

## **The Beginnings of the Colebrook Consolidated School**

The evolving complexities of our society are graphically illustrated when one reads how the residents of the Forge District in Robertsville decided to build a new schoolhouse to replace their aging one in 1834. From the day it was decided in a meeting of the school district that a new one was needed and that the location needed to be changed (May 1, 1834) until the completion of the new school (December 4, 1834), a period of 214 days had elapsed and there had been an expenditure of \$180.00, a figure that took into account whatever incidentals that might have been incurred in the process. They even were able to sell the old building for \$26.00, which they applied to the cost of the new school.

As World War II drew to a close, it became apparent to the citizens of Colebrook that our old system of regional schoolhouses was antiquated and was in need of immediate overhaul. I attended the Colebrook Center School from the first grade (1938) until graduating from the eighth grade in 1946, and I remember hearing my parents talking about this need and where it was proposed to build the consolidated school. I don't remember hearing anything about the projected costs, which is understandable when you consider my aversion to any form of math in those days!

In reality, we will assign the date of the Colebrook Town Meeting of September 25, 1945 as the beginning of our present school, as it was on this date that the voters decided to purchase a plot of land from William Mather Lewis for the location of the new central schoolhouse for a cost of not more than \$2,000.00.

The next reference to the school was at a special Town Meeting held May 28, 1946 when it was resolved that the Town of Colebrook shall build a public school building not to cost more than \$50,000.00.

More months slipped by, and on January 6, 1947, at a special Town Meeting, the 1947 budget appropriated \$11,500.00 for operational expenses for the three remaining schools, i.e. The Center School, Forge School and what remained of the River School.

There were still heated arguments anywhere in town that either the location was wrong or that the projected costs were exorbitantly high. This continued until a special Town Meeting was called for December 1, 1947, when it was voted to proceed forthwith to have a well drilled at the new school site "sufficient to provide an adequate water supply for any proposed school". The voters appropriated \$6,000.00 for drilling a well, and for expenses of said committee in carrying out its functions.

Well drilling, especially in our area, is a very iffy business. One well will produce 10 gallons per minute after having been drilled 150 feet, while another well drilled a short distance away, will produce one half gallon per minute at a depth of 350 feet. The well drillers will only discuss the price per foot, or the price per hour, and there never is any suggestion of a guarantee of water at any depth or at any flow.

Before proceeding further with the water, hear what transpired with the building itself: On March 15, 1948, at a special Town Meeting, 5 options were presented to the voters as to the type of construction of the new school. The plan for a masonry school with an assembly hall won with 95 votes. It was also voted that the Town provide a sum of not more than \$125,000.00 for the construction of the new school. Of this, \$90,000.00 in bonds was to be issued by Colebrook, with a grant of \$25,000.00 by the State.

The first well drilled produced only 1/3 gallon of water per minute, so it was decided to drill another one a short distance away. This second well only produced 1½

gallons per minute, not nearly enough. A Mr. Sexton, water supply engineer for the City of Hartford, was consulted, and after reviewing the first two wells, recommended drilling a third well 200 feet east of the school. The proposed site had been approved by the Board of Education. Irving Pruyn stated that the cost at the very maximum would not exceed \$12,000.00. It was then voted to postpone this motion until the building committee could bring in actual contract figures on well drilling.

On January 24, 1949 an additional \$9,000.00 was appropriated for further well drilling

February 7, 1949, adjourned Town Meeting: "The school building committee reported that they had sent out eight bids to well drillers, inviting them to bid on the basis of 10 gallons of water per minute, and if there was no water obtained, there would be no compensation. No bids had been received by January 31, 1949. The only bid they did get was from the Church Co. of Seymour, Connecticut for 10 gallons per minute on the basis of \$7.00 per foot plus the cost of the casing, but they would expect to get paid whether they struck water or not.

The Laffarque Co., already on site, suggested that they go another 100 feet and stop drilling there, and that if they struck water, would charge the usual \$6.00 per hour, but if they didn't strike water at or before that level, they wouldn't be paid.

It was recommended that this plan be followed. It was determined that presently the well was 200 feet deep and that the price of \$6.00 hourly equaled about \$5.00 per foot.

On February 21, 1949, at an adjourned Town Meeting, the voters authorized the well driller to go an extra 20 feet past the 100 feet already agreed upon.

By March 7, the well driller was slightly below the 300-foot level and still had only 3 gallons per minute. He wanted to pull out and start a fourth well. The town brought in a United States Geological Survey man and he was to file a report in a day or two. I cannot begin to tell you today of the animosity this well situation developed in Colebrook. I am not exaggerating when I say that we avoided someone getting murdered because of this by the narrowest of margins.

A voters uprising resulted in the negotiations conducted by the authorized committee being tossed out and a diviner was called in, witched the area and chose a location. This was chosen as the final site.

At the April 11, 1949 special Town Meeting it was voted to appropriate an additional \$4,700.00 to cover the extra cost of well drilling in addition to pumps, tanks, etc. Thus the final cost of obtaining water (the volume of which is still a very real cause of concern), was \$19,700.00.

On April 11, 1949 the voters gave the Selectmen authorization to sell the Center and Forge Schools (the MDC had already purchased the Colebrook River School) and the land they stood on. The Center School was appraised at \$2,100.00 and the Forge School at \$1,900.00. On April 19, 1950, the Town sold the Forge School to the Victory Grange for \$750.00, and on January 1, 1961, the Center School was sold to Dr. Luchs for \$625.00.

On June 1, 1954, the chairman of the Board of Education presented figures for salaries ranging from \$15,000.00 to \$17,800.00.

The Consolidated School opened its doors the first week of 1949, nearly four years after the decision was made to have it built, and at a cost of some \$144,700.00.