

Feb. 9, 2006

# Windham Ponde residents raise an uproar

Part two of  
three

In early 1892, Thomas Snell Weaver, the Willimantic Journal's editor, launched a series of historical articles in his weekly newspaper to celebrate Windham's bicentennial anniversary. He scoured town and state records and painted an interesting picture of the town's early origins. In his March editions,



Tom  
Beardsley

Weaver discussed how the residents of Windham's Ponde settlement were dissatisfied with their arrangements for worship.

Weaver explained that during the late 1680s, the settlement of 21 home lots at Windham's Ponde Place, or Ponde Towne, took place at the same time as the Hither Place or Southeast Quarter, now Windham Center. The Ponde settlers derived the community's name from the pond located near the junctions of today's Routes 195 and 89 and Center Street.

The Ponde Place settlers laid out a highway and placed 18

home lots on its east side, and three on the west. These lots had a 20-rod frontage (330 feet) and were 60 feet wide, equaling approximately 6 acres each. They were specifically known as "home lots" in distinction from the settlers' other holdings, which were comprised of woodland and plantations. George Dennison drew the first lot on the new highway, which Weaver believed was located east of the current highway (known today as Route 195), and ran to the "Hollow."

The first list of freemen living at the Pondes was made on May

30, 1689, and included Jonathan Hough, Samuel Hyde, John Royce, Samuel Birchard, Robert Wade, Peter Cross, Samuel Lincoln and John Arnold. Subsequent freemen lists compiled up until 1698 included Robert Fenton, Joseph Hall, Samuel Gifford, Benjamin Armstrong, Nathaniel Bassett, Joshua Allen, John Allen, Samuel Storrs, Thomas Dunham and Shubael Dimock.

By the mid-1690s, "Ponde Towne" consisted of 40 percent of

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all Windham's settlers and they called upon the Rev. Samuel Whiting to preach there. However, Whiting had to cross the fast-running and wide Natchaug River, so Ponde Town's settlers crossed it in canoes and boats to get to a location to hear Whiting's sermons.

The Natchaug River crossing was particularly dangerous during the fall and spring and the

Windham town meeting of Feb. 6, 1695, chose Royce Fenton, Joshua Ripley and Jonathan Ginnings "to view a place on Natchaug River to make a bridge and to agree with men to make said bridge."

Two weeks later the town fathers voted to build a meeting house at Ponde Place where Whiting could preach. However, this meeting house would never be built.

Windham's selectmen and freemen eventually chose a place to build a bridge and the town meeting minutes of June 12, 1695, record that "Robert Fenton is engaged to build and make a sufficient bridge over the river at Natchaug Falls suitable for man and horse to pass with a load. The bridge is to be made by the first of October next."

Nonetheless, even after Fenton had built the bridge, Whiting was

still reluctant to preach in two sections of the town, even though the selectmen agreed that the minister should preach every third Sunday at Ponde Towne.

Whiting met with the selectmen on Dec. 9, 1696, and told them that he was not willing to travel over to Ponde Towne but would continue to hold meetings halfway between the Ponde and Hither Places, in the house of Goodman More, which was locat-

ed on Bricktop Road.

Accordingly, the townsmen could build no permanent congregational meeting house at Windham because they could not agree where it should be built — at either what is now Mansfield Center or Windham Center.

The disagreements came to a head at a town meeting on Jan. 14, 1697. The minutes recorded that "whereas the town of Windham, by its settlement and

laying out of the allotments is in two places, about 4 miles distant from one another, and that there is a bad river between these two places, it is therefore much to be desired that it might be that each place may be a distinct place and society." However, the year 1697 was one of disagreement and discord over this proposed division.

*Concluded next week.*