

Hobart Victory Welton

1811- 1895

"For sixty years in this community, the name of Hobart V. Welton stood for intelligence, uprightness and sound judgement."

- Joseph Anderson,

The Town and City of Waterbury, Connecticut from the Aboriginal Period to the Year Eighteen Hundred and Ninety-Five

Hobart Victory Welton was an important engineer in Waterbury during the 1800's and became famous during the 1900's, long after his death, as an outstanding American folk artist.

Born in Woodbury, Connecticut on October 26, 1811, he was the son of Rev. Joseph and Eunice Tomlinson Welton. The family lived in Easton, before moving to a farm on what is now Wolcott Street and Manor Avenue in Waterbury in 1819.

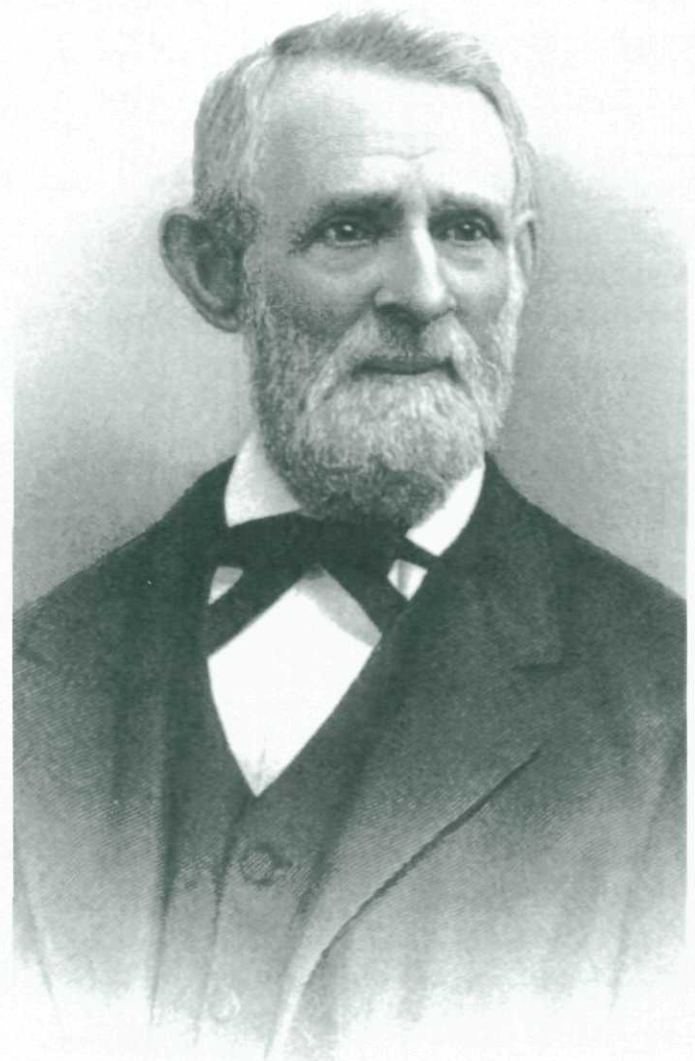
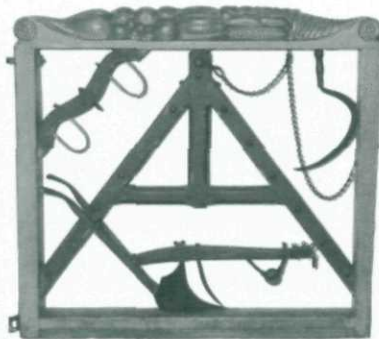
Following the death of his father, young Welton was left in charge of his younger siblings and the family farm at the age of fourteen. He attended school whenever he could during the winter months, studying Latin and land surveying.

In addition to overseeing the family farm, he worked as an engineer. He served as Waterbury's superintendent of public highways for twenty-five years, constructed a system of reservoirs on the Mad River for the Waterbury Brass Company, built Waterbury's first stone arch bridge, and built the state's first iron bridge, over the Naugatuck River at West Main Street. He was a founding member of the Mad River Company, which was responsible for all improvements on the river, which powered several brass mills.

Welton was also involved in politics, serving as a selectman in Waterbury and as a member of the state legislature in 1852 and 1853.

Despite his accomplishments in engineering and politics, his true passion was his art. He began sculpting as a boy, carving wood with a penknife. He later learned to carve in stone. His two stone sheds remain on Wolcott Street, one topped by a pair of carved cornucopia and the Latin phrase "puteus dolium," which roughly translates to "Welton." Other works include a baptismal font donated to St. John's Church in memory of his father, stone lion heads which ornamented the steps to his house, and a drinking fountain for both humans and animals now at the Mattatuck Museum.

Welton's most famous artwork is a gate designed with such agricultural symbols as a yoke, sickle and chain, harrow, and plow, topped with an array of carved fruits and vegetables *spilling out of a cornucopia*. Originally made for his farm, it is now part of the Mattatuck Museum's permanent collection. The gate was exhibited at the Time Life Building (New York, 1966), the United States Pavilion at the World Expo in Japan (1970), "The Flowering of American Folk Art" exhibit which was organized by the



Whitney Museum in New York and traveled to the Virginia Museum of Fine Art and the DeYoung Museum (San Francisco, 1974), a "Three Centuries of Connecticut Folk Art" exhibit (1979), and the National Gallery's exhibition on the *Index of American Design* (Washington D.C., 2004).

The gate was included in the *Index of American Design*, a pictorial survey of American design compiled by the Works Progress Administration (1935-1942). The gate, which is widely considered one of the best examples of nineteenth century American folk art, has been illustrated in textbooks, exhibition catalogues and various other books.

Hobart Victory Welton died on April 16, 1895.