

**THE
CAPTAIN OLIVER FILLEY
FAMILY**

**BY EILEEN PHELPS
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The history of the Filley family in America begins with William Filley, an immigrant from England. William owned land in Windsor in the year 1640 and records show he married there in 1642. William fathered eight children, three sons and five daughters. Many of the early Filley family owned land and lived in Massaco (Simsbury) and Wintonbury. Samuel, one of the men of the second generation had a house lot laid out for him in Massaco on Hopmeadow Street in 1667. The family line then runs to Jonathan, then Nathaniel, then to Oliver and finally to our Captain Oliver Filley for whom the stone house on Mountain Avenue is named. In 1793 Oliver Senior purchased from James Roberts, the latter's home lot of 72 and 1/4 acres with all buildings, "lying partly in Simsbury and partly in Windsor." The actual house was located in Simsbury (now Bloomfield). This was the nucleus of the present property. Oliver Sr. died in 1796, only 39 years old, when his eldest child, Oliver, was just 12 and, as the story goes, Oliver took on the entire management of the farm which eventually came into his full possession. At that time the estate consisted of a dwelling house, barn, cider mill and 80 acres of land plus a meadow lot of 7 acres and a mountain lot of 9 acres, 96 acres in all, as well as 3 1/2 pages of inventory ranging from farm animals and produce to black worsted stockings. In October, 1798, the widow, Tabitha, with 2 children younger than Oliver to support, (a fourth child having died) exercised her dower rights. The dowry was distributed in the form of land and buildings, consisting of 49 acres of land on the East side of the home lot of her late husband Oliver Filley (late of Simsbury), running from the chimney of the dwelling house together with one half of one third of the dwelling house and one half of one third of the barn. Tabitha married a neighbor, Isaac Buff in 1800 but the estate was not settled until 1805, the year Oliver married Annis Humphrey of Simsbury.

It is believed that Oliver became engaged in the Tinware business about 1806 and that it was started and maintained on this site until 1817 when he moved it to Brown Street. In the early 1940's Oliver's great granddaughter, Grace Filley Bidwell and her daughter Dorothy Bidwell gave many of the family's papers and Oliver's account books to the Connecticut State Library, Connecticut Historical Society and a few to the Wintonbury Historical Society.

One of these documents, an account book covering the years 1807-1809, is summed up by the then State Librarian as follows:

"After his father's death in 1796 he (Oliver), then 12 years old, took entire charge of the farm on Cook's Hill in Wintonbury, now Bloomfield. He became engaged in farming and manufacturing and represented his Town in the State Legislature for several sessions.

The account book shows that Oliver Filley made, sold and repaired a sorts of tinware-milk pans, tea and coffee pots, candlesticks, large and small pails, and cups, skimmers, dippers, kettles, sugar boxes, servers, ovens, lanterns, sausage stuffers and other useful articles. He also sold farm produce, brandy, gin and timber. He rented out his horse and wagon for various purposes and often drove to Hartford on business for his neighbors. He died in Bloomfield on December 9, 1846. "

Signed: James Brewster, State Librarian
Connecticut State Library
May 1947

About 1810 there begins to be mention of turpentine, varnish, colors such as vermilion, which indicate that they were then starting japanning and decorating tinware, rather than just manufacturing and repairing it.

There are two books on tinware locally, one owned by the Wintonbury Historical Society, the other by Prosser library, donated by Dorothy Bidwell. From the latter I quote " ...Tinsmiths, decorators and peddlers made Oliver's shop their headquarters. Oliver was kept active teaching his trade to relatives as well as to others. This master-smith encouraged and advised members of the family who set up shops outside of Connecticut. He helped to finance, to order supplies, to train decorators; he shared his materials with the Filley tinsmiths who moved to Philadelphia, St. Louis and Lansingburgh, New York." Among the members of the family to enter the trade after learning it in the Bloomfield shop were; Oliver's younger brother Harvey, who was put in charge of the shop in Philadelphia, Augustus Filley, his cousin and brother-in-law who opened the branch in Lansingburgh, New York around 1815, Augustus' wife, (Oliver's sister), who was a decorator and his sons; Oliver Dwight who established his home and business in St. Louis and Marcus Lucius who worked in all the Filley shops and finally settled in Lansingburgh to become a manufacturer of stoves. It is also believed that Oliver's wife Annis did some decorating of the tinware.

Of interest are some of the contracts with apprentices, one with a young lad of 17 years, 8 months and 15 days signed April 16, 1811, spells out the responsibilities of each party. The term was 3 years, 3 months and 14 days, during which time the lad was to dwell with and serve his master; shall not play cards, dice or any other unlawful games; he shall not frequent taverns or ale houses, he shall not commit fornication nor contract matrimony; he shall not embezzle, waste, or lend any of his master's goods. Meanwhile, the master (Oliver) shall and will teach or cause to be taught, the trade, mystery or occupation of tin japanner in the best way and manner he can, and shall allow unto the apprentice decent and sufficient wearing apparel.

An agreement between a different master and apprentice is slightly more tolerant in one aspect and less generous in another in that, "for faithful performance the apprentice shall receive \$18 and a pair of shoes and if he does not get drunk above once in three months, a pair of stockings and his diet." It will perhaps not surprise you to learn that Oliver Filley gave the land for the first Methodist Church in Bloomfield.

Oliver was one of the Captains of the old militia company. The Wintonbury Historical Society has a copy of the members of his company of May 16, 1816 listing many local names such as Cases, Bamards, Burrs, Griswolds and Pinneys. The Captains drilled the militia regularly until it was disbanded. To quote the book, "Memorial History of Hartford", " just long enough before the Civil War for us to find only raw recruits." One of those raw recruits was Oliver's grandson Louis James Filley who was imprisoned at Andersonville and Libby prisons during the War.

The Wintonbury Historical Society has copies of two tax lists from Oliver's papers. The first list in 1827 when he was in Windsor listed one dwelling house and 168 acres of land. The second list from 1838 of property in Bloomfield listed 2 dwelling houses (the second house is the present stone house) and 149 acres of land.

The only son of Oliver Filley who did not leave Bloomfield was Jay Humphrey Filley, and we believe that it is this son for whom the stone house on Mountain Road was built. Jay married Julia Newberry in 1833 but the house was not completed until 1834. A bill to Oliver from Elijah Whiting of Canton for "all the lumber I have carried him for to the present time" was paid in September 1834 with a notation by his great grand-daughter, "this is for the stonehouse where Papa was born. " "Papa" being aforementioned Louis James son of Jay and Julia. Another bill addressed to Oliver dated October 13, 1834 is for the boarding of masons to build the stone house and is for 50 weeks and one day at a weekly cost of \$1.50 totaling \$75.22.

Oliver's son Jay was living in the house in 1849 when his father's estate was settled. Jay then moved to Brown Street in Bloomfield. He raised and traded in tobacco and in 1865 entered into partnership with Gaylord Meacham and Timothy Jerome under the name "Filley and Co." for the purpose of buying and selling leaf tobacco. The tobacco was kept in Filley's warehouse on Brown Street. In 1874 he sold the Massaco Farm located on Brown Street in Bloomfield to his son Louis James reserving the use of the tobacco warehouse for 8 years.

Jay's other son, Alfred Newberry, who lived on Brown Street next to the old Farm also made his contribution to Bloomfield. He was president of Prosser Library for 10 years, President of the Bloomfield Village Improvement Association and on his death he bequeathed to that Association a 7 acre tract of woodland for park purposes. In 1930 Wilbur J. Filley (Louis's son) provided funds to buy an overgrown pasture connecting the woodland to Tunxis Avenue and a little later his sister Mrs. Grace Bidwell purchased and gave to the Association 5 more acres completing what is now Filley Park which was dedicated in 1938. The newspaper clipping from which this was extracted states that in 1916 when the Chestnut blight killed practically all of these trees, over 200 beautiful native Chestnuts were cut from this tract. These trees were sold for telephone poles.

The third child of Louis James, Oliver Dwight, operated Massaco Farm. His only son Oliver Filley left Bloomfield for a military career and I understand, retired as Colonel Oliver Filley and is now living in South Dakota.

This is the end of the story, abbreviated as it is, of the Filley family. But let us trace the history of the house a little longer. Captain Oliver Filley died in 1846 and the house and farm were sold to Watson Wilcox of Simsbury in 1849, then by him to Amasa Holcomb on May 24, 1854, then by Amasa on October 25, 1854 to Samuel Pinney. The Pinneys lived in the house and farmed the land until it was sold in 1913 to the Missionaries of LaSalette. Recently the historian for the Wintonbury Historical Society, Roberta Kania, obtained some very interesting pictures and information from the LaSalette Missionaries archives about the property which they called "The Villa. " The research on the Filley house is an ongoing project as the restoration of the house is undertaken by the Wintonbury Historical Society. If you have any information or old pictures you would like to share with the Wintonbury Historical Society please contact the Society at: Wintonbury Historical Society, P.O. Box 7454, Bloomfield, CT 06002