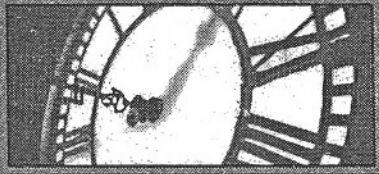


Local History



An untapped source of history

Part one
of two

In early 1892, Thomas Snell Weaver, the Willimantic Journal's editor, launched a series of articles based on unpublished Windham genealogical and historical notes compiled by his late father, William L. Weaver. William L. Weaver had edited the Journal during the Civil War period. The Connecticut State Library has archived the senior Weaver's valuable records of Windham's earliest families.



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Weaver had also contributed to a series of historical essays pub-

lished in a volume entitled "Windham's Bi-Centennial 1692-1892: A Memorial Volume of the Bi-Centennial Celebration of the Town of Windham."

However, his 1892 newspaper articles provide a virtually untapped source of early Windham history. The issues of the Willimantic Journal containing T. S. Weaver's articles are also available, on microfilm, at the Connecticut State Library. After Weaver's stint at editing the Journal, he taught in Hartford and gave his name to the city's Weaver High School.

After recounting Windham's history in his early Journal articles, Weaver discussed John Cates, the town's first settler, and recalled the names of the town's founding families.

One of the first was Jonathan Ginnings (Jennings), who gave his name to Windham's Jennings Lane. He was a carpenter who came to Windham from "West Farms," now known as Franklin. Jennings assisted Cates in the building of Windham's first house and occupied a lot he purchased from Norwich's James Fitch.

He exchanged it for a lot owned by the Rev. Samuel Whiting, on which the pastor built the Congregational Church's parsonage.

Jennings' child, Ebenezer, born Feb. 18, 1691, was the first baby born in the Windham settlement. Ebenezer's daughter, Mary, married a prominent merchant

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(Thomas Snell) in the nascent community. In 1733, Snell gave land on which the town fathers built the Windham Center courthouse. By October 1691, Windham's families accounted for 38 people, 11 of who petitioned Connecticut's General Court for incorporation as a town.

"We whose names are hereunto subscribed are proprietors of that tract of land given by Joshua, a sachem diseased, unto several gentlemen of Norwich. We do humbly pray your honours that you would grant us a township and call it Windom and that our town be granted the same privilege as to other new plantations. We remain yours in all duty bound October ye 6, 1691. Joshua Ripley, Jeremiah Ripley, John Ceats, Jonathan Ginnings, Jonathan Crane, Thomas Huntington, Joseph Huntington, Richard Hendee, William Backus,

John Backus, John Larrabee."

The petitioners and their families were located at "Hither Place" in Windham's southeast quarter and their home lots were on the west side of the street known as the Nipmuck Path. The General Court granted the incorporation petition on May 12, 1692, and the settlers held their first town meeting on June 11. They organized a church and appointed Samuel Whiting, the son of the Rev. John Whiting, pastor of the first church in Hartford, as Windham's first pastor where he served until his death 33 years later in 1725.

Whiting was a man of "uncommon fervor" in the pulpit, who held large interests in real estate. His wife, Elizabeth Adams, was the great granddaughter of the Mayflower's Gov. William Bradford. The Whitings' eldest daughter married Joseph Fitch and their son, Col. Eleazer Fitch, "the handsomest man in the American army," served at the head of the Fourth Connecticut troops in the French and Indian war. However, his sense of honor, having been once the king's soldier, tied him to the Tory cause and thus alienated him from his townsmen.

Nevertheless, Weaver concluded that members of the Whiting family "could pray or fight as occasion demanded and whatever they did they did well. No family of eastern Connecticut put better blood into its descendants nor allowed itself to commingle with any better blood. It was very blue, but it was tinged with the red blood of courage which sent the Mayflower across the sea."

Next week: Weaver's account of the settling of "Ponde Place."

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