

The Interim Report on the Archaeological Investigation at the Richard Smith Forge Site in Colebrook, Connecticut

As we are in the middle of a major archaeological “dig” in Robertsville, I can think of no better way to keep the public abreast of our research than to reproduce here the interim report written by Dr. Marc Banks. While the Farmington River Coordinating Committee (FRCC) underwrites the major part of the funding, additional funds are necessary. Several people have inquired whether or not private contributions can be made, and the answer is a resounding yes. Contributions may be made to either the Colebrook Historical Society, PO Box 85, Colebrook, CT 06021 or the Barkhamsted Historical Society, 100 East River Rd., Barkhamsted, CT 06063 both of which are tax-exempt organizations. Make a notation that the funds are to be used for the Richard Smith Forge Archaeological Investigation. Here is the report, written in April 2008:

Introduction

Walter Landgraf’s work at the Beckley Furnace in East Canaan and research into the iron industry in the Northwest Corner of Connecticut led him to the Smith Forge in the Robertsville section of Colebrook. Walt recognized the historical importance of this ironworks and put together a research group that included Colebrook Historian Robert Grigg, economist David Ingram, archaeologist Dr. Frederick Warner, English genealogy and historical researcher Ray Wheeler and university student David Veling. Dr. Robert Gordon, Linne Landgraf and Anne Fenn also contributed to the Colebrook forge research. An extensive search of local land records, histories and archives provided information on various aspects of the Colebrook Forge and the iron industry. With the help of a grant from the FRCC a review of documents in the archival collections at Harvard’s Baker Library and the Archibald Library at Rutgers University was undertaken. Sources in England were also investigated to obtain additional information on Richard Smith. The data collected by the research group fills over eight banker boxes presently stored at the Barkhamsted Historical Society. This research guided the archaeology at the forge site that was directed by archaeologist Dr. Mark Banks. Ultimately, these materials and data obtained as the research continues will be sent to the Dodd Center at the University of Connecticut where they will be available for future study.

This report summarizes the archaeological investigation conducted during 2007 at the Richard Smith Forge site. The project was funded by a grant from the FRCC, the Barkhamsted Historical Society and Colebrook Historical Society and the Colebrook Land Conservancy. The site is located in the southeast corner of Colebrook, Connecticut immediately south of Robertsville Road between the intersections of Route 8 and Old Forge Road. This property is owned by Marcia Marsted and William Currier and is bounded on the south by Still River, a major tributary of the Farmington River, and the eastern boundary abuts Northeast Utilities property. A number of buildings associated with the Richard Smith Forge were located here. Presently, the artifacts recovered at the site are being processed and analyzed. A detailed report including the history of the Colebrook Forge and a full analysis of the materials that were recovered at the site will follow the completion of fieldwork planned for 2008.

The Colebrook Forge

The following history of the Colebrook Forge was written by Walter Landgraf based on the work of the Richard Smith research group

The Richard Smith Ironworks was constructed in 1771 following the destruction of the ironworks at West Simsbury, now the Collinsville section of Canton. The *Connecticut Courant* reported on January 15, 1771, "We hear that the ironworks at Simsbury are entirely swept off in the flood, together with one or two houses which stood contiguous to the river, and with great difficulty the large and commodious store, which contained a great quantity of English goods was saved." The same article reported that the rains had started on Saturday, January 6. Nine days later, the Connecticut River and its tributaries experienced a flood of historic proportions.

At the time of the flood the ironworks in West Simsbury (now Collinsville) were owned by Richard Smith, a British merchant living in Boston. Starting in 1768, Smith began to acquire the ironworks, along with the furnace and iron mines from George and Charles Caldwell in Salisbury, Connecticut. The Connecticut public records covering 1768 to 1771 detail how Richard Smith took deeds from Charles and George Caldwell for the ironworks, in both West Simsbury and in Salisbury, to cover the debts the Caldwells were not able to pay off.

The Simsbury land records show that Richard Smith took a deed from Charles Caldwell (iron master) of Hartford for the iron house, forge, utensils, coal house, dwellings, and rights to the river in West Simsbury on December 16, 1768. Smith then invested £127 (about \$635) into the building of a new store, making improvements to the iron house, and the breast works in the river at West Simsbury. Also between September and November of 1768 Smith delivered 2,200 pounds of goods to the new store at West Simsbury for Charles Caldwell.

Smith had made similar investments at the Salisbury furnace, also owned by George and Charles Caldwell, who were having trouble managing the ironworks to pay Smith back. Charles Caldwell had built the ironworks in West Simsbury starting in 1766.

The ironworks at West Simsbury (Collinsville) refined pig iron, which was shipped from the Salisbury furnace, into wrought iron bars and products, greatly increasing the value of the iron. Thus, when the ironworks were destroyed in the flood, Smith immediately made plans to rebuild.

Smith's eyes turned to a site on the Still River in southeastern Colebrook. This site was just up the Still River from its junction with Sandy Brook and offered dependable waterpower, less flood threat, and large forests stands for making charcoal. It could be joined to the Old North Road, thereby providing a connection between Salisbury and Hartford. Starting on March 21, 1770, Smith executed the first of eight deeds with the Wolcotts, Drakes, Kingsberrys, Filleys and Mathers. He purchased 289 acres with rights to the Still River.

To be continued next week