

Some Background on the Colebrook Fair

The Colebrook Fair is a good example of how something small can have a great impact. Our fair certainly must rank as one of the smallest in the State, but it has been held dear to not only our citizens, but also a sizeable number from surrounding communities for sixty-eight years.

The Colebrook Fair began as an event of the school children at the old Center School, a two-room schoolhouse once located at the foot of Schoolhouse Road. The year was 1943, and the country was embroiled in the sad events and worries of World War II. Ruth Bushnell, the teacher of the 5th through 8th grades, came up with the idea of a children's fair to instill a sense of happiness when happiness was in short supply.

Jimmy Mills, although only an 8th grader, was quite accomplished with carpenter's tools, and made a band /stage platform, a small house for Rosemary Larson, the school "Fortune teller", and tables to hold farm produce and craft items. The children truly had a marvelous time, and were cheered on by parents and grandparents – mostly female, as there were few men who were not in the service.

The following year, 1944, it was expected that the fair would be a repeat of the previous year, but that prediction didn't come true. The fair was basically the same as 1943, but at the opening hour cars began arriving; soon there were autos parked on both sides of the road from the top of the hill by Colebrook Road to the crest of the hill by the Carrington houses. And this during a period of restrictive gasoline rationing! It seemed to the children that the entire town was there, and in actuality, that was not far from the truth.

The unexpected success of the small school fair was noted by the Colebrook Associates, a civic organization devoted to the betterment of the community, and in 1945, they took this kernel of success and built upon it to create a true community fair. The first years saw professional bands, of which there were two band leaders in Colebrook, which provided dance music into the small hours; there were booths for food, beverages, crafts, etc., which were enjoyed by all. Enjoyment then was a very precious commodity; we had our men, now veterans, back with us, in some cases they had been gone for three years. A community fair was just what the doctor ordered, where complete families could celebrate the fine points of living in a small town.

Over the years there have been evolutionary changes; The long-popular auction, at the parking lot of the Meeting House has evolved into a silent auction, held in the new Town Hall, and in 2013 the first cardboard boat regatta, the brainchild of Ron Aibel, was held at the town recreation area to the vast enjoyment of all. Probably chief in popularity is the frog-jumping contest. This causes as much excitement each year as in the previous year, and many of our children wouldn't part with a first-place ribbon emblazoned with a bullfrog for anything in the world. (The fact that there are several categories more or less guarantees that there are no "losers".)

Of the many cultural events held annually in Colebrook, The Fair is without a doubt the crown jewel.