

Creating a Farm on Prock Hill, 1830's

The Colebrook Historical Society owns a ledger book kept by Daniel Sears of Sandisfield, Mass. One of his customers was James French of Colebrook. By following along with the entries concerning French, a window opens which allows us to envision the creation of a farm. It is a saga of hard work, done at a time when money was a rare commodity, and barter was the most common form of payment.

Daniel Sears began this ledger in April, 1793, and maintained it until the late 1830's, when his son Henry took it over. Sears was a cobbler, blacksmith and farmer. By the nature of these entries, it appears that French has recently moved into Colebrook, and bought a house and property on what is today known as Prock Hill Road, at the very site of our last article, indications are these: French purchases two fields of standing hay; he uses trees for barter, has Sears build him a barn. When the barn is completed, French pays for the keep of his two cows and two sheep for approximately the duration of the construction period.

Another point of interest is that the monetary system, although officially dollars and cents since 1787, was not fully incorporated until nearly the middle of the 19th century. The same situation exists today in the change-over from yards, feet and inches to meters, centimeters and millimeters. Sears figures in pounds (l), shillings (s) and pence (d) until 1825. There were no further transactions until 1830, when he resumes using dollars and cents.

To give you an understanding of the comparison between pounds and dollars, the following may be of help. Keep in mind, however, that the values changed slightly from time to time, but this is fairly representative: 2d was equal to .05~; 3 1/2 d = .10k; 9d .25g; 1s 6d (there were 12 pence in a shilling, therefore 6d = 1/2 a shilling) 3s = \$1.00 and £11 10 / 0 (read that as 1 pound, 10 shillings, 0 pence) \$10.00. With that out of the way, let's proceed.

August 30, 1822, 1 sheep and 2 lambs to pay 3 days work and 13 1/2 lbs. flax, 19s, 3d (\$8.42); Dec. 28, 1822, one Ash tree, price agreed for 2 1/2 days work planting and hoeing, 7s 6d (\$2.50); April 18, 1823, 100 lbs. of hay, \$1.00. (This figure was arrived at by figuring 10 cubic yards of meadow hay weighing one ton.) May 10, 1823, 7 quarts of flax seed, is 4d (.44~) (Flax seed was an ingredient in animal and chicken feed. It was also pressed to produce linseed oil. There is a possibility here that at least some of this was scheduled for planting, as May 10~ is about the time to plant flax seed.)

July 2, 1823, 7 bu. potatoes at your house carried, 10s 6d (\$3.48). Aug. 1st, 1823, 1 qt. brandy, 9d (.25~) May 4, 1824, 4 cords of Hemlock bark on the trees, £1/4s (\$6.78) (This was used in the tanning process of leather.)

Now comes the barn: June 1835, 4 sticks of timber for your barn ... \$1.33. 4 gallons of cider, .33~; June 26, 1835, carting boards from Couche's mill, \$3.00. July 6, another four gals. Cider. July had a total of 12 1/4 days work on the barn, with an added cost of .25k for dressing stone for the underpinning. On August 1st another 2 gallons of cider. (Dry work, building a barn in August!) In August, another 3 1/2 days work on the barn, plus 2 days laying the floor (for which Sears charged \$1.90). Finally, on August 23, 1835, an entry states that a pitcher of rum was purchased (.25k). This

indicates the completion of the barn, as rum was traditionally served at the completion of a building.

Two final entries on August 26, 1835 relate to Sears boarding 2 cows 16 weeks ~ .25~ per week (\$8.00), and boarding 2 sheep 17 weeks @ .02~ per head. (.68~). This gives a grand total of \$20.96 for the complete cost of the barn. It would have been helpful if dimensions had been mentioned, but I grew up on a 2 cow, 1 horse farm, and our barn was about 25 x 40 feet. The size of a barn in those days was based on the amount of hay storage needed. It was at the time before baling, which compresses the hay, allowing for a far greater amount to be stored in the mows, thus the high roofs on the old barns, which gave the needed volume.

One more piece of information on Mr. French and his new barn; his cattle had been kept by Sears on Sears' property in Sandisfield, and they must be driven to the new facility, thus the last entry: one bridle, .25g.

Historic Bytes

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