

Julia Wharton's Colebrook

In the archives of the Colebrook Historical Society there is a large amount of documents concerning all sorts of Colebrook facts. The following is the contents of a manila folder authored by Julia Wharton nearly eighteen years ago that should be enjoyed by our readers as we enter this holiday season.

“This is April, 1993. Mrs. William McNeill, curator of the Colebrook Historical Society, has asked me, Julia Wharton, to record for the Society events about Colebrook that I recall. I will make no attempt at continuity.”

“Except for home ownership, Colebrook is much the same as it was when we moved here over 50 years ago. It was October 11, 1937, my 35th birthday. My husband, the Reverend Henry J. Wharton, (Harry), our daughter, Elizabeth (Betty) and I arrived at the parsonage in late afternoon, having first seen to the loading of a truck with our furniture and other belongings, then travelling half-way across the state. By seven o'clock the men with their empty truck had departed and we were exhausted. We had just finished a quick lunch in the kitchen when there was a knock at the front door. It was Deacon James W. E. Allen and his wife, Emma, coming to welcome us to the Colebrook Congregational Church where Harry was to serve as its new minister. We appreciated their coming. They meant well, but were unaware of the fact that, having just moved in, among other things we still had to assemble beds and locate sheets and blankets before we could go to bed. They stayed and stayed - - and stayed! It was with a collective sigh of relief that we saw them leave at nine o'clock. While their visit was much too long under the circumstances, we soon shared a warm friendship. Their first Christmas card was signed 'Deacon and Mrs. James W. R. Allen', the next year 'James and Emma Allen', and after that it was 'Jim and Emma'.

“Summer was the busy time for the church. Relatives and friends returning from wintering elsewhere, almost completely filled the auditorium, along with local residents. On Sundays, after the service, they remained on the porch or lawn just to visit or make plans for the coming week. During the winter, services were held downstairs for the diminished congregation and to save heat.

The Women's Church Union was a very active group, which met regularly on Thursday at noon to make plans and sew items to be sold at the annual church fair at Christmas, as well as other times. The proceeds were an important addition to the church's income. Each woman brought a sandwich, and coffee was served, after which they went to work. It was fun time as well as a productive one. While working, they exchanged recipes, talked about their families, and discussed local and national events as well as church problems. Each year they had a picnic at some member's home.”

“The Sunday School was in session while the children's parents attended the service upstairs. The classes were quite large. Each Children's Day, the children conducted the church service, and at Christmas time they put on an interesting and colorful pageant. The young people had their own worthwhile meetings. All in all, the church was an important part of the community.

There were two grocery stores in Colebrook Center. One was a combined grocery store and Post Office in the home of Mr. & Mrs. W. W. Cooper, located on Smith Hill at the side of the church green. [This is 474 Smith Hill Road.] Afternoons Mr. Cooper made deliveries in Colebrook for the Jones Laundry of Winsted, as well as groceries from his store. His wife, Alice Cooper, was postmaster. All day she sat in their living room playing solitaire until someone came to pick up mail, or post mail. She told me she knew 13 different games of solitaire.”

“The 1812 store with pillars similar to those at the church, was owned by Clarence Stotts. It was (and still is) located on Route 183, diagonally across the road from the Cooper home. It is said to be the oldest store in Connecticut in continuous operation. For many years Mr. Stotts was Town Clerk, its office being in a room at the rear of the store. He and his wife, Mary, lived in the apartment above the store. He had one of the first telephones in town – a wall type with a crank. He enjoyed talking about it and showing the original directory of names as an oddity. It listed only 29 states. When he died, the telephone company finally was able to acquire it for their museum.. In good weather he always hung a huge American flag between the pillars. Mr. Stotts liked young people. When they came home from college, he welcomed them with candy bars.”

“Before we moved to Colebrook, the 1812 store, and a house nearby on Smith Hill, were owned by a Mr. Northrup. The story was that he would give the store and his home to Clarence Stotts (his clerk in the store) if he would promise to take care of Mrs. Northrup, an invalid, if she should survive her husband. Both promises were kept.

We were told two stories about Mr. Northrup that were supposed to be true. The first was about a woman who wanted to buy considerable yardage of sheeting, but he said he couldn’t sell it to her until he sold the remaining smaller amount on the present bolt. The other story concerned the excellent cheese he always had on hand. A man from Norfolk stopped one day to purchase some. Mr. Northrup was reported to have said he was sorry he couldn’t sell him any because he saved it for his Colebrook customers only.”

“The Misses Kate and Sarah Carrington lived in Hartford in the winter. Summers they opened their ancestral home (on what is now called School House Road) to select guests to help pay for their contributions to the Missionary Society. They had young Chinese students from Yale Divinity School to wait on table. One of the students died while working here and is buried in the Carrington family plot in the Colebrook Center Cemetery. There is a tombstone noting his relationship to the Carringtons, but time has almost completely obliterated the words. His father held an important position in the Chinese government. In appreciation of the Misses Carrington’s kindness to their son, his parents sent them a lovely teakwood shield faced with silver on which the message was inscribed. Appropriately, it always hung in the dining room.

To be continued.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg