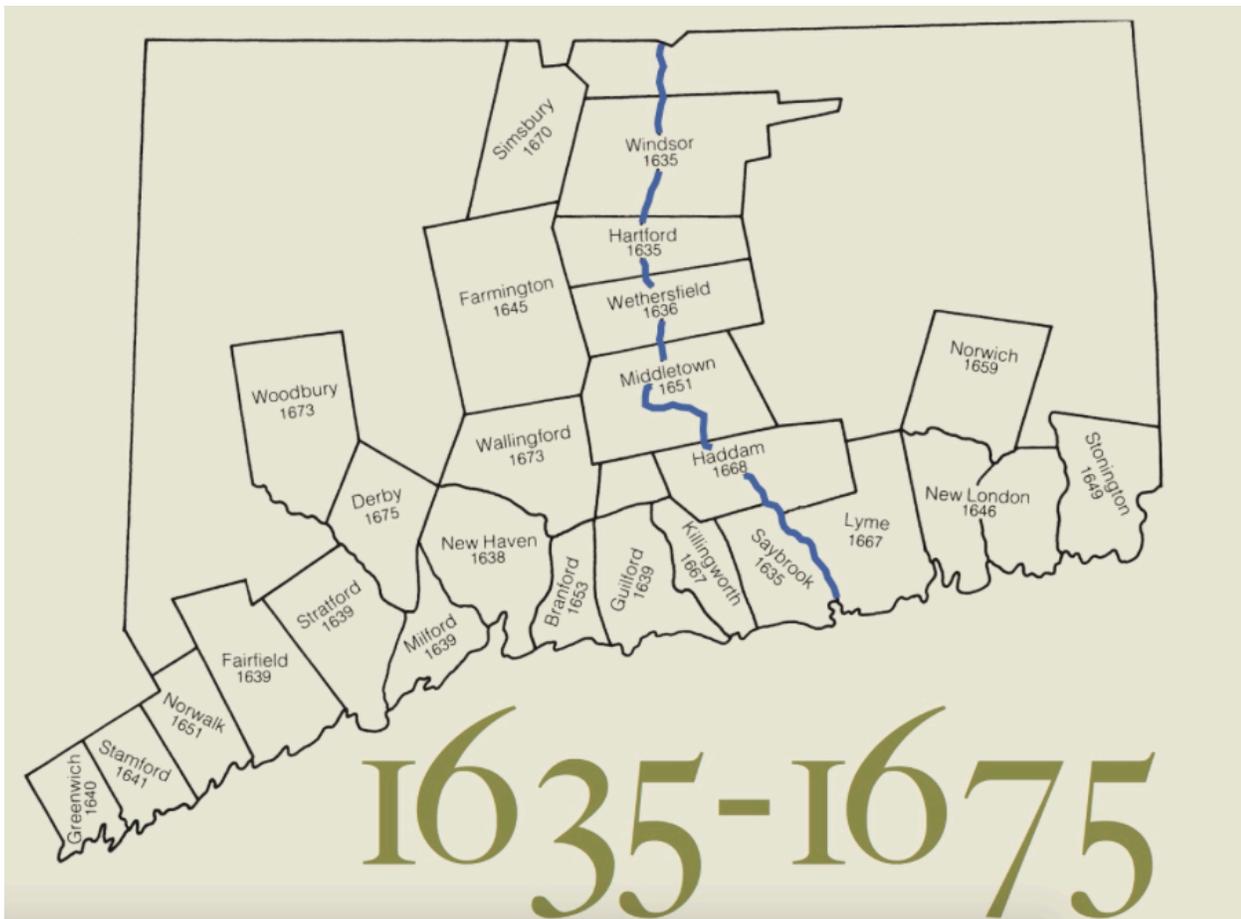


## Settling Connecticut

Connecticut's 169 towns didn't happen all at once. It took more than 250 years for all of Connecticut's towns to be **established!**

### 1635 – 1675

The Pilgrims arrived in the “new world” in 1620. Just 15 years later, settlers began leaving the Massachusetts Bay Colony for a fresh start in Connecticut. During the next 40 years, 25 towns were settled. (Map 1)



The first towns formed inland on the Connecticut River. Towns also quickly settled along Long Island Sound from Greenwich to Stonington.

Each of the first towns was settled near a body of water. Waterways provided food to eat. They made travel and trading easier. Land near rivers was fertile and was a good place to farm. The early towns formed where they did because of good farmland and good trading.

The first towns formed for religious reasons, too. The settlers were **Congregationalists** who wanted to worship in their own way.

The meetinghouse was one of the first buildings erected in a new town. The meetinghouse was used for town meetings and for worship. In colonial Connecticut, everyone had to attend church. Congregationalists didn't celebrate the Christian holidays of Christmas or Easter! People paid taxes to support the minister. This began to change after 1700.

The three river towns of Windsor, Wethersfield, and Hartford banded together to form the Connecticut Colony in 1636. Towns surrounding New Haven formed the New Haven Colony in 1638. The two colonies merged in 1665.

## 1686 – 1734

King Philip's War kept people from settling new towns for several years. King Philip was the British name for Wampanoag **sachem** Metacom. Native American tribes under Metacom tried to drive the settlers out of New England. The Connecticut Colony sent soldiers to fight. Most of the fighting

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was in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. But Simsbury was burned to the ground.



After the war, 28 towns formed between 1686 and 1734. (Map 2) Something new was happening. Not all towns were new settlements. Five towns split off from existing towns. This happened when the **population** grew large enough to support its own meetinghouse. East Haddam is a good example. It separated from Haddam in 1734. Look at the map to see why that town might have split from Haddam.

Most of these new towns formed east of the Connecticut River. They formed along smaller rivers and streams. The land was

less fertile there, but the streams provided waterpower for mills. These towns formed for economic reasons.

## 1737 – 1766

By 1737, Connecticut was almost entirely settled. Fourteen towns in the northwest corner formed in a new way. This large area of land was owned by people in Hartford and Windsor. The landowners planned seven new towns. They sold the lots to settlers or groups of settlers. It was a business venture. The Connecticut General Assembly supervised the creation of seven more towns.



In addition, four towns were **annexed** from Massachusetts. Suffield, Enfield, Somers, and Woodstock joined Connecticut in

1749. Connecticut's shape and borders were now close to what they are today.

1767 – 1921



During the era of the American Revolution, 29 new towns formed. Connecticut became a state in 1788. The new towns split off from towns that already existed. (Map 4) Thompson was one of these towns. Compare the four maps to see which towns split from earlier settlements.

After 1789, more than 50 towns formed by separating from other towns.

Today, Connecticut has 169 towns.

Towns are grouped into larger sections

of the state called counties. Of our eight counties, four formed in 1666. They are New London County, New Haven County, Hartford County, and Fairfield County. The other four counties were added by 1785. These counties are Tolland County, Windham County, Middlesex County, and Litchfield County. Connecticut abolished county government in 1960. Today counties are geographical groupings but have no government role.

**West Haven was the last town to form, in 1921.  
It split off from Orange.**

Find a complete list of towns in the order they were founded on the Secretary of State's website at <http://www.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?q=392440>

This essay is adapted from "Connecticut's Brand of Colonial Town," Connecticut Explored, Summer 2016 and Bruce Daniels, The Connecticut Town: Growth and Development 1635 – 1790 (Wesleyan University Press, 1979).

## Glossary

*Annex* to attach as an addition

*Congregationalist* a member of the Congregational Church, which is a church governed by its members

*Establish* to put securely in place

*Population* the number of people living in a place

*Sachem* the name used by Algonquian tribes for chief or leader