

From the Historical Society

Nayaug's Founding Fathers, Part III

by Susan Goodrich Motycka

In the early 1640s, the Proprietors of Wethersfield (investors) granted property in Nayaug to Richard Treat and to his son-in-law John Hollister. Although Treat lived on the west side of the Connecticut River, he continued to expand his holdings on the eastern shore. When he gifted his "Nayog Farm" to his son Richard Jr. in 1652, it contained 900 acres. Richard Jr. married Sarah Coleman in 1661, and they became residents of Nayaug. By 1693 with 1,860 acres, Treat Farm was one of the largest properties in the new town of Glastonbury.



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John Hollister also lived on the west side of the river but, unlike his father-in-law, he farmed his land in Nayaug. In 1649 he built a small farmhouse near the riverbank north of Ferry Lane where he occasionally spent the night. As opportunity arose, he acquired an additional 900 acres. In 1655 he purchased ten acres from the Gibbons' estate, which he leased. After his death in 1665, his 22-year-old son, John Jr. inherited his Nayaug property.

Two years later, John Jr. married Sarah Goodrich and they moved into the riverside farmhouse where the first three of their nine children were born. In 1675, to avoid the river's frequent floods, John moved the family to a dryer spot at what is now 14 Tryon Street, and placed the hearthstone above the high-water mark. Historian Florence Hollister Curtis described the home as a "plain rectangular house of four rooms, two below and two above." No records from the time indicate if any part of the riverside house was included in the new structure. (Last summer an archeological dig exposed what is thought to be the foundation of the riverside house. Future excavations are expected to reveal more information.)

In 1640, Wethersfield's Proprietors granted to the Reverend Richard Denton a ten-acre property in Nayaug. The following year, Denton left Wethersfield. William Gibbons of Hartford purchased Denton's Nayaug property and, after constructing "a dwelling and necessary buildings," leased the land to the Gilbert brothers.

Thomas Gilbert, his wife Lydia, their daughter, and six sons came to America from Yardley, England in 1639. They settled in Braintree MA where Thomas was granted 28 acres of pasture land. In 1644, tempted by opportunities in the Connecticut Colony, some of them moved to Windsor. Thomas left his cattle and pasture in Braintree in the care of their 19-year-old son

Josiah. Several years later he had to forfeit that property because he no longer resided there. Remaining in Windsor, however, proved to be a mistake.

The family prospered in Connecticut. Son Jonathan was a Marshall for the colony, a position like England's High Sheriff. He was also Clerk of the Train Band, and a liaison between the colonists and Native Americans. Son John became a highly skilled glazier. Back in Braintree, Josiah was not as successful as his brothers in Connecticut. When Jonathan and John decided to lease 10 acres of farmland from William Gibbons, Josiah was eager to join them.

In 1651 Josiah and his 19-year-old bride Elizabeth Belcher, moved to Nayaug. Four of their 10 children were born in the little house on the Gibbons' property. Josiah farmed the land while his brothers carried on their responsibilities in Hartford. The brothers leased the Nayaug property until 1663.

In 1654, a great misfortune caused Josiah's father to join him in Nayaug. The records are somewhat unclear but apparently, in 1649, Thomas and Lydia occupied a home in Windsor owned by Henry Stiles. By a prior arrangement, perhaps as part of the rent, Lydia agreed to repair Henry's clothing and care for him when he was sick. Everything was satisfactory until the militia's training day in November 1651 when Henry was shot in the back and killed. Although it was an accident, Thomas Allyn was convicted of manslaughter, fined, and prevented from carrying a gun for a year.

Three years later, Lydia Gilbert was charged with witchcraft. The indictment against her read, "That not having the feare of god before thy Eyes thou hast of late years or still dost give entertainment to Sathan the great Enemy of god and mankind and by his helpe hast killed the Body of Henry Styles...thou Deservest to Dye." On November 28, 1654, she was sentenced to hang.

There is no known documentary evidence of her death. Shortly after her trial, Thomas left



The Hollister House at 14 Tryon Street, as it appeared about 1880. It is considered the oldest house still standing in Glastonbury.

Windsor and moved to Josiah's house. It's possible that Jonathan, who as a Marshall was in charge of executions, helped his mother escape and brought her down the river to Nayaug. Thomas died in Nayaug in 1659. The administrators of his estate noted expenses for funerals for him and his wife. There is no record that Thomas remarried. He was buried in Wethersfield's Old Burying Ground, but there are no existing gravestones from that period. Lydia's fate remains unknown, but hopefully she spent her last years as a resident of Nayaug.

The Gilbert family has conflicting opinions about who was the wife of Thomas Gilbert.

Some claim that his wife was Elizabeth Bennett and that Lydia was the wife of their oldest son Thomas. Extensive research completed by William Gilbert, a descendant of Jonathan Gilbert, favors Lydia.

[Mrs. Motycka is most appreciative for information provided by William Gilbert, a Professor Emeritus at Simpson College in Iowa. His genealogical research has brought him several times to Glastonbury's Historical Society. For more information or to join the Society, please call 860-633-6890. Our email is hsglastonbury@sbcglobal.net, our website is www.hsgct.org and we are on Facebook.]