

The Windham Frog Fight Legend

On a dark, cloudy, steamy night in June, 1754, according to the most reliable witnesses, it happened. Just after midnight, the peaceful slumbers of Windham Center residents were abruptly ended by a noise so loud and hideous that they rose from their beds in one horrified mass of humanity.

The frightful clamor seemed to be coming from right over their heads and from all directions at once, a shrieking, clattering, thunderous roar such as never had been heard on earth before. To some it sounded like the yells and war whoops of attacking Indians. To others it was the last ding-dong of doom, announcing the arrival of Judgment Day.

A handful of citizens concluded that the village was under siege by a large band of Indian warriors. These valiant villagers loaded their muskets and energetically pumped volley after volley into the murky gloom, until all their powder was expended. Several of the more daring musketeers were even bold enough to climb Mullin Hill, an elevation east of the village green, where they discovered that the sound did not come from the skies, as first believed, but from an area toward the foot of the incline, still farther to the east. None, however, dared to venture in that direction.

As the darkness slowly gave way to sullen dawn, the banshee sounds in the air seemed gradually to die away. In the light of day, it soon became apparent that no Indians had been in the vicinity the previous night. It wasn't long, though, before the news began to get around that someone had discovered the awful truth. Around the shore of the small mill pond and along the banks of the little stream that bubbled out of the pond to the south, lay the belly-up bodies of hundreds, maybe even thousands of bullfrogs!

It seems that the area had been in a state of severe drought for many weeks, causing the pond to be reduced to little more than a puddle. As the water became shallower and shallower, the heavy frog population was sorely affected. As the frogs desperately sought a few drops of water in pond or outlet ditch, they inevitably encroached on some neighbor's wet space. The result was a batrachian battle royal, complete with the anguished croaks of the dying, and little green casualties beyond any accurate body count.

It is also not surprising that ever since that dark June night, residents of Windham have been subjected to all manner of jokes and jests about bullfrogs. For years, no history of Connecticut was complete without some pun-laden or exaggerated description of the night the frogs put the fear of God into the folks in Windham Center. Yet, while some residents may have felt the mortification passed on by their ancestors, the majority of townspeople have come to terms with their untoward celebrity, even to the point of turning it to some advantage. The infamous Frog Pond (for so Col. Dyer's mill pond has been called since that dismal night in 1754) has been prominently marked by the local D.A.R. chapter with a huge granite boulder and bronze tablet commemorating the frog fight legend. When the Old Windham Bank issued its own notes back in the nineteenth century, the directors thought it entirely appropriate that their paper "greenbacks" should be embellished with the likenesses of two grumpy Windham "greenbacks," fresh from the Frog Pond.

One reminder of Windham's genuine affection for the frog lives on: in the center of the official Seal of the Town of Windham squats a baleful bullfrog.



Adapted from *Legendary Connecticut* by David E. Philips

