

The Stoppleworth Farm

The stone foundation seen here is of the home that was occupied by several farm families for about 200 years before it became a 55 acre town conservation area. A three to four hundred acre land grant prior to 1750, the farm was subdivided several times to provide land for the sons of the original and later owners. By the late nineteenth century, it became a 78 acre farm, the minimum needed to support one family. Because only one son inherited the farm, the remaining sons had to find other work or move west to find inexpensive farmland.

Because farm land in Tolland was among the poorest in all of Connecticut, farmers could only raise cattle to support their families. A few acres (3 to 6), on this farm and on most farms in Tolland, produced feed (corn and oats) for cattle and some corn and rye to provide food for the family. A large garden produced vegetables for immediate consumption and also root crops (potatoes and hard squashes) that could be stored for winter use. Ten additional acres produced hay to feed livestock in winter. About one third of the farm was woodland to provide fuel for heating and cooking.

Most of the remaining land was set aside for grazing 2 or 3 beef cattle, 2 oxen, a horse or two, and 2 or 3 cows to provide milk and butter for the family. In addition to the income families received from the sale of 1 or 2 beef cattle, women churned butter to be sold to the country store owner. A couple of pigs and 6 to 10 chickens produced meat and eggs for the family dinner table.

From its inception in 1715 Tolland was primarily an agricultural town. But like so many other small agricultural towns in New England, it was in decline since the 1820s because canals at first and then railroads transported food produced more economically from western New York and beyond. As a result, Tolland's population in the 1920s was about half (1000 individuals) of what it had been in the 1820s. By 1950, full time farming in Tolland all but disappeared when the automobile provided employment opportunities in nearby commercial towns. Now returned to woodland, the Stoppleworth farm represents what Tolland once was and what it has become.

Bill McDermott, author of *Tolland: A Connecticut Town 1715-1815*