

## **Colebrook, Ohio Revisited**

From Colonial times, there has always been a slow exodus from these hill townships by residents who sought better farmland or a more advantageous location. After the conclusion of the War of Independence, lands in New York State, Vermont, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Ohio beckoned. Many of the local settlers were veterans of Washington's army, and as such, were entitled to land as a form of compensation. One such location was Johnstown, New York, where at least two of Colebrook Connecticut's pioneers were granted land that had been confiscated from British Tories. A great inducement to Litchfield County's residents was an area known as the Wyoming valley (now located in northwestern Pennsylvania), formed in 1753, which became legally a part of Litchfield County in 1774, and remained attached to Litchfield County until 1782, when a counter claim by the State of Pennsylvania was honored by a court of arbitration appointed by the Continental Congress. To offset the loss of these 3,300,000 acres, an equal amount of land was established as a Connecticut possession in the area known as the Western Reserve, located in what was eventually to be known as Ohio.

For a time "New Connecticut" became the name of the Western Reserve, but after Ohio was admitted as a state in 1803, the area was formed into two counties, Ashtabula and Trumbull, with the latter being named for the popular Connecticut governor Jonathan Trumbull. After more than 200 years there are many names here attesting to the Connecticut connection; towns such as Colebrook, West Farmington, Windsor, North Bloomfield, Kent, Vernon Hartford, Southington and Warren.

One of the first settlers to arrive in what was to become Colebrook was Colebrook Connecticut resident Samuel Phillips.

The following is a fact sheet supplied by a group in Colebrook, Ohio that is of interest:

"Colebrook is at the geographic center of an area bounded by Ashtabula, Niles and Chardon, Ohio and Greenville, Pennsylvania. While these communities that lie 25 miles to the north, south east and west of this Western Reserve township have grown into fair-sized towns, Colebrook's slow growth has not been enough to raise the population to its high of 800, which it had during our country's centennial celebration.

Colebrook is the crossroads to many places, a town that was settled in the pioneer tradition 195 years ago.

In 1808, the 16,000 acres were surveyed into half-mile square lots. Samuel Phillips, a Revolutionary War soldier and resident of Colebrook, Connecticut, was to assist in surveying. When he arrived in Warren, he organized a company with John Henshaw as surveyor.

Their first night in the township was spent camped at the foot of a whitewood tree, which stood west of the intersection of Route 46 and Windsor Road.

Also in 1808, the Windsor Road was laid out on the lot lines straight through the township one mile from the north line. In 1818 it was laid out four rods wide [66 feet] and in 1820 this was reduced. The settlers set aside the first Monday of each month to work on the road, a rule that was followed faithfully for many years.

In the spring of 1821, Samuel Phillips Sr. made his fourth trip to Colebrook. He came on horseback and spent the summer working on his property. Roswell Stillman brought Phillips' wife and their three daughters, Fanny, Cleora and Cordella. The

journey had taken them only 28 days, the best time anyone had achieved since Colebrook had become a separate township. On the first Monday in April of that year, all the electors met at the home of Francis Drake. At this meeting, the names Quincy, Putney and Colebrook were proposed as names for this new township, with Colebrook receiving seven votes, Quincy one, and Putney one.

New families began to arrive more often; among those early settlers were Ezra S. Chapel, Daniel Loomis, John Bogue Sr. and Jr., Nathaniel Shipman, Benjamin Scott, Sidney S. Carter, Josiah I. Peck, William Forman and S. G. Peck.

In 1830, Henry Stults and his wife were the first to settle near the center, others coming in 1830 were Isaac L. Jayne, Roland A. Treat, Gilbert Cole, Jacob Bunker, Joseph Allison, Sylvanus Webb, Elkenny Webb, Jonathan Webb and Elder David Webb. Most of these families were from Gorham, New York, many having traded their farms there with Oliver Phelps.

Because Oliver Phelps had offered to give three acres at the center for a public park (worth then about \$9.00) if the township was renamed Phelps, the first thing the settlers from Gorham did was to petition the commissioners to have the name changed. This caused a furor with a petition submitted to the commissioners by people outside of Colebrook on behalf of the first settlers. The matter was acted upon by the state legislature, but because of a technical error, referred back to the township. In a general election it was again voted to have the name Colebrook, but by a majority of only two votes.”

Halsey Phillips, probably a son of Samuel, left Colebrook, Connecticut in 1814 and moved to the new state of Ohio. A letter exists from him written in 1881, in which Halsey, then 91 years of age, recounts his memories of those early years in Colebrook, Ohio. As interesting as the facts pertaining to Ohio are, to us back in Colebrook, Connecticut, what he had to say in regard to some photos he had recently seen of several houses here were of greater importance; Bickford’s house, located at 145 Bunnell St, is the site of a dwelling built in the 1770s by Hezekiah Simons. We questioned whether or not this present building, or any part of it, might be the original. Halsey Phillips states that he was very happy to see the house of his old neighbor, as all the buildings there were built since I left. He also enjoyed photos of the Phelps Inn and apparently the Rock Schoolhouse, as he states that he attended that school along with some of Capt. Arah Phelps’ daughters.

Some day I intend to drive out to the northeast corner of Ohio and see for myself the land that drew away some of our early settlers. I say this with two provisos: one, I live long enough, and two, if the price of gasoline doesn’t get any higher, in which case I have been forewarned that the journey will take me 28 days if I borrow one of my daughter Patty’s horses!

#### **Historic Bytes**

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