

Students Interact With History

Each year just prior to summer vacation, grades 2 and 3 of the Colebrook Consolidated School are introduced to the Historical Society and what it stands for. This begins with a visit to the second grade from the curator, who brings an assortment of items calculated to be of interest to their age group. Experience has taught us that the more gruesome the object is, the better it will be received; a three pound cannon ball, a bayonet for a Civil War rifle, a powder horn made from a cow's horn, all are looked upon with an air just short of reverence. Also we bring wooden toys such as tops and "the preacher and the bear", that they can play with. In case you may not know about the preacher and the bear, it has been in constant use throughout the rural districts of North America from at least Colonial times, although now it is found primarily in the southern Appalachians. It consists of two short (6-inches) square sticks pinned together with a human figure (the preacher) at one end and at the other, a bear, each holding a wooden mallet with which they pound a wooden block located at midpoint between them. By alternately pulling first one end and then the other, the two mallets pound the block, missing each other by a fraction of an inch. By imparting the (false) notion that if the operator is quick enough, the mallets will hit each other, and anyone who fails, is just not doing it fast enough! A home made wooden top, which is held in a handle while it is wound up with a shoestring, then given a hard pull, never fails to be popular. A Civil War horn, made from a cow's horn, and looking very much like a powder horn except for the mouthpiece, is popular, primarily because it makes a loud noise, once the technique of blowing through it is mastered. A collapsible Civil War drinking cup is a perennial favorite, although I think they are still made, but with plastic instead of pewter.

Two days after the visit to the school, the two grades, one after the other, pay an hour visit to the Society, where they are introduced to the wonders there. The collection of objects that had made the trip to the classroom, now returned to their accustomed locations throughout the museum, are asked to be located and identified.

There are three favorites year after year, and they are a home-made mousetrap; a brutal device, guaranteed to cut a rat or mouse in half, the Civil War jacket of Lt. Edward Carrington, complete with the 50 cal. bullet hole of the missal that took his life and the children's room, containing toys and games of long ago.

Following this excursion, the third grade spends a full day at the Rock Schoolhouse, where they relive a day somewhat similar to those experienced by students a century and a half ago. This building is the same age as the Town of Colebrook, having been constructed in 1779. It saw continuous use until 1911, when a decreasing population coupled with an improving road system caused the students to be transported to the Center School. The Colebrook Historical Society acquired the building in 1971, and it has been a working museum ever since. It is undoubtedly one of the high points in the academic year.

The other event that we have been doing for the past four or five years is a trip around Colebrook for the second and third grades. The school bus company supplies a bus and driver for this hour and a half sojourn. The route varies, but this year they were treated to the fish ladder, located on Sandy Brook in North Colebrook followed by a trip down Sandy Brook Road with various points of interest such as the location of the last Native American's house site and some of the larger mill sites. Then it was on to the

Colebrook River Dam, where resident officer David Platt gave the students a talk and handed out souvenirs. The return journey went up Mount Pisgah Road, a mile and a half long gravel scenic road along which is to be found Beulah Falls. These falls cannot be seen from the road, but if a secret formula is followed, the students will be able to lead their parents or siblings directly to Colebrook's most famous falls during the summer.

Shortly after the return to class, both grades wrote letters to the historical society. Every year these letters prove to be a very pleasant experience to read. We will share some of them with you, and sometimes you have to remind yourself that these are seven and eight year old children; their penmanship is legible and the contents are clearly stated. Their teachers and the community at large should be rightfully proud of them all.

"Thank you for coming to our class. I enjoyed the tour of Colebrook. The tour of the dam was cool. I liked the spillway and the view of the lakes.

The Historical Society was interesting. The mouse trap was cool. I learned a lot about the past. Your friend, Garrett." (2nd grade)

"I liked the fish ladder and the Colebrook Dam. My favorite thing in the Historical Society was the mouse trap. From Tucker." (2nd grade)

"Thank you for bringing in the war material and the cool old-fashioned toys. (That was very interesting.)

The fish ladder was one of the best things you showed us and so was the Colebrook River Lake. Sincerely, Christian." (2nd grade)

"I bet the class had a great time! I'm very sorry that I was sick. I would have loved it. I was very mad that I was sick. I liked the Historical Society also. I liked when you came to visit. From Jane (2nd grade)

"Thank you for showing me my uncle's badge. I hope we come there again to see that badge. [Buster Hart's badge. He was Colebrook's first fire chief.] I liked when you showed us the sword. Sincerely, Adam" (3rd grade)

"My favorite part [of the museum tour] was the quilt and the toys. They all look cool to me. Everything is so interesting to me. I love history. Thanks again, Kelsi"

"My favorite thing was the sword that the captain used to lead his army. Was that sword real gold and silver or just fool's gold and silver? When was the sword made and how many times do you think the captain used his sword? Write back soon, Monica" (grade 3) [Yes, it is real gold and silver, the sword was made in the 1770s, and we don't know how many times it was used in battle.]

"Thank you so much for taking pictures of us. The pictures will be great memories. Also thank you for teaching us some very interesting things. I had so much fun I wish we could go every day – except this Thursday, because it is field day! Thanks, Kelsi." (3rd grade)

"Thank you for taking pictures of us at the Rock Schoolhouse. I was the one who you took the picture of the shoes when I was reading.

I liked math the best because I like using slate board.

Everyone laughed at me when they saw the picture when I was stepping out of the outhouse. Thanks again! Sincerely, Courtney" (3rd grade)

And from the 3rd grade teacher, Virginia Manulla: "Every time I come to the Historical Society I discover something new and wonderful. Some day, I must visit without children in tow, so I can peruse all the treasures inside in my own time, at my own pace."