

Julia Wharton's Colebrook, part II

Julia Wharton, wife of long-time minister of the Colebrook Center Congregational Church, wrote her recollections about Colebrook when she was in her 91st year in 1993.

“The [Carrington] sisters died in the early thirties and their home was inherited by two nieces and a nephew: Mrs. Eddy (Sarah), whose husband was a banker in Flint, Michigan; Mrs. Lawton (Grace), whose husband had interests in the copper mines in Hancock, Michigan; and Edward Carrington, who was in the lumber business in Saginaw, Michigan.

The husbands only came to Colebrook just before the Fourth of July with the families, but never came again. Grace, Edward, his wife, Lois, and their children arrived on the Fourth to spend a vacation of several weeks. In October they always returned to spend several more weeks. They loved being there and made many friends.

Sarah, only five feet tall, was the acknowledged head of the family to whose wishes the others deferred. Sarah had two children, a son named Carrington and a daughter Priscilla (Butler). For some time the Butlers lived year round in a little house approaching the Carrington house from the Center. Many years later it was purchased by Dr. David Luchs. In need of extensive repair due to years of neglect, he had it burned down under the supervision of the Colebrook Fire Department.

Carrington Eddy and his wife, Helen, lived in Mio, Michigan. They had no children. They usually came to Colebrook in the fall, when cleaning and repair work needed to be done before winter arrived.

When Sarah and Grace were in their eighties, Sarah decided it was time to sell the house, saying the grandchildren were not interested in it. Carrington and Helen wanted to buy it, but Sarah said “no – they couldn't afford it”. Helen told me how disappointed they were, but nothing could change Sarah's mind. The truth was that Carrington had made a great deal of money from his Michigan forests. It was such a large operation that he had a miniature railroad built to bring the logs out of the forest. Helen told me that friends and friends of friends came on weekends to enjoy a ride on the train. (Only during the week was it used to haul logs). The engineer, dressed like an engineer on big railroads, would blow the whistle as they sped along, much to the delight of the passengers. It was a big hit, but eventually it became such a nuisance that to cut down on the number of visitors, Carrington reluctantly had to charge for the rides; that, too, made money!”

“Carrington was a railroad buff as well as a competent photographer. Each year he and Helen took extensive train trips across the country, photographing things of interest. Later he would give lectures and show the photographs to raise money for the Lion's Eye Bank.

Edward had died, leaving his sisters to decide on the fate of the house. As I have said, Sarah, for reasons of her own, insisted it should be sold, and Grace felt that she should agree. Carrington and Helen came to settle things, pick out furniture and items they would take west, including the Chinese teakwood shield. Everything else was to be sold. I had always admired the drop leaf table used by the Misses Carrington for their summer guests, and now, at last I

could buy it. It has five extra leaves, only two of which I can use for special occasions. Looking at it brings back memories of many delightful dinners we enjoyed with the Michigan families.”

“The house was sold to Harry Van Deusen, then to Frank Egler of Norfolk, and then bought by Mr. & Mrs. William Riddle. When they moved away, it was purchased by Dr. Ludwig Licciardi, a Brooklyn, New York orthopedic surgeon, and his wife, Vicki. They had previously bought the house across the road, once owned by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Vincint, then by Mr. and Mrs. Proctor Cook, and finally by Col. James W. Fountain, Jr. and Enrique Loynez.

Miss Maria Farr was the special friend of the Michigan families. She was raised in St. Louis, where her father owned a shoe factory. Her parents, proud of her singing voice, sent her to Germany for further musical training that eventually, they hoped, would lead to an operatic career. When her father’s business began to fail, she returned home, enrolled in a school of nursing. She finally joined the nursing staff at St. Luke’s Hospital in New York City. She saw an ad in the New York Times describing land for sale on top of Taintor Mountain in Colebrook, Connecticut, where she was living when we moved here. She had built a modest cottage and workmen had constructed several wooden platforms on which tents could be secured. It was her hope that nurses from St. Luke’s Hospital would rent them for vacations, but that didn’t work out.

One summer afternoon, at her invitation, Harry, Betty and I trudged up the dirt road to see her one-room home. It was meagerly, but adequately furnished, the most important piece being her upright piano. She said she enjoyed playing her favorite music in the quiet surroundings. Deer often poked their heads out of the forest edging her property, curious about the strange sounds. She was told that when the wind was just right, people living several miles away could hear her playing her piano. She also had a phonograph with many operatic and classical records, several of which she gave to Betty.”

“While Miss Farr’s friendship with the Michigan Carringtons couldn’t have been more pleasant, there was a practical side to it as well. Since her cottage on Taintor Mountain was inaccessible during the winter, the Carringtons offered her the use of the little house at the rear of their property. Finally she lived there year around, taking care of the property when they were not there. With winter approaching, or spring emerging, she would phone the plumber to adjust the water system. She never let anyone into the house without her watchful presence. ‘They may be trustworthy’ she told me, ‘but when I put on my major general voice, they do as I say’. She did some travelling. On a trip to a pineapple facility in Hawaii, she saw many employees whose forearms were inflamed, presumably from the nature of their work. That was over 50 years ago. No doubt that condition no longer exists.”

To be continued.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg