

The History of 78 Millbrook Road

As this house is a good example of the type of early construction employed by the inhabitants of these wild western lands, a short background of early houses may be in order.

Although not unheard of, the log house or cabin was never a common feature in Colebrook because of the availability of lumber from local sawmills. The first structure in town was a sawmill erected by Erastus Wolcott on Center Brook in Colebrook Center in 1765. The material for its construction would most likely have come from a surrounding town such as Norfolk (established in 1768) or Winchester (1771).

Some of these first houses were of plank construction, that is, the sides were of two-inch plank, spiked perpendicularly to the heavy framework, with either clapboards or shingles on the outside. There was little studding used on the inside and the partitions were often of one-inch boards carried from floor to ceiling, with a paneled base.

In the center of the house was a chimney with many flues, being about 12 feet square at the foundation.

The typical house was of two stories, with two rooms on each floor, with the chimney between. On one side of the chimney was the stairway leading to the second floor. The roof was covered with hand-rived shingles, known to last fifty to seventy-five years. The interior was often left unfinished. Across the center of each room from chimney to wall was a huge beam parallel with the front of the house. This beam was called a "summer tree", and was either left as it was, rough hewed, or boxed.

As the family increased and money became more plentiful, the house was enlarged by extending the roof at the rear to the level of the first story, thus giving space for several more rooms, with a loft above. The middle room was usually the kitchen with a large fireplace and brick oven. On one end of the kitchen was the pantry, or buttery, as it was called. On the other end was a bedroom. This type of house was called a lean-to, or saltbox, from its resemblance to the saltbox always hanging from the kitchen wall.

The style of house found in Colebrook in those early days was more apt to be the story and a half than a saltbox. The full two story became the most common after the town became more settled and prosperous.

The Adin Wakefield house on Hart Street (today number 78 Millbrook Road) is a good example of those early story and a half type. On the front were two rooms with a small hall in the center, with a door opening into each room. The front room was flanked by small side lights, with lights over the door. The house faces west. On the south side was a doorway similar to the one on the front, opening into a little hall, which led to the kitchen, located in the middle of the back, flanked by a small bedroom on the southwest corner, and a good-sized buttery on the northeast corner. The stairs leading to the second floor were next to the buttery, with the cellar stairs underneath. This kitchen had a fine fireplace and brick oven. Each of the front rooms had a fireplace. On the east, or back side of the kitchen, was a door that led into the back, or summer kitchen, where a well existed in one corner. This ell also contained a woodshed beyond the summer kitchen, with stone steps leading up into the loom-room, a small building at the end of the ell.

The upstairs was all one room except for a rough plank-partitioned room on the south side, called the "Bridal Chamber". This chamber was fitted up for one of the Wakefield boys when he brought home his bride.

This house was remodeled about 1908, and much of its charm was lost.