

North Colebrook Roads *

North Colebrook began as an area of exceptional agricultural land. The topography wasn't conducive to a road network radiating outward from the center of operations, and beginning in 1765 the Sandisfield Road was the only highway through that section of town. The bridge carrying Rt. 183 across Sandy Brook in front of Phelps' Tavern was probably built in 1794, seven years after Arah Phelps constructed the tavern. We know that landowners were clearing away the forest on what is now Church Hill in the late 1780s, but as this type of work utilized oxen, a bridge wasn't an absolute necessity; there might have been a ford near the location of the present bridge.

Arah Phelps, whose tavern still stands, was not the first to build in the neighborhood, that honor goes to Joseph Seymour, who built the first dwelling there in 1766, along side the eastern bank of Sandy Brook on the left side of Rt. 183 going north, more or less in back of the large yellow house built for Gen. Edward A. Phelps (751 Colebrook Road). The original alignment had the road following closely along the bank of the stream. The present location through the meadows was a later refinement.

In the early days, when there were only two bridges on the Sandisfield Road, the one over Sandy Brook at the south end of the meadows was referred to as the North Bridge. The South Bridge is the one in the Center, where Loon Brook drains the extensive marshlands found between Colebrook Center and Norfolk. For a while, the North Bridge was located almost on top of an intersection; the road to the west, alongside Sandy Brook, led to the Phelps' forge and on into Norfolk, the one leading downstream was the beginning of Sandy Brook Road, later the Sandy Brook Turnpike. Nowadays Sandy Brook Road begins at the intersection by the Rock Schoolhouse, but that is a result of a name change that didn't take place until well into the twentieth century. The present name of this partially gravel road is Phelps Flat Road. (Most old timers always referred to it as Bill Gray's Road, he having spent his entire adult life on that road.)

Returning to the village of North Colebrook, and crossing the bridge there, by following along Rt. 183, we are traveling over a section of highway accepted as a town road in 1794. Eventually it became the primary route into Sandisfield, while the alignment east of the brook, laid out for troop movements during the French and Indian War, went into decline and was eventually abandoned as a town-maintained road in 1875. It was not to be reinstated until the summer of 2000.

Adjacent to the Church in the Wildwood, on the west side of Sandy Brook, ascends Church Hill Road. There are now and always have been only two houses on the Colebrook end; the one on the west side of the road is an original 1790s structure, the one on the opposite side with a pond, is a replacement.

Continuing north on Conn. Rt. 183, only one other road intersects this side of the Norfolk line, and that is Wolford Hill, a short connector added in the 1850s between Prock Hill Road and present Rt. 183. It had no name until the state requirement that all roads be named, whereupon our ad hoc committee applied the name of a family that had formerly lived at 124 Prock Hill Road.

Prock Hill, the summit on the state line located west of the road of the same name, is supposed to have received its name from a General Proctor of the Revolutionary War era who marched his troops over the road. Why his name was applied to that

geographical feature escapes me, but perhaps someday I'll stumble over that bit of obscure information.

Two roads branch off of Prock Hill road to the east. The most northerly is Fritz Road, a short, dead-end road originally created as an access to lumbering and farming enterprises in an area immediately south of the Massachusetts border, the other is McClave Road, named in the early 1900s for the family who had purchased a large tract of land embracing both sides of the state line. David Viets first lived on the road in the early 1780s. In 2001, this road received a new bridge across Viets Brook as it flows into Triangle Lake at Camp Jewell. Milton Smith, who owned what was called Viets' Meadow, created this body of water in the summer of 1858. He built the dam on its present location to supply power to his new lumber mill, but neglected to correctly calculate the area of the body of water that would be impounded. Consequently, we find in volume 14, on page 57 of the Colebrook Town Records, an entry stating that Milton Smith shall lower his dam on the line with the top of the log lying on the stonework the west side of the dam and pay the plaintiff, Mr. Clement Thompson, \$25.00 for damage done to his flooded property.

Cobb City Road branches off from McClave Road and heads east to eventually intersect Simons Pond Road. This is another of our roads that were constructed in segments beginning at opposite ends. The bend in the road between number 43 and 47 marks the point they were joined. Several families named Cobb lived along this road in the mid-1800s. The word "city" seems to my ear at least, to be a humorous addition applied by townspeople. It certainly isn't a new name, as I knew that there had been a former road there by that name prior to the 1950s when the road was finally reconstructed. It had completely gone back to nature with mature forest filling the old roadbed. Had it not been for segments of parallel stonewalls, a hunter would never have guessed that he was traversing an area that once had heard the rumble of wagon wheels and the voices of the children going back and forth to the Beech Hill Schoolhouse around the corner on Simons Pond Road.

At the west end of Cobb City Road, on the south side, can be found an old cemetery sitting on a little rise. The oldest date that I can find is 1805. That particular stone is difficult to read today, having endured the ravishes of time for more than two hundred years, but when I was a boy, I wrote down the inscription, which went something like this: "Mr. Nicholas Bond, who died Nov. 27 1805, aged 80". Immediately under that it states that this was erected completely at the expense of Anna, wife of one of Mr. Bond's relatives, who had to pay all the expenses through his illness, including funeral and headstone costs, as all other members of the family were too cheap to contribute one red cent! The last several lines may still be legible, but the stone has sunken nearly one foot into the ground, and they can no longer be seen.