

Deacon Grant Farm, The

The so-called Deacon Grant farm, located at 52 Norfolk-Winsted Road, is one of the early historic houses in Colebrook. The origins of the Grant family began with immigrants who arrived on the ship *Mary and John*, that docked in Boston May 30, 1630 and who eventually settled the town of Windsor in the new colony of Connecticut. From this group descended Elijah Grant, born in Norfolk, Connecticut. He married Elizabeth Phelps in 1810, and one year later moved with his wife and new son, also named Elijah, to land that he had been buying in Colebrook. On this land was situated a story and a quarter dwelling and a barn that he had purchased from Jesse Taylor and his wife. He remodeled the original dwelling into the present much larger house. He did this by cutting the original structure in half and inserting a two-story building between them. One wing was used as a cart shed and cheese room and the other as a woodshed. It is written in the Grant documents that "Elijah was noted as an embodiment of Grant characteristics, shown in his quiet persistence in executing his plans, desiring only to know what was right and then doing it; never neglecting a duty for his own ease and advantage, but performing every duty assigned to him, however small, with conscientious care and fidelity" He also had charge of the repairs of the Greenwoods Turnpike, as attested by contracts found in the attic.

Elijah and Elizabeth had a large family, but only one, Marcus, who was the youngest, remained on the farm. It was he who would be known to all as "Deacon" Grant. In all the family records, he is referred to as Marcus, but in all the documents that he signed, such as the minutes of the meetings of the Southwest School, of which he was a long-time clerk, he signed himself as J. M. Grant. In addition to being a devout Christian, he also was a civic-minded man who served the community throughout his life unselfishly in many capacities, undoubtedly having learned these attributes from his parents. The farm during his tenure had a reputation of being one of the best run in Colebrook, encompassing much of the nineteenth century. He passed on in 1901.

Deacon Grant's mother, Elizabeth, kept nearly every letter and document that came into the house, which is a boon to researchers. Much of this material was given to Smith College, the alma mater of one of the Grant descendants; however, lists of this material are in the possession of the Colebrook Historical Society, along with descriptive notes.

With the passing of Deacon Grant and his wife, the farm was bought from the other heirs by Jane Grant, daughter of the oldest son of Elijah and Elizabeth, who used the place as a summer residence for the rest of her life. She deeded the property to two of her nieces, Mrs. Janet Curtis and Mary Wallace. They continued to use it as a summer residence until 1945. The Mead family, the present owners, has owned it for many years.

Until the mid-1930's, the farm consisted of one hundred and some-odd acres that Elijah had accumulated. At that time, as the timber needed to be harvested and they were unable to have it done, Mrs. Curtis and Mrs. Wallace gave 100 acres to the State of Connecticut, leaving with the house three meadows, a wood-lot, a fine grove of Hemlocks and the two brooks crossing the land in addition to the house site. At the time the state accepted this land, it was published in the Hartford Courant that the State Forester had said that the land contained the finest stand of Hemlocks in the state. The

reservation was named the Elijah Grant Hemlocks. Today, most of the land known as the Algonquin State Forest in southwestern Colebrook is comprised of this gift.

Here are some excerpts from an interesting letter written in 1915 by a 90 year old distant cousin of the Grants in which she gives an accounting of the lifestyles that she remembers as a youth:

“I am afraid I cannot give you many items of interest in regard to the five adjoining farms [that made up the neighborhood], one of which was the Deacon Grant farm. 50 children were born in these five homes, 9 Grant, 11 Cowles, 13 Griswolds, 6 Canfield and 11 Wakefield. Of these, 6 sons were Yale graduates, 1 of Western Reserve College. 10 daughters were either graduates or students in female seminaries.

Cooking was done before an open fire, assisted by a tin oven, a dutch oven and semi-weekly baking in a brick oven. After the food was removed from the brick oven, it was filled with apples; these baked slowly and remained in the oven all night, making them very delicious. Lamb and poultry, and fish from the streams gave variety to the dried beef, ham, salt pork and beef. I remember my father went to Hartford every spring and brought out a load of shad; this was salted for use during the summer.

Rye was raised for daily bread; wheat flour was bought for cake, piecrust, biscuits and shortcakes. Abundance of maple sugar and syrup furnished sweets. Excellent gardens produced all kinds of vegetables. More butter and cheese were made than consumed by the family. These were sold to the stores in exchange for rice, spices, etc. Corn meal with an abundance of milk and cream produced six-foot men. Flax and wool were spun and woven for family use. I remember meeting a woman several years ago, who said she spun three summers in succession in my father's family. After a certain number of skeins were spun, the spinner's time was her own. She spun for three and six [three shillings and sixpence] (fifty cents) a week. A four-horse Albany and Hartford stagecoach passed on the turnpike, going each way every day.

Your Grandfather's was a representative homestead. Two stories high with a large, light attic made the chambers pleasant. I think you have had all from the nonagenarian that you might wish for.

Your loving cousin, Ellen A. Phillips”

The families who comprised the neighborhood known as Millbrook were well educated and well read; here are some of the books and other reading material inventoried in the 1930's with a notation that they were regularly passed from one family to another:

Over 600 book titles, odd numbers of the American Journal of Science and Arts, 1838; ditto of Geology and Natural Sciences, 1810-30; Hartford Courant, papers and magazines, 1820's and 30's; Appleton's Picturesque America, 1872; St. Nicholas Magazines; Dwight's Geography, 1812; Uncle Tom's Cabin; Maps, 1830's and 40's and a copy of Shakespeare. Some authors were: Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Dean Howells and many others.

The Greenwoods Turnpike went by the dooryard of the Grant house, but the realignment of U.S. Route 44 in the early 1940's has left it off the highway and somewhat secluded.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg