

Whittlesey Avenue: Recalling a minister?

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Reverend Samuel Street.”

The Rev. Whittlesey was also an original proprietor of the town. North and South Whittlesey run in opposite directions from downtown Center Street.

There are two spellings of “Whittlesey,” where the “e” and “l” are switched. The street names in town are “Whittlesey,” while the family name was usually “Whittelsey.” Variations in spelling were common and sometimes signified two different families. In this case “Whittlesey” and “Whittelsey” refers to the same family, Beaumont

WALLINGFORD — North Whittlesey Avenue and South Whittlesey Avenue were probably named after the Rev.

Street Smarts

Samuel Whittlesey, the town’s second minister, even though the streets use a different spelling of the family name.

“The name goes back quite early,” said Town Historian Bob Beaumont. “Samuel was the second minister and took over for

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Rev. Samuel Whittlesey’s grave at Center Street Cemetery in Wallingford. Other members of the Whittlesey family are also buried here. | (Eric Vo/ Record-Journal)

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said.

Whittlesey was born on Jan. 10, 1686 in what is now known as Old Saybrook. His parents were John and Ruth Whittlesey. He graduated from Yale College in 1705 — a class that consisted of only five graduates, according to the “Genealogy of the Whittlesey-Whittelsey family,” written by Charles Barney Whittlesey.

Five years later after graduating from Yale, Whittlesey was invited by the town to visit and preach, Charles Barney Whittlesey wrote. Satisfied with his preaching, the town invited him to become the pastor. And in April 1710, he was “installed as colleague with Rev. Mr. (Samuel) Street.”

On Aug. 4, 1710, Whittlesey was appointed “the Chaplain of our forces upon the expedition to Port Royal,” in Nova Scotia. The following year, on

July 24, 1711, he was again offered the office of chaplain, but didn’t accept it. The next year, on May 20, 1712, he became one of the original proprietors of Wallingford.

After Street died in January 1717, Whittlesey became the sole minister of the Congregational Church. During his tenure as minister, he became involved in a “religious controversy,” according to Jerry Farrell Jr., the president of the historical preservation trust. Prior to Whittlesey’s death, “he observed the symptoms of a latent spirit of strife and division amongst his people,” Charles Henry Stanley wrote in “History of Wallingford.”

“There was a lot of religious controversy at that time between the New Light and the Old Light,” Farrell said. “Those who were going to keep the Puritan ideals and those who wanted to move away from that.”

As minister, Whittlesey

also had a substantial amount of power in town. During the 1700s, Farrell said, the minister and selectmen were the leaders of the community.

“Church and state weren’t separated like they are today,” he said. “At that point, certainly his opinion mattered on how the town got run.”

Whittlesey continued to preach until his death on Aug. 15, 1752. He was 77 years old and was in his 42nd year as a minister. Whittlesey was a known for being morally upright, according to his obituary.

“Under the influence of Christian principles, his soul flowed to diffusive benevolence; he lived the religion he inculcated, and recommended it by the powerful charms of a virtuous examples,” his obituary states. “His talents as a preacher were singular, being master of an engaging elocution and address, and in composition judicious and instructive.”

Another Whittlesey that the street could be named after is Jared Potter Whittlesey — an individual dedicated to his hometown. Jared Whittlesey was the third son of Elisha and Sara Whittlesey and was born March 8, 1787. Davis wrote that “during the remainder of his life, he devoted his time to improving and beautifying the streets of his native town, by setting out shade trees, opening walks and highly improving his own grounds.” Jared Whittlesey was also a giving man, who often made donations to the Episcopal church and the sanitary commission during the war, according to Davis.

Beaumont said he didn’t know which Whittlesey the streets are named after. Farrell agreed, adding they “were just a very prominent family.”