

# Canterbury Connecticut Local History

Keeping roads and bridges in order was one of the burdens of this town in the early years of its settlement. As early as April 24th, 1716, the town voted "That a highway be laid out, from the country road that leads to Norwich to the country road that leads to Windham." In 1719 a committee was appointed " to view the country road from Norwich line to ye upper end of this town, and to renew the bounds and monymets of said roade and to make their return to said town by the first of April next, with ye point of compass from bound to bound, at ye town's charge." The pay of those who served the town in running lines, fixing bounds and the like, was fixed at "two-and-six-pence per day and no more."

A sad accident occurred at the raising of a bridge over the Shetucket river in 1728. One end of the bridge, with forty men upon it, gave way and was precipitated into the stream below. One young man, Jonathan Gale, nineteen years of age, was instantly killed, and several others were so severely injured that they were laid out for dead, but afterward revived. Among those most seriously wounded were Lieutenant Samuel Butts, Samuel Parish and Ebenezer Harris.

A bridge over the Quinebaug, a formidable and troublesome stream to the early inhabitants, was built in 1728 by two gentlemen' of Plainfield, but it was soon swept away by a freshet. Another was built at the same place by Samuel Butts, in 1733. This was maintained by private subscription for a few years till it was carried away by ice. Jabez Fitch, a son of Major James Fitch, built a bridge over the rebellious stream, which was, according to his own assertion, the only one south of Sabin's in Pomfret, all the others having been carried away by ice. He was allowed by the general assembly in 1740, the privilege of collecting toll on this bridge. A committee was appointed in 1753 to view sundry private ways supposed to be needful for roads on which people could pass from point to point without trespassing on one another's property, "especially by the way crossing Quinebaug river, known as Shepard's fordway," passing through land owned by the Shepards, Spaldings, Adamses, and Paines. Joseph Woodward, of Windham, was allowed the privilege of a dam across Little river, on condition of erecting a good cart bridge over it, " so often as the same should be carried away by reason of waters being flowed by said dam." The Quinebaug, which had given so much trouble to the early settlers, was not yet reduced to proper subjection. In the severe freshet of 1757, the bridge was partially, destroyed, and a serious casualty occurred in repairing it. David Nevins, an active and respected citizen, who had resided for ten years in Canterbury, while standing on a cross-beam, giving directions to the workmen, lost his balance and falling into the stream, was swept away and drowned.

In 1761, Ezra Ensworth, having constructed a dam across the Quinebaug in the south part of the town, was granted liberty to keep the same in repair for the benefit of his corn mill. This permission was reluctantly given because the interposition of anything in the way of the annual ascent of the shad up the river was most vigorously resisted by all the residents of the Quinebaug valley. Further opposition to this dam was raised by the argument that it was the cause of undermining and greatly damaging Butt's bridge, just below it. The latter bridge, kept in repair as we have before stated by private subscription, -was rebuilt in 1760. The following winter ice again falling over the dam, carried off the bridge. The dam itself is supposed to have been destroyed by the same flood and never rebuilt. But now the neighbors refused to rebuild the bridge, and the town also refused to undertake the task. The latter already had to join Plainfield in maintaining Nevins' bridge on the great public thoroughfare, and a fordway near Shepard's hill in the north part of the town, besides keeping up other bridges over

Rowland's brook and Little river. Butts' bridge, however, was a public necessity, and in answer to petitions from Plainfield. Preston and other towns interested, the assembly provided by a special act in 1763, that Canterbury should build and keep in order a bridge at this place, under the direction of a county committee. Seth Paine, of Brooklyn parish, Nathaniel Webb, of Windham, and Asa Smith, of Woodstock, were accordingly placed in charge of the work.

So heavily did the burden of bridge building and repairing weigh upon the inhabitants of Canterbury that they, after failing in appeals to Norwich and other towns for help, petitioned the assembly for assistance. Solomon Paine and Daniel Frost, in behalf of the inhabitants of Canterbury, October 10th, 1782. averred that they were obliged to maintain a large number of bridges in said town, many of them across large and rapid streams, viz.: one and half of another over the Quinebaug, four over Little river, and six over Rowland's brook. They further represented that the bridge over the Quinebaug, known as Butts' bridge, in the southeast part of the town, was of very little service to the inhabitants, though of great utility to those traveling from Boston to Norwich, and was now out of repair. They asked for the privilege of raising by a lottery x-250 to aid in the enterprise of repairing and rebuilding. The assembly authorized the lottery, and John Fitch, Daniel Frost, Doctor Welles, Deacon Asa Witter and Stephen Butts were chosen managers of the lottery. Captain Sherebiah Butts, Jabez Ensworth and John Adams were appointed to superintend the construction of the bridge. and the work was speedily completed. The bridge was a substantial one, resting upon stone piers. In 1788 the town was again called upon to join with Plainfield in rebuilding Nevins' bridge.

Turnpike projects called out frequent and sometimes strenuous discussion. The town at one time unanimously "disapproved of any turnpike gate being erected at or near Mr. Samuel Barstow's blacksmith shop, on the great road from Plainfield to Windham, judging it unjust and impolitic." The proposed Norwich and Worcester turnpike excited much opposition. A committee was appointed to join with other towns in opposing it and the representatives were instructed to use their influence in the assembly in opposing the charter. All their efforts, however, were fruitless, and in May, 1801, the company was incorporated. Among the men composing it were Moses Cleveland, William Adams, Asa Bacon, Luther Paine and Jedidiah Johnson, of this town. The first meeting of the company was held at the tavern of Jedidiah Johnson, in the following September, and the work was rapidly pushed to completion. The great road leading to Windham was also made a turnpike in 1799, and a gate erected near the center of, the town. In 1804 this gate was removed to a point near the Windham line, and a new gate placed near the Plainfield line.

The highway running north and south through Westminster society was a public thoroughfare from time immemorial, accommodating travel from Norwich town to the Massachusetts line. It is not known when this road was first laid out, but it was improved from time to time and made more passable. It is said that in the original survey the road was marked out to run a due north and south line over Westminster Plain, but that the occupant of the old Parks tavern, located nearly a half-mile eastward, managed to exert influences of human courtesies and distilled spirits, under which the engineers consented to lay out the road so as to pass near the tavern, joining the original survey about one and one-fourth miles from the point of divergence. A highway was laid out in 1785, from Ephraim Lyons' potash works to Parker Adams' mill, crossing the south part of the town.

Freshets and floods have occasionally subjected the town to serious outlay and inconveniences. The great flood of 1867 damaged Butts' bridge, and destroyed Bacon's (formerly Nevins') bridge, occasioning a fatal accident and loss of life. The ferry boat used as a substitute for the latter bridge was overloaded and swamped. Some plunged into the waves and swam ashore, while others clung to their

horses and wagons and wrestled with the wild current, and all on board reached the shore in safety except Nathaniel Kinne, of Black hill, who, though a large and strong man, was injured in the struggle so that he was dead when brought ashore. Ten years later the town was again called upon to rebuild or repair both Bacon's and Butts' bridges: The selectmen were enjoined to confer with Plainfield in regard to building a good boat to convey passengers and teams across the Quinebaug near Bacon's bridge. In case of a refusal by Plainfield they were directed to build the boat and have it kept ready for use, and to petition the county court to divide the charge of building the bridge between the two towns.

The schools received attention in the early years of settlement. March 4th, 1718, the town ordered " that there should be a school kept in this town six months, viz., two months \_at ye upper end of ye town, and two months in ye west row, and two months at the lower end, at one place or more, as either party shall agree." No school houses were as yet built. In 1724, and probably in other years about that time, a schoolmaster was employed to perambulate the town and teach one month at Widow Ensworth's, one month at John Fitch's, one month at Deliverance Brown's, one month at Nathaniel Bond's, and one month at David Adams'. He, was to be paid twenty shillings a month out of the school funds of the town; and if no suitable person could be employed for that money, then those whose children went to school should pay their proportion, and so make up the deficit. In 1726 the town was arranged into three sections-" a school to be kept three months in each squadron." A new school house was built on the Green about the year 1730. Probably school houses were built in the other two sections or districts of the town about the same time or not long afterward. This " squadron " system was kept up for many years. About 1773 the interest in schools had lapsed into a very low state. Other public concerns so absorbed the attention of the people that school matters could receive but little thought. The number of " squadrons " had been from time to time increased. In 1770 they appear to have reached the number of seven. In that year Ezekiel Park, Captain Elijah Dyer, Nathan Waldo, Joseph Clark, Joseph Woodward, Asa Stevens and Joseph Stevens were ordered " to take care of the schools in their respective squadrons, and to hire suitable persons to keep the schools." A division into twenty-three districts was soon after effected, and the number of schools was increased. Private schools were often supported in different neighborhoods. A "night school" was kept at one time by Joseph Carter in the school house near Westminster meeting house, and at another time a writing school was authorized. John Adams, after his graduation, commenced a select school in his own neighborhood in the North society, and exhibited such aptitude in the work as to draw a large number of pupils. Plainfield Academy was at this time in a state of temporary depression, which gave Canterbury a chance to establish a rival institution. In the spring of 1796 he removed his school to Canterbury Green, where it achieved immediate success and popularity, attracting pupils from the neighboring towns and some even from Woodstock and Thompson.

In the public schools the central district of the First society had liberty to erect a convenient school house on' the Green, north of the meeting house, in 1795. In the following year a school society was organized with a large board of officers charged with the duties of taking care of the loan money, locating and bounding school districts and overseeing the schools in general. Committees were thenceforward appointed by the several districts, with nine overseers to superintend them. In the care of its schools the society of Westminster vied with the First society. Alexander Gordon, Samuel Barstow and Asa Nowlen were appointed to oversee the schooling in 1787. Nine districts were here set out, and Sherebiah Butts, John Barstow, Isaac Backus, Roswell Parish, Joseph Raynsford, Joshua Raymond, Daniel Downing, Robert Herrick and -Nathaniel Smith were appointed to act as committee-men and collectors in their respective districts. In 1812 a school society was organized in the Westminster society. A committee-man and an inspector were appointed in each of the nine districts. Those appointed that year are named in respective order for each district as follows: No. 1, Amasa

Park, Reverend Erastus Learned; 2, Daniel Meech, John Barstow; 3, Horatio Pettingill, Nathaniel Clark; 4, Nathan Allen, Ebenezer Waldo; 5, Daniel Storer, Asa Butts; 6, James Cary; 7, Samuel Chad, Isaac Backus; 8, Curtis Barstow, Samuel Barstow; 9, Roger Smith, Asa Burgess. Lack of endowment and suitable building accommodations compelled Canterbury to give up her prospect of an academic school establishment in her territory, and in 1801 her honored teacher, Adams, was drawn to the older institution in Plainfield.

In the autumn of 1831 a young ladies' boarding school was opened in a large house which had been vacated by the death of Esquire Paine, the teacher undertaking the enterprise being Miss Prudence Crandall. A number of young ladies from the best families in town were enrolled as pupils, and the school seemed to start under most favorable auspices and with brilliant prospects of success. An impression favorable to the school was created in neighboring towns, which brought pupils from some distance. While the tide of prosperity was thus setting in, a colored girl applied to Miss Crandall and was admitted as a day pupil into the school. This gave offense to some of the patrons of the school, who threatened to remove their daughters if the colored pupil were retained. Miss Crandall, whose sympathies had become thoroughly aroused in behalf of the oppressed colored race, determined to open her school for colored girls, and, in anticipation of the withdrawal of her former patrons, at once dismissed all the white girls from her school. This action excited great indignation throughout the town. A public meeting of citizens was called and a delegation appointed to try to persuade Miss Crandall to relinquish her determination to establish a school "for young ladies and little misses of color." But she stood firm to her purpose, in the face of all persuasions.

Being in correspondence with some prominent abolitionists, who supported her with their advice and assurances of help, she arranged to receive pupils from different localities, even from distant cities and towns. The excited populace called a town meeting "to devise and adopt such measures as will effectually avert the nuisance or speedily abate it if it should be brought into the village." This meeting, held March 9th, 1833, in the large meeting house, which was filled to its utmost capacity with an angry and boisterous company of citizens, passed resolutions protesting against the proposed establishment of a school for people of color within the bounds of the town, in which they declared that "the obvious tendency of which would be to collect within the town of Canterbury large numbers of persons from other states whose characters and habits might be various and unknown to us, thereby rendering insecure the persons, property and reputations of our citizens." The very few who attempted to speak in Miss Crandall's behalf were stormed by interruptions, and at last driven from the house in the uproar which followed the closing of the meeting.

On the day appointed the school began; some ten or twelve colored girls from some of the respectable families of northern cities had found their way to Canterbury and sat down as pupils before Miss Crandall. But the imagination of the people was now wrought up to that state of excitement wherein the most harmless objects appear as frightful goblins and hideous spectres. Another town meeting was held, and the little school of a dozen harmless negro girls was seen to be "designed by its projectors as the theatre, as the place to promulgate their disgusting doctrines of amalgamation and their pernicious sentiments of subverting the Union." Further, they declared that the pupils congregating here under the false pretense of education, were really to "scatter fire-brands, arrows and death" among brethren of our own blood." The determination of the people to break up this school seemed to know no bounds. The general assembly was appealed to; the "boycott" principle was vigorously applied, and countless impositions and indignities practiced. Dealers in all sorts of wares and produce agreed to sell nothing to Miss Crandall, and the stage driver refused to carry her pupils. Stable refuse was thrown into her well, and then the neighbors refused her a pail of freshwater. Vagabond boys pelted her house with

stones and rotten eggs, and hooted at the children if they appeared on the street, and from all this persecution and wrong there was no redress in Canterbury for Miss Crandall. Even her old father, a quiet, unoffending Quaker, living in the south part of the town, was made the object of threats and intimidation until he begged of his daughter to give up the school. But she held firm through this kind of persecution. Meanwhile the general assembly, in process of time, after sufficiently horrifying themselves with the possibilities of having " a nigger school on our common," labored in travail and brought forth the enactment: "That no person shall set up a school or educational institution for the instruction of colored persons who are not inhabitants of the state, nor instruct in such a school, nor harbor or board any colored person instructed in such a school, without the consent in writing first obtained of a majority of the civil authority and selectmen in the town in which such school is situated, under penalty of a fine of one hundred dollars for the first offense, two hundred for the second, and so double for every subsequent offense of which such person shall be convicted." This enactment was greeted in Canterbury by the ringing of bells, firing of cannon, and every demonstration of popular delight and triumph.

But these acts of persistent persecution awakened friends who came to Miss Crandall with offers of aid and assurances of sympathy, and thus encouraged, she went calmly forward. She was at length arrested for violating a statute law of the state, and in default of bail was confined in Brooklyn jail for a night, being placed in the cell not long before vacated by the murderer Watkins, who had -one thence to the gallows. These circumstances proved more powerful in her favor than anything that her friends could have done for her. Many new friends now rose to offer her their sympathy and encouragement. Her trial went forward in due course of time, first in the county court, then in the superior court, in both of which verdicts were pronounced against her, and finally in the court of errors, where the case was reviewed July 22d, 1834, and where the former decisions were reversed. The school, meanwhile, kept steadily on with its work, Mr. William H. Burleigh and his sister for a time assisting as teachers in it, as did also Miss Almira Crandall, a younger sister of the founder. But though foiled in their attempt to crush out the school by law, the more bitter of her opponents appear to have determined to do it by force. One morning early in September her house was set on fire, but timely efforts saved it from being consumed. Again, a few days later, as the family were preparing to retire for the night, a number of men, armed with heavy weapons, surrounded the house, and at a given signal smashed in all the windows on the ground floor with one simultaneous crash. This sudden and violent outbreak of the spirit of ruffianism so thoroughly alarmed the inmates of the house that it was decided to abandon the enterprise rise and, as soon as it was practicable, the pupils were sent to their homes, and the property was sold and its proprietress, who not long before had married Mr. Calvin Philleo, removed from the scene of her conflicts and bid a lasting adieu to the people and the soil of Canterbury.

The scene of that strange conflict of human passion is to-day one of the quietest, most peaceful, homelike, restful and refined in all the domain of New England. Grand old elm trees make a beautiful and refreshing shade along the grassy street of the slumbering hamlet. The old house, once the scene of so much commotion, is now the peaceful home of Deacon Thomas G. Clark, and the hill near by, where the victors expressed their triumphs in the belching of cannon, now offers no suggestion of aught but one of the richest and quietest and most soul-inspiring landscapes of homestead, valley, field and distant hills to be found in all this beautiful region. After long years of waiting the victim of those commotions is receiving by act of Connecticut legislature passed two years since, an award of \$400 a year in restitution for the damages she then sustained. She is still living, at about ninety years of age.

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