

Julia Wharton's Colebrook, part III

Julia Wharton, in her 91st year in 1993, was asked to record her reminiscences of Colebrook since her arrival there in 1937.

“Robert Kelly Prentice was a retired New York lawyer. When he and Mrs. Prentice came to spend long summer vacations in the large house just across Route 183 from the parsonage, they brought with them a butler, cook, maid and chauffeur, and had as their gardener Roger Webb. James W. R. Allen of Colebrook took care of their horses and cows. It was a beautiful sight to see them in their open carriage, drawn by two high-stepping horses harnessed in tandem, out for an afternoon ride. When Mrs. Prentice rode, she rode side-saddle. Mr. Prentice's middle name was ‘Kelly’, and Mrs. Prentice often wore a ‘Kelly’ green gown. In late October, just before they returned to the city, they always gave a very large party – a truly gala affair – for all their local friends, especially those with birthdays in October; Eleanor Campbell, Kelly Prentice, Mary Bickford, Fred and Cornelia Waterman and me, as well as many from out of town.”

“They had a French poodle named Peter. One Sunday in the middle of the church service, he walked down the aisle looking for his owner. To the controlled laughter of the congregation, Mr. Prentice escorted him out. Another time I witnessed a curious sight of the tame and the wild walking side by side in friendly fashion on the lawn across the street. It was Peter and a young deer.

The Prentice's daughter, Caroline, was married to Erving Pruyn, also a New York lawyer. They and their two young daughters, Caroline and Justine, spent their summers with their parents. When the girls were grown, Caroline and Irving lived here year around, at which time Erving represented the town in the state legislature. Later he was one of the 42 lawyers chosen to preside as judges over the state's restructured court system. I was invited by the Pruyns, since Harry had died in 1955, to attend the impressive swearing-in ceremony at the Bushnell in Hartford.

What good friends and fine neighbors the Prentices and Pruyns were!”

“Robert and Mary Whiting lived in a large house on Route 183 near the Massachusetts border. Bob had graduated from Harvard the year before Harry, so they had much in common and our families enjoyed a delightful friendship.

Mr. and Mrs. Julius Whiting, parents of Bob and his sisters, Mary, Caroline, Dorothy and Ruth, lived in Winsted, but had a summer home here in Colebrook at the end of Schoolhouse Road. It is now owned by their granddaughter, Elizabeth McNeill, curator of the Colebrook Historical Society. Elizabeth's husband, William H. McNeill, was head of the History Department of the University of Chicago.”

“Among our most memorable times were when we were always invited to share Thanksgiving and Christmas with members of their families, which included Mary's grown children by a previous marriage, and young grandchildren. Mary's daughter, Betty, and her husband, Baron Serge Karrf, noted scientist of New York University, who would attend when

possible. Both sisters, Miss Mary Whiting, Caroline and her husband, Bob Nash, Dorothy and her husband, Kenny Terrell, as well as good friends. There was much reminiscing, laughter and singing to Caroline's playing of the piano, followed by a wonderful dinner with Bob carving the turkey.

One Fourth of July Bob put on a fireworks display to which many were invited. Sitting on the lawn next to me was 'Aunty' Chester, who, many years before had been the Whiting children's nursemaid. When a particularly brilliant rocket went off, she excitedly pointed to it and exclaimed, 'Look at that Roman Catholic!' Then, realizing what she had said, she quickly corrected it by saying, 'I meant Roman Candle.' When their large house was too much to care for, they built a smaller one in the Center on Smith Hill, now owned by Sam and Jane Franklin. [462 Smith Hill Road.]

There were many interesting people who, with their families, spent summers in Colebrook. Among them were William Mather Lewis, president of Lafayette College; Frederick Waterman, president of Waterman Pen Co.; Roy Chapman Andrews of the New York Museum of Natural History, who, on a trip of exploration to the Gobi Desert, discovered the first known dinosaur eggs; John Torrant Kenney, president of Hitchcock Chair Co.; Mrs. Evelyn Adams, headmistress of the Buckley School for Young Ladies in New York; Mrs. Irvin S. Cobb, widow of the popular writer; Edward Stansbury, writer, U. S. envoy to Nairobi; Colonel Frederick Wildman, president of Bellor Liquor Company; The Reverend Dr. Karl Reiland, Rector of St. George's Episcopal Church in New York; some of the staff of Collier's Magazine, namely William Chenery, publisher; Charles Coldbaugh, Managing Editor, and Walter Davenport, feature writer; William McNeill, professor emeritus of the History Department at the University of Chicago, member of the International Committee on the Voyages of Columbus, and who is in demand to speak at universities in the United States and abroad; Donald Barr, retired headmaster of Dalton School in New York City, father of William Barr, U. S. Attorney General in President Bush's administration; John Blum, Vice-president of Macy's department Store in New York City; Donald Dornon, vice-president and treasurer of Dun and Bradstreet in New York City; Frederick Schell, executive with Firestone Rubber Co.; Proctor Cook, associate editor and writer of the feature 'Talk of the Town' in the New Yorker Magazine; Carrington Phelps, writer; Richard Threlkeld and his wife, Betsy Aaron, international correspondents for the Columbia Broadcasting Co. Several of the above didn't actually live in Colebrook, but were active in its social life.

Dr. Reiland had a home just over the line toward Winsted; Walter Davenport lived in Winchester and Donald Dornon in nearby Sandisfield.

Christopher Chenery, brother of William Chenery, owned considerable land in North Colebrook, some of which he sold to the Hartford YMCA, which ultimately became Camp Jewell. His daughter, who lived in Kentucky, sometimes visited her father when he was in Colebrook. She and some friends owned the very famous race horse named Secretariat, who was often brought to Colebrook."

Julia Wharton's narrative will conclude next week.

Historic Bytes

