

Interpretations From Colebrook Town Records

Statistics can be pretty dry and boring if you let yourself read just the printed words. In my experience as town historian, I am constantly (or so it seems sometimes) researching some aspect of what went on in the distant past.

Years ago, when I was just beginning to get the feel of what the job entailed, I discovered that there were some severe glitches in the path of any researcher who needed to rummage through our documents. Let me give you an example:

Colebrook, and all the other 168 towns in Connecticut, has a certain specified number of categories on which statistics are kept, and these are collected in folios such as land titles, birth, death and marriage statistics, tax lists, voter lists, school society records, highway records and so on. This implies that if you want to trace ancestry, and needed to access the marriages that had taken place in town at any given period, you would go to the "Births, Deaths and Marriages" volume and proceed from there. Imagine my frustration when I discovered that there was a huge gap of some twenty-odd years between the 1830s and the 1850s in the marriage category. Our records are not complete from 1779 until the present, but they are surprisingly so, especially when compared with some of our sister towns; initially, this was my assumption, although the fact that the birth, death and marriage volume had a great many blank pages, and there didn't seem to be any logical reason why that twenty some-odd year period should be blank.

Our land records are contained in nearly 83 volumes, encompassing many thousands of pages. Many volumes have 600 or more pages, others a couple of hundred. It just so happens that volume 6 is one of the smaller ones with less than 400 pages. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the missing marriages were tucked into the middle of the land records. There is no reason for this to exist; it is simply a case of some town clerk making a mistake. It doesn't make any sense that it should have taken twenty years to rectify the error, or why no one had ever made a notation in either of the volumes or in their indexes as to the hidden statistics awaiting discovery elsewhere.

I uncovered this information at a time when I was trying to determine where the young people of Colebrook went to when they left town to help push back the frontiers of our expanding nation.

Let's begin with page 343 of Land Titles, Volume 6: "This certifies that David Matthews of Painesville, Ohio, and Abigail Marshall of Colebrook were legally married by me on the seventh day of November 1832. Colebrook, Nov. 7th 1832, Frederick Marsh.

This tells me that Abigail Marshall, daughter of one of the three Marshall brothers who had built on what was to become known as Marshall Street (the Colebrook section is now named "Old Colebrook Road"), married a man from Painesville, Lake County Ohio, in the northeast section of the state then referred to as "New Connecticut". Two years later this account of her sister appears in the marriage ledger: "This certifies that Reuben Hitchcock of Painesville, Ohio and Sarah Marshall of this town were married by me on the 18th instant, Edward R. Tyler, Colebrook, Oct. 9th 1834". For those of you who have been following my ramblings these past

years, you might remember the account of the Rockwell girl who travelled from Colebrook to visit relatives in and around Painesville in 1850. By her account the Rockwells had many friends and family within a few miles of Painesville, Lake County, Ohio, which is adjacent to Trumbull and Ashtabula Counties, where several Colebrook names became prominent, among them Halsey Phillips (relative of Ammi, the artist) and Seth Hurd, the first pioneer to build on Beech Hill in 1786 and who left for Ashtabula County in 1806.

Halsey Phillips, leaving his family's home on what is today Shantry Road, went to an unoccupied region of Ashtabula County and began to clear a plot of land on which he intended to create his homestead. This became the nucleus of what was to be named "Colebrook". If you look at a map of Ohio, the northeast corner was once known as "New Connecticut", the bulk of which is comprised of Ashtabula, Lake and Trumbull Counties. (Trumbull, by the way, is named for Jonathan Trumbull, Governor of Connecticut, whose signature on a document in 1779 created the Towns of Colebrook and Barkhamsted, the last towns in the state to have been created from virgin, or unconsolidated lands.)

Seth Hurd, the first inhabitant of the upland known as "Beech Hill", staked out his claim in 1786, and remained for twenty years, at which time he and his family removed to the newly created town of Southington, Ohio in Trumbull County. As members of the Hurd family still live in the Southington area, there is a supply of family documents attesting to the fact that they have been a contributing force in that township for more than the past two hundred years. Among the interesting facts about the Hurds leaving one pioneering settlement in exchange for another can be found in the documents kept by the Town of Colebrook. The land records show that the sum total of the amount received for the sale of all of Seth Hurd's land was approximately \$1,000. Family papers in Ohio show that the trip west took about one month by ox cart and cost \$1,000. In other words, they arrived in the new wilderness flat broke, but with twenty years experience as Colebrook pioneers, they were able to survive and probably (by the standards of the time) to prosper.

The surviving ledger book kept by the North family, showing the various materials made and services supplied by members of that family, indicate that when their sons left here to pioneer in western New York State shortly after the War of 1812, they were adequately prepared for the daunting task before them of surviving the rigors of pioneering. Letters to their family back in Colebrook through the 1820s indicate the challenges that they were faced with. There is nothing unusual about these pioneers; what makes them special is the documentation that has survived in town and family records that will yield up their secrets when properly interpreted.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg