

## Andrews, Roy Chapman, Recollections

Recently, I received a call from an admirer in Virginia of Dr. Roy Chapman Andrews, a former director of the Museum of Natural History in New York, explorer, discoverer of the first dinosaur eggs, world traveler and Colebrook resident. He seemed amazed that there were still people around who actually knew, or remembered the Great Man. He explained that he and his son had a collection of Andrews' paraphernalia, and could I give him any additional information. Both he and his teen-age son were great fans of his, and the son in particular viewed Andrews as a hero and role model. I can relate to this, as that was my attitude of Andrews while growing up here in Colebrook. As it turns out, there were several items that I felt that I could share with him, as well as a couple that I felt were best left alone.

Roy Chapman Andrews was an enormously recognizable name and face during the 1920s, 30s and 40s; his life and career had been the subject of many books and articles in magazines and the press. What could be added at this late date?

Andrews and his wife Wilhelmina, whom he always referred to as "Billy", purchased an old farm on Church Hill Road in North Colebrook in 1937. The previous owner called it "Seven Hills", but the Andrews', noting that there were nothing but hills in the area, renamed it "Pondwood", a name that is still applied by the present owner, Bill Haskell. During the early years, they were summer residents, as they had an apartment in New York City as well as a place in Arizona. During the 1940s, he often remained over the winter with a manservant, while he attended to his writing. His wife preferred the warmer climes, rejoining him in Colebrook after the ice went out of the pond. They sold Pondwood in October 1954 to Bill Haskell's father.

Once or twice he paid a visit to the Colebrook Center School, bringing along three of his dinosaur eggs as well as other artifacts from his illustrious past. To be honest, all I remember were the eggs, which I can see in my mind as clearly as though my viewing them took place yesterday. They were all broken, although two were basically just cracked. The third, perhaps three and a half by two and a half inches, had been crushed, allowing the contents to be seen. And what a sight! Among the red sand that filled the shards of shell were the recognizable remains of a triceratops embryo, fossilized sixty some-odd million years ago in what is now southern Mongolia.

He regaled the students with tales of the two expeditions he had led to that far outpost of the world during the 1920s. He told of the bullet wound in his leg that he had received at the hands of a native bandit, and of the several encounters the expedition had with these scourges of the desert. The brand-new Dodge vehicles preformed as they were intended, and they were always able to make their escape. This information has been documented, but there was one story that he told us that I have never seen in print, and it is a good story, and one that I believe has a ring of truth in it. Here is what I remember him telling us on what is surely the best "show and tell" that we ever experienced:

Color photography was in its infancy in the 1920s, and like all new technologies, was expensive and required someone trained in its use. The person filling this description was also the expedition's ornithologist. In addition to these attributes, he was also an inveterate practical jokester.

After arriving at a place they had dubbed "The Flaming Cliffs" during the previous trip, the site that had yielded dinosaur eggs, the crown jewels of the

paleontological world at that time, they made camp and soon proceeded to explore the immediate surroundings for more treasures. Almost immediately the remains of an ancient campfire was uncovered. This happened at the end of the day, and the scientists had to bide their time until morning to further process the site. During the night, while the others were asleep, the photographer/ornithologist, ever the practical joker, stealthily went to the site containing the bits of charcoal, and carefully inserted a short section of broken hack saw blade under the ancient campfire. Then he returned to his sleeping bag.

The first thing in the morning, careful digging resumed with camelhair brushes and small sculptor's trowels at the charcoal site. Eventually the hack saw blade came into view, and consternation reigned throughout the camp for all except one individual. Soon he had to tell them of his joke, as he certainly didn't intend to compromise the findings. Before long, plans of revenge began to take shape. One member, while exploring the tops of the Flaming Cliffs overlooking the campsite, discovered the nest of a common bird in the area located some two feet below the lip of the cliff. (This would have been comparable to finding a robin's nest around here.) In the nest were three eggs. He then returned to camp and quietly asked if anyone had any colorful paint with them. Yes, a small amount of gold paint turned up. (Probably left over from the lettering on the vehicles.) This was taken to the nest site; the eggs were removed, painted gold, and then replaced. Upon returning to camp, the perpetrator said to one of his co-conspirators, (making sure they were within earshot of the ornithologist) "I found something strange this morning: a nest with three golden eggs in it up on the cliffs." Of course the intended victim swallowed this story hook, line and sinker, and insisted they show him exactly where this treasure trove was that would guarantee his everlasting fame within the world of ornithology.

Loaded down with countless rolls of film and his entire array of cameras, he struggled up to the top of the cliffs, where he soon was set up overlooking the nest with its cargo of gold. He then proceeded to use "about one third of the color film intended for the entire expedition", according to Dr. Andrews, shooting this wonder from every possible angle. After everyone had assembled back at the camp, and the ornithologist had finally stopped expounding on his amazingly good luck, he was let in on the secret. The entire scientific community went to sleep that night, all content with the knowledge that each had been duped, and each had achieved revenge. Also they realized that they had been part of what would probably be remembered as one of the funniest episodes in the annals of exploration.

I know that there are a few oldsters out there who remember Roy Chapman Andrews, and the visits he made to our little school. He provided a lifetime of pleasant memories for us.

### **Andrews, Roy Chapman, Revisited**

I have retold the story that Roy Chapman Andrews, a former Colebrook resident and internationally known explorer, told about the tricks that members of his 1920s explorations into the Gobi Desert in Mongolia played on each other. There are other stories that I feel, at least on a local level, should be remembered as a segment of our past history, but not widely circulated, as out of context they would cast an unfavorable light

on what otherwise was a well known and decent man. These are small bits of local lore that I personally know to be true:

When I was growing up in the late 1930s and 40s, Roy Chapman Andrews was probably my greatest hero, along with Amelia Earhardt. He had already authored several books, and continued to write into the 1950s. I read everything I could lay my hands on that he wrote. One day, after the end of WWII, he published a volume entitled “An Explorer Comes Home”, an autobiographical account of his years in Colebrook. I obtained a copy, and after completing it, was recanting its contents to my parents. My father said, “Why don’t you take the book up to North Colebrook and have him autograph it for you?” At first I resisted, as I was rather shy in those days, and felt it would be an imposition for me to ask such a thing. My father insisted, saying that he would most likely be happy to sign my copy. Finally I mounted my bicycle, and with my book securely wedged in my carrier basket, set out for the upper reaches of Church Hill Road. It was a warm summer day, and I was rather hot after that long uphill session on a bicycle that if you wanted to ride, you had to stand up on the peddles and pump.

Upon arriving at my destination, I left my bike at the edge of the road and proceeded to the porch, where I (probably timorously) knocked on the door. Dr. Andrews himself came to the door and said, “Yes?” I offered him my book, and told him something about how much I had enjoyed it., and would he autograph it for me? He then ordered me off his property and told me not to come back! (His exact words were burned into my brain): “Get the Hell off my property, and stay off!” It seemed a lot further down that hill than it had been going up, with me looking over my shoulder to see whether he was following me, or worse yet, gaining.

When I arrived home, my father of course wanted to see my autographed copy, and when I told him what had just transpired, he snatched “An Explorer Comes Home” out of my hands and said he wanted to read what that so and so had written. He never got past the forward, because in it Andrews had, among other things, told of the wonderful studio that he had had built in a stand of white birch down in back of his home in Colebrook, and what a joy it was to have such a perfect writing environment.

In those days, my father was both a game warden for the State of Connecticut, as well as one of the three assessors in the Town of Colebrook. The law says that an assessor does not have the legal authority to go poking about someone’s property without a proper court-issued document. The same is not true for game wardens, however. My father then proceeded (over my protests, because I didn’t hold it against Andrews for not signing my book) to figuratively put on his warden’s hat and go looking for signs of illegal deer jacking in North Colebrook. Lo and behold, down in back of Roy Chapman Andrews’ house he came across the beautiful studio, so accurately described in his new book. As an assessor, he knew that Andrews had never notified the town of his intentions to build another dwelling on his property. In the days prior to building codes, you could build whatever you desired, but you had to notify the town so that you could be properly taxed on the addition. Failure to do so stated the erring property owner must pay back taxes on the building from the day he purchased the property, which in Andrews case went back to 1937. On top of that, there was also a fine. Andrews was brought before Judge Joseph Rowley and subsequently found guilty of tax evasion and fined. As he turned to leave the room, my father asked if he didn’t think it would have been a whole lot easier and cheaper if he had only signed a young boy’s book. Andrews did not say a

word, but strode out of Judge Rowley's living room, never to speak another word to my father as long as he remained in Colebrook, which was over ten years.

To many Colebrook residents, Andrews was a much sought-after guest at social functions, and was generally considered to be the Great Man he personified. I will not say otherwise to this, because for all I know, he might have had a bad day, and didn't need some adolescent kid cluttering up his day. He did however, pull one other stunt while writing a subsequent book to the afore-mentioned volume. It took place during mid-winter, I think possibly the winter of 1944, which was a particularly severe one in these parts. Snow was piled many feet high, roads were impassable, telephones were out, and vast areas were pretty much in total isolation. North Colebrook did not get electricity until a couple of years after the end of WWII, so that wasn't a concern at this time.

Andrews sent his manservant out on snowshoes to route 183, at the foot of Church Hill Road where he got a message out to the telephone crews that the book he was writing was at a critical point, and it was imperative that his phone service be restored as soon as was humanly possible. In due time, and prior to many other people having their service restored, a crew, led by the Colebrook town truck, battled their way up Church Hill to the only occupied house on the road. As the plow stopped at Andrews' driveway, they plowed out a few feet of his driveway in order to turn around, and then left, leaving the phone crew to make certain the service was uninterrupted from that house to New York City. Andrews sent his man out to the end of the driveway, with the wind screaming, and still blowing drifts about, and with the temperature very low, (around the zero mark, according to my mother's diary) and informed the weary phone crew that they had his permission to back their truck into his driveway where they could eat their lunch; no invitation to come inside and warm up, no offer of a hot beverage, no thanks for having given him top priority for the restoration of his phone service. I don't know, perhaps he had another bad day.

One other item, and then I will let poor Dr. Roy Chapman Andrews alone, and this is admittedly rather petty, but it is somewhat humorous.

His wife "Billie" was his second wife. She was a pleasant woman, and an absolutely beautiful one. She really was - she could turn heads by her mere presence. Andrews always told everyone that she had been Miss America for 1932. The whole town believed him, because it was pretty obvious that if she hadn't been, she should have been voted into that exalted position.

One day my father bought a copy of the "Information Please Almanac", and while flipping through the pages, came across the list of Miss Americas. What did he discover? The pageant had not been held from 1928 to 1933! It was a technicality, however, the 1932 name should have read Wilhelmina Anderson!