

Winchester 170 Years Ago

“This township was laid out into distinct lots in 1758. It belonged to patentees in Hartford, was incorporated as a town in 1771, and the year after the Rev. Joshua Knapp was ordained the first minister. Winchester is bounded north by Colebrook, west by Norfolk and Goshen, east by Barkhamsted and south by Torrington. It is 6 miles in length and more than 5 in breadth. The township is situated in the ‘evergreen district’ of the state and is hilly and mountainous. Its geological character is primitive, the rocks and stones consisting of granite, mica slate, and other primitive formations; the soil is a hard, coarse, gravelly loam. The lands afford very good grazing and the making of butter and cheese constitutes the principal agricultural interest in the town. There are 4 houses of worship, 2 Congregational, 1 Methodist and 1 Universalist.”

“The borough of Clifton, (formerly Winsted, West Village,) in the town of Winchester, was incorporated in 1832. It is a flourishing village, consisting of about 60 or 70 dwelling houses and 4 mercantile stores. The village is principally built in a narrow valley, on the banks of a mill stream called Mad River, which is a tributary of the Farmington River. The valley at this place is but barely of sufficient width to admit of a street, with buildings on each side, the ground rising immediately on each direction. Westward of the main street in the village, a road passes up a steep hill for nearly a quarter of a mile, where, upon an elevated plain, is an interesting lake, or pond, which is one of the largest bodies of water in the state, being 3 ½ miles in length and three fourths of a mile in breadth. The outlet of this lake presents a novel scene; it consists of a small stream, compressed within a narrow channel, and literally tossed from rock to rock till it unites with Mad River. Most of the manufacturing establishments in the village are situated on this outlet, upon which there are some of the best natural sites for hydraulic works in the state.”

“In this village are four large scythe factories, one machine shop and five forges. The ore to supply these forges is brought from Canaan, Kent and Salisbury. There are two churches in the village, one for Methodists and one for Universalists. The Methodist church is the building seen in the central part of the engraving, with a spire. The Congregational church, in the central part of the town, is situated about 4 miles southwest of the village.

The second engraving shows the appearance of Winsted, (or the East Village,) as seen from a sandy bluff directly south of the village (where the cemetery is today). In this place is an extensive clock factory, one axe factory, owned by an incorporated company, and one large woolen factory and an iron foundry. The Congregational church is seen in the central part of the engraving, distant from the Methodist church in Clifton about three fourths of a mile. The clock and axe factories are situated north of the church in that part of the village called Whitingville; the clock factory is just seen in the distance, near the church; the post office is in this village. Winsted is 26 miles from Hartford, 49 from New Haven, 17 from Litchfield, 9 from Wolcottville and 6 from Hitchcocksville. Winchester (as has been stated) lies within the “evergreen district,” so named from the forests of Hemlock and other evergreen trees with which it abounds. These “Green Woods” present one of the most impressive scenes that can be found in the American forest. The branches of the trees are thickly covered with a deep green foliage, closely

interwoven overhead, nearly excluding the light of the sun. The scene forcibly reminds the contemplative traveler of the words of Thompson, in his celebrated hymn:

‘Oh, talk of Him in solitary glooms!

Where, o’er the rock the scarcely waving pine

Fills the brown shade with a religious awe.’”