MAJOR MOSES MANSFIELD
NAMESAKE OF THE TOWN OF MANSFIELD

(Article from the November 2011 issue of the Mansfield Historical Society Newsletter)

Sometime before 1692, the first settlers put down roots in the area that is now Mansfield Center. They called their new settlement Ponde Place, a translation of Naubesatuck, the Native American name for the area. It was one of three village settlements established in the town of Windham. The early settlers of Ponde Place soon complained about the distance and difficulties of traveling to Hither Place (now Windham Center) to attend church and sought to become a separate town.

After much controversy, a Windham town meeting voted on January 30, 1700 to separate the north end from the south end of Windham. The General Assembly ratified and confirmed the agreement on October 9, 1701. The following year on May 26, 1702 the General Assembly granted the request for two townships, with Ponde Place, the northern section, to be called Mansfield. The new town was named for Major Moses Mansfield of New Haven. So who was this man and why does our town bear his name?

Moses Mansfield was born in 1639, the same year that his father, Richard Mansfield, came from Exeter, Devonshire, England and became one of the first settlers of New Haven, Connecticut. Moses took the freeman's oath on May 1, 1660 at the age of 21.

On May 5, 1664, he married Mercy Glover, daughter of Henry Glover, an early settler and prominent man. Together they had nine children – five daughters and four sons. The family lived in the homestead formerly owned by Moses' father at the corner of the present Elm and Church streets in New Haven. Following the death of his first wife, Moses married Abigail Yale, daughter of Thomas and Mary Yale. They had no children. [Yale College was named for Abigail's nephew, Elihu Yale, in 1718.]

Moses Mansfield was active in military service of the colony. During King Phillip's War in 1675-1676, he was Lieutenant of the New Haven company under Captain John Beard. Service records show that he fought in the Narragansett Campaign in Rhode Island in 1675. Following the war, he was named Captain of the New Haven train band in 1683 and was appointed Sergeant Major of New Haven County in 1694. This was the highest rank in the colonial militia. According to tradition, our town was named for Major Mansfield because he "routed a body of hostile Indians" in the area. However no records have been found of such an encounter.

In addition to his military service, Moses Mansfield was prominent in civic affairs and the colonial government. He served as Deputy from New Haven to the Connecticut General Court in 1676-1679, 1681-1687 and 1689-1691. He was also an Assistant in the colonial government of Connecticut from 1692-1703. All told, he served as a member of the General Court or Assembly for forty-eight sessions. He was also judge of the probate court as well as of the county court and he served as moderator at numerous town meetings.

In 1701, New Haven was made co-capitol with Hartford, a status it retained until 1873. This was the same year that the General Assembly ratified the agreement to divide Windham into two townships. When the Assembly officially granted the request in May 1702, it named the new town in honor of one of its most prominent members and a respected citizen of the co-capitol. It was a way of recognizing Major Mansfield for his many years of military and public service.

Moses Mansfield died on October 3, 1703, shortly before the town of Mansfield received its patent on October 20. He is buried in the Grove Street Cemetery in New Haven.

Sources: *The Colonial Records of Connecticut, 1678-1689 and 1689-1706*. (Hartford: Case, Lockwood and Brainard, 1868) and Ellery Bicknell Crane, *Historic homes and institutions and genealogical and personal memoirs of Worcester County, Massachusetts, Volume 2.* (Lewis Pub., 1907. Available as a Google eBook)