

## History of the Rock School \*

At the first town meeting held in Colebrook, held on December 13, 1779, the voters authorized two school districts – North and South. “The north is to go from the colony (state) line south as far as Capt. Samuel Rockwell’s. The south consisting of all Colebrook lands lying two miles north of the Winchester line.”

At this meeting the voters directed that the listers (tax collectors) set up notifications on the signpost and on the two schoolhouses.

As Colebrook’s population grew, the need for more districts became necessary, and on October 20, 1796, a meeting of the inhabitants of Colebrook was called to form a School Society. Chosen was a moderator, chairman, treasurer and a three-man school committee. The first vote taken by this body was to appoint a committee to form several school districts.

Now, for the first time, the North School found itself in a named district – the Sandisfield Road District. This district encompassed the area from the Massachusetts border at the point where Viets Brook enters Colebrook, down that brook to Sandy Brook, south along that brook to about where the Kitchel cottage now stands, then westward over the hill to Colebrook Center approximately where the Colebrook Consolidated School now stands, then westerly along property lines to near where Loon Brook crosses Phelps Road, up that brook to the Norfolk town line, then north along that line to the Massachusetts line, and ending by going along the state line to Viets Brook.

District revision came in 1805 when the south part of the north district was granted the right to set up a school. (Presumably this would be called the Center District.) Revision again came in 1823 when all that part of the North School District north of Capt. Arah Phelps’ was made a new school district. Thus the original Sandisfield Road District was divided into three parts with the schoolhouse now sitting in what was then called the North Middle District. During the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the name, through popular usage, presumably, became simply the Rock School District.

From the fall of 1779 until the fall of 1911, this building continuously served Colebrook as a schoolhouse. Population declines forced the town to cut back the number of schoolhouses, and thus we see the voters on October 26, 1911 abolishing the transportation routes for the Beech Hill and Rock Districts. The remaining students were transferred to the Center School.

On March 1, 1920, it was voted to sell the Rock and North schoolhouses. The Rock Schoolhouse remained in private hands until 1970, when the then owner, not having any plans for the building, and not wishing to pay taxes on it, suggested that perhaps the Historical Society would like it as a museum, if it could be moved to a new location.

Nancy Phelps Blum, long a mainstay of the Society, and whose ancestors had attended the school since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, donated the corner of her adjacent field, directly across the road from the school. After a successful fund-raising campaign, the Rock School building was moved to its present location on March 23, 1971, having remained in front of its namesake glacial boulder for 191 years.

The Colebrook Historical Society, upon deciding to make the school available to school groups, elected to restore the classroom to that of the late 1850s. Primarily this is due to the fact that there are individual seats and desks, whereas in the 1700s, benches

were built in as an integral part of the building. The position of these benches can be seen today on the floor patterns. In 1858, the year currently being chosen for the visiting student's yearly sojourn, the U. S. flag had 32 stars consisting of 5 rows containing a pattern of 7-6-6-6-7.

It is indeed fortunate that during the period when the schoolhouse was in private hands, no modernization took place. It was only used as a summer cottage, and the elderly owners didn't feel the need for electricity, nor did they object to using the "backhouse". They continued to use the spring, located just downhill from the schoolhouse that has been in documented use since the early 1760s. The result is that this schoolhouse museum is, as far as can be determined, the only colonial era school in Connecticut that has never been modernized in any way; what the visitor today sees is essentially exactly the same that students saw the first year Colebrook was a town. The vast majority of the textbooks that are used by the students today are original, as is the large 1829 wall map.

-- Bob Grigg