

Colebrook Community Center Background (560 Colebrook Road)

According to the best information obtainable, the idea of a community house or organization, was suggested by the Reverend E. N. Griggs, acting pastor of the Colebrook Congregational Church during the year of 1916, and the matter was taken up and formed by others, among whom were Mrs. J. H. Bickford and Howard Bement. A committee consisting of Mr. Griggs, Mrs. Bickford, Mrs. Winthrop Smith and Howard Bement made a canvass of the community to ascertain the sentiment of the people and to solicit subscriptions. So much encouragement was received that Mrs. Bickford invited the committee to arrange a social to be held in her house to further solicit subscriptions, and to raise funds as well as to talk the matter over. The result was that \$200.00 was secured, and it was decided to go on with the project.

Mrs. Bickford was selected as treasurer. Later the Ceninte Quartette of Pittsfield upon the invitation of Mr. Bement gave a concert, and this added nearly \$100.00 to the fund. This, with the other \$200.00, was deposited in the Winsted Savings Bank in the name of the Colebrook Community Fund.

Nothing further was heard of the matter until 1920 when Mrs. W. E. Hinchliff and Mrs. Edward P. Lathrop of Rockford, Illinois purchased the hotel property at Colebrook Center and remodeled the barn into a modern hall with kitchen and conveniences.

A newspaper account of August 3, 1920 has this to say concerning the Community Hall: "Work is going on rapidly in the remodeling of the old Johnson Hotel property in Colebrook into a teahouse and community building.

E. R. Beckley has a force of men doing the carpenter work, and Howard Hotchkiss is doing the mason work. The hotel is to be raised two feet and modernized throughout. The tearooms will occupy the main floor. In the basement there will be a kitchen, furnace room, etc. and on the second floor apartments for the caretaker. Attached to the main building, which is about 28 by 36 feet, there is an ell 20 by 30 feet. In addition to the tearooms, the barn in the rear is to be converted into a community hall, with a floor space of 28 by 55 feet, and there will be a stage 8 by 20 feet and a dressing room over the vestibule 14 by 28 feet. A fine maple floor will be laid in the hall, and the walls will be sealed with beaverboard and wainscoted. There will be small lighted windows in the hall to match the teahouse.

It requires 40,000 shingles to cover the two buildings, and 4,000 feet of clapboards for the community hall. It will be several months before the improvements will be completed.

The work is being done under the supervision of Mrs. E. P. Lathrop and Mrs. H. E. Hinchliff. The improvements, it is estimated, will cost \$12,000 to \$15,000."

In a letter of intent written by Mrs. Lathrop and Mrs. Hinchliff to the Ladies Aid Society dated September 3, 1920, the following is extracted:

"It has been our purpose in building the hall now nearing completion to assist in providing a center for community activities, for entertainments and such gatherings, for social or other purposes as may meet the community requirements. We presume that this building will be called "Community Hall."

In the fall of 1920, the kitchen and appurtenances were placed in the jurisdiction of the Ladies Aid Society of the Colebrook Congregational Church, as well as a room in

the inn for this use and convenience. At the same time, they turned the hall over to the community for two years to be managed by a committee consisting of W. W. Cooper, Lester N. Smith and Clinton Mackenzie, with the understanding that they should procure furnishings and pay running expenses such as taxes, light, heat, janitor services and necessary repairs. This was taken over November 1, 1920, when activities commenced, and the privileges and opportunities afforded were at once appreciated by nearly the entire community.

During the year 1921, the hall rented 76 times for dances, suppers and Farm Bureau meetings. A rental of \$2.00 was charged for short meetings, and \$5.00 for dances. In 1921, they received for rent of the hall \$270.00. Expenditures were:

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|---------------------|--------------|
| Janitor..... | \$65.00 |
| Light and heat..... | 60.00 |
| Victrola..... | 115.00 |
| Incidentals..... | 5.00 |
| Cash on hand..... | <u>25.00</u> |
| | \$270.00 |

The need of adequate seating accommodations was apparent and the committee in charge purchased of the Colebrook Grange 80 chairs for \$100.00, which was taken from the funds in Mrs. Bickford's hands. These had been turned over by the original committee for the use of the Community Hall.

Early in 1922 the demand for a piano became so great that it was decided to purchase one as soon as a bargain presented itself. The result was that the present instrument was purchased for \$150.00 plus \$10.00 for transportation.

During 1922 the same committee continued and much of the same policy was followed with the following result:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| Cash on hand from 1921..... | \$25.00 |
| Rentals of hall..... | 235.00 |
| Town taxes..... | 50.00 |
| Janitor..... | 60.00 |
| Light and heat..... | 54.00 |
| Tuning piano and transportation..... | 4.50 |
| Repairs and incidentals..... | 60.00 |
| Cash on hand Nov. 1, 1922..... | <u>\$31.50</u> |
| | \$260.00 |

The 1923 season saw Mrs. Lathrop and Mrs. Hinchliff suggesting that we discontinue the renting of the hall to out-of-town parties for dances with few exceptions, this with the cold weather and snow blockades slowing operation.

[If this last statement sounds odd to you, the following facts will explain what the problem was.]

From the Colebrook Town Records, Vol. II, at the annual town meeting held October 4, 1926, the voters of Colebrook voted not to purchase a snow plow and to indefinitely postpone the question of opening the roads for automobiles in winter. (Page 536)

At a Special Town Meeting held November 8, 1929, it was voted that the selectmen be empowered to purchase suitable tractor and snow equipment. N. F. Thompson made a motion regarding the tractor and budget that the town should look after roads, which were in very bad condition. Also the summer people were objecting to paying taxes on account of bad roads. (Page 602)

Let us now skip through the 1920s and 30s in the history of the Colebrook Community Center

The Colebrook Associates, who formed themselves on August 26, 1935, purchased the inn and Community Center from Harriet E. Hinchliff of Rockford, Illinois for \$6,000.00 on February 25, 1944.

The Articles of Incorporation of the Colebrook Associates reads in part: Article 2 "The purposes for which said corporation is formed are the following: To engage in charitable projects in the Town of Colebrook, Connecticut without profit; no part of the net income of the corporation shall inure to the benefit of any member or individual."

The Colebrook Associates, Inc., in their July 12, 1953 meeting, made the following proposal: "Mrs. Thomas Brown moved that the Colebrook Associates offer the Inn property as a gift to the town of Colebrook for civic and town purposes with the provision that it revert to the Colebrook Associates if it cease to be used for such purposes, and with the provision that the outside appearance of the building remain substantially as it is now." This motion was seconded by Mrs. Kelly Prentice and was carried by a vote of eleven in favor and six against.

Formal offer of the Inn property as a gift to the Town on the conditions thus specified was made by letter dated August 28, 1953 to First Selectman Leroy Millard.

At the annual town meeting held on October 5, 1953, the Town directed the moderator of the meeting to appoint a committee of five to study the proposal and report to an adjourned meeting to be held on October 13, 1953. The moderator appointed Roy M. Hawkes, Earl W. Smith, Leroy E. Millard, Robert B. Whiting and Seth H. Seymour as such committee.

At the adjourned town meeting on October 13, this committee made its report recommending that the Town accept the gift of the Inn property on the conditions specified. By a vote of 50 in favor to 16 opposed, the meeting voted to accept the gift.

"With this gift the Colebrook Associates, Inc. will have taken a great step toward fulfilling one of its purposes - - preserving Colebrook Center in its unspoiled state, and the Town of Colebrook will have a Town Building befitting the dignity of the Town."

Compiled by Robert Grigg, Municipal Historian, Town of Colebrook, Connecticut.