

Highlights of Colebrook History

Probably named for a community now incorporated into the city of Plymouth, Devon County, England, the port from which the Puritans departed for Massachusetts Bay. The three English counties of Somerset, Devon and Dorset supplied many of the names now so familiar throughout New England.

- 1732** The name “Colebrook” first appeared in the records of the Connecticut General Assembly, when the wild uplands were proportioned out to the residents of the towns of Windsor and Hartford. Task forces of young men were dispatched to determine potential sites for development and girdled the trees in these areas so that in another generation they would benefit from second growth trees that could be used for the construction of needed buildings.
- 1760** Although not actually surveyed, the town was laid out in 8 three-quarter-mile wide strips, or tiers, parallel to the western boundary with Norfolk, which were further divided into three divisions. 79 land-owning residents of Windsor purchased these parcels, but did not yet begin moving here.
- 1765** The first dwelling is constructed on what is today Smith Hill Road at the Winchester town line.
- 1766** Erastus Wolcott built the first sawmill and sawyer’s house in Colebrook Center. The house still exists as the central portion of 561 Colebrook Road (across from the town hall).
- 1767** Capt. Samuel Rockwell, with his family, bought and occupied the dwelling and proceeded to operate the sawmill.
- 1770** Richard Smith begins operation of his forge on the Still River, in the southeastern section of Colebrook. The first North American steel is made here and utilized in bits to drill out Salisbury cannon. Without the ability to produce cannon, the outcome of the war would have been different.
- 1774** Little went on during the war years, but by this date there were some 40 settlers scattered around the township.
- 1779** Colebrook and her sister town of Barkhamsted became the last townships in the state to be created from virgin lands.
- 1810** With the end of the French and Indian Wars in 1763 and the American War of Independence in 1783, the population rapidly increased, and by this date the census recorded 1,242 inhabitants.
- 1812** Master builder William Swift built the Colebrook Store for the Rockwells. This remained in continuous operation until the summer of 2006.

- 1816** Swift builds the Inn that now houses the Colebrook Historical Society for William Underwood as a wedding gift to his daughter and her new husband, Rufus Seymour
- 1820s** Industries such as lumber mills, woodworking shops, tanneries and fulling mills were well established.
- 1840** The Sawyer brothers opened a cotton mill in Colebrook River; this became the town's largest employer until closing its doors in 1890 due to a poor economic climate.
- 1849** A railroad comes to Winsted and ends, leaving Colebrook 9 miles short of an economic connection. This and the fact that no major highway connected Colebrook to the rest of the world, denied us any chance of becoming a town with any significant development.
- 1871** The Connecticut Western RR, connecting the Connecticut and Hudson River valleys, passes through Winsted and Norfolk, but avoids Colebrook. Colebrook Station actually is in Winchester. This railroad is responsible for making the area available to wealthy New Yorkers, who discovered the abandoned farms with their spectacular views over the treeless hills that were now easily accessible for weekends and summer vacations.
- 1870s** Economic and political problems in Europe, especially Germany, Ireland and France spark an influx of immigrants, many of whom brought special skills to add to the town's resume.
- 1920s** Colebrook's population, which had been in decline since Civil War times, bottoms out at 494 in 1920. Farming and wood production continues to decline, however.
- 1936** The town began to pave its highways.
- 1955** The Hartford Metropolitan Water Commission, having purchased all the land along the West Branch of the Farmington River, completes the Hogback Dam, flooding most of the valley.
- 1969** The much higher Colebrook River Dam is completed with a maximum capacity of 16,000,000,000 gallons.
- 2010** Improved transportation (limited access CT Rt. 8 to Winsted and the northern terminus of Metro North in Wasic, New York) provide ready accessibility. That and the internet allow businessmen and professionals to maintain residences here and offices in the city.
- Active civic organizations include the Colebrook Historical Society, the Colebrook Land Conservancy, The Colebrook Congregational Church, The Colebrook Associates, The Colebrook Senior & Community Center, a well-trained and equipped fire department and a good school system all of which combine to make Colebrook the desirable town that it is.