

David Bishop and 3 Mountain Avenue

On the National Register: Hempstead Street Historic District

Notes by M.E. Baker for New London Landmarks 6/29/17

David Bishop (1812-1894) was a New London grocer who also went into the lumber and building business – with his brothers, with others, but mainly on his own. He started out as a teenager in grocery stores owned by a series of New London businessmen: Adam Frink, Frank Holt, and Adam Prentis, among others. Learning the grocery business would stand him in good stead throughout the vicissitudes of his life.

David was the second of seven sons and one daughter of Charles Bishop, Sr. (1784-1866) and Charlotte Lattimer Bishop (1783-1867), most of them staunch Baptists. David's brothers were: John, Charles, Joseph, Henry, Gilbert, and Elias. His sister was Charlotte, who married Ezra S. Beckwith. The family left farming in the Chesterfield section of Montville at different times, the boys leaving first, and then the parents about 1840, coming to New London to go into the grocery business. Some of the boys became farmers in Waterford, no doubt helping to supply the family's various grocery businesses.

For a time, David Bishop went into the lumber business in Norfolk, Virginia, and then worked for various New London concerns, though the chronology is unclear. Because the Bishop brothers were in business together and with others under various partnerships over the course of the 19th century, untangling their activities is complicated.¹

In the 1830s and 1840s, the Bishop brothers formed a partnership for a grocery, lumber, and building business and located their headquarters near the ferry landing to Groton, on the future site of Union Station. The firm manufactured sash, doors, blinds, and outside finishes, also dealing in lumber, coal, and building supplies. There were several devastating fires and more than one move, but the firm continued on and in the later 19th century became one of the largest such companies in Connecticut.

By the time Bishop was in his 30s, he had built a vinegar factory and also a development of houses on a recently opened street, Mountain Avenue. The remarkable Mountain Avenue cider vinegar factory, built in 1846, was carved out of the rock in the hillside below the factory (site of 19 Mountain Avenue). Bishop had purchased a large tract above Hempstead Street in 1845. Boulders had to be dug up and rock drilled, and the stone was dressed for use as construction material for the factory's walls, which eventually reached a height of five stories. The stone blocks were also used for house

¹ The history of the Bishop family in Montville and the circumstances of their removal to New London is a topic for further research. For description of family members, see *Genealogical and Biographical Record of New London County, Connecticut*, 341-344. Sorting out the business ventures of the Bishop brothers calls for far more research than is presented here.

foundations and retaining walls, creating terraces for the new houses.²

David Bishop opened Thompson Court as a roadway from Hempstead Street to the factory and to a three-story brick federal (1845). (Now a triplex, its current address is 33 Mountain).³ The factory did business for 20 years, when it was foreclosed. It was replaced by the Toby and Blackwell Shirt Manufactory, which produced fine quality shirts for the Boston market. In the 1870s, 200 people were employed there, mostly women, operating the sewing machines, while other women were employed at home working buttonholes. Later it housed a broom factory, and after 1887 it became the Bingham Paper Box Company. Sometime in the 1920s, the building was entirely rebuilt using the old foundation.

3 Mountain Avenue

David Bishop constructed at least five homes, likely more, on Mountain Avenue, plus more on Hope Street. The Mountain Avenue development included Bishop's own 3-bay, 2 ½ - story Italianate home (18), and some 200 feet down and across the street, a series of three 1½-story federals (11, 7, and 3), all still largely intact.⁴ Bishop likely built the house next door to his own (14), which is very similar to his but larger. The next house (12) may also have been built by Bishop for Captain Charles Vail.

No. 3 was sold to Joseph L. Sharp on 25 December 1858. Sharp was a carpenter, perhaps working for Bishop at the time. By 1852, Bishop was paying taxes on three houses and a store. Both Sharp and Bishop are listed as living on Mountain Avenue in the 1859 New London City Directory, at a time before there were house numbers. Bishop is listed as a grocer, but thereafter as a vinegar manufacturer.

Sharp sold his house on Mountain Avenue back to Bishop in September 1859, and Sharp is listed as a teamster living on Chappell Street in the 1863 city directory, before he disappears from local records.

Bishop lived on Mountain Avenue at least until 1865, according to city

² The foundation of the factory survives, but the original vinegar factory came down between 1921 and 1933. Part of the granite wall survives as the rear wall of the present building at 19 Mountain Avenue. For a photo of original building, see Picturesque New London (1909), 68. See National Register nomination form: <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset?assetID=e4264422-6562-45f8-af2e-ac3a0c2f2d42>

³ The 1876 birds-eye map of New London shows a tree-lined lane (Thompson) without houses leading to factory and what today is 33 Mountain Ave.

⁴ Note that the nomination research for the Hempstead Historic District does not list #11 as a Bishop house. No. 12 Mountain Avenue was sold by David Bishop in 1849 to Capt. Charles Vail (1822-1874, at sea) who likely had the house built. Bishop figures into numerous property transfers involving No. 12 in 1850, as do Vail's in-laws. His first wife, Ellen Haynes (aka Haines), died in 1851. Capt Vail then married Ann Elizabeth Griswold (1831-1920), and they had Ellen, Marion, Charles (dy), and Alvin.

directories, apparently in partnership with James Greenfield in the vinegar business. In 1866, Bishop's house at 18 Mountain was foreclosed and taken over by the Savings Bank of New London. It was purchased by the owner of 12 Mountain, Captain Charles Vail, who was soon to pass it onto his wife when he died at sea in 1874. Note that Joshua C. Learned, insurance agent, who owned #3 from 1864 to 1868, lived at a fashionable address on Church Street, not on Mountain Avenue.

The next owner of 3 Mountain Avenue, starting in 1868, was James J. Connor, born in 1838 in Ireland. His wife, Catherine Carroll Connor (Kate), was also born in Ireland, about 1842. Their children included, Francis J. (Frank), Alexander J., Mary E. (Lizzie), George W., Catherine (Katie), and William (Willie). The 1870 census does not list a Mountain Avenue address for the Connors, but their real estate is valued at \$4,000, indicating multiple properties. The Connors probably leased out the house for income. James shows up in the city directory of 1872 with a root beer factory on Division Street, living on Bank Street, and the family is listed as living on Bank Street for many years thereafter. The Connors are buried in St Mary's Cemetery.

Ada H. Wrisley was the live-in owner of the house between 1891 and 1901. The 1900 census shows Ada, age 27, living at the house with her mother, Eliza, age 74. Ada worked as a bookkeeper. There are no further records of Ada in New London. The house was evidently foreclosed in 1901 when the Brownings, the couple who held the mortgage, died and the estate called in the debt. Emeline Louise Browning (1852-1900) and Lewis Browning (1840-1900) lived on Alger Place. Their investment on Mountain Avenue went to their two minor children: Amy E. and Lewis M., and it was sold to Ellen M. Breen in 1901.

Ellen Breen was a young widow at the time. It's unclear if she ever lived on Mountain Avenue. Her address in 1902 and for several years thereafter was Shapley, then Blackhall, then Garfield Avenue. By the time of the 1930 census, she was living with her step-daughter, Josephine Breen, who worked as a housekeeper in a private family. Ellen owned 41 Garfield Avenue and rented half the house to Terrance M. Cook and family.

By 1914, the first year when the New London City Director lists residences by street, Mountain Avenue had 28 homes, many with two or three families, plus the paper box factory. At 3 Mountain was Dominick Bricca. Perhaps he was related to the multi-generational Bricca/Leverone family who lived on Golden Street in the 1920s, but Dominick disappears from the record.

The 1920 city directory lists 28 homes on Mountain Avenue, with one vacant. Simon Reheiser was renting at No. 3. Simon, 53, had immigrated from Germany in 1885. He was working as a restaurant cook, and his wife, Sarah, 45, was a homemaker with six children. By 1930, the Reheisers had moved and purchased a home on Blackhall Street.

By 1930 there are 34 homes on Mountain Avenue, mostly multi-family. No.3 is

listed as the home of Willis E. Maynard, 27, and his wife Helen, along with their five children. Willis worked as a finisher in a textile mill at that time. They owned a radio.

Though they didn't buy the house until 1942, Arthur J. McPherson lived at 3 Mountain Avenue from at least from 1935. His wife, Mary Ellen, six years his senior, was from Ireland, with a fourth-grade education and the mother of six children. With a fifth-grade education, Arthur was employed full-time as a crane operator in a shipyard, according to the 1940 census. Their three boys and three girls ranged in age from 6 months to 16 years in 1940. In 1975, after her husband's death, Mary Ellen McPherson sold the property.

More on the Bishop Brothers

The 1860 census lists David Bishop, with real estate valued at \$20,000. After the Civil War and after the vinegar factory folded and his home was foreclosed, David left New London with his wife and daughter and purchased a 900-acre farm in Virginia.⁵ Just what drew the Bishops to this particular location is not known, though David's time in Virginia during his youth doubtless laid a foundation for the return. Perhaps he hoped that the warmer climate would improve the family's fading health. Cynthia Lester Bishop died in 1870, aged about 55, and daughter, Cornelia, died the following year, aged 32. Cynthia and David Bishop also had a son, Henry, born about 1841, who stayed in Connecticut and had several New London businesses.⁶

Returning to New London, David Bishop moved to 30 Starr Street, according to the 1872 city directory.⁷ He soon married Mary Elizabeth (Peckham) (1839-1926), widow of Richard E. Greenfield (1832-1862).⁸ In 1872, then age 60, David purchased a 1796 gambrel-roofed house at 49 Washington Street. He inserted a ground floor and raised

⁵ An 1870 census shows David Bishop, Cynthia and daughter Cornelia living in the township of Washington in the county of Westmoreland – not the Washington, Virginia in Rappahannock County. David lived near Nomini Grove near the Potomac, south of Washington, DC and near George Washington's birthplace.

⁶ Henry Bishop, son of David, had a book store on State Street – Slocum & Bishop. He went to Hartford for some years, going into business selling spectacles: Roberts & Bishop, Co. He had returned to New London by 1877 and began clerking for various incarnations of Bishop & Co., lumber and coal. He had three wives but no known offspring.

⁷ Street numbering has been revised several times. Perhaps David lived at #8, which is plaqued as the "John and David Bishop House." In the 1872 city directory, Elias Bishop is listed with a meat and vegetable grocery store at the corner of Washington and Starr. Does this mean the two brothers had competing shops across the street from one another?

⁸ What is the connection between James Greenfield, one of David Bishop's former partners, and Richard E. Greenfield, his second wife's first husband? The Greenfields, like the Bishops, originally came from Montville. There is a James Greenfield House, c. 1900, at 245 Montauk Ave.

the building. This redesign allowed for a grocery store and meat market (and today, the offices of New London Landmarks). In 1877, David and Mary had a daughter, Cornelia, named for the daughter who had died. This Cornelia was to marry Dennis McEwen, who worked as a butcher in the Bishops' grocery store on Washington Street. Dennis eventually took over the business and the building.⁹ David Bishop died in 1894, aged 82. He and both his wives are in Cedar Grove Cemetery.

David's brother Gilbert (1824-1906) built a dozen homes, mostly in East New London. Like several of his brothers, Gilbert was a carpenter as well as businessman, eventually becoming president of the family firm. His splendid home (no longer extant) was located at 152 Main Street.¹⁰

Henry Bishop (1820-1892) built a home on Jay Street in 1845, where he prided himself in making various small improvements over the years. Judging from the Historic District report, it no longer exists.

The oldest brother, John Bishop (1811-1892), is credited with building five homes on Starr Street in 1839 as well as homes on Whale Oil Row. John and brother Charles Bishop had a lumber and carpentry business from 1838 to 1892. Though without formal architectural credentials, John Bishop did a great deal of design work as well as building. In 1840 he designed and oversaw the construction of Stonington's lighthouse (now the Old Lighthouse Museum owned by the Stonington Historical Society). Built in 1840 of quarried granite and rubble stone, it is unique in its fortress-like appearance with heavy corbelling that encircles a 35-foot tower, topped with a lantern. As far as is known, this was John Bishop's only lighthouse, perhaps for good reason. Due to design flaws, it had to be rebuilt only two years later by Charles H. Smith of Stonington.

John Bishop is also associated with a number of churches including the large wood-frame Huntington Street Baptist Church (1849), and the stone sanctuary at the end of Starr Street, the Universalist Church (1882), which was sold to the Brainard Lodge of Masons in 1896. In Norwich, he built the fortress-like stone church known as Dr. Bond's Church (1844), located at 63 Church Street.

John Bishop was involved with Perry Douglass in developing the Pequot Colony, when they purchased the 35-acre Harris farm for \$3,600 from Douglass Harris in 1852. John Bishop designed and built a palatial hotel at the northwest corner of what is now Pequot and Glenwood Avenue, and he also built numerous cottages in the Pequot Colony.

⁹ Cornelia Bishop and Dennis McEwen had Lawrence Bishop McEwen (b. abt. 1901) and Dorothy G. (b. abt. 1903). The family lived with David's widow, Mary E. Bishop, on Washington Street. By 1910 Dennis's occupation is listed as chauffeur.

¹⁰ For a photo of Bishop lumber and coal at 61-65 Water Street, see *Picturesque New London*, 120, and of his Main Street home, see p. 90. This house is remarkably similar to the Second Empire 1860 house located at 85 Main Street, Stonington Borough, minus the cupola and plus a tower.

Charles Bishop (1813-1898) was a house carpenter and then a manufacturer of sash trim, according to census records. In 1866 he built a home on Franklin Street (44) (corner of High, now Garvin Street).¹¹ It seems possible that he built more than one house on Franklin. In any event, by 1880, he was boarding with relatives on Franklin in a household of nine.¹² Charles also built tenements and cottages at Eastern Point, Groton.

Joseph Bishop (1815-1869) married Sarah Noyes and was a builder living in Waterford in the 1850 census, then a farmer in Waterford in the 1860 census.

Henry Bishop (b. abt 1821-1892) had a house at 4 Jay Street. He founded the building company Bishop Brothers with Charles and Gilbert.

The youngest brother, Elias Bishop (1827-1915), was married first to Harriet Lincoln (d.1875) and then to Louisa Johnson (1857-1948) of Waterford. In census records Elias is listed as a "joiner" and then as a farmer in Waterford. He was living on Broad Street, New London, by 1900. By 1910 he had a grocery store on Broad (or Bishop Street), a store that afterwards was run by his son Elias, Jr.

Much more could be gleaned from the records about all of these Bishops and their relationships.

Some Sources:

Genealogical and Biographical Record of New London County, Connecticut.

Property records researched by Platt Arnold and others, New London Landmarks

David Bishop Obituary from the New London Day

http://www.livingplaces.com/CT/New_London_County/New_London_City/Hempstead_Historic_District.html

<https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset?assetID=e4264422-6562-45f8-af2e-ac3a0c2f2d42>

¹¹ National Register survey dates #44 to 1859.

¹² In the 1880 census, Charles is listed as "border," living with his wife Cynthia, his sister-in-law, Sarah Noyes Bishop, widow of brother Joseph, and Joseph's daughter, Julia E. Caverly, also a widow, and her two daughters, Alice and Emeline. Also boarding in the house: a school teacher, a music teacher, and a servant.



The house of Gilbert Bishop on Main Street is gone, even the street is gone, but a version of it survives. Compare it with the Second Empire home at 85 Main Street, Stonington Borough, which is remarkably similar in its details, minus the tower and plus a cupola.