

Growth and Development of Connecticut Towns 1635 – 1790

There were no major town officers other than Townsmen (selectmen), Constable, Clerk and special committees, but there were several lesser ones. Two of the most active groups of officers were the surveyors of highways and fence viewers. Surveyors were responsible for maintaining existing roads and building new ones when needed. Fence viewers maintained fences along the common lands, observed and brought to order those who neglected animals there, and noted whose animals got loose from private land and caused damage to others' lands.

Packers and Sealers were men who inspected certain goods in town, usually barrels of pork and beef and tanned hides, then stamped them to show that the goods conformed to existing colonial standards. The sealer of weights and measures inspected and certified all the scales used in business transactions.

Windsor, in 1641, established the office of Hayward, who inspected all grains that were sold and certified them to be of acceptable quality. Thirty-one years after Windsor elected its first Hayward, the Connecticut General Assembly ordered all towns in the colony to do the same (1672).

When New Haven was forced by imperial fiat in 1662 to join the Connecticut Colony, they tried to protect and perpetuate its magisterial form of town government. As part of its terms for submitting, New Haven asked to be constituted into a separate county within the larger colony. Connecticut agreed to this, and in 1666, the county system was created.

At this time, the General Assembly created four counties, *i.e.* Fairfield, Hartford, New Haven and New London, each of which was presided over by a county court. In 1667, the General Court ordered each county court to appoint a "grand jury of 12 men at least" from amongst the towns.

The General Court added to the juryman's duties so that by 1710, he effectively became a social constable in his town. He assisted the selectmen and constables in maintaining order and assuring high standards of moral conduct.

This period from 1667 – 1712 was the time when many people in Massachusetts and Connecticut were rebelling against the strict Puritan codes of behavior. In 1679 Massachusetts created the office of Tithingman in each town to combat this moral decay. Grand jurymen were the Connecticut General Courts' solution to this problem. The major differences between the two states concerning these offices was that the tithingman in Massachusetts was an elected official, while the Connecticut grand juror was appointed by the county court. In 1712 Connecticut's General Assembly ordered all towns to elect at least two grand jurymen a year.

Tithingmen had long existed as parish functionaries in East Anglia and other parts of England; the colonial governments adopted the office to suit their needs.

The Connecticut office of Tithingman, borrowed from Massachusetts, was created by the General Assembly in 1721 to combat moral laxity. Colebrook's first town meeting, held on December 13, 1779, created the office of Grand Jury. It was not until the town meeting of December 10, 1781 that the office of tything [*sic.*] man was established. The office was maintained in Colebrook through the year 1865, but was not voted upon at the town meeting of October 1, 1866.

The office of “Lister”, as it applied to Colebrook, evolved from the title “Ratemaker”, which in turn changed to “Lister and Rater”. In 1779 Colebrook elected three listers to set the tax rates.

The following is a list of officers established at Colebrook’s first town meeting in 1779:

- A Moderator
- Registor, or Town Clerk
- 3 Selectmen
- Town Treasurer
- Constable
- 1 Grand Jury
- 3 Surveyors of Highways
- 3 Listers
- Collector
- Brander of Horses
- Sealer of Measures
- Sealer of Leather

Colebrook Historical Society