

## Robertsville Roads

A modern traveler driving north on Conn. Route 8 finds himself traversing the Town of Colebrook in an almost straight north-south highway. It does this in such an effortless way that the natural assumption would be that it had been surveyed and laid out all at the same time; nothing could be further from the truth.

The valley of the West Branch of the Farmington River was the last geographical area to be populated in Colebrook. The reason was strictly a matter of topography; in regard to the rest of the township, the old joke that “You can’t get there from here!” really did apply.

There were two avenues of approach – one going north from Winchester to the area just north of Bell’s lumber mill where it was blocked by Woodruff Hill. This location does not appear to be such an imposing obstacle when viewed by today’s traveler, but in Colonial days, it was just short of impassable. The purpose of this northern route from Winchester was not to penetrate into points north, but rather to gain access to the waterpower potential of the lower reaches of Sandy Brook and Still River. The northern approach, proceeding southward from New Boston, is covered in the chapter on Colebrook River Roads.

The first road crossing into Colebrook from the south, along the route now covered by Conn. Route 8, was a lumber road created by a man named Kellogg, who supplied wood products (mostly for charcoal) to Richard Smith’s forge on the lower reaches of Still River. Specifically, this location is at the intersection of Robertsville Road, Old Creamery Road and Old Forge Road. Kellogg’s road followed the present layout of Route 8 and Robertsville Road, but for some reason made a bend to the left just before coming to the forge building, where it ended. This final bend took it around behind Putnam’s house (1 Old Forge Road) and across their present front lawn. There isn’t an obvious reason for this alignment, but we do know that the large field between Robertsville Road and Still River was in existence in 1770, as it is described as having 1,100 cords of wood stacked on it that year, and perhaps the charcoal burning process had begun with a pit constructed in what would now be the middle of Robertsville Road, which they wanted to avoid. It would have been a logical placement for a pit, as the coalhouse was located alongside the present road at the edge of the field.

A man working for Richard Smith by the name of Cahoon first laid out Old Creamery Road in the late 1780s, which didn’t receive its namesake creamery until 1888. It was constructed in order to access the standing timber located on the east bank of Still River. The town accepted a survey of a road known today as Ruth Cross Road, (named for an early twentieth-century writer who lived on the Winchester end) that branches off southward and on into Winchester from Old Creamery Road immediately after crossing the bridge over Still River in 1822, although it is possible it might be a few years older. The road at that time did not go all the way through into Winchester, the final leg was surveyed and provisions made to reimburse landowners in Sept. of 1860. Just because the wording is “accepts a survey” does not mean that the survey covered unbroken ground, some of our roads have been surveyed over and over for various reasons covering a span of many years, all using this terminology.

At the eastern end of Old Creamery Road, as it makes a sharp right-hand turn into Winchester, there was once a bridge crossing Still River and connecting with Riverton

Road. This was built in Sept. 1833 and went by the name of "Moore's Bridge". Legend has it that Mr. Moore had two daughters who were members of a church in Riverton, and had beaus there. They pleaded with their father to have a bridge constructed there to make life simpler for them. The father was successful in persuading the town of the pressing need for this bridge. Later, there was another bridge a few hundred yards upstream from this site that provided access to the creamery. This remained in place (although in sad state of disrepair its last few years) until going out in the 1936 flood. The central footing for this bridge can still be seen lying on its side in midstream near the small structure for measuring water flow on Still River.

Returning to the intersection of Robertsville Road and Old Forge Road we follow along that last named road across the new bridge over Sandy Brook to its intersection with the Riverton Road. This recently constructed bridge is the last (and by far the most magnificent) of a series of bridges at this location, the first being built as a result of Richard Smith's 1772 realignment of roads leading to and from his forge. Finished products crossed this bridge on their way to Hartford.

At first, these materials from Salisbury had to be transported through Colebrook over the Old North Road, which passed over the summit of Stillman Hill, continued up and over the Old Colebrook Rd., then went downhill to Smith Hill Rd. all the way to the intersection of present Conn. Rt. 8 and Conn. Rt. 20. Upon arriving there, a ninety-degree left turn was made along present day Rt. 8 until it became Kellogg's Road upon entering Colebrook. The 1772 realignment avoided hills that needed to be climbed (remember that the heavy raw materials arrived from the west, therefore descents were not the obstacles that ascents were), and greatly shortened the route, in particular the creation of what we call Deer Hill Rd. today.

During the era of turnpikes in the first half of the nineteenth century, this roadway was at various times referred to as the Suffield Turnpike or the Hartland Turnpike. There was a toll station along the Robertsville road east of its intersection with Route 8, but the exact location has been lost.

What is now Rt. 8 was continued northward in the 1780s, crossing Sandy Brook at the same location as the present bridge near the site of the new Forge Fire Company, where it had its intersection with a road running generally along the eastern bank of Sandy Brook. This road today is named the Riverton Road and has intersections with the previously mentioned Old Forge Rd. and the two long-vanished bridges crossing Still River, all of which were on the south side of the road. One other road, Eno Hill Rd., comes in from the left at a point opposite the new cement bridge crossing Sandy Brook. When originally constructed during the last decade of the eighteenth century, Eno Hill Road did not make a complete circuit between Riverton Rd. and Route 8, but ended in front of the present cemetery. Almost a century was to pass before the northern end of Eno Hill Rd. was extended to connect with Route 8.

One more intersection, that of Sandy Brook Road, completes Route 8 before it makes the connection with the valley of the West Branch of the Farmington River.