Prospect

1868

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No. 1

Primer of History
This Series of Booklets
authorized by

THE PROSPECT BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION

in observation of

the BICENTENNIAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

and

the ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY of the

INCORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF PROSPECT

which will be observed May, 1977

Vol. 1, THE PROSPECT PRIMER touches lightly on many aspects of town history. The series will include booklets on Wars, Education, People and Places, Factories and Agriculture, Library, Post Office, and such other subjects as interest and information indicate. Readers who desire certain subjects, or able to give assistance should contact the Bicentennial Commission.
A ANNIVERSARY is defined as the celebration of the return of a date. We observe birthdays, the Fourth of July, and Christmas every year. But TWO HUNDRED years call for a special observance; of the signing of the Declaration of Independance, July 4, 1976; and of the War which we call the AMERICAN REVOLUTION. It begins April 19, 1975 or earlier, and extends to 1983, the Anniversary of the date when the War was officially over. Prospect had been a community for many years when it became incorporated as a town with the name of Prospect in May, 1827. The first Town Meeting was held in June of that year and we will have OUR 150th Anniversary in 1977.

BOUNDARIES are the limits within which some area lies. When the earliest settlers came to this country they had acquired a certain title to the land. They bought additional rights from the Indians. A ridge of rock running north and south through Prospect had been accepted as a tribal boundary. When the Quinnipiack Indians sold to New Haven Colony, one of the markers was three chestnut trees growing from one root, known as "Three Sisters" or Three Brothers. New Haven Colony expanded to Wallingford, Wallingford to Cheshire, Cheshire to Prospect. The Tunxis branch of the Algonkian tribes sold the right to Mattatuck settlers who came from Hartford by way of Farmington. The same boundaries are mentioned in the History of Waterbury, and 1/3 of Prospect lay within Waterbury. Present Prospect includes very nearly the same area surveyed and bounded in 1778 to give "winter privileges" to Columbia Parish.
In the CEMETERY we can find some of the earliest records of the town. In 1798 a lot measuring 16 rods near the south end of the green was purchased for use. As a rude church building had been in use since 1778, some burials may have been made before the land was bought. In 1805 the Congregational Church Ecclesiastical Comm. voted to secure a larger ground, and land was purchased from Asahel Chittenden. This is the south end of the "Old Cemetery", and most of the Revolutionary graves we have are there. Most of those in the small old burying-ground were moved at the time of opening the new one, but a few still were buried in the "old ground" according to records and no stone now appears for them anywhere. It is probable also that many early graves were not marked, or stones were broken. A few town or church records for "digging a grave", "mowing the graveyard""making a fence"exist, and contribute sparse information. We do know it is the last resting place of men who served in the French and Indian Wars, Revolutionary, Mexican, 1812, Civil, Spanish, World War I and II, and Korean; The local State Militia and Civil Offices; and their families. About 1860 the cemetery was enlarged toward the north, in 1896 land was bought on the hill toward Rte. 69, called "the New Cemetery", and a few years ago from the graves to the road, Rte 68, not yet in use. The Cong. Church for many years was responsible for the maintenance of the "grave yard". About 1860 it was turned over to the town, and care was not too good, so the Cemetery Association was formed 1921, to whose officers we owe the present fine appearance.
DOCTORS, DENTISTS, and other professional men were in the town in early days, but Prospect must have been largely dependent on Waterbury or Cheshire. Bills from Dr. Cornwall Sr. in Cheshire, and several different men in Waterbury are in existence. Dr. Hiram Bunce lived here at least as early as 1830 or 32. Dr. Aaron Austin held town offices in 1844 and Dr. Henry Ducachet is listed in the 1850 census as age 30, but before 1865 had moved to Guyana, Porto Rico. Doctors often served as dentists, but the only treatment for faulty teeth was extraction. Neighbors helped neighbors, and the herbs of garden and meadow served except in desperate cases. More recently we have had doctors, dentists, nurses to care for the well being of the town. Lawyers are not recorded, but many local men had some legal training, and cases were heard by Justices of the Peace and few appeals were made to higher courts.

EDUCATION has always been an important item in the town. Soon after homes were built the records show school districts in what is now Prospect, both on the Cheshire and Waterbury sides. Perhaps the earliest was on Cook Road where a school house stood on the corner of Radio Tower Rd. At the Center, when the Ecclesiastical Society of the Congregational Church organized Nov. 10, 1797 they met "in the school house near by the meeting house". There were school districts all over town within walking distance of children. School might be kept in one district for a few months and then in another, with the older pupils attending both. Referances are found to Center, East, West, North, North East, North West, South East, and
South West districts between 1800 and 1840 but some may have been the same with a different name. As the population varied some of the old buildings, crude at best, dissapeared from sight. A fire place, later replaced with a stove, furnished what heat there was. A writing shelf against the wall, with backless benches facing it, and a few benches in the center for pupils who were reciting, and a teacher's desk and chair were replaced with desks and seats, books, maps and equipment. In 1935 there were Center, West, East, and North East Districts. Electricity had been installed, and wells drilled at most schools. But building conditions were poor, and the advent of good roads made busing easier. A school with four class rooms, an assembly room, nurse and teacher's room and library was opened in 1936 as a result of a vote to build with PWA help. This "Community" school has been added to, and additional buildings erected since as the population multiplied. Details of buildings, teachers, etc. and of private schools will be expanded in another book.

FIRES and the Fire Department, have been more fully documented in recent years than in history. Occasionally in death records "burned to death" but whether in house or not we do not know. Several of the match factories were destroyed by fire and a school house on School House Rd. burned in the 1850s. In 1905 the Congregational Church burned. Barns and houses through the years, but not many as people were trained to be careful. Brush and grass fires were met with community attention. In 1931 an attempt was made to organize a Volunteer Fire Dept. but progress
was slow. In Nov. 1941 the Congregational Church burned. Help was called from Cheshire, Waterbury and Naugatuck but lack of water prevented saving the building. As a result of the interest a truck was purchased and stored in a nearby barn, and work on a building started. In Feb. 1943 the Grange Hall was partially burned, but good work on the part of the new fire dept saved most equipment and part of the building. But the war delayed building and Civil Defense helped in the alarm system. Dedicated volunteers accomplished results. The 30th Anniversary of the incorporation of the department will be observed in 1975. We now have one of the best trained and best equipped and most devoted Fire and Ambulance Departments in the State.

GOVERNMENT of any organized group is essential. Our earliest records begin Oct., 1797 with the "Columbia Company!" As well as being the business body of the Congregational Church, they elected school officials, constables, road surveyors and grave diggers. They chose the tavern keeper and made arrangements for local militia. They laid and collected taxes, and in general did much of the business of a town. Poor handwriting, an apparent reluctance on the part of officials to a complete record on paper (record reads "met, transacted business, and adjourned"), hampers complete history. In May 1827 The Society of Columbia became the town of PROSPECT. Another town had been incorporated with the name of Columbia, and postal conflicts would have resulted if the name had been retained. The town
records are full of information about town poor, roads and bridges, elections and making voters, regulation of liquor sales, perambulating the bounds with selectmen of other towns, and any thing neccessary to smooth administration. Town officers included, as well as the present ones; sealers of weights and measures, pound keepers, fence viewers, road supervisors, school visitors, Records were kept in the homes of each official, until 1961, when the town hall was built, dedicated Sept 1961. Town meetings were annual, and held in the afternoon of election day. Special town meetings were held on call at a convenient hour and place. When the Congregational Church built a new building in 1841 the town contributed and used the basement instead of the local tavern. Later an additional room at the Church was the property of the town and a part of the insurance when that church burned in 1905 went to the town. Then meetings were held in the Grange Hall, until the Community School supplied a needed room.

HOTELS, or taverns, or inns were to be found in almost every town. Some place of public accommodation was needed every few miles as man or horse could not travel far in a day. The earliest town meetings were held in Castle Tavern and later "widow" Hannah Castle" was paid by the town for maintaining a room for the selectmen and other town officials to meet. This was on the Cheshire road, opposite the Library, when the road was on the same level as the green is. Later Col. George Payne kept tavern there, and then a man named Gunn. Where the Cong. Church parsonage stands the Kimball family kept tavern. Other names appear on the records as part owners in later years.
INDIANS lived in almost every part of Connecticut. Some stone tools have been found in Prospect such as mortar and pestle where the soil would have been good for growing corn. Arrowheads where Indians camped or hunted. The record of ownership shown in Waterbury and Wallingford records indicates that one time Indians roamed over the hills and valleys. Their paths may have made the first roads. But we have no indication of any village, of Quinnipiachs or Mattatucks. New Haven bought 50 acres in 1731 on what is now Bronson Road, as a reservation for remnants of a Quinnipiac tribe. This would have been within Waterbury limits. How much use was made of it is a question as it was sold in pieces in 1778 to 3 different people. But that part of town at one time yielded many arrow heads.

JUSTICE was done in local courts in the earliest books. Serious offences would be carried to State Officials but Grand Jurors swore out warrents, Constables made arrests and Justices of the Peace tried the cases. These officers were all chosen at town election. Cases were usually heard in the Justices' own home. They were as varied as today, disturbing the peace "with loud noises in the night", or stealing the honey from a hive of bees, or a woman's dress from the line. Some men did not pay their bills at the store, or their taxes. Some by "their idleness were in danger of coming to want and becoming town charges." The part of Prospect which was in Waterbury was in the Woodbury Probate district for settling estates and care of orphans. That in Cheshire was in Wallingford. Now all of the
town is in the Cheshire-Prospect probate district. Prospect is served by State Police, Auxiliary State Police and local constables; cases are heard in Waterbury rather than by local Justices, who now only witness signatures and perform marriages.

KINDRED, or relatives and family of Prospect people have been well known for a variety of reasons. Gideon Hotchkiss, who was a Captain in the French and Indian Wars from Waterbury, then Deacon from Salem and Prospect, included in his descendants David M. Hotchkiss who gave the town its name; Julius Hotchkiss who was the 1st mayor of Waterbury and Benjamin Berkley Hotchkiss, inventor of machine gun. William Mix was a manufacturer and first made the rag polishing wheel, Benjamin Dutton Beecher inventor of the fanning mill and an early screw propelled boat was one of a large family of Beechers, connected with Harriet Beecher Stow and Henry Ward Beecher. Burr, Ford, and Chittenden are frequently found in records. Peter Gilkey won fame as a counterfeiter, The Tuttle family started their business here and later moved to Naugatuck. The Whittamore family are descendants of an early minister. In recent years C. L Mortison, known throughout the country as "Mort" the cartoonist and also as Lester Green with tall stories about Prospect, brought fame to us. Robert Wallace started the Wallingford Wallace Silver Co. here in Prospect. There were several families of Platts and Tylers and Clarks. The list can fill an entire book, and will if there are enough friends who will furnish the material.
The LIBRARY in Prospect has a lengthy history. As early as 1830 there was a Sunday School Library. Early residents had private libraries which they shared with neighbors. After the Civil War there was a "Magazine Club" and each family subscribed to one magazine and then passed it on to the next. In 1883 a group of men and women started a library subscription and canvas of the town. The Library Association was organized Aug. 18, 1886 with D.B. Hotchkiss president. Mrs. Sara Talmadge was first librarian and for 9 years kept the books in her home. In 1895 the library was moved to the vestry of the Church and the town made an appropriation of $25.00 a year. In 1902 Mrs. Will Clark was appointed Librarian. 1903 Bronson Tuttle gave money to start a building fund. May 1904 Howard Tuttle and his mother gave $5,000.00 toward the fund that Prospect and Waterbury friends were raising. The building was erected and a fund remained as an endowment. The building was dedicated May 25, 1905. Mrs. Clark was librarian for many years, succeeded by Mrs. Elmer Main. Miss Nellie Cowdell, Mrs. Miriam Levesque, and Mrs. Dreher have worked, with assistants, as librarians in more recent years.

MANUFACTURING, INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE can only lightly be treated here. The early blacksmith shop, saw mill, grist mill, and fulling mill turned into industries that employed many residents full or part time. Pewter, silver, german silver, Britannia ware; farm tools, scythes, shovels, forks, hoes; Clay and metal buttons, umbrella trimmings, sewing machine needles,
leather shoes and pocket books, and matches are a few of the items. Products of the farm included wood and charcoal, hay and ice, apples and cider, milk, butter, cheese, eggs, wool and flax, corn, rye, barley, oats, flax, sheep, horses, swine, and cattle are listed in census reports.

Names by which our community has been known appear in histories of other towns. Wallingford as early as 1703 referred to a road for horse and footman to "West Rocks". Waterbury called us "Cheshire Mountain". Naugatuck and the southern part of Prospect were "Salem Parish" and Salem Road led to "Salem Bridge". The word "Columbia" was on many a tongue at the end of the Revolution, when the parish on the hill first gathered. By the time of our incorporation as a town another had chosen the name so we became "Prospect" the town with the extended view. Within the town Roaring Brook, Fulling Mill Brook, Ten Mile River, Juggernaut, East Mountain Brook flow to other towns. Rag Hollow, Turkey Hill, Germantown, Indian Farm, Three Brothers, College Farm Bars, Goat Lot Corners are a few localities. Again help from our readers is requested for a complete list.

Organizations in town that kept records give interesting side lights on people and activities. The Prospect Total Abstinence Society beginning 1840 lists over 300 members and includes the names of those who "fell from grace". The Ladies Benovolent Society from all churches sewed for the needy before the Civil War. The Prospect Cornet Band records begin 1858 and continue to 1882. The Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry was organized in Prospect on Dec. 10, 1894.
Farm Bureau, or Extension Service started during W W I. A Lycium Society started in 1923 furnished excellent programs including a Home Talent Play. The Historical Society was incorporated 1945 at the same time the Fire Dept was, but both existed for some years prior to incorporation. Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Sport groups for all interests. Veterans Organizations have included the Grand Army of the Republic who seem to have all vanished, and more recent Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion. Again we ask the assistance of readers in completing the list and writing their history. The Prospect Woman's Club has so many members, so diversified activities, and such accomplishments that they must have their own history.

POSTAL SERVICE probably existed in some form before the town became Prospect. Letters addressed to Salem Bridge, Waterbury or Cheshire were left in store or tavern. Some addressed to Columbia exist. As there was a store kept by Asahel Chittenden as early as 1803, and as his son Edward was the first known Post Master, in Jan. 1830, letters may have been brought here. A Post Office apparently continued in stores, hotels or business places. Among the Postmasters were Aaron Austin, Hobart Porter, Robert H. Platt, Samuel C. Bronson, Edwin Tyler, Luther Morse, Richard Tyler 1871, Henry Nettleton, David B. Hotchkiss and in 1886 Mrs. Stephen Talmadge who became the last postmistress, as Feb. 20, 1902 the Post Office was closed and Rural Delivery was started. Delivery continued from the Waterbury Post Office, with part of the town from Naugatuck and a small section from Cheshire. Oct, 1962 a branch of the Waterbury Post Office was opened here, and we again have a Post Office, and delivery also.
QUESTIONS frequently asked and their answers include: the first settler? probably John Cook on Cook Road in the early 1700s. Where do you find information? Histories of Waterbury, Wallingford, Cheshire, New Haven County. Histories of Churches and other Organizations. Deeds and records of Prospect and other towns, War and Pension records, old diaries, account books, and letters. There is always a possibility of error or omission and buildings and businesses did exist earlier than some writers show. the area? 8,834 acres according to the State Register and Manuel. Five miles north and south and about 1/4 miles east and west. The elevation? about 900 ft on top of Turkey Hill. Monument dedicated? May 30, 1907. Library building dedicated May 25, 1905. First telephone 1904. First electricity 1928.

RELIGION has always been a gathering of the people in War and in peace, in sorrow and in gladness. The settlement of New England resulted from differences, one from another. The Congregational Church was the authority in Connecticut in early days, yet a group of "Separatists" organized enough to build the first church here. Their records mingled with the "winter privileges" from Waterbury and Cheshire that turned into Columbia Parish in 1797. The building, rebuilt several times, was replaced in 1841. This burned in 1906. The stone church dedicated in 1908 burned 1941 and the present Congregational Church has been built by stages since the dedication of the basement April 1945. There was an active Methodist Church about the same time the Congregational Church started. They may have had a building 1805, and
certainly in 1832 were the largest Methodist church in the Hamden Circuit. In the 1850 census the Cong. Church held 300 members and the Methodist 200. That building stood about where the Grange Hall now stands. The members of the Methodist Church seem to have affiliated with neighboring towns about 1860. The 1850 census does not mention an Advent Church but we think that William Mix kept a large room at his house for Advent Meetings. Some were held at other homes. They built a Chapel (now Chapel School House) about 1870, but joined with Waterbury about 1900. Mr. Theodore Allen bought the building and sold it to the town for school use in 1917. St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church is now the largest in town. From 1850 on the Catholic population increased slowly but surely. Prospect was designated as a mission Church attached to St. Mary's in Union City and the first Mass was celebrated at the Grange Hall July 19, 1936 by Father Morrisey. Spring 1937 Mass was transferred to the basement of the new Community School. A church was erected in 1938 and dedicated Sept. 16, 1939. June of 1943 the parish of St. Anthony, Prospect was established, independant of St. Mary's. The need for a larger building became apparent as the population of the town grew. Ground was broken for a new church and rectory May 20th, 1961, and the present building dedicated Oct. 1962.

STORES were one of the earliest requirements of a new community. People could raise or barter for much of their needs, but some items had to be bought or done without. Names of store keepers and their customers appear on a few old bills and ledgers. Asahel Chittenden had a store near the center, with partners, 1802. Ozro Collins kept store 1829-34, before he was of age. A little
later he was manufacturing clocks and acting as town clerk. In 1838 Luther Morse had a store and manufactory on the tax list. George Payne had a general store and a lengthy statement of goods bought in one year includes molasses, calico, hayrakes, a "pale", candlewicking, and other assorted items. The People's Saving and Building Association owned the store in 1858,59 but by 1861 Tyler and then Tyler and Bronson. With the decline in manufacturing in town the town wealth turned and many sought employment in neighboring cities and did much business there, but small stores continued, and today are in great variety.

TRANSPORTATION. The earliest roads laid out may have followed Indian trails. The first from Wallingford "for horse and man on foot" may have been only marked by blazes on trees. One entire booklet is being researched regarding the development of the road system. Roads laid out and surveyed were not always built. The agreement between Prospect and Waterbury and Prospect and Cheshire on Prospect's Incorporation mentions responsibility for roads and bridges. The Plank Road was a Toll Road between Cheshire and Waterbury and connected with other Toll Roads. There was probably a stage that went thro the center of the town when some of the tavern were in existence. The Rail Road and Trolley both ran through the north east corner of town. From the discontinuance of the trolley, about 1940, there were buses from Waterbury at convenient intervals. Gradually that service has been discontinued.
UNSUNG heroes and heroines deserve honor as much as the named ones. We may find their names in tax lists, in voting lists, in church memberships or in the graveyard. They did the daily work of felling the trees, and converting to lumber, or firewood, or fences. They moved the rocks and built foundations, or walls. They kept the roads open and tended the cattle and horses, sheared the sheep and planted the crops. They were the private soldiers and the men who kept the home fires burning. They were the women who saved the cooking fat to make soap and candles, who gathered and dried berries and apples to furnish a varied diet to family. They wove the cloth of wool or linen they had spun, and washed the clothes and scrubbed the floors with water they carried from spring or well and heated over a fire. They still found time to help their neighbors, write letters and worship God. We can name the leaders, but without these followers they would have been nowhere. Let us remember what we owe to them.

The VIEW is one thing Prospect has always had, and time cannot take from us. From a high point, as the steeple of the Congregational Church, it has been possible on a clear day to see boats on Long Island Sound, hills beyond the Connecticut River, and mountains in Massachusetts. On every road beauty spots rival those famed in far off places. And, as the mental outlook has always been to the future, we can say "Prospect, the town with the extended view".
WAR has given men and women an opportunity to show their true character. Waterbury and Wallingford or Cheshire histories include names of men living in what became Prospect, who had served in the Colonial Army or in the Continental Army. Apparently many more who called Prospect their home did serve in some war, or in the local militia, than history has written. On the Honor Roll we have names, as known at the time the monument was erected. Some are buried here, some in New York State or Pennsylvania or Ohio. But there were some buried here, with and without stones who did serve and who are not on the Honor roll. We may have had men in the War of 1812, and Mexican War. We know that in the Civil War Prospect sent the largest proportion of soldiers to the population of any town in the state. At least 17 were killed. In World Wars I and II, in Korea, and Vietnam our men and women have done their share. Time has hidden many records, some lie in unmarked graves, but an effort is made to complete the list, on paper if not in bronze or marble. We know that Peter Gilkey, our counterfieter had fought with the English against Spain in 1762. That is where he got his patterns. We do not find a record of Revolutionary service, but it was claimed. Where he is buried no one knows, His companions, who did not suffer as severe a punishment in prison, are buried in Prospect. They may have all served in Rev. War together, and there made their plans for a fortune. It is on record that Peter had an injured hand and could not work at regular work. There are others whom we wish to research further.
X is a term often used to indicate the unknown. Here I use it for the unknown future of Prospect, which we can see as everything good if people make it so. In his Gettysburg address, Pres. Lincoln called on the audience to rededicate themselves to the great task remaining before them. So may we dedicate ourselves to making the unknown future as productive and honorable as the recorded past.

YOUTH is a time of strength, of education, and accomplishment. It was largely the young who moved to these hills, and while they often remained here until a ripe old age, the young town of Prospect grew to its present position, experiencing difficulties at times, as does any individual, but overcoming them just as individuals do. We look to the youth of the town to honor the work done in the past, and to accomplish in the future the work that arises.

ZEAL for the proposed Bicentennial observance and for Prospect's Sesquicentennial. We have been awarded our Bicentennial Flag for our plans. Let us develop our plans. In Heritage we will research and record the past. In Festival we will celebrate fittingly in the present. In Horizons we will plan and carry out the plans for the future. In every organization and gathering let us remember to make Prospect "the town with the extended View".