

## **John Winter Robinson**

John Winter Robinson, the son of Charles Robinson and his second wife, Miriam Jack, was born in Litchfield on December 23, 1824. The farm where he was born still stands on a knoll on Route 197 near the Maggotty Meadow Bridge. His Robinson family was established in Litchfield by his Grandfather, David Robinson, who settled on the Upper Pond Road. The Robinson Cemetery across from the David Robinson homestead contains the grave of John W.'s first cousin, Sylvanus Robinson.

John W.'s early years were spent on the family farm and he was undoubtedly educated in one of Litchfield's one room schools. It is possible that he could have attended one of the first classes *circa* 1846/7 of either the Litchfield Liberal Institute or Litchfield Academy but no records for those classes exist. We do know that he graduated from Bowdoin Medical School in 1849. Entrance to Medical School in the 1840's did not require a prior college degree and could have been completed in three years.

Upon graduation from medical school, Dr. John W. Robinson established residence in Rockland, Maine and served as physician at the State Prison at Thomaston. His marriage intentions to Hannah Francis "Fannie" Blish of Richmond, Maine were published on December 22, 1852. Census data indicates that Fannie was seventeen years of age and Blish family research indicates that she had been, "educated in Boston." Her father, James Blish, was a sea captain who had died of consumption in 1847. John W. and Fannie's only child, Frederick Sylvanus Robinson died August 20, 1855 aged four months and seventeen days. He is buried in the Litchfield Plains Cemetery.

The lives of John W. and Fannie took a dramatic turn in the late 1850's when they removed to Kansas which was not as yet a state and was known as "bloody Kansas". In 1854, The Kansas-Nebraska Act had opened Kansas to settlement under the principal of "popular sovereignty". This meant that the settlers would vote to see whether Kansas would be a "free" or a "slave" state. Forces of both persuasions recruited settlers to go to Kansas to swing the vote in their favor. In New England, The New England Immigrant Aid Society was formed

to recruit “free soilers” to go to Kansas. It is highly likely that John W. and Fannie were among their number.

In 1859 John W. was chosen to be Kansas’ first Secretary of State in an election held in anticipation that Kansas would be granted admission into the Union in 1860. Political haggling delayed admission until February of 1861 when John W. took office as Kansas’ first Secretary of State. He and the State Auditor began to issue bonds to finance the government of the new state. Financial uncertainty caused by the outbreak of the Civil War depressed the bond market and John W. and the Auditor were forced to sell the bonds below face value. The pro slavery forces in the Legislature succeeded in impeaching the Governor, Dr. Charles Robinson (no relation to John W.), the Auditor, and The Secretary of State. At the trial, the Governor was found innocent but John W. and the Auditor were found guilty and dismissed from office. No criminal charges were ever filed.

In October of 1862, John W. was commissioned as an Assistant Surgeon in the Second Volunteer Regiment of the Kansas Cavalry and was assigned to Fort Smith, Arkansas. On December 10, 1863, just thirteen days shy of his thirty-ninth birthday, John W. Robinson died of dysentery at Fort Smith Arkansas. Fannie (Blish) Robinson remarried a man named Horton and lived out her later years in Kansas City Missouri. To this day a stained glass window in the Nave of the Episcopal Cathedral for the Diocese of West Missouri honors the memory of Hannah Francis “Fannie” Blish Robinson Horton.