

Colebrook's Brush With the Spirit World

In the past few years I have been approached by two prospective buyers of Colebrook properties and asked if the house they were interested in had a history of ever having been haunted. The first time this happened, my response was "Who told you anything about that place being haunted?" I don't remember the response, but within a few months a second call, this one from New York City, came to me by a person interested in Sugar Hill Farm on Smith Hill, asking if the house was haunted. Why the sudden interest in this subject, I didn't then and still don't have a clue, although I asked where the notion of its being populated by spirits came from. This fellow replied, "he had heard something to that effect", and wanted to clarify the situation. I told him that I had never heard anything about that particular place, or any other in Colebrook, being haunted. He seemed surprised at this and asked if I was sure of my information. What could I say, other than I had been born and brought up here, and would certainly have heard about any hauntings had there been any. I felt that perhaps I should elaborate upon the subject as best I could, just to make him think that I knew anything at all, by saying that we once had a house in which séances were held. This proved to have an electric effect on the New York caller. What were the particulars, and how far away from Sugar Hill Farm was the location of this mysterious house?

So I told him that the two were several miles apart, and the last time a séance was held there would have been in the 1880s. I never did find out how he felt about ghosts; did he want for them to be associated with the property, or did he wish to only consider buying property nowhere near anything ethereal? We'll never know, as he dropped out of the bidding for the property.

In case any of you out there would like to know about Colebrook's history of haunted houses, here is all that I can offer you:

The section of Sandy Brook that traverses Algonquin Forest was once home to a thriving community during the 30 years or so before the Civil War. Because very little of this land could be considered as having any potential for agriculture, this left any form of economic development in the realm of forest products. By this we mean primarily trees for lumber, charcoal and firewood, but also maple sugar, gathering of wild plants such as witch hazel, black birch and ginseng, and quarrying stone.

Today there is only one road along Sandy Brook, but in the mid-nineteenth century, there were several. Two went northward up into the highlands usually referred to as Corliss Mountain and Balcom Mountain, where they dead-ended. Several dwellings were located on these two roads, one of which belonged to Henry Mosuk, better known in Colebrook as Henry Manassa, the last Native American to have lived in Colebrook, and whose name will forever be linked with the murder of Barnice White in 1850, although he had nothing to do with the crime, and was exonerated by the Governor and Connecticut Legislature. One bridge crossed the river and ascended Taintor Mountain and went on to connect with Colebrook Center. Another bridge connected to "The Island", the site of a large lumber mill as well as a stone quarry and four or five acres of cleared land on which "Lum" Whiting once raised corn. There were three lumber mills within two miles of Conn. Rt. 8, this one being the farthest upstream.

The point of interest for us today is the road connecting with Colebrook Center. The bridge for this road was physically about the mid-point of the longest straight-away

on Sandy Brook Road, and the careful observer will be able to make out the stone abutment on the far side of the stream. The Town of Colebrook constructed this road in 1851 or thereabouts for the express purpose of connecting the Center with the economic activities along Sandy Brook. Although the Sandy Brook end is all but forgotten nowadays, the Center end is today a private driveway that leads to two dwellings, one at the very summit of Taintor Mountain, the other branches off to the right and after three quarters of a mile or so leads to a house overlooking a man-made pond. There was a house fire here the first week of March 2006.

In the 1850s, there were only two houses on this road, one was on the south bank of Sandy Brook, the other was on the summit, in the same spot the current cabin now stands. It is the location on the bank of Sandy Brook that once was associated with spiritualism.

Originally it was locally referred to as “the Taintor house on the brook”, and the one at the summit as “the Taintor house on the mountain”. In 1869, the then owner, Edward Taintor deeded “the White House on the brook”, as he called it, to his sister, Cleopatra Taintor North, who was the owner until her death in 1885. For years there were weird tales of spiritualistic séances held in Cleopatra’s house.

There was a legend that one of Edward Taintor’s sons left home once upon a time and nothing was heard from him, and as time went on, the family became greatly worried by the lack of news. At length, during a séance at Cleopatra’s house, a communication was received from the missing Taintor, and after that, frequent conversations were held with his spirit. Somewhat later, however, he appeared in the flesh at the old place on Sandy Brook, much to the discomfiture of those who had consigned him to an early grave.

In the latter half of the last decade of the twentieth century, the old road that began next to Cleopatra’s house and ascended the mountain, was opened as a hiking trail through Algonquin Forest by the Colebrook Land Conservancy, who occasionally leads walking tours along it, starting from the Center and ending up at Sandy Brook, where autos for the return trip have been parked. One strange phenomenon that has been noted on these walks is that as you descend the mountain and the sound of the waters of the babbling brook begin to be heard, and the old cellar hole comes into sight after the last turn has been negotiated, a chill wraps itself around you, the birds cease to sing, crickets fall silent, and a strange breeze stirs through the silent trees, even though the air is motionless elsewhere. Once the waters of Sandy Brook have been waded, and the road on the opposite bank has been achieved, the normal sounds return, the birds resume singing and the motionless air does nothing to dispel the beads of perspiration that return to your brow.

I’m just kidding, I just wanted to make sure that those of you reading this were paying attention!

Historic Bytes

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