

## The “Old” Colebrook Road

There are words we all use our entire lives that we never really think about until something happens that forces us to take a closer, more analyzing look at one of them. A case in point is the name of one of the main roads between Colebrook Center and Winsted.

The very first road (probably no more than a glorified trail), which was created through the virgin forest, was completed not later than November 20, 1761. This was the so-called Greenwoods Road, which ran from Simsbury to Canaan. (Remember that Canton had not yet split off from its parent town, so they really meant an alignment generally along Route 44). It was mandated by the colonial government for the rapid deployment of troops to the vicinity of upstate New York during the French and Indian War. Because it was intended only for foot soldiers, the committees assigned to lay out these first “highways” tended to follow as straight a line as they could between point “A” and “B”. In all likelihood, they expanded upon existing Indian footpaths. The result was a road ascending our numerous hills and ridges in what must have seemed an endless uphill climb. Using today’s terminology, the Greenwoods Road entered Colebrook from Winchester along Smith Hill Road, having ascended the mountain from near the present intersection of Conn. Route 8 and Conn. Route 20. At today’s intersection of Smith Hill Road and Old North Road, it followed the latter to its western terminus with Old Colebrook Road. (See – we didn’t really lose site of our primary topic!) It followed this road northwestward to the intersection of Conn. Route 183 (Colebrook Road), then continued straight up Stillman Hill along today’s Conn. Route 182 (Stillman Hill Road). That original road then followed along today’s Conn. Route 182 until it passed into Norfolk.

The first building ever erected in Colebrook Center was a sawmill in 1765. The main “shopping center” in those days was New Hartford, not Winsted, so there wasn’t any pressing need for a road southward from Colebrook Center to present-day Winsted. By 1768, there existed the basic road patterns along which the town’s transportation routes would develop. This consisted of the rest of present day Smith Hill Road to Colebrook Center, then northward along today’s Conn. Route 183 to North Colebrook, and up Prock Hill Road, where it passed into Massachusetts. Only one more major route remained to complete the basic grid, and that consisted of what now is Conn. Route 183 southward out of the Center, then along Millbrook Road to Hannifin Road, which leads into Winchester, then through Winchester Center, and southward through the Naugatuck Valley, with Waterbury being the largest center of population. That is the reason, incidentally, why a few years after its completion, it became known as the Waterbury River Turnpike.

Now we will return to the task at hand and explain the title of this chapter.

It was a logical step in the expansion of necessary roads to connect the Greenwoods Road at its highest elevation southward toward Winsted and to connect with today’s Conn. Route 183, or Coe Street, as it is now known. As Winsted grew, this last mentioned road became the main route between the two population centers. However, the old problem of the increasing population as to how to cope with steep hills traversed by the highway system they found in place upon their arrival still was a situation to contend with. Thus, in Colebrook’s town records dated July, 1825, we find the

townspeople “accepting the survey of a new highway recently laid out by the selectmen that was to run ...from the Waterbury River Turnpike through Peter Corbin’s (second house on the left on Millbrook Road) land southerly to the north line of Winchester, the whole distance being 73 chains” (4,818 feet)”. This completed the last segment of the route covered by today’s Conn. Route 183. Strangely, there was some strong resistance to this segment being added, and it was nearly 20 years later that the road was actually made passable and maintained by the town. At this point, the residents of the area could finally pass between Colebrook Center and Winsted without having to climb over several hills.

Popular usage now referred to the original route as the “Old Colebrook Road” and the just completed one as “New Colebrook Road”. Soon the “New” was dropped, and we move on until we arrive in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it became imperative that all roads be named, and all houses have numbers. (Fire and ambulance protection, for example.) Many of our roads never had “official” names, and thus ad hoc committees were assembled to create an official list. There were instances where they had to make decisions where ambiguity or other problems existed. One such example is Winchester’s naming of their end of the Old Colebrook road. If you look at a current map, you will see that the first road branching off from Route 183 after it leaves U. S. 44 is named “Marshall Street”, and about a quarter of a mile along that road there is a short, dead-end road named “Old Colebrook Road”. What’s going on here? Well, the committee made a mistake; the Winchester end had always been called the Old Colebrook Road, and the short, dead-end road Marshall Street. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Colebrook end was called Marshall Street due to the prominent family that then lived there. When the Marshall family removed to Pennsylvania, the road began to be referred to as “The Colebrook Road” until the present alignment of State Route 183 became the more accepted route between the two communities in 1845. The problem with committees such as these, mandated as they were by the state, is that at the time they submit their final report, it becomes “carved in stone”; the time for making corrections has passed.

So next time you drive up Coe Street, heading for Colebrook, and decide to take the “high road”, don’t scratch your head when you pass the Old Colebrook Road on your left and wonder just how anyone could have ever reached Colebrook by that route!