

Colebrook School Records

During the summer of 1998, a series of documents turned up that had never been seen by anyone now living. Before the present Town Hall was acquired in 1953, all town documents were kept in the office of the current town clerk. Clarence Stotts was the last town clerk to do this. He owned the Colebrook Store, lived upstairs and used the office at the back of the store, later used as the kitchen, as the repository for all official documents. These were all moved across the road and into their new quarters; most were eventually placed in the newly constructed vault, but three cartons were placed on shelves in a closet in the back office. Here they remained for nearly a half-century, hidden behind a wall of legal books. Meanwhile, the Colebrook Historical Society had been founded, and over the years pieced together much of Colebrook's history. However, there were frustrating gaps, especially in school records, and as the years passed and no new documents turned up, hope faded that they would ever turn up. With the surfacing of the cartons, however, many of the missing pieces have fallen into place.

Records of the Colebrook School Society, formed in 1796, were there – contained in a volume entitled *School Society, 1796 – 1856*. Another volume is entitled *Record of Colebrook Center School District Society*, covering the years 1829 – 1903. And there are more, but the purpose of this covering document is to present several reports of the School Visitors, a committee of the School Society, which evolved from a previous committee called School Inspectors in 1837. The purpose of the visitors was to evaluate the teachers, pupils and the physical buildings. In the early years, these visitors were dedicated men who wrote long, carefully thought-out reports. Presumably there was a report for the school year 1837 – 1838, but the earliest we have seen so far is for the school year 1839 – 1840, written by Harvey Whiting, a man who fulfilled his office with distinction.

School Visitors' reports covering the school years 1850, 1856 and 1857 were also found and transcribed. It is remarkable to see the similarities of the problems and concerns between the last years of the twentieth century and those of the 1840s and 1850s. These are not dry statistics, nor the stuff ledger books are made of; they are written by articulate men, often in the first person and not without some humor. Reading them gives a wonderful sense of our personal history, as well as a feeling of intimacy with a time long past.