

**THOMAS BINGHAM
OF CONNECTICUT
SIXTH CHILD OF THOMAS BINGHAM AND ANNE FENTON BINGHAM
OF SHEFFIELD, YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND**

1. Thomas BINGHAM of CONNECTICUT

Born: 5 Jun 1642 Sheffield, Yorkshire, England⁴¹⁷

Mar: 12 Dec 1666 **Mary RUDD** (Jonathan RUDD, Mary METCALF) Norwich CT²: 8; Born: 1649 Saybrook CT; Died: 5 Aug 1726 Windham CT⁵: 33

Died: 16 Jan 1730 Windham CT; Inv & Adm: 3 Mar 1730 Windham CT⁹: I: 198: 356

Thomas Bingham, progenitor of his line of the Bingham family in North America, was born in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England in 1642 and migrated to CT Colony between 1652 and 1659 with his mother, Anne Fenton Bingham. Thus, he was between the ages of ten and seventeen when he became the first male of his Bingham line to settle in North America. Many suppositions, traditions, and fictional accounts have been printed about Thomas, the reason for his and his mother's migration, and his life as a colonist, but none will be repeated herein.¹; ⁴²⁷ Only the documented facts will be presented.

Thomas's father, Thomas Sr., was a cutler (knife maker) in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England.⁴²⁰: 2: 96 According to the Cutler's Company third set of ordinances, his own mark, a capital TB written with a common staff to form a merged letter, had been assigned to him by the time he was twenty-six years old in 1614.⁴²⁰: 2: 93 Baptized 3 Aug 1588 in the Cathedral Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Sheffield, Thomas Sr. married Elizabeth Woodhouse in the same church 2 May 1618. They had a son, Thomas, in 1619, but the child died in 1621.⁴¹⁷ Thomas Sr. was included again in the list of cutlers prepared in 1624 when the company incorporated, and he was a master cutler, but at no time was he a Masters Cutler or president of the company.⁴²⁰: 2: 96 Thomas Sr.'s wife, Elizabeth, died April 1631 without bearing additional children.

Thomas Sr. married for a second time 6 July 1631, Anne Fenton.⁴¹⁷ In many earlier publications, Anne's maiden name was erroneously given as Stenton. Confusion came from the lack of familiarity with old English writing in which a capital F was made by writing two lower case fs. Thus "ff" should have been read "F" not "St." Evidence independently corroborated by two Bingham researchers strongly suggests that Anne was the oldest daughter of Robert Fenton and Alice Hancock Fenton.^{RCB}; ^{FC} The will of Alice Fenton, made on the 23rd of March 1642/43 and probated in September 1644/45 names her eldest daughter, Anne, as wife of Thomas Bingham.⁴¹⁹: Sep 1644-45, LDS film no. 099, 540; ^{RCB}

In regard to the Fenton family, Robert Fenton married Elizabeth Bray on the 30th July 1576 at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Sheffield, and they had six children. Their fourth child, Robert, was christened on the 21st March 1583/84. He married Alice Hancock on the 23rd September 1605 at the same church. Four children have been traced to Robert and Alice, all were christened at the same church. There is a three year gap between the marriage of Robert and Alice and the christening of their oldest child. With Anne being named in the will as Alice's oldest daughter, she was in all probability born in 1606. Although Anne's christening has not been found in the Register of St. Peter and St. Paul, Sheffield, Alice could have returned to the home of her parents to have her first born child, which was a common practice. A search covering the Registers of some twenty neighboring parishes has so far failed to find the baptism entry.^{FC}

Thomas was the youngest son in a family of eight children; five boys, Abel, Stephen, Edward, Robert and Thomas and three girls, Elizabeth, Ann, and Mary. All children were baptized at St. Peter and St. Paul in Sheffield between 1632 and 1648/49. Mary, the youngest, was baptized after her father was buried.⁴¹⁷

Data indicates that by 1652, Anne Fenton Bingham was a widow with one ten year old son to care for. Each of her three daughters had died by the age of three, the youngest, Mary, was buried 16 June 1651.⁴¹⁷ Son Edward died when he was seven.⁴¹⁷ Abel and Robert moved to Birmingham, England where they had families and later died.⁴²³; ^{RCB} Stephen may be the Stephen who married Sara Brag in 1652 at Worksop, Nottinghamshire a short distance from Sheffield.²¹¹; ^{FC} Finally, Anne's husband, Thomas Sr., was buried in Sheffield 12 Feb 1648/49.⁴¹⁷

Based upon this evidence, we know that Thomas and his mother did not leave Sheffield, England before June 1651 when his sister, Mary, was buried. We also know that Thomas and his mother had arrived in CT colony and lived in Saybrook by 1659 for in that year Thomas was assigned a house lot in the new settlement of Norwich, although the list of original proprietors was reconstructed and recorded in 1692, thirty-three years after the fact.⁴²²: 138 Further, Caulkin's relates that Mrs. Anne Bingham married William Backus Sr. before removing to Norwich in 1660 and that they brought her son, Thomas Bingham, to Norwich with them along with William Backus's three daughters and two sons.¹¹: 158

William Backus (Backhouse in England), Anne Fenton Bingham's second husband was also a cutler from Sheffield, Yorkshire, England.³³ He completed his apprenticeship in 1627 and his name likewise appeared on the list of cutlers prepared at the time of and shortly after the company incorporation in 1624.⁴²⁰: 2: 96, 116 His mark was a W directly over a B. His wife had died and was buried in Sheffield 19 Feb 1643/4.⁴¹⁷ Left a widower with two sons and three daughters, he migrated to CT Colony and settled in Saybrook. The town then adjoined New London, but Lyme, East Lyme, and Waterford later developed in between. Although town records for Saybrook before 1660 do not exist, a few items of earlier date were entered between subsequent entries. One such entry for a Saybrook town meeting of 1648 recorded William Backus Sr.'s presence among twelve men assigned land across the CT River in the area that later became Lyme.⁴²⁴ There is no other reference to him in the town records, but his son, William Backus Jr. signed as a witness to a Saybrook will 11 Sep 1659. ¹⁹: Probate Records: 2: 132

Saybrook residents applied for and received from the Connecticut General Court in 1659 approval to establish a new town twenty-five miles up the Thames River. Named Norwich, historians generally accept that the town was settled in the spring of 1660, but the first division lots were not laid out until April 1661 and it was more than thirty years later before a list of original proprietors was reconstructed. At that time, William Backus Sr. and William Backus Jr. were listed among the original proprietors and Thomas Bingham was listed with those having original home lots and all the privileges of first proprietors.¹¹: 62

William Backus Sr. died shortly thereafter. Although his date of death is unknown, his will was dated 12 June 1661 and he signed it with his mark of a W directly over a B.⁴²⁵: 1646-1666: 143-4 He provided for both his "loving unto me" and "careful of me" wife, Anne Bingham Backus, and Thomas Bingham as well as his children by his first wife. His home lot in Norwich was never recorded in his name, but rather in the name of his son, Stephen Backus. Furthermore, William Backus Sr.'s name never appeared in records, again, and in 1662 William Backus Jr. was recorded simply as William Backus. The Sr. William Backus inventory, recorded 7 Jun 1664, included cutlery tools and ivory.¹⁹: Probate Records: 3: 175-6

Thomas Bingham lived in Norwich for a little over thirty years. His four acre house lot was located between West Town Street on the north, the Yantic River on the south, Thomas Waterman on the east and John Post on the west.¹ At the most, his land was worth 25 shillings per acre, the value placed on land for the entire colony. Usually one quarter of a person's land was assessed at 20 shillings per acre and the rest at 10 shillings per acre.¹⁹: 1665-1677: 294 In the course of his time in Norwich, Thomas acquired other lands amounting to more than 256 acres.⁴²²: 138 (recorded 1692)

Five years after the first division lots were laid out, Thomas married Mary Rudd 12 Dec 1666.²: 8 He was twenty-four years old; she was seventeen. Mary probably was the daughter of Jonathan Rudd and Mary Metcalf, the celebrated "bride of Bride Brook." In a deed recorded in Norwich, Thomas named Nathaniel Rudd as his brother and in a deed recorded in Saybrook, Nathaniel Rudd named Jonathan Rudd as his father.¹¹: 164-65 Four years later, in May 1670, Anne Fenton Bingham Backus died.²: 1: 8 With whom she had lived after William Backus Sr.'s death is unknown, but he had provided for her in his will, the more so if she lived with his son, Stephen Backus.

In 1671, age almost thirty, Thomas had sufficient worth to be made a freeman of Norwich entitling him to full voting and office-holding privileges.³³: 1665-1678: 154 His first position was that of townsman or overseer of the west end in 1676 and in 1683 he served a term as constable. Nothing else about his life in Norwich survives documented except his restatement as freeman in 1681.¹¹: 83, 84, 86 (from Norwich Town Records)

After thirty-three years in Norwich, Thomas Bingham moved his family to the newly forming town of Windham CT. Located fifteen miles north, northwest of Norwich, Windham was destined to become the business center of CT. Willed to a group of Norwich settlers by Joshua, son of Uncas the Mohican chief, the CT General Court upheld the will in 1678. Meeting periodically thereafter, the Norwich legatees decided to settle the area in 1685. They divided the tract into three sections and in 1686 laid out forty-eight shares of 1,000 acres each as follows: Southeast quarter or Hither Place (Windham), fifteen lots; Pond Place (Mansfield), 21 lots; Willimantic, 12 lots. Each lot consisted of a house lot, and lots of meadow, pasture and woodland, but none of the original legatees took up their lots. They were prohibited from doing so by colonial politics until after 1689. About twelve actual settlers then materialized to buy the shares and form a town. They broke land and held their first town meeting in 1692. Ten more families arrived during the winter of 1692-93. Thomas Bingham was among them. The second oldest man in town, he purchased an allotment as a legate 22 Mar 1693. Located next to Capt. John Mason's house lot in the southeast quarter, he paid £14 in current provisions for the lot. The provisions were used to defray the town charges to the Corn Mill and when they were paid in full, 20 April 1693, and a deed drawn, Thomas had legal assurance of his right to all the divisions that went with his house lot.⁴²¹: Old: 5; D: 25; I: 27

Thomas Bingham's house lot of about thirty-three acres was located on the west side of the south end of Windham Street and at the corner where the road branched to Norwich or to Scotland and he had nineteen acres of pasture across the road to the east. Town meeting records show that he added three acres to his house lot in 1695 and seven acres to his pasture in 1696.⁴²¹

The permanent home he built faced south down a valley. About 100 yards in front of the house, the ground dropped abruptly 30 or 40 feet to a plentiful spring of water that gave rise to a little brook. The cellar was about seven feet deep and walled with heavy flat stone masonry. It had a pit or sub-cellar about 8 feet by 6 feet by 6 feet deep and the chimney foundation had a closet with a large wooden door. Over two hundred years later, Charles Larrabee owned the house lot and the Thomas Bingham cellar sat under a portion of Larrabee's house.¹: I: 174

As a senior member of Windham, Thomas was active in town affairs. His first job, 1693, was to be on the committee that negotiated with Samuel Whiting who became the first minister in Windham. In 1695, Thomas was chosen one of the Selectmen of Windham, in 1696 he took inventory of the estate of Jonathan Fowler, and in 1697 he refused to be an overseer of the estate of John Cates, Windham's first settler. Thomas's main efforts were spent in church organization. He was one of three to petition the General Court in 1699 for church organization and when it was granted in 1700 he was chosen to be one of three deacons, an office and title he held until he died. At the seating of the new meeting house 19 Apr 1703, by reason of his age and office, Deacon Thomas occupied the most honorable position - the seat at the right hand of this wife in the pew.⁴²¹

When he moved to Windham, Thomas's family consisted of all his children but his married son Thomas, and his married daughter, Mary. Son Thomas remained on the family farm in Norwich, but Mary and husband John Backus, son of William Backus Jr., settled in Windham. Son Abel may or may not have moved to Windham as he married the year after the move and lived in Stratford, Fairfield Co for several years before removing to Windham. Children Jonathan, Ann, Abigail, Nathaniel, Deborah, Samuel, Joseph, and Stephen accompanied their parents, Thomas Bingham and Mary Rudd. Abigail returned to Norwich after she married, Nathaniel and Samuel settled in what was to become the Scotland section of Windham, Ann eventually settled in Lebanon with her husband, and Stephen moved to Lebanon and on to Andover. Joseph was left to inherit the Windham property.

Approaching eighty years of age in 1718, Thomas deeded to Joseph all his Windham property in return for a £400 bond guaranteeing that Joseph would care for his parents in their home the rest of their lives. Since marrying, Joseph and his family had lived with his

parents. Mary lived another eight years and died in 1726 age seventy-seven. Thomas lived twelve more years and died age eighty-seven in Jan 1730.

As there was no need, Thomas left no will, but by law, his estate was inventoried and the results recorded in the Windham probate records.⁹ 1: 356 The most significant item remaining in his estate was an £84.14.0 debt due from Josiah Kingsley (1.1.5.) and Jabez Bingham (1.1.6.). Son Jonathan, administrator of the estate, distributed a total of £96.19.08 among the living heirs.⁹ 1: 442-3

Thomas and Mary were buried in Windham Center.⁶⁷ A head stone for Thomas, not paid for from his estate, was erected. On the stone, Thomas's mother was given the first name, Mary, instead of Anne. The stone, however, is notable for a more important reason. Carved by skilled craftsman, Obadiah Wheeler, authorities of gravestone carvings single the stone out as one his most beautiful for its spatial perfection, simplicity, and symmetry of design.³³⁹ 85 & Plate 8 Thomas's stone depicts the customary angel face with well carved wings emanating from each side of the head. The face has fully rounded eyes, an aquiline nose, and a thin, small, sad curved mouth.

In 1859, Norwich CT held a Jubilee to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of the town. Speeches delivered at the time were printed in a volume and copies were deposited in most Connecticut libraries. The volume contained the facsimile of the signature of Thomas Bingham written, apparently, in 1696. We have used a copy of that signature on our cover.

Children born Norwich CT²: 1: 8

- 1.1. Thomas 11 Dec 1667
- 1.2. Abel 25 Jun 1669
- 1.3. Mary Jul 1672
- 1.4. Jonathan 15 Apr 1674
- 1.5. Ann Aug 1677
- 1.6. Abigail 4 Nov 1679
- 1.7. Nathaniel 3 Oct 1681
- 1.8. Deborah 18 Dec 1683
- 1.9. Samuel 28 Mar 1685
- 1.10. Joseph 15 Jan 1688
- 1.11. Stephen 30 Apr 1690