

The Highways of Colebrook's Southwestern District

There were originally three main traveling routes through Colebrook; the Old North Road (1761), Highway Number Three (1765) and the Greenwoods Turnpike, which traverses the southwestern corner of Colebrook, also called the Millbrook Section. The name Green Woods Turnpike itself indicates the late nature of this road, as turnpikes in Connecticut began their history in 1791; the Green Woods Turnpike was chartered in 1799. As U.S. Route 44 was laid down on its foundations, we today may think of them as being one and the same, although with modern refinements.

Just south of the Winchester town line, a seemingly insignificant road ties into Rt. 44. Today this six tenths of a mile long road is named Hannifin Road, named for Thomas Hannifin, who moved to Colebrook in the late 1870s and who lived at the north end of this road near its intersection with Millbrook Road. In 1883, Hannifin was elected collector and treasurer of the South West School District, whose school was located to the west of the intersection of Millbrook Road and Pinney Street. Hannifin Road was a segment of the Waterbury River Turnpike, and as such established a quite important intersection with the Green Woods Turnpike. The foundation of an inn known as the Crocker House, that served these turnpikes, can be seen on the south side of Rt. 44, opposite Hannifin Rd.

A few hundred yards northwest lies the Colebrook-Winchester town line and the southern terminus of Pinney Street, followed within one hundred yards by the southern end of Millbrook Rd., again on the right side of 44, which is fairly straight here before making a slight left turn and ascending the hill. At the base of this hill on the left, can be seen the location of a long-abandoned road that once connected this neighborhood to the Danbury Quarter Rd. in Winchester. The Winchester end, by the way, is still in use, with several houses on it.

A mile or so west, on the left is Flagg Hill Road, another old road that used to continue on into Winchester and the Danbury Quarter Rd., but today ends at the Colebrook-Winchester line. While during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were but two houses on the Colebrook end, today sees thirteen homes with others either in the planning stage or actually under construction.

We are approaching the Norfolk town line, but before that, there are two more roads intersecting Rt. 44 from the right; first is short, T-shaped, dead-end Greenwoods Turnpike. (Note that the Colebrook spelling is one word rather than the historic two.) Lastly Rock Hall Road tees into Rt. 44. This road may well be slated for residential development. The entire length has recently been paved, and there are large blocks of undeveloped land situated on both sides of the road. This road connected the Old North Road with the Green Woods Turnpike. The modern name is derived from the name of the estate located at number 16, which was built around 1911. Rock Hall was designed by Addison Mizener, a world-famous architect, known for his structures in Palm Beech and Boca Raton, Florida that he built during the 1920s. To my knowledge, it is the only dwelling in Colebrook designed by a well-known and respected architect.

Returning to the east end of the Southwest District, we will begin with Conn. Rt. 183, or the Colebrook Road. The segment from the Winchester line into Colebrook up to its intersection with Millbrook Road was not built until 1825. It eliminated several steep sections of hills along what today is the Old Colebrook road, but in days of yore, referred

to as either Marshall Street, or simply the Winsted road. The popularity of this addition soon resulted in the popular usage of the term “Old Colebrook Road”.

Millbrook Road, proceeding southward from the Colebrook Road, was a segment of the important Waterbury River Turnpike, which connected Colebrook Center with Winchester Center and points south. Many prominent Colebrook residents lived on this road, among them Peter Corbin, Revolutionary War veteran, William Swift, master builder and Adin Wakefield. Records of this section of the turnpike yield information concerning the early years of the nineteenth century not easily found elsewhere. For example, the procedure allowing town residents the use of their local roads without having to worry about paying tolls. At a site just north of the intersection of Hannifin Rd., notice a small garage sitting alone across the road from the house at number 78. That garage, along with the land it sits on, exists today because that was the site of the tollbooth. A note in the Colebrook Town Meeting book dated April 7, 1823 states that the residents voted that the town pay the Waterbury River turnpike Co. \$40.00 per year for the privilege of passing the gate free of toll.

After proceeding southerly one mile, Millbrook Rd. makes an almost ninety degree turn westward and proceeds another half mile, intersecting with Pinney St. and continues across Mill Brook, with the foundation stones of the William Lawrence sawmill on the left, and ends at Route 44. The Pinney Street intersection marks the center of what used to be a thriving community, boasting a post office, school, lumber mill, cider and bone mill, as well as the Lawrence Farm, the largest in the district, and the reason the railroad named its station at the east end of the Danbury Quarter road “Lawrence Station” (sometimes known as “Colebrook Station”). The name of the Post Office was Mill Brook P.O., hence the name of the road leading there. As was the case with Green Woods vs. Greenwoods, the official spelling of the road today is one word.

Pinney Street runs two miles north from the Winchester line to the intersection with Conn. Rt. 182, or Stillman Hill Road, (named for Osman Stillman, who lived for much of the nineteenth century at the large house at number 33 at the top of Stillman Hill). It was home to several members of the Pinney family, David Pinney being in attendance at Colebrook’s first town meeting in 1779. The land this road served was extensively farmed from colonial times and on into the twentieth century. The school, known as the South West School, near the south end, was formed in 1796 and continued in use through 1901, when the few remaining students were transferred to Winsted.

The once hard-working Mill Brook now flows unimpeded past the overgrown embankments; the former millponds now full of sediment and Alders, the industrial and agricultural buildings, (except for those of the old Lawrence Farm, now owned by Ellen Fredsall) all turned to dust.