



A Tankerhoosen Book

# *David Allis and the Birth of Vernon*

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Our First 90 Years as North Bolton



Jon Roe



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**Our First 90 Years as North Bolton**

*A Tankerhoosen Book*



*Bolton Center Green*

by

**Jon Roe**

for the

**Vernon Historical Society**

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# 1. Preface

This book is intended to serve two purposes. First, it is the origin story of Vernon. We became Vernon when the North Bolton Parish separated from Bolton in 1808. Most of our history books spend little time on the 88 years we were part of Bolton; but during those years we grew from a wilderness of farmers to a town about to enter the industrial age. Our country transformed from an English Colony to the United States of America. Our place in this transformation is worth telling.

Second, the origin story is woven around the life of David Allis, who was born in 1720, the year Bolton was incorporated. David was one of our many founders forgotten to history; yet as one of the town's leaders during its early years he helped settle North Bolton, built our first grist mill on the Tankerhoosen River, participated in creating the North Bolton Parish, and guiding us through the Revolutionary War.

Allis is barely mentioned in our history books and his early mills forgotten. He recently came to our attention when his gravestone was found in the backyard of a Vernon Center home. On walks I often pass through our old cemeteries, particularly the Old Burial Ground Of North Bolton on Bamforth Road. Buried there are the men and women who founded Vernon and fought in the Revolution, yet most have been forgotten.

Having lived in Vernon for nearly 60 years, I became interested in our history only a dozen years ago. For my research I chose the Tankerhoosen River Valley and have discovered a wealth of stories to investigate; much that is not known to the public or other researchers. Having entered my ninth decade I want to record these stories for future generations.

I chose to write these stories as narratives for the casual reader rather than with detail references for historians. Those interested will find references in the Appendix.

Many in town, including myself, did not grow up here and our roots are far away. How does it serve us to learn the history of our temporary home? I like the explanation of Jeffrey Partridge, chairman of humanities at Capital Community College. In an editorial that appeared in *The Hartford Courant* in 2016 he wrote:

We are inspired by history. Everything we have and know derives from the past be it family genealogy, scientific knowledge, or civil rights, historical subjects inspire and instruct us. We abandon history at our peril.

We need a sense of place. Place is essential to a healthy self hood and effective citizenship. A properly functioning democracy depends upon citizens committed to neighborhood, town, city, nation.

The humanities and the arts develop committed, informed, engaged citizens. This isn't dessert, and this isn't frosting. The humanities and arts are essential vitamins that are a part of an healthy state's diet.

Even though you may only call Vernon home for a time the origin of our town is not that different from the origin of many other small New England towns. I hope it helps you find roots here too.

This book roughly covers the years from 1700 to 1800, an introduction to the story of Vernon's founding. It is far from a complete story or without errors, and David Allis is only one of the men who made important contributions to our early town. There are many puzzles yet to be solved and other early settlers' stories worth telling.

In 2026 America will be celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Plans are being made at national, state and local levels because it is seen as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to renew our engagement in history.

Through the stories we share we will be reminded that history matters, deepening our appreciation and broadening our understanding of who we are and the courage and sacrifices which brought us to this point. I hope this small book will support the anniversary by providing you with background on those who founded Bolton/Vernon and the sacrifices they made to give us the opportunities we share today.



*The final resting place of our founders on Bamforth Road.*

As with any history we build on the work of earlier historians. This book references Vernon's Allyn Stanley Kellogg and Bolton's Samuel Morgan Alvord, Bruce Ronson, Charles Crandall Church and Edna Sumner. I want to especially honor the work of former Bolton Town Historian Hans DePold. He includes in his writings much that I do not, such as Bolton's rich Native American history and details of the town's participation in the Revolutionary War. See References to find his writings.



## 2. How Our Borders & Geography Influenced Our History

Understanding Vernon's history begins with how Bolton's unusual borders were established and the impact the physical geography had on settlers. It was this combination that will lead to Vernon's separation from Bolton in 1808.

A map of the combined Vernon and Bolton today shows an odd shape compared to neighboring towns Tolland, Coventry and Manchester, which were laid out as six mile by six mile towns. Bolton was originally nine miles high, three miles wide at the bottom, and only two miles wide at the top. Bolton was unplanned and the town's shape was leftover after our neighbors' boundaries were established.

### Early Borders

In the early 1700's the Colonial government's ideal town was six miles by six miles with the church in the center so that families didn't have to walk more than three miles to attend church each week, as church attendance was mandatory. Tolland and Coventry are examples, established only a few years before Bolton.

When the English settled Windsor, Hartford and Glastonbury in the late 1630's they laid out their towns on the west side of the Connecticut River.

North and south boundaries were carefully surveyed separating the three towns. To the west the territory of each town extended indefinitely. To the east their towns went generally through the wilderness to the Rhode Island colony.



*Bolton's neighbors. (1792 Blodget map, UConn Library MAGIC)*

As populations grew the river towns first expanded their farms to the east side of the river and then began building homes there also. To keep order Hartford and Windsor established an eastern boundary three miles from the river and laid out lots. A number of the 3-mile markers still exist.

Although their numbers were declining rapidly the local indigenous tribes still claimed ownership of the land between the Hartford and the Rhode Island colonies. In the ensuing years large tracts were sold to individuals and to the Connecticut River colonies. Rights to these purchases were somewhat vague.

In 1672 Windsor and Hartford extended their boundary five miles further to the east and in 1682 this 'Five Mile Tract' was formalized by a deed from Joshua Sachem defining the territory. This purchase added to the 3-mile boundary such that the eastern boundary of the colonies was now eight miles from the Connecticut River, where it would remain. This land will become East Windsor in 1768 and East Hartford in 1783 and later be further divided to separate South Windsor (1845) and Orford Parish, later renamed Manchester (1823).

Bolton's western boundary was set by the eastern boundary of the river towns as eight miles from the Connecticut River.

Bolton is part of the Eastern Highlands overlooking the Connecticut River Valley. The terrain was a barrier to movement between the river towns and Massachusetts and Rhode Island with native trails such as today's Hartford Turnpike and Bolton Notch as early routes. This area was known as the Hartford Mountains and was very visible rising above the river valley.

In the early 1700's the river towns grew concerned as settlers from Rhode Island began moving west into wilderness areas and threatened to claim territory Connecticut felt belonged to them. They began laying out new towns beyond the Hartford Mountains to secure their border. Hebron was incorporated in 1708, Coventry in 1712 and Tolland in 1715. The growing populations of Hartford and Windsor were encouraged to settle there to solidify their claims.

In Colonial times towns were also parishes. Ideally the church or meeting house was in the center for convenient travel to worship. By the early 1700's the preferred town measured six miles by six miles with the meeting house at the center. Coventry and Tolland were laid out this way with the Willimantic River as their eastern boundary. The western boundary of those towns is a straight line which defined Bolton's eastern boundary.

Thus our western boundary was essentially defined as eight miles from the Connecticut River and our eastern boundary as six miles from the Willimantic River. The left over piece of geography became Bolton in 1720, explaining our long narrow shape.

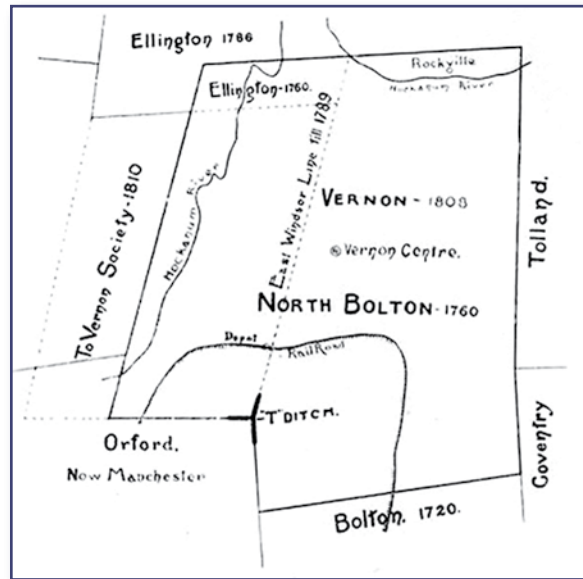
The northern border was defined by setting our northeast corner at the shore of Shenipsit Lake and running a line west. Our southern border was Hebron's northern border.

## Annexing East Windsor

There were some borderline arguments in the early years, particularly with Coventry, but the changes were minor with one exception important to North Bolton.

As mentioned, the original border with Windsor was eight miles from the Connecticut River placing our border just west of today's Vernon Center. In Rockville the border was just west of Grant's Mill. This boundary will affect the 1762 location of our first meeting house and school.

In 1789, on the petition of Alexander McLean and others, a mile and a half was taken from East Windsor and added to Bolton (who officially opposed the addition). The reason for this border change will be covered in the chapter on forming the North Bolton Parish.



*1789 East Windsor addition to North Bolton.*

The mile and a half addition included the future Talcottville and Dobsonville with their mills, as well as the fertile valley of the Hockanum River along the western edge of town; an important addition for the future Vernon.

## Geography

And what was the land like in our unplanned town?

Dominating the narrow center section of Bolton was 2-mile long Box Mountain running from the Tankerhoosen River in the north to below Bolton Notch. This divided Bolton into a northern and southern section. Although historically incorrect this narrative will refer to southern Bolton as 'South Bolton' for clarity.

The southern section had better farmland such that most of the first settlers in the 1720's selected their farms in that part of town. The meeting house was then built nearby and, as the meeting house was also the location of town meetings, this became the center of Bolton, far below the northern section.

The glaciers 16,000 years earlier carved deep river valleys that modified the original terrain, but would be a good source of water for future mills.

In addition to good springs, two bodies of water in North Bolton stand out - Shenipsit Lake on the northeastern corner and the Cedar Swamp on the eastern border with Coventry.

The Cedar Swamp was the source of the Hope River (later accidentally renamed the Hop River), which roughly forms the eastern boundary of South Bolton and much later will be dammed becoming the three Bolton Lakes and providing water for Willimantic's mills. And Shenipsit Lake was the source of the Hockanum River, which will power Rockville's mills. The Hockanum River also roughly forms the northern and western boundary of North Bolton.

Other important streams are the Blackledge River, roughly the western boundary of South Bolton, the Tankerhoosen River in the north and Box Brook, later renamed Railroad Brook, connecting the two halves of Bolton. Box Brook is unique in that it runs north.

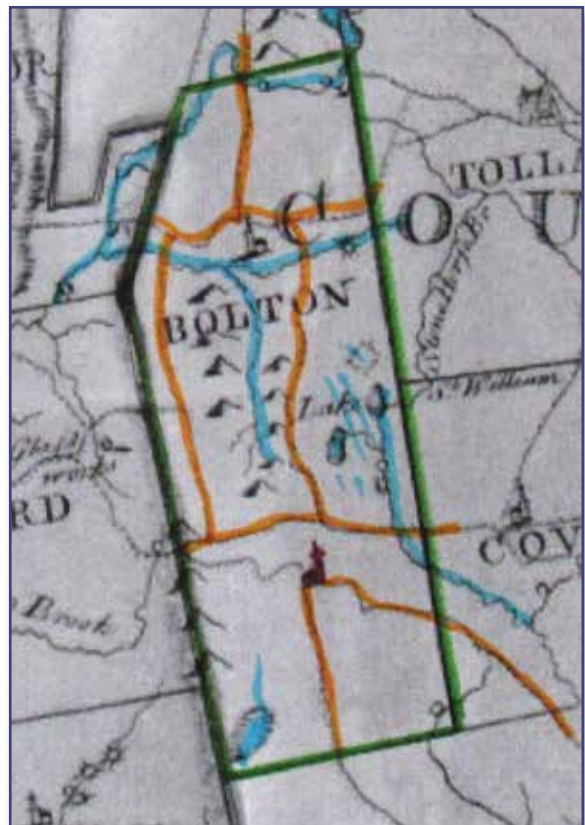
All these waterways had mills - grist, oil and cider - during the early years of the town.

The narrow width of the town with Box Mountain in the center and the Cedar Swamp on the east made travel between the north and south parts of town challenging. On the west a road ran along the East Hartford (now the Manchester) line, and to the east a second road ran along the ridge separating the Box Brook Valley from the Cedar Swamp. Enough of a challenge in good weather, they were much more difficult during the winter and wet weather. This lengthy journey will be a major factor in the creation of the North Bolton Parish and eventually the separation of Vernon.

Another important geographic feature was Bolton Notch eventually providing easy access through the mountain from Hartford to points east. However, during the Colonial period the route across the Hartford Mountains was primarily through Bolton Center, the route followed by Rochambeau's troops and many other Revolutionary travelers.

Thus the topography of Bolton was a challenge for our early settlers, but there was reasonably good farmland and settlers were attracted to the area as the Connecticut River Valley's best land was occupied.

Bolton's geography will lead to Vernon going its own way in 1808.



*Bolton's original boundaries highlighting main roads and rivers.*





### 3. 1720 - The Founding Of Bolton

The Colonial government recognized Bolton in 1718 and we were formally incorporated in 1720, however, there were a few settlers living here as early as the first decade.

The General Court granted Capt. Thomas Bull 200 acres near the Cedar Swamp in 1673 for his services during the Indian Wars. In 1674 Joshua, son of Uncas, conveyed 150 acres in Bolton to Major John Talcott. Other Native American claims included those by Moses Thrall and Stephen Johns in North Bolton. Claims were complex and most land was not occupied.

In 1720 15 family heads petitioned the General Assembly for incorporation as a town. A committee was appointed by the General Assembly to organize the town, lay out lots and see that the land was fairly distributed. It was important that absentee owners move to Bolton, occupy and improve their land.



*Early Connecticut General Assembly.*

Town names were chosen by the General Assembly. Bolton was apparently named for Bolton, England, although we are not sure who had that connection. Bolton, in recent times, has established and maintained a friendly relationship with Bolton, England.

In 1731 the town was granted a patent naming the Grantees and Proprietors, and listing how many of the 50 100-acre lots belonged to each. For example, Nathaniel Allis, who we will follow, received 'one fiftieth part.' Most of the 50 lots were in South Bolton, but familiar North Bolton names include: Bissell, Clark, Dart, Johns, King, Loomis, Olcott, Strong, Talcott and White. They and their descendants will help build North Bolton.

The 50 proprietors were granted 100 acres for their homelot in what was known as the First Division. A common practice was to draw a grid on a map, number the plots and draw lots.

There is no record of how Bolton actually divided its land or a map of the first lots, but Coventry, which was incorporated two years earlier, did keep good records and it is likely that Bolton used a similar method of laying out and distributing lots. Coventry's records were preserved by their first and long time Town Clerk Thomas Root.

We do know that Bolton's 100-acre lots were 60 by 280 rods (1000 x 4620 feet), with the narrow side on a road. In 1920 for Bolton's Bicentennial historians attempted to recreate a map of the initial land distribution based on early deeds. We have a preliminary version of the map which is helpful, but it appears a final map was never completed.

Initially there were 50 100 acre homelots laid out for the 50 proprietors plus one reserved for the pastor. The primary north-south road in South Bolton was Hebron Road and most of the first lots were laid out on both sides of that road. Only a few of the original homelots were located in North Bolton, likely to settlers already living there.

Stephen Johns at Valley Falls was the first settler in North Bolton according to Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg. He tells the story that Johns thought he was settling in Tolland. The Thrall family claims that their holdings were purchased from Native Americans. And another nearby 100-acre lot on Hatch Hill belonged to John Dart or Darte.

This first division of land probably took the best farmland, but was only a small portion of the town. The rest was considered Common Land owned by the town. To divide the remaining land there were subsequent divisions until almost 1800. The second division was half the first or 50 acres, the third was half that or 25 acres all the way to a 12th division. It is unknown if there was a lot plan for other than the first division, although Coventry does show maps for 2nd and 3rd divisions. In North Bolton lots were likely laid out along Hartford Turnpike and in the Tankerhoosen Valley.

In Bolton, after the first division, the farmers began selecting land in North Bolton and Box Mountain - often for wood lots, but also preserving land for sons and grandsons.

After the initial distribution property owners were able to divide and sell their land as new people came to town. This is one of the few ways they had of obtaining hard money in the early Eighteenth Century. Only the first 50 Proprietors had rights to subsequent divisions of land and these were hereditary like English laws of primogeniture. Thus Nathaniel Allis passed this right to his son David who took part in three of the Divisions to expand his holdings in North Bolton.

## 4. Who Were Bolton's Settlers?

The early settlers of Bolton came primarily from the river towns of Windsor, Hartford and Wethersfield. By 1720 the river towns were 80 years old and the best land was long gone. New territory, even if not the soil quality of the Connecticut River Valley, was still very attractive so younger generations moved to the east and west of the Connecticut River Valley.

Here is the path taken to Bolton by three of the prominent families who came to early Bolton - the Talcott, Grant and Allis families.

### The Talcott Family

The Talcott's are an example of a well established family purchasing land in new towns for sons and grandsons.



*John Talcott came to Hartford with Rev. Thomas Hooker in 1636.*

**John Talcott (?-1660)** came to America in 1632 with Rev. Thomas Hooker's Company settling first with Hooker in Newton, MA. He came to Connecticut with Hooker in 1636 passing through Bolton. He was one of the leaders of the new colony and a wealthy man who bought land in neighboring towns including Wethersfield. All Connecticut Talcott's descend from him.

His son **Samuel (1634-1727)** was Harvard educated and his father established him in Wethersfield where he was an active town leader. He also became one of the original proprietors of Glastonbury and left his property there to his oldest son Benjamin.

**Benjamin (1674-1727)**, known as Deacon Talcott, was the first of the family to live east of the river. His house was a refuge from the frequent Indian attacks and bore the mark of bullets. He purchased land in the future Bolton leaving it to his son, also Benjamin.



**Benjamin (1702-1785)** was born in Glastonbury but inherited land in both Hebron and Bolton where he lived. His son, also a Benjamin, was born in Bolton and settled on land near the quarry given to him by his father.

Of the original 50 proprietors receiving homelots, three are Talcott's - Benjamin, John and Nathaniel. The Talcott's are an example of prominent families planning ahead for their descendants.

### **The Grant Family**

The story of Samuel Grant from Windsor is legendary. He was not one of the 50 Proprietors, but acquired land, probably as an investment, in the center of South Bolton. As the settlers laid out the town Grant's homelot was where they wanted to establish the Town Common. The town offered to trade his 100 acres for 500 acres in the far northern and unsettled part of town. Grant rode over to take a look. At the time Grant was still living in Windsor and eager to obtain land. The property included the Hockanum River running through an impenetrable thicket of rocks and brambles, but it was closer to Windsor and had promise. So Grant, in 1728, became owner of the 500 acres that would become Rockville.

Samuel established his family in the northwest corner of Bolton, and built a grist mill where his sons were successful for generations.

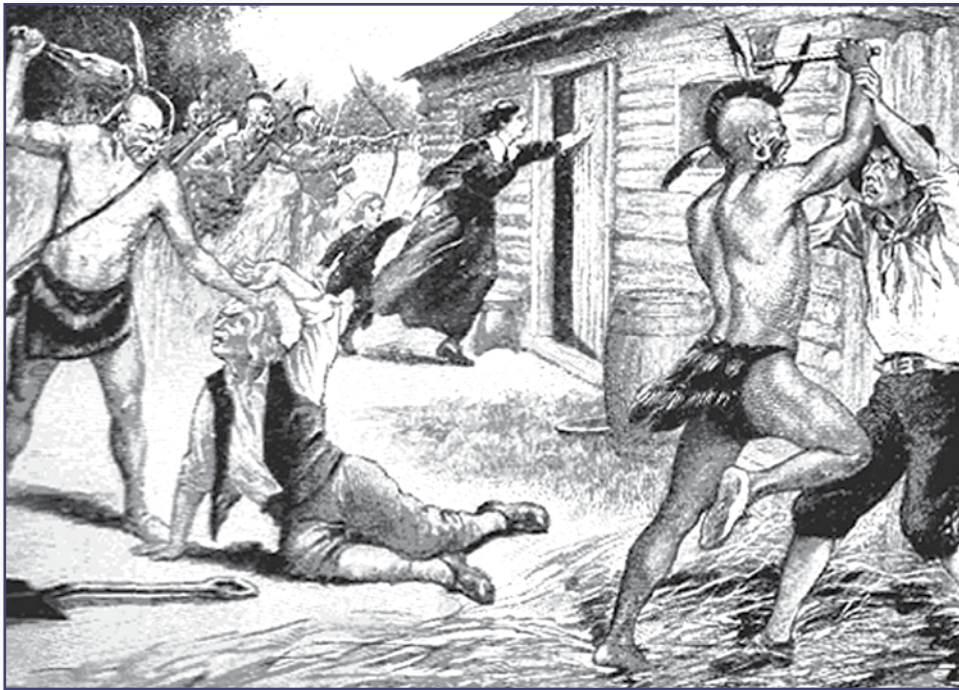
### **The Allis Family**

This brings us to the Allis family who we will be following through the 18th Century. They took a very different route to Bolton.

**William Allis** came from England to America in 1630 as a young man and established himself as a surveyor near Braintree, MA. In 1658 he emigrated to Wethersfield and three years later moved to Hadley, MA over a dispute with the church. His oldest son **John**, from whom Bolton's Allis family descends, was born in Braintree in 1642.

Hadley and Deerfield were the frontier in 1675. William and his sons, including John, were officers during King Phillip's War when Hadley was attacked in 1675 and 1676. The war was the greatest calamity to occur in 17th Century New England and is considered by many to be the deadliest war in the history of American colonization.

William was a Captain at the Battle of Great Falls where his son William, Jr. was killed. In 1677 Indians from Canada again raided when the men were away and burned the village, killed 12 and captured 17 taking them to Canada. William's wife Mary was killed and John's daughter Abigail taken captive. The prisoners were turned over to the French and later returned.



*The Allis family lived on the frontier during the 1675 King Phillip's War.*

The family suffered additional tragedy in 1704 when the French and Indians attacked Deerfield and John's sister-in-law was killed and two nieces captured.

**John's youngest son Nathaniel** was born in Hatfield in 1685. As his father and grandfather were leading citizens he grew up with stories of the recent Indian raids and the possibility of future threats.

At the time many Pioneer Valley families were moving back to Connecticut. Land in the Connecticut River Valley was no longer available so the new settlers looked to newly incorporated towns further from the river.

In 1709 a congregation from Northampton settled in the new town of Coventry. Nathaniel Allis also bought property in Coventry about that time. He may not have been part of the Northampton group, but likely knew them.

At some point before 1720 he moved to neighboring Bolton where he was one of the first settlers. He found there his safe haven where he could bring his young wife and family and have his own farm.

His son David was born in Bolton in 1720 – perhaps the first child born in the newly incorporated town.

## 5. 1725 - The South Bolton Parish & Meeting House

During the 18th Century church and state were one and church attendance was required by law. The first towns of Wethersfield, Hartford and Windsor were settled by congregations moving from Massachusetts. When the three towns established the General Assembly spreading and maintaining church ethics was a core of their governance.



*Arriving at the meeting house on a Sunday morning.*

As people moved east of the Connecticut River complaints arose about having to travel across the river to attend church. The General Assembly would then authorize another parish. Later, as population grew, a parish would be incorporated as a town as was the case of East Windsor and Glastonbury. New towns carved out of the wilderness, such as Tolland and Coventry, included the provision that a meeting house be constructed and a pastor hired as soon as possible. The ideal size of a new town was six miles by six miles with the church at the center so residents would not have to walk more than three miles to church.

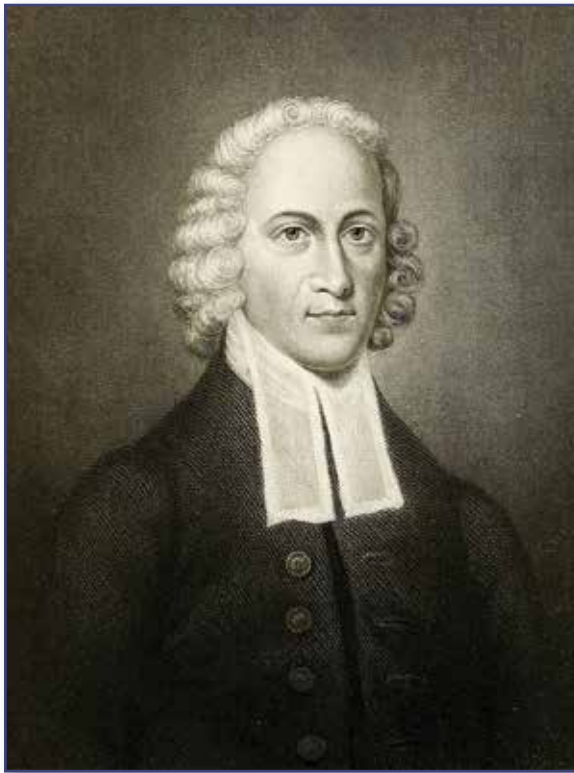
And so it was when Bolton was incorporated and the residents made known that they desired to establish religious worship. Religious services were held as early as 1722 or 1723 in private homes. In 1725 the General Assembly granted them liberty to build a church and call and settle an orthodox minister. The Assembly also enacted a tax on land to pay for the church and appointed a committee to collect it.

The first meeting house was located near the center of the green. The building was to be 40 feet long, 35 feet wide, and 20 feet between joists. When the building of the church was first undertaken progress was slow and money very scarce. At the end of the year work entirely stopped with no progress made for another year or two.

Tradition says that two of the leading citizens 'King' Hammond and 'Bull' Tucker became annoyed over the delay and Tucker with five of his sons and Hammond with seven of his went to work on the building and completed it themselves. Later when people of the church wished them to help pay for the work Tucker told the pastor and committee that "he would take out his share in prayin'."

At first the church had only 17 members, all bringing letters from other churches. Obtaining this referral was standard practice when transferring from one parish to another through the 18th and much of the 19th centuries.

At a town meeting in 1730 it was voted that the meeting house be seated and how the seats should be assigned. The best pews were purchased as a way of raising money for the church, and pew ownership passed to sons in wills.



*Jonathan Edwards. (Library of Congress)*

Jonathan Edwards, a recent graduate of Yale College, was 20 years of age when he became the first minister called in 1723. He was to receive his salary half in money and the rest in Indian corn and wheat. Every male inhabitant over 16 was to work for the minister two days every year for three years fencing and clearing the land, cutting and carting his wood.

Edwards didn't stay permanently as he was offered a tutorship at Yale and the church released him. But while walking in the fields of Bolton he had a remarkable religious experience and would later become a prominent religious leader. At the time it was said he possessed the keenest intellect and most logical mind of any man that ever graduated from Yale College.



Bolton next called Rev. Thomas White, also a Yale graduate, who began his pastorate in 1725. He served the church for 38 years until his death and lived on what was called the Minister's Farm, now the Heritage Farm. He was described as "above average height with a portly appearance and a loud and sweet sounding voice; a companionable man and able to make all in his company happy."

In 1762, a year before Rev. White's death the Second or North Bolton Church Society was organized taking from the mother church 35 members. Until that time North Bolton residents walked or rode horses five to seven miles to services in South Bolton.

Rev. George Colton was the second minister to become pastor in 1763 and served for 49 years. Because of his height - 6 feet, 7 inches - he was called the High Priest of Bolton. Many stories are told of his eccentricities.

Soon after Rev. Colton arrived in Bolton, the people began planning for a larger and finer building, the first having served for 40 years. Consequently, a large square building with double doors on three sides was erected on the site of the old church. Although most New England churches at the time were painted white this one was painted yellow and had no steeple. It also had no chimney and when later stove heat was added pipes were put through the side of the building. This church was used until 1848 when the present church was erected. Rev. Colton died in 1812.



## 6. The Allis Family & Life In The 18th Century

The Allis family, Nathaniel and his son David, is an example of the first generations who settled Bolton. From an earlier chapter recall that the Allis's descend from a family of Pioneer Valley leaders. They were smart, courageous and religious and these traits passed down the generations.

Nathaniel is representative of many of the first generation of settlers in Bolton. He spent his life building his farm, raising a large family, supporting the church and participating in town responsibilities.

David represents a more restless second generation. He steps off the farm to build small mills, takes a more active roll in town affairs and helps establish the foundations of the future Vernon. Many of his peers will leave Bolton for opportunities further west.

Nathaniel was born to John Allis in Hatfield, MA in 1685, John's 11th child. He moved to Connecticut and at the age of 18 married Mercy Dudley of Guilford. A number of young men from the Deerfield and Hadley area moved to Coventry and Bolton at this time for a safer place to farm and raise their families than the frontier. Nathaniel and Mercy settled in Bolton about 1705.

Nathaniel was one of Bolton's earliest settlers, 15 years before Bolton was incorporated, and as such was one of the original 50 proprietors. He and Mercy had 12 children in Bolton. Their first child Mindful, born in 1708, died in infancy, the first recorded death in Bolton.

David, a middle child, was born in 1720 the year Bolton incorporated.

The homelot that Nathaniel drew in 1723 was located below Bolton Center on the east side of town. Upon receiving this property he immediately exchanged it with another Proprietor for a 100 acre lot on today's Bolton/Vernon town line on the Cedar Swamp. Perhaps this was where he had been homesteading for the previous 15 years, and by agreement exchanged lots.

From 1720 to 1800 there will be a total of 12 Divisions of Common Land, most smaller than the previous Division. Nathaniel and his heir David will receive land from Divisions 3, 5, 6 and 7 - a total of 50 acres, all in North Bolton.

Life was hard for the first settlers, clearing land, establishing crops and raising their families. In many ways the church was the center of their lives. There were no newspapers or books except for the Bible so the sermon provided news and intellectual exercise as well as a guide to salvation. Aside from the taverns there were no other meeting places. The walk to and from church and the interval between sermons was a major part of social life.

The Allis house was on Bolton Road so that those traveling from South Bolton to the iron works near Shenipsit Lake passed by providing an opportunity to hear the news of the day. In Colonial times residents were required to maintain the roads in front of their houses.



*Plowing the fields changed little for 150 years.*

We sometimes think of early houses as crude dwellings, but Nathaniel's house with eleven children was likely quite large with two stories and an added wing near a large barn. He also had a fine apple orchard and a variety of livestock including cows, oxen, horses and pigs. Many of these items were documented in the inventory taken at the time of his death.

In the 1730's the population of Bolton was small and distributed across the town. There were limited opportunities for children to meet and play with others, except for Sundays when the family attended church at the town's first meeting house on the South Bolton green. Church was an all day affair with a break midday for lunch. For David, growing up a middle child in a large family, there were always brothers to fish and hunt with when they weren't working. Neighboring farms likely also had large families.

Education was important to our early settlers. By 1692 towns of 50 households were required to provide a schoolmaster. Bolton secured a teacher by 1731. By 1738 there were classes at the lower and upper end of town, although at first they likely met in private homes. Only boys went to school until 1780. The schools were under the control of the church's Ecclesiastical Society until 1796 when a separate School Society was formed.

A woman's role was often more challenging than her husband's. Besides tending the children she was responsible for all the kitchen and household chores as well as the kitchen

garden and chickens. All this besides giving birth to another child every two years. David and his siblings probably learned to read and write from their mother supplemented by seasonal teachers when he was a teen.

David's mother died in 1731 when he was just 11. Nathaniel quickly remarried a second wife, Elizabeth, as both parents were essential for survival on the farm.

Children were given chores at an early age and as they grew took on more of the farm responsibilities. It was an interesting place to grow up as the Cedar Swamp with its cranberry bogs was on the east side of the farm, and Box Brook at the bottom of the hill on the west side, likely with good fishing. This brook was also used by generations of farmers for pasturing their cows.

Beyond the brook was the steep face of Box Mountain with its rattlesnakes and timber. It would have held a strong attraction for growing boys to climb and hunt, and there was a cash bounty for any snakes caught.

Tasks were seasonal. During the warm months the priority was the fields. After the harvest there was time for hunting and gathering wood on Box Mountain for the winter. Winters were colder during this period and families more isolated.

Still there was Sunday church throughout the year. All but necessary farm chores were halted and the family walked or rode to the meeting house on roads that were but rough dirt paths. Good wagons came along later. From the Allis farm they passed down Quarry Road hill to Bolton Notch and then up the long hill to the church. David's father likely made additional trips to the meeting house for town meetings and business.

David probably enjoyed getting off the farm whenever he could, traveling with his father to local mills as well as occasional trips to Hartford. He may also have had an opportunity to go up river to visit family in the Pioneer Valley.

In 1740, when he was 21, David married Sarah Pendal, also from Bolton. He likely met her at the meeting house. He and Sarah had eight children, all girls, over the next 17 years, one roughly every other year. Their first child died an infant, but the other seven grew to adulthood. Six married and eventually moved out of town.

David, as were other young men in Bolton, was well prepared to go off on his own and establish his own farm. Some sons might remain on the family farm taking care of parents as they aged, but David seems to have had other plans as he began buying land in North Bolton at a young age for his own farm and business.





*One of 18th Century 'Great Snows.' (New England Historical Society)*

We don't appreciate today the hardships the early settlers endured. For example the winter that David and Sarah married, 1740-1741, was one of the coldest on record. Winter arrived early in October with substantial snowfall in mid-November. Then came two weeks of rain in early December severely damaging bridges, fences, hay and Indian corn chambers. Extreme cold followed and most travel was suspended. By January highway travel in New England came to a halt and rivers and waterways were frozen over with solid ice. Long Island Sound could be crossed on a sleigh and the Connecticut River remained frozen into April. Shortages arose continuing through the summer as livestock died and corn was ruined.

But the rural towns rebounded. David apparently planned early to become a miller as the mill lots on the Tankerhoosen River were laid out in 1743. The next year he purchased from his older brother Jonathan 10 acres north of the Tankerhoosen Brook and across Reservoir Road from the mill lots to build his dwelling house.

David's father Nathaniel died in 1751 at the age of 66, a prominent member of the community and church and financially comfortable, likely from selling land to new settlers. By this point most of his children had married and moved away.

He is buried in the Quarryville Cemetery. Although the Old Burial Ground of North Bolton was created the same year, Nathaniel was likely buried with his first wife Mercy.

Nathaniel left a will with an inventory of his property. At the time inventories were very detailed listing items of furniture, clothing and tools. Other than the 100-acre Homestead he retained only two 15 acre parcels on the Tankerhoosen Brook at the time of his death. With his family grown, having married or living on their own farms, he likely sold portions of his land. In later years he would have needed help from laborers or tenant farmers to care for the farm. As his heir David helped out making ensuring his aging parents were secure.

As all of Nathaniel's other sons had moved from Bolton David, at age 31, was his sole executor. He was charged with taking care of his stepmother Elizabeth and paying the legacies left to Nathaniel's nine living children. David sold Nathaniel's homelot and house in 1757 to provide cash for the legacies.

Besides his father's land David also inherited the right to further land divisions, receiving the smaller 9th and 10th Divisions in 1754 and 1762; only a total of 14 acres but they were located north of Baker Road and west of the mills, thus adding to his property. David bought and sold many parcels between 1744 and 1763.

David's own farm and the mills were just a few miles north of his father. His stepmother Elizabeth lived with him for 23 years until her death in 1774.



*Nathaniel Allis gravestone in Quarryville Cemetery.*

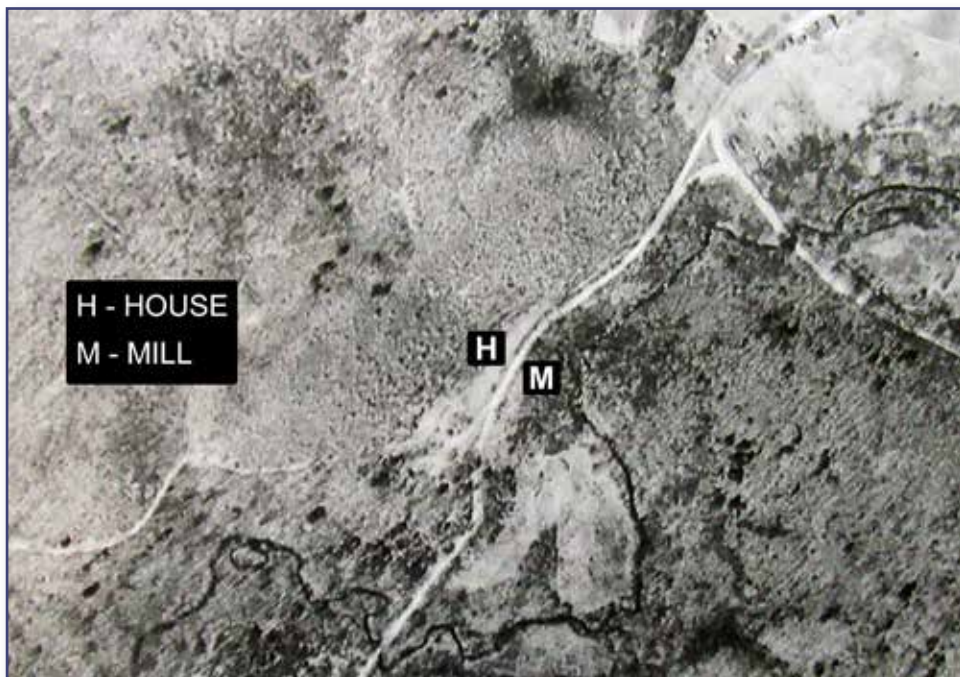
## 7. 1745 - The Allis Mills

In 1743 Bolton laid out a 20-acre lot for mills at the corner of today's Reservoir and Fish and Game Roads on the Tankerhoosen River, which David bought that year. He was just 23. A year later he bought property next to the mill site on the west side of Reservoir Road near today's Baker Road where he built his house, farm and raised his family.

David built first a saw mill and then a grist mill just south of today's Fish and Game Road. Although there were other sawmills, including John's saw mill at Valley Falls, this seems to have been the first grist mill on the Tankaroosen Brook, as it was known then. There was no Walker Reservoir or Walker's Mill upstream. The Tankaroosen Brook tumbled down from Tolland into the relatively flat area of today's Belding Wildlife Management Area.

For context there were other early mills in North Bolton. By 1739 there were saw, grist and iron mills below Shenipsit Lake on the Hockanum River. The Grant mill was on the west end of town and the Payne mills on the east end. The Payne mill performed grinding for a good portion of Ellington, Tolland and North Bolton. The Iron Works were established as early as 1741, but probably discontinued after the Revolution.

The place Allis chose for his mills is a challenging location in a difficult to access gorge off Reservoir Road. It has been over 200 years since the mills were in use and nothing else



*Location of the Allis Mills and Homestead. (1934 Fairchild Aerial Map)*



was built at that location so the land has returned to forest. Still, you can see stone walls where dams and the mills were located.

In those times there were two places to which roads were built - the meeting house and the mill. The meeting house was in South Bolton so the priority in North Bolton was the grist mill. Shortly after David built his mill in the mid 1740's Bolton constructed Baker Road connecting David's mills to the center of town making the mill accessible from the north, south and west. This road will also influence the location of the meeting house 20 years in the future.

No record, sketch or description of these mills has been found, but they were likely typical of their times. Reading the land today there seems to have been a side lane off Reservoir Road leading down to the second floor of the grist mill. This side of the brook is very steep so the milling wheel would have been above brook level.

In an agricultural community there were few opportunities to earn hard cash so that a miller, who might trade for his services, could sell excess flour in Hartford. Thus David probably became one of the wealthiest men in North Bolton. He was very active and influential in town and church affairs accumulating a great deal of land and owning perhaps the largest house in the area as it was used for meetings and church services until the meeting house was built in 1762.



*Typical Colonial grist mill.*

David lived with his seven daughters, wife and stepmother, which must have been a challenge in a man's world. He had no sons to help with milling or to later inherit his mills. He did have employees working for him, including relatives, and built a tenant house next to the mills for them to live in.

Grist mills were a place where farmers gathered to exchange news and gossip while their grain was being converted to flour. During the Revolutionary War the Allis grist mill was a designated site for posting information.

There is an interesting addition to his probate papers about a grandson who likely helped with the farm and mill, "We the subscribers are able to testify that we heard Mr. David

Allis, late of Bolton deceased, who died intestate, say in the time of his last sickness, that it was his intention and will, that his grandson, David Allis Hodge, who has lived with him for some years past, and is now in the sixteenth year of his age should, after his decease, have all his wearing apparel."



*1740 Elisha Treat house in Wethersfield.*

### **The David Allis House**

David's house was probably similar in style to merchant houses in the river towns of Wethersfield, Windsor and Glastonbury. Many of these houses still exist as a reference and a few are located in Bolton and Vernon today, such as Bolton's Oliver White Tavern. In the mid 18th Century they followed English designs with adaptations for life in Colonial America.

From the street there were five rows of windows evenly spaced on the second floor and four on the first floor around a central door, often a double door. In the center of the roof was a single chimney for the large fireplace used for cooking and heat. There were generally four rooms on each floor. Toilets were outhouses.

Later in the century designs changed to place a chimney at each end of the house providing a central hall and staircase. As Allis's house was built mid century it likely had a central chimney. As families and fortunes grew additions were made to the house, likely the case of the Allis house.

There are no pictures or descriptions of David Allis's house. Probate records mention Southeast and Southwest bedrooms supporting the idea of four quarters on the second floor. There is no record of the Allis house after 1805 – about the time his second wife Keziah no longer occupied it. It may well have been moved, as many structures were at the time, and is still in town waiting to be discovered.

## 8. 1751 - The Old Burial Ground Of North Bolton

The year that Nathaniel Allis, David's father, was buried in Bolton's Quarryville cemetery was also the year North Bolton's first burial ground was established.

Known today as the Old Burial Ground Of North Bolton it has also been called East Cemetery or just the Vernon Cemetery.

Captain Moses Thrall from Windsor was the first to settle and farm this tract of land about 1703, well before Bolton was incorporated. According to Thrall family lore his land was purchased directly from Native Americans.

Tradition says the first body buried here was that of a Thrall child who died in a fall from a load of goods near that very spot. Where the child was buried became the northeast corner of the cemetery. Buried here are Moses Thrall and most of Vernon's earliest settlers as the Elmwood Cemetery wasn't opened until 1838. There are 12 patriots who answered the Lexington alarm as well as familiar names such as Grant, Kellogg, King, Ladd, Nye, Olcott, Pearl, Skinner, Talcott, Thrall, and West. Many other families that were prominent at the time are no longer familiar names. The cemetery was active just a hundred years closing in 1851. At one time it had over 800 stones, but only 450 survive time and vandalism.



*Old Burial Ground*

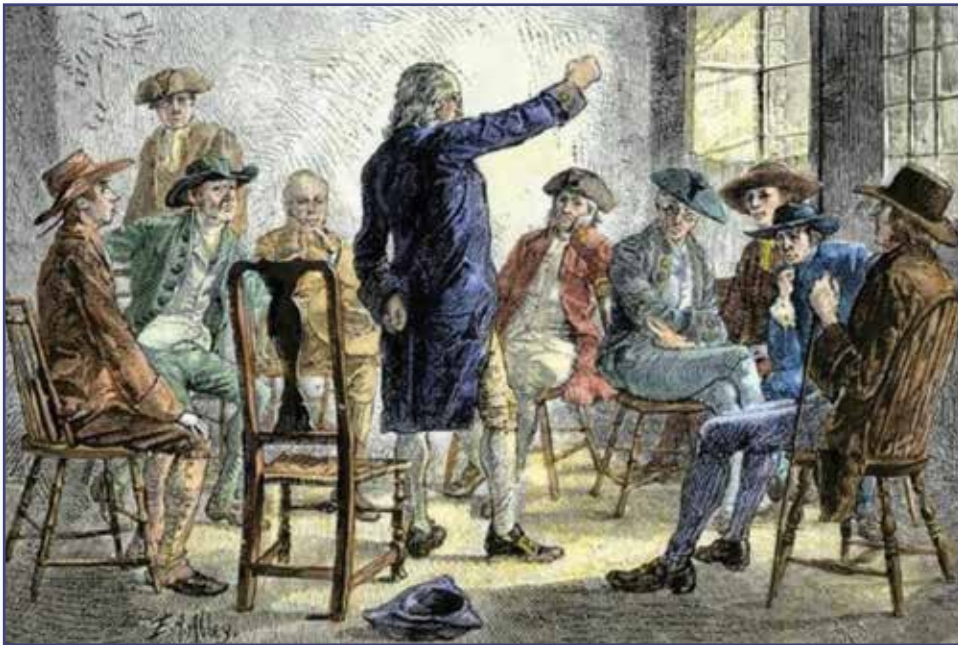
The following passage is from "A Century Of Vernon, CT 1808-1908:"

Once the center of the parish, time has played strange pranks. It is today 'far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,' removed from the haunts of men. Few go there, except the curious, and those drawn by a desire to muse and be alone. As we wander through this old graveyard and pause to read the uncouth rhyme, under the rudely carved death's head on the frail memorial of one of the early pioneers, we are bidden:

'Behold and see as you pass by,  
As you are now so once was I,  
As I am now so must you be,  
Prepare for death and follow me.'

The location of the cemetery also played a role in locating our first meeting house.

## 9. How Early Bolton Was Governed



*Typical New England small town meeting.*

Governing a town in the 1700's was much different than it is today. There were no paid Public Works Dept, Tax Collectors, Town Planners, Animal Control Officers nor Engineers. Property owners did these tasks themselves. As raised by their parents and reminded at church it was everyone's duty and responsibility to do their share. These were tasks undertaken by men only and small towns tended to be run by a relatively small group of the willing and the competent.

At the annual Town Meeting, usually in December, men were chosen to fill the necessary positions for the coming year. Typical of the positions was this list from a 1782 Town Meeting at which David Allis was elected Moderator: Town Clerk, Selectmen, Treasurer, Constables including tax collection, Grand Jurymen, Leather Sealers, Sealer of Weights, Listers, Highway Surveyors, Key Keepers of the Pounds, Fence Viewers and Tything men who preserved order in church during service and enforced the observance of the Sabbath. The men tended to rotate these positions.

Early settlers and larger landowners were often opinionated, contentious and could be litigious so it was important to have a meeting moderator who was trusted by all and could find common ground. As North and South Bolton began to separate the meetings must have been particularly difficult. With a larger population in South Bolton they voted







## 10. 1762 - The North Bolton Parish & Meeting House

As good farm land in South Bolton became scarce sons, son-in-laws, and new settlers turned to North Bolton. By mid century this newer section of town, separated by Box Mountain from the meeting house, mills and taverns in South Bolton, began to forge its own identity.

Each Sunday these farmers and their families were required to travel over five miles from Vernon Center to the meeting house in South Bolton where they would spend all day and then return home. The roads were little more than dirt paths and, particularly during winter months, the journey was difficult due to mud, snow and cold.

When there were enough families in North Bolton local leaders, including David Allis, formed a committee and in 1749, 30 years after the town's founding, eighteen families from North Bolton petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly for the privilege of a Winter parish. This was the first step towards separation from Bolton and when their petition was granted services were held in private homes during the cold months.

By 1760 the population of Bolton had grown to almost 850 people. Sixty families, representing one third of Bolton's population, lived in North Bolton. The Ecclesiastical Society of North Bolton was formed with a territory similar to present day Vernon.

The General Assembly required a certain number of families in order to form a new parish. To reach this threshold a number of families along the Hockanum River, then part of East Windsor, agreed to join the North Bolton society as they traveled to Main Street on the Connecticut River for services. They preferred attending church nearby and over time began to identify with Bolton. The new parish was known as the Second Church of Christ in Bolton until Vernon was incorporated in 1808.

Once North Bolton received permission from the General Assembly for its own parish the Ecclesiastical Society immediately began planning for their meeting house. Remember that at this time East Windsor extended to almost Vernon Center. For ease of access the meeting house should be located in the center of the community, near a crossroad and preferably on a hill. The site that was chosen, later called Old Meetinghouse Hill, was not at the corner of Center Road and Hartford Turnpike, but a half mile further east near the corner of Bamforth and Hartford Turnpike. At the time this was geographically the parish center.

Recall that the Old Burial Ground of North Bolton was established on Bamforth Road in 1751, ten years before the church was planned. Records and maps of the very early settlement are poor, but the cemetery would have been near the center of the community, as the Elmwood Cemetery would later be close to the second church.

Most of the planning meetings were held at David Allis' house. Other still familiar names

on the planning committee were John Dart, Aaron Strong, Moses Thrall, Seth King and Titus Olcott. Sunday services were also held at Allis' house near his mill until the meeting house could be built. The Allis house must have been one of the largest in the community and was accessible from three directions.

The meeting house was raised on May 6, 1762 and the first worship held there on June 20. Building the church was probably much like an old fashioned barn raising with the community coming together for a weekend and whole families participating. The meeting house fronted the Hartford Turnpike on the South with adjacent horse sheds. Our first school house was built next to the meeting house a short time later and served as a warming place for parishioners during cold weather. The church initially had 35 members, including the Allis family, transferring from Bolton.

Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg, a recent Yale graduate, was called that year as our first minister. David Allis sold him four parcels of land for his house and farm on the road between his mills and the meeting house. Rev. Kellogg remained as our minister for 55 years.



*North Bolton Meeting House based on Allyn S. Kellogg description.*

When first used the meeting house was little more than a shelter for the congregation. Slow progress was made in fitting the building owing to the slender means of the people. The building remained without pews, using benches until 1770 and was not plastered until 1774. There was never heat in the meeting house during its 63 years of service. Parishioners brought foot-warmers and retired to the school house for lunch.

This was at a time when our neighboring towns were building much larger traditional church buildings.

Our meeting house was far more than a place of worship. Other than the school house this was the only public building in town. The meeting house was the center of community life in rural New England where government meetings and other important gatherings took place.

Once the North Bolton meeting house was opened Bolton began alternating annual Town Meetings between parishes.

There was likely friction between members of the two parishes, but it was not long after the new parish was established that Bolton's attention turned to regional and then national issues as war with England approached.

### Annexing East Windsor

When Bolton's Borders were drawn North Bolton was only three miles wide with its Western border located just West of Vernon Center, paralleling West Road.

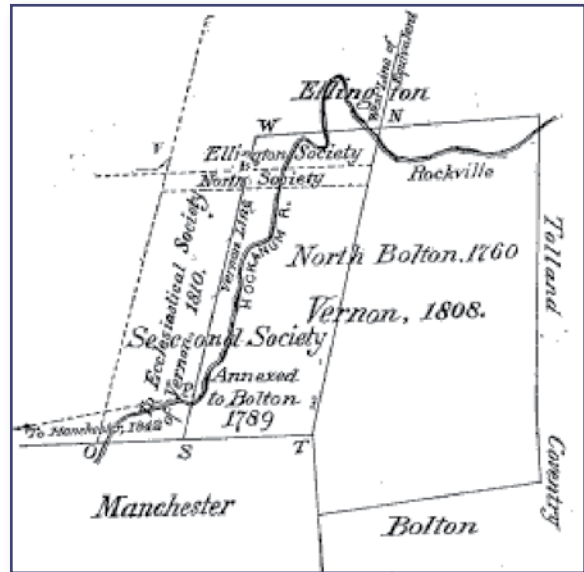
In 1762 when the Colonial Legislature created the North Bolton Parish it included part of East Windsor to have a large enough population to justify the new parish. In 1788 this part of East Windsor, about a mile and a half wide, was given to Bolton. When Vernon separated in 1808 this piece, which included Talcottville, went with it.

In May, 1788, a petition was made to the General Assembly by the residents of the East section of East Windsor, who had previously been annexed to the North Ecclesiastical Society of Bolton, that they might also be joined to the town of Bolton, since it would be more convenient for them to attend town and public meetings in Bolton than in East Windsor.

The petition was granted at the May session of the Assembly in 1789. Thus the north boundary line of the town was widened about a mile and a half to include what is now Talcottville and the section lying north of that village.

From the September 9, 1788 Bolton Town Meeting: Samuel Carver was chosen agent to attend the General Assembly at New Haven in October next in behalf of said town to oppose that part of East Windsor that belongs to North Bolton Society being incorporated with the Town of Bolton.

Included in the new territory was the fertile valley of the Hockanum River, the future villages of Talcottville and Dobsonville. It also included the lower Tankerhoosen River which would soon power the early cotton mills of Vernon - the Phoenix, Dobson and Talcott Mills. On the Hockanum would be the Granite Paper Mill and several grist mills.

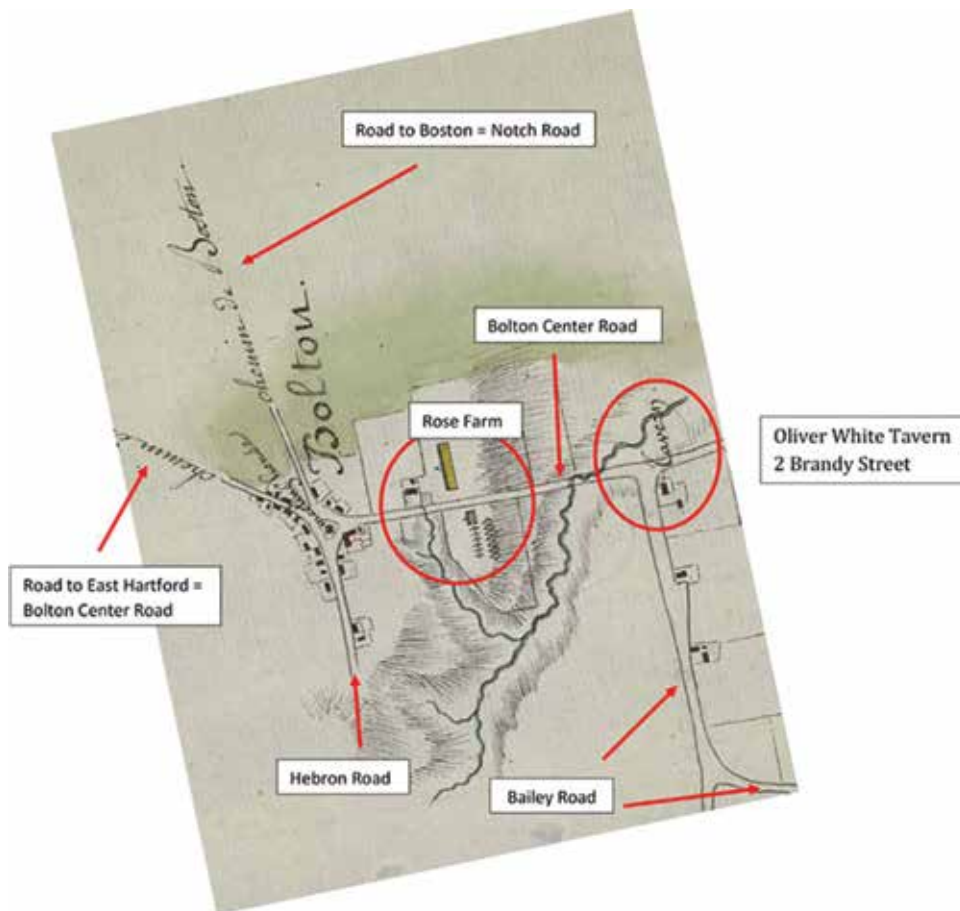


Boundary map. (*The History of Ancient Windsor, Vol. 1* by Henry Stiles, p. 588)

## 11. 1765-1781 - Bolton In The Revolutionary War

In Vernon we learn little about our role in the Revolutionary War because most of the activity took place in South Bolton. Yet members of North Bolton were very involved.

We think of Bolton Notch as the main passage from the east into the Connecticut River Valley, but during the Revolutionary War era it was still little more than a Native American trail. The main roads through Bolton were further south converging on the Town Green. From Newport and the east travelers crossed Hope Brook (as it was then known) and climbed the steep hill to Bolton Center. Bailey Road was the primary route during the Revolution and was a particular challenge for coaches and wagons as it could be wet and muddy. Even Rochambeau's coach broke an axle on one of his travels through Bolton.



*Bolton Center in 1776. (Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library)*



*The open fields of Rose Farm.*

In Bolton Center there was the meeting house, the green, White's tavern and the Minister's Farm (later known as Rose Farm) with large fields perfect for troop camping. From there roads could be taken south to Hebron, west to Hartford and Wethersfield, north to Somers and Massachusetts, or northeast to Boston.

This route was popular because it was inland avoiding the shore. Before the war it was a route for carrying goods to avoid the King's taxes, or carrying goods that were banned in the Colonies. During the war it avoided British ships on Long Island Sound and hid troop movements.

Bolton was a small, quiet town of hard working and religious farmers. They had a militia as required of all towns and met regularly to drill on the Bolton Center green. This included the men living in North Bolton. Drills were usually followed by soldiers relieving their thirst and hunger at a local tavern. There would be some heated discussion about how far we should go and what might happen if we did rebel, with strong opinions expressed on all sides. Not everyone felt the best course of action was to fight.

There was always tension between the Colonies and Great Britain, but it had little effect beyond taxes on Bolton's farmers. Being on a key road between Hartford, Massachusetts and the Rhode Island colonies, news was heard and discussed wherever men gathered – at church, the mills and the taverns. Due to its location, Bolton was about to become one of Connecticut's most important towns.

Rumors and stories increased about 1765 when the Stamp Act was passed and hot heads like Patrick Henry began speaking against the crown. It became evident that things were coming to a head with the Boston Massacre in 1770 and the Boston Tea Party in 1773. Traffic through Bolton increased along with passions as representatives met in Philadelphia



in 1774 for the First Continental Congress. In July 1774 Bolton pledged support for Boston while also acknowledging the sovereignty of the King. At the same time they established a Committee of Correspondence.

Everything changed with the Battle of Lexington and Concord in April 1775. Bolton's Captain Jonathan Birge and 63 Bolton Minutemen were joined by 45 men from Hartford riding out to participate in the Lexington Alarm. Bolton sent one of the largest area contingents.

Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence in July 1776 and Bolton became a way stop for the Continental Army as they camped here moving back and forth during the war.

Most of the important politicians and generals of the time passed through or stayed in town at one time or another: Lafayette five times, Washington twice, Franklin, Hamilton, and Knox once. As one of the town's leading citizens David Allis likely met and conferred with most of these important visitors.



*Oliver White Tavern today.*

It was a heady time for little Bolton. Many visitors stopped at the Oliver White Tavern overnight or for a meal. The White Tavern, below the green and near Minister's Field, was a central meeting place.

Taverns played an expanded role in the early Colony. The General Assembly mandated that towns each have a tavern where travelers could rest, eat and safely spend the night. Accommodations were often four strangers to a bed, but the food, ale and conversation were good. During the 1700s, when there were no office buildings, banks, or post offices, taverns served all those functions. It was in taverns that Bolton lumber and quarry stone were bought and sold, new companies were formed, militia was inducted, auctions were held, stagecoaches stopped and mail distributed.

There were numerous town and committee meetings to plan for the visitors as well as to support Bolton's own troops and their families. Towns were also required to raise supplies for the troops. For example, when Washington visited in 1781 Bolton was asked to raise 20 tons of hay to feed the recently purchased horses of the French army.

Some of the challenges for those left home included providing for non Commissioned officers and soldiers' families while they were in service; purchasing clothing for the soldiers; providing for the families of soldiers; and purchasing clothing for non commissioned officers and soldiers.

Other committees and initiatives mentioned in the records were the Committee of Correspondence, committees to gather gun powder, and purchase clothing for the troops, a committee of inspection of the town and another near war's end to see what was due to those soldiers who enlisted in the army upon the encouragement of the town.

As one of the town's leaders, as well as a grist mill owner, David would have been in the middle of this activity.

To add to the difficulty of the winter of 1779-1780, the winter of Valley Forge was the worst ever recorded in New England. By mid January the standing snow was four feet deep with massive drifts. Frozen ports and snow clogged the roads, paralyzing daily activity. Then temperatures dropped to daily readings below zero. Rivers were frozen, commerce stopped and news could not get in or out of the area. Not until May did things begin to return to normal in Bolton and throughout New England.



*French troop encampment. (Painting by David Wagner – davidrwagner.com)*

Bolton is particularly known for the encampment that took place in 1781 when General Rochambeau and the French army camped at Minister's Farm on their way to Yorktown. On June 21, 1781, and for a period of four days, the entire French army passed through Bolton. The four French regiments had over 1,000 men each plus camp followers. At the time the entire town of Bolton had only a little over 1,000 people.

The French hired many local colonists to provide for their needs on their journey, such as cooks and bakers, paying them in welcome silver. Laborers came in advance of the soldiers, setting up tents and a camp. The next day the soldiers moved forward, leaving the camp and the second regiment moved in. This continued for four days.

The British surrendered in Yorktown on October 19, 1781 and life slowly returned to normal in Bolton.

After the war the world began to pass Bolton by. The turnpike would go through Bolton Notch and some of the roads through Bolton Center closed. The long term blessing was that the area has been preserved much as it was in Colonial Times. Rose Farm and the White Tavern building are still there, as is the Green. Many of the old homes from Revolutionary times look much the same. In 2009 the National Government created the 680-mile Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route tracing the path from Newport to Yorktown, and Bolton has its place on the trail.

### **David Allis' Role in the War**

During the Revolutionary War period David Allis was very active in Bolton's town affairs. We have primarily town records to inform us, but as was typical of leading citizens and land owners of the time David played many roles.

He was 55 years old and owner of both a saw and grist mill in 1775. At various times over the next decade he was a Grand Juryman, Surveyor, Collector of Highway Taxes, Selectman, and Fence Viewer. He was the Town Meeting Moderator every year during the war years from 1777 to 1783.

His grist mill in North Bolton was a location for public notices in the north section of town as his mill would have been a location where farmers gathered to exchange news and opinions.

He contributed with flour from his mill and by helping organize the town to support visiting troops, collect supplies and support returning troops.

When in 1780 David's wife Sarah died she was buried with his stepmother in the Old Burial Ground Of North Bolton. Three years later in 1783 as the war ended, he married Keziah Dewey from Lebanon. He was 63 and she 53.

After the war David returned to his mill and farm, but he continued serving and guiding Bolton in various capacities, including serving as the town's representative to the General Assembly in Hartford in 1783.

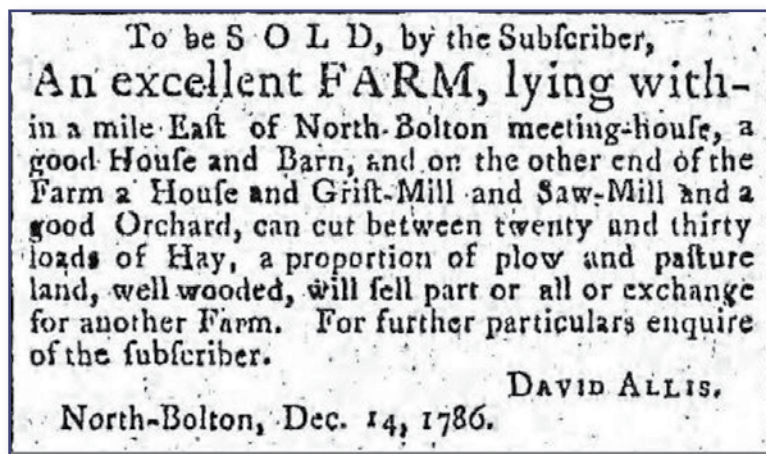
His life is an example of the contributions to the war effort made by those who stayed home. Their work never let up from 1775 to 1782. David's contributions have been recognized by the Sons of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the American Revolution.



## 12. 1789 - David's Death & The Aftermath

Sarah and David were blessed with eight children between 1742 and 1757. All but the first grew into adulthood in a time with high infant mortality. However, they were all girls in a time when sons were necessary to operate the farm, and in David's case, work in the mills and to eventually inherit them. All but one of the seven daughters married and moved out of town.

In his last years David began to wind down his affairs. In 1786 he placed an ad in *The Hartford Courant* offering to sell the farm and mills. With apparently no interest he leased the mills and tenant house in 1788 to Samuel Bishop for three years.



*1786 Hartford Courant ad.*

David died on April 27, 1789 at age 69; apparently quite suddenly as he didn't leave a will, quite unusual for a man of his wealth and importance. Without sons his holdings were broken up.

In cases like this the Probate Court assigns three administrators to evaluate the estate and determine a fair value and division. The first step is a detailed inventory and evaluation of property, including every tool and piece of clothing. The value of David's estate was about 720£. to be divided between his wife Keziah, his six married daughters and unmarried daughter Content.

David was laid to rest next to his wife and stepmother in the southeast corner of the Old Burial Ground Of North Bolton. He was the only male Allis buried in Vernon as his father was buried in Bolton and his brothers moved away.

David's Dwelling House and homelot with barn and orchard, valued at 614 pounds, went to his wife Keziah. She will keep a third, known as the widow's share, and gives a third to unmarried stepdaughter Content, who lives with her, and a third to stepdaughter Sarah.

At the time women did not often own property unless they were widowed. As a widow Keziah paid taxes, owned her part of the property and was essentially head of household. She and Content remained in the house until the early 1800's.

Thomas Kellogg, Rev. Ebenezer's youngest son, bought Content and Sarah's shares for \$100 each in 1800. Keziah remained in the house until about 1805 when she went to live with her Dewey relatives in Vernon. When she died, about 1815, she was in debt, but left a will. Although uncertain she is likely buried near David, but without a grave marker. The disposition of their house is still being researched.

The two mills, tenant house, and several lots totaling 118 acres were divided between the daughters. Their husbands weren't interested in running the mills and new owners obtained mortgages, but were often disappointed in the results. By the 1790's larger and better located mills were appearing further down the river.

In 1804 the young and ambitious Francis McLean bought the property and mill privileges. In his memoirs he says, "About 1805 or 1806 I built a grist mill, saw mill and dam over by Erastus Hunt's. After a few years, as it did not do well there, I moved the grist mill to Phoenix Village, and there built a dam and saw mill."

Francis must have rebuilt the mills and dams. Although not a success at this location, the experience was his initiation into the new industry. He would learn from it and build or own the mills further down the Tankerhoosen and be the driving force behind building Rockville's Rock Mill.

In 1808, the year Vernon separated from Bolton, McLean sold the property to Ezekiel Baker who was accumulating much of what is today's Tankerhoosen Wildlife Management Area. When Baker died in 1842 he left



*Francis McLean. (Maxwell Memorial Library)*

everything to his adopted son Frederick Walker, who would build Walker Reservoir and his own mills on Fish and Game Road.

For the past 200 years there has been no activity on the old Allis mill site as the land returned to its natural state. Only a few walls and mill race remnants remain to leave witness to what was once an important mill where farmers brought their grain, met neighbors and shared the news.



*Allis mill dam remains.*



### 13. 1800 - Rev. Kellogg's Parish

When David Allis was born in 1720 Bolton had just been incorporated. There were very few settlers and the land had not yet been divided in South Bolton. North Bolton was even more rural.

When David died in 1789 much had changed. North Bolton was a separate parish only a few years from separation in 1808 to become Vernon; we were no longer subjects of Great Britain, but our own nation and the cities along the Connecticut River were thriving. We were on the brink of entering the Industrial Age. What must North Bolton have looked like at the turn of the century?

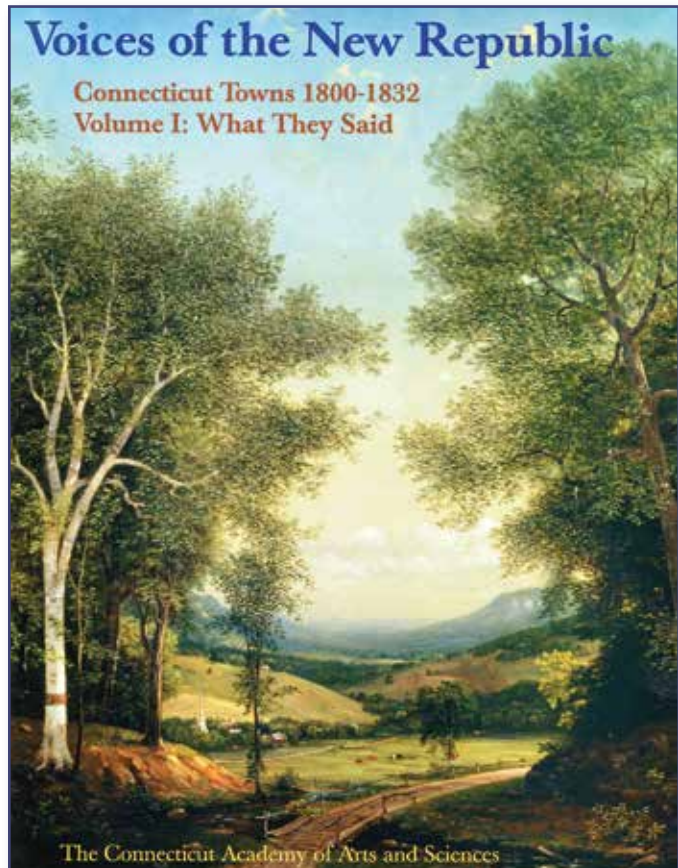
Fortunately Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg gave us a unique snapshot of our town in 1800.

In the first decades after winning independence from Great Britain

Americans sought to describe their new republic both to themselves and to others. To gather information for the effort, the newly chartered Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences at Yale University sent a questionnaire to the state's 107 towns in 1800.

Questions asked about each town's history, its plants, animals and fishes, geology, rivers, weather, farming methods and farm products, industries, diseases, churches, schools, libraries, taverns and breweries, ships, roads, bridges, Indians, free blacks, poor relief, emigration, crimes, amusements and vices. It was extremely thorough.

In Bolton both parishes received the questionnaire, but only North Bolton's Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg responded. Rev. Kellogg was probably selected to write the response as the best educated person in town and he was certainly used to writing. His was one of the first responses the Academy received.



His response is in the form of a letter that includes information on some, but not all, of the questions. After fulfilling his duty the letter was lost to history for over 200 years. In 2003 the Academy published “Voices of the New Republic” containing all the letters they received and it was by chance in 2012 that we stumbled across the book and found Rev. Kellogg’s letter.

The letter as written is a bit hard to read as the language is 220 years old. As it is lengthy a transcription modified for easier reading is included in the Appendix. The original can be found in the reference book or on the Tankerhoosen.info website.



*Sharon Chaples painting of the North Bolton meeting house, school and horse sheds.*



## 14. David's Missing Gravestone

David did not live long after the war dying in 1789 at the age of 69. The only cemetery in the parish was the Old Burial Ground of North Bolton on Bamforth Road. David's first wife Sarah died 8 years earlier in 1781 and was buried there next to David's stepmother Elisabeth. David was buried next to them.

The three distinctive headstones were carved by the Manning family whose stones are in most 18th century cemeteries in Eastern Connecticut. As David was a relatively wealthy man the three headstones had elaborate carvings. David's reads:

In memory of Mr. David  
Allis, who departed this  
Life, April 27th, 1789  
In ye 69th Year of his Life

Death leaves a melancholy gloom  
It makes an empty seat.  
Ye living mortals all must come,  
And join this long retreat.

For the next 150 years the headstone stood in the now closed cemetery as the only reminder that he ever lived and served the community.

And then it was gone.

During the 1930's a Depression era WPA project recorded headstones in Connecticut's old cemeteries. David's inscription was also recorded. Sometime after that the stone went missing and with no living descendants in the area he vanished from history.



*David Allis broken headstone in Vernon Center patio.*

In September 2017, the Vernon Historical Society sponsored a history tour of Vernon Center, concluding at the First Congregational Church. They were approached by a neighbor who said that when she bought her house in Vernon Center, she discovered David Allis' broken headstone in a patio behind her home.

The Vernon Cemetery Commission removed the stone and we began to learn who David was, and with additional research the contribution he made to our community.

Too damaged to restore, the cost to replace the stone with the same design and inscription as the original was about \$7,000.

Money was contributed by the community as well as two descendants of David Allis. Randall Nelson was hired to recreate the gravestone. Randall is one of the few people who can repair and carve old stones and has done extensive work at Hartford's Old Burying Ground.



*Stone carver Randall Nelson with new headstone.*

The remainder of the funding was secured through a Historic Preservation Grant from the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. This \$1500 grant enabled the project to be completed. The local Captain Noah Grant Chapter sponsored the application.

David's new stone was installed on June 16, 2020 next to his family. The broken stone was roughly reassembled and has found a home in the First Congregational Church Of Vernon, United Church of Christ's Memorial Garden; a fitting location for one of the church's founders.

## 15. Afterward

I hope this little book gives you a better understanding of Vernon's earliest days when Vernon was known as North Bolton: how we got our borders and how geography played a role in our future; how the early town was incorporated, formed and governed; how our values - hard work, religion and family were exemplified through the Allis family, just one of many forgotten founders who built the town.

I also hope you will get a better understanding of our contribution to the Revolutionary War beyond the men we sent to fight.

David Allis was born in 1720 in Bolton, the year the town was incorporated. He lived in what was then known as the North Bolton section of town that in 1808 would become Bolton's daughter town of Vernon.

Raised on a farm with limited education, he built and operated the first grist mill on the Tankerhoosen River, was a leader in establishing the North Bolton Parish, and helped guide us through Revolutionary War. Except a footnote in old books there was little record of him, including no gravestone.

Vernon history books spend little time on our early years because events focused on Bolton Center and our first church in South Bolton. Yet those living in the future Vernon were very much a part of every step - establishing the town, building the first church, governing the town and supporting the Revolutionary War.

How many more of the forgotten men and women in the Old Burial Ground Of North Bolton also made significant contributions to the birth of Vernon and are now lost to history?

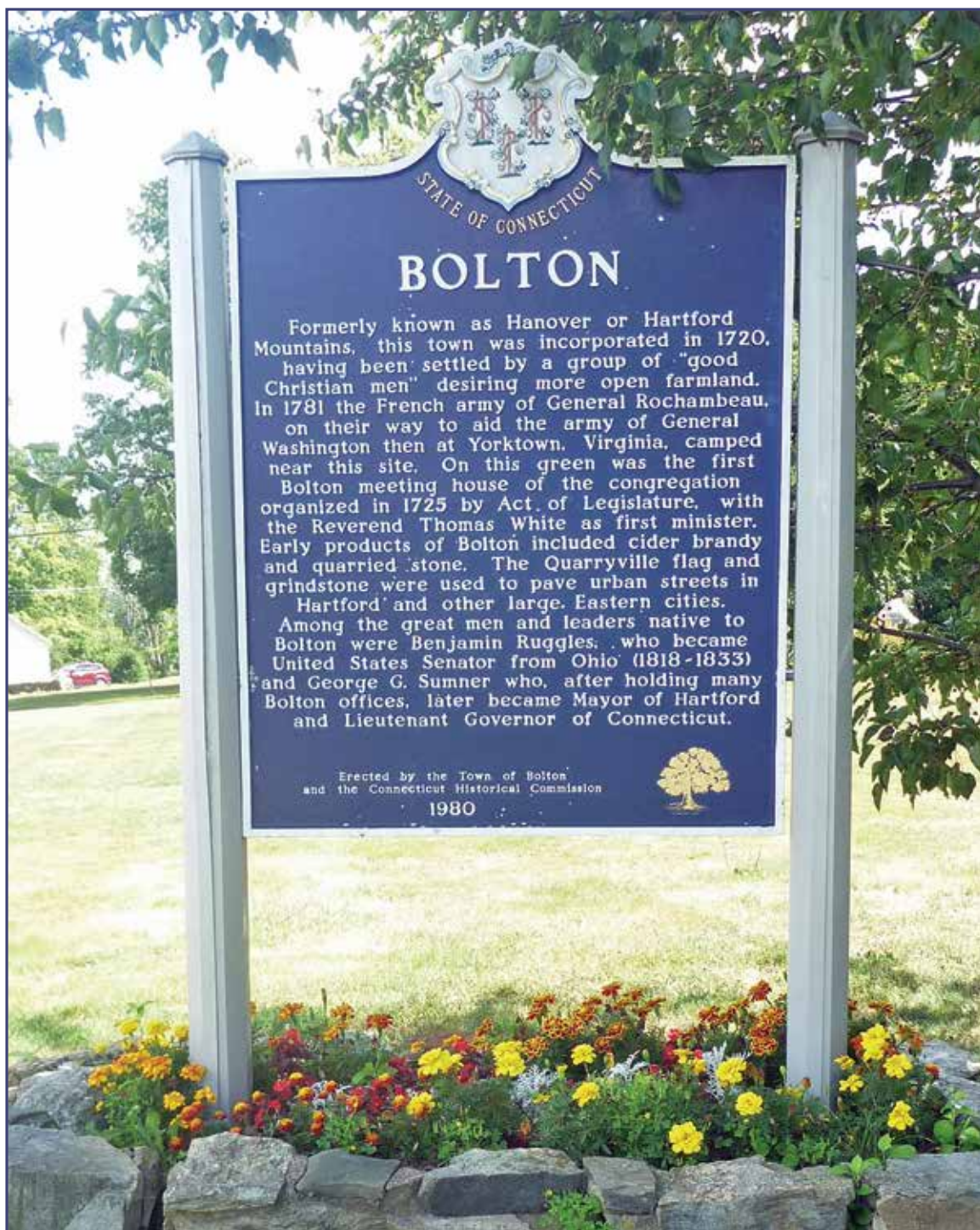
### **What If?**

We went into quite a bit of detail on how our borders were set and our geography affected Vernon's future. Consider what might have happened had there been no Box Mountain and from North to South the land was decent farm land so that North and South Bolton were settled simultaneously.

The first church would probably have been in the center of town and there would have been no need for a second parish. It would have then been unlikely that the section of East Windsor be added to North Bolton, such that Talcottville, Dobsonville and Vernon Depot would have been part of that town.

But for Box Mountain would we still be one town, Bolton, today?





## Appendix

This small book is intended to put into print and preserve stories that are interesting, but not previously available. They are printed in narrative form for easy reading.

Some stories do not nicely fit the narrative so are included in this Appendix for those who might want more. And some stories that would be of interest to an even smaller audience are only on the Tankerhoosen website.

In the Appendix:

**A Timeline.....46**  
Key dates of events referenced.

**B Discovering The Allis Mills.....47**  
David Allis' mills appear in no Vernon history book. It was through a series of synchronicities that they were discovered. I like to think that David left clues for us to follow.

**C Where Did David Allis Live?.....49**  
The location of David's Dwelling House and homelot has been incorrect for many years. Through research on his mill we found the correct location.

**D North Bolton In 1800 .....51**  
Too long for the narrative a readable version is included here. It's a description of our town as it begins to transition from an agricultural to an industrial town.

**E Chapter Notes .....56**  
The Notes include commentary on why chapters were included and the primary sources for each chapter. See the Reference section for more detail on sources.

**F References.....61**  
Listing of books and manuscripts referenced and for further study.



## A. Timeline

- 1636: Rev. Hooker follows CT Path to found Hartford
- 1716: First settlers arrive in Rockville area from East Windsor
- 1719: Windsor & Hartford survey establishes our western bound with the 'T Ditch'
- 1720: Bolton incorporated including the current town of Vernon as North Bolton
- 1725: Grant trades 100 acre homelot for 500 acres, the future Rockville
- 1725: Grant builds the first grist mill on the Hockanum River
- 1740: Saw mill erected at Valley Falls
- 1745: Allis Saw and Grist mills erected on the Tankerhoosen River
- 1751: North Bolton Cemetery on Bamforth Road established
- 1760: North Bolton becomes a distinct Ecclesiastical Society
- 1762: Meeting house built on Old Meetinghouse Hill, Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg called
- 1776: Declaration of Independence signed
- 1789: North Bolton given mile and a half of East Windsor
- 1789: David Allis dies
- 1800: Rev. Kellogg writes description of North Bolton
- 1802: John Warburton operates first Cotton Mill
- 1808: Vernon separates from Bolton and incorporates

## B. Discovering The Allis Mills

The Allis Mills are not mentioned in any of Vernon's or Bolton's history books. They were truly one of our lost mills and located by accident.

Talking with Tom Mason in the Fall of 2016 about the Tankerhoosen Wildlife Management Area, formerly owned by the Bissell-Mason family, he mentioned that as a boy he played on very old mill remains on the Tankerhoosen River south of Fish & Game Road. We were aware of Walker's mills on the north side of Fish & Game Road, but had read nothing about other mills in the area. Early maps show only Walker's mills.



*Exploring the Allis Mills site with mill researcher Richard Symonds, Jr.*

Exploring the area with Richard Symonds, Jr, who was researching the area for a book, we saw evidence of ancient dams and perhaps head races, but little else remained. A series of land deeds loaned by Tom Mason from the early 1800's made no mention of these early dams either. If they did exist they must have been from the 1700's and all record of the mills and their owners lost. When Symonds published his "Water Powered Mill Sites in Vernon, Connecticut" in November 2016 he didn't mention this site as it hadn't been confirmed.

The first written evidence of mills at this site was also found by accident. While at the Connecticut Historical Society researching the Kellogg Family two articles by Allyn Stanley Kellogg published in *The Rockville Journal* in 1889 on Rockville's Iron Works were found.

Allyn S. Kellogg was the great grandson of Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg, and might be considered Vernon's first historian as his writings provide the basis for our knowledge of our first meeting house and the establishment of the North Bolton Parish.

In the article, 'About The Ore For The Iron Works' was the following paragraph: "David Allis owned land in the eastern part of the town, on Tankerooson Brook, and had there, . . . a saw mill and grist mill, a short distance south of where Walkers's mill now stands."

The piece of land laid out in 1743 was bounded on the west by 'the highway leading to the Iron Works.'

Now we had a name and date so began searching Bolton land deeds and Allis family wills where we found frequent reference and some detail on the Allis Mills. A mystery solved.

## C. Where Did David Allis Live?

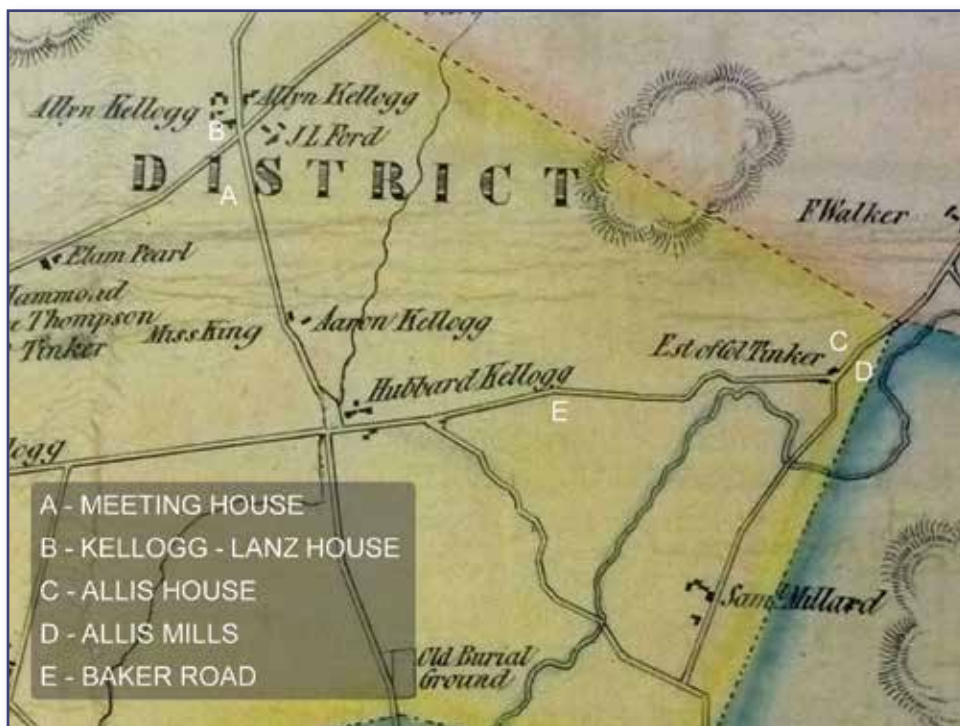
The location of David Allis house has been controversial.

Congregational Church records show that when North Bolton received the Connecticut General Assembly's approval to form a separate parish, and planning began for a meeting house, the planning meetings were held at 'David Allis' Dwelling House,' as were church services until the meeting house was constructed.

David was also active in hiring Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg as minister and sold him four parcels of land for his farm and house within walking distance of the meeting house.

This led to the assumption that since meetings and services were held at Allis' house it must be close to the meeting house. Also a notation in the Bolton Land Record Grantor's Index indicates the parcels Allis sold Kellogg included buildings, so it was assumed this meant they included a house.

The nearby Kellogg-Lanz house on today's Hartford Turnpike seemed to fit the descriptions and was presumed to be the house that Allis lived in and then sold to Rev. Kellogg in 1763. A plaque on the house bears the name 'Allis.'



On this 1853 E. M. Woodford Vernon Map published by Richard Clark the Allis home site was owned by Col. Tinker.

However, no house is mentioned in the deeds themselves. Tracing the parcels Allis sold they are all on Bamforth Road rather than Hartford Turnpike. Other records indicate that at the time a road ran directly from Allis' grist mill to the meeting house.



*Location of David Allis dwelling house.*

It was only recently recognized that David built and operated a saw and grist mill on the Tankerhoosen River on Reservoir Road. There are many references in deeds to his mills and homelot, but the definitive reference is the 1752 Bolton Land Record 3- 135 laying out a road in the area: "Beginning at the West side of the highway 10 rods South of said Allis' house by the Sawmill . . . " That locates his farm, orchard and dwelling house on the Northwest corner of the Baker and Reservoir Road intersection. Today nothing exists at that location to indicate there was once a house there.

The best roads in early towns ran either to the meeting house or to the grist mills. In 1762 the meeting house was in South Bolton and Allis' house was on one of the two roads leading to it. Roads had also been built from the middle of town to his mills, so although it was a mile further from the meeting house than the Kellogg-Lanz house it was accessible from three directions.

In 1763 David was 43 years old and had accumulated a great deal of land. He remained in his house near his mills until his death in 1789 when the house passed to his wife and youngest daughter.

Bolton Land Record 7-13 also shows that Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg in 1786 bought the Lanz corner lot and gifted it to his oldest son Ebenezer, Jr in 1794, who then built his house at that location. This house and farm were passed down the family to Allyn Kellogg and then to his son Allyn Stanley Kellogg before it eventually became the property of the Lanz family.

David's wife and youngest daughter continued to own and occupy his house on Reservoir Road until at least 1805 according to Bolton tax records. Then the house vanishes from the records. Was it moved to another location, common at the time, or did it burn? Research is ongoing.



## D. North Bolton In 1800

In 1800 Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg responded to a survey from the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences at Yale University gathering information on our new country. The background of the project is described in Chapter 13.

The letter as written is challenging to read as the language is 220 years old. The following is a transcription updated for easier reading. The original can be found in “Voices of the New Republic” or on the Tankerhoosen.info website.

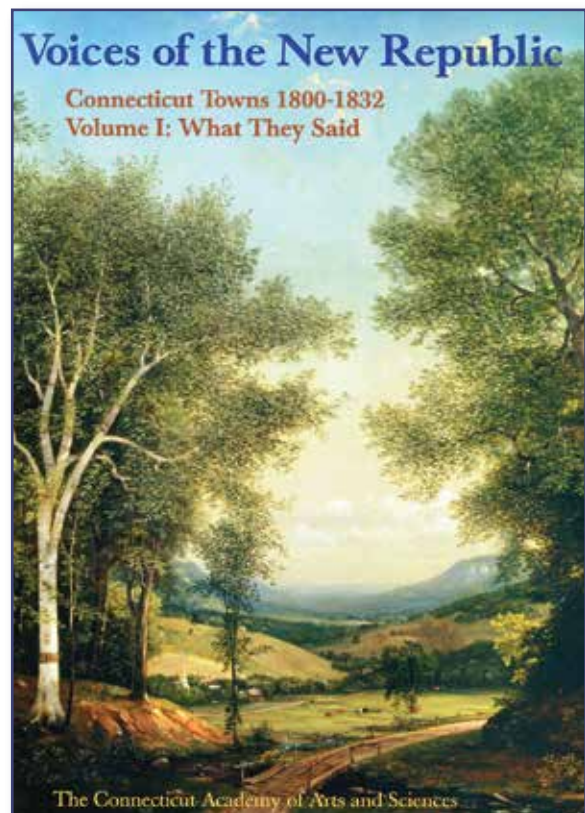
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Sir, In compliance with your request, I send you the information I have obtained and what I know relative to the history, geography etc. of the Society in which I live.

### Early Bolton

I would first observe that the town of Bolton, by its record at the time of the first settlers, was called Hartford Mountains. The first matter of record I find on the Town Books is the following, which I transcribe at large: “William Pitkin Esq. These are to desire you to run out and measure the sundry lines about the Lots in the mountain plantations, that thereby the said lots may be by you regularly bounded out, that no wrong may happen to the settlers upon them. Hartford, Apr. 2, 1719, James Wadsworth, John Hooker, John Hall, Hez Brainard.”

The next thing recorded in said records, is a deed of conveyance of land by John Bishop in which the place of his abode is thus expressed: “Living at the place called Hartford Mountains, in the County of Hartford,” which deed was authenticated in July, 1719.



The next thing on record is a deed of land given by “Abel Shaler in the town of Bolton,” dated Apr. 26, 1721.

These I have mentioned are the first three filings which stand recorded on Bolton Town records. By them it appears, that there was at least one settler in the town, as early as in the Summer of 1719 and that the Town took the name of Bolton sometime between that date and 1721. But as I did not design to give an account of the whole Town, (supposing the Rev. G. Colton will send you concerning the part of the Town in which he lives) I shall speak only of the Society in which I live.

### **North Bolton**

North Bolton, in the County of Tolland, and State of Connecticut is, in extent from North to South 5 miles, and from East to West about 4. It is bounded North on the town of Ellington, East on Tolland and Coventry, South on Bolton and East Hartford and West on East Windsor.

The tract of Land comprised in this Society, before the year 1760, belonged to the towns of Bolton and East Windsor - about 3/4 to the former. It was constituted an Ecclesiastical Society by the legislature of the then Colony at their fall Session in 1760; and in 1789 the Windsor part of the Parish by an act of the General Assembly of the State [at the] May session was annexed to the Town of Bolton.

The first planter in this Society, and indeed in the town of Bolton, was one Stephen Johns from England. He pitched down on a valley in the wilderness (as a daughter of his, who yet surviving informed me, in the year 1716; supposing the land on which he settled to be in Tolland. He lived there several years before there were any other inhabitants on lands which fall in the bounds of this Society. Some of the first settlers in this Parish were from Bolton, Coventry, Hartford & Windsor.

The first and present Gospel-Minister in this Society, was ordained on the 24th day of November 1762. There are at present in it 130 families, six school districts, and as many School-Houses; in which children are taught the Rudiments of common learning the main part of the year by a Master for four or five months in the cold seasons, at a price of 8 or 10 Dollars per month, exclusive of his board and by a Mistress the other seasons at the price of 4 Dollars and .50 Cents per month exclusive of board.

### **Wood**

The land on the east part of the Society is mountainous; interspersed with valleys. Some ledges of rocks—considerably stony. The west part, in general, is level and not too much encumbered with stone. The wood and timber at the time of the first planters were rather poor, except on the highland on the east part of the Society, which were good. The growth

on the other parts, principally, was low pitch or yellow pines intermixed with small black and white oaks and chestnuts, and many patches with shrub oaks.

The poor growth of wood at that time was occasioned by fire, which for many years burnt over the lands. The Indians in their day to procure feed for their game or other purposes; and after them the people of some adjoining Towns for pasture for their cattle annually put fire to the woods, which killed the greatest part of the growth. The fires being prevented, in a few succeeding years, the growth of oaks, chestnuts, some walnuts and other kinds of wood over-topped and mainly destroyed the smaller and less useful growths becoming fine groves of wood.

Many groves at present stand thick with chestnuts of a good size, out of which are cut timber for rails and other uses, which furnish the fields with fence and many loads of rails for market, which are annually transported to Hartford and Windsor the distance of 10 & 12 miles and sold from 4 to 5 Dollars per hundred. Posts for rail fence, both white oak and chestnut, some oak boards, ships planks and wood for fire, also annually are carried from this place to Hartford.

The growth of wood after curing and clearing (if suffered to grow) rather improves; and wood at present is in good plenty for fuel and other uses and if cut with prudence will continue so for ages to come. The common price of oak wood is one Dollar per cord.

## **Agriculture**

The soil in different parts of the Society is, principally, of two kinds. The eastern part is generally a blackish dirt intermixed with gravel and stone, in some spots a little clay. It is natural for grass and good for pasture and mowing. There is also a good proportion of tolerable plow-land. The western part in general is of a loamy soil intermixed in some places with gravel or sand.

Both parts of the Society, when new, or fertilized with manure, produce Wheat, from 15 to 20 Bushels per acre, but generally the old improved lands are sown with Rye, which yield from 7 to 12 Bushels per acre. The year after the crop of Wheat or Rye is taken off, the fields are planted with Indian corn, and some potatoes and the next year sown with oats and flax, and frequently stocked down with red clover or herds grass seed, or both together for mowing or pasture, which answer for one or other of these purposes three or four years, then it is usually fallowed for Rye etc. In this rotation the arable lands are generally cultivated by the farmers.

The produce of Indian corn per acre, is from 12 to 25 bushels. The quantity of flax annually raised, upon an average is a competent supply for home consumption. The moist and swampy parts and lowlands near streams of water are improved for mowing and pasturing. The higher land in many places, when enriched with manure produces a good burden of excellent hay.

The principal manure used is, stable and barnyard dung; Plaster of Paris is made some use of, and has a surprising effect on warm dry land in the production of red clover, Indian corn, and other grain.

The cultivation of land is with oxen, but oftentimes with a horse or horses harnessed before them. The Plough made use of and preferred by the farmers, is what they call the Dutch Plough. It is constructed with one handle, its share rises high on the fore-end of the Chip or bottom piece is fastened on with an iron bolt which comes up through the beam; it has no Coulter. The harrows in use, are small timbers framed in a triangular form and set with iron teeth. Ox carts are principally in use, there may be in the place 8 or 9 Ox Wagons. The latter are preferred for carrying loads to a distance; but accounted not so convenient for short movements on a farm.

Orchards are considerably numerous and improving. It's supposed there are made in the Society annually about 2600 barrels of cider, priced from 1 to 1 dollar 50 cents per barrel.

## **Water**

This Society is well watered by many brooks, small rivulets and springs, which by intersecting roads, afford great convenience of water to most of the inhabitants. There is scarcely a Farm but what is accommodated with lasting water.

The principal stream of water in the Parish, is known by the Indian name of Hokkanum: It has its source out of a large Pond, called by the Indians, and still called Snipsick Pond. This Pond lies in the N.W. corner of Tolland, and near the N.E. corner of this Society. The greatest part of the Pond is in Tolland. It is about two miles in length and half mile in breadth. The stream from this fountain takes its course westerly, and with considerable descent, in a serpentine manner runs over rocks and stones about a mile and a half; and then turns a southern course on smoother ground, leaving the Parish by cutting a little on the corner of East Windsor, then enters the town of East Hartford in Orford Society (Manchester), and makes its way by many windings to the Connecticut River, into which it empties near the meeting house in East Hartford. This river in its general course may be from 20 to 30 feet in width; in common seasons. It is remarkable for mill seats, and on which in its length, there are many mills of various kinds.

The next stream for bigness is called by its Indian name, Tankkerrooson, on which stands several mills. Wells, which afford good water for all uses, are obtained by digging from 15 to 25 feet.

## Manufacturing

The Society is well accommodated with mills of the following kinds: 5 Grist mills, 6 Saw mills, one fulling mill with other apparatus of the Clothiers business, one linseed-oil mill, one Cotton Factory for the spinning & twisting of cotton yarn built by and on the property of a Mr. Warburton, a few years since from England, who is of uncommon mechanical genius. This factory is now of considerable business and increasing.

There are 4 Stills worked in this Society, one of which is of large capacity. It contains 8 [hdds?] principally used in distilling Gin from rye, the product of which in the present year 1800 is 3,117 Gallons. The others are employed in distilling Cider into Brandy.



*1811 map published with article showing mills.*

The Butter and Cheese carried to market, annually, is conjectured to be, (I cannot obtain the exact weight) about 2,000 wt of each. Grains of all kinds, (but principally rye) that is carried to market may be about 1500 bushels. Pork that is marketed, yearly, is supposed to be about 15,000 wt or 75 barrels. Of sheep's wool we have a sufficiency for home consumption and some to spare.

It's difficult, if not impossible, for me to obtain exact information of these things; therefore with the aid of the opinion of some others of the Society, I have stated as above.

There are 146 oxen in this Society, which with those that are younger subjected to the yoke, together with horses—tis supposed make about 80 working Teams.

Within 30 years past, the price of land has risen four double.

There are but two taverns in the Society.

If the preceding information will be of utility in any respect, it will be grateful to your humble Servant Ebenezer Kellogg.

North Bolton  
September 6, 1800



## E. Chapter Notes

The Chapter Notes include commentary on why chapters were included and the primary sources of the information for each chapter. See the Reference section for more detail on sources.

### **Chapter 2 - How Our Borders & Geography Influenced Our History**

Vernon histories include the story of the establishment of the North Bolton Parish and our first meeting house. They note the reason for this was the distance from the South Bolton church and difficulty of travel around Box Mountain. What is not discussed is why Bolton's boundaries were such that another parish was necessary. This chapter explains how our borders were defined.

Since Bolton's boundaries were not established by intention the story of our boundaries was found in the history books of our neighboring towns. Each town begins their story with how their boundaries were established. Additional background was found in the records of early Connecticut and decisions made in the General Assembly.

### **Chapter 3 -1720 - The Founding Of Bolton**

Vernon history books discuss the founding of Vernon, but not that of Bolton. The Colonial government in the 1700's was small and as our colony was founded by church leaders they made decisions on all areas of life. Towns and parishes had local control, but all other decisions were made in Hartford by a relatively few men whose families maintained control for generations. As we were still under the King in 1720 we followed the English form of government, which generally worked well.

Thus Bolton was established by the General Assembly after a petition from local landowners. The steps that followed - dividing the town, establishing the church, setting up local government - were overseen by the General Assembly and followed an established procedure.

Bolton's founding is documented in several Bolton histories, particularly Samuel Alvord's 1920 book for Bolton's bicentennial "A Historical Sketch of Bolton, Connecticut."

### **Chapter 4 - Who were Bolton's Settlers?**

Bolton was an odd piece of unsettled land between Windsor, Hartford, Glastonbury, Hebron, Tolland and Coventry. Relatively close to the Connecticut River it attracted established river families buying land for their sons and grandsons, families just arriving in the Hartford area who found the best land occupied, and in the case of the Allis family, leaving the danger of the frontier for safer areas.

The paths taken to Bolton by the Talcott, Grant and Allis families are examples of the different routes, but also provide background on three families that played important roles in shaping the town, and North Bolton in particular.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's there was a great deal of interest in our history - towns and families. As a result very detailed books were published on the history of Connecticut towns at a time when the early years were still relatively fresh in people's memory. This chapter draws on genealogies of the Talcott and Allis families. The Grant story is covered in Vernon histories.

## **Chapter 5 - 1725 - The South Bolton Parish & Meeting House**

Settlers living in North Bolton attended weekly church in South Bolton for almost 40 years before the North Bolton Parish was approved. Our early farmers were as active and involved in this church as they later were in North Bolton.

Information for this chapter is from Charles Crandall Church's "A Documentary History of the Three Bolton Congregational Churches," as well as other Bolton historians and authors.

## **Chapter 6 - The Allis Family & Life In The 18th Century**

This chapter introduces the Allis family and provides an idea of what life was like in the 18th Century.

The information on the Allis family is from deeds, church birth and marriage records, and probate records. What life was like for the Allis family is drawn from many descriptions of the times, as well what we know of Bolton's geography, church and town history.

The story of the winter of 1740-41 was included to show the extreme hardships our founders endured. What was known as the Little Ice Age included much of the 17th and 18th Centuries and lasted into the mid 1800s. It influenced Colonial settlement, migration and our relations with Native Americans. You'll find another example of Colonial hard winters in the chapter on the Revolution.

## **Chapter 7 - 1745 - The Allis Mills**

David Allis and his saw and grist mills were unknown to Vernon historians. Another article in the Appendix explains how we learned of these early mills. Most of the detail was teased from Bolton deeds and visits to the mill site.

The Johns family is often credited with having the first saw mill in the Tankerhoosen Valley, but David Allis was a contemporary and also built his mill in the 1740's. The Johns and Allis families were neighbors and likely supported each other.

There are almost 100 deeds in Bolton's Land Records involving the Allis family or their properties from 1723 to 1803. They provide dates of acquisition and sales as well as detailed locations.

## **Chapter 8 - 1751 - The Old Burial Ground Of North Bolton**

Establishment of our first burial ground was recognition of North Bolton's growing population and was the first step toward establishing the North Bolton Parish and would influence the location of our first meeting house.

There are several listings of the graves. The most recent is "Old Cemeteries, Vernon Connecticut, U. S. A." published in 2014.

## **Chapter 9 - How Early Bolton Was Governed**

At the Bolton Town Clerk's office are the records of all our early Selectmen and Annual Meetings. Minutes include positions and who was appointed for the year. Most positions were volunteer, a few were compensated.

Only the results of votes are recorded. Discussion and arguments for and against are not. For example the January 26, 1761 entries creating the North Bolton Parish:

Voted: To divide this town into two distinct Ecclesiastical Societies.

Voted: Whether the Town will divide said town between said Society by an East and West Line so as to take half the land in said Town in each Society. Voted in the negative.

The Selectmen also set taxes, established roads, funded schools and repaired the church.

Most of the information for this chapter came from Bolton's meeting records or descriptions of small town meetings of the time.

It is impressive that one organization of town leaders essentially made all the decisions. They were no doubt motivated by the church, but also taught by their fathers that they have a responsibility to their town and church.

## **Chapter 10 - 1762 - The North Bolton Parish and Meeting House**

The creation of the North Bolton Parish, construction of our first meeting house and the hiring of our first minister Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg were covered in the research for the purchase and preservation of Meetinghouse Hill in 2019. This will be included in another book in this series.

Much of the information on the early town and church was preserved for us by Allyn Stanley Kellogg, Rev. Ebenezer's great grandson and Vernon's first true historian. It is recorded in the short book, "The Church of Christ In Vernon, Connecticut: An Historical Address." The First Congregational Church of Vernon also published church histories in 1974 and 2002.

## **Chapter 11 - 1765-1781 - Bolton In The Revolutionary War**

The part North Bolton settlers played in the Revolutionary War is usually not included in Vernon histories as the events took place in South Bolton. However, those living in North Bolton were very involved as soldiers and supporters in the Revolution. Many are buried in the Old Burial Ground of North Bolton.

As described in this chapter South Bolton was on the main route between New England and the middle Atlantic states and frequently hosted the leaders of the effort for independence. Of particular pride was hosting the 1781 encampment of General Rochambeau and his troops on the way to Yorktown.

Most of the information for this chapter is from Bolton authors, particularly the research and writings of former Bolton Historian Hans DePold.

The National Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Association Inc. (W3R-US) has an informational article on The French Encampment at Bolton. See [w3r-us.org/french-encampment-bolton-21-25-june-1781/](http://w3r-us.org/french-encampment-bolton-21-25-june-1781/)

## **Chapter 12 - 1789 - David's Death & The Aftermath**

David apparently died suddenly without making a will, unusual for a wealthy man with a large family. In such cases the Probate Court appointed administrators, usually family members or close friends, to inventory his property and fairly distribute it.

If you recall Nathaniel Allis had a will and tasked David with disposing of the farm and giving each of his family their designated share. He also requested that David take in and care for his stepmother. In those times, long before retirement homes, it was the responsibility of family to care for aging and elderly relatives.

The Probate Records provide a detailed inventory of David's mills and other assets and their division between the daughters. Their husbands were not interested in operating mills and the property was sold off piece by piece over the next few years.

The one enduring mystery is what became of David's house. As it was used for meetings and early church it was likely one of the largest and finest houses in North Bolton. From Bolton Tax Records David's wife, Keziah Dewey Allis, remained in the house until about 1805. Then she likely lived with her Dewey relatives in Vernon as her Probate Records indicate she died in Vernon. There is no record that she sold the house but she may have given it to her relatives for caring for her.

The house might have burned or it might have been moved, a common practice at the time. If it was moved it might still exist. Thomas Kellogg, Rev. Ebenezer's second son, bought two of the shares of the property in 1800. His son Hubbard was living at the other end of Baker Road in 1853, near Thomas house and farm. Might this be David Allis house? More research is needed.

### **Chapter 13 - 1800 - Rev. Kellogg's North Bolton**

Early research on Vernon involved a review of any book or study that might provide new information. One of the books at the Rockville Public Library was "Voices Of The New Republic" where the letter from Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg describing the North Bolton Parish in 1800 was found.

The Vernon Historical Society was unaware of Kellogg's letter as the book containing it had only recently been published. When a copy was purchased from the publisher in New Haven at their small office at Yale University permission was received to reproduce it, and not previously having done so it is included it in this book.

As it is rather long and difficult to read in the 1800 writing style it is included in the Appendix with modernized text. The original is in the reference book or on The Tankerhoosen website at [Tankerhoosen.info/history/kellogg\\_letter\\_original.htm](http://Tankerhoosen.info/history/kellogg_letter_original.htm)

### **Chapter 14 - David's Missing Gravestone**

Although David's name appeared in early histories of Vernon's church it was the discovery of his gravestone in 2017 that stimulated the research that uncovered his mills and his contributions to the developing North Bolton Parish and Bolton's Revolutionary War effort.

#### **Photo and Illustration Credits**

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Image attribution can be found in the caption.



## F. References

### Bolton

*Most of Vernon's early history is Bolton's early history also. Following are those referenced for this book. Most of the books and manuscripts can be found in the Bolton's Bentley Memorial Library.*

Alvord, Samuel Morgan. *A Historical Sketch of Bolton, Connecticut*. Manchester, CT: The Herald Printing Co., 1920. 29 pages. History of early Bolton written for the bicentennial.

*Bolton Community News*. The Bolton Historical Society published articles in the *News* from 1992 to 2014. Most were written by Bolton Town Historian Hans DePold. Some are included in his *Bolton Historic Tales*. Other articles can be found on the Bolton Historical Society's website at [BoltonCTHistory.org/archives/](http://BoltonCTHistory.org/archives/)

Church, Charles Crandall. *A Documentary History of the Three Bolton Congregational Churches - 1725, 1768, 1848, Second Edition*. Manuscript, 1986. 92 pages.

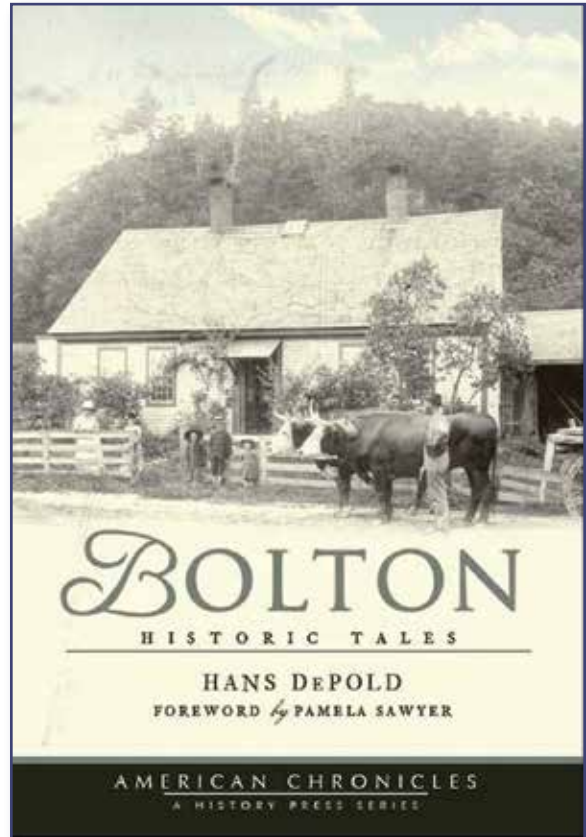
DePold, Hans. *Bolton Historic Tales*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2008. 160 pages.

DePold, Hans. Bolton. Charleston, SC: Images of America, 2011. 127 pages.

Ronson, Bruce. *Bolton's Heritage: Historical Sketches of Bolton, Connecticut*. Essex, CT: Pequot Press, 1970. 220 pages.

Sumner, Edna. *Early Years of Bolton*. Manuscript, 1950. 15 pages.

*Vital Records of Bolton To 1854 and Vernon to 1852*. Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1909. 291 pages. Births, deaths and marriages. Includes early Colonial laws and detailed Bolton patent.



## Vernon

*A History of the First Congregational Church of Vernon - 240th Anniversary.* 2002. 31 pages. Includes early history of Vernon and first Meetinghouse. 1974 pamphlet update.

Brookes, George. *Cascades and Courage.* Rockville, CT: T. F. Rady & Co., 1955. 529 pages. This is the classic Vernon/Rockville history.

Cole, J. R. *History of Tolland County, Connecticut.* New York: W. W. Preston & Co., 1888. 992 pages.

*Commemorative Biographical Record of Tolland and Windham Counties, Connecticut.* Chicago, IL: J. H. Beers & Co., 1903. Beers published books with paid biographies.

Kellogg, Allyn Stanley. *The Church of Christ In Vernon, Connecticut: An Historical Address.* 1888. 50 pages. History and memories of the First Congregational Church by Kellogg (1824-1893), grandson of the first minister. Although primarily a church history it also includes early town history.

*Old Cemeteries of Vernon, Connecticut, U.S.A.* Agawam, MA: Bridgeport National Bindery, 2014. 373 pages. An Eagle Scout project conducted by Zachary R. Kline and Michael J. Leonard supported by the Vernon Education Foundation. Photographs and GPS data on graves in the Bamforth Road and Dobson Road cemeteries.

Smith, Harry Conklin. *A Century Of Vernon, CT 1808-1908.* Rockville, CT: T. F. Rady & Co., 1908. 160 pages. Published for Vernon's Centennial. Good history of Vernon's first 100 years drawing on contemporary sources. Smith was the editor of the *Rockville Leader*.

Symonds, Jr., Richard N. *Water Powered Mill Sites in Vernon, Connecticut.* Willington, CT: Anything Printed, 2016. 44 pages.

*Vernon, Our Town.* Vernon, CT: Minuteman Press, 2018. 180 pages. Vernon Historical Society & Vernon Public Schools. 180 pages. Although written for school children this is a good overview of Vernon history.

*Voices of the New Republic: Connecticut Towns 1800-1832, Volume I,* New Haven, CT: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2003. 493 pages. Includes Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg's 1800 description of North Bolton (Vernon).

Willes, Mildred. *225th Anniversary Celebration of the First Congregational Church, Vernon, Connecticut 1762-1974, 1974.* 32 pages. Includes early history of Vernon and first Meetinghouse.

## Other Towns Histories

Goodwin, Joseph. *East Hartford: Its History and Traditions*. Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1879. 249 pages.

Love, Rev. William Deloss. *The Colonial History of Hartford*. Hartford, CT: By the author, 1914. 369 pages. History of Hartford, including early East Hartford and Manchester.

Messier, Betty Brook & Aronson, Janet Sutherland. *The Roots of Coventry, Connecticut*. Willimantic, CT: Willimantic Instant Printing Inc., 1987. 206 pages. Detail on founding of the town a few years before Bolton. Process was likely similar.

Spiess, Mathias & Bidwell, Percy. *History of Manchester, Connecticut*. South Manchester, CT: W. H. Schieldge, 1924. 306 pages. The definitive history of Manchester.

Stiles, Henry. *The History of Ancient Windsor, Vol. I*. Somersworth, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Co., 1892. 950 pages. Detailed history of Windsor and its daughter towns.

Waldo, Loren Pinckney. *The Early History of Tolland. Hartford, CT*: Case, Lockwood & Co., 1861. 148 pages. An address delivered before the Tolland County Historical Society.

Weigold, Harold. *Tolland: The History of an Old Connecticut Post Road Town*. Chester, CT: The Pequot Press, Inc., 1971. 246 pages. Combines and updates earlier histories.

## Genealogies

Allis, Horatio. *Genealogy of William Allis of Hatfield, Mass and Descendants, 1630-1919, 3 Volumes*. Hartford, CT: Art Press, 1919.

Hopkins, Timothy. *The Kellogg's In The Old World and The New, Volumes 1-3*. San Francisco, CA: Sunset Press & Photo Engraving Co., 1903.

Talcott, S. V. *Talcott Pedigree in England and America from 1665 to 1876*. Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons & Co., 1876.

## Maps

*1730 Proprietor's Map of Bolton/Vernon*. Preliminary map created in 1920 to show the early division of land between the 50 proprietors. Never completed. Available at Bolton Town Clerk's office.

*1811 Hudson & Goodwin Connecticut*. Enough detail to locate Vernon mills. First map published after separation from Bolton.

*1934 Fairchild Aerial Photography Maps of Connecticut*.



*Local DAR visits Allis' new gravestone.*



*Installing the new Allis gravestone.*



*David Allis's descendants Cynthia Demers and Kent and Larry Freeman visit family graves.*



## Biography

*Jon Roe graduated from Pennsylvania State University in 1961 as an Aeronautical Engineer. He came to Connecticut that year to work at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft in East Hartford.*

*He grew up in a small town in northern New Jersey surrounded by dairy farms and state forests attracting him to the Vernon/Ellington area as it felt like home. He has lived in Vernon's Tankerhoosen Valley since 1963.*

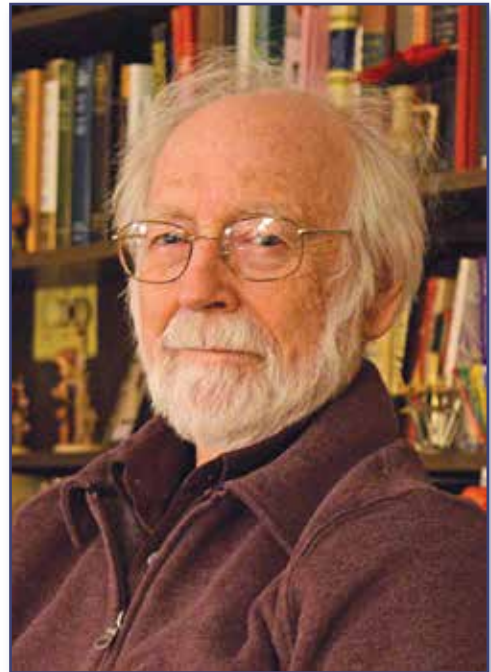
*After 32 years at Pratt he took early retirement at age 53 to publish a magazine. Jon had become interested in holistic health and spirituality in the mid 1980's and, with others, started The Door Opener as a networking publication.*

*At the time natural health was largely underground in Connecticut with practitioners forming small organizations to support each other and promote their businesses. Jon worked with most of these organizations which united in the mid 1990's to become the CT Holistic Health Association. In Vernon he co-produced the Greater Vernon Holistic Healthfest for many years.*

*Jon became interested in history as a young man, but didn't become involved in Vernon history until 2009. At that time he was part of the group that defeated TicketNetwork's effort to build an outdoor concert venue on the Tankerhoosen River. It made him curious to learn more about the Tankerhoosen Valley and its history. Most Vernon histories focused on Rockville, but there were many stories in the Southern part of town to be discovered and mysteries to be explored.*

*In connecting with local historical societies and land preservation groups Jon found they weren't working together and the leaders often did not know each other. From his experience with holistic groups he and a few others invited the nonprofits in town to work together. Jon began facilitating the Vernon Volunteers' Collaborative in 2014.*

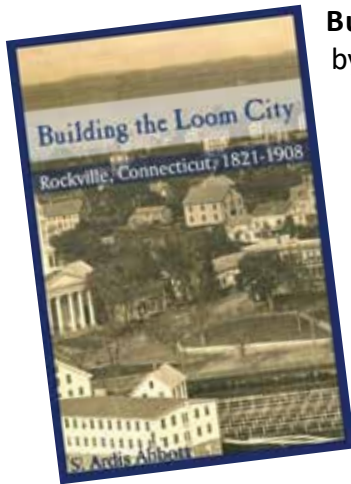
*After a dozen years of Tankerhoosen Valley research and reaching his 80's his goal now is to preserve what he has learned for future generations in a series of short books, this being the first.*



Jon Roe



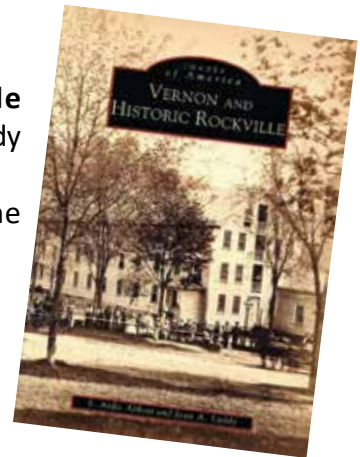
## Other Publications Available From The Vernon Historical Society



**Building the Loom City: Rockville Connecticut, 1821-1908**  
by Dr. S. Ardis Abbott \$15.00

**Vernon and Historic Rockville**  
by Dr. S. Ardis Abbott & Jean A Luddy  
\$18.99

Images of America history of the growth of Vernon and Rockville.



**Water Powered Mill Sites in Vernon, Connecticut** by Richard Symonds, Jr. \$20.00

20 existent & vanished mill sites in Vernon along the Hockanum & Tankerhoosen Rivers

**Remembering Those Who Served** by James W. Ashe & Carolyn G. Blouin \$10.00  
The history of the Henry Park Tower.

**Vernon-Rockville in the Twentieth Century** by Dr. S. Ardis Abbott & Jean Luddy \$19.99  
Images of America history of the last century.

**Vernon, Our Town** by the Vernon Historical Society and Vernon Public Schools. \$18.00

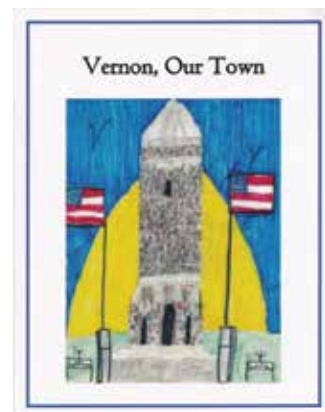
A history of Vernon for the public schools and the Vernon community.

**History of Rockville from 1823 to 1871** by William T. Cogswell  
\$10.00

Cogswell's memoir of early Rockville.

**Old Cemeteries, Vernon Connecticut, USA** \$10.00

Gravestones found in the Old Burial Ground on Bamforth Road and Southwest cemetery on Dobson Road. These burial grounds were in use between 1751 and 1908.



For more information on these books visit <https://vernonhistoricalsoc.org/location-and-hours/vhs-publications>



## David Allis and the Birth of Vernon

**V**ernon was incorporated as a town in 1808, but this book is about our first 90 years when we were the North Bolton section of Bolton. Other than the establishment of our church in 1762 our history books begin in 1808 and little has been written or taught about our beginnings.

This little book provides some of our forgotten history including:

- Why Bolton's shape was long and narrow while our neighbors were square.
- How Box Mountain played a role in our early development.
- How land was divided among our first settlers.
- Where our first settlers came from.
- How families lived in the 18th Century.
- Our early militia and where we drilled.
- Our church before Meetinghouse Hill.
- The role we played in the Revolutionary War.

The story of our early history is woven around the Allis family; early settlers important to the creation of the North Bolton Parish, and an integral part of the events of 18th Century Bolton.



*The final resting place of our founders on Bamforth Road.*

\$18.00