

Frederic Phelps Bissell's Third and Fourth Journal Entries June 1887 to July 1905
Gary Heard December 2020 glheard@yahoo.com Updated November 2021

Acknowledgements: As with the first and second journal write-ups, I collaborated with historian and long-time resident of Hebron, Mary Ann Foote of the Hebron Historical Society. She made invaluable suggestions and edits and researched a number of topics without which this narrative would have been incomplete and inaccurate.

Frederic Phelps Bissell, or F.P. as he may have been known, is related to me through my maternal grandmother Helen Mansfield Bissell Carroll. She was the daughter of F.P.'s son Frederic Clarence Bissell and Sarah Gertrude Storrs. F.P. descends six generations from Captain John Bissell who emigrated from England to Windsor in the early 17th century. Frederic Bissell's ancestors migrated to the northeast section of Hebron, Connecticut in the early 18th century and to a farm below Hebron center on Church Street in the early 19th century. F.P. wrote a daily journal between 1847 and 1905 about his life in and around Hebron, Tolland County, Connecticut



A photo of Frederic Bissell and Almira alongside their Hebron house around 1895. An inscription on the photograph says one woman in the carriage is their granddaughter Alice Gertrude Bissell.

Frederic Bissell's third and fourth journal entries were endless weather reports, familiar farm activities and the comings and goings of family and friends. But they were also an account of life rapidly changing for the Bissells. Train and trolley travel became routine making it possible to go to new places. Towns modernized with the telephone and better telegraph so news traveled faster ("digging of telephone poles" October 1897). Coal-fired furnaces and stoves replaced wood ones, so no longer did people have to keep "wood lots" or cut and split wood frequently. Steam power supplanted water and wind to power mills and water vessels and; the "horseless carriage" debuted in Hebron as Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell drove up "to Mrs. Phelps with an Automobile in September 1903."

Both Almira and F.P. were still vigorously engaged in their livelihoods at ages 62 and 65, respectively. For F.P., that meant grueling days of farm life, while supervising an office for P.W. Turner at the mills, conducting his insurance agent business for

Tolland Fire Insurance Co. and “putting up” birds for customers of his taxidermy business. For Almira, that meant cooking and chores around the house, gardening, entertaining and taking care of Clarence and Sarah’s children, Helen and Alice. But as their lives drifted into the latter 1890’s such a pace started to take its toll. F.P. hired more farmhands and help around the house. He leased out some of his farmland. He hired craftsmen like the Simon Brothers to shingle his barn and do other tasks he previously would have undertaken himself. To stay active, he helped with all farm and church activities, but he turned more towards helping Almira grow flowers and show Chrysanthemums at local fairs, and make currant jams and fruit and vegetable preserves for the winter. Both accepted more aid from Clarence and Sarah and the girls, as they grew older.

Their health deteriorated particularly after 1895 when F.P. developed heart and lung problems and Almira rheumatism and digestive trouble. He and Almira “staid” from church more often, particularly during the winter months.

Adding to their worries were two poignant events marking this period. One was the death of his half-brother Levi in 1888, who had not visited from western New York for years. Levi was mentioned previously in his journals, but never before identified as his brother! The other was the suffering and death of their adopted daughter, Carrie Adelaide Brown Bissell Talcott at age 43 in 1900. About both events I will say more in this narrative.

Other family members and a friend died as well: Sarah’s uncle Zalmon Storrs (February 1890), Sarah’s mother Lucinda (April 1891), Almira’s brothers H. O. Carver (September 1891), Henry S. Carver (August 1893 in St. Paul), Lucien B. Carver (May 1899) and F.P.’s pal Mr. Champlin from New London (December 1898). Only long-time friend Joel Jones remained until their passing. Though life became a little lonelier without those people, they filled it with church work and pleasure.

Church, Social and Society

F.P. was no less an active caretaker of the church in 1880’s and 90’s, sometimes working on the stables, the cemetery, and lending a hand to younger men leading major repair to the church as he did in November 1895, documented on “time sheet” found in the journal:

works at and about Church
 in November
 3 about 3 hours .30
 4 I and Louis Phelps spent 6 hours
 each on the center pole on tower .60
 6 mixed joint & helped Henry Tennant put up
 ladder at Church 3 hours .30
 drew 2 to coal 6 hours .60
 7 drew 1 to coal 1.00
 went to Church twice to help Henry
 about painting 20
 9 went to Ch 1/2 hour AM. went to
 Adahnt Taffin to loan funds P.M.
 10 spent about 2 hours in morning with
 Henry Tennant & Geo Harris
 went to Liddle to buy for coal
 16 went to Church to draw Matrons
 about painting & mixed paint
 17 went to Taffin to see about a loan
 18 worked all day with Louis Phelps getting out
 pickets & putting rails for boundary fence
 19 made a lot of pickets for Church board
 25 1 day on picket fence
 27 Louis Phelps & myself on fence 2 hours

Bissell "time sheet" for work done at St. Peter's in November 1895

His work was often on the rectory to ready it for new ministers – shingling, repairing the porch, trimming trees and other minor repairs.

He remained a senior vestryman at St. Peter's with warden Mr. Townsend. The vestry met often at the Bissell homestead. He was their representative to talk with Bishops Williams or Brewster about calling new rectors.

Sometimes those rectors did not work out for long. F.P. related that the vestry called a Mr. Johnson in 1889 after longtime Rector Reverend Ellsworth left for Naugatuck. By September of 1892 something was amiss with Mr. Johnson's tenure. September 9, "went to Middletown to see the Bishop with Townsend"; October 2, "No service at church. We released Mr. Townsend from the Rectorship of St. Peter's Church last eve." Mr. Merrill followed him and shortly thereafter without explanation, Mr. Fitzgerald became Rector. Sometimes new pastors have a hard time following popular ones!

St. Peter's Church history reports a decline in attendance at the church late in the 19th century into the 20th that led to a partial repurposing of the church as a summer performing arts center run by associates of Wesleyan University in Middletown. The confirmation class sizes did decline as reported by Frederic P., but his accounts describe good-sized congregations in the 1890's for events at Christmas and Easter and "many strangers at church" in the summer perhaps showing that leisure vacationing became important to families, or as participants of the dramatic events.

Indeed F.P.'s entries show that Clarence, Sarah and family vacationed every August for two or more weeks on the Connecticut shore 40 miles south of Hebron - places like Ocean Beach, New London, the Blackpoint Niantic "encampment", Clinton Beach, CT, Pleasant or Pleasure Beach, Waterford and others further afield like Shelter Island, NY and Colebrook, N.H. These places became beach communities during the booming economy of these times.



Early 1900's picture postcards of Connecticut beach towns, which the Bissell family visited in the late 1880's and 90's when they became popular vacation destinations. Found on websites. See below also.

Frederic P. and Almira took a long vacation in August 1894 to Block Island, Groton and New London and again in September of 1895 to Ocean Beach, Groton and Shelter Island; another to Sag Harbor, Long Island in September 7, 1896 possibly to visit Almira's nieces Eliza Carver Fitch or Maggie Carver Thompson, first stopping at Seaside and Pleasure Beach, Waterford, CT for a few days. They took day excursions out of New London to Glen Island near New Rochelle several years and to Savon Rock, New Haven, CT in August 1897. Charles Babcock of Niantic was also someone with whom they visited at the "Niantic encampment" in the summer and the off-season - March and December of 1901.



Presently we have a beach house in Oak Grove Niantic nearby Crescent Beach.

As in the first two journals, St. Peter's Social Society provided much of the fellowship in which the Bissells participated – the annual August-September picnics to the nearby Columbia Reservoir, the occasional clam chowder dinners (September 1899) and lawn parties at the Rectory where in July of 1901, "the young people stage a play (for) 125 people".

Sometimes socializing mixed with charity work: October 30, 1890, "Gertie and Anna Perry gone to Hartford to attend the meeting of the Woman's Auxiliary Mission."

From my narratives of the previous Bissell years, the reader knows that F.P. often commented on the national news, significant weather events and local events that affected the community. I learned he was involved in the local Connecticut Humane Society adjudicating cases of child and animal cruelty. He had previously been the Probate Judge in town. In January 1893, he pens, "I looked over the Banning case of cruelty to children. Went to T'ville, hearing in the case of the Banning children, sent to County home." In October 1896, "Chandler Miller called on business of Conn. Humane Soc. in case of Wm. Swans children. Sent five children of Wm. Swan to County home. Carried Charlotte Swan to Depot. She is going to a family in Hartford." (William Swan is the "half-breed" mentioned years later below.) On December 20, 1898, "Investigated a case of cruelty to animals a Jew's horse." September 1, 1899, "Acting Judge Buell of Colchester committed Irene Palmer age 5 yrs. to County home." November 20, 1893, "Jeff Palmer accidentally shot dead", possibly a relation.

On August 30th, 1889, F.P. relates another tale of Mr. Swann; "Wm. Swann a half-blood Indian broke into E.J. Wilcox's 3 AM had a fight with Ephraim but got away, but we got him arrested before sunrise, had a hearing and bound over under \$700 bonds." October 23-24, 1892, "We had a darkey arrested this eve for breaking into the parsonage yesterday, Smith by name. Attended Court, State vs. Smith, he pleaded

guilty was bound over to the Superior Court under \$500 Bonds. November 7, 1892, "A tramp set my Sorghum Mill on fire. I took him to Sheriff Fillmore & he arrested him. (The) Justice bound-him-over under \$500 bonds, and sent him to Tolland, but little damage done." Wages at the time were in the neighborhood of \$1 a day, so the bond amount set was tantamount to incarceration without bail, an inequality in the news today.

That Judge Bissell felt it necessary to identify the ethnicity, religion or status of people in question illustrates something of the social attitudes at the time, probably openly discussed. The weather and war were also topics that I am sure animated conversation in parlors and shops around town.

The Great Blizzard

F.P. cited many events of the day but few greater than the Great Blizzard of 1888 and the Spanish American War of 1898. Writing on Sunday March 11, F.P. exclaims "Blizzard Commenced This Evening." Reporting March 12 through 16:

" Snowed all day, commenced about 7 last eve. There is probably 2 feet, the hardest storm I think I ever saw, thermometer at 34* in morning but fell steadily to 12* at 9 P.M. very blustery 2 P.M. since. 13th, "Snowed all day. I think there has fell 30 inches this storm. No mail. Not a team passed today. I tried to go up the street with cattle but could go no further than Ephraim's (E. J. Wilcox lived almost directly across from F.P. on Church St.)



Joel and Ephraim J. Wilcox House at 182 Church Street

March 14th, "Broke paths all day, the most snow I ever saw fall in 1 storm. 15th Broke paths all day, got through to Turnerville today, no train over the A.L.R.R. (Airline Railroad) since Monday morning. The train on the Colchester branch blocked at Turnerville Mon., but got through today - 75

men on the main track at Turnerville shoveling snow. Telegraph down, no communications. We have had no mail since Sat. night. The mail driver tried to get through but failed. Clifford Robinson married in Ch. this eve, all hands gone on ox sled. March 16th, Went to Turnerville, about 45 men, women, & children went on sleds. No mail through yet, got telegraph connections today, expect a train through tomorrow. A party gone to Post Hill to call on the bride and groom on an ox sled this Eve.”



An iconic photograph of New York City taken following the 1888 storm side by side with one of partially cleared train tracks near Norwalk, CT.

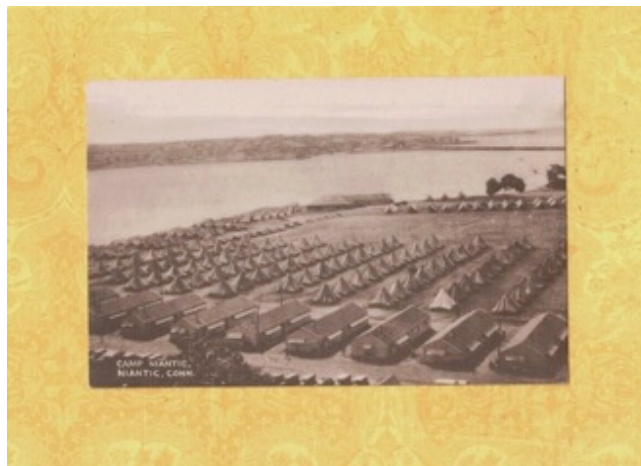
According to a Wikipedia entry: “The Great White Hurricane was one of the most severe recorded blizzards in American history. The storm paralyzed the East Coast from Chesapeake Bay to Maine as well as the Atlantic provinces of Canada. 58 inches of snow in some places and 400 fatalities.” Subsequently, F.P. estimated 36 inches in Hebron. The “teams” to which Frederic P. refers were teams of oxen from the farms around town that were sent out to tramp-down and plow the snow.

The Spanish-American War of 1898

You may recall from your textbooks that the sinking of the warship *USS Maine* in Havana, Cuba precipitated the war. It had been sent to protect American lives and property that were threatened by the anti-Spanish rioting in the city, part of a civil war that had been raging since 1895. The U.S. supported the rebels’ case for independence. In April 1898, after Spain announced an armistice and its intention to allow Cuba more self rule, President McKinley ordered the Spanish out of Cuba and Congress authorized battle. The ensuing war lasted four months and resulted in the sinking of Spanish fleets in Manila Bay, The Philippines and Santiago, Cuba. America became an imperial power annexing Spanish possessions and Theodore Roosevelt was catapulted into prominence for his “Rough Rider” charge up San Juan Hill. Soon, he would become McKinley’s Vice President in 1900 and succeed him in 1902 after McKinley was assassinated at the World’s Fair in Buffalo.

Judge Bissell seemed initially indifferent to the war but gradually became riveted to newspaper accounts. April 22 he writes, "partly pleasant. Mrs. Budding died on the 20th, funeral tomorrow. Clarence came tonight. War with Spain declared over Cuba." On the 29th, " Cloudy and some rain. The war does not seem to progress." But then May 2, "Cloudy, great news today, Americans victorious at Manilla (sic), several Spanish ships destroyed. May 3, "Cloudy and showery all day, did nothing but read war news, still lame." May 4, "Cloudy all day; went to Middletown. 1st Regiment (Hartford) went into Camp today at Niantic."

According to a Spanish-American War website (spanamwar.com) at least three Connecticut volunteer units were mustered at Camp Haven in Niantic, Connecticut and eventually deployed to Portland, Me., Fort Griswold in Groton and Camp Alger, Virginia to defend against remaining Spanish naval units. Some had orders to deploy overseas but the early engagements brought an end to the war and their demobilization just four months after its start. August 13th, F.P. writes, "Peace between U. States & Spain proclaimed."



Known as Camp Haven in 1898, this circa 1906 photo looks south along the Niantic River Estuary.

Politics

Judge Bissell was a life-long member of the Republican Party or its predecessors. He attended every town caucus, was an elector, a state senator, assemblyman and of course longtime probate judge. Clearly he followed politics. He noted every presidential election starting with Zachary Taylor in 1848 and probably others prior to starting his journal, though some did not rise to the level of his editorial comment.

His interest was evident though in the November 6, 1888 election: "Presidential Election. I went to Turnerville, staid until 12M to get returns. N. York, N. Jersey, Conn. gone for Cleveland, three doubtful states." Incumbent Democrat Grover Cleveland lost that election to Benjamin Harrison when in reality New York went for

Harrison. Four years later Cleveland regained the presidency beating Harrison handily - with no editorial comment from the Judge.

In 1896, Ohio Republican William McKinley was “elected by an overwhelming large majority”, says F.P. March 4th, “Maj. McKinley Inaugurated.” Trade and monetary policy were the key issues, the northern states wanting protective tariffs and the south and west wanting better prices for their products domestically and overseas. The collapse of the economy in 1893 had caused a recession that would last past the election and McKinley appealed to people who wanted change. McKinley was reelected in 1900 in a rematch with Democrat William Jennings Bryan with both foreign and domestic issues at the forefront. Jennings was anti-imperialist and favored a weaker dollar, but the strong economy won for McKinley.

When McKinley was assassinated in September 1901, Judge Bissell recorded the events:

September 6, “It is reported this eve that President McKinley was assassinated at Buffalo this P.M.”

September 7. “President McKinley said to be resting well this P.M.”

September 9, “President improving.”

September 13, F.P. writes solemnly, “President McKinley is dead, the fate of our country remains to be seen.”

Saturday September 14, “much public mourning expressed at the death of the President.”

The next day St. Peter’s held a memorial service with hymns, “Lead Kindly Light” and “Nearer My God to Thee”. It had been almost forty years since Lincoln’s assassination. I am sure that many were shocked by this kind of tragedy. Clearly, F.P. was “taken aback” to have written so much. On October 24th, 1901, friends “Hewitt and E.J. Wilcox got home from Buffalo.” They may have been attending the world exposition or Roosevelt’s inauguration on Delaware Avenue following the assassination.

When Theodore Roosevelt became president it consolidated America’s imperial gains in the war with Spain and commercial interests in Central America - the building of the Panama Canal being a major accomplishment. It also ushered in an era of progressive anti-big business politics – trust busting, and continuing union gains. F.P. refers to a coal strike that began in June of 1902 and ended that October because of the intervention of President Roosevelt and industrialist J.P. Morgan. November 25-26, “Bought a ton of coal of Elliot of Willimantic...Put up coal stove and started fire, been using wood through scarcity of coal on account of strike.”

The Coal strike of 1902 (also known as the anthracite coal strike) was a strike by the United Mine Workers of America in the anthracite coalfields of eastern Pennsylvania. Miners struck for higher wages, shorter workdays, and the recognition of their union. The strike threatened to shut down the winter fuel

supply to major American cities. At that time, residences were typically heated with anthracite or "hard" coal, which produces higher heat value and less smoke than "soft" or bituminous coal. The strike lasted four months, as the miners received a 10% wage increase and reduced workdays from ten to nine hours; the coal trust owners got a higher price for coal and did not recognize the trade union as a bargaining agent. It was the first labor dispute in which the U.S. federal government intervened as a neutral arbiter.



United Mine Workers President John Mitchell arriving in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania surrounded by strikebreakers.

In the 1904 election F.P. noted, "Roosevelt plurality, overwhelming beyond expectations." Indeed Roosevelt was not predicted to win but his superior organization, foreign policy achievements, firmness against monopolies and charismatic personality catapulted him to victory.



Republican Theodore Roosevelt pictured in 1904.

Fires, Deaths, Earthquakes, Crimes, Hurricanes, Strike and an Eclipse

Throughout F.P. Bissell's journals he wrote about tragic fires, deaths, crimes and natural events in Hebron & environs and elsewhere:

November 2, 1887 – "A terrible murder at Turnerville this morning. A man shot his wife and set his house on fire and smothered two children. (He) probably meant to have burned up house, wife, and children. Rum and cider did it." The next day he attended the Coroner's inquest in Turnerville.

June 9, 1890 – "Great fire in Colchester this morning."

September 25, 1891 – "P.W. Turner's safe blown open last night and about \$100 cash and stamps taken."

July 5, 1894 – "Cars blocked by fire at N.H. (New Haven) old depot."

February 11, 1896 – "C.H. Rogers' son committed suicide yesterday. His mother died Sunday and he mourned 'til insane, hence suicide." Charles Carroll Rogers, age 26.

July 8, 1896 – Native daughter, "Miss Mary Olive Emmons of Boston died today" at 32. She wrote "Moods And Whims" published in 1892.

For the glad Springtime is coming, creeping slowly, slowly on,
And the little birds are singing,
And the wee green birds are springing,
And the sweet words soft are winging."

A February 1, 1897 entry F.P. says, "Put a memorial cross in the church in memory of Mary Olive Emmons, a very nice one." (I wonder if it is still there?)

October 12, 1896 – "A gale from N.E., much damage done to shipping." At this time "hurricanes" were gales. The storm had its origins in the Gulf, crossing Florida and traveling up the east coast out to sea off Halifax.

September 2, 1888 – "Fire in the east last eve was in Windham barn and 11 cows burned."

May 10, 1899 – "Quite an earthquake shock at 6:15 this eve."

June 26, 1899 - "Earthquake shock at 7:10 pm quite a shock."

None of these is listed in my search of historic eastern earthquakes.

May 28, 1900 – "Great eclipse of the sun but poor day to see it, a short time it was to be seen fairly well." According to Wikipedia research the eclipse was nearly total in

the Northeast, the “darkness” arc sweeping up into the Maritime Provinces of Canada.

November 30, 1900 – “Chauncey Little crushed by a log falling on him.”

August 18, 1901 – “P.W. Turner’s boarding house burned this morning 2 o’clock, one man at least burned.”

February 3, 1902 – “A mean day, windy and chilly, great Fire in Waterbury.” From accounts at the time, the whole of downtown was destroyed causing \$2 million in damage, a huge sum at that time. The fire started in the upholstery showroom of Reed & Hughes, a dry goods company on Bank Street. High winds quickly spread the fire throughout the town.

April 16, 1903 – “Launching of the great steamer in New London.” This would be the *Minnesota* built by the Eastern Ship Building Company and launched by the Great Northern Steamship Company, then the largest vessel in the world.

February 8, 1904 - “Great Fire in Baltimore.” More than 1500 buildings burned to the ground over 140 acres in central Baltimore causing over \$100 million in damage. It was reminiscent of the great Boston fire F.P. penned about in 1872.

February 15, 1904 “St. James Glastonbury burned yesterday morning.

November 1, 1904 – “Old elm cut, gale injured it, planted in 1763 by David Barber, tavern keeper.” The grand elm had been at the center of Hebron town long a symbol of town pride.

Bissell Farm Life in the Latter Part of the 19th Century

In his third and fourth journals, 1887 - 1905 F.P. recorded the familiar cycle of planting, cultivating and harvest, pasturing, calving and butchering, canning and milling. He devoted a lot of space to apples in August through October. It seems that apples became F.P. and Almira’s chief cash crop probably because the apple trees they had planted earlier matured. Having walked the Bissell property the summer of 2020, ancient apple and other fruit trees are evident still between the fields. Of course they are too old to bear fruit today.

They grew Golden Sweets, Cheesebrook Russets and Pippins, barreled them and sold them locally to cider mills and canneries. December 4, 1887, “I have sold 140 bbls of winter fruit. December 12, “got my last apples to the Depot, sold about 120 bbls of apples this fall.” October 7, 1893, “sold all my fall and winter fruit to Lewen of Willimantic, 40ct per bushel for all through”. November 7, 1889, “Carried 10 bbls apples to Depot for S.B. Balkan, Hyde Park, Massachusetts. November 10, 1899, “Picked over 32 bushels of apples to carry to canning factory in Colchester cannery.” August ?, “consigned 6 bbls of Golden Sweets to Geo. Hawes and Sons, 11 (bushels)

later went to Providence to market apples." A bushel barrel of apples weighed almost 50 pounds!

F.P. identifies Button's cider mill as one to which he brought apples, but he writes about others that were numerous throughout the area. Richard Symonds's extensive exploration of water-powered mills is found in the Hebron Historical Society's publication of his "Lost Mill Sites in Hebron, Connecticut." F.P. identifies a number of saw, shingle, grist, and cider mills; some were steam powered by now as F.P. writes on March 13, 1889, "Went to the steam sawmill in morning" – unspecified name or location. Here are some mills he identifies all unspecified locations:

Holbrook's Sawmill – May 23, 1887 – off Rt. 85 just north of Hebron Center
Mill on Spafford's (or Spafard's) Lot – February 11-12, 1889 – It may have been the steam-powered mill just over the line in Lebanon. Spafard had bought a farm in Hebron in 1888, according to a J. W. Beers publication in 1903.
D. B. Strong's Mill – July 25, 1890 – Strong now living in the Packwoodville section of Colchester
Button's Mill – grist, saw and cider – May 12, 1887, November 17, 1899, February 11, 1901, October 5-7, 1901 –in the Hope Valley section of Hebron
Ryan's Sawmill – July 16, 1903

November 18, 1898 – After mentioning he was clearing out or fixing up his sorghum mill the previous month F.P. writes, "Drew traps from Sorghum Mill. I have sold it!" It was located at the corner of Church Street and Kinney Road. It was active in the 1860's through the 1880's when he grew sorghum and milled it for its sugary syrup and animal fodder. Since we have no record of the sale, and the property on which the mill sat was not sold, we can only assume that F.P. or the buyer arranged to have it dismantled and moved.

My previous narratives have accounted for a bountiful assortment of garden vegetables, fruits, flowers and grains. Perhaps duplicating a few, the following shows the richness of Bissell farm produce: apples, quinces, peaches, pears, walnuts, whortleberries, strawberries, pumpkins, Hubbard squash, beets, potatoes, parsnips, sweet corn, cabbage, lettuce, pole beans, watermelon, cantaloupes, citrons, cucumbers, tomatoes and wild carrots. Wine: October 10-11, 1887, "pressed wine", "put up 20 gallons of wine." Maple syrup: March 29, 1889, he "boiled down sap, it run finely today."

F.P. Bissell produced more "mystery" words used to describe farm operations but most lost on us today:

Horsrake – iron wheeled implement pulled behind a horse to gather hay into rows
Hubbard's Hay Tedder – type of forked machine used to aerate freshly cut hay
Cradling oats – scythe that sets the stalks down orderly
Grist – the grain that is milled

Hominy – dried corn soaked in sodium hydroxide then dried to use as grist for flour.

Provender – a type of grist for animal fodder

Windfall (of apples) – hence the common reference to an unusual, unexpected bounty. Apples would fall to the ground due to high winds. The bruised fruit would be used for cider.

Jack Clip – fastener to the scythe

Hoop Poles - Hoop poles were long, straight rods, cut in the woods from ash, hickory, hazel, and white oak saplings. The poles were used around the farm for many tasks such as rollers for moving heavy loads and for temporary floors under haystacks. They were also split to make barrel hoops and basket-weaving material; the poles were hammered to flatten them, soaked in water, and then split into the hoops that held the barrel staves together.

Whiffletree - a crossbar, pivoted at the middle, to which the traces of a harness are fastened for pulling a cart, carriage, plow, etc.

Neap - believed to be the dashboard on a carriage

Cowslip – a variety of primrose. “Mr. Wilcox and I went cowslipping.” – A medicinal plant used for nose throat and bronchial inflammations, also for cramps, spasms and rheumatoid arthritis. Almira Bissell had a severe case of rheumatism so he may have been seeking relief for his wife.

Daboll 's Almanack – November 24, 1894, “today is Almanack Day for the winter so says Daboll’s Almanack.” Nathan Daboll was an early 19th century New London author of arithmetic guides for teachers and may have lent his name to what was undoubtedly a farmer’s almanac.

Candlemas Day – an ancient Christian tradition representing by some the presentation of Jesus to the temple and by others the purification of the Virgin Mary. The holiday was made secular over time turning it into Ground Hog Day, February 2. Candlemas was celebrated at St. Peter’s, as F.P. would note on the day in the 1880’s and 90’s.

Decoration Day – celebrated after the Civil War, later to be called Memorial Day

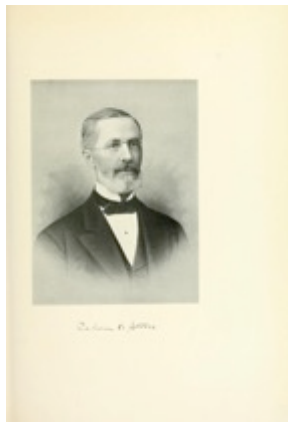
Arbor Day – Hebron celebrated it May 4, 1888 according to F.P. Originally it became a holiday in Nebraska in 1872 at the urging of J. Sterling Morton who missed the trees of his native Michigan. One million trees were planted that year and the idea caught on in other states. F.P. planted evergreens around St. Peter’s Church.

Melodeon – a double register foot pump organ that could be folded and transported. The melodeon to which F.P. makes reference was used for Sunday school. It is probably the very same organ now in our family’s possession!

Family and Friends

As with the first and second journals, the third and fourth journals reveal the usual compliment of Bissell family visitors and local friends and relatives. But F.P.’s generation was fading. Neighbor Joel Wilcox died in 1891 at 76. D.B. Strong from whom Ira bought and to whom F.P. sold the sawmill in the 50’s died in 1894 at 70 in “Packwoodville” Colchester, leaving his wife Emily Foote. Longtime friend William Champlin died in 1898 at 86, his wife Ruth predeceasing him in 1881 of malaria. All

of Almira Carver's brothers died and Sarah's mother Lucinda Gilbert passed in 1891. Uncle Zalmon Storrs namesake of her grandfather died in Hartford, 1890 at 76.



Uncle Zalmon Storrs, namesake of Sarah Gertrude Storrs's grandfather.

F. Clarence's generation became more prominent in F.P.'s entries – people such as Maggie Thompson and Eliza Fitch who were daughters of Almira's brother H.O. Carver; Carrie and husband George Talcott and of course Clarence, Gertie and the "girls" Alice and Helen. An unknown relation John C. Bissell of Cleveland Ohio visited in August 1893 and October of 1899. An H. A. Alverson of San Bernardino County, California a contemporary of Clarence's born in New Haven, Connecticut sent F.P. 22 Cereus Cacti, which on September 2, 1901 bloomed in the night!

We can't tell exactly from F.P.'s writings exactly what Clarence was doing for a living after he stopped being active on the farm with F.P. We know he was the church organist and a vestryman at St. Peter's. He may have been involved with finance. Several entries talk about "pension papers" on which Clarence was working. There is some evidence that he was working for P.W. Turner. He went to Chicago March 19-25, 1889 on business. On March 30 1891 he traveled "to N.Y. State on business for P.W. Turner." This trip was a few months after the legal fight that the town and P.W. had over the beneficial use of the North Pond, a favorite picnic and fishing spot for the town. Turner wanted to close it off to the public. F.P. records being in court in December 1890 and January with 30-50 others in January. January 10, 1891 he traveled "N. Pond with commissioners and lawyers." P.W. Turner won the fight but it must have been very uncomfortable for F.P. who was employed at Turner's mill in Turnerville and for Clarence who may have also been employed by him.

Clarence found a job in Willimantic at the end of 1891 at what may have been a business in which Turner had an interest, the Natchaug Silk Company. (See the price list below. See also the notes F.P. made on the reverse side about his work at St. Peter's for which he was being paid 10 cents an hour!) After he moved his family to Willimantic, all four became frequent visitors back to Hebron with the "girls" spending many summers playing about the house and on the farm. Where he had

been living in Hebron remains a bit of a mystery, which I will leave for a final “post scripts” narrative.

As Alice and Helen became older and more independent, they traveled frequently on the 9:17 am, 11:44, 2:20 pm or 5:20 train from Willimantic and returning on the 4:30 pm, 7:45 or 8:40, F.P. taking them to or meeting them at the Depot and recording the times in his journal!

Alice was confirmed at St. Peter’s April 22, 1894 at 16 with a whole list of kids in F.P.’s journal entry, Bishop Williams declaring the kids “a very interesting class”! The next year June 28, Alice was said to have “gone to Colchester to class day and reception” which makes me think it may have been a graduation or conclusion of the school year. Prestigious Bacon Academy was the secondary school in nearby Colchester and one of the few open to women, but I have not been able to confirm that any of the Bissells went there. It remains today as their local public high school. So we can speculate that despite moving to Willimantic Helen and Alice continued to attend church and school in the area.

As Alice and Helen came of marriage age in their early 20’s, each would bring suitors around for tea or dinner to the Bissell farmstead or to accompany them to a whist club game at the church hall or some other social event – C. Louie Phelps, Mr. Branch, Mr. Spring, George Elliot and others unnamed. “Alice, Helen, Mr. Phelps and Branch are here, took dinner with Mrs. Phelps”, March 20, 1904. Apparently none of the suitors stuck! Alice would never marry becoming a schoolteacher living on North Street in Willimantic. Both Helen and Alice would move to Hartford after their father Clarence became Chief Clerk in 1905 and the next year Deputy Comptroller in the state government, the family living at 375 Laurel Street. Helen would marry my grandfather William J. Carroll an immigrant from Liverpool and live in Hartford at 5 Regent Street across from Alice.



The photograph on the left is of Clarence and Sarah “Gertie” Gertrude Storrs Bissell and their grandchildren John (Jack) Bissell (r) and Helen (Polly) Margaret Carroll (l). Judging from their ages, it was taken in 1923 in the backyard of their parents’ home at 5 Regent Street in Hartford. Their

parents were William Carroll and Helen Mansfield Bissell Carroll shown in the photograph on the right with infant Alice Storrs Carroll and my mother Polly, taken in 1921 at Clarence and Sarah's home 375 Laurel Street.

So too F.P.'s daughter Carrie's life changed as careers and interests blossomed. She and her husband George lived in Rockville, building a house there after their marriage, close to George's Talcott family who operated mills for which a section was called Talcottville. She was also close by cousins Eliza Fitch and Mrs. Fred "Maggie" Thompson. George's business responsibilities grew in the 1880's, and soon they were off to Boston and later Flushing Queens, New York. F.P.'s entries record the dates when Carrie would come for the summer and go back to Boston or New York in October; George visited and vacationed in the summer when he could. I have been unable to confirm George's businesses in Boston or Flushing.

Brother Levi

In Frederic Phelps Bissell's first two journals Bissell relatives would arrive for extended stays and likewise F.P. and his father Ira would head "West" for long stays. For most of the visiting relatives, I could not tell from whence they came or their exact relation. From cemetery records and local histories, I discovered that some of Ira's brothers Alexander, Levi and Aaron and one sister Hannah moved to Genesee County in western New York in the first decade of the 19th century, Abel in 1848.

So it was easy to conclude that the Levi and Aaron to whom FP referred as visiting in September of 1853 were his uncles. But I overlooked the fact that Levi Bissell had died in 1847. So who was this other Levi?

Surprise, surprise! In F.P.'s third journal, Sunday, September 23, 1888, he writes plainly, "My brother Levi died this morning in Le Roy, NY." Then on Wednesday, October 10 he pens further explanation, "got back from western N.Y. got a telegram Sept. 24th that my Brother Levi was dead and we left here at 2 PM same day and returned today, had unpleasant weather all the time and wife & myself had colds all the time, sick in bed some. Left T'ville 3 P.M. arrived at Le Roy about 8 AM next morning."

Brother? F.P. never mentioned a brother! Who was Levi and what was he doing in western New York?

Research showed that Levi was Judge Bissell's half brother! Ira had been married to Acenith Mann prior to Levinia Phelps. Acenith had died in 1820 at age 32 not long after Levi was born in 1818. The 1890 publication: "Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, New York. Edited by F.W. Beers" describes the relation:

"Levi Bissell was born in Hebron, Tolland County, Conn., April 12, 1819, and was a son of Ira and Aseneth (sic?)(Mann) Bissell, natives of Hebron, Conn. Ira Bissell, son of Levi, was a leading and prominent farmer of Connecticut.

He served in the State Senate, as did also his son and grandson, and in the Assembly. He reared two sons and two daughters. Levi Bissell, the subject of this sketch, came to Bergen, where he purchased 167 acres of land, which his widow now owns. In May 1868, he moved to Le Roy, where he resided until his death. He married Bellona A. Anderson, daughter of Seneca and Lucy (Webb) Anderson, who were born respectively July 17, 1798, and February 12, 1804, in Massachusetts. Levi Bissell and his wife (Bellona Anderson) had one daughter (Emma Adell Bissell), who died at the age of 22. They have an adopted daughter, Bell Bissell."

It's easy to conclude that at some point prior to 1847 when F.P. started his journal, brother Levi moved to Bergen to where the elder Bissell uncles and an aunt had moved and Levi migrated eventually to Le Roy New York a bit further southwest in Genesee County. F.P. first writes about Levi February 17, 1851 saying, "had a letter from Levi Bissell Sat." In September 1853, Levi came to visit with Aaron Mann Bissell and their wives Bellona and Avis, Aaron being son of F.P.'s uncle Aaron. Levi came regularly for visits in 1862, 1865, 1867, 1869 and 1870 sometimes with others of the Genesee Bissells. Ira and Frederic "went west" also. I will have more to say about the Western Bissells in another narrative. Some are documented in the late 19th century Gazetteer publication.

F.P. must have kept in touch with Levi's widow Bellona writing to her February 13, 1902. Bellona had been the name of the town to which the Anderson's had moved before it was renamed Le Roy.

The Aaron that accompanied Levi to Hebron with wives in 1853 was probably a contemporary Aaron Mann Bissell, son of Uncle Aaron.

Carrie Adelaide [Brown] (Bissell) Talcott

It was a happy time for the Bissells when the Talcotts, Clarence, Sarah and their children were visiting and filling their lives with such joy. But that joy would soon turn to worry about Carrie Bissell Talcott's health. Judge Bissell writes July 10, 1900, "Carrie come home tonight" from Flushing. Two days later he explained that she went to Hartford. On August 31 he noted that "Carrie (was) quite unwell." The next day Dr. Wilcox came for Carrie and George arrived. September 3 he says hopefully, "Carrie some better, (but) not able to sit up." This was the pattern for the next several months:

September 4, "Carrie some better, Dr. come over. George went back to New York (on the) 7:52.

September 5, "Carrie some better."

September 6, "Carrie came down stairs today."

September 7 -8, "Dr. Wilcox came to see Carrie."

September 11, "Dr. Wilcox came to see Carrie. She is not much better."

George and Dr. Wilcox would come and go regularly throughout the rest of September, October and November, Dr. Wilcox visiting no fewer than 15 times arriving by train. A Dr. Clapp accompanied Wilcox on October 11, F.P. reporting, "Clapp's expenses were \$75.00!" an enormous sum in the day, roughly two months wages.

November 30, "George still here. Dr. Wilcox (is) here today. Carrie no better."

December 6, "Carrie no better"

December 7, "Carrie very low. Dr. Wilcox here." "Low" indicating gravely ill in F.P.'s journals.

December 9, "Carrie very low."

December 10, "Carrie died at 1 o'clock P.M. aged 43 years."

George would go home to New York on the 11th and return for the funeral of "Mrs. Talcott...at noon, "friends (and relatives) all here at church." "Mrs. Fitch and Mrs. Cowles." Nurse "Mrs. Smith went home" on the 15th with Judge Bissell paying her \$76 for her services. June 14, 1902 "Mr. Ebzold set a stone at the head of Carrie's grave." After that last entry about Carrie, she and George were never mentioned again. Life would go on about the Bissell farm.

Frederic and Almira had adopted Carrie when she was two-years old. Town records show that she was the daughter of Watson and Lydia Perkins Brown. Frederic was the guardian of Carrie Brown and her brother Everett following their parents' death or abandonment – still a mystery.

I reviewed F.P.'s first journal to see if I could learn more about Carrie's parents and brother and I found the entries below. It tells me that Carrie's father was living in town when Carrie first came to live with the Bissells February 5, 1861 at age 2. Carrie was baptized August 3, 1862.

August 20, 1861, "Went to Watson Brown's in fore noon."

April 17, 1862, "Watson Brown buried today."

February 19, 1864, "Went to Mansfield after Everett Brown"

February 23, 1864, " Carried Everett Brown to Hartford."

August 18, 1864, "Went to Mansfield, brought Everett Brown to R. A. Thompson."

February 10, 1865, "Deeded Brown place to Sarah Thompson."

December 1, 1866, " Went to Liberty Hill after Everett Brown." 3, Carried Everett to Hartford."



Carrie's headstone is in St. Peter's Cemetery. George died some years later and is buried in Rockville.

Lydia Brown may have predeceased Carrie and father Watson did not have the health or wherewithal to care for his children. We know from the deed that sold the Watson Brown property to Sarah Thompson, that F.P. was also guardian of Carrie's brother Everett. Judging from the entries above, F.P. may have had some difficulty finding a home for Everett. Perhaps Everett was attending a boarding school in Mansfield or Hartford. After 1866, none of F.P.'s journal entries mentions Everett until possibly shortly before his death in 1905 when F.P. refers to an Everett Thompson helping around the house.

According to town records, Carrie's cause of death was "Pulmonary Tuberculosis", commonly referred to as "consumption" or the "White Plague." In 1882, Robert Koch, a Prussian physician, discovered that the Mycobacterium was the cause of the disease. It's observed highly contagious nature and lingering time until death or recovery eventually led to the sanitarium movement, a method to separate the sick from the general population as well as healthy open air. Such sanitariums continued housing the ill through the 1950's. I recall one such place in Westfield, New Jersey where I once lived.

Frederic and Almira Bissell's Later Years and Failing Health

Judge Bissell was often ailing with one thing or another often for a week or more during his lifetime. He and Almira led hard lives as farmers and were constantly exposed to diseases that today would be easily treated or for which vaccines are

available – typhoid, smallpox, mumps, measles, chicken pox, scarlet fever, diabetes, viral pneumonia and influenza. There was little treatment for heart and lung ailments, rheumatism or various cancers. F.P.'s sister, Mary Adelaide Bissell had died young, as did Carrie and Levi. (Below see the memorial window in St. Peter's Church.) F.P. had almost died in 1873 after being sidelined for three months with a lung "hemorrhaging" disease.

January 16, 1896 his health took a turn that would signal a long decline: "Had more pain across my chest at times today" – angina? Throughout January he complained about not feeling well then saying "I'm feeling some better today" a few days later.

February 9, 1897 F.P. started a pattern of longer illnesses, "Poorly, bad cough, have not been well since December 20th last." He recovered enough to have the vestry over February 22, "Townsend, Gilbert, H.A. Bissell (Alfred), C.L. Phelps & Will Warner all called today to talk about calling Fitzgerald as Rector." On May 2 and 3 the Bissells celebrated the "50th anniversary of our marriage, a good number of friends called and all seemed to enjoy themselves." He listed Gertie, Alice, Emily Cone and Mrs. Fitch. Later that year he had colds in October and December saying December 20, "I have been quite poorly for several days." By January 9, 1898, F.P. was back at church with "Mrs. B" and January 17-21 well enough to labor, "worked on the floor to the back veranda, sawed out slats for walk in front of s (outh) part; finished back veranda, trued up grind stone; made bar parts in shop and; commenced papering hall to s. part." F.P. still had a lot of stamina.

His health and Almira's held together very well from 1898 through most of 1901 with little complaint. November 4, 1898, he reported proudly "our choir went to South Manchester last evening to attend the Harvest Festival at St. Mary's Church." In 1899 he participated in summer haying and fall apple picking and he and Almira attended a September clam chowder dinner at church. In January 1900 F.P. cut a pear tree on the south house lot, but "tripped and fell on a peach basket" and hurt his throat. In April 1900 Judge Bissell worked on an estate of a Mr. Shoemaker, "got a deed for release of the Whipple bond on property located in Chalk Level, Missouri and "went to Willimantic to deliver quit claim deed to parties in Missouri at 1st National Bank." Of course Carrie's death in December of 1900 laid them low.

As time went on, F.P. spent more time working their gardens and less time with the harder work of field labor and big projects about the house. Hired hands Mr. Watrous, Porter and Frank Raymond did much of the hoeing, hilling, mowing and harvesting though he says July 30, 1901 "Louis Tennant and myself got in 2 loads of hay." After putting "micas in the stove" and "placing it"; taking down the staging chimney to the Rectory and; finishing packing the apples the latter part of October, he says, "Not able to be out much, fainting and palpitations of the heart trouble."

Though not feeling well periodically over the next several months, life continued happily at times, "Christmas, Clarence and family, Mrs. Harriet Bissell (who had moved into the southern part of the home), Oliver Hull our boy (helping around the

house and farm) here at supper. Alice and Helen had a Christmas tree here this morning, a very nice affair in remembrance of old times." January 20, 1902 he reports, "I had a poor day of it, trouble about breathing." In April his back was bothering him as he chored around the house and gardens though not feeling well. He says, "I am feeling poorly these days" in May, staying from church. August 2 he says "I have not been in the hayfields for a week." He has a sore foot September through November. His former farmhand "C. Adelbert Porter of Highland Park, So. Manchester died Sunday night" October 26 1902.

In November 1902, "Mrs. Bissell not well as usual" "Had Dr. Wilcox come to see Mrs. Bissell." Mrs. Smith come (sic) to take care of Mrs. Bissell." "Clarence come over 5:20, I think some symptoms indicate that Mrs. Bissell will be better soon." Though Mrs. Smith would not go home until Christmas Eve, Almira continued not to feel her best into the next year. In March 1903, F.P. had the "grip" for a week, which required Dr. Wilcox to come over a couple of times. Mid- April, Almira has "inflammatory rheumatism", Mrs. Smith and Dr. Wilcox again caring for her. In May Mrs. Smith went home. For nearly the balance of 1903 both Almira and Judge Bissell were feeling better, the warm weather perhaps helping matters. October 3, "Very pleasant, spent the day at Clarence with Mrs. Bissell, the girls and myself went down and back to Baltic on the trolley."



The Baltic terminus of the trolley from Willimantic

This pattern of ill health and recovery repeated over the next two years with F.P. having long illnesses in November 1903 and September 1904. Clarence, the girls

and Dr. Wilcox came often and F.P. was less active around the house and farm. December 7, 1903, "Sherwood Raymond came to do my chores. Mr. Noise (sic) has been doing them for a few weeks; he is the best can be." December 14, "Poorly today, did not sit up much, heart and head troubled me." May 1, 1904, Mrs. B and myself went to church for the first time since last October, 7 mos. this Sunday." June 21, 1904, "I have had a poor day of it, short of breath." He writes November 6, 1904, "I and Mrs. B went to church a while today, the first time I have been in weeks."

Mid-March 1905, Clarence and family are calling nearly every day and F.P. is especially unwell, "I'm not feeling first rate." "Mrs. Bissell very sick with one of her bilious turns." "Mrs. Wilcox and Fitch up with her nearly all night." Everett Thompson (quite possibly Carrie's brother) helped around the house and garden in May and June. On July 3-4, Frederic P reports, "Gertie came this noon and Clarence to night, all here." "Never was there a pleasanter 4th." It was to be their last together as a family.

July 7th - "Foggy in the morning but cleared and warm. I'm not as well as usual."

July 14th - "I'm sitting up some today, not been able to set up much for one week"

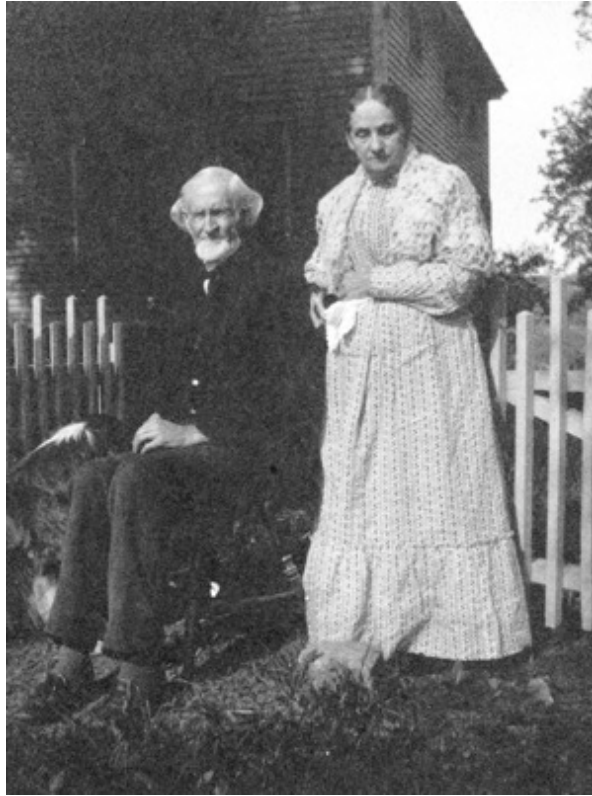
July 25th - "Got a ripe pear from my tree."

These were to be his final entries in his fourth journal. Probably Clarence or Gertie penned these words on the last entry page of the fourth journal:

"Frederic P. Bissell died
September 22, 1905

Almira J. Bissell died
October 10, 1907"

F.P.'s death certificate lists "Old Age/General Asthma as the cause of death and Almira's "Senility/Rheumatism". F.P. probably died of congestive heart failure as his father Ira had 35 years earlier at the same age 83.



Frederick Phelps Bissell and Almira Jane Carver Bissell.

According to a note on the photograph, it was taken by Mrs. Robert Cone in Hebron CT on May 23, 1905. F.P. notes May 23, "R.R. Cone and wife here." Probably Robert R. and Edna Kenney Cone of East Haddam. They were undoubtedly related to Emily Carver Cone, sister or cousin of Almira and Zachariah Cone who sold the farmland to Ira Bissell in 1839. . Robert and his wife Edna Cone below:



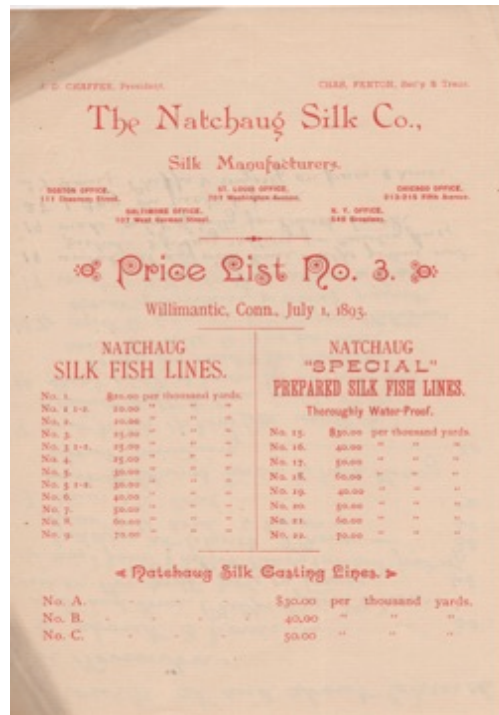
Epilogue

Now the Deputy State Comptroller living in Hartford, F. Clarence Bissell and family would return to Hebron in 1908 for the bicentennial celebration of the town. Clarence would deliver an address about the early history of Hebron and compile and publish a hard-cover book about the celebration titled, "*Hebron, Connecticut Bicentennial, August 23^d to 25th, 1908: An Account of the Celebration of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town: 1708 – 1908.*" The family

must have used the farmstead as a retreat before selling half of the property to the Swedish immigrant family the Hildings in 1914, who became a prominent farm family in town as documented on the Hebron Historical Society website. Sarah “Gertie” Bissell died in 1924 at age 74 in Hartford and F. Clarence seven years later in 1931 at age 83, also in Hartford.

Daughter Helen Mansfield Bissell the only one to marry and have children – Jack, Helen Margaret and Alice and the only surviving members of the Ira and Levinia Phelps Bissell line subsequently produced a blizzard of descendants scattered all over the world from Alaska to Wales at this writing. See the family tree in the first and second journal narratives! I reside with my wife, Sara and my daughter Marjorie in Brooklyn, New York and I have a daughter Beth who with her husband Kahlil and children Rosalia and Mateo, live in Olympia, Washington.

In a subsequent “post script” narrative I will explore the history of the Western Bissells; give some details about the Hebron Strong and Carver families to which the Bissells were related; and elaborate on where Ira, F. Phelps and F. Clarence and families lived on the Bissell farm, subjects too lengthy for this narrative.



I found a price sheet of the Natchaug Silk Company, Willimantic sandwiched between the journal pages of October and November 1895. F. Clarence Bissell worked there from 1892 until 1905 when he became a state official in Hartford, moving to 375 Laurel Street.



Mary Adelaide Bissell's memorial window is in St. Peter's Church, Hebron. Frederic writes April 19, 1892, "My sister Adelaide if living would have been 60-years old."



An undated photograph of F. Clarence Bissell



Memorial window for Frederic and Almira in St. Peter's Church, Hebron alongside James Townsend, F.P.'s friend and St. Peter's warden.

A number of early 1900's postcard photos of Hebron follow:



Old postcard image of Turnerville around 1900



Circa 1906 postcard photograph probably taken at the center of town. The Bissell farm was a half-mile down Church Street on the left.



Circa 1906 postcard photograph taken looking north past St. Peter's Church on the left. Note the "whitewashed" brick walls the remnants of which can be seen today.



A 1908 postcard photograph of Center School, now the American Legion Post 95, decked out for the bicentennial celebration of Hebron in which F. Clarence Bissell participated.

Below an 1893 map of the "South Part" of Tolland County

