

POST-OFFICE.

This series began in the Fall 2004 issue, page 56 which you should see for background and source information. It all comes through the courtesy of CFA Member #184, Leonard Chapman who sent the reprint for the CFA data collection. Yet to come is information on "town clerks," "censuses," "Members of the House of Representatives," "Selectmen," and "Justices of the Peace." Most of the segments mentioned some of the Chapman folks involved. There is no Chapman in this segment but it does contain some very interesting information on transportation in the area in that period. There will be at least one Chapman in all the remaining segments except "censuses" in which folks are not named.

BEFORE the year 1795 or 1796, there was no post-office in Tolland. In one of those years an office was established in this town, and Deacon Benoni Shepard was appointed post master. Dea. Shepard kept a tavern in the house where Mr. Charles R. Hicks now resides, and kept the office in his house. At that time there was but one mail a week between Hartford and Boston, and that was sometimes carried on horseback, sometimes in a one horse sulkey. No stage coaches passed through Tolland until the year 1807, when a line of stages was established from Hartford to Boston, passing through this town. Within fifteen years after its first establishment, the mail route through Tolland became a great thoroughfare; there was a daily mail both ways, which was carried through Tolland in four horse post-coaches. The route for the mail from New York city to the Eastern States, was through this town, until the western railroad was completed to Springfield, after which the mail was placed upon that route. There was also a tri-weekly mail from Springfield to Norwich, through Tolland, from 1828 to 1851, carried in post-coaches, when it was placed upon the railroad by the way of Palmer. These principal mail routes have been turned from Tolland in consequence of the building of the railroads, so that while other places have been benefited by those improvements, this town has been a sufferer. In place of the mail accommodations with which the town used to be favored, it is now supplied specially with a daily mail from Hartford,—Tolland being the end of the route.

BENONI SHEPARD, the first postmaster, was probably a son of Jonathan Shepard, whose deed of land in Tolland, dated April 8, 1763, describes him as belonging in Coventry. Benoni Shepard married Desire West, a daughter of Zebulon West, Esq., June 16, 1774, at which date he is described of Tolland. In another record he is found to be of Tolland, May 25, 1772. His first wife, Desire, died July 20, 1778, leaving one child, whose name was Pamela, born January 23, 1777. Mr. Shepard married for his second wife, Anna Alvord, of Bolton, daughter of Saul Alvord, Sen., February 15, 1781. By her he had the following children :

Benoni	born	January 4, 1782, died August 26, 1799
Desire	"	June 29, 1783
Anna	"	March 31, 1785
Sophia	"	February 3, 1787
Sally	"	November 24, 1788
Lydia	"	December 14, 1790
Eunice	"	March 5, 1794
Benoni A.	"	June 28, 1796
Anson	"	September 29, 1799.

Mr. Shepard has the reputation of having been a good neighbor, a worthy citizen and a useful man. He was for several years a deacon of the Congregational church in Tolland, and died January 16, 1808, aged sixty-eight years.

Upon the resignation of Mr. Shepard in 1807, Col. Elijah Smith was appointed postmaster, and continued in office until the year 1812, when for political reasons only, he was removed, and Calvin Willey, Esq., appointed in his place.

Col. ELIJAH SMITH was a son of Moses Smith, of East Hartford, and was born January 16, 1767. He was by trade a hatter, and removed to Tolland and set up his business in the Spring of the year 1788. He took a deed of a house and a piece of land in Tolland, from James Wells, dated March 19, 1788. He married Melicent Wills, a daughter of Col. Solomon Wills, October __, 1792 ;—she died May 22, 1810. He married for his second wife, Lydia Curtis, July 16, 1811. Their children are two sons, born March 22, 1812, whose names are Elijah Wills and Eli Ives ;—and two daughters, Lydia Melicent, born August 22, 1817, and Mary Mindwell, born June 4, 1822.

Col. Smith commenced keeping a public house in Tolland soon after his first marriage, at the place now occupied by Ansel S. Barber, and continued in that business until his death,—a period of about fifty years. To say that his house was excellent—that he was a model landlord, and his good lady a princess among landladies—would not be telling the whole story, and would give but a faint impression of the comforts afforded by his mansion. His house was indeed the traveler's home, where a guest had every wish gratified without feeling that some extra effort had been put forth for his special benefit. The Colonel was always cheerful and familiar, without losing any of that dignity so essential to command the respect of others; and without seeming to exercise authority, he always kept his bar-room in such order that one would as soon think he was sitting in a gentleman's parlor as in a place of public resort. The whole establishment was managed upon the plan of having a place for every thing, and every thing in its place; and this general plan had few innovations. At this tavern, Gen. Lafayette, in his tour in this country in 1824, halted and had an interview with some of his comrades in the revolutionary war.

As a citizen, Col. Smith possessed many of those qualities that adorn human nature, and which make a man's society desirable and his life useful. He was once a member of the General Assembly, and as Colonel of the twenty-second regiment was a popular military officer. He was an affectionate husband, an indulgent parent, a kind and accommodating neighbor, and a sincere and constant friend. He was forward in all attempts to build up the interests of the town, active in works of benevolence and charity, and ever ready to relieve the poor and distressed. He took a deep interest in the welfare of young men, often aided them by his counsels, and encouraged them to hope for better prospects when angry storm-clouds seemed ready to dash upon them. The writer has too often experienced his kindness to let his name fade from his recollection so long as his own memory performs its office. Col. Smith departed this life May 24, 1847, aged eighty.

Hon. CALVIN WILLEY was postmaster from 1812 to 1820, when he resigned, and Luther Eaton was appointed in his place. Mr. Willey kept the post-office a part of the time in his own house, being the one now owned by James S. Kent, and a part of the time he had Joseph Howard as assistant, who kept the office at his own residence in the south part of the square roof house near the north end of the village street, now owned by Doct. Jeduthan C. Eaton.

Mr. Willey was born in East Haddam, Conn., September 11, 1776. His early advantages for education were very indifferent, being nothing more than the benefits of the common schools as they then existed. He commenced reading law in the office of the late Hon. John Thompson Peters, afterwards one of the judges of the Supreme Court of Errors, in June, 1795. Mr. Peters was then a resident of Hebron, in Tolland County. Mr. Willey was admitted to the bar in Tolland county, in February, 1798, and first opened an office in Chatham, in the County of Middlesex, but in 1800 he removed to Stafford, in Tolland county, where he resided until the year 1808. While in Stafford he was twice chosen a representative to the General Assembly, and was postmaster in that town from 1806 to 1808, when he removed to Tolland. He was Judge of Probate for the district of Stafford, then including the town of Tolland, from 1818 to 1825—seven years; was six times elected a representative to the General Assembly from Tolland, and twice to the State Senate, upon a general ticket, before the State was districted for the choice of Senators. He was a candidate for the office of Representative in Congress in

the year 1821, but was defeated by his own party because he had, in 1820, suffered his name to remain on a union ticket for State Senators, consisting of an equal number of federalists and democrats. Mr. Willey was identified with the democratic party. In 1824 his friends brought him forward for the United States Senate, when the same objection was urged against him. There had always been some rivalry and a little ill feeling between Mr. Willey and some of the prominent politicians in the south part of the county; and hence the strong opposition to Mr. Willey whenever he was candidate for an office that called for their suffrages. He was defeated as representative to Congress by Hon. Daniel Burrows, a resident of Hebron. In the canvass for the United States Senate in 1824, the citizens in the south part of this county, brought forward as his competitor, the late Governor, John S. Peters, of Hebron. During the session of 1824, Mr. Willey was three times elected by the House of Representatives to the office of United States Senator, by very considerable majorities; and John S. Peters was as many times elected to the same office by the Senate. As the two Houses did not concur, the Assembly adjourned without making a choice. The friends of Mr. Willey were very active in the Spring of 1825 in securing a return or members of the legislature favorable to his election to the senatorship, and succeeded in electing a decided majority in the House of Representatives, which early in the session elected Mr. Willey to that office; but the Senate, as if to try the temper of the House, re-elected on their part Hon. James Lanman, whose term in the U. S. Senate had then expired, and whose place this election was to fill. But the House immediately returned the name of Mr. Willey to the Senate, who upon reconsideration concurred with the House, and Mr. Willey was thus elected Senator of the United States for six years. In this canvass, which had become very animated, Mr. Willey received the support of the remnant of the federal party, which then existed in some strength. They were conscious that much of the opposition to him arose from his conservative course in the election of 1820, and the gentlemen who sympathized with him then, manifested their gratitude by sustaining him for the office of U. S. Senator in 1825. Mr. Willey entered upon and discharged the duties of that appointment, and retired from public life at the close of his term in 1831, and at the age of fifty-five years.

He returned to his profession in 1831, but his absence for so long a time, and the changes in the course of business, had turned the current into other channels, and he was never able to regain the professional standing he enjoyed previous to his election to Congress.

Mr. Willey was a man of more than ordinary intellect, and his attainments as a lawyer were very fair. At one time he stood at the head of the bar in Tolland county. He was devotedly attached to his profession, entertained strong views of the ennobling and elevating effect its practice has upon the mind or the honest practitioner, and maintained that in its benefits to community it stood second to no other. He was very successful before a jury; he always entered into the cause of his client with his whole heart,—indeed, he often became so identified with his client as to make success a matter of personal feeling; and he sometimes lost sight of the true interests of his client in his zeal to defend the claims he set up. At the close of his life, the bar of Tolland county noticed his memory by appropriate resolutions, which by order of the Superior Court were placed upon the Court records.

Mr. Willey was twice married. His first wife was Sally Brainard, of Chatham. They were married October 22, 1798. Their children were as follows :

Sidney Brainard	born	March 14, 1807
James Marshall	"	December 27, 1811
John Calvin	"	June 28, 1814
Sarah Jane	"	June 29, 1816
Elizabeth Mary	"	December 24, 1817
Asa "		September 7, 1819
George Parsons	"	July 27, 1821

Sally Willey, the wife of Hon. Calvin Willey, died February 25, 1827, aged 44. He married Nabby Brainard, sister of his first wife, April 25, 1827. The following are their children :

Harriet Maria	born	April 28, 1828
Mary Ann	"	January 19, 1830
Lucretia Green	"	February 4, 1832
Eliza Hall	"	May 14, 1833
Letitia M.	"	February 24, 1835

Mr. Willey continued to reside in Tolland until the spring of 1854, when he removed to Stafford, where he remained until his decease, August 23, 1858, at the age of eighty-two years.

LUTHER EATON was postmaster from 1820 to 1845, when, upon his resignation, JOSEPH BISHOP was appointed to the office. In the spring of 1850, Mr. Bishop was removed, solely for political causes, and HENRY UNDERWOOD was appointed in his place. Mr. Underwood removed from the town in the spring of 1853, and resigned the office, which in June, 1853, was filled by the appointment of OBADIAH P. WALDO, who held the office until July, 1861, when he was removed, for political causes, and WILLIAM KEITH appointed as his successor.

Thus in sixty-six years there have been but seven postmasters in Tolland, three of whom have been removed from office on account of politics, the others having been permitted to hold the office until it was their pleasure to resign,—one of whom, Luther Eaton, Esq., held the office twenty-five years.