

**HISTORY OF NEWGATE OF CONNECTICUT, AT
SIMSBURY, NOW EAST GRANBY: ITS
INSURRECTIONS AND MASSACRES, THE
IMPRISONMENT OF THE TORIES IN THE
REVOLUTION, AND THE WORKING OF ITS
MINES. ALSO, SOME ACCOUNT OF THE STATE
PRISON AT WETHERSFIELD**

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RICHARD H. PHELPS

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Painted by A. S. Percey

Amos Pilsbury

1841

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INTRODUCTION.

WHATEVER relates to the early history of a Locality or People, illustrating the manners, the civil, religious or criminal policy thereof, is undoubtedly worthy of preservation. The records of deeds and events, apparently of slight moment at the time of their occurrence, increase in importance as ages roll away, and are the indices by which we estimate the truth of history. It is therefore needless to dwell upon the necessity of recording events in their day, lest the memory of them be destroyed by the tooth of time, or they lapse into tales and traditions.

There is an exciting fascination in the eventful history of Newgate of Connecticut, to all who have been familiar with it, more especially to those who, like the writer, have resided in its vicinity and witnessed many of its scenes; and if we may judge by the numbers that travel far to

explore its caverns and the works which now cover its grounds, it will long continue to be an object of interest and examination. When the aged residents in its vicinity are gone, which must soon be, this prison fortress will doubtless remain. The traveler will inquire, Who built these towers? Why these iron grates, these trenches and walls? How came these huge caverns to be dug out of solid rock, and why these rings and fetters bolted to their massive sides? Surely the echo of the caverns can not answer, nor the people who lived cotemporaneous with their use. Enough, then, by way of apology for these sketches.

The materials here presented, have been gathered from a variety of sources. Besides what came within the knowledge of the writer, he has availed himself of the statistics afforded by the ancient colonial and state records; of the facts recorded in the *History of Simsbury*, by N. A. PHELPS, Esq.; of the verbal statements kindly furnished by aged persons still living; and a multitude of facts, preserved from the recorded relations of witnesses long since passed away; all of which may be relied upon for entire accuracy.

Windsor, Ct., 1860.



NEWGATE OF CONNECTICUT.

THIS is the name by which the prison was known in the time of the American Revolution, and it was so called after Newgate prison in England. It is well known that our forefathers, in giving names to their towns and rivers, and other objects of nature and art, by which they became surrounded, drew freely upon those which they had been accustomed to in their ancestral homes; thus they endeavored to make their adopted country, in names at least, to assimilate to their native land. So, in denominating this receptacle for their criminals after the world-renowned prison of London, they intended to endow it with all the terror which attached to that fearful abode of the depraved.

The mines and prison buildings occupy an eminence on the western declivity of the greenstone mountain, which rises to an elevation higher than at any other place in the state, and is here surmounted by lofty, precipitous and craggy rocks. This range of mountains extends through the whole length of the state, and terminates at the East Rock near New Haven. Towards the west and south, can be seen in the distance, bold and irregular outlines of mountains, interspersed with extensive valleys, forming a scene of impressive grandeur and sublimity, seldom surpassed. Says a writer:

“The appearance of this place forcibly reminds
“the observer of the walls, castles, and towers,
“erected for the security of some haughty lordling
“of the feudal ages; while the gloomy dungeons
“within its walls, call to remembrance a Bastile,
“or a prison of the Inquisition.”

The mines were formerly included in the limits of the town of Simsbury, and so remained until 1786, when a part of the town, including mines and prisons, was set off and incorporated under the name of *Granby*; hence the place was at that time known by the name of *Simsbury Copper Mines*, on Copper hill.