

Torrington and Harwinton 170 Years Ago

“Torrington was a township which was allotted to the Windsor proprietors by the Legislature. It was named Torrington at the session in May 1732. The number of proprietors was one hundred and thirty-six. At their first meeting in Windsor, Sept. 10th, 1733, they voted to make a division of lots in Torrington, and that there should be one acre to the pound on the list of each proprietor. A survey of the town was completed in 1734. In 1737, the proprietors voted a second division of the lands, and to lay out one acre to the pound on the list of each proprietor. About five years after, another division was voted.”

“The first settler that moved into the township was Ebenezer Lyman, from Durham, with a young family, consisting of three persons only; this was in 1737. Several young men had, however, labored in the township the summer previous. Jonathan Coe was the second person who moved into the place; he also was from Durham. The principal settlers were from Windsor and Durham. The settlement of this town was slow. When the first minister, the Reverend Nathaniel Roberts, was ordained in the summer of 1741, there were but fourteen families in the town. As this was considered a frontier settlement at this time, a fortification was erected not far from the center of the town. It was incorporated in 1741.”

“Torrington is bounded north by Winchester, west by Goshen, east by New Hartford and south by Litchfield and Harwinton. It is about six miles square, containing upwards of 23,000 acres. The surface of the town is uneven, with hills and valleys; the soil is mostly fertile, and well adapted for grazing. The township is well watered by the east and west branches of the Waterbury or Naugatuc River. [Today, a “k” has been added to the end of this spelling.] There are within the limits of the town 3 Congregational churches, 1 Baptist and 1 Methodist. There are three post offices: one in the first society called the Torrington office, one in Torrington, the eastern section of the town and the other in the village of Wolcottville.

Wolcottville, the principal village in the town of Torrington, is situated in a valley near the southern boundary of the town at the junction of the two branches of the Waterbury or Naugatuc River, 26 miles from Hartford, 40 from New Haven and 17 from the New Haven and Northampton Canal at Avon. The village consists of about 40 dwelling houses, a handsome Congregational church, a three-story brick building used as a house of worship by various denominations, (also used for an academy,) 4 mercantile stores, 2 taverns, post office and an extensive woolen factory. The engraving shows the appearance of the village from the Hartford Turnpike, looking westward. The Congregational church stands at the northern extremity of the village, but owing to the limited extent of the engraving, it could not be introduced. The brick building used for a house of worship is on the left, over which is seen the Litchfield Turnpike, passing over the heights westward. The woolen factory is the large building with a spire. This factory went into operation in 1813. One of the principal owners was the late Oliver Wolcott, Esq. Formerly governor of the state: the village owes its rise principally to this establishment. [This Oliver Wolcott, born in 1760, was the son of Oliver Wolcott, signer of the United States Declaration of Independence.] A short distance westward of the factory an establishment for the manufacture of brass is now erecting; it is believed to be the only one of the kind at present in the United States.”

Harwinton originally consisted of two half townships, one part belonging to Hartford and the other to the Windsor proprietors. The first settlers were also from Hartford and Windsor. The town is said to have derived its name from the names of the towns Hartford, Windsor and Farmington, *Har-win-ton*.

The six first settlers were Messenger, Brace, Hopkins, Webster, Phelps and Wilson. These were on the lands before the division and sale of them in 1732. The settlement of the town is considered as having been made in 1731. It was incorporated in October 1737. The first minister was the Rev. Andrew Bartholomew, ordained about the year 1736.

Harwinton is bounded north by New Hartford and Torrington, west by the Naugatuc River, separating it from Litchfield, east by Burlington and south by Plymouth. It is 6 miles in length and upwards of 5 in width. The township is elevated and hilly, with granite rocks. The lands are best adapted for grazing, and the making of butter and cheese is a leading agricultural interest. There is one house for public worship in the town, which is for Congregationalists. The central part of the town is 8 miles from Litchfield, 23 from Hartford and 40 from New Haven. The number of inhabitants in 1810 was 1,718; in 1830 the number was reduced to 1,516.

No engraving accompanies the text for Harwinton.