

The Colebrook Historical Society, Inc.

The Society was founded in 1953 by a dedicated group headed by Mabel Newell and Margaret Thompson, who served as the first president. Also instrumental as founders were Elaine Wesley DeLarm (1917-1987), who served the CHS for 26 years, and Dr. William Mather Lewis (1878-1945), a long-time resident of Colebrook. Dr. Lewis had been president of both George Washington University, (1923-27) and Lafayette College (1927-1945). He was also the father of Sally Lewis Betts Hale, who devoted much of her life to the betterment of our society, which included decades of service to the Colebrook Historical Society. The Colebrook Historical Society has served our community as an educational as well as a cultural tool for more than a half century.

The society is housed in a wonderful building built in 1816 by Colebrook master builder William Swift, who also built the Rockwell home now housing the Winsted Historical Society, the Colebrook Store, and other dwellings in town. It was built as an inn for William Underwood as a wedding gift to his daughter, who was marrying Rufus Seymour, hence, its first name of "The Seymour Inn."

The present building reflects renovations made in 1920 by owners Mrs. W. E. Hinchliff and Mrs. Edward P. Lathrop (both of whom were descendents of the Rockwell family, so instrumental in shaping Colebrook during her formative years.) In 1944, Mrs. Hinchliff sold the building to the Colebrook Associates, and they in turn made a gift of it to the Town of Colebrook in 1953 with the stipulation that it be used for civic and town purposes, with the provision that the outside appearance remain substantially unchanged.

From 1953 until the construction of the new town hall in 2003, one half of the first floor constituted Town Hall, an amazing feat when you realize that all the offices now in use there were just a few short years ago shoehorned into these two tiny rooms. With the withdrawal of the town offices, the historical society was given jurisdiction over the interior of the entire building. The incorporation of the old town hall into the historical society was still ongoing during 2008.

The society is the repository of the entire set of documents covering the Colebrook school system, beginning with its inception in 1796. We also have a valuable collection of genealogical material that is available to the general public.

Contained within two floors are a plethora of objects and artifacts donated by Colebrook residents, both present and past. The vast majority were either made in, or used in Colebrook.

In addition to our museum collection, our society owns the Rock Schoolhouse, located a little more than one mile north of the village. This original school building was in continuous use from 1779 until 1911, when population decreases necessitated the consolidation of several of our one-room schools. Today it remains essentially as it was built, having never been electrified nor supplied with water or "inside plumbing". To our knowledge, this is the only Colonial schoolhouse in Connecticut that can make these claims.

Annually, the third grade of the Colebrook Consolidated School spends an entire school day there, using books and other teaching paraphernalia bearing dates from the opening decades of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.

As we begin our journey into the twenty-first century, the Colebrook Historical Society feels confident that with the sustained support of our community, we will

continue to provide social and educational excellence to our community in a style established by the examples set by the Rockwells.

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