

## **The Building of 597 Colebrook Road \***

The Colebrook Historical Society, as well as most such societies, has a shelf containing old ledgers and account books that have been acquired over time. To my knowledge, no one has ever taken the time to even open one of ours, certainly not since I have been associated with the Society. Our shelf is not even with the rest of the research material in the genealogy/research room, it resides in the curator's office high up so as to be well out of the way of more important items. William Lawrence's ledger covering the last half of the nineteenth century is there keeping company with the ledger book of the Salisbury iron operations for the entire Revolutionary War period, Dr. George Jarvis' medical and personal ledger, nineteenth century ledgers from Cooper's store, and the Colebrook Store and a faded, well-worn and dog eared volume inscribed with the title "B. W. Cadwell, Hitchcocksville, 1832"

How we acquired a journal from Barkhamsted escapes me, as there is no indication who the donor might have been. However, the date intrigued me, as it falls right at the time Lambert Hitchcock was manufacturing chairs, and based upon that, I took a closer look one day. B.W. Cadwell was a woman who lived in the village of Hitchcocksville. She did tailoring mostly, but also took in boarders. The period covered was 1832 through 1855. Two complete pages deal exclusively with Hitchcock and his family. It brings a smile when you see that he sometimes paid her with his chairs as barter. Those who have an idea as to the value of an original 1832 Hitchcock chair will be glad to know that Lambert placed a value of .75 cents on each one!

But I'm rambling – the purpose of this report is contained on the last few pages at the back of the book, where, for some unknown reason, all the entries are for two of her boarders, who, it turns out, are building a house in Colebrook. The only logical explanation seems to be that she acted as their bookkeeper. Whatever the reason, we have invaluable information concerning the process involved in building a house during the pre-Civil War nineteenth century.

Henry H. Bolles and Lorin Hurlburt were their names, and the three Gilbert sisters, Eliza, Rebecca and Ann, had employed them to build a house on land they had inherited four years previously at the edge of Colebrook Center. Interestingly, there did not seem to have been room and board available in Colebrook, thus they traveled back and forth between Riverton and Colebrook Center.

Under the heading "Hurlburt & Bolles – Board": "Both here five days the first time. Bolles came January 1, 1855 in the PM; Hurlburt came January 2 in the AM. They were here all the week. The house was raised on Jan. 5. On January 4, both came in the AM, and here all the week with the exception of one meal. They left Saturday PM. Hurlburt came on Jan. 15 in the AM; Bolles came on Jan. 16 in the AM. Dunham came in the PM of Jan. 18. All left Sat. PM" etc, etc. (Every meal and all their comings and goings are similarly recorded.)

On January 30, Bolles and Hurlburt received the first of several payments from the Gilbert sisters, the initial payment being \$65.00 and the last, on September 21, 1855 for \$156.75. The grand total of their wages for building the house was \$467.75.

Following the section devoted to the two carpenters is the heading "House Expenses, 1854" which reads as follows: North, for digging the cellar - \$10.00. Bazney as North's helper - \$3.50. Hart, for stoning the cellar - \$45.00." (This building measures

29x30 feet.) “Bailey (the next-door neighbor), for leveling off the dirt - \$1.75. Beecher - #10 nails, 50 lbs. \$2.75; shingle nails, 25 lbs. @ 5.5 cents - \$1.37.5; brush, .95 cents.”

Then in January 1855 the list continues: “Paint and oil, \$13.55. In March, 3,333 lath from Allen Barnes, \$20.00; an oven mouth (door) \$1.25, mantle iron, .72 cents; two door handles, 60 screws @ .03 per dozen, 2 knobs and catches, .25 cents each, and a brush and jappan” (black, shiny paint for painting these iron objects). The list continues: “Tin and pipes for the chimney, \$1.07; 3 pair of hinges, .37.5 cents; fixing iron for cellar door, .40 cents; 1 keg of paint, \$2.25; 1 paint brush, .75 cents.” Two men’s names, Milton Smith, who received \$5.00, and J. Williams, who received \$3.00, followed this. I presume they were the painters. The list ends on May 30, 1855 with the purchase of 250 bricks costing \$1.65, followed by the notation “paid M. [Milton] Smith \$45.00.”

Today, as you pass 597 Colebrook Road, notice that there is a fairly large ell at the rear of the house that I believe was added at a later date.

It is interesting to read what David Ransom, the State Architectural Historian had to say about this house in his 1997 compilation “Historic and Architectural Resources Survey, Town of Colebrook, Connecticut”:

“The Miss. E. Gilbert House is another in the fine row of well-designed Greek Revival houses in this Colebrook Road neighborhood. Its doorway and pediment are fully articulated in standard Greek Revival proportions. Probably constructed by a joiner, not to architect’s drawings, the house demonstrates the skill of Colebrook builders in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.” (Ransom had estimated the construction date as 1840.) “They may have worked from basic designs in a pattern book, but their own ability developed through experience clearly is evident.”

It is serendipitous discoveries such as this that make all the hours of pouring over old, difficult to read volumes worthwhile.