

## Biography of Winthrop S. Porter

Written by Beatrice Porter 1938

On a cold winter night in December 1894 a dark haired son was born to Annie Eliza Strong and Henry Clinton Porter of Hebron Connecticut. This was the fourth child in the family. He was born in the Porter homestead, a house which now stands on the site of the old Fuller Tavern. It was built to resemble the original house where the stage coach used to stop every day on its way from New London to Hartford. This property has been in the Porter family for over two hundred years.

Doctor Cyrus Pendleton, the residing physician and family doctor of Hebron at the time welcomed him to this world at a cost of only five dollars.

The parents of this baby could not decide on a name for him so relatives and members of the family put names in a hat. Finally the name of Winthrop was decided for his first name. He was given Strong for a middle name, which was after his grandfather Charles Benjamin Strong, whose family came from Taunton England and who were the founders of Dorchester and Taunton Massachusetts. One of his ancestors John Strong came over on the boat called "Maryand John" and first settled in Dorchester Massachusetts. Later he moved and settled in Windsor Connecticut after founding Taunton Massachusetts.

His grandfather Charles Benjamin Strong was born in Colchester Connecticut and was a member of the Colchester Congregational Church. After his marriage he lived in Exeter Connecticut and was a very prosperous farmer.

His father, Henry Clinton Porter was also a farmer. He was a member of the Hebron Congregational Church, a member and

one of the original starters of Hebron Grange, active in dramatics and at one time Town Clerk. The Town Clerk's office was in his home at Hebron Center. He also held many other offices of the Town, being Justice of the Peace at the time of his death.

Winthrop was educated in the schools of Hebron and Exeter. He was a very earnest and sincere lad, doing his best in work or play. The games he likes best when a boy were baseball and duck on the rock. Once when playing duck on the rock with his brother Robert and sisters Bessie and Ethel he got cut on the lip by a stone. His grandfather Porter who lived a short distance was a Homeopathic Doctor, and he took two or three stitches in his lip with a common needle and thread. Winthrop stool there with his sister beside him considerably frightened but not saying a word. He was about ten years old when this accident occurred and he carries the scar to this day.

He also walked in his sleep. One night his mother heard a noise in their sitting room. She got up to see what the noise was and found Winthrop crawling on his knees around the room in his sleep, picking at the chairs. She asked him what he was doing. He said he was picking huckleberries. His mother smiled and she asked him if he hadn't better wait until morning. He replied, "It is pretty good picking here."

He spent the greater part of his boyhood days with his grandfather and grandmother Strong in Exeter, going there when he was about nine years old and staying until he was fourteen. Every morning and night he did the chores, which consisted of bringing in the wood, milking the cows and feeding the chickens. He missed his brothers and sisters a great deal as he did not have any one to play with and looked forward to going home for a visit or having his folks

his folks come to see him. For about a year when it was hard for his grandmother to get around he had to get breakfast which consisted of boiled potatoes, fried pork and johnny cake. His grandfather gave him a calf which he raised. When he was fourteen he went back to Hebron to stay taking his heifer with him. Later he sold the heifer and bought his **f**irst horse with the money.

After coming back to Hebron he went to school for a while but he had seven brothers and sisters now and as his father was not very well he felt he was needed to ~~support~~ help support the family. Upon leaving school he drove team for his father, rising early in the morning and working until late at night. He also set incubators, hatching chickens to sell so as to earn a little extra money..

When Winthrop was nineteen his Uncle Roger who owned and operated a saw mill in New York state offered him a job agreeing to pay him ten dollars a week besides his board. This looked very big to him so he left home again. A short time after his brother Robert also came to New York State and joined him in the saw mill work. They worked for their uncle during that winter and the following Spring they bought the mill as their uncle came back to Connecticut and started a grain business in Amston which he continued until he sold to Ira Turshin the present owner. It is now known as Amston Grain Mill.

Winthrop continued in the saw mill business with his brother moving from place to place until the time of the World War. Robert bought a Model T Ford and the ~~trips~~ trips home for holidays and vacation were made in it. He was quite proud of his car as not many of the boys were lucky enough to own one at the time.

Before entering the services of the World War Winthrop was

married to Ethel Louisa Hills of Gilead. He had first met her and attended school with her at Hebron. She is the daughter of Annie A. and Wilbur N. Hills of Gilead, also of English ancestry. Mr. Hills is an honest hard working man, one of the largest dairy farmers in the town.

After their marriage they kept house for a short time near Newburgh New York before Winthrop was called into the service. After passing examination at Rockville Connecticut in October 1917 he was sent to Camp Devens, Massachusetts. He remained there for about two weeks and was sent to Camp Gordon , Atlanta Georgia. About a month later his wife followed him. Here she met a girl from Massachusetts, who was also there to be near her husband. They rented a small apartment together and stayed all winter so they could go into camp to visit the boys or the boys when on leave could come into Atlanta to see them. While in camp here Winthrop was very sick with measles nearly developing into pneumonia. He also had chicken pox.

The following April he received word that the boys were being shipped to Europe. He left Camp Gordon for Camp Upton New York. After one week here he sailed for England. On the way over the American boys were joking and laughing and said they wished to see some submarines. This attitude astonished the English on board. They got their wish however as three submarines were sunk by convoy before the end of the trip.

He landed at South Hampton, England and remained there in training for a few days before sailing for France. The trip across the English Channel was made at night and lights were not allowed on the ship. After arriving in France they marched to the nearest camp where they were issued their first gas mask and instructions

for its use. He still has the gas mask. Sometimes they hiked for-a as much as eighteen or twenty miles with full pack which weighed fifty pounds. This was more than some of the boys could stand and they had to drop out of line overcome with fatigue.

Winthrop served in the front line trenches and on account of his bravery, risking his life to find some valuable information about the enemy he was recommended by his Captain to return to the United States as an instructor before the war was over. One boy was selected from each company. He left Brest France for the United States on the ship named Mt. Vernon, which was the Kaisers favorite ship. Three hundred miles out from shore the ship was torpedoed by a German submarine. A hole eighteen feet by thirty six feet was made in the side of the ship. The men and sailors bailed water in line pail after pail with the help of pumps and saved the ship from going down and they returned to England. He set sail for America again on the Whilemania. This time the trip was successful and after fourteen days on the water he arrived in New York.

After sending a telegram to his folks which was the first they had heard of his good fortune, he went to Hebron for a ten day furlough. He had now reached to rank of Sergeant and after the furlough he went to Camp Sherman, Chillicothe, Ohio, as an instructor, where he stayed until the end of the war.

At home every one was glad to see him and wanted to talk with him about the Hebron boys still over there and about the war. In a very pleasing and modest manner he gave a talk about some of his experiences during his stay in Europe in the Congregational Church.

Upon his discharge from service he returned to New York

State and continued in the saw mill business for about two years with his brother Robert. Finally he had a chance to buy a farm in Gilead which joined that of his father in law Wilbur N. Hills. He talked this offer with his wife and they decided to return once more to their home town as they were tired of the unsetled life.

Since returning to Gilead he has carried on a very busy life. Operating a large dairy farm, saw mill business and trucking business. He does the trucking for the Hebron Farmers Exchange of which he is one of the directors. The Hebron Farmers Exchange is a group of farmers who buy their grain and supplies collectively doing a business of over one hundred thousand dollars a year.

He now has four children. Douglas Hills, Beatrice Lucille, Wilbur Strong and Winthrop Henry. His most serious illness occurred in September 1927 about one week after Douglas first started school. On Sunday afternoon Winthrop apparently in good health went to the Hartford Hospital to visit his sister Bertha who has given birth to a son. Very early the next morning he awoke with severe pain in his back and was unable to turn over in bed. His wife called the doctor and after a consultation of doctors the case was diagnosed within twenty four hours as Infantile Paralysis. No encouragement was given for his recovery. He was taken in an ambulance to the Isolation Hospital in Hartford. This was a great shock to the community for fear there would be a spread of the disease. The schools was closed and the family was in quarantine. But after remaining in the hospital for three weeks Winthrop was able to return and a very lucky person-he-was- as he was not paralyzed in any other way. Of course it took him quite a while to fully recover and be able to work again.

He has been very active and interested in town affairs. In 1928 he represented the town in the Legislature, one of the youngest to be sent from the town. He held the office of Commander of the G. Merle Jones Post American Legion for a number of years, is a member of Hebron Grange #111, has served on the Board of Assessors and Board of Selectmen. At the present time he is First Selectman. After the death of his father three years ago he was appointed administrator of the estate of three hundred acres.

As the saying goes he was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth but has had to work for what he has. When he left home to take his first job all he had in his pocket was his car fare.