's commercial paper business, he quickly amassed a fortune, and could easily afford Windham's finest house.

Continued next week

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