

## **Elections of the Past**

As you read this, you will know the results of this year's elections. The study of history is essential in understanding the past, but not worth much when it comes to predictions of the future, so as this is written, we can't help out on that account, nor can all the pollsters out there, apparently.

A few years ago, several boxes of Colebrook documents were uncovered in Town Hall. They covered such topics as land records, school operations, legal notices, elections, road and bridge maintenance, etc. Here are a few items culled from the category of politics and elections from the 1880s and 1890s:

In 1884, voters were asked to decide on a proposed amendment to the State Constitution establishing Election Day as the Tuesday after the first Monday of November 1886 and biennially thereafter. There were 5 sections in this proposal; one set the compensation of members of the General Assembly at \$300.00 for each term. Colebrook's vote was 60 in favor, 50 against. No party affiliations are mentioned.

Another proposed amendment to the state Constitution came in 1889. It reads: "The manufacture or compounding of, and sale or keeping for sale, of intoxicating liquors, excepting for sacramental, medicinal, mechanical and art purposes, shall be, and hereby are, prohibited in this state; and it shall be the duty of the legislature to pass laws for the enforcement of this article."

Colebrook voted 51 in favor, 65 against.

Another election return from the 1880s, but surprisingly un-dated, is for State offices. Both the Republican and Democratic tickets have the candidate's names printed using standard typefaces, but the third party candidates, who were running under the banner of The National Greenback Labor Party, all have their candidate's names in their own handwriting. Every one is very legible and all could be shown to school children as examples of what a person's handwriting should look like, something that is generally not the case, as any of us who work with old documents can attest. However legible their signatures were, it didn't help them gain votes, as the results show 66 Democrat votes, 45 Republican and 9 for the Greenback Labor Party. Interestingly, two members of the Greenback Party came from Winchester; Lucien V. Pinney running for treasurer and Frank E. Cleaveland, for Judge of Probate.

We close with this last item; it is written on a sheet of 6 inch by 8 ½ inch note paper with a heading which reads: "Howard Smith, Teacher of Vocal and Instrumental Music. Dealer in Musical Merchandise, Sheet Music, Books and Small Instruments, Colebrook, Connecticut." It is dated November 14, 1896. The purpose is to satisfy the law requiring candidates to file financial reports to the Secretary of State's office. By all accounts, the election just past is acknowledged to have been the most expensive in U. S. history, with figures I can pronounce, but which exceed my capacity of comprehension. With that in mind, read the 5 line statement filed by (successful) candidate Howard Smith: "This is to certify that my expenses as a candidate for the office of Justice of the Peace November 3, 1896 were nothing at all." (signed), Howard Smith.

**Historic Bytes**

Bob Grigg