

## Introduced Plant Species at the Rock School

Over the years, as members of the historical society cared for the grounds at the Rock School, the realization came to us that there were a considerable number of plants growing in the lawn and around the borders of the property. A list has been compiled that still grows as we occasionally make a new discovery. At this time (June 2000) there are 50 flowering plants identified, not to mention 10 tree species and 8 different shrubs, all this on a small plot of land consisting of not more than 1200 square feet.

Several of these, such as dandelion, have been introduced by European settlers, and we thought it might be interesting to see just how many on the list were in fact immigrants to these shores, as are we.

As we have already mentioned it, lets begin with the **dandelion**. This comes from Europe, and the name refers to the likeness of the leaf teeth to those of a lion. When young, the leaves make a nice salad. The blossoms can be made into dandelion wine (Not bad, when it is well made. Rose (Jasman) Hakulin of Winsted, who grew up in Colebrook, made the best that I have ever had the privilege to drink.)

**Daisy**. As common as these are, they also are an import. The origin of the name refers to the bright yellow center surrounded by white petals, thus a “day’s eye.”

**Buttercup**, a nuisance plant seen everywhere, especially in pastures. The reason for this is that they are poisonous to horses and cattle, and they seem to know this, as buttercups are studiously avoided. However, the result is that the competition gets eaten, while the buttercup grows vigorously and reproduces unchecked.

**Vinca (myrtle)**. Commonly planted around house sites from colonial times to the present. It is often a clue to a former site, now lost but for the blue flowers and shiny leaves.

**Gil-over-the-ground**, also called **Ground Ivy**, receives its name from the French word “guiller” meaning “to ferment”, as the leaves were used to flavor, or ferment beer.

**Sheep sorrel** was brought here because it is tasty when young and tender.

**Tawny Hawkweed** (orange blossom), and its yellow look-alike, which goes by the name **Canada Hawkweed**, and that are so common in the summer, are immigrants. Farmers hated seeing it growing in their hayfields, and called it “Devil’s paintbrushes.” The name hawkweed refers to a folk belief that hawks ate the flowers to aid their vision.

**Heal All**. Colonists believed the plant possessed medicinal qualities, and brought it with them across the Atlantic.

**Live-Forever**, a member of the sedum family, will re-establish itself if the smallest scrap of root is overlooked when the plant is pulled up. Colonial children would separate the outer leaf layers and form little “balloon purses” to play with.

An **asparagus** plant has established itself along one of the boundaries, planted there, no doubt, by some passing bird.

**Fleabane**, very common in our fields and lawns during the spring and early summer, looks very much like one of the autumn asters, but is not related to them. The colonists, who used to have their children pick the flower heads, which were then scattered about the house to rid the premises of fleas, brought them here. “Bane” means deadly, thus “death to fleas”.

The Colebrook third grade spends one day in early June at the Rock School, where this living museum brings a little of our past to us, and allows us to appreciate the roots that we all share.