

Memories of Colebrook, Connecticut 1868-1877

**By
Jane E. W. Smith**

Occasionally someone will ask me how I am able to write a column basically on Colebrook every week for years on end. My answer always is that there is such a wealth of information in the files of our Colebrook Historical Society that I am not likely to run dry in my lifetime. What follows is a classic example; a 28 page memory written in 1930 by Jane E. W. Smith, a former resident who put her pen to paper at the request of the Winchester Historical Society (the Colebrook Historical Society didn't come along until 1951). The home she lived in is today 667 Colebrook Road, diagonally across the road from the Rock School.

“My first acquaintance with Colebrook began on a warm, sunny March day in 1868. As a child of ten years, I had gone six months before, to live with Reverend Henry A. Russell and Mrs. Russell in the town of Essex, Connecticut, where Mr. Russell was minister of a Congregational church.

It was decided early in 1868 that we were to remove to Colebrook, to live with an aunt of Mrs. Russell's, Mrs. Samuel E. Mills, whose husband had died the year before, and whose home was the farmhouse next south of the Rock School, so called, a mile north of the Center.

After packing the furniture, in which I assisted by winding the rounds of the chairs with newspaper, and tying it on with twine. Mrs. Russell and I left Mr. Russell to ship it, and drove ‘Jimmie’, the handsome dapple-gray horse across the state to our new home.

In order to reach Winsted, we had to go to New Haven, thence to Waterbury, and from there by the Naugatuck Railroad to Winsted. At that time neither the Connecticut Valley Railroad to Hartford from Essex, nor the Connecticut Western from Hartford to Winsted were built, though both were contemplated.

We arrived at Winsted late in the afternoon and spent the night. Shortly after noon the following day, the Sandisfield stage stopped at the door, and we and our baggage were taken on. The stage of those days was a long, covered vehicle, somewhat resembling the pioneer wagon of Oregon Trail days, though much smaller, and with a wooden top instead of a canvas one. It had a back seat and another seat facing it. A partition separated this compartment from the front seat, where the driver

sat exposed to the weather. The top was white, while the sides were of some gay color, usually red or green.”

“The springs were not of the most approved kind, and often when the wheels descended into a mud-hole, the heads of the passengers would bump against the roof. On the back was a rack for trunks and other baggage, or bags of grain to be delivered to stores along the route.

On that eventful day in March, soon after leaving Main Street for the Colebrook road, we began to encounter snowdrifts, through which the stage lurched heavily. Sometimes when the drifts were very deep, we all got out and walked through them, while the men passengers helped turn the wheels. After getting clear of a snowdrift, we often plunged into mud nearly up to the hubs.

The only one of the other passengers whom I remember was Reverend Wolcott Smith, son of Dr. Francis Smith of North Colebrook, who was on his way home to marry Mary Webster, daughter of Deacon Abner Webster of South Sandisfield.

Late in the afternoon we drew up to the stone horse-block in front of our new home. We and our baggage were unloaded and the stage went on.” [That stone horse-block is still in place in front of 667 Colebrook Road.]

“Aunt Mills, as we always thereafter called her, was on the little porch to receive us, and she won my heart when she kissed me and said to Mrs. Russell: ‘I’m glad you brought the little girl.’ She was a woman of great intelligence, and a great reader, interested in all that was going on in the world. Among the happiest recollections of my childhood are the hours spent in her room listening to her as she read aloud, sometimes from the *New York Tribune*, sometimes from the Bible, or some popular book of those days. Two of the books which I remember hearing her read were Mrs. Stowe’s *Oldtown Folks* and Henry Ward Beecher’s *Star Papers*.

We had a Polander, Valentine Yankofski, living with us in the early seventies and working on the farm. She often used to read to him evenings of the Franco-Prussian War. He hated Prussia and always took the part of France.

Aunt Mills always had a candle in addition to the lamp, and as she read, it followed along the lines. When she turned a leaf, she sat the candle on a little cherry stand, which stood by her side. (A

year ago [1929], I gave that stand to the Winchester Historical Society, accompanied by an excellent photograph of its former owner.)”

“Her conversation was an education to me, and she often delighted me by sending away for something she knew I would like. One was a small telescope, which was a wonder to me, and another, a microscope through which we studied various things pasted on little glass slides.

Two other things I remember were a music box, which when wound up, gave forth sweet tones, and a stereopticon mounted on a standard and moving backward and forward on hinges. One picture I remember was ‘Broadway on a Rainy Day.’ Once when showing me the picture of an English castle, she repeated most impressively, Mrs. Heman’s poem, ‘*The Stately Homes of England, How Beautiful They Stand.*’

On Sunday evenings she brought out a pile of old hymn books, and we sang together ‘How Tedious and Tasteless the Hours, When Marshaled on the Nightly Plain’ and other old, and now almost forgotten hymns.”

“Her husband, Samuel E. Mills, who had died the year before our arrival, was one of the county’s most famous farmers, and one year his farm was awarded a prize as being the best in Litchfield County.

During the last years of his life he was an invalid, but it used to be said that ‘Uncle Sam’ could make more money sitting on his porch than any other farmer who worked all the time. Mr. and Mrs. Mills had no children of their own, but there was scarcely ever a time when some homeless boy or girl was not a member of their household, and they never lost interest in any of them after they had left them.”

Old Time Occupations

“Many of the occupations and practices of old-time New Englanders were in vogue in Colebrook in 1868. Among them the making of cheese in the homes, the weaving of rag carpets, and the making of patchwork quilts. The day of spinning was past, and I have never seen a spinning wheel in action.

One of my tasks was sewing carpet rags and rolling them into balls, another, the piecing of 'blocks' to be sewed together to make quilts. 'Log Cabin' quilts made of silk or woolen pieces were very, very popular and when women visited each other, these treasures were exhibited. Both the rag carpets and quilts offered an opportunity for the display of artistic tastes.

I was taught to make newspaper holders of old hoop skirts, which, if not elegant, were at least useful. Miss Mary Coy [who lived at the intersection of Stillman Hill Road and Rock Hall Road] made picture frames of pieces of hard coal glued to strips of wood, which after being made into frames were varnished, and glittered cheerfully on the walls. Pinecones and acorns were sometimes used instead of coal. 'Spatter work' had many admirers."

"One of our men (Jules Toupouse) used to make baskets of willow wands, and I used to help strip the bark. These were also more useful than artistic.

Mittens and woolen socks were knit for the men and children and wonderful fascinators and hoods for the women. I started to knit a pair of stockings once, but do not remember that I ever finished them. Sunbonnets were made for summer wear with pasteboard 'slats' that were slipped out when the bonnet was laundered.

Sometimes Aunt Mills used to have a tea party for her lady friends, when she and the visitors were arrayed in their full-skirted black bombazine or silk dresses, and immaculate white caps often elaborately trimmed with black or lavender ribbon. They brought the caps in bandboxes covered with wall paper, and donned them after arrival, and they certainly did look nice, and thoroughly enjoyed these occasions. I loved to be present and listen to their reminiscent talk.

Among the ladies who used to come were the 'Phelps girls' as Aunt Mills used to call them, sisters of General [C.A.] Phelps. There were originally eight of these sisters living at the old home in North Colebrook known as the 'Phelps Tavern', but only four were living in my day; Misses Keziah, Wealthy, Gabriella, (Gabrilla they called her), and Catherine, widow of Dr. William Carrington, the last resident physician of the town. Mrs. Carrington was the only one of the sisters who married. The names of the others who had died were Aurelia, Livia-Drusilla, Candace and Laura. I went once with Aunt Mills to call at their home, and Miss Wealthy gave me an almanac of the year before to amuse me as the elders visited."

Our Home

The Mills farmhouse in which we lived was the story and a half type arranged in the prevailing fashion. Two large front rooms opened into a small front entry, the other door of which was a sort of sacred institution seldom used except for weddings and funerals. In back of these was the long room used as the sitting room in summer, and combination sitting and dining room in winter.

Opening back from this was the large kitchen, with its big cook stove in which wood was burned. This stove had a big reservoir on one end, which gave us plenty of hot water. There was a cistern into which water poured every time it rained, and a pump from this at the right end of the kitchen sink. I used to worry for fear the floor might give way while I was washing dishes and precipitate me into the cistern. A great square table was in the middle of the room, where we and the hired help always ate in summer.

On cold winter nights this kitchen was about the coldest place I seem to carry in my memory, and just before retiring we were like an ancient procession with votive offerings, carrying everything that freezing would harm to the sitting room, where the fire was kept all night by means of big chunks of wood in the great sheet iron stove. In later years, a coal stove was installed in this room.

On the coldest nights the cook stove reservoir was emptied, and the water let out of the pump. When this was done, water had to be put in to start it in the morning, and sometimes it took vigorous work to make it function again.

The drinking and cooking water came from a deep moss-lined well out in the yard, and was deliciously cold. In the wall of it was built a chamber into which were swung in hot weather great pails of cream and butter, the ropes tied to the well curb ready to pull them up again. When the bucket rope broke, as it sometimes did, and sent the bucket to the bottom, an iron thing with hooks called a 'creeper' was attached to the rope and worked along the bottom until it caught the bucket. These occasions were full of interest to me."

“From the kitchen toward the west opened the inevitable ‘back room’ in which was the dry sink used in summer, and a small stove with a very big furnace kettle on its top in which were boiled messes of grain and vegetables for the pigs and hens, and where ‘hay tea’ was made for the calves. One of our hired men said it always made him think of a big woman sitting in a small boy’s lap.

From the back room opened the cheese room, where the curd was made with rennet in big tubs, and put into cases of cheesecloth set in wooden rings. These were put into the cheese press and pressed solid; the whey, as the liquor was called, being fed to the pigs. The cheeses were then capped with cloth and set on the shelves that lined the room and every day they had to be turned and greased to keep them from molding. When they were ripe for market, Mr. Beecher came around and bought them for the lowest possible price.

A door led from the back room to the chicken yard and the bee house in which the hives were housed. Places were left in the side of the building through which the bees could go out into the sunshine if they chose. A drink called metheglin was made from the honey.

In the main part of the farmhouse there were three rooms upstairs opening from a large hall room in which great bins where grain used to be stored, but in my day they were used only for bedding. In this hall room was a sheet iron stove, through which a pipe from the sitting room stove ran into the chimney. This moderated the air to some extent, but I have shivery memories of getting up on cold mornings in those rooms.”

“The kitchen chamber was over the kitchen and was usually the place where the popcorn, walnuts and butternuts were spread to dry, also seed beans and peas; seed corn and herbs were hung from the rafters. Catnip, boneset and wormwood were some of the herbs.

The garret contained the usual array of old trunks, carpetbags and cast-off clothing, as well as unused and decrepit furniture, and most everything else you can think of. It was a good place to play on rainy days. Housekeeping invariably began with the garret and proceeded downward.

The cellar was a fascinating place in autumn and winter. The walls were of enormous rocks set one above another and chinked with smaller stones without mortar and on each side, against the walls were great wooden bins built one above another, the upper ones for apples, the lower ones for potatoes, turnips, carrots, beets etc. Pumpkins and Hubbard squashes were also stored here, and one end was

given up to barrels of cider, and beef and pork salted down. We never used cider as a beverage, being a strictly teetotal family, but it was allowed to stand and make excellent vinegar.”

The odor of the apples as we opened the door to go down cellar was simply entrancing. The varieties were Baldwin, Hurlbut Stripe (originated by a Winchester Hurlbut), Northern Spy, Rhode Island Greening and Roxbury Russet. The Spitzenberg was a small spicy apple, which the housewives used to like for their mince pies.

A long ell off the kitchen to the north was the wood house. In the fall it was piled full of seasoned wood cut the winter before and left out all summer. ‘Getting up the wood pile’ and harvesting the ice crop occupied a large part of the farmer’s time in winter. One of my tasks, which I heartily disliked, was picking up chips. Another task in summer was driving the cows to pasture and driving them home at night. I did not mind going for them at night, though often each cow was in a separate place in the pasture, but getting up at dawn to drive them away was a sore trial. My favorite cow was ‘Old Brindle’ and she seemed rather fond of me.”

I had at one time a lovely black and white Sheppard dog, named ‘Fritz Horace Greeley’. He used to get in behind the last cow of the procession, catch her tail in his mouth and swing along home with her. She never seemed to mind. I also had a black kitten that would sit under Old Brindle and hold her mouth open, while I milked into it.

Other tasks, which I was called upon to perform, were chopping hash (which it seemed to me had to be of a fineness wholly uncalled for), churning, and weeding rows of carrots, beets and parsnips in the vegetable garden back of the house. Aunt Mills used to give me a penny a row, and I used to admire the good sense of some of our neighbors who planted these things in beds with short rows, instead of the seemingly interminable rows of our garden.

It was my habit to read a book when churning, holding it in one hand as I stood to work up and down the dasher of the churn of the earlier days, and when the improved crank churn came into use, sitting in a chair and holding the book in my lap. On one occasion, when reading the closing chapters of ‘*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’, I became so absorbed that I churned on some ten minutes after the butter came.”

“Another dreaded task was scouring tin, when the annual cleaning of the pantry took place. It was literally a scouring of tin for with the fine sand used in the operation, it was only a question of a short time when all the tin was scoured off, but it was considered the proper thing to do, and we did it. The whole family dreaded this pantry cleaning, for it was always an all-day affair, and as the whole contents of the pantry were arrayed on the dining table, dinner was always served on side tables, chairs, or any old place, and needed dishes were difficult to find. But when fresh papers had been put on the pantry shelves, and the dishes were all back in their places, how nice it did look! (For a week or so.)”

Our Neighbors

“One of the ways in which Aunt Mills was wont to entertain me, was the recital of the names of the inhabitants of the houses of our neighborhood when she came here as a bride. I was almost as well acquainted with Captain Arah Phelps as with his son, General Phelps, and to my childish imagination, Captain Howell and the Stanwoods, who used to live to the south of us, were as real and present as the people who actually lived in those houses in my day.

Next house to us on the east, at the foot of the hill, lived Mr. Hiram Sage. [Today, this is the home of Jon and Sherri Gray.] He was a widower with a large family of sons and daughters, who were always hard at work to make a living on the farm. My particular chums were Charlotte and Susie, the former, now Mrs. Charles Hewitt of Winsted.

We used to slide down hill together and occasionally spent the night in each other’s home, when we popped corn, cracked nuts, roasted apples, had pillow fights and giggled a lot.”

“Mr. Sage was usually reading the *New York Tribune* evenings, and he scandalized his good Republican neighbors by voting for Horace Greeley.

General Edward A. [for Arah] Phelps was the nearest neighbor on the north. He was jovial, and though a bit rough, I always liked him. His first wife was related to Uncle Mills, and the two families were very intimate. General Phelps was a Democrat, and was always joking Mr. Russell

about his Republicanism. He thought ministers should not even vote, much less take any wider interest in politics. When the black Mexican corn first came into use, he sent Mr. Russell several ears for seed, describing it as 'Black Republican Corn'. The second Mrs. Phelps, whom I knew, was a cultured, charming woman and I was always very fond of her. She talked very rapidly and Aunt Mills used to complain that she could not understand her."

"Carrington Phelps, the son, was graduated from Yale while I lived there. One evening he gave a much-enjoyed reading in the Congregational church at the Center. I do not remember any of the selections except '*Darius Green and His Flying Machine*', which of course delighted us children. He was in those days a handsome, immaculately dressed young fellow, with a waxed mustache.

Mrs. Phelps often had with her a sister, Mrs. Frank Swazey, who, though an invalid, was about the jolliest person I remember. She was always telling some funny story with shouts of laughter. I once heard her tell of buying some goods at Brown & Thompson's in Hartford, and ordering them sent by express to Winsted. When asked what name should be put on the address, she said she was unable to remember her own name, and had to go out and walk up and down Main Street for some minutes before it came to her. She said the clerk looked as if he had some doubts of her sanity.

Next south of us lived Mr. & Mrs. John S. Wheeler in a big brick house. [Today this is the home of Jonathan and Kimberly Crocker at 661 Colebrook Road.] Mr. Wheeler kept the store, which became so celebrated when its contents were sold at auction after his death. He was attacked there one night by a Negro with a big wrench, and never kept the store open evenings after that. [Note: this Black man, after leaving Colebrook, traveled northward into Massachusetts, where he again committed another crime, for which he was hanged.] Mr. Wheeler was a kindly little man with a sense of humor, and an excellent business education, and he used to talk very pleasantly to me when I went to the store to buy a stick of striped candy. He never shoveled a path through the snow, but trudged over the drifts between his house and store by the narrowest path I ever knew a person to make. 'Mr. Wheeler's path' was one of the jokes of the neighborhood.

Mrs. Wheeler was a fine cook and many a delicious piece of pie or cake I received at her hands. She was a tall, handsome lady and dressed more elegantly than most of the Colebrook ladies, and I was very fond of her."

“Beyond the Wheeler’s lived Mr. Carey, father of Joseph Carey. [Today this is the home of Robert Seymour at 657 Colebrook Road.] Joe and his older brother Charles were both at home then, and their pretty sister Mary, soon after my arrival on the scene, married Michael Ryan of South Sandisfield.

Next south of the Careys lived Miss Matilda Howell, with her Aunt Hannah. [Today the home of Jonathan and Cornelia Small at 645 Colebrook Road,] Miss Matilda was formerly a teacher, but when her aunt became too feeble to be left alone, she came home and cared for her ‘till she died, then she went to Elgin, Illinois, to act as private secretary to Gail Borden, the celebrated milk condenser. (Mr. Borden married for his second wife, Mrs. Emmeline Church, a niece of Aunt Mills, and they often used to come to visit her.) Miss Howell was a woman whom I remember with pleasure and affection. I was often at her house, and her earnest, cultured conversation made a great impression upon me, and I am sure has influenced my whole life. I was in the habit of going to her house to wash dishes and help her with other household tasks during the days when Aunt Hannah required more than the usual attention.

As an appreciation of this service, she gave me, among other things, a gold dollar, which I long cherished, but finally took it to Mr. Clayton Case’s jewelry store in Hartford to exchange for a long-wanted napkin ring. Mr. Case himself waited on me, and gave me, for my gold dollar, a lovely silver-plated, gold-lined ring with my initial engraved on it. As this ring has been in constant daily use for nearly sixty years, and the gold lining has never worn off, I must conclude that Mr. Case sold goods of excellent quality, and he has always had a warm place in my memory.”

“Nearly across from the Howells lived Mrs. George Austin and her daughter, Hattie. [Today this is the Thompson property at 650 Colebrook Road.] Mrs. Austin’s cows were often pastured in the street, to the great annoyance of Mr. Russell, as they were always getting into some mischief on our premises. On one occasion he shut them up, and Mrs. Austin had to come and get them, and this, I remember, created a great commotion in the neighborhood, and Mr. Russell became unpopular with Mrs. Austin and her sympathizers.

Over on West Street [today named Bunnell Street] lived Mr. Lucien Bass with his mother and sister, Elvira. [Today this is the home of James and Linda Bickford at 145 Bunnell Street.] His

widowed sister, Mrs. Jerusha Butler and her daughter Mary also lived with him. Mary afterward married Robbins Allen of Millbrook and I was present at the wedding.

Mr. Bass, when a young man, went out to Ohio and engaged in business, but on the death of his father, which left no one but women on the farm, he returned, and stayed the rest of his life. He was a well educated, public-spirited man, a great reader, and though a bachelor, was deeply interested in the public schools. He was said to be an atheist, but he attended church regularly, listening attentively, and never entered into any arguments with Mr. Russell, who supplied the pulpit of the Congregational church as long as he lived in Colebrook.”

“Beyond Mr. Bass lived Mr. and Mrs. Erastus Hart, parents of Gilbert Hart, with their daughter Hattie, who afterward married Henry Mitchell, a young lawyer of Athens, Georgia. Mr. Hart was a jolly man much liked by his daughter’s chums.

On the same street lived two retired ministers, Reverend Thomas Benedict and Reverend Ira Bonney. [Benedict lived at what is today 85 Bunnell Street; Bonney lived in a house now gone, but was located on land now owned by Jeff and Jennifer Hodgkin at 72 Bunnell.] Mr. Bonney was one of the saints of the town, but was a very homely man, and when he talked in meeting, used such facial contortions that we children used to think it as good as a circus, but we always liked and respected him.

It was said that once when attempting to put up a stove pipe, Parson Benedict became so angry that he used swear words that were a scandal to the neighborhood. I cannot vouch for the truth of this!

Next house to Mr. Bonney lived Mrs. Cooke, a widow, and her three daughters, Emma, Winnie and Agnes. [That house burned, but was replaced with the present 85 Bunnell Street.] They were very attractive, nice girls and their mother made sacrifices to educate them. She was very particular about their associates, but I, being a member of the minister’s family, was allowed to visit them occasionally, and they have always remained pleasantly in my memory.”

Social Life

“Our social life in those days centered largely on the church. We had morning and afternoon services with Sunday school in between, but no evening service. The short interval between Sunday school and afternoon service was our visiting time. The men met at the horse sheds and talked over the things that interested them, while the women were welcome at Grandma Smith’s, near the church. She was a most cordial hostess and interested in the affairs of both old and young.”

“Of great interest to us girls in those days were visiting cards with our names printed on them in different styles, types and prices. Some of them had dashes of bright color across their glazed surfaces, and some were delightfully perfumed. The printers gave little prizes to us for securing orders, and for a time I did quite a thriving business among the boys and girls during these Sunday intermissions. But Mr. Russell heard of it, and I was informed that it was most unseemly for a member of the minister’s family to be engaged in mercantile business on Sunday. After that another girl, not hampered by religious restriction, succeeded to my profits.

The older girls had visits with their beaux in summer out under the lovely great elm trees that graced the lawn in front of the church, and in winter around the big wood stoves in the rear of the church auditorium. Later these stoves were taken to the basement, boxed, and connected by large pipes with registers in the church.

The pews had doors with buttons to close them, and it was the custom for the mother to go in first while the children filed in after her and the father entered last and closed and buttoned the door.

The deacons were Marcus Grant, Lorrin A. Cooke, William P. Lawrence, George M. Carrington and Eugene H. Barber. Deacon Lawrence was also the Sunday school superintendent and Deacon Cooke’s assistant, until he moved to Riverton, when Ezra Stocking took his place. One Sunday Mr. Stocking asked us to bring in all the promises we could find in the Bible beginning with ‘A’. We then voted which was the most precious one, and that was placed at the head of our list. The next Sunday all the promises beginning with ‘B’ were presented and the choice made, and so on to the end of the alphabet. I remember still those of the first four letters. ‘As the mountains are round about Jerusalem’ and ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ’ and ‘Come unto me all you that labor’ and ‘Draw nigh to God and He will draw close to you.’ Innovations in religious services were very rare in those days, and we younger members welcomed this one.”

“At the end of the afternoon service the men went to the horse sheds to get their teams, and the procession proceeded to the church horse block where the women folks were loaded in, and they started homeward. Sometimes the women were so busy visiting that they did not appear when the team drove up. Then the driver drove ‘round to the rear of the procession, and waited his turn. I always imagined that these laggard ladies got a lecture on the way home. The minister had to stop and talk and shake hands with everybody, so we were usually about the last to leave the church.

Mrs. Russell was a very religious, rather sober woman, with a firm belief to the end of her days in what are now called the fundamentalist doctrines and dogmas. The traditions of the fathers were sacred in her eyes, but she had a warm, sympathetic heart, and was often sought by the women of the parish for council and comfort.

Our home was a social enter for all ages and conditions. One year during the holiday season the young people were all invited one evening, and the older people the next. Refreshments were served by us and they proved to be very pleasant occasions. Mrs. Reuben Rockwell came both evenings as she said she would be classed with the older people, but classed herself with the younger.”

“The Tea tables of those days were loaded down with raised biscuits, sweet butter and cream from our own dairy, sliced, dried beef of our own curing, cheese of our making, and the inevitable ‘silver and gold’ cake, frosted and laid in alternate pieces in a silver cake basket; wonderful spiced pickles, sweet and sour, coconut or pumpkin pie, and delicious canned fruit of our own canning.

To our house also came indigent ministers who were often entertained over night and given a little ‘lift’. Book agents never failed to call to get the minister’s name to start off with. I remember one who was selling an expensive illustrated edition of the Bible. Turning the leaves to a picture of Moses, he said to Mr. Russell: ‘Now doesn’t this look just like Moses?’

Reverend Mr. Dickerman of the Colebrook Methodist church came occasionally, and I used to go with Mr. Russell when he went there. His daughter, Miss Addie Dickerman, and I were very good friends. With Colebrook River we had almost no other contact, except on election days, or the days when the selectmen met for conference.”

“Revivals of religion were very solemn occasions, and dreaded by the young people. I never took to them, and as I grew older, refused to go to the meetings.

The choir sat in the gallery in the rear, and it was considered good form to turn around and gaze at them during the singing. Mary Coy always played the cabinet organ in accompaniment. On Communion Sundays the choir always sat below, and the organ was not used. It was reported that once when the organ was used at this service, Mrs. Seth Whiting, to show her disapproval, rose and left the church. She was my first Sunday school teacher and whatever her musical eccentricities may have been, she was a good, faithful teacher, and we all respected and loved her. One of the days we all looked forward to, was the one when we were all invited to her house to tea.

Later on I was promoted to Miss Charlotte Rockwell's class. She was a strong personality, well read, and with decided opinions, which she did not hesitate to express. Tall, with a somewhat sharp, angular face, and a rather haughty, aristocratic air at times; she had the confidence and affection of all her 'girls', and I always loved to meet and talk with her in after years. She and her sister, Mary lived in their childhood home across the road from the church." [Rockwell Hall]

Schools and Teachers

"The schools then had only two terms. The summer term was taught by a woman and the winter term usually by a man. Hiram Smith, who traveled summers for a Winsted scythe company, was often the winter teacher in the West District, and at the Rock School, which I attended, we had for winter teachers Julius Whiting, Egbert Norton, Ezra Stocking and Riley Padelford. Mr. Norton was by far the best liked. He was competent, patient and resourceful. For some of the more ambitious pupils, he sometimes held an evening session. I remember one especially hard nut of an example in arithmetic, which he could not make plain to us by ordinary methods, and so constructed an ingenious model of the box in question, and we saw and believed at once. I think none of his pupils could ever have forgotten that box."

"Mr. Whiting was a well educated man, a good disciplinarian and a beautiful penman. He tried hard to make good writers of us, but I do not remember that he succeeded in a single instance, which was certainly to our discredit.

I did not attend school the winter Mr. Stocking taught, but believe he was well liked.

Mr. Padelford was a handsome little dandy, but not much of a teacher, but I have always remembered gratefully his kindness to me on one most trying occasion, and I am glad to record it here. If he was not much of a teacher, he was very much a gentleman. One evening I was sent to Mrs. Austin's for eggs, but Mrs. Austin, because of her unpleasantness with Mr. Russell about her cows, refused to let me have any, and her daughter, Hattie, declared that they 'would give the eggs to the pigs before Russell should have any'. Mr. Padelford, who boarded there, and was in the room, seeing me ready to cry as I left the room, took his hat and walked home with me, comforting me by the way.

I was fond of all the women teachers in our school. They were: Mary Butler, our neighbor, Miss Ellen Ryan of South Sandisfield, and Miss Anna Hathaway of New Hartford, who afterward married and went to Winona, Minnesota to live. She introduced singing into the school, to the great delight of all of us. Among the songs we used to sing were '*Lilly Dale*' and '*Annie Lisle*'.

Miss Tillie Norton, sister of Egbert, began a term one spring, but became sick and had to resign. She was a most attractive and interesting teacher, and we mourned her departure."

"I taught this school in the winter of 1877-78, and several of my pupils were my former mates. This was by far my very pleasantest experience as a teacher, and I still have the little hand bell, which I rang to call them in from their play.

My good friend, Irving Oles, made several sets of light wooden dumb-bells for me, and the practice with these each day was a great delight to the children, largely, I think, because it was something new. Colonel Henry S. Terrill wrote me many years after that these exercises were largely instrumental in awakening his latent love of military tactics.

Others of my flock that winter were Emery Terrell, brother of Henry, Anna and Julia, his sisters, Charles Hart, brother of Gilbert, Ida and Rosie Simons, Edward Simons, for many years a merchant in Winsted, George, Ned, Jerry, Nora and Jennie Burkette, Mary Barry, afterward the wife of Joseph Carey of Winsted, Rosie Bettis, who wrote most wonderful compositions of imaginary travels, and memory lingers long over dark eyed, conscientious, studious little Edith Barnes, and sweet-faced Annie O'Connell, who died in her childhood. I can close my eyes and see them all now in their seats, eager and alert, and I have followed their lives with deep interest and affection.

The examining and visiting committees of my teaching days were Mr. Eugene H. Barber, who was always most helpful and encouraging to a young teacher, and Mr. Edward Carrington, who was also courteous and kind, but did not hesitate to suggest or criticize where he thought there was need of it. Reverend R. H. Maine, a Baptist minister of Robertsville, may have been mentally competent, but he certainly was not gentlemanly, as he kept his feet elevated on his desk, and puffed a cigar all the time he was exhibiting his learning in my examination. I was thankful to get my certificate, and relieve myself of his presence.

Corporal punishment was not often resorted to in those schools. It had had its day and gone. When it was considered necessary, the ‘ruler’ was generally used and left a stinging hand and a very revengeful pupil.”

“Some of the schoolbooks then in use were Eaton’s *Arithmetics*; Wells’ *Grammars*; Quackenbos’ *Histories and Progressive Readers*. I do not recall the geographies or spellers. Webster’s old blue spelling book had been superseded, but the general arrangement was much the same in the new book, from the column beginning with ‘baker’ to the eight syllable columns beginning with ‘incomprehensibility’.

The method of spelling was to spell the first syllable, pronounce it, spell the next, pronounce that, then both syllables together and so on, after this manner; i-n—in; c-o-m—com; pre; incompre; and so on. It took some time to spell it, but when we were through, we knew our word.”

Amusements of That Period

“The greatest amusement interest of the years I am recording was the ‘Band of Hope’, which met once a month in the basement of the Congregational church. People of all ages were admitted if they signed the pledge and paid their dues. The pledge was against tobacco as well as intoxicating liquors, but we admitted some men like Mr. Reuben Rockwell, who were tobacco addicts, and placed ‘ex-tobacco’ after their names. ‘Extobes’, we called them. The badge was a nickel-plated star with ‘Band of Hope’ in black letters and proud we were to be the wearers of it.

This band was a great forum for our youthful geniuses. A stage was erected in the basement of the Congregational church where the meetings were held, and a dressing room provided on either end by means of heavy curtains strung on wires. This basement was also used as a balloting place on election days, and our souls were tried by having to remove our stage for these occasions. The prayer meetings, which were held here, did not interfere, as the attendance was never so large but that the minister could sit in front of the stage.”

“As I remember it now, I think that Mr. Hiram Smith was the president of the ‘Band of Hope’ during most of its existence, and he took a most kindly interest in its performers. Mr. Ezra Stocking was also a prominent member.

People came from far and near to attend our frequent exhibitions and visions of a stage career must have danced before the eyes of many of us. My own ardor was somewhat damped by the unappreciative attitude of Mr. Russell. At one of the meetings Mr. Smith read with great dramatic effect that temperance classic of those days, ‘*The Drunkard’s Wife*, which began in this way: ‘Dark is the night! No light, no fire! Cold on the hearth the last faint sparks expire.’ The minor chords in life have always seemed to have a sort of fascination for me, and that recitation took my fancy. In the days following, I practiced and practiced reading and reciting it, and when it came my turn to appear on the stage, I came proudly forward and recited it, expecting that same measure of applause that had attended Mr. Smith’s recital would be mine. But to my surprise and consternation, the audience did not seem enthused, and when I returned home, Mr. Russell called me into his study and told me that it was a cause of great embarrassment to him, that I should for a moment have dared to think I could give that recitation after Mr. Smith had given it in such a masterly manner. I felt for a time as if I was an outcast from society, but Mr. Smith was kindness itself to me.”

“Another social organization of great interest to us girls, was the sewing circle called ‘Laurel Leaves’, where we made the most wonderful needle-books, emery bags to look like strawberries, and various other useful articles. We met once in two weeks, and once a year, when the city people were with us, we had a sale, and sent the proceeds to Mrs. Julia Twining of New Haven for missionary uses. Miss Mary Butler, who presided over us, was patience and kindness personified, and we were most fortunate to have had such a leader. Two of our most enthusiastic summer workers were Annie and

Mary Gilbert, daughters of Reverend William Gilbert. [The Gilberts lived at what today is 597 Colebrook Road.]

Our most enjoyable amusement during the summer was the Fourth of July picnic at the church, to which everybody, old and young, went. A collection was taken up beforehand for lemons and sugar, and the young men of the parish made the lemonade in great new wooden tubs lent by storekeepers for the occasion. The boys also put up the strong swings on the lawn in front of the church, which at that time was shaded by beautiful great elms. The flag was raised on the tall liberty pole, and sometimes we had an orator, who in the spread eagle style of the time dwelt on the grandeur of our nation's history."

"But the chief event of the day in the opinion of us youngsters came about one o'clock, when the women had spread a feast fit for kings, under the great maple tree, (or was it an oak?) opposite the entrance to the basement. If the day proved stormy, the exercises took place in the basement and the feast was spread there. The dear old basement room! What memories cluster 'round it! Of these occasionally unpleasant Independence Days, its solemn prayer meetings, when we were brought face to face with our inherent sinfulness and its remedy, and our Band of Hope meetings and exhibitions attracting an audience from miles away."

We children were usually well supplied on the Fourth with torpedoes, and small firecrackers and we rose early to celebrate. I remember one year when I must have been in an unusually patriotic mood, for my supplies were exhausted early in the day, and I borrowed some money of the hired man, and made another trip to Mr. Wheeler's store. It took me all the rest of the summer to save enough from my small allowance to repay him, but he was a good sport and didn't 'snitch'.

In the winter, 'parties' at the homes of the young people were given at intervals. These parties were not much approved by Mr. & Mrs. Russell, but I was allowed to go occasionally. Games like 'Copenhagen', 'needles eye', and 'drop the handkerchief' were popular, and at some of the homes dancing was allowed, but never card playing. The dancing was usually in the big kitchen, and often the dust got so stifling that the boys had to sprinkle the floors. The favorite dance tunes were 'Money Mush' and 'Irish Washerwoman'. Tom Dewey was usually the fiddler and the whole orchestra.

The last party of the winter was often a ‘sugaring off’ at the home of Mr. Hiram Sage, when the maple sap was running. The syrup was served to us in little wooden bowls called porringers, and we stirred it into sugar, or made wax by spreading it on great milk pans full of snow. Once in a while a bad boy would offer old Carlo, the Shepherd dog, a lump of wax, and delightedly watch his frantic efforts to get his jaws loose from it. But having disposed of it, he was always eager to get another lump.

Singing school was another activity of the winter season. I never could sing much, though I used to try, and this drew from Mr. Russell one of his frequent witticisms. He said I sang for my own amusement, and other people’s amazement. In spite of this, I was allowed to go to the Singing School sometimes, but Sterrie Weaver, the teacher, was a stern disciplinarian, and we did not get as much fun out of it as we would have liked. Those who came to play, remained to sing, or were sent home.”

Red Letter Days

“Among the events of those years I recall with special pleasure was the occasional coming of Lucien Burleigh to lecture on temperance. He was a big, jovial, handsome man, who looked something like James A. Blaine, and was a most forceful speaker. He always stayed at our house, and entertained us with good stories. I recall one, of a woman where he was entertained, who tried to catch him unawares by serving him brandied cherries. He fished up the cherries and ate them, leaving the syrup in the dish, so she could not accuse him of drinking brandy.

The greatest of all Red Letter Days was the Fourth of July of Centennial Year 1876. In addition to the usual attractions was a wonderful parade, when Mr. Riley Stillman (who was a Beech Hill native of Colebrook) came over from Norfolk with his ox-cart, and a group of us rode in it all about the Center, dressed in the most marvelous old-time costumes loaned for the occasion. The music in attendance upon us was of the fife and drum. The oxen were evidently astonished at the doings, but kept their heads and sedately paraded us around.”

“Another Red Letter Day in our history was the Centennial celebration of the Congregational Church, which occurred about this time. Mr. Russell preached a most interesting historical sermon, and the day was one of intense interest and enjoyment to the members of the church.

Although it may seem to be rather of a drop from the sublime to the ridiculous, and may indicate that our tastes were rather vulgar, yet it is necessary in the interest of truthfulness to confess that a Red Letter Day of no small importance each year was 'Butchering Day'. The refreshments of those days did not require that the tragic death of the pigs should be kept from the sight of the children, and although I always got as far away as possible from the sights and sounds, there was always an admiring crowd from the schoolhouse during 'recess', peering through the fence.

Lottie Miles, a girl who lived at the Center, was heard to say one day, 'Oh my! I don't like to hear the pigs squeal!' But her more practical sister replied, 'Well *I* do, it sounds as if we are going to have something to eat!' And this 'something to eat' was the great and important result to most of us. The delicious spare ribs, the fried liver and sweet breads, the pickled 'souse', and later on the hams, sausage and head cheese can never be forgotten by any of us. The sausage machine, a partnership affair owned by the neighborhood, went the rounds; the hams were put in brine, and then smoked in the old smoke house. Lastly, the pork was salted down for use through the year. Usually, soon after the butchering, came the making of the boiled cider apple sauce, made from sweet apples and cider boiled down to syrup, a most delicious breakfast dish."

Tragic Events

"The first great sorrow that I remember was the death of Miss Nellie Stillman, daughter of Riley Stillman, and granddaughter of Tracy Whiting of Colebrook. She was teaching school in the South District, when taken sick, and the trouble proved to be typhoid fever. She was taken to her home in Norfolk, where she died after a few days. She was a most attractive and winning young person, ardently devoted to music, and though several years my senior, I was, with all enthusiasm of a young girl, deeply devoted to her. I can recall vividly my misery during her illness, and despair at her death. It occurred in the autumn season, most romantic, but saddest of the year.

Another most tragic and depressing event was the running away of Mr. Lucien Bass' horse one Sunday morning, when his niece, Miss Butler, was driving to church with her mother, her grandmother, and her Aunt Elvira. Some part of the harness broke on the hill west of our house, and the horse broke into a frantic run, throwing out his load in front of the Rock Schoolhouse. The

grandmother was dead when they took her up, and both of Mrs. Butler's legs were broken. Miss Butler and Elvira escaped injury. Weeks of gloom and suffering followed, during which time Mr. & Mrs. Russell carried almost daily aid and comfort to the stricken home.

The death of Carrie Allen, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Henry Allen, and later on that of her sister, Minnie, in the Tariffville disaster, as it was called, cast a dark shadow over us who were their friends and playmates, and over the whole community."

[Note: The Tariffville bridge disaster, as it was called, was the worst accident that ever occurred on the Connecticut Western RR. The wooden truss twin bridges spanning the Farmington River at Tariffville were constructed only some ten feet above the waters of the river. On the evening of January 15, 1878, a special ten-car train, carrying passengers returning home from a revival meeting in Hartford, plunged through the bridge just as the lead engine was about to exit the span. Both engines, a baggage car and three passenger coaches were plunged into the frigid waters. Thirteen people died in the tragedy, and seventy sustained injuries. New Hartford alone lost five teenagers.]

"The burning of General Phelps' barn caused great excitement in the whole town. It was supposed to have been set by a Black man named John TenEyck, who was afterward executed for murder in Pittsfield.

Another sad occurrence was the dying of yellow fever of Mr. & Mrs. Wilcox. They were missionaries in the Sandwich Islands [Hawaii] and came to visit Mrs. Wilcox's sister, Mrs. Nelson Bernard. The neighbors were almost in a panic of fear of the disease, and the Barnards had a hard time, but I remember that Mr. Russell faithfully visited the house and did everything he could to help them.

Still another thing that happened at our house, and assumed the proportions of a tragedy at the time, was the stealing of our beautiful dapple gray horse 'Jimmie', by a man named James Berkley, who came along asking for work and was hired by Mr. Russell. The discovery was made one Sunday morning, and though Mr. Russell put sleuths on the job at once, they tracked him to Poughkeepsie, but no further trace of him was ever found. The thief not only took the horse, buggy and harness, but also the roast chicken ready for our Sunday dinner, and two pies, which Abbie Cleaveland, our 'hired girl'

of that period had made the day before. When she discovered their loss, she exclaimed, 'I wish I'd pizened 'em!'

Years after Mrs. Russell, when visiting Dannamora Prison in northern New York, thought she saw James Berkeley among the prisoners. With the permission of the warden she asked him if he was not the man who took our horse. But he denied it, saying

I've done a great many wicked things in my life, ma'am, but I never yet stole a horse.'

Fashions of Those Days

"Hoop skirts were still worn in 1868, but they were abbreviated ones, and the full and much beflounced skirt was drawing in. Later came the bustle, chignon and Grecian bend.

'Rats' were used to comb the hair over to form a pompadour and sometimes the flowing hair was confined in long nets, some of them decorated with beads.

Bonnets were tied with long, wide ribbons making a great bow under the chin. During the years of which I am writing, these bonnets ranged in size from the 'poke' to a narrow strip of braided straw or horsehair covered with flowers or autumn leaves.

Croquet slippers with wide flaps and immense buckles were quite the thing for afternoon wear, and Congress gaiters were still worn, and men strode about with trousers tucked into their high-top boots.

Delaine, French gingham and calico were the materials of which most of my frocks were made. But one garment dear to my memory was my 'redingote', a long double-breasted coat-like dress of blue flannel trimmed with black velvety collar, cuff, pocket lids and buttons. It reminded me of Napoleon's campaign coat, and at that time Napoleon was one of my great heroes.

The tight basque, the dolman, the overskirt and the polonaise with ribbon bows down the front, were much worn, and some of the costumes were not so ugly on good-looking women.

The materials mostly used for women's gowns were bombazine and cashmere, soft clinging fabrics, and alpaca, a stiff, wiry, glossy cloth that I never liked."

Industries

"The only industries besides farming, that I remember, were the paper mill, General Phelps' saw mill, both on Sandy Brook, and the new cheese factory in North Colebrook. The paper mill employed only a few people, but was considered quite an asset to the town. The superintendent was John W. Bliss. Mr. Hiram Sage did the trucking, carrying to Winsted for shipment the great bales of finished goods and returning with the bales of rags and jute. I often used to visit this mill with my playmates, Charlotte or Susie Sage, and the machinery was always a fascination to me. I did not like the great vats of ill-smelling pulp, but was never tired of watching the finished paper coming over the great cylinders, and the great shears cutting it into sheets, and laying them on the table beneath.

The saw mill was the old type with upright saw, and the log was laid on a railroad and gradually moved up to meet the saw. We children were often allowed to ride on the railroad behind the log and it was considered great fun.

I do not seem to remember much about the cheese factory, though I often used to ride there with the cans of milk that went from our farm and the whey was brought back and fed to the pigs. If I remember correctly, the pigs were not very fond of it. The project could not have been much of a success, as it did not long continue in operation, and the great building stood vacant for many years. [It has remained vacant to this day.]

Some of the people living in the vicinity of the paper mill, which was just at the entrance to the Beech Hill Road [Campbell Road today], were John and Henry Sage, the latter the sawyer at General Phelps' mill, Mr. James Cobb and his wife, who was known as 'Aunt Jim', Miss Sally Peck, a spinster who worked in the mill, and farther along Beech Hill lived Mr. Hiram Bliss and Mr. Nelson Hitchcock.

Further down the Sandy Brook Road lived two respected Irish residents, George Burkette and Patrick Sullivan.

There were cotton mills at Colebrook River, but I did not know much about them. Most of the residents of the town were engaged in farming, and they seemed to make a comfortable living, and some of them laid up money.”

Eccentric Characters

”Probably the most eccentric character who ever tramped the roads of Colebrook was known as ‘Old Leonard’, the essence peddler. He was tall, loose-jointed, lantern-jawed and painfully cadaverous. His shock of white hair added to his strange appearance, and when his peculiar sense of humor produced an open smile, his face was positively ghastly.

He carried slung across his left shoulder a pair of saddlebags. In one of these were his essences (which were of excellent quality). In the other were Yankee notions; needles, pins, thread, shoelaces and as he called them, ‘hanks’ of linen thread. In his right hand he carried a wicker-covered demijohn of alcohol as a solvent for his essences and camphor gum.

He was a keen trader and would haggle over a penny in a sale, but if he could not win it, would give it up with a fatalistic smile. He had the reputation of being the demijohn’s best customer, and one very cold night he came to our house so much under the influence of his potations that Mr. Russell did not dare to refuse him shelter, for fear he might freeze to death. It was a very embarrassing situation for us, as we had company, and the old man was sick and noisy most of the night. The next morning after he had been given a warm breakfast, Mr. Russell charged him ten dollars for his night’s lodging. He was amazed and distressed to the point of tears, and pleaded to have the charges reduced, but Mr. Russell was insistent, and threatened him with arrest for drunkenness unless it was paid. It was pitiful to see the old miser dole out the money a half dollar at a time, vainly hoping to the last that his enemy would relent. It is needless to say that he never called at our house again. Years after, I heard J. S. Wheeler say, ‘I always had a greater respect after that for Russell’s smartness, for I don’t believe anyone else could ever have got ten dollars out of Old Leonard in one morning.’”

Another peddler who carried things more attractive to me, like combs, pin cases, pencil cases, jews-harps, harmonicas, etc., was Robert McDowel Cleaveland, brother of Abbie, our housemaid. Robert was allowed to stop over night to visit with her.

“These two were said (how truthfully I do not know) to owe their weak mental condition to the harsh treatment of their father, who used to travel around lecturing on ‘salt’. The boys and girls of Colebrook used Robert as a butt for the perennial juvenile meanness, but though they tried to cheat him and get his money away, they never succeeded, for both he and Abbie were smart enough to make and save money.

One of Abbie’s chief pleasures was to handle and admire the treasures of her ‘chist’, as she called it, which she brought with her when she came to our house. I was often invited to admire the contents with her, and I like to hope at this distance that I was not quite so mean to her and Robert as some of the other young folks, for I was sorry for them.

Abbie married Jordan Smith, who possessed about the same degree of mentality, but together they bought a farm and made themselves independent. To the end of her life whenever she met me, her face lighted up, and she told me the joys and sorrows of her married life.”

“Charlie Squires was another queer chap who used to go to our parties in spite of all the chaffing he had to endure from the more fortunate boys and girls. He had strange attacks of hysteria when he got excited, and couldn’t stop laughing, and of course we young savages tried often to bring on one of those attacks, for the fun of watching him. But I do not think there was ever anything meanly cruel in our actions, for he was a gentle, kindly young man, and we all liked him and he never seemed to bear a grudge. If boys and girls could realize that some of the things they do in fun would haunt them all through life, I am sure they would be more thoughtful.

Captain Cook was an odd fish, and used to make periodical calls on his friends and acquaintances in Colebrook, Winsted and Winchester Center. He had the reputation of being an old beau, and having lady friends, among them Gen. Phelps’ sisters, the ‘Phelps Girls’, as Aunt Mills used to call them. It was whispered that he often played cards with them until the wee small hours.

Jacob Cobb, familiarly called ‘Uncle Jake’, was one of those genial souls whose daily bread came in some mysterious way, and not because he worked for it. When his tongue was limbered by a generous dose of ‘Oh Be Joyful’ as it used to be called, he could talk most entertainingly, and often with good sense. He had a son, Hiram, who was for many years a prominent citizen of Windsor, Connecticut, and two daughters, Jane, the wife of Samuel Sage of Norfolk, and Alzada, who married

Edward Oles. This same Edward Oles really belongs in our list of eccentrics; a gaunt, wrinkled, sad-faced man who reminded me of the picture of Abraham Lincoln. He was a carpenter, and a most useful man in the town. He had two sons, 'Ned' and Irving, and after the death of their mother, he lived alone with them in a cabin in the woods, and brought them up in his own peculiar way. He thought out things for himself, and often his theories were excellent. He was most kind and devoted in his friendships.

He made my first sled because, as he told me years afterward, he was touched when he found me one day trying to make one by nailing boards across two barrel staves. What that sled meant to me, no one but myself knows.

His son 'Ned' died early in life. He was of a dreamy temperament and not well equipped to battle with a hard world. He had married and lived in Canaan, and his father, in telling me about him said, 'I brought him home and laid him beside his mother'.

Irving, the youngest son, lived for some time at our house, working on the farm, and later followed his father's trade of carpenter. He realized his lack of education, and devoted his evenings to earnest study of the writings of the greatest minds, until he became an excellent speaker on widely varied subjects. He afterward went to California, never returning to his native town."

"I expect 'eccentric' is not the correct term to apply to two notorious characters who lived at the center. 'Old Ryan' and 'Old Conner', but I will make a note of them here. They both lived on Water Street [Center Street today] and occasionally during their drunken revels made that thoroughfare an unsafe place for women to travel. Conner's favorite amusement was chasing his wife out of doors and around the house with a big stick, and if he caught her would beat her with it.

Mrs. Conner was the washerwoman and household assistant of the neighborhood and in spite of her troubles had a rosy face like a winter apple and a most hearty laugh. One of the ladies for whom she worked, indignant at the abuse to which she was subjected, offered to give her a home if she would leave the old brute, but the faithful soul considered her marriage a life contract, and stuck it out to the end.

Ryan often used to come home drunk from attending church in Winsted, and would start out to terrorize the neighborhood. Mrs. Ryan often tried to get him home, but did not have much influence

over him. They had a daughter, Ellen, who married Martin Barry, and she was generally respected in the neighborhood.

The last of the eccentric personalities that I shall mention was Deacon James Mars, an old colored man, and former slave. He used to travel around selling a little pamphlet, which some friends of his had printed for him, telling of his life as a slave. He had been in the habit of stopping at Aunt Mills' hospitable home when he was in town and continued to stop after the Russells came. I have spent many an evening listening entranced to his stories of plantation life in slavery days."

My Favorite People

"Before closing these very imperfect memories, I am according myself the privilege of dwelling for a little on those personalities with whom, as a child, I came most in contact, and whom I especially liked. I will not repeat the names of those to whom I have already paid my tribute in these pages.

Mr. & Mrs. Reuben Rockwell stand out prominently in my memory, as they were often at our house. Mrs. Rockwell, whose maiden name was Aurelia Eno, was a niece of Aunt Mills. I was also often at their house, and one summer when attending school at the Center under the tuition of Miss Ellen Bacon, a much loved teacher, I made my home at their house through the week. I assisted Mrs. Rockwell, who was a most exquisite housekeeper, in the work of the household, and whatever of success I have ever attained in that line I owe largely to her instructions. To the air of homely comfort always in evidence in her rooms, was often added the artistic touch that was always impressive to me as a child. To cite one example; every autumn she gathered the most beautiful of the maple leaves, pressed, and then waxed them, and arranged them over the folding doors between the parlor and the sitting room. I think I have never picked up a lovely autumn leaf since then without thinking of Mrs. Rockwell.

Her personal appearance had this same exquisiteness. Always dressed with perfect taste in simple garments, rather frail in health, but always with a smile of appreciation and interest, she seems to me now as I look back, like a piece of fine fragile china.

As a cook, she vied in my opinion with Mrs. John S. Wheeler, and she made the most perfect rhubarb pie I ever tasted. I was often tempted to 'sneak' a piece between meals from the great homemade ice box in the back room of our house.

Mr. Rockwell was easily the most prominent man in the town, being nearly all his life either town clerk, postmaster or town treasurer. At one time he held a federal office under President Grant, I think. He was a most genial man, interested in everybody, and to whom many came for advice and assistance, usually with satisfactory results. I was told by an old friend of his after his death, that among his papers were found mortgage notes on the farms and homes of many people in the town, and that his will directed that they should be cancelled at his death. I could not vouch for the absolute truth of this, but it certainly sounds very much like him. [Her information was accurate; he did in fact leave instructions to cancel all mortgage debts held in his name.]

He was a very devoted Republican, but when democrats were elected to offices whose duties they did not understand, as very often happened, they almost invariably came to him for instructions which were always cheerfully given. He cultivated his ancestral acres, and among his farmer henchmen were Bernard Barry, 'Jim' Miles and Luther Sparks. They were all devoted to him and to his interests both agriculturally and politically.

Both Mr. & Mrs. Rockwell were very fond of children and as they had none of their own, they paid a great deal of attention to all the children of the town, and were much liked by them. Many were the Christmas presents we received from them, and even now I can recall some of mine, and the delight they gave me. One Christmas it was a frock pattern of Merrimack calico, the very best to be had in calicos, and I still have a piece of that dress in the 'block' of a bed-quilt, and it has never faded out,

Mr. Rockwell loved dearly to tease his wife. As I have said, she was a fine cook, and like any wife liked to have her efforts appreciated by her husband, whom she adored, but out of pure mischief he would never praise anything. One day when I was having dinner with them, and the most delicious biscuits were being served, Mrs. Rockwell said, 'Reuben, don't you think those biscuits are good?' 'Why yes, my dear, but don't you think it would have sounded better if someone else said it?' A discouraged look came over her face, while he chuckled, and winked at me.

He had a great aversion to patchwork quilts; said he couldn't see the sense of tearing up cloth and sewing it together again. Once in the last years of his life I got him to talk about his boyhood days. He told of one of his teachers named Nancy Barker, who once pulled a whole tuft of hair from the head of one of the boys. He said, 'I vowed that when I got big enough, I would thrash that old woman', but she died before that time came.' I think she must have been one of the 'old dame' schoolteachers.

Describing an old time 'General Training' he said the boys all despised the officer in command that particular day, who appeared in a fine uniform with immaculate white trousers. 'It had rained the night before and Captain happened to stand opposite a mud puddle when we marched past him. We all slapped our feet down hard into the puddle and splashed those beautiful trousers.' After all those years, he still chuckled at the remembrance.

Mr. Rockwell was not what orthodox people would call a religious man, but he always attended church and helped support it, and was one of the most consistent practitioners of the Golden Rule I ever knew. I heard him say once, 'The Lord ain't guilty of half the things that are laid to him.' He didn't like so-called 'revivals' any more than I did and speaking of one such service he said: 'The minister asked everyone who knew they were saved to stand. Everybody stood but Caroline Corbin and me.' (This was Mrs. Peter Corbin, a most intelligent woman, who did her own thinking.)

I was present when his sister Elizabeth passed away. The tears of the woman who had been her housekeeper and companion for years were falling over the dead body of her friend. Mr. Rockwell said, 'Don't feel so badly miss, it's just as natural to die, as it is to be born.'

When it came his turn to go, he sat by the open fire in the old house as long as he was able, then laid him down in the room that had been his sister's, sent for his faithful Luther Sparks, who stayed by him until the end, which was not far off. It seemed that he managed his dying in the same business-like manner that he had his living."

Mr. & Mrs. Solomon Sackett and Mr. & Mrs. William A. Smith, people living near the Center, I always liked very much as a child. As I think of it now, I believe the reason was largely because they always talked to me as if I was as old as they, and therefore I was interested in what they said. I remember that Mr. Smith and I sometimes had arguments over knotty problems when I was visiting his daughter Hattie, and Mrs. Smith's motherly kindness has never faded from my memory."

“Mr. Sackett was a model farmer of his few acres, and a very public-spirited man. [The Sacketts lived at what is today 522 Colebrook Road.] The sides of the highway abutting on his premises were always clear of brush, and as scrupulously mowed by him as his own meadows. He had a general charge of the cemeteries of the town, if I remember correctly, but I do not think he was ever paid anything for his services.’ [It was the same Solomon Sackett who held the franchise for the sale of the zinc headstones that are to be found in most of the cemeteries in this part of the state as well as adjacent Massachusetts. These headstones look as modern as any recently erected ones, and I have always wondered why they are not still sold. The company that manufactured them was located in Bridgeport.]

Among the younger women of those days who interested me were the ‘Carrington Girls’, Kate and Sarah, Susan Whiting, Mary Phelps and Mary Smith. Misses Sarah and Kate Carrington have lived practically all their lives at the old home, and have been interested in all that concerned the welfare of the church and town. They have had as guests during the summers, people of culture and distinction, who have added to the social and mental attractions of the town. These two women, simple in their tastes, lovers of natural beauty, with high ideals and splendid common sense, have been for all these years one of Colebrook’s greatest assets.”

“Miss Susan Whiting was one of the most useful, most interesting woman I ever met. She was the daughter of Tracy Whiting and sister of Mrs. William Smith and of Mrs. Riley Stillman. Tracy Whiting had the reputation of not being over fond of work, but he certainly produced a wonderful daughter.

‘Miss Susan’, as she was familiarly called, was rather thin, but with a most kindly face, and always immaculate in her dress. All her younger years were spent as a teacher, usually as companion and housekeeper for elderly women, among whom were Miss Charlotte Rockwell and Mrs. John S. Wheeler. She was, with her kindness, patience and Yankee common sense, a tower of strength to those who were fortunate enough to secure her services.

I have purposely left until last the name of Mary Smith, daughter of Milton Smith, the sweetest, most saintly young woman I ever knew. She was my fellow pupil the summer I attended Miss Bacon’s school at the Center, and together we committed to memory long sections of Quackenbos’ Old History, as the fashion of the time was. Later on we were together in the State

Normal School in New Britain and attended the same church in that city. We were both in the science classes of Professor William B. Dwight, who afterward went to Vassar College and remained there until his death.”

“We were in the Sunday School class of Professor Ralph Hibbard, a most genial man, who was also our teacher of elocution in the Normal School.

Mary was like a sister to me, and had a great influence over me. She was a great favorite in the school, charming in her manner, with a sympathetic interest in everybody, and deeply spiritual in her perceptions. She thought this a beautiful world, and that everybody ought to be happy in it, and did her best to make it so.

Always frail in body, she did not live to follow the teaching profession for which she had fitted herself, but died in 1879, and was laid beside her father and mother in the forlorn little cemetery in north Colebrook. In that cemetery, the one at the center and the one in the south part of town known as the ‘Old Burying ground’, lie the ashes of most of these old friends of mine.”

“God bless the memories of these kindly, earnest hearted men and women, boys and girls of Old Colebrook from 1868 to 1877.

If our hope of a life to come in which we shall find again our lost friends proves true, as I believe it will, if in what Bishop Doane calls our ‘Easter after Lent’, these old neighbors and comrades of mine shall hold out hands of welcome as I enter in, then I must needs be happy in their happiness, and who knows what stories of those old days we may rehearse.”

[Jane E. W. Smith’s journal is of historical significance on several fronts; one of which is to put into perspective several of the residents of Colebrook, particularly those who have left writings of their own. A case in point being that of Mary Butler, whose journal, while being similar to Miss Smith’s, is never-the-less nowhere as comprehensive in scope. She did, however, clear up the mystery as to the nature of the paper manufacturing that was an important part of the manufacturing sector here in the nineteenth century. This came in the form of a school paper that she had written and was found with her papers at the historical society.

It was interesting to note that both of these women were teachers at the Rock School and taught at approximately the same period that the present-day students relive during their yearly “Rock School Day” in June. I believe that we all would agree that the children at that school during their tenure were in very competent hands.

Another significant contribution was the personal reflections of the folks who surrounded her. Her observations serve to flesh out what we already knew about these past residents, making them more alive and meaningful to those of us who are interested in such things in the twenty-first century.

It is more difficult for someone today to write about the residents of a small rural community than it was in the past. For one thing, there is no longer a thread of continuity binding our communities together. People tended to “stay put” longer, and the political and social leaders remained mainstays of the entire town even after their periods of leadership were over simply by their continued presence. Nowadays there tends to be segmented groups with little in common. People who work in the larger cities have the ability to commute from those centers to a residence far removed from the urban scene. Often they do not remain long at their country home, but leave and are replaced by other itinerants. The gulf between these citizens and the “natives” grows ever wider.]