

Colebrook's Oldest House *

The first house built for human habitation in Colebrook was built by Benjamin Horton in 1765. Its location was on what today is Smith Hill Road on or near the Winchester town line, most likely on the west side, as there was and still is a spring having exceptionally fine water. This currently belongs to 255 Smith Hill Road. Horton only lived there very few months, and then removed to southern Vermont. The building has been gone and its exact location lost for generations.

But what about the oldest building still standing and in use in Colebrook? Our first clue is a statement made by Enos Sage, who, while journeying from Middletown to Sandisfield in 1767, stated in his diary that there were only two houses between New Hartford and the Massachusetts line. One was in South Colebrook, as he called it, and he mentions stopping for water at the previously mentioned spring, the other would have been located in what today is Colebrook Center. It is this building that is our oldest, and here is its history:

To set the stage, we will go back to a meeting of the proprietors of Windsor, the owners of the land that was to become the Town of Colebrook. This meeting was held October 17, 1765 in Windsor. They granted to Erastus Wolcott Esq. £17 (17 pounds) worth of land as an encouragement to set up a sawmill in Colebrook to be surveyed and laid out to him by a committee to be appointed by the Proprietors on condition that Wolcott "set up and erect a good sawmill in Colebrook by the 15th day of May next." (1766) Proprietor's Book, page 262

At a meeting of the Proprietors held in Windsor on the 2nd Monday of January 1767, they "voted and now granted to Erastus Wolcott Esq., as a recompense for building a sawmill in Colebrook, 60 acres of land to be laid out on the north end of the eighth tier which is to be 60 chains in length (1980 feet) east and west, and 10 chains in width." (330 feet) Proprietor's Book, page 291

On page 279 of this same volume, we find that Erastus Wolcott Esq. of Windsor, sells to Samuel Rockwell "the one-half for quality and quantity of one certain lot of land in Colebrook, with one-half of a sawmill & dwelling house standing thereon. Bounded east and west on highways (by this is meant the tier lines embracing the third tier, which were thought of as being potential highways, 165 feet wide). North on land of the heirs of Jonathan Filly, south on land laid out to the heirs of Samuel Whiteley and to contain about 200 acres more or less." This document is dated February 2, 1767

It was to this house that Samuel Rockwell brought his family upon his arrival in Colebrook. Now it is the central portion of the home at 561 Colebrook Road.

Here is the time frame: on October 17 1765, Wolcott was asked to build a sawmill and have it operational by May 15th, 1766. He was successful in this, as the proprietors granted the promised land. If there was to be a sawmill in a completely uninhabited area, some lumber had to be acquired. New Hartford already had a sawmill, as did Winchester. Presumably what lumber was required for its construction would have come from either of those locations, and the first lumber from the new mill would have been used in the construction of the first house. Therefore, this house may have been constructed as early as the fall or winter of 1765, but more likely early spring 1766. For this set of reasons, we apply the date of 1766 to Colebrook's oldest house.