



Sign Post

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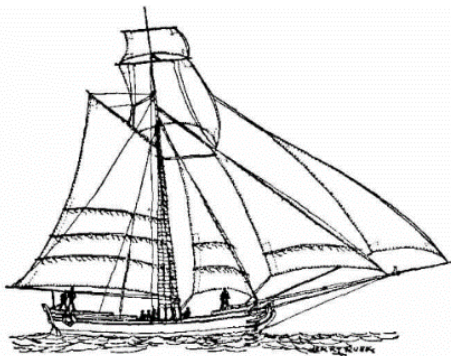
THE STORY OF JOHN (1766 - 1789) & ROBERT (1774 - 1799) WHITE: Brothers in Coventry and at Sea – Part I

By Daniel Gorka, CHS Executive Board

Background at Sea

The story of John and Robert White reflects upon the continued role of Connecticut's trade with West Indies trade even after the War of the Revolution. Three voyages cover an 11 year span starting in 1788, 5 years after the end of the War of the Revolution and just a few months before the Constitution was brought into effect. The last voyage ends in the middle of the United States' Quasi War with the French and less than 3 weeks after Napoleon came to power. Within this short span of our nation's early history, the U.S. underwent significant changes in willing European trading partners. And while there was growing sentiment towards the matter of enslavement (Connecticut had already passed a gradual abolition act in 1783), the United States' demand for West Indies goods was sustained, despite the continued heavy reliance on slave labor in making those goods.

Prior to this period, the British-imposed Prohibitory Act in 1775 and subsequent Revolution halted trade between the North American colonies and the British West Indies. Sailors also diverted their efforts and



SLOOP RIG, 1760

Picture from Gaspee.info

vessels to the war. After the war, the British Parliament passed an in 1783, limiting U.S. exports to the W. Indies to lumber,

livestock, grains, and lumber products. Also, imports and exports could only be transported by British built ships owned and operated by his majesty's subjects only.¹

During this period, and leading into John White's first known voyage in 1788, the U.S. established trade with the French, Dutch and Danish, but trade with these partners did not offset the reduction in exports to the British colonies despite the sustained demand for British imports into the U.S., creating a significant trade deficit. Eventually, U.S. trade partners would come full circle differentiating the nature and purpose of John and Robert's voyages.

In John's case, W. Indies trade was generally limited to Dutch and French colonies. Records exist of two known voyages taken by John White to the colonies at Rio Essequibo in S. America (Dutch) in 1788 and Martinico (French) & St. Croix (Danish) in 1789. John's death in May of 1789 was only weeks before the start of the French Revolution.²

Robert, the younger brother was known to take at least one voyage, which took place in November 1799 on the frigate, USS Connecticut II, during a markedly different time with respect to trading partners and of naval aggression against American merchant vessels. That story is discussed in our second part of this story.

But neither naval aggression nor the elements were the perils that John and Robert succumbed to. But both would die at sea, John at 22 years in 1789 and Robert at 25 in 1799.

Mark Your Calendars

Robert Visny Dedication & Father's Day Annual Ice Cream Sundae Social

June 16, 1-3pm

Brick School House Museum, 1019 Merrow Road

The Coventry Historical Society will honor the memory and legacy of our friend Bob Visny with a tree planting and plaque dedication, followed by our annual Father's Day Sundae on a Sunday, with free sundaes for fathers. All others \$3 till we run out. Museum will be open to visitors. For more information visit

<https://www.facebook.com/coventryhistory/>

Back In Time 60's, 70's & 80's Car/Bike

Cruise event

Sat July 20, 12pm

Strong Porter House Museum, 2382 South St

Period cars, trucks, bikes, tractors, or other vehicles and traders and swappers invited. For more information visit

<https://www.facebook.com/coventryhistory/>

Caprilands Style Luncheon

August 24th

Strong Porter House Museum, 2382 South St

Mark your calendars! The date for the upcoming 4th Annual Caprilands Style Luncheon is August 24th at the Strong Porter Museum. We are honored to welcome back Chef Denise Reardon-Popp of Chow, LLC. Last year's menu provided us a delicious goal to exceed and we plan to do so! Expect book sales, raffles, fabulous food and beverages as well as tales from the heyday of the herb farm. Ticket sales are being planned for a release of a limited 60 person registration so look out for your notification via email sometime in June from Coventry Historical Society!

visit <https://www.facebook.com/coventryhistory/>

Members 62nd Annual Potluck Meeting

Sun, Sept 15, 4pm-6pm

Strong Porter House Museum, 2382 South St

View and learn about one of the Society's collections. Please bring a favorite side dish or dessert to share. Meats, beverages and paper goods will be provided. Business to be conducted includes election of officers and board members,

receive and approve annual budget, and any other necessary and proper business.

Arts on Main

Sat, Sept 14, 11am-3pm

Coventry Village

Annual festival throughout the historic village, with arts and crafts, music, performances, children's activities, food and more!

(Cont'd. from page 1)

White Family Background

John White was the oldest of nine children Abner White (1742 - 1795) and Jerusha (Thompson) White (1745 - 1824) and grandson of James (1708 - 1765) White, the first White to settle in Coventry (1733), removing from Stafford, Connecticut. James, Abner and Robert (8 yrs younger than John) were all coopers and James and Abner held a cooper shop in Coventry, on what is now known as Cooper Ln. Barrel-making would be important both locally and for imports and exports.

Voyages of John White

We know for sure that John's second documented voyage was on the Schooner Farmer. His first known voyage is suspected to have been on the Sloop Betsy. Sloop Betsy was a single mast vessel, 60 feet in length with a tonnage of 70. The Schooner Farmer would have been similar in size or slightly larger and with 2 masts. These vessels were generally manned by a crew of six men or so³ and the crew members would be allowed to barter their load small quantities of their own goods for trading.

Mainly though, a merchant vessel would sail under a larger contract through its captain or owner in much larger quantities. In the year prior to John's voyage on the Schooner Farmer, Captain Joseph Chapman delivered 34 horses for various owners at a tally of 430 lbs⁴. His ship's log noted that rum, sugar, molasses, hides, coffee, brimstone, pimento, cotton, fruit, ginger, riging, turtle, cian, salt were brought back.⁵

Voyages took around 3 weeks, one way. Stops at several W. Indies islands were usually made to trade goods.

Our documentation of John's voyages include letters to

his father and Thomas Allen's marine list of vessels departing and arriving in New London. John's 2 known voyages took place in 1788 and 1789:

- **1788 - Rio Essequibo** (*Dutch*) in what is now the country of Guyana - probably leaving around mid-March of 1788, returning on or before 7-19-1788 likely on board the sloop Betsy, Capt. Pride
- **1789 - Martinique** (*French*) from 3-13-1789 to 6-24-1789, including a stop at St. Croix (*Danish*) on the schooner Farmer under Capt. Jos. Chapman

John's 1788 'minit' book detailed the sale of rum and sugar that he brought back from 'Zeeland' (Rio Essequibo) which he sold to many Coventry residents including notables such as Capt. Jeremiah Fitch, Don Carlos Brigham, William Porter, Jabez Ripley, William Root, Gershom and Elias Palmer. He sold 110 quarts of rum and received mostly cash as well as issued credits for use of Elias Palmer's cart and for cattle from William Root (likely driven down to New London).⁶

During this trip, John wrote several letters to his father. One letter was dated May 2, 1788 from Rio Essequibo. He noted that his captain was very sick and probably wouldn't make it, indicating that he did not expect to sail until mid-June. He asked his father to look after his horse and garden.⁶ Tim Allen's marine reported a sloop named Betsy under Capt. Pride that departed for Rio Essequibo in March, 1788. The sloop Betsy returned in July 1788 with passenger Capt. Peabody, noting that Captain Pride 'left at Rio Essequibo on the 24th of June', suggesting that he was not able to sail back³ supporting John's letter. Capt. Pride does show up on later marine lists.⁷

Upon his return, he bought his father's property and dwelling house through a mortgage deed facilitated by Eleazor Pomeroy, a local tavern keeper who purchased the property from Abner the same day. He made five annual promissory notes to Eleazor Pomeroy to be paid ½ in neat cattle at current cash rate and half in current lawful money making in whole 150 pounds.

John's second voyage in the 1789 provides insight into the goods he brought on board the Schooner Farmer to sell in the W. Indies. John sold barrels of pork, beef,

beans and two firkins of butter, the latter whom he sold for a merchant Joshua Abbe of Norwich under a contract dated March 2nd, 1789.⁸ John's sold these goods at Martineco on April 20, 1789.

John's first voyage and his captain's illness should have been a sea-faring warning about the perils of the W. Indies trade. Perhaps he was dismissive of it, feeling some degree of immunity after his 1788 voyage.

However, the day before John made sale of his goods in Martineco, he wrote John wrote his father:

Martineco, April 19, 1789

Hon: Father I take this opportunity Crable [to write] a few lin[e]s to you to let you [k]now that I have got the Small pox that I took By the way of [1]Nocolation I thought Imprudent to risk [risk] It.....for thar is not A vessel in the harbor but...has [not] got it on bo[a]rd. I have it very hard I am a get[t]i[n]g better thank God and the rest of us. two has it besid[e] my Self on bo[a]rd. Time is very dul[t] her[e] at present but I have Sold the greater part of [the] venture but at a low Rate pork at 9 1/2 Dollars per bar[rel] beff-[beef] per 7 Be[]ns per 2 pens [beef?] bens [beans] per 2 My hors fec[t]h me about the ful[t] Cost and other thing In porpo[rt]sion I wo[u]ld Wish that you wo[u]ld get my Ox on good order for ship[p]ing and coll seat it be Cep? would Bring it from Capt Fitch by the 20[th] of May Sqr Ripley Now his thing now here[.] Right [Write] to Betsy and Dolly that you her[e] from me[.] Give Love to all my Friends I rema[i]n your Dutiful son ----- John White

To Abner White of Coventry

Dont forget to send James to Skull [school] all that you can I wish you all well

[] = Inferred; ✕yz = Strikeout for spelling correction

The low prices John realized for his goods as discussed in his letter was indicative of the market due to the trading restrictions of the British, which by 1787 included restrictions on W. Indies inter-island trade in further attempts to monopolize on trade causing the U.S. to further struggle to export goods at the pre-revolutionary war levels and at premium prices.⁹

John's inoculation for small pox took a turn for the worse and by May 11th, he received his fourth daily on-board visit at St. Pierre, Martinique by Dr. John Stuart,

Surgeon. Medical treatment included snakeroot, purging draught and delayent gargle according to a doctor's invoice to Capt. Joseph Chapman.

The Schooner Farmer went on to St. Croix. Despite the efforts of 2 more doctors, John died on May 22nd at 1 PM. His inventory was taken that day and included:

1 Chest containing clothes & ?; 2 Hatts; 1 short woolen jacket; 4 Vests; 2 P woolen trousers; 1 P Fustin? Dido; 2 P Linnen dido; 1 white shirt ruffled; 1 dido Handkerchief; 1 shirt cheek linen; 1 P Black Britches; 2 P woolen stocking; 1 P thread dido; 1 P woolen mittens; 2 Black silk Handker; 1 Frock; 1 Watch coat; 1 blanket; 1 pillow case; 1 C plated shoe buckles;

Medical and coffin expenses were also included⁸

John had no cash in his probate inventory and still owed several nots on his mortgage. Consistent with this period, disease trade relations did not afford a sailor like John any fortune. Conditions for such ventures further deteriorated by the time Robert began sailing, which is discussed in part II of this story.

The Buena Vista Canal, Reminiscences of Ernie Wheeler, Former Coventry Zoning Agent, June 1987

Submitted by Bill Jobbagy, CHS Board

Buena Vista lies across Route 31 from the lake's Lisiscke Beach. The Buena Vista Canal begins in a pond at the far end of Buena Vista, about 1000 feet north of the Tolland Turnpike. The dike that forms the canal runs from the pond's east bank, about 30 feet high against the mountain. It was first built by Confederate prisoners and Union soldiers. Since 1970 it has been damaged by explosion at least three times. Twice, during the summers of 1981 and 1982, the Summer Youth Program repaired it, but now it needs repair again. One of the explosions was caused by a man who kept trout and wanted more water for his fish.

You can walk to the top of the dike all the way down to where it levels off at ground level, southeast of the house located directly across from

Lisiscke Beach. The canal runs for about a mile from Buena Vista, and then empties into Lake Wangumba right at Lisiscke. Other than a small brook from Daley Road, Buena Vista Canal is the largest year-round source of fresh water available to feed the lake. Keeping it clean and in good repair would benefit the lake.



1934 Aerial clearly shows the Buena Vista Canal (Arrows show start- upper left- and finish-lower right) Main Street goes left to right at the bottom, Old Tolland Tpke is faintly visible as a diagonal road in the upper right section.

(editor's note- per CHS Board Member Peter Hrechanyk, no Confederate prisoners were housed in Connecticut. He suspects the prisoners were part of a work detail from a Connecticut prison, dressed in prison grey uniforms)

Caprilands Corner



By Michelle Heimall, CHS Board

Rescued, Reprinted, Recreated-The latest update from the Caprilands Committee reminds us that we have continued to stay busy! After we made the rounds of the Church Fairs in the fall at both First and Second Congregational as well as debuting a display at the Kerri Gallery in Willimantic for the holiday season, we are sustaining the expenses of reprinting some of Adelma's classics and also

proving that the nostalgia and mystique of Caprilands is still a draw! Books can currently be found in several local establishments and we are choosing our next publications for reprinting. The display at Strong Porter was refreshed this spring, we continue to hear stories from our visitors of their time at Caprilands during group tours booked by appointment as well as drop in visitors. Mark



your calendars! The date for the upcoming 4th Annual Caprilands Style Luncheon is August 24th at the Strong Porter

Museum. We are honored to welcome back Chef Denise Reardon-Popp of Chow, LLC. Last year's menu provided us a delicious goal to exceed and we plan to do so! Expect book sales, raffles, fabulous food and beverages as well as tales from the heyday of the herb farm. Ticket sales are being planned for a release of a limited 60 person registration so look out for your notification via email sometime in June from Coventry Historical Society!



Archives Corner

By Susan Way, CHS Archivist

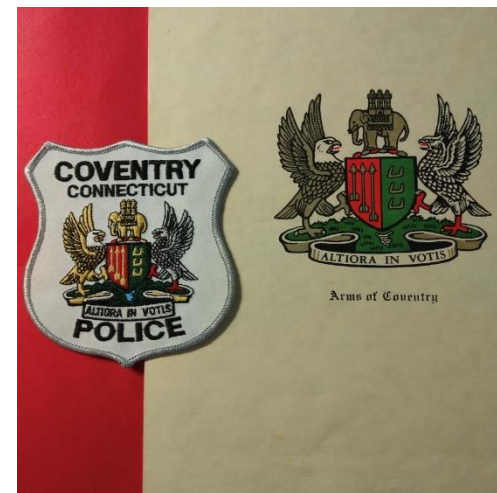
Wes Lewis and heraldry - Wesley Frank Lewis husband of Joan (Ayer) Lewis was born in 1921 in Stratford, VT, son of Llewellyn and Mildred Brown Lewis. It would seem that with the last name Lewis and his father's name Llewellyn, he must have had Welsh ancestors. Wes graduated from Mount

Herman School in 1940, and attended MIT graduating in the class of 1948. He was an Army veteran of WWII 26th Yankee Division, 328th Infantry Regiment. He fought in the Battle of the Bulge and other major battles. He was employed by Lebanon Steel as Vice President of Sales; Philbrook Booth and Spencer as a Vice President of Sales; and Muncie Machine and Tool as Sales Representative.

After moving to Coventry, he became a very active member of the community. He was a member of Coventry's first elected Town Council and served as Chairman. He was an active member of the Coventry Lions Club; Rotary Club, Coventry Hist Soc., Nathan Hale Fifes & Drum Corps Board of Trustees, Coventry American Legion, and the Coventry Republican Town Committee. He was a former leader of the Coventry Boy Scouts, and an active member of the Second Congregational Church.

His hobby was heraldry and he designed Coats of Arms for several of the above named organizations including the Town of Coventry, and the Nathan Hale Fife & Drum Corp, and we believe for several local families. He was very much involved in the activities surrounding the 250th and 275th Anniversary celebrations of the Town. His widow Joan Lewis recently donated a collection of Wes's papers, heraldry, newspaper clippings about the anniversary events and the Exchange trips with Coventry, UK, as well as the costume he wore during the Anniversary celebrations.

We at CHS are very glad to add this donation to add to our Archives. We'd like to thank Joan and to remember Wes for his service to the country and to the Town. This is the season to remember all those who have served.



"Back in Time" a 60's, 70's and 80's car/bike cruise event

July 20th, 12 noon at the Strong-Porter museum
2382 South St. Coventry CT

See cars and bikes from the period! Everyone with any vehicle (including farm tractors and trucks) from this period or before is invited to participate. There will be trophies for the best vehicles in classes, prizes will be awarded. This event will be open to the public. Traders and swappers are welcome. There might be food available, period music will be provided.

This event is being sponsored as a fund raiser by the Coventry (Connecticut) Historical Society; all proceeds are to benefit CHS, donations are welcome. There will be a \$10 charge for participating vehicles. Period dress is preferred but not necessary. For questions on pre-registration: please contact Jim Murphy at: irishbrit0471@ att.net (preferred) or by phone 860-965-9663.



St Coventry CT 06238

The event will be located at the Strong-Porter House Museum, 2382 South

Captain Jeremiah Fitch's Jailbreak

By John Holmy, Town Historian

What does the picture of the storming of the Bastille and this humble gravestone have in common? A Jailbreak! The beginning of the French Revolution and one of the most famous



jailbreaks of all time has a parallel event in Coventry's History!

Captain Jeremiah Fitch lived in a boundary disputed section of Southwestern Coventry known as the "Mile and a Quarter" along the Hop River. He is

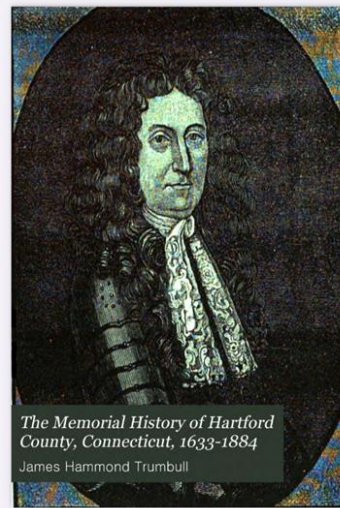


Captain Jeremiah Fitch,
1670-1736

buried in the Nathan Hale Cemetery. In 1723, as a result of a property dispute, he was jailed in Hartford, and was subsequently broken out of jail by an angry mob of his neighbors.

Connecticut enacted its first riot laws shortly thereafter. When the Sheriff came to Coventry to

arrest him, he was repelled by Fitch's neighbors and returned to Hartford empty handed. Fitch was found not guilty of walking out of the broken down doors of the jail since he had not orchestrated the jailbreak. Fitch eventually won his land dispute and



The Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut, 1633-1884
James Hammond Trumbull

Coventry elected him to the General Assembly as their representative. "The Roots of Coventry" a book commemorating Coventry's 275th anniversary contains the story as well as an early history of Hartford County.

Coventry was part of Hartford County until 1785 when Tolland County was formed. Think about Captain Jeremiah Fitch on Bastille Day, July 14, and this fascinating bit of Coventry history marked by a barely legible grave.

Member Spotlight

This member spotlight shines brightly on Coventry Historical Society Executive Board Member, Steve Marshall, the “Historic House Guy”. Steve was recently honored by Preservation Connecticut with the prestigious Janet Jainschigg Award for Preservation Professionals. This award was presented in recognition for “nearly five decades, Stephen Marshall has preserved historic places as a contractor, restoration carpenter, home inspector, educator.” Steve has been involved in the restoration of 18th century homes, and has worked with major institutions such as Sturbridge Village, Connecticut Landmarks, and the Wadsworth Atheneum. Congratulations Steve on this well-deserved recognition!



From left to right- Stacy Walsh, Travis Marshall, Andrea Marshall, Stephen Marshall, Lauren Marshall, and Matthew Marshall

Photo credit- Ian Christmann Photography



Jane Montanaro, Executive Director of Preservation Connecticut and Stephen Marshall

Photo credit- Ian Christmann Photography