

Arnold, Charles

Colebrook has been fortunate to have had so many benefactors in the past that we tend to forget them a half century or so after they have passed on. One such person was Charles Arnold, formerly of Eno Hill in the Robertsville section of town. His house stood just west of the Eno Hill Cemetery with the location marked by a stone monument. The 100-plus acres of his property were left to the Town of Colebrook, to be used for recreation by its citizens after his death in 1979. Some of his civic responsibilities to the town were: chief of the Forge Fire Company, member of the Colebrook Board of Education and fire marshal. He is interred in the Eno Hill Cemetery, just steps from his old home.

In his will, he specified that the house was to be dismantled and removed from the premises. At first there was some talk of actually moving the entire building, but that proved to be too much of a logistical problem (have you ever noticed how steep Eno Hill Road is?), and instead it was taken apart and sold to a family from Norfolk, who had a lot they intended to erect it on. I don't know what happened next, but the material was stacked on the ground, with no cover, until it became worthless.

At one time before he purchased his home, the kitchen had two doors, one in the front and the other in the rear through which a horse dragged wood for the kitchen stove. The horse was led in one door, dragging the wood into the middle of the room where it was dropped. The horse was then led out the other door, no doubt tracking up the place something terrible.

The kitchen must have been quite a busy place, as Charlie claimed it to be the site of one of the first appendectomy operations in Litchfield County some years prior to his purchasing the place. Neighbors gathered around the building to peek in at the doctor removing what was then known as "inflammation of the bowel"

Arnold devoted years to acquiring antiques and objects that struck his fancy. He spent time researching his discoveries, so that he could understand the circumstances surrounding their manufacture and use. He liked to show off a small flintlock pistol as a reminder of the rugged men who lived in Northwestern Connecticut a century and a half ago. Publisher and editor of *The Winsted Citizen* Irving E. Manchester found the gun, old and unused, in his desk drawer when he began work at the paper in 1897. A peaceful man, Manchester thought nothing of it and left it there until his death, when his son recovered the pistol and gave it to Arnold.

Much digging and many years later this is what Charlie found out about his flintlock pistol: According to his findings in *The Mountain County Herald*, a Winsted newspaper that was published from 1853 until the turn of the 20th century, the town appeared to have been a little rough around the edges. Advertisements warned Winsted residents to carry arms with them if they planned to walk on the streets at night. This, in all probability, was the reason for the gun in the editor's drawer.

His interest in firearms led him to another local story; percussion caps, used in firearms beginning shortly before the Civil War, were manufactured at the corner of Main and Rowley Streets, where the old Dano Electric building now stands. Troops on both sides of the conflict needed these caps to ignite the spark for their rifles and pistols. This factory was run by a

shrewd old Yankee, who sported a goatee that he liked to tug on at moments of decision. A stranger came into town one day in 1862 with an order for 500,000 percussion caps, no questions asked.

The old Yankee said, “How do I know your order won’t go to the Confederacy?” The stranger said, “If I pay in cash, what difference does it make?” The old Yankee tugged on his goatee and replied, “You’re right, what difference does it make?”

The day after President Kennedy was assassinated, an FBI agent walked up to Charlie’s house, knocked on the door and asked if Arnold would answer a few questions. The first thing he asked about was the Mannlichen-Carcano 6.5 mm rifle he had hanging on the wall of his den along with a number of other firearms used for hunting and sport. Lee Harvey Oswald had used the same model gun, and FBI agents were questioning everyone in the country who had ever bought one. It had to have been a mammoth undertaking, because the Carcano rifle was a very common, inexpensive, war surplus firearm imported from Italy. The story of this particular gun is the stock, which is not army surplus, but solid hand-carved mahogany. Arnold had carved and polished the stock from a blank left over from the World War II shop of the Hendy Machine Co. in Winsted, which turned out thousands of wooden stocks during that war.

Arnold’s stories cover a lot of territory, but many of them center on the Gilbert Clock Company, where he worked as a supervisor and assistant to the president. Some Gilbert stories:

Admiral Byrd came to the clock factory for a series of clocks to take to the South Pole. After returning from his expedition, Byrd issued a certificate saying how well the clocks performed, and Good Housekeeping Magazine gave them their seal of approval. About eight months later a box of clocks was returned to the factory. They were Byrd’s clocks, supposedly veterans of the South Pole, but they had never left New York, having been lost in the mail there.

Timers used in the Selma, Alabama bombings in the 1960s came from General-Gilbert Co. FBI agents came to the company to get names of stores to which these timers were sold, to aid in tracing the identities of the bombers.

He told about canned clocks. Alarm clocks were to be packed in cans like the old one-pound coffee cans, the theory being that they were hermetically sealed to preserve factory accuracy. The U.S. Government said it wasn’t so and the clocks never got on the market. When the clock shop shut down in 1969, there were 150,000 empty cans awaiting a content that was never to be.

Leon Bruno, at one time the treasurer of General-Gilbert, had furnace grates that had melted over the years, so he required a new grate. Men of the Forge Fire Co., to which Charlie belonged, were picking up old iron around Colebrook River prior to the flooding of the valley and found a large grate. They put a Sears Roebuck label on it and sent it to Leon. It wasn’t the right size and he sent it back to Sears Roebuck. One day he came to work complaining, “Now Sears says it isn’t even their property, and I’m not even able to get a rebate!”

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg