

Colebrook News From January 5, 1877

From the microfilm files at the Beardsley and Memorial Library come these facts from the old Winsted Mountain Herald:

Colebrook “We wish everyone a happy January thaw. Sleigh riders leave their whips behind nowadays and take their shovels instead. The stage route and Smith’s ‘Milky-way’ were both rendered impassable by drifts last Saturday. Miss Sarah Carrington and Edwin T, her brother, spent the ‘Happy New Year’ under the paternal; roof.”

[Those of you who follow Historic Bytes will remember that this is the period when Yew Fun Tan and other Chinese students were members of both the Winsted and Colebrook communities, with the Carrington household being the focal point for their activities in Colebrook.]

“The Winsted brethren, after 5 unsuccessful appointments, held their first union meeting in the brick schoolhouse on Wednesday evening of last week. These meetings are full of interest and will be continued, weather and roads permitting, for some time to come.”

[This is an interesting observation, as the South School, located at the intersection of the Old North Road, Smith Hill Road and Losaw Road, was the official schoolhouse for a one square mile of Winchester contiguous to that section of Colebrook’s south line. This is the only reference that I have ever come across that dealt with a school committee consisting of Winchester residents whose children attended that school. Losaw Road, recently reopened after decades of abandonment, used to be an important road during the period when both towns used the South School. The eastern side of the one square mile of Winchester encompassed Smith Hill adjacent to Rowley Pond, where the bricks were made; the southern boundary took in the houses along Spencer Hill Road far as the intersection of the south end of Losaw Road; the western side included all the farms along that road, of which there were several, and the common town line served as the northern boundary. This arrangement began at least as early as 1816, possibly a few years earlier, and continued throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. The school was discontinued after the 1916 school year and the Colebrook students were transferred to the Center School.]

“The South School numbered 29 pupils, and the highest number of credits for scholarship and deportment was awarded by the teacher to Ida Barber, next in number to Bessie Barber, and third to Dorence Barber. Barberous, wasn’t it!”

“There are 84 dogs registered in this town whose aggregate value is estimated at \$0.000.00. Only 143 sheep in all the town, and dog starvation is imminent.

The gentlemen elect, whose business is to relieve property holders from undue anxiety in regard to supposed exorbitant assessments are Edward Taintor, Burritt Roberts and George Whipple. They met in the performance of their duties at Wheeler’s store last Monday, and will meet at Colebrook River on Monday week and at the Sandy Brook schoolhouse on the Monday succeeding.”

[These meetings, held at various geographical locations throughout town, were necessitated by the lack of a town hall or other public building. The physical layout of the town caused a nearly impassable barrier between the eastern and western parts, and in

the days before modern roads and reliable transportation, citizens were effectively isolated from all but their immediate neighborhood. Discussions were held nearly every year as to a fair and equitable location for such a town hall, but the differences could never be overcome until the town was offered the old Colebrook Inn, located in Colebrook Center. This did not occur until 1953, and by that time Colebrook River had ceased to exist, which left Robertsville isolated all by itself in the southeast corner. Although many there were disappointed with the outcome, at least they were able to attend meetings in the Center via the new (1946) Sandy Brook Road or the now paved Deer Hill Road without too much inconvenience.]

“It will be remembered that our town at its October meeting voted a re-assessment of all its property and appointed Hiram Bliss and Albert Kelsey to perform the duty. Such a step had become necessary, from the fact that no re-assessment had been made since that by Deacon Elijah Grant and Rufus Seymour some 25 years ago, and values had fluctuated very materially during this quarter of a century. Messrs Bliss and Kelsey have now completed the duties of their appointment and their work is before us.”

[Here the writer uses two columns, one for 1875, the other for 1876 to show the reduction in assessed values, but as we wouldn't find this very interesting, I will list only the several categories that were taxed in those years. At the present time, Colebrook is once again undergoing a revaluation, and our residents are looking forward to it with the same trepidation as did our forefathers. The concern in 2005 is for the assessed value of land, especially that which lends itself to development. Recent house prices have spiraled into the rarefied realm of \$1,000,000.00, which may be affordable to someone from New York, but which will make it difficult if not impossible for our elders and young people to remain in town. At any rate, here is the list of taxable items in 1876:]

19,332 acres of land, 243 dwelling houses, 19 mills and stores, 174 horses, 1,041 neat cattle (the term “neat” means any member of the bovine family; in other words, a cow.), 143 sheep, 41 carriages, 13 watches, 28 musical instruments and several categories of monetary investments. The taxes for that year brought in \$446,391; in 2004, the figure was \$4,251,288.00.

One item in this “local news” category mentions a term that I am completely ignorant of: a “sugar wedding”. Has anyone out there any knowledge of such an anniversary? Here is the report:

“Monday evening a grand sugar wedding was celebrated by Thomas Mather and wife at his father's residence. I should judge about 50 were in attendance. All were merry and left, at their departure, sugar sufficient to sweeten, if necessary, the bride and groom during the remainder of their lives, with enough left over to please the children. The old fashioned games were indulged in until a late hour and the occasion, on the whole, was one of interest to all present, especially to the correspondent.”

It seems that this “sugar wedding” must have taken place shortly after the actual wedding. If anyone has knowledge of such an event, please contact the Winsted Journal, as it is a small bit of local lore that has escaped us until now.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg

