

History

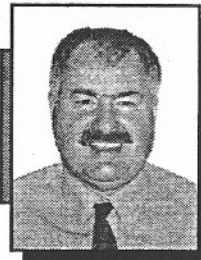
Isaac Fitch: Lebanon's master builder

Part two of two

Lebanon's Isaac Fitch (1734-91), a cousin of Gov. Jonathan Trumbull Sr., was one of Connecticut's most skilled and accomplished builders and carpenters during the Colonial and early Federal periods. He renovated Jonathan Trumbull Jr.'s house in 1780-81, and prior to that he manufactured gunstocks from black walnut plank for another of his cousin's sons.

David Trumbull (1752-1822) had a small arms manufactory in Lebanon during the Revolutionary War. He was a supplier for Rochambeau's French Army when they landed at Newport, R.I., in 1780, and he also supplied the provisions, barracks and housing for officers and men in the duc de Lauzun's cavalry legion at Lebanon in 1780-81. From November 1780 until June 1781, David Trumbull turned over his magnificent Lebanon house, Redwood, to Lauzun to use as his headquarters. Redwood was designed and built by Isaac Fitch in 1778-79, and it was considered to be the most sophisticated piece of domestic architecture for its time in Connecticut. It stands on land, opposite the Lebanon town hall, purchased by his grandfather, Joseph Trumbull, in 1713.

Joseph was the first Trumbull



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to settle in Lebanon. He had originally arrived in Lebanon from Simsbury in 1704.

Isaac Fitch was commissioned by David Trumbull to build copies of English furniture for Redwood. Furniture in Boston was very expensive during the Revolutionary War, and David's brother John Trumbull, studying art in Boston, suggested that David get Isaac Fitch, the house builder, to make copies. John Trumbull also hoped to obtain goods, captured from two English merchant ships bound for the West Indies market, for his brother's house. David Trumbull sent Fitch to Boston to buy the articles to furnish Redwood. They consisted of "elegant" curtains, wallpaper, paints, china and glass.

Fitch also designed and built a number of buildings in New London and Colchester. Probably his most famous piece of work is the New London County Courthouse, built in 1784-85. This outstand-

ing building still stands, and it has been described by the architectural historian William Warren as "an ambitious and expensive undertaking for a small region in the New Republic."

Warren also noted that at the other end of New London's State Street is Henry Hobson Richardson's Union Railroad Station, so New London possesses "two architectural gems that are cultural and historical attractions of national significance."

Prior to his New London work, Isaac Fitch was employed to build the pulpit and plan the joinery, trim and interior cabinet-work of Colchester's third meetinghouse in 1771. The church was located next to the Bacon Academy, and was later torn down and replaced by the current church.

Fitch also built Colchester's Deming House in 1768. This fine mansion was demolished in 1958, but it possessed outstanding examples of Fitch's craftsmanship. The house's most elaborate work, located in the northeastern parlor, was purchased by the American Museum in Bath, England. However, it is not necessary to travel to England to see Fitch's fine craftsmanship. Examples of it can be found in the Jonathan Trumbull Jr. house at Lebanon.

Jonathan Trumbull Jr. (1740-1809) had a store in Lebanon,



Redwood, above, the home of David Trumbull, was designed by Isaac Fitch, Lebanon's master builder.

and his surviving ledgers reveal many transactions with his father's cousin Isaac Fitch. A 1772 account book, and bills from 1777 reveal that Fitch built beds, chairs and tables for Jonathan Trumbull Jr., who lived in the house on a 200-acre farm on the east side of the Lebanon green owned by his father. He later purchased the farm from his father for 1,631 pounds sterling in March 1777. The date of the house on the Trumbull farm is given as circa 1769, but it may have been built a few years earlier and the interior not completed. This would account for the work by Fitch on the house that was recorded by Jonathan Trumbull Jr. in his ledgers.

The house was also extensively remodeled by Fitch between 1777 and 1784.

After Jonathan Trumbull Jr.'s death in 1809, the house and farm were sold. The house was remodeled throughout the 19th century, and became a working farmhouse, and also served as a summer house for vacationing city people. It was restored to its early 18th century appearance in 1978, and Fitch's woodwork was preserved to be admired by future generations.

Isaac Fitch's outstanding workmanship can still be studied and admired in the Jonathan Trumbull Jr. House in Lebanon at 780 Trumbull Highway (Route 87), open weekends 1 until 5 p.m.

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