

STURGES SELLECK WHITLOCK (1844-1914)

The publication *Representative Citizens of Connecticut* by Samuel Hart, 1916 provides an interesting portrait of the industrialist, Sturges S. Whitlock. It is interesting to note the first full page (not reproduced) of this portrait is the author attempting to portray the Whitlock factories and mills as landscape poetry and art!!

“Born January 28, 1844, at Ridgefield, Connecticut, Mr. Whitlock was a member of a very old Connecticut family which had made its home in that region for many generations. There is a tradition concerning the actual founding of the Whitlock family in this country that three brothers of the name came from England to the “New World” during the early period of its colonization, one them settling in Connecticut, one in New York and one in New Jersey, and that it is from these that all the various Whitlock families in the United States are descended. However this may be, it is certain that the ancestors of the Mr. Whitlock with whose life and career this sketch is concerned were living in Ridgefield during pre-Revolutionary days, the line being clearly traceable for five generations back.

Thaddeus Whitlock, who was the representative of the family during the Revolution, took a credible part in that historic struggle, and his son, the grandfather of Sturges S. Whitlock, fought in the War of 1812. Mr. Whitlock’s father, John Whitlock, was a very prominent man in the community in his day, with extensive manufacturing interests in Derby, Connecticut, where he founded the business afterwards developed to great proportions by his son. His wife, before her marriage to him in 1842 was Mary Ann Selleck, a daughter of Sturges Selleck, of Danbury, Connecticut, and Sturges S. Whitlock was one of the two children born to this union, the other being Charles Whitlock, who died as early as 1860.

Sturges S. Whitlock passed the years of his youth in the region of the State where he was born, but not all of it in his native town, receiving his education at Jackson’s Academy in the neighbouring town of Danbury. He proved an apt and industrious scholar and left school at the age of eighteen the possessor of a liberal education. Upon completing his schooling he entered the machine shop of his father at Derby and there learned to become a practical machinist, as well as the business side of the enterprise. Though still a young man of twenty-four, he stepped into his father’s place on the retirement of the elder man in 1868 and from that time for twenty years had complete control of the business, which he conducted on the most progressive principles and with the highest degree of success. During the first ten years of his management he carried on the industry in the same manner that his father before him had done, at least in so far as the actual product of the mills was concerned. Mr. Whitlock was, however, a man of great inventive genius and about 1877 designed a printing press which had many features that greatly improved on the type then in use. This design he patented and in 1878 began the manufacture of his invention in his mills. The invention was a notable one and the new form of press rapidly displaced the older forms throughout the country so that the capacity of the plant was strained to the uttermost. This capacity of the plant was about one hundred presses a year and the manufacture of them at a rate was continued by Mr. Whitlock for about ten years longer. Finally, in 1887, it became impossible to supply the growing demand for the mechanism as practically every printing concern of any importance found it necessary to install one, and Mr. Whitlock formed the corporation known as the Whitlock Machine Company, which removed the following year to Shelton, Connecticut, where much more adequate quarters were provided for the carrying on the great business. It is here that the industry is still continued to-day under the same name, forming now as it has from the outset one of the most important manufacturing interests in the district. Mr. Whitlock, himself, up to the time of his death was a very prominent figure in the industrial circles of the State and a man whose reputation for probity and sound practical business methods was surpassed by none.

The great interests connected with his industrial operations made it impossible for Mr. Whitlock to devote as much time or attention to many other aspects of the community's life as both inclination and talent impelled him to. This was particularly true in the case of politics in which he was always keenly interested and in which he would unquestionably have risen high had it been possible for him to take part in public affairs to a great extent. Even as it was he became a prominent factor therein in the county, a recognized leader and held a number of important offices. He was a staunch supporter of the principles of the Republican party with which he was identified from attaining his manhood until his death, and it was as its candidate that he was elected to the several offices that he held. For a year he was assessor for the town of Derby and later served a term as member of the board of burgesses for the borough of Birmingham. In the fall of 1896 he was elected to the State Assembly from the township of Huntington, and upon the completion of his term in that body in 1898 was sent to the State Senate from the Fifteenth Electoral District.

In the fall of 1868 Mr. Whitlock was united in marriage with Mary Olive Singer, a daughter of Isaac M. Singer, of New York City. To Mr. & Mrs. Whitlock were born two children: Olive Voulette, now wife of Walter Randall, of Shelton, Connecticut, and Mary Lillian, now the wife of Alton P. Terrell, of Ansonia, Connecticut. Mrs. Whitlock died in August 1898, and on June 2, 1902, Mr. Whitlock was united in marriage with Inez M. Wakefield, a daughter of Charles Everett and Louise D. (Wentworth) Wakefield, of Maine. Of this union one son was born, Sturges Selleck Whitlock, Jr., born Feb.24,1904, died March 5,1904. Mrs. Whitlock survives her husband and is now the wife of Yale D. Bishop, of No. 271 Crown street, New Haven, Connecticut.

Mr. Whitlock was a man of strong social instincts who enjoyed greatly the society of his fellows. He was prominent in Masonic circles and a member of Hiram Lodge, No.12, Free and Accepted Masons, and of King Solomon Chapter, No.3, Royal Arch Masons, of Derby. He was keenly interested in all matters pertaining to the public welfare and was active in many movements undertaken with this objective. He did invaluable service in aiding the developing of the town of Shelton as a member of its Board of Trade, of which he was a director for a number of years. In the matter of religion Mr. Whitlock was an Episcopalian and a very liberal supporter of the church's work. Mr. Whitlock possessed a rather unusual union of characteristics which, when taken together, almost invariably spell success. The capable business man and the inventor are rarely found together in one person, the qualities which make for ability in each line somewhat negating the others. In his case, however, this was not so and he was equally capable of inventing his splendid press and successfully putting it upon the market. Nor was invention one effort merely, but he followed it up by much valuable work, making great improvements from year to year in his own device, and had eventually about twenty patents on these various supplementary inventions. A man of strong personality, he was everywhere and in all relations a sort of leader among his fellows who readily deferred to views which he could at once urge with so much enthusiasm and back with argument so convincing. His relations with other members of his own family and household and with his personal friends were of a most delightful kind, and his death left an unusually large circle of those who mourned him as a personal loss."

Sturges Selleck Whitlock's family is detailed on the WHITLOCK09 chart, The Whitlocks of Connecticut. The author's assertion that he could trace his ancestors back in Connecticut for five generations was true, in fact we have been able to trace them back from Sturges S. Whitlock for seven generations. The story about the three brothers coming to America is not likely true as further research has shown the New Jersey Whitlocks came from Wiltshire where as the Virginia families came from Berkshire. It is not yet clear where in England the Connecticut family originates but Buckinghamshire or Hertfordshire seem likely.

Sturges' wife Mary Olive Singer was the daughter of Isaac Merritt Singer the owner of the Singer Sewing Machine Company. The marriage was therefore a very influential connection for Sturges and his family. I have not been able to find any descendants of this family through his two daughters. Olive Vouletti was the wife of Walter Randall and Mary Lillian was the wife of Alton Truman Terrell. The latter had a son Sturges Terrell born in 1900 but that is as far as we have been able to trace this line so far.

SOURCE: R2466