

# History

## The high-tech way to research local history



Tom Beardsley

Two excellent resources for historical research recently came on-line. Historians, researchers and genealogists no longer have to seek out the 15 bound volumes containing colonial Connecticut's records. The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 1636-1776, are now online at [www.colonialct.uconn.edu](http://www.colonialct.uconn.edu).

A link to this site can be found on [threadcity.com](http://threadcity.com) at [www.threadcity.com/link\\_exchange.shtml](http://www.threadcity.com/link_exchange.shtml)

The project to digitize the records got under way when David Avery, a library assistant in the University of Connecticut Libraries Research and Information Services, was approached by the history department's graduate students. They complained that the printed volumes of the Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut were always off the shelf even though they were non-circulating.

Avery decided to undertake a digital project to put the records online.

The library formed a partnership with the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center to plan for this vast undertaking, and Avery became the project manager. He worked with webmaster Steve Wieda and Heidi Abbey, the Digital Collections Librarian, to design this most useful web site.

Avery also develops and serves

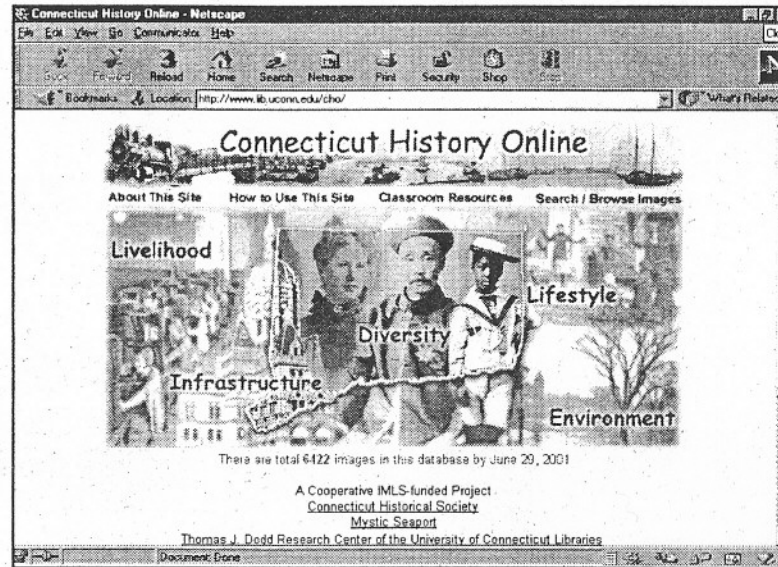
as liaison for UConn's Connecticut state documents collection, and works closely with the Connecticut State Library.

A "Colonial Pathways" link on the web site enables users to go directly to specific charters, documents, laws, and letters. Users can browse the entire records by employing a handy A-Z subject index.

It is also possible to search by date, volume and page number. Although full-text and keyword access to the text is not yet available, future phases of the project will most likely incorporate such access.

The web site makes it possible to step back in time to the Colony of Connecticut during the 17th and 18th centuries to read about what colonial life was like. Researchers can find out such things as what people were growing in their gardens and on their farms, and discover what the penalty was for being found idle.

There is a wealth of information dealing with political science, law, agriculture, sociology,



*Connecticut History Online was recently launched through a partnership between the Connecticut Historical Society, Mystic Seaport and UConn's Thomas J. Dodd Research Center.*

Indian Policy, military history, and foreign relations. Those keen to know about Windham's colonial history will discover, for example, that in May 1692, petitioners and proprietors from the town of Norwich, settling the plantation above Norwich, were granted the "liberty of a township," if they could procure an able and faithful minister.

A minister was found and the new town of Windham became a part of Hartford County. The following October, it was noted that a number of Windham's settlers

were not paying their rates, so the colony's General Court was empowered to seize their lands if the rates of 40 shillings a year were not paid.

In May 1701, Windham was divided into two religious societies. A year later the northern parish became the town of Mansfield. On Sept. 23, 1701, Windham and Lebanon agreed upon their town boundaries, marked by white oaks, and in 1726 Windham County was created, with Windham being named as the county town. On April 3, 1729,

the justices of the new county voted to build a courthouse at Windham, 40 by 24 feet, and the General Assembly ordered that funds could be collected in the county's towns.

Windham and its surrounding towns became very active during the Revolution. In April 1776, Windham's Jedidiah Elderkin and Nathaniel Wales were ordered to organize a committee to "take care and provide" for English prisoners, recently captured by one Admiral Hopkins, in the Windham County jail.

Connecticut History Online is another fine history web site. It was recently launched through a partnership between the Connecticut Historical Society, Mystic Seaport and UConn's Thomas J. Dodd Research Center. It contains more than 6,000 digital images from towns across Connecticut.

For example there is an excellent image of Willimantic's Brainard Hotel. This rambling wooden structure was demolished in 1892 to make way for the Murray Block, better known today as Hurleys. There is also an excellent 1885 picture of the Windham Hotel at Windham Center. The site can be found at [www.lib.uconn.edu/cho](http://www.lib.uconn.edu/cho). But of course, while on the web, don't forget to visit [www.threadcity.com](http://www.threadcity.com).

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