

Nancy Phelps Blum

The recent passing of Nancy Phelps Blum brought on particularly poignant feelings on the part of the members of the Colebrook Historical Society. Nancy represented the culmination of ten generations

Those fortunate people in the Colebrook Historical Society and the Colebrook Land Conservancy perhaps knew Nancy best, but every resident of this town, whether they knew Nancy or not, owes her a debt of gratitude. Without Nancy and John Blum as well as Nancy's long line of illustrious ancestors, Colebrook would be a much different community than it is.

Nancy had a sense of history and civic responsibility that governed her actions. In her 1997 book One Old House Its People and its Place, she addresses her sense of belonging in the prologue thus:

“The Place, that's what they always called it. Me too. ‘Yes Johnnie, I love you but I can't say I will marry you – not till you've seen the Place’. Grandfather going broke in Minnesota in the 1890's: ‘It'll be all right if I can just get back to the Place’. My father to his child trotting behind him through the woods echoing his father: ‘Nancy, some day the Place will all be yours’, meaning no more to me than if he'd said to hurry or we'd be late for supper.

What I didn't know he meant was that I am the tip of the pyramid. To perfect the analogy perhaps I should reverse the pyramid and rest its peak upon my head, spreading out above me all that mass, that swell of people that is my ancestors, beginning with William Phelps in 1630, on and on through the generations (I can count ten, I think, from me back to that William). After all those women bearing all those children, this branch of the Phelps line has petered out and there is no one left to carry on the name. And with my departure goes much information, some irretrievable. Therefore, I am putting down some of what I know or guess, perhaps sparing my children that helpless rage when one realizes all one has neglected to ask of the Dear Dead, all those things that can never ever be known.

And perhaps, too, for I can never have read it all, they will want to seek out more from those family papers which will have been baled up and deposited, if my dying request is carried out, with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.”

Thus did Nancy make provision for the preservation of the priceless documents that contain the economic and cultural history of North Colebrook. Nor did her endeavors stop there, the hundreds of acres that comprise the Phelps holdings in North Colebrook which include what had been the last section of virgin forest in the State of Connecticut, are under the protection of the Nature Conservancy, assuring us that this large tract of forest will remain ever wild.

Years of working with Nancy have given us a core of people in Colebrook well equipped to carry on and meet whatever challenges the future holds for us as we approach the fourth century of the Phelps presence in America.