

Simons Pond in Colebrook *

I'm quite certain that there are more than a few of the older readers who, as soon as they saw the name "Simons Pond" and "Colebrook" used in the same sentence, figured that I have indeed lost my mind! However, there's a story here.

Just north of Colebrook's boundary with Sandisfield, there is a rather large body of water that since the mid-1700s was known as Simons Pond. This received its name because a family by the name of Simons was among the handful of original settlers to that township. The pioneering Simons' set up housekeeping on a picturesque elevation just east of the sparkling body of water.

The name remained unchanged until the early years of the 20th century, when the McClave family of New Jersey purchased the land surrounding the lake, in both Massachusetts and Connecticut. Shortly after this, a request was made to the Board of Geographic Names, a U. S. government agency charged with formalizing all geographical names in the United States, to change the name to "Lake Marguerite", after the eldest McClave daughter. This was done, and forever since, some of us refer to the body of water as "Simons Pond" while others more accurately, call it "Lake Marguerite".

The name change does cause some problems today, however. To begin with, there is a road leading northward from Beech Hill Road in Colebrook that is named "Simons Pond Road". This road is not passable up to and past the Massachusetts border as it once did. Instead, for all practical purposes at least, it ends just past the junction of Cobb City Road and Simons Pond Road. To confuse the issue even more, there is a pond visible from this intersection that has no formal name, having been formed by a colony of beavers some years back when E. R. LeManquis owned the site. It is a very easy and logical mistake for someone to look at a map, see the road going northward tangent to a large body of water named "Lake Marguerite", while at the same time ending (as far as a passable road, at least) at another unnamed body of water. It is easy to assume that this is Simons Pond.

Another problem exists with the name of Colebrook's highest elevation, Pond Mountain (height 1552 feet), which lies directly south of Lake Marguerite. It received its name, of course, when its watery companion was named "Simons Pond".

One other confusing point in this location does not have its roots in the name change, but rather with the fact that Sandisfield calls their end of this road "Beech Hill Road", right to the state line where it meets Colebrook's end, which is called "Simons Pond Road". The improved portion of Simons Pond Road is only about one half mile long and intersects at its southern end with "Beech Hill Road". The underlying factor is that this entire upland, centered on Beech Hill, a geographical elevation in Colebrook, until quite recently was known as "Beech Hill", and any resident, regardless of where on this upland he lived, thought of himself as a resident of Beech Hill. Not so today when there are six different named roads on, as the old timers used to say, "The Beech Hill, so called."

But there really was a Simons Pond in Colebrook, at least during our formative years. The pond name has been changed to "Phelps Pond". Its exit waters, Loon Brook, passes under Phelps Road and flows into the marshy meadows north of Colebrook Center at a point west of 645 Colebrook Road.

An agreement between Capt. Samuel Rockwell, Samuel Gowdy and Hezekiah Simons took place on August 29, 1789 whereby Rockwell was to have “ ½ the highway where the old mill dam now stands [Phelps Road] near the said mill known by the name of Simons’ Mill, and the said Gowdy and Simons to have the other. A new dam to be built across the neck of the pond known by the name of Simons Pond, on the highway aforesaid [near the intersection of Phelps Road and Pine Road], one-third of said dam to be built by Rockwell, the other two-thirds to be built by Gowdy and Simons. A channel to lower the pond to be dug one-half by Gowdy & Simons, the other by Rockwell. After the dam is built, Simons & Gowdy are to have the whole command of the water from October 1 – May 15, and from May 15 – October 1, Rockwell is to have the whole command of the water until Gowdy and Simons shall build a grist mill, after which Gowdy & Simons are to have water enough to carry said grist mill, (which is to be built on a good construction and with an overshot wheel.) Rockwell during the term, i.e. from the 15th of May – 1st of October, is to have liberty to draw ¼ of the water that can be drawn every day and no more.”

Recorded on March 24, 1791 in volume 1, page 405 of the Colebrook Land Records.

Another mill agreement with a Rockwell, this time Reuben (the first), took place on November 27, 1829 between Joseph Taintor Jr. and Levi Leonard. The entry reads: “To build on my land [Rockwell’s] on the Mill Brook, so called [Center Brook] with a connecting road from the public highway to and from the mill. [Seek out this access road by going down hill past the foundation site to the point where the road makes a slight bend to the left, then look over the embankment on the right and find the old roadbed dropping off. After a few yards there is a switchback, which then leads to the old mill site.] Also with liberty to build a dam across the brook about 20 rods [330 feet] above the place where they propose to build the sawmill. Also liberty to carry the water in a canal or ditch across my land from the dam to the mill. The plan herein described being about 70 rods [1,155 feet] below the place the reverberatory forge formerly stood”.

This reverberatory furnace was used to make blistered steel, some of which was sold to the U. S. Armory at Springfield, Massachusetts and used by them to make gun barrels.

The foundations of the sawmill can be seen today about 200 yards past the bridge on Pisgah Road in front of 36 Schoolhouse Road where the road changes to gravel. The Rockwell forge referred to was located approximately opposite the upper driveway to 36 Schoolhouse Road.

Volume 8, page 479, Colebrook Town Records.

-- Bob Grigg