

Westmoreland County Connecticut

Connecticut's early history, as far as Europeans are concerned, began in 1633, when a small group of Dutchmen from New Netherland (New York) created a settlement about where Hartford is now located. That same year a trading post was established on the Connecticut River near present-day Windsor by members of Plymouth Colony. The valley was explored by John Oldham, who submitted a glowing report as to its resources. Encouraged by Oldham's report, residents of three Massachusetts towns, Dorchester, Watertown and New Town (now Cambridge), left that colony for the Connecticut Valley. Those from Watertown founded Wethersfield in the winter of 1634-1635; those from New Town founded Windsor in the summer of 1635; and in the autumn of the same year, Dorchester residents settled at Hartford. These residents formed an instrument of government that became known as the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, which was adopted in 1639.

In the meantime another migration to the region, which we today call Connecticut began in 1638 when a group of Pilgrims from Boston arrived at a harbor that they named New Haven. The following year they drew up what is known as a statement of political principals, all of which was based upon biblical scripture. Slowly other towns sprang up around New Haven, which were admitted into that colony.

In 1662 a royal charter unified the New Haven and Hartford colonies. This charter defined the boundaries of Connecticut as extending from Massachusetts south to the sea, and from Narragansett Bay west to the South Sea (Pacific Ocean). The immediate result of this was to cause the New Haven colony to strenuously protest, as this move was taken without their prior knowledge. A move was afoot for New York to lay claim to parts of Connecticut as far as the Connecticut River, which would have included New Haven, and the union with Hartford was considered to be the lesser of two evils. One result of this union was that the towns of Hartford and New Haven shared being the capital from 1701 until 1873.

The 1662 charter caused problems with Rhode Island regarding Connecticut's eastern boundary being Narragansett Bay, and it didn't take long before the Dutch took exception as well. Both of these differences paled in comparison with what was to take place further west.

A considerable portion of northeastern Pennsylvania at this time was known as the Wyoming Valley. It was claimed by Connecticut, and the Susquehanna Land Company was formed in 1753 to colonize the valley. The following year they purchased title to the land from the Six Nations, or so they thought, because in 1768 the Six Nations repudiated the sale and sold it to the people of Pennsylvania. Before we jump to the conclusion that the chiefs of the Six Nations were out of line by selling the same piece of land to two different parties, look carefully at the dates; the land company bought the land from them in 1754, and proceeded to do absolutely nothing with it until fourteen years later. By the Native Americans' figuring, this long period constituted a breach of contract; they felt that the whites did not want the property. When Pennsylvania sought to dispossess the colonists who had arrived, it sparked what became known as the first Pennamite-Yankee War. The conflict that followed saw the Connecticut settlers repel the Pennsylvanians in 1771. The war terminated in 1775 with 700 Pennsylvanians being defeated by a force of 300 Yankees under Colonel Zebulon Butler in the battle of

Rampart Rocks on Christmas Day, 1775. The General Assembly of Connecticut, in January 1774 had established the valley into the township of Westmoreland, and attached it to Litchfield County. In October 1776 the General Assembly changed its designation to Westmoreland County.

As the War of Independence came to a close, the old trouble with Pennsylvania was revived. A court of arbitration appointed by the Continental Congress met at Trenton, New Jersey, and in December 1782, rendered a unanimous decision in favor of Pennsylvania. Connecticut was compensated by Congress to good title of an equivalent territory of 3,300,000 acres named the Western Reserve, in what would someday be northeastern Ohio. The refusal of the Pennsylvania Government to confirm the private land titles of the settlers resulted in the outbreak of the Second Pennamite-Yankee War. The disputed territory was renamed Luzerne County in 1786, and land titles were confirmed. That same year Connecticut relinquished all claims to its western lands, except for the Western Reserve in Ohio.

For a time "New Connecticut" became the name of the Western Reserve, but today is represented by the counties of Ashtabula and Trumbull (named after Connecticut governor Jonathan Trumbull) and many transplanted town names soon dotted the countryside; names such as Windsor, Colebrook, N. Bloomfield, W. Farmington, Kent, Vernon, Bristolville, Hartford, Southington and Warren. In addition, the Ohio towns of Boardman, Hudson, Johnson, Canfield and Tallmadge were settled and named by Litchfield County men.

This is an interesting chapter in our state's history, and one that isn't well known. You can prove this to yourself by asking some persistent know-it-all who has annoyed you since way back when, just where Westmoreland County Connecticut might be located!

Historic Bytes

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