

Descendants of one of the town's founders, they're

calling all Doolittles

to return to Wallingford for a reunion

by Andrew Ragali
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WALLINGFORD — Around 1670, 38 men, some with their wives and children, traveled from New Haven through dense forest to a piece of land atop a hill above sandy plains. In all, there were about 107 people in the group that established the town of Wallingford. One of those 38 was Abraham Doolittle, who had served as a prominent official in New Haven.

This weekend, 343 years later, about 65 descendants of Abraham Doolittle from the U.S. and Canada will return to town for the family's reunion, said Nancy Rose Redling, an 11th generation Doolittle, formerly of Wallingford. Redling, who recently retired to New Hampshire, is the president of Doolittle Society of America as well as the reunion's chairwoman.

"The reunion is held every 10 years so people can return back to their roots and learn more about their ancestry," Redling said.

Among the states represented at the reunion are Mississippi, Michigan, Virginia, Louisiana, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In 2003, about 150 people attended. But age, health and the economy caused the number to drop this year.

The reunion will begin Friday at Meriden's Four Points by Sheraton hotel. On Saturday, attendees will travel through Meriden, Cheshire and Wallingford on the Howard Rose Bus Tour. The tour is named for Redling's father, the former owner of Rose Bus Service, which operated for more than 50 years in Wallingford. The tour will stop at the Center Street Cemetery in Wallingford, where Abraham Doolittle is buried, along with John Moss.

According to newspaper archives, Moss is thought to have given the town its name, as he came from Wallingford, England. Besides being a founder of Wallingford, Moss was the father of Abigail Doolittle, Abraham's second wife.

The tour will also stop at Doolittle Park, named for Stillman Doolittle, said Jerry Farrell Jr., president of the Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust. Stillman, a farmer, died in



1918, leaving \$5,000 to establish the park. "I know I'll be going," said Wallingford Mayor William W. Dickinson Jr. Dickinson said he marvels at the ability of people in the country's early days to live and thrive. "Considering the severity of the conditions, they were a hardy, intelligent people," he said.

Dolieta to Doolittle

According to an Aug. 13, 1953, Morning Record story, the Doolittle name is believed to be a contraction of the surname de L'Hotel, or Dolieta, an aide to William the Conqueror who accompanied the Normans on his invasion of England in 1066. Rudolph, the Earl of Dolieta, became Rudolph Doolittle after he was honored as an



Above: Rider Doolittle, 18, and his grandfather, Donald Doolittle, show their family tree at Colony Glass in Wallingford, which is owned by Dennis Doolittle.

Left: The grave of Abraham Doolittle, a founder of Wallingford who died in 1690, is in the Center Street Cemetery.

Photos by Dave Zajac / Record-Journal

Below: The Doolittle family reunion in 1971 was attended by family members from New Jersey, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Alabama and Connecticut.

The Morning Record, Aug. 12, 1971



English subject after completing the conquest of England.

Born in 1620, Abraham Doolittle arrived in Boston in 1640, a member of the Massachusetts Bay Company, and then lived in New Haven in 1642 as a member of the Davenport-Eaton Company. In New Haven, Doolittle served as deputy seven times, and acted as a selectman for many years, according to the same Morning Record article. Abraham was chosen as one of four managers to search out and establish a new settlement. He laid out a tract of 12 square miles, where he moved with 37 other men and their families in 1670 to establish Wallingford.

There are about 22,000 descendants of Abraham Doolittle, said Redling. The Merriman family, descendants of Wallingford founder Nathaniel Merriman, has about the same number. The Merrimans held their reunion in Wallingford in the spring. Redling is also a Merriman descendant.

"All these people are connected," Farrell said of the descendants of Wallingford's

Please see **Doolittle** /