

**Joseph Talcott**  
**Governor of the Colony of Connecticut, 1724-1741**

**Born:** November 16, 1669, Hartford, Connecticut

**College:** None

**Political Party:** None

**Offices:** Various Offices, Town of Hartford, 1692-1705

Justice of the Peace, Hartford, 1705

Deputy, Connecticut General Assembly, 1708

Justice of the Quorum, 1706-1714

Major, First Regiment of the Colony of Connecticut, 1710

Speaker of the Lower House of the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, 1710

Assistant, General Court of Magistrates, 1711

Judge, Hartford County County Court, 1714-1721

Judge, Hartford Probate Court, 1714-1721

Judge, Hartford County Superior Court, 1721-1723

Deputy Governor, Colony of Connecticut, 1723

Governor, Colony of Connecticut, 1724-1741

**Died:** October 11, 1741, Hartford, Connecticut

Joseph Talcott was born on November 16, 1669 in Hartford, Connecticut, the son of Lieutenant-Colonel John Talcott and his wife, Helena Wakeman, whose father was once treasurer of the Colony of Connecticut. Joseph was the eighth of nine children born to this marriage, and the first governor of Connecticut to be born in the colony itself. His mother died in 1674, when he was four. His father remarried in November of 1676, and Mary (Cook) Talcott was the mother who raised him. Five more children were born to the second marriage.

Joseph's grandfather, also named John, had immigrated from England to Newtown, Massachusetts about 1632, and had been among the first twelve men to buy lots in Hartford in 1635. The lot the senior Mr. Talcott purchased was at the corner of what is now Main Street and Talcott Street, the site of the G. Fox & Co. department store. A basic house and barn were built on this lot in December of 1635, making each the first of its kind built in Hartford (see E. Negus and others). John Talcott, Senior had been a treasurer of the Colony of Connecticut,

and his son, Lt. Col. John Talcott, had also served as Treasurer of the colony from 1660-1676, resigning to command troops in an Indian war.

This family background meant that Joseph Talcott would have grown up in a household in which government officials often visited. His education was probably at home, with tutors, as Hartford did not have a traditional grammar school until the mid-1670s. There is no record of him attending college, but in those days it was possible to apprentice oneself to a profession. Joseph is referred to in later years as a lawyer, so he probably "read for" the law, beginning in his mid-teens, a common pattern for those days.

Joseph's father died intestate (without a will) in 1688, and in 1691, Joseph claimed the whole of his father's real estate under English law, as the oldest surviving son. Although he was only 22 years old, his inheritance perhaps helped him to be chosen as a townsman of Hartford in 1692. A man could only become a townsman if he was of good character and had property.

In 1693, Joseph Talcott married Abigail Clark, daughter of Ensign George Clark of Milford, Connecticut. The couple had three sons before she died in 1704. A year or two later he married Eunice, the daughter of Col. Mathew Howell, of South Hampton, Long Island and widow of Samuel Wakeman. There were five more children by this second marriage.

Once Joseph had been made a townsman, he held offices in the town government and began to advance in responsibility. He was made an officer of the local "train-band", the local militia. His law background caused him to be chosen as a justice of the peace in 1705 and a Justice of the Quorum in 1706. His responsibilities advanced to the colony level when he was chosen as a deputy to the General Assembly of Connecticut from Hartford in 1708. The year of 1710 saw him appointed as Speaker of the lower house for the May session, and also as Major of the First Regiment of the Colony of Connecticut. In 1711, he was chosen as an Assistant to the General Court. It would have been in this capacity that he served that year as a member of the committee to lay out the town of Coventry.

In May of 1714, he was appointed as a judge of the Hartford County Court and also as Judge of the Hartford District Probate Court. He was advanced to the position of Judge of the Superior Court of Hartford in May 1721.

The legislative positions only lasted for the year of the election, but his post of Major continued to 1723, when he was directed to "ride forthwith into the western frontier" and take action against the Indians. He was elected as Deputy Governor in 1723, to replace Nathan Gold, who had died. Then, Governor Gurdon Saltonstall died suddenly on September 20, 1724, and Joseph Talcott was chosen to fill that position. He was re-elected for 17 years after that, for a total of seventeen years and five months in office. This time was only surpassed by Gov. John Winthrop's eighteen years in office.

Governor Talcott's reputation was such that he was asked to be one of the commissioners to settle a boundary dispute between Massachusetts and New Hampshire in 1730, and to arbitrate a boundary between Maine and New Hampshire in 1731. The boundary disputes had gone on for years, and England had threatened to revoke the charters of the colonies involved unless an agreement could be reached.

Talcott also led the colony in two legal disputes, the Mohegan and the Intestate cases, both of which threatened Connecticut's freedom to enact and interpret its own laws. In the Mohegan Case, several colonists tried to have England overturn Connecticut's local authority regarding ownership of land in the eastern part of the colony, land that had once belonged to the Winthrops. The Intestate case involved an eldest son who wanted the English courts to invalidate the Connecticut law that allowed brothers and sisters to share in the estate of their father. Talcott was successful, in both cases, in not allowing the English courts to change these laws, which had been part of Connecticut's Charter. This helped to reinforce Connecticut's power as an independent colony.

On May 25, 1738, Governor Talcott's wife, Eunice, died suddenly and unexpectedly at noon. The General Assembly was in session, and the morning's business had been completed. However, the sessions required the presence of either the Deputy Governor or the Governor. The Deputy Governor, Jonathan Law, was in Norwich, working on the Mohegan case. Governor Joseph Talcott, in spite of his shock and grief, returned to the legislature for the afternoon, so that the business of the colony might be accomplished for that day.

In addition to all his political activities, Joseph Talcott also owned lands in a number of places in Connecticut. By the time of his death in Hartford on October 11, 1741, he owned property in Middletown, Stafford, Bolton, Coventry, and in the "Five Miles" (present day Manchester). Like many wealthy people of that era, he also owned slaves, and five of them -- Jupiter, Prince, York, Rose, and Lillie -- are mentioned in his estate inventory.

Joseph Talcott is buried in Hartford's Ancient Burying Ground. A street in Hartford is named after him.

### **Bibliography**

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### **Portrait**

No known portrait of Joseph Talcott exists.

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