

[Eric Weber](#)

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August 18: The birthday in 1781 of Sylvester Bodman, and also in 1793 of his brother Theophilus Bodman. In 1806 Sylvester and his older brother Artemas operated a small fulling mill on the river side of East Main Street, more or less across the river from the back of the present Florence Bank. There they engaged in fulling, dressing and dyeing wool, using water power from a small dam upstream of what we now call the Library Bridge. (It was then called Fenton's Bridge, after Thomas Fenton, who had built it and lived beside it.) After a short time they were joined in the business by younger brother Theophilus, and continued operating through the War of 1812. Artemas died in 1816, only 36 years old.

In 1818 the two surviving Bodman brothers sold the business, whose new owners moved it downriver to the present site of the Williamsburg Pharmacy. There it became a modest precursor to the big woolen mill later owned by Winfield Scott Pierce and Lewis Bodman, then Henry James (owner during the 1874 flood), and later the sawmills of Gilbert Bradford and Morris Clark.

Sylvester Bodman left town after dissolving his partnership with Theophilus, moving west in 1820 to Theresa, Jefferson County, NY, where he died in 1859. His widow, the former Relief Burt of Southampton, lived on in Theresa until 1886, dying at the age of 104 years, 9 months.

Theophilus Bodman was married in 1819 to Sophia Bartlett (1796-1880), dau. of Simeon & Elizabeth (Burt) Bartlett of Williamsburg. He and Sophia stayed here in town, and Theophilus was well known for his energetic singing in church. In early August 1838 he was committed by order of the town's Selectmen to an insane asylum in Worcester, where he died a few days later, probably a misdiagnosed epileptic. There are indications that epilepsy, which can be hereditary, may have appeared in several members of the Bodman family, one of Williamsburg's most prominent before 1850. Widow Sophia Bodman and her daughter Hattie were living in 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 with son-in-law Joshua Crosby in what later became the Lawton farmhouse, on

the east side of Gere Hill Road at its north end (now renamed Lawton Hill Road). That very early gambrel-roofed house was dismantled in 2002, to be partially reconstructed somewhere in Whately. ("The house is now a garage in Hatfield." – comment by Jackie Lawton)