

The Ashmere: A Brief History (short version)

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Three families (the Dexters, the Coffins and the Haskells) played central roles in the life of the most elegant house ever built in Windsor Locks - the Ashmere estate. Seth Dexter and Jabez Haskell were early settlers in Pine Meadow, which later became Windsor Locks.

Seth Dexter's daughter, Harriet Clark Dexter, married Edwin Douglas in 1834. Edwin Douglas was the "onsite engineer" during the construction of the Windsor Locks canal. Seth gave his daughter, Harriet, a five acre tract of land on Main Street. It was called Ash Meadow because of the beautiful Ash trees on the property. Edwin and Harriet had a magnificent house built on that property in about 1848. The estate came to be known as "Ashmere". They lived in it until the canal was completed. Then they moved to Pennsylvania where Edwin worked on another canal.



Ashmere

In 1861, Julia Sergeant Dexter, a granddaughter of Seth Dexter, married Thomas R. Haskell, a grandson of Jabez Haskell. Thomas R. Haskell died shortly afterward after fathering a daughter, who was named Thomasine. We shall re-visit her shortly. In 1866, Julia, who was then a widow, married Herbert Raymond Coffin, and they moved into Ashmere. Herbert Raymond Coffin soon became a partner in the Dexter paper company. Herbert and Julia Coffin had two sons, Arthur D. Coffin and Herbert Raymond Coffin, Jr. Both of their sons followed their father into leadership roles in the paper company. Arthur Dexter Coffin continued to live at Ashmere. Arthur D. Coffin later had a son, Dexter Drake Coffin, to whom we shall return shortly.

We now return to Thomasine. She was the reason for one of the most important social events ever held in Windsor Locks. In 1906, Thomasine Haskell was engaged to marry George Albert Conant. Julia, who was Thomasine's mother, and who lived in the Ashmere, offered to

have her daughter's wedding at the Ashmere. Thomasine accepted. Three hundred people came from New Hampshire, New York and Connecticut to Windsor Locks by train. When they arrived at the Railroad Station, they were taken by carriage to the Ashmere Estate. A great deal of work had been done on the estate to prepare for the wedding. A large porch had been enclosed and steam heat was added, along with additional electric lights. The dinner was sumptuous. The decorations were extravagant. It was an extraordinary event.

At the time of his death in 1940, Arthur Dexter Coffin was living in Ashmere. After Arthur Dexter Coffin's death, his son, Dexter Drake Coffin, and his family moved into Ashmere. His wife, Betty, never liked Ashmere. She felt it was too big and coldly institutional

In 1952, Dexter and Betty Coffin and were still living in Ashmere. Mr. Coffin, who sat on the Library Board, was ready to retire, and to move elsewhere. He offered the Ashmere and its five acres to the Library Board to serve as the Windsor Locks Public Library. The Library Board declined his offer, so he sold the Ashmere to local businessmen. They turned it into an Inn, which closed after seven years of operation. The Ashmere was then purchased by a New York company as the site for Dexter Plaza, and the building was demolished in 1960. It is said that Dexter Coffin wept as sat in the Board Room of the C.H. Dexter mill, and watched the mansion being torn down.



The Ashmere being torn down

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