

The
FOURTH GOVERNOR
of
CONNECTICUT
was
THOMAS WELLES

An Englishman believed to have been connected with nobility but whose antecedents across the water still remain a mystery and even his burial place is unknown but is said by genealogists to be either in Wethersfield or Hartford

T H O M A S

W E L L E S

THOMAS Welles, the fourth governor of Connecticut colony, was born in England in 1598, but where he came from has not yet been determined. Absolutely nothing is known of his antecedents across the water.

One of Governor Welles' descendants, Hon. Gideon Welles of Hartford, wrote of his ancestor, the governor, in 1843: "My father, who died in 1834, aged eighty years, used to tell me that our English ancestors were once of the nobility; that amongst his earliest recollections were the strong injunctions of his grandfather and his great uncle, Samuel Welles of Boston, never to omit the letter "e" in his name; that the family had once great estates of which they were wrongfully deprived and that in due time they would return. These were the remarks of the old men to him, born about thirty years after the death of Governor Welles, and who in childhood imbibed impressions brought from the parent land."

A tradition, long believed to be true, connected Welles with the service of Lord Say-and-Sele, and made him one of the first settlers of Saybrook in 1636. This has been quite thoroughly disproven in the light of more recent investigation, and all state-

ments of this sort concerning the governor's early career in America are purely conjectural.

There is absolutely nothing to show that Governor Welles was ever secretary to Lord Say-and-Sele, but on the other hand it is more than probable that Governor Welles came to Hartford in 1636 from Boston. A copy of a grant in which he figures tends to confirm this statement. The first appearance of Governor Welles in Hartford was on March 28, 1637, according to the Colonial Records. He was one of the magistrates in 1637 and he held the office for many years. He rose rapidly in the councils of state, for at the election in 1639 he was chosen the first treasurer of the infant colony, holding the office until 1641 when he asked to be relieved. He was next secretary of the commissioners of the United Colonies. In 1649 he became one of the commissioners and served for some years.

He was chosen governor in 1655 and 1656; the next year he was deputy governor and in 1658 was re-elected governor of the colony. The following year he was deputy governor again, and that ended his eminently successful and honorable public career. Governor Welles went to Wethersfield to live in 1643 and he died in that town on January 14, 1660, (1657, o. s.).

Concerning the exact spot where the governor's remains lie buried, there has been considerable controversy among the historians.

Albert Welles, a biographer of the governor, says that his remains were buried "on the top of the hill near the fence on the south side of the old yard, in the rear of the meeting-house, where the remains of the Welles family for many generations now lie grouped."

Benjamin Trumbull, the eminent historian, wrote regarding this: "Though Governor Welles was first buried at Wethersfield his remains were afterward removed to Hartford. Four of the first governors of Connecticut, Haynes, Wyllys, Welles and Webster, lie buried at Hartford without a monument. Considering their many and important public services this is remarkable. But their virtues have embalmed their names and will render their names venerable to the latest posterity."

One of the very best authorities on this question contends that the governor was buried at Wethersfield and was never removed from that town. This seems to be the general belief.

A writer says of the governor: "Governor Welles possessed the full confidence of the people, and many of the most important of the early laws and papers pertaining to the founding of the colony were drafted by him. The successful issue of Connecticut from her difficulty concerning the fort erected at Saybrook on one side and the Dutch encroachments on the other was largely due to his skill and wisdom."