

School Report for Colebrook – 1916

This week we will focus upon the report of the School Committee of Colebrook for the year 1916 and see what has changed during the 30 year period since 1886.

In the 1880s, a board of school visitors monitored the curriculum as well as the physical condition of the various schoolhouses; by 1916 this system had been replaced by a school supervisor, a state employee rather than a member of the community. For better or worse, we see throughout the old records, both dealing with the educational system as well as other aspects of local government, the erosion of self control by state and federal governments,

By 1916, the number of schoolhouses had decreased from 10 to 5, the survivors being the Center, North, Forge, River and South.

The supervisor's report begins with attendance. "The figure for Colebrook was 87%, which, considering the severity of the winter, the deep snows and heavy traveling cannot be too severely criticized. The following students will receive perfect attendance certificates: Ralph Cooper, William Fuller, Mary Cooper, Marion Stotts, Margaret Mills, Margery Smith, Kenneth Welcome and Viola Chapman. Of these, six were attendants at the Center School."

Next came the report of the physical condition of the several schools.

"Extensive repairs have been made at the Center School. A large addition has been built, the old double seats have been removed and single seats provided. The North and South schools will be united with the Center the coming year, and it is expected that the enlarged room will furnish ample accommodations for all. The school will be in charge of Miss Gertrude Silvernale, whose splendid work the past two years has brought this school to a high standard of excellence and made it rank among the best rural schools of the state. The town is fortunate in being able to retain the services of Miss Silvernale another year. It is gratifying to the Supervisor to realize how fully the town appreciates Miss Silvernale's efforts, a fact that is indicated by its willingness to do all in its power to aid her in her work."

[The large addition to the Center did not turn out to be acceptable, and the following year a partition was added between the new addition and the original room with the lower four grades assigned to the new, or back section and the upper four grades to the old, or front section.]

"Among the recommendations for repairs to the schoolhouses this year are "jackets for the stoves and ventilators [screens] for all windows. Another thing which must be looked after closely is the source of the water supply. Bad drinking water is responsible for many of the ailments common to children."

[They may have recommended changes in the water supply beginning with 1916, but it never was implemented. The Center School was supplied with a "bubbler" at the end of an overflow pipe from the parsonage, about 100 yards uphill. The parsonage in turn was supplied by a lead pipe beginning at the Rockwell Spring south of the village that supplied all the buildings in the Center. That pipe was some 1300 feet long, allowing it to saturate the water with a considerable amount of lead by the time it emerged at the school's drinking fountain. We never did have "indoor plumbing" either. Two backhouses within the woodshed sufficed.]

The report goes on; “In our desire to get our buildings into suitable condition we have been obliged to curtail expense along the line of text books. Not that we have been particularly remiss, but there are better text books on the market that are in use in our schools, and one day we must investigate this problem more fully. The Supervisor has ever in mind the limited resources of the town and his recommendations are made accordingly.”

“The final and mid-year tests were given by the supervisor. Colebrook was singularly lacking in eighth grade material this year and only one pupil, Charles Seymour, was given a certificate of entrance to high school. One other, Bernice Deming, after successfully passing entrance examinations to Gilbert School, decided to go to Northfield.”

“In November a week designated as Men’s Week was set apart for the purpose of encouraging the men of the town to visit the schools. For no obvious reason, men as a rule are somewhat averse to visiting schools. It certainly ought not to be beneath the dignity of any man to manifest at least a show of interest in the operation of an institution which is bound to exert so great an influence over the lives of his children.”

“The closing day of the Fall and Winter term is designated in the calendar as Parent’s Day. Parents are welcome at any time, but on this day it is expected that they will have a better opportunity to judge the pupil’s work and note the progress that has been made during the term.”

The school calendar looks much like today’s counterpart, with one exception. One entry reads: “Appropriate exercises are recommended for all special days such as Arbor and Bird Day, Good Roads Day, Library Day, etc.”

In 1916 the teachers at the five schools were paid a grand total of \$1,915.80. The highest, for the Center School was \$441.80, and the lowest was \$364 for the Forge School. Gilbert School was paid \$340.00 for the nine Colebrook students attending. Transportation, supplied by 12 individuals, came to \$651.75. The total expenses of the school system came to \$3,099.13.

The fiscal year ending June 30, 2004 listed the salary of the Superintendent/Principal at \$90,148 and the total of all other certified teachers as \$523,454. Total salaries for all personnel in the education department were \$868,801. Add to this employee benefits of \$158,116 and all purchases, transportation, building service and maintenance, etc, and you arrive at the grand total of \$1,305,335.00. Nearly 90 years after 1916 the town has almost the exact same tax base, namely the real estate and personal property tax. In 1916 the population was approximate 300, in 2005 it stands at about 1470.

It is hoped that the map showing the historic school districts can accompany this article; space constraints prevented it from being published last week.

Historic Bytes

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