Joshua Stow: Local Scapegoat

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An obituary from a western newspaper said of Joshua Stow:

"...A good man has fallen in Israel." During his lifetime, Joshua Stow was a Connecticut Senator, Judge of the Connecticut Superior Court, Manager of the Connecticut School Fund, Middletown Postmaster, a collector of the Internal Duties and Taxes of the U.S. County of Middlesex, Director of the office of Discount and Deposit of the U.S. Branch Bank located in Middletown, a member of the Constitutional Convention of Connecticut, and the author of the Article in the Constitution which secured complete religious toleration for the state. In addition, Joshua Stow was one of few men associated with the settling of the Western Reserve. Truly, a man of such talents and accomplishments deserved respect and support from the members of the community within which he lived.

It was remarked that, as the fruits of his toil, industry and enterprise, and example of a virtuous and honorable life, Joshua Stow left to his heirs a large and extensive property in the County of Middlefield and the State of Ohio. On August 1, 1845, the Probate Court of Middletown, Connecticut ruled that the Stow estate was insolvent and ordered the sale of the whole of Stow's moveable and real estate except for his personal estate; the value of his estate decreased from approximately $27,000 to $3,000. Are these the fruits of a man of "toil, industry and enterprise and an example of a virtuous and honorable life."? An analogy can be drawn between the Stow estate and his standing with the community of Middletown. A man of accomplishment, virtue and honor, one would expect to be of high standing in his community, as would he see to it that his
family was well provided for after his death. While Joshua Stow was unable to provide for his family after death, he was viewed as a man of low standing, ill-repute, and an outcast of the community of Middletown, Connecticut.

Joshua Stow waged war upon Middletown's Standing Order. He challenged and threatened the religious and political orders as they existed in this town. Stow also participated in numerous economic ventures that aided his purse at the expense of the public. Stow's actions throughout his lifetime attest to the fact that Middletown was in the process of changing; a community was on the verge of becoming a society. No town is willing to accept change without a fight. Middletown was unwilling to allow Joshua Stow and the values he represented, to be accepted. The community used this man of change, to set an example for men who harbored similar ideas regarding change. By the time of his death, Joshua Stow was seen as a legacy and an example of a relatively virtuous and honorable life. During his lifetime, however, he was a villain, a scapegoat, and the community of Middletown would view or treat him as nothing more or less.

Within our society, it is often possible for one groups hero to be another groups villain, fool, or scapegoat. Whether the character becomes or remains a hero, or sinks to the level of fool, traitor or villain depends on numerous forces and factors. This may depend on the actual circumstances of the individuals life, upon the individuals who are interpreting the actions, as well as the psychological and social needs of the people during a particular period of their history. A hero must always be present in civilizations,
nations, cities and towns. The hero is usually he who expresses within his actions and lifetime the fundamental and important themes of the culture in which he is found. Aside from the fact that the hero will generally support the morals and values and economic, political and religious mores held by the community, the hero's beliefs and presence should serve as a model for change, changes accepted by those around him; his presence will be accepted as a model for imitation, learning and growth. The hero will also give hope and direction to those around him, those who, prior to his emergence as a hero, are in a state of fear.

Frank Lloyd Warner compares the role and success of the hero in relations to his community, to that of the artist and his audience:

"The artist and the members of his audience, although different persons, were products of the same social matrix, with closely corresponding beliefs, values and experiences about each other and the world in which they lived. The symbols and themes used to arouse anxiety or assuage fear, and the masks and ritualistic plots of the drama which evoked the hopes and fears of their audiences, needed only the artistry of the entertainers and the sanction of conformity to the conventions of the culture to be assured eager acceptance. The audience believed a tale or a drama to be true and conformed to their reality if it fell within the confines of sanctioned collective representations."

Generally speaking, whether an artist or a member of a town, the first step to being successful, being a hero, rests solely upon one's ability to conform to and represent the conventions of the culture in which one is working or living. According to the time and necessities of those watching, the artists or the man's
drama of triumph may become simply a tragedy. When a man ceases to conform to the criteria of the heroic figure, when he no longer conforms to the needs, dictates and values of the community in which he exists, he, like the artist, becomes the victim of a tragedy. Every man is not viewed as a potential hero. Many men, however, do have the ability to meet certain criteria required to become a hero. This is the type that is of interest in this study of Joshua Stow. I am speaking of the man, who, through other events has lost his heroic stature; the community in which he lives joins together in thinking of him as contemptible, a fool, or a villain and works together in large enough numbers in bringing about his defeat. He is used as an example for others who might stray from what the community dictates as the boundaries within which one can work if he is to retain his acceptable stature and become a hero. If he embodies specific standards and beliefs long held as being destructive to the welfare and mores of the community, he is attacked by those who disapprove of his actions.

The fool, the villain or the scapegoat is usually he who has transfigured the superior, sacred and symbolic world into one that is common, public and inferior. This man is often working against a society that is resisting change; he sees the new as more beneficial to the community as a whole, than the dormant, narrow, respectable limits of community as established by the Standing Order. The villain has strayed from working within the system and works outside of acceptable norms; he begins to assault the strength and prestige of the wealthy town superiors and attacks authority as it exists within the community. He supports the values of progress and
change against those of conservatism. Every economic advance he makes and every political and religious change he advocates appears to be an attack on the foundations of the community. In so doing, this man attacks the positions of the powerful few, of those who control the fears, anxieties and discontent of the many. Such a man if viewed as a revolutionary; he threatens the security of the town, the existence of the community, the security of the individuals in it, and of those in control of these individuals. His success, his significance in the eyes of the community, must be destroyed, either by those in power or himself.

The villain embodies the evils that the people guard against and he manifests them in crucial situations. Such a villain, dramatizes the communities fears regarding the disintegration of the group and the ramifications suffered upon those who, by intent, attack the Standing Order. The community will make use of whatever is available to intensify and maximize the villains worst and most condemned qualities.

As a betrayer, the villain tends to reaffirm and strengthen the private convictions of each member of the community. More than a symbol of deviance, the role of the villain demonstrates the increasing need by the established order of the past to control and direct the present community; this order attempts to conserve the past and resist any changes that might eliminate it.

Such was the situation in Middletown, Connecticut during the lifetime of Joshua Stow. Here was a community of an established order. During these years, the rest of Connecticut was in a state
of transition. Economic, political and religious changes were occurring hand in hand. Modernization and urbanization were transforming Middletown from a community to a society. The Standing Order was not willing to change as rapidly as men such as Joshua Stow desired. Embodied in every action of Stow was his defiance of the old and passionate support of change and growth. Every action representing change was seen as one more act of defiance; he was a betrayer of the community. He represented the disintegration of the group, as did he represent the ramifications suffered to those who defied the Standing Order. Every word he uttered, every position he held, every investment he took part in, was examined and criticized. He was a threat, a destroyer to all those with whom he came in contact or represented; Joshua Stow was a villain to the people of Middletown and neighboring areas. Similarly, he was a scapegoat, for he suffered for the fears of the people and the powers of Middletown.

By 1800, Connecticut's economy had been transformed from one that was essentially self-sufficient, to one that had become increasingly commercially oriented. Among other reasons, the emergence of a market economy had precipitated this change. In order to get goods to market more quickly and to distribute foreign goods in the Connecticut interior, Connecticut inhabitants built turnpikes. Turnpikes were viewed as being established essentially for the betterment of the economic interests of the entire community. However, turnpikes soon became vehicles for the economic interests of only a select few. Incorporators sought to make money from tolls. The absence of charter provisions facilitated the growth and success of turnpike incorporators. The number of shares a man
could hold in turnpike investments were not limited and voting
procedures were not fixed in any way. Charters that were established
left the formal organization of companies up to stockholders;
this led to concentrated control. Because a few companies abused
some privileges, bitter opposition arose to the use of turnpikes
and the men associated with them.

In most instances, turnpikes returned investors a steady
income, made travel easier, served the public interest and promoted
economic growth. Middletown did not view turnpikes as positively
as most of Connecticut. Aside from the fact that it cost more to
build bridges and repair roads than Middletown was willing to
spend, the growth of the turnpike system meant that Middletown
was to quickly lose its significance as a powerful business community
to larger, more centrally located cities like Hartford and New Haven.

What of the men and women who had been abused by turnpike
tolls, the men and women whose homes and property had been destroyed
by turnpikes, whose incomes had been decreased if not destroyed by
the deterioration of Middletown as a trading district? Is it
difficult to imagine that they would be at all sympathetic or
tolerant of a man associated with such an economic venture? In
view of this fact, it is interesting to note that during the case
of Stow vs. Converse for Libel, it was remarked that "Stow pays
no other attention to his office as Postmaster than to form it
out...to the purpose of a turnpike gate."

Land speculation, another enterprise illustrating Connecticut's
expansion into a commercially-oriented economy, depicts the unwholesome
aspects of a developing economy and concentrated economic and political
power. Again, modernation and concern for the public good gave way to confusion, dishonesty and legislative favoritism. Although widespread throughout New England, Connecticut contributed substantially in speculative investments, particularly in lands now known as the state as Ohio, formerly the "Western Reserve."

In 1795, with General Anthony Wayne's defeat of the Indians in Ohio, Connecticut was stimulated to sell and colonize her western claims in this territory. During this same year, dozens of Connecticut men bought the Western Reserve, a region amounting to approximately three million acres. The General Assembly at Hartford accepted a supplementary measure which maintained that eight citizens (representing each county in Connecticut) were to be authorized to sell the lands at no less than 33¢ an acre. The proceeds of the sale were expected to be placed in a special fund, the interest of which was to be used for the support of Connecticut schools. The Western Reserves' faulty title impeded sales and caused it to fail in payment to the State. In 1796, a group of thirty-five men negotiated the purchase of this territory, some acting not only for themselves but for other interested speculative parties. The committee of eight granted deeds to each of the purchasers for his proportionate share of unsurveyed, undivided Reserve. The purchasers were collectively named the Connecticut Land Company. Aside from the fact that the Connecticut Land Company was never officially incorporated, arrears were made by the company in payments to the State of Connecticut. By 1809, the Connecticut Land Company had only paid one-half the purchase price, causing Connecticut to
forfeit all claims to her western lands. Measures for surveyance of
the lands, the sale, partition and method of transfer of shares
of stock of the company were not precise enough to avoid conflict.
The State and people of Connecticut, those who funded as well as
purchased and lands and stocks from this Company, were damaged by
this speculative venture. The Connecticut School Fund also lost
economic support. What had initially been thought to be beneficial
to Connecticut had become a series of misgivings, disappointments,
and disillusion. The nature of the western movement itself was
enough to arouse misgivings. Due to the fact that population was
kept at a standstill, statesmen were questioning whether it was
good political policy to encourage western migration. One wondered
whether, by arousing the migratory spirit, the land speculator was
actually performing a patriotic service.

Aside from the fact that in 1797 he purchased land in the Ohio
territory, no other man "contributed more to the advancement and
prosperity of the Western Reserve than Joshua Stow." As early as
1797 he visited the country as an agent for the Connecticut Western
Land Company, having charge of the first surveying party that was
sent out to survey the Reserve into townships. Joshua Stow was
an investor, a surveyor and a speculator, a man of wealth and
outside of Middletown, a man of eminence.

Middletownians were aware of the precariousness and the difficulties
precipitated by land speculation. Those that weren't would be quick
to realize. In Stow vs. Converse, one witness for the defence, in
substantiating his belief that Stow did not run the Middletown
post office as he should for $8-900 annually, stated that Stow
tended to be increasingly concentrated. Clauses in bank charters which had originally given an advantage in the corporation management to small over large shareholders were modified so that voting strength depended upon the number of shares one owned. The money-lender appeared to prey upon society and enriched himself by buying at heavy discounts and selling at heavy mark-ups. As greater problems and threats presented themselves to the public, it responded.

Sentiments toward banks and bankers held by much of New Haven and Middletown were best expressed in a series of articles entitled "Six Numbers of Banking." "Bystander" believed that the only solid foundation of national glory, prosperity and power were agriculture, commerce and manufacturing; banking assisted these industries and by so doing, the nation benefited. Banks, due to their concentration of money, their loans where an occasional supply of money was needed for business, were of primary importance. They were no longer of any value when they ceased functioning as intended and became a monopoly, a usury or when the money they supplied was used for wild speculation. "Bystander" wrote that, once a place of safety and of profit for a man's money, banks had since become no more than "...a channel through which passes the disposable capital of our inhabitants." In addition, banks didn't enrich the public for they failed to employ, clothe or sustain other classes. Embedded in such an institution could not be located the foundations of national greatness, dignity, power and happiness.

The banker, believed to be a money-dealer or note-shaver was viewed with minimal respect. "Bystander" writes:
"He is a speculator upon the wants of these useful classes of citizens— he is watching for distress, of which he takes advantage to enrich himself; he is enquiring into the circumstances of his neighbors, which when on the decline, he sinks by artful insinuation and significant gestures— he lives upon the misfortunes of society— he thrives upon the misfortunes of his fellow man— he rejoices in their misery and boasts of his usury and rapine— blood from the heart, and the 'pound of flesh' are his nourishment." 12

Banks, "Bystander" comments; like every other good, were liable to abuse, and this occurred particularly by hard-headed, worthless, destructive bankers. Banks had become an "aristocracy of wickedness— a union of crime and meanness." 13 Such an institution "...cannot sustain the fabric of society— it chills the spirit of enterprise— it ruins the hopes of families..." It is a relentless tyranny— cruel and despotic." 14 The writer wonders whether there is any farmer, manufacturer or merchant who has not been victimized by banks, bankers and their machinations. Speculation lead to lesser funds for the aid of the public. Banks were parading their speculative ventures under the noses of the public, yet on numerous occasions refused loans or were unable to acquire the funds needed by those same people. The disappearance of money made this irritation worse.

"Bystander," expressing the beliefs of the majority, held that no man should allow such workings and abuses to occur and if such a bank, such a banker were to attain power, "...let it be, like a viper or assassin, pursued until it ceases to afflict or destroy." 15

The problems behind the management of the Branch Bank of Middletown and the Eagle Bank of New Haven intensified these forces behind public discontent. Both banks victimized the public as did they further discredit the institution of banking.
In 1821 the case of the United States Bank vs. Magill, Stow and others was heard before the Circuit Court of the United States. The Defendants were ordered to answer to the President, Directors and Bank of the United States for having never met the terms of a loan in which A.W. Magill, Joshua Stow, E. Coe and Nathan Starr Jr. had borrowed $50,000. During the trial, it was found that while Magill was cashier of the discount office of the Middletown Bank, he permitted Stow, as a stockholder of the Bank, to receive $75.30 more in dividends than he was entitled to receive. Magill also permitted Stow to overdraw on his account to the sum of $359,605. The verdict held that Magill, Stow, Coe and N. Starr Jr. were to pay the Bank the $50,000 plus interest and that Magill had permitted Stow to overdraw on his account to the sum mentioned.

Equally, if not more damaging to the public's view of banking and bankers were Stows' actions as Director of the Office of Discount and Deposit of the United States Branch Bank of Middletown from 1817-1819. In the March 16, 1819 edition of the "Connecticut Journal" an editorial was printed regarding Joshua Stow and his conduct as Postmaster, Collector of Internal Duties and Taxes of the United States, and as the head of the United States Branch Bank of Middletown. An "Elector of Middlesex" wrote:

"Let the Stockholders, whose dividends he received and whose powers he procured in violation of the charter of the institution, to make himself director, speak of the difficulties they have experienced, the pretense he has set up, and the trouble they have had in obtaining their stock and dividends, and ask one of these men if they would again trust Joshua Stow."
"Let the customers of the bank inform the public what sums he has excited for lending his aid as director, in procuring their notes discounted."19

The Eagle Bank of New Haven was chartered in October of 1811. The ninth section of the statute incorporating the Bank stated:

"...That the Bank shall be open at all times for subscriptions at the rate of $100 for each share, from the School Fund of this State, or from the Funds of any College, Ecclesiastical Society, School or Corporation for charitable purposes within this State...shares so subscribed...may at any time be withdrawn on giving six months notice to the Directors."20

The statute also stated that whether the Banks capital consisted of doubtful debts, forfeited mortgages and property of uncertain value, the financial state of the Bank could, at any time be ascertained, and that every half-year, the directors of the Bank would be in complete knowledge of the state of affairs of the Bank. With no further inquiry and no outstanding difficulty, the Bank would, upon request, be able to offer any stockholder the proportion of cash due to him by his capital stock. Despite these provisions, the Eagle Bank went bankrupt.

By September, 1825, the Eagle Bank had suspended specie payment and the bills of the Bank were taken in payment of notes due the Bank as they became payable from individuals. Months later, the Banks vault was ordered shut by the government. When opened, it was discovered to be empty; innocent creditors were left to sustain a loss of more than a half-million dollars. Upon further investigation, the scandalous management of the Bank was uncovered. Directors of the Bank were believed to have borrowed anywhere from $15-50,000 from
the Bank. Shares of stock, originally selling at $100 per share were forced down to $90 in order to buy in, while selling at $100 and taking a 10% profit on each share. Before the Bank closed, subscribers were selling out at $30-40 per share. Honest investors and investments suffered amazing damages from the mismanagement of the Eagle Bank.

Atwater's *History of New Haven* states that "no Bank was ever more firmly established in the public's confidence" than the Eagle Bank. Perhaps for this reason, response to the scandal was so strong. In the Bank were deposited the funds of ecclesiastical societies, literary institutions, hotel investments, colleges and the properties of widows and orphans, on the interest of which they relied in a great measure for their support and maintenance, as well as other deposits for personal, charitable and benevolent purposes. Aside from the fact that innocent creditors sustained great losses from the disaster, public faith in contracting parties and in the sacredness of the institution of banking were shattered.

Articles printed in the Connecticut Courant during the height of the scandal stipulated that banks should be publically supported for the sole purpose of building roads, canals and bridges. It was suggested that banks be reduced to one-third their number. This, it was held, would do everyone good except speculators, note-shavers, presidents, managers, cashiers and others "who make themselves rich by the craft of banking."

Many who believed banking to be, on the whole, a beneficial institution, were particularly annoyed that, because of a handful of selfish men, the entire history and benefits of the institution
would be forgotten and destroyed.

Not enough damage could be inflicted upon any man who had held a position of authority in the Eagle Bank. The entire community was called upon to denounce and proscribe the "speculators."

"If hanging laws are necessary for any other classes of persons than deliberate murderers, pirates and slave traders, fraudulent bankers ought to receive all the benefit of them. It is not easy to comprehend anything more villainous, than these persons, pretending to respectability, should combine to defraud the public..."

The role Joshua Stow played in this entire affair is very unclear aside from the fact that Atkins wrote that during the difficulties with the Eagle Bank, three men of Middletown were put under bonds which prohibited them from leaving Middletown; Stow was one of these men. For years, Atkins comments, because Stow was unwilling to forfeit his bond, Stow remained without visiting his home in Middlefield. The actual nature and complexity of his involvement is purely speculative.

Bearing in mind the earlier description of Stow's and Magill's involvements with the Bank of Middletown, one comment located in the Connecticut Courant of November 9, 1825 possibly links Stow to the Eagle Bank.

"Is it not also much to be lamented that the legislature of 1822,3 and 4 appointed a man to a judicial office, who aided in plundering the Branch Bank in Middletown out of a large sum of money? Must not those members of that assembly who deliberately placed on the seat of judgement a man proved before this community to have swindled that bank, reflect on their conduct with remorse?...What an encouragement to unworthy and corrupt men—What a protection—passport to rogues? Does not a legislature which elevates a man to a seat of judgement, who is found guilty of gross fraud in the property
of others, sanction iniquity by placing him in 'high places?' How can such rules be said to be a 'terror to evil doers' and 'a praise to them that do well?'

The manner and the degree to which Joshua Stow was involved in the failure of the Eagle Bank is still undetermined, yet he suffered for the evils of the entire affaire; He was

"...denounced and proscribed by the good sense of the whole community, that the sufferance of one may not be a plea for all...the merchant, the mechanic, the farmer, the butcher and the laborer set their faces against them, as the only means of preserving a sound and wholesome currency, and the security against the wiles of speculators, and the imposition of fraud and bankruptcy."26

As late as 1818, the Connecticut Standing Order was unwilling to tolerate any actions taken by the Federal government that might limit their stronghold over politics and religion. Madison had urged the passing of an amendment that would place checks on arbitrary power of state governments, thus prohibiting encroachments on religious freedom, free speech, freedom of the press and the right to a fair jury trial. The amendment was defeated in Congress, due to the strength of Connecticut Federalists and their failure to approve such an amendment that might limit their power. Such was the strength of the Connecticut Standing Order. The Standing Order of Middletown was equally as opposed to any changes that may limit their control. Joshua Stow was one of many men who threatened this power that was so aristocratic and paternalistic.

Connecticut Federalists held an unbroken monopoly on every Congressional seat until 1819. They held every seat in the upper
house of the state legislature until 1818 and no Jeffersonian had
been placed in the governor's chair until well after 1818. Connecticut
"was Federalist to the backbone." 27 Educated, well-born, and
respectably wealthy, Federalists were intrenched behind status,
election devices and impregnable barriers.

"This state, and many others, were under a most
perfect aristocracy—the name truly we dis-
owned, yet quietly submitted to a government
essentially aristocratic." 28

These men ruled with zeal; such vehemence and even fierceness
was exhibited when they were forced to defend their positions, in
the name of the Federalist party, against the inflood of democracy,
which came with the growth of the anti-Federalist Party and with
the diffusion of political education.

By 1800, the Connecticut public had become increasingly aware
of the ills of the government that controlled the State. The election
of Jefferson into the Presidency signified the political transition
that had begun. Connecticut elections in 1804 further demonstrated
to the public as well as the Federalists that the Federalists were
losing strength and support. 29 By 1810, the growing strength of
Republicans had shown signs of deterioration. The War of 1812
further contributed to the revival of the Federalist Party.

The strength of Connecticut Federalist opposition to an anti-
Federalist government culminated at the Hartford Convention of 1814.
From 1812-1813, Republicans called upon the public to lay aside
party differences and present a united front to the enemy. Such
an appeal remained unanswered by much of Connecticut. Aside from
the fact that the majority of Connecticut did not support America's
entering into war, they sympathized with England. The Federalists also gloried in the difficulties presented to the Republican administration during the War. By 1814, the governor of Massachusetts asked the Connecticut General Assembly to send delegates to Hartford to consider measures of safety "not repugnant to our obligations as members of the Union." At the Convention, Federalists spoke of disunion. It was resolved that, by going to war, the government had violated constitutional principles and disappointed the hopes of the public. Members of the Convention declared in favor of some means to protect their citizens against the national draft and resolved to protect themselves against a national debt. With the end of the War, the difficulties subsided and New England Federalists resigned themselves to the fact that theirs was no longer the only political power. A community forever resisting change such as Middletown was not to adapt so readily to their loss of power.

As early as 1792, Middletown was responding to the threat of political radicalism.

"Beware of men whose desparate circumstances, whose profligacy of character, whose hatred of the christian religion and whoseordinate ambition, render them turbulent under the disguise of a flaming zeal for the public interest."31

In 1802, it was argued that:

"There will be imperceptible increases of power and gradual encroachments on the part of the rulers who will brand inquiry as licentiousness, innovation or infidelity."32
The people of Middletown held Stow to be "licentious" and an "infidel," and the contempt they held for him and his political practices emerged in 1820 during the case of "Stow vs. Converse." Before the case opened it was remarked that "The Plaintiff had long been regarded as one of the most active and distinguished leaders of the present dominant party of the State; he had a large share in accomplishing the late political revolution." Throughout this case, members of Middletown aired their strong political feelings and their strong feelings of hostility toward the political order represented by Joshua Stow.

The essence of the trial centered around the general character of Stow, but as Alexander Wolcott stated:

"His general character has not been questioned till since the time when all Jacobins were called Infidels." 34

In the eyes of the Middletown public, Stow was a supporter, a member of the government they opposed and every action of his reeked of the ever-increasing anti-Federalist control over the old Standing Order of Middletown and the policies against which they rebelled. Stow was Postmaster of Middletown, a position appointed by the anti-Federalist U.S. government. Much of the community believed him to be unfit for the position as well as did they believe him to have abused his position.

"Let the citizens of Middletown say what services he renders for the 8 or 900 dollars a year which he receives as post-master. It ought to be known by the government of the United States, and particularly by that class of the community who condemn high salaries and sinecure places, that post-master Stow lives in Middlefield, 3 or 4..."
miles from the city of Middletown, the place where the office is by law established— that he pays no attention to his office... He is wholly unfit to attend the Post Office."

Was Joshua Stow "unfit" for the office, or was it that the man, a Jacobin, a Middletonian, had to be prevented from gaining further power, further influence and further respect by those around him?

In 1814, Stow was duly appointed under the authority of the United States as Collector of Internal Duties and Taxes for the city of Middletown. In "Stow vs. Converse," it was remarked of Stow's dealings as Collector:

"Let those who have been compelled to pay their taxes to him as collector of the national tax, speak of his fairness and impartiality in his exactions of the justness of his demands and of his fees of office."

Stow was further castigated for having charged an additional 5% on taxes that had been paid late. These taxes were most likely used to pay off the expenditures of the War of 1812. In view of the fact that the Hartford Convention, a response to the War and the financial burden it placed upon New England, occurred during the year of Stow's appointment as Tax Collector, is it not understandable that the community would be inflamed over paying taxes and that the tax collector would be abused for that which he represented?

It was written of Joshua Stow:

"...the first services the patriot rendered the State, after toleration took the reins of government, were to import and procure the appointment of a Sheriff for the county of Middlesex. Next to displace a worthy officer, the States' Attorney of the county, and appoint in his place a young Tolerationist, just hatched, with the shell yet
on his head- And now this modest office-seeker, would-be Senator, Judge of the Superior Court, Manager of the School Fund and Lieutenant-Governor. When will the people cease to be the dupes of demagogues and Jacobins? 37

Not only was Stow a representative of the new order against which Middletown was battling, he was intensifying the strength of the movement as well as dumping it upon a city resisting political change, and a city of strength. Stow, not for what he was, but for what he represented, was the man to be held responsible for an entire generations', and entire movements' actions.

Comparable to the political Standing Order in Connecticut, the years 1775-1818 marked the breakdown of Connecticut's religious Standing Order and the inception and rapid spread of religious infidelity. Irreligion seemed to gain strength and by the end of the Revolutionary War, orthodox Congregationalism had been seriously weakened. Just as the Federalists had been unwilling to relinquish control, concerted actions would be taken by the ministry as well as political leaders to preserve religious practices and control as they had existed prior to the War. As late as 1808, atheists and diests were classed as felons who, upon conviction of denying God, the Trinity or the Scriptures, were unable to hold office.

The state of Connecticut had always been governed by a religious aristocracy; in rural Connecticut, orthodox Congregationalist leadership existed with little opposition. As stated before, beginning with the Revolutionary War, doubts held by the public regarding religion as well as actions taken by them to guarantee greater religious freedom, increased radically.
"...infidelity began to obtain...an extensive currency and reception."\textsuperscript{39}

"Her secular affairs were most flourishing. It was a transition period, a day of upheaval, over-turning and uprooting. Infidelity and universalism had come in with the Revolution and drawn multitudes from the religious faith of their fathers... Sons of those honored fathers and the great majority, of those in active life, were skeptics and scoffers and men were placed in office who never entered the House of God except for town meetings and secular occasions."\textsuperscript{39}

Beginning in 1801 there were a series of religious revivals throughout Connecticut. These stemmed from the placement of a "howling atheist" in the White House. These revivals were most dramatic from 1808-1813. Many men from Middletown were members of the four societies which precipitated these movements. During these years, Connecticut witnessed a rise in religious and moral life; infidelity became dishonorable and less rampant.

In 1811, Rev. Dr. Holmes stated:

"A religion under the flattering yet imposed name of rational was substituted for the religion of the cross... Christianity, it was conceded, ought to be believed in general; while it should seem nothing need be believed in particular. As a whole it is worthy of all acception, but several parts which compose it may be rejected ad libitum. Religious opinions are different, and it is no matter what a man believes, provided that he acted right."\textsuperscript{41}

Holmes may have accepted the direction religious practices were taking during these years, but most clergymen were more persistent. Implanted within the minds of the public was the fear of damnation. Persistance on the part of the Clergy did not go unrewarded, for the religious Standing Order regained much of the strength it had lost.
Migrants were generally those persons that were discontented with the narrow religious system of the State church. They were opposed to the scrutiny over morals and pleasures, the forced payment of tithes and the oppressive ministerial influence which pervaded the entire atmosphere of Connecticut. To the Standing Order, western migration did not mean fewer men to convert, but a still lesser stronghold. The Standing Order opposed those who encouraged migration.

Stow's relations with the Western Reserve were not the only means through which he opposed the religious Standing Order of Connecticut, particularly that of Middletown. As written in the Connecticut Journal:

"Let those of his early companions who are seduced to join an infidel club, by him and others set up and supported, tell us of his virtues, and of the blessings they have derived from his company? Let the parish in which he lives speak his virtues—his attempts, but too successful, to destroy all religious institutions—his insults to the Clergy, who have offered their services in the parish."

Stow's attack on strict Congregationalism was multi-faceted. He believed that "Christ's Kingdom was not of this World," and that the government had no right to enforce this worship. He brought his disrespect for the Clergy to the attention of the public in 1816 at a conference in Middlefield. Among others, Joshua Stow, and a clergyman, Mr. Davis were present. In his prayer, Mr. Davis stated that every man deserved to be damned and that God would be just in casting everyone off forever.
"This was at the time of the awakening and many were affected. Stow made some remarks and said that a man that pretends to be minister and gets up and tells the Lord we ought to be damned, deserved to go to Newgate."44

Soon after this remark, Stow read a hymn beginning:

"I hate the temper and his charms
"I hate his flattering breath...

Stow changed flattering to loathsome and turned directly toward Mr. Davis as he read. Such ridicule may influence the public, yet it would not influence nor be accepted by the religious Standing Order of Middletown.

Stow was labeled as an infidel by those that opposed him, and a testimony given by John Bacon of Middletown verified this:

"About twenty-one years ago I lived with Mr. Stow. In our parts he was called a Universalist by some....The Virgin Mary, he said, would be considered a whore and the Savior a Bastard....The Resurrection of the Dead was as miraculous as if a turkey were to rise up with its wings and feathers all on, and gobble, after having been eaten and pulled to pieces by half a dozen men at a dinner table....Joshua Stow said I ought take up my certificate to help them vote and pull down the Presbyterian Order."45

Such beliefs held by Stow did not help him win votes in Middletown as much as they gained him a reputation that would barely be lived down.

Prior to 1818, the religious order of Connecticut was so influential that the public was required to support the ministry. Stow refused to pay such taxes that went to the ministry and at a meeting of the inhabitants of the society of Middletown, held
December 26, 1816, Joshua Stow, acting as the society's clerk resolved:

"...That in our opinion, all mankind have a natural and unalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscientiousness, and that no power can or ought to be vested in any legislature to establish any sect of religion, or to raise money from the people for the support of any sect or order of religion whatever, and that all laws or grants contravening this principle are unconstitutional, arbitrary and unjust..."\[6

Such a stance was the ultimate threat to both the political and religious Standing Order of Connecticut. The most dramatic, most destructive influence Stow had on both orders, the Congregationalists and the Federalists occurred in 1818 with the ratification of the Connecticut Constitution. The complete impact of this destruction can best be comprehended when one understands the degree to which the strength of each group depended upon the other. As Judge Samuel Church wrote in 1850 on the position of the clergy to the Standing Order prior to 1818:

"The whole influence of the State from the beginning had been confined to the Clergy of the Congregational Churches and their advents. Their influence controlled the elections...Appointments to office were not suggested by Caucuses as present but by mutual consultation between the Clergy and the party [Federalist] politicians."\[7

A deterioration of strength for the Clergy meant the same for the Federalists.

By 1818, it was clear that a State Constitution was needed and delegates were called to Hartford, where the Constitution was to be drawn up. Joshua Stow was sent as a Middlesex representative. The seventh Article, dealing with religion, was one of greatest
importance and Stow was one of two men assigned by the Committee to draft the Article. Parts of it read as follows:

"1) ...no person shall be compelled to join or support, nor by law be classed with, or associated to any congregation, church or religious association. And each and every society or denomination of Christians in this State shall have and enjoy the same and equal powers, rights and privileges; and shall have power and authority to support and maintain the Ministers or teachers of their respective denominations, and to build and repair houses for public worship, by a tax on the members of their respective denominations, and to build and houses for public worship, by a tax on the of their respective societies only..."

"2) If any person shall choose to separate himself from the society or denomination of Christians, to which he may belong...he shall thereupon be no longer liable for any future expenses, which may be incurred by said society." 48

As presented, it was believed that the Article completely separated church and state in such a way that it would practically cause the destruction of both societies. The Article was contested by Federalist leaders; the entire Article, however, was accepted. The Federalists:

"...could not prevent the complete severance of church and state, the constitutional guarantee of the rights of conscience, the recognition of the absolute equality before the law of all Christian denominations." 49

Republicans, sectarians and more specifically, Joshua Stow, had forced the hand of the Standing Order.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the problem of community was one of great concerns in most American small towns. Modernity and urbanization threatened and destroyed traditional patterns of social life that had earlier shaped the
lives of men and women. Such a transition was occurring in Middletown.

Community has been defined as an aggregate of people who share common interests in a particular locality; these common interests are wide enough and complete enough to include the lives of every member of the community. New England towns were self-contained social units; each community provided within itself a focus for the economic, political, social and religious lives of its members. Towns' values existed independent of national ones and were controlled by the local elite. The mutuality and emotional ties that existed within New England towns were breaking down and individual economic, political and religious interests began to exist independent of the beliefs of the elite. 

A town that had formerly remained united in spite of all separating factors and forces seemed to be in the process of becoming an aggregate of human beings, impersonal, in competition with each other and resisting the mandates of the elite. Times were changing; the community could no longer offer its members what was required to maintain the close, interpersonal relationships under which they had always lived. The members of a family were forced to stand upon an entirely new footing toward each other. Sons were no longer able nor willing to accept specific occupational nor familial roles which had at one time been but a tacit agreement of the towns' traditions. Fathers could no longer provide for their sons and familial relations became severed. The several members of a family tended to stand upon an entirely new, impersonal existence. Family roles were believed to place constraints upon behavior that tempered a person's pursuit of self-interest. The rejection of these roles meant not only a rejection of responsibilities but a rejection of the old Standing Order.
The cutting-off of familial ties contributed to the termination of economic, political and religious community ties. It is interesting to note that by the fortieth year of his life, Joshua Stow had completely lost support or interest in those of his siblings who had remained in Middletown. This may have been promoted by the fact that he had inherited a substantial portion of his father's estate, or that he held different political and religious beliefs from those of his brother and sister. Nevertheless, in "Stow vs. Converse," both Obed and Eunice Stow spoke of Joshua Stow's infidelity. In addition, the Will of Eunice Stow left her entire estate to her brother Obed. During his lifetime, Joshue Stow embodied every familial, economic, political and religious change that was occurring throughout Connecticut during these years.

The history of most eighteenth and nineteenth century New England towns is the history of a falling away from the social, economic, political and religious standards and modes of behavior that had prevailed for so long. Those that lived by and depended upon the benefit of these traditions, however, were to fight verbally, legally, and socially to maintain the conventions that had thrived in New England for so long.

Any attempt to determine whether or not Middletown was typical of other towns during this period is subject to speculation. It is relatively safe to assume that during a period of approximately fifty years, Middletown was battling against tradition as well as transition. Most of Middletown battled, desperately and unsuccessfully against change; such change she saw to be devouring all around her. Embodied in Joshua Stow was all against which Middletown had fought.
so passionately. Joshua Stow, however, was a solitary person and was successfully squelched in retaliation for the mores that he and his ideologies destroyed in Middletown, Connecticut.

A man of property, wealth and eminence in certain regions, why is it that Joshua Stow remained in Middletown to be rejected by his family and community and treated as a villain, a scapegoat, when he had ample opportunities to establish himself in areas outside of Middletown? As did thousands of Americans during this period of change, Joshua Stow could have migrated west where opportunities for free political and religious thought presented themselves. Remaining in Connecticut meant that Stow would be imprisoned by Middletown's past and fears. On December 31, 1785, Joshua Stow wrote in his diary: "I have resolved to do and say nothing that afterwards I should be sorry for and to be cautious in school as well as elsewhere in my actions." To accept this resolution means that Stow understood completely the ramifications his actions would have on Middletown and himself. He tolerated disdain from those he had known intimately and those he had never met. He accepted financial and political defeats. For what?

Attacking the mores of Middletown meant more to Joshua Stow than the acceptance and respect he could so easily have obtained elsewhere. Nowhere but in Middletown could he have so easily assaulted the foundations of community as they then existed. He supported the values of progress and change and regarded all his advances and mishaps as attacks on traditional values and those who emulated and stood for them.

"Ambitious individuals can accept the present world for what it is, they can attack its
weaknesses and abuses and attempt to improve parts of the structure to conform to the precepts of justice and morality; or they can challenge the whole social, political and economic order and attempt to substitute a new system for the old. This last inevitably incurs the application of violent sanctions against those who lead such revolutionary movements, yet such roles are provided for, recognized and grudgingly accepted by our society.

Joshua Stow was a prisoner of his age; he knew that his actions, his life, the mores he represented would be attacked. Yet, he deliberately played the villain, the scapegoat. During his lifetime Stow had contributed so greatly to the progress, the betterment of Middletown, Connecticut, that the prices he paid for such advancements were insignificant.
Footnotes

1) Atkins, Thomas. History of Middlefield and Long Hill. p. 80
2) Middlesex County Probate Records vol. 16, p. 277
3) Middlesex County Probate Records vol. 16, p. 289
4) Warnar, W. Lloyd. The Living and the Dead. p. 54
5) Saladino, G.J. The Economic Revolution in Late 18c. Connecticut. p. 35
7) Saladino, G.J. The Economic Revolution in Late 18c. Connecticut. p. 28
8) Middlesex County Probate Records vol. 16, p. 266
9) Atkins, Thomas. History of Middlefield and Long Hill. p. 80
11) "Collector." Six Numbers on Banking and the Shaving Operations of Directors. p. 1
12) "Collector." Six Numbers on Banking. p. 3
13) "Collector." Six Numbers on Banking. p. 4
14) "Collector." Six Numbers on Banking. p. 6
15) "Collector." Six Numbers on Banking. p. 6
16) United States Bank vs. Magill, Stow and Others. p. 8
17) United States Bank vs. Magill, Stow and Others. p. 9
20) United States vs. Eagle Bank- Defendant's Brief. p. 2
22) Ha sse, William F. A History of Banking in New Haven Connecticut. p. 1
23) Connecticut Courant. November 25, 1825
24) Connecticut Courant. November 4, 1825
26) Connecticut Courant. November 25, 1825
31) Middlesex Gazette September, 1792
34) Stow vs. Converse for Libel. p. 58
35) Stow vs. Converse for Libel. p. 16
36) Stow vs. Converse for Libel. p. 10
37) Stow vs. Converse for Libel. p. 11
40) see Purcell, Richard J. Connecticut in Transition 1775-1818 pgs. 24-25
41) Purcell, Richard J. Connecticut in Transition 1775-1818. p. 29
42) Report of the Case of Stow vs. Converse for Libel. p. 10
43) Stow vs. Converse for Libel. p. 11
44) Stow vs. Converse for Libel. p. 24
45) Stow vs. Converse for Libel. p. 25
46) Stow vs. Converse for Libel. p. 46
50) see Report of the Case of Stow vs. Converse for Libel. pgs. 28, 49-51
51) Warner, W. Lloyd. The Living and the Dead. p. 96
1) Atkins, Thomas. *History of Middlefield and Long Hill*. Hartford: Lockwood and Brainard Comp. 1883

2) Beers, J.B. *History of Middlesex County*. New York: J.B. Beers & Co. 1884

3) Bender, Thomas. *Community and Social Change in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 1978

4) Connecticut Courant Editions: New Haven, Conn. September 27 - November 29, 1825


6) County Court Records of New Haven County. Vol. 21 1823-1826.

7) Field, David D. *A Statistical Study of the County of Middlesex*. Middletown: Clark and Lyman. 1819


12) Middlesex County Probate Court. *vol. 5 pg. 108, 113, 117, 6 pg. 65, 16 pg. 219, 224, 266-8, 277, 288, 289, 71, 75, 93, 166, 170, 172, 17 pg. 15-7, 65, 89, 201-9*
13) Middlesex Gazette. 1792


17) United States Bank vs. Magill, Stow and Others, Circuit Court of the United States for the second Circuit holden in the District of Connecticut, September Term 1822

18) United States vs. Eagle Bank- Defendant's Brief

