



370 Beach Road, Fairfield, CT 06824
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Learn More About Fairfield County History

English Settlement at Uncoway

In the fall of 1639, two years after the Great Swamp Fight with the Pequots, Ludlow returned to the area, remembering its meadows and the cleared land that had been cultivated by the Paugussett clans. Ludlow had received a commission from the Connecticut General Court to establish a plantation near the Pequonnock River on land that is now part of Bridgeport. When Ludlow arrived, he learned that a disgruntled group of men from Wethersfield, who had recently joined the New Haven Colony, planned to settle in nearby Uncoway. Unwilling to let this desirable land fall into other hands, Ludlow disregarded the authority granted by his commission, and proceeded to Uncoway with four other men.

Ludlow purchased land from the Pequonnock Indians stretching between the Sasqua (Mill) and Pequonnock Rivers and roughly eight miles inland. The Indians agreed to live on an eighty-acre tract west of the Housatonic River, formally established as the Golden Hill Reservation in 1659. Other parcels of land in the Fairfield area were reserved for them to farm and to hunt on, hence place nicknames such as “Old Indian Field” that are still present as road names. Not content with his sizable acquisition from the Pequonnocks, Ludlow continued to purchase tracts all the way to the Norwalk River, extending twelve miles inland in some areas. Despite exceeding the authority he had been granted, Ludlow was only fined, and the settlement at “Uncoway” was permitted to remain.

The permanent settlement of Fairfield began in 1639 when Roger Ludlow laid out four “squares” of land divided by five roadways. This area defined the center of the new settlement, and remains today as the Historic Town Green with town government buildings, churches, and the surrounding neighborhood. Home lots were located within the four squares, while surrounding land was set aside for pasture, meadow, and crop cultivation. In five years the town grew from nine households to about twenty-four. New arrivals settled in the town center or chose an area to the east that came to be known as Black Rock. However, people could not freely choose to settle in Fairfield. Town Meeting participants decided who was permitted to live here because the founders wanted a cohesive, like-minded community. Those who were not approved were warned to leave the town. Failure to obey the community’s rules could also result in expulsion from the town.



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As generations passed, families divided the land they had received as town proprietors. New settlements sprang up further from the town center. Residents petitioned to be recognized as separate parishes, because traveling to worship in Fairfield center was a hardship; law required attendance. Stratfield, West (Greens Farms), Greenfield Hill, and Redding were among the first newly formed parishes in the 1720s and 1730s.

As the formation of new parishes and religious denominations continued through the 18th century, Fairfield became a less homogenous community than its founders would have found acceptable. These differences, as well as the physical distance from Fairfield's Town Meetings, set the stage for town separations. In 1767, Redding became the first new town "carved" from Fairfield lands. The Norfield and North Fairfield parishes below Redding became the town of Weston in 1787. Half of Weston separated to become Easton in 1845. Westport was carved from both Fairfield and Norwalk in 1835, and Black Rock was acquired by Bridgeport in 1870.

Division of the Long Lots and Commons

In the 1660s and 1670s, Fairfield began purchasing additional land from the Indians, extending well into the area that is now Redding. (Fairfield's northern boundary was present-day Cross Highway in Redding.) This formalized expansion was part of a colony-wide effort to gain control of land. When the British monarchy was restored to power in 1660, New England colonists began to fear that the mother country would renew its interest in the colonies and its land resources. In 1671, Fairfield set aside a half-mile-wide swath of land running approximately east-west and two miles north of the King's Highway. A mile-wide tract, intersecting the Half-Mile Common at its center, extended to the northern boundary of Fairfield, today's Cross Highway in Redding. Land on either side of the Mile Common was divided into long, narrow parcels, which were distributed as dividends to Fairfield proprietors. These "long lots" were about thirteen and a half miles long and ranged in width from a mere fifty feet to 875 feet. Residents who already had sizable land holdings typically received the widest "long lots." "Upright highways," of which present-day Burr Street in Greenfield Hill is an example, were created to provide access to the far ends of the long lots.