

Solomon Sackett of Colebrook

Every so often, I review the un-published papers of Ed Simons (1864-1955), which he left to my parents. Some of them had been slated for inclusion in *The Colebrook History*, by Irving E. Manchester in 1935, but were never printed. Today we will learn about one of Colebrook's former residents, who was greatly respected during his lifetime and for many years after. This gentleman's name was Solomon Sackett. He first drew breath in Sandisfield, Mass. on May 23, 1823, the son of Solomon. I will let Ed Simons tell in his own words, the story of his friend, which also affords a look at life in the mid-1800s in these hills, as well as some humor of the times.

"In the happy days of youth and early manhood, young Solomon labored early and late on the rough and rugged acres, a part of which was tillable and productive, and the remainder was composed of pasturage and woodland. In some sections of the pastureland, the soil was so thickly studded with rocks that it was found necessary to hold up the sheep by their hind legs to permit them to nibble the grass growing between the rocks.

It was midst this primitive environment young Solomon grew up and labored, and during the winter months received his education in the old-fashioned district school, which was thought to afford ample educational advantages for a boy of that day and generation. Following his marriage to Miss. Melissa Fargo in 1847, he successfully engaged in farming in his native town before crossing the state line into Connecticut, where he purchased a small farm in the Town of Colebrook, which he brought to such a high state of cultivation that it attracted the admiration, and in some instances, the envy of the neighboring farms.

Prior to the purchase by Mr. Sackett, the property was occupied by the pastor of the Congregational Church, at the time (1867) being the property of the Congregational Society, and conveyed to the purchaser by the society. [Today, this is 522 Colebrook Road.] In addition to his farming abilities, he was also the sales representative for the Monumental Bronze Co. of Bridge, Conn., manufacturers of monuments and memorials, one of which was erected on the Sackett plot in the Colebrook Center cemetery, as well as many others in this and other nearby cemeteries. [And they are in as good condition today as they were at the time they were erected.]

Solomon Sackett was elected to several important town offices, among them selectman. He was also Colebrook's elected representative to the General Assembly.

Three days after the blizzard in 1888, when Colebrook had been deprived of mail service during that period, an 'expeditionary force' was organized under the leadership of Mr. Sackett, with Winsted as the objective. The force consisted of six men – the writer being one of them – followed by a pair of strong horses hitched to heavy bob-sleds. After five hours of strenuous labor, Winsted was reached, out-going mail delivered, and incoming mail received. The horses were fed at the livery stable located on land now occupied by the Hurlbut Bank building, and owned and operated by the late Jason K. Gillette. [The bank was more or less across Main Street from High Street.]

While the horses were resting, the men roamed at will in search of rest and refreshment. Some of the party longed for stimulants, but it being a period of prohibition, the desire was reluctantly dismissed, but the writer, being acquainted with a M. D. who operated a drug store, obtained a prescription for a quart of cider brandy, which was

cordially welcomed by the weary and distressed, but not by the leader of the expedition – whose disapproval was manifest. Of the said ‘expeditionary force’, only the writer is living. This being the case, it is assumed that the reading public will credit the distilled apple juice with being a preservative. Although Colebrook was only five miles distant, the return trip took three hours, and while there was rest at intervals for the shovel brigade, there was no rest for the weary horses.

Solomon Sackett died February 19, 1904. Several years after his passing, his son Grove left a legacy to the Litchfield County Hospital [later Winsted Memorial Hospital, currently the Winsted Health Center], of \$20,000 to establish the Solomon Sackett ‘Free Bed Fund’. A part of the income from said fund to be used for general hospital purposes, and the remainder to provide two free beds. This is indeed a fitting memorial to the man who was interested in the welfare of his fellow men during life, and generously contributed to their comfort.”

What is printed here is but a small portion of Ed Simons’ biography of Solomon Sackett, but I thought that the description of the Blizzard of ’88 might be of special interest, as it was a late season March Northeaster storm, and the weather forecast at the time of this writing (March 3, 2001), seems to hold out the threat of something similar during the next several days. Do you suppose that our great-grandchildren will someday talk of “The Blizzard of ‘01”?