

## **Vegetation Existing at the Rock School Property**

*For orientation purposes, Sandy Brook Road is south of the schoolhouse, Colebrook Road (Conn. Rt. 183) is west, the large Maple and the Ash are on the north and the rear of the building faces east.*

### **TREES**

**Wild Apple** An apple that grows from a seed will not generally produce eatable fruit. In order to get Red Delicious apples, for example, a twig from a delicious apple would be grafted onto a wild apple. When the branch grew large enough, it would produce Delicious apples. The wild apple at the Rock School is located about mid point along the east side of the stone wall. (In back of the schoolhouse.)

**Crab Apple** This ornamental tree was planted in the front yard to beautify the grounds.

**White Ash** Located along the north wall, this tree is growing rapidly, as it now is taller than the building.

**Black Cherry** Most of the brush on the east side of the wall is black cherry. When these trees grow to maturity, they produce very beautiful wood that sometimes is made into furniture

**Hemlock** Two young ones are to be found on the south edge of the schoolyard next to Sandy Brook Road. This road, by the way, used to be named Rock School Road. When the building ceased to be used as a school, Sandy Brook Road was renamed starting at the corner here down to just past the Colebrook Town Garage. What used to be the western end of Sandy Brook Road was then renamed Phelps Flat Road.

**Sugar Maple** The large tree at the edge of Colebrook Road on the northwest corner is a sugar maple, the sap from which is made into maple syrup and maple sugar. It is also called rock maple, due to the hardness of the wood.

**White Pine** There are two or three small ones on the south side. White pine always has clusters of needles containing five leaves. A needle is what is known as a modified leaf. This tree and the hemlock are known as evergreens. The white pine sheds one half of its needles each autumn.

**Red Oak** For probably one hundred and fifty years there was a large red oak growing in the front yard. In 2006 several of its lower limbs died for no apparent reason. Then in the spring of 2007 more branches died and fungi was observed on a significant portion of the trunk, indicating that the tree was dying. It will be replaced by another red oak, but it will be many years before it will attain the stature of the beautiful original tree. In the meantime, there are several large red oaks along the north side of Sandy Brook Road down hill from the school.

**Poplar** There is one small poplar near the big rock at the corner. Perhaps it's not such a good idea to let this one establish itself, as they tend to spread quite fast and are hard to get rid of.

**Red Sumac** This is also at the corner near the poplar. Like the poplar, it also spreads rapidly and is very difficult to eradicate. Another name for the Red Sumac is "lemonade tree", because when the red seed spires are young, the tiny red hairs that cover the seeds will dissolve in water (or on your tongue) and they really taste like lemonade. Don't confuse the Red Sumac with the poisonous White Sumac, which doesn't grow anywhere near the schoolhouse.

## **Shrubs**

**Lilac** There is a clump of lilac near the southwest corner of the schoolhouse. The early settlers brought these ornamental shrubs, so beautiful to see and smell in the springtime, to this country from Europe. (Although originally they came from Turkey.)

**Dogwood** Another of the several species of trees and plants along the south side of the yard. These are native shrubs, although they can be purchased from nurseries. There is a disease that is killing our dogwoods, but the ones here at the Rock School seem to be healthy.

**Blueberry** Technically, these should be called high bush blueberries, as most of the commercial blueberries that are sold in the marketplace are harvested from low bush blueberries. Many acres of these can be found up in Maine. Sometimes you will see blueberry bushes covered with netting to keep birds from eating them. A flock of wild turkeys consisting of two adults and four young ones the size of hens were watched crossing a field on Beech Hill when they spotted a blueberry bush loaded with berries. It took less than five minutes for them to eat every single berry. The adults ate the highest ones using those long necks of theirs, and the little ones hopped up, grabbed a berry, hopped up and ate another and so on until the bush was bare. It's a good idea to use netting!

**Juniper** These evergreens produce bluish berries that some people find tasty. Don't swallow them just chew for the flavor. They wouldn't hurt you if swallowed. These berries are used to flavor the alcoholic beverage known as gin.

**Azalea** The bush next to the front door as well as another along the edge of the south lawn are native azaleas. Most of the azaleas you will see in blossom during the month of May are commercially raised and can be purchased from nurseries. They have more and larger blossoms, but the natives have a nicer fragrance. Locally, these are often called swamp pink.

**Mock orange** The tall shrub about midpoint along the east wall is a mock orange. This particular one is an Asiatic specie. There are 9 or 10 different types found in this country. The one we have has the nicest fragrance.

**Meadowsweet** You will find this growing alongside the wall on the east side and also outside the north wall. Mother Nature does not like what we think of as nice lawns and open fields going right up to our stonewalls. She prefers woods consisting of many different species. This is what we call reforestation. One of the first woody shrubs that start the process of reforestation is meadowsweet and its sister shrub steplebush. Steplebush has tall, pointed clusters of blossoms, the meadowsweet has similar flowers, but the clusters are rounded at the top. These, along with red sumac, poplar and gray birch are among the first to begin the transition from fields to forest. Before long, if we leave them alone, the north wall will begin to have sugar maple and black cherry, just as the east wall now has. By the time you grow up and have children of your own, those black cherry on the east wall will be about one foot thick.

**Barberry** Barberry is a shrub you don't want to get too close to, as it seems to have more thorns than leaves! It produces many bright red berries in the autumn that the birds eat during the winter. The inner bark and wood are bright yellow. You can find it along Sandy Brook Road not far from the hemlock tree.

## Flowering Plants

**Blackberry** There are a couple of these on the east side. The fruit ripens in late July and early August. The berries are good with cream and sugar, in pancakes, on cereal and in jams, jellies and pies. The leaves make a nice drink when steeped in hot water. They have a branched stalk and much worse thorns than raspberry stalks.

**Raspberry** These are also to be found on the east side. There are more thorns on these than blackberry, but they aren't as hard and sharp. However you won't think so if you sit on one!

**Bindweed** Bindweed is a member of the morning glory family. Like most vines, they tend to wrap themselves around whatever they grow next to, thus binding everything together. An interesting fact about vines is that in the northern hemisphere, they twist counterclockwise, in other words from right to left. If you lived in Australia, in the southern hemisphere, they would twist exactly opposite.

**Poison Ivy** Over in the northeast corner you will find this most unwelcome vine. We have been attempting to eradicate this for several years, but so far we haven't been successful. There are always three shiny leaves in each cluster. Early in the spring the leaves are almost purple, later becoming green. Either way, stay away!

**Bluets, or Quaker Ladies** The bluet practically forms a mat on some lawns and fields. They generally have four petals that can be colored blue, white, yellow or combinations of these. Stop and look closely at these; they are a particularly beautiful plant.

**Pussy Toes** Bristly flower heads crowded together into a cluster resembling a cat's paw give this plant its name. They bloom here in May, but are usually hard to find later after the lawn is cut.

**Common Blue Violet** Violet leaves contain high amounts of vitamins A and C, and can be used in salads or cooked as greens. The flowers can be made into candies and jellies.

**Strawberry** Strawberries are in bloom throughout the month of May, and by June the ripe fruit can be seen peeping out from under its leaves. Although much larger and showier, the strawberries purchased in a store don't come close to equaling the flavor of the wild strawberry.

**Blood Root** Ours can be found at the highest point of the schoolyard next to Sandy Brook Road. In June, all that will be seen are the large, deeply lobed leaves. The white blossoms come out in May and only last a few days. The red juice from the roots was used by the Indians as a dye for blankets, clothing and war paint, as well as for insect repellent. (How could they tell whether the Indian coming up the path was on the warpath or just trying to keep from being chewed up by mosquitoes?)

**Dandelion** This is not a native plant, but was brought here by the colonists from Europe. The name refers to the likeness of the leaf teeth to those of a lion. When young, they are quite good in salads. The blossoms are used to make dandelion wine. Most people hate them in their lawns, but if you look closely at a blossom, you will find it to be very beautiful.

**Trout Lilly** This early spring yellow blossom is accompanied by two mottled leaves that resemble a trout when seen through shallow water.

**Canada Mayflower** This small plant covers large areas of the forest floor and can be found south of the schoolhouse under the hemlock.

**Canadian Dwarf Cinquefoil** The easiest way to find one of these is to look for a small bright yellow flower growing close to the ground. The name comes from the French word for "five", as it has five petals on the blossom as well as five leaves in each cluster.

**Northern Bedstraw** This belongs to a family of plants known as bedstraws, since the pleasant smelling foliage was used to stuff mattresses in medieval times. Roasting the seeds after they turn brown in July can make a non-caffeine coffee substitute. Roast in a warm oven (300 degrees F) for about an hour until they become dark and crisp. Grind in a blender or crush on a hard surface. Simmer  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a cup of these in one quart of water until it turns medium to dark brown. Strain and serve. Look for bedstraw by the north wall between the school and Colebrook Road.

**Daisy** The name is derived from the fact that the bright yellow center is surrounded by white petals. This reminded people of the sun and thus they were known as "day's eye".

They are so common that it seems they must always have been here, but our daisy came from Europe.

**Buttercup** This is another European import. A special layer of cells just beneath the surface causes the shiny, waxy texture of the buttercup petals. Don't try to eat this plant – the juice from the stems and leaves are very acrid, which means it tastes terrible. That is why you will see so many of them in fields and pastures; the animals also know how horrible they taste! Young children will pick a buttercup and hold it close up under someone's chin to "see if they like butter". (Meaning that the reflection from the petals will make the skin appear yellow.)

**Wild Oats** Wild oats have a pale yellow blossom that hangs down like a long bell. Find them along the south wall.

**Solomon's Seal** Look for a long, arching leaf-stalk over a foot long with flowers hanging from the underside. The rootstalk of solomon seal is jointed; the leaf stalk breaks away from it, leaving a distinctive scar, which is said to resemble the official seal of King Solomon. Indians and colonists ate the starchy rhizomes (roots).

**Solomon's Plume (False Solomon's Seal)** This plant looks almost like Solomon's seal, but the white flowers occur at the end of the long, curving leaf rather than on the underside. The rootstalk does not have the distinctive markings.

**Goldenrod** There are 11 different kinds of goldenrod growing in Colebrook. When they are mature, you can figure out which one you are looking at, but that doesn't happen until autumn. In the springtime, it's not difficult to find goldenrod leaves, but when it comes to identifying the exact type, do the same as most honest adults do – say "I haven't the foggiest notion what kind of goldenrod this is!"

**Purple Trillium** This pretty spring flower does not have the best fragrance; in fact another name for it is "stinkpot". The name trillium comes from the Latin word for "three", as it has three petals as well as three leaves.

**Wild Sarsaparilla** These plants are to be found at the high point on the southwest corner. The leafless flower stem, topped with clusters of greenish-white flowers, is beneath a large, umbrella-like leaf. The aromatic rootstalks are used as a substitute for sarsaparilla.

**Vinca (Myrtle)** This low, evergreen trailing plant has purplish-blue five-lobed flowers. It was brought to this country by the colonists, who planted it around their homes, where it went wild and in some cases has continued to grow for more than 200 years. Sometimes it is the best way to locate old house sites. Myrtle continues to be a favorite groundcover; that's why you will find it growing here.

**Horseweed** No flowers will appear on the tall stalk of the horseweed until July at the earliest, but the leafy stalk may be seen on the highest point of land near the intersection

of Sandy Brook Road and Colebrook Road. Indians and early settlers used a preparation of its leaves to treat sore throats.

**White Snakeroot** The single stem bears flat-topped clusters of small fuzzy white flower heads. In days gone by, when there were many more dairy cows about town than at present, farmers had to be careful not to let white snakeroot grow where cows could eat it, as this toxic plant results in milk that can be fatal to humans. You will find it by the north wall.

**Gill-over-the-ground** This is also known by the name of ground ivy. It was introduced from Europe. The name “Gill” comes from the French word “guiller”, which means “to ferment” because the leaves were used to help ferment, or flavor, beer. This also will be found by the north wall.

**Fleabane** This foot tall plant has small aster-like flower heads, but blooms much earlier than do the asters; as early as April to as late as August. Early colonists believed that by scattering the flower heads around the house, they could rid themselves of fleas, as the word “bane” means “deadly”, thus “death to fleas”.

**Yarrow** The leaves of the yarrow have very fine teeth, much like a fern, with a pleasant, aromatic fragrance. Yarrow was formerly used for medicinal purposes, to break a fever by increasing perspiration, to treat hemorrhaging, and as a poultice for rashes. A tea used by the Indians to cure stomach disorders was made by steeping the leaves.

**White Campion** This plant, when it blooms from July to October, has white, balloon-shaped blossoms that bloom at night so as to attract moths, which pollinate it. This plant will be found next to Colebrook Road at the northwest corner.

**Yellow Wood Sorrel** The deep yellow blossoms have five petals and the leaves have three heart-shaped leaflets that look very similar to shamrock. The leaves have a pleasant taste and seem to be sweet and sour at the same time.

**Sheep Sorrel** Here is yet another weed brought here from Europe. The leaves are shaped like a long arrowhead. The leaves can be eaten when young and tender.

**Red Clover** This is one of the favorite flowers of the bumblebee. If you pull out one or two pieces of the flower-head with your thumb and forefinger, place it on your tongue, then squeeze your tongue against your upper teeth and gently pull out the blossom, a drop of honey will be left on your tongue.

**Plantain** Generally called common plantain, this plant is related to the banana. If you ever happen to be at a pond that has ducks swimming on it, pick a plantain leaf, turn it so that the stem points upward, place a peanut or piece of cracker on it, and it becomes a boat to carry the food out to the ducks.

**Blue Eyed Grass** This is a coarse grass that has a flower stalk up to a foot in height. The flower is light blue with a yellow center.

**Tawny Hawkweed** In this part of the country, this is probably better known as orange Indian paintbrush. Originally brought here from Europe, but now grows everywhere.

**Canada Hawkweed** Like the tawny hawkweed, this is better known as yellow Indian paintbrush.

**Butter-and-eggs** This is also called toad-flax. The color of the flowers reminds you of egg yokes and butter.

**Ragweed** For people with allergies, this is perhaps one of the worst plants that grow around here. Unfortunately, it is very common, grows everywhere and is difficult to get rid of.

**Nightshade** This plant, although related to the tomato and potato, is quite poisonous. Fortunately, the small, oval green or red fruits don't taste or smell very appetizing, but please – don't ever eat these! A couple of these plants grow by the steps of the front door.

**Heal All** The colonists believed that this little plant possessed medicinal qualities that were helpful in curing a lot of ailments, that's why the name.

**Vetch** This member of the pea family has escaped from hayfields, as it is not only good for horses and cattle, it also puts an element called nitrogen into the soil. The flowers are purplish-blue.

**Burr Dock** Everyone at sometime or other has gotten mixed up with the burrs of the burr dock. They also have a nasty habit of attaching themselves to our pets, especially dogs. They live several years, and eventually have a taproot that goes down a foot and a half into the ground, making it almost impossible to get rid of, because when you pull one up, it breaks off just beneath the ground and before you know it, more foliage sprouts, and the burr dock is as healthy as ever.

**Grape Vine** The one we have grows at the end of the stonewall by the intersection of the two roads. It looks to be a Concord grape, meaning that it started from the seed of a cultivated grape, not our native grape, which we call a fox grape. These vines can grow to a very large size. In the woods it is possible to find them six to eight inches thick, and growing to the tops of the forest trees.

**Milk Weed** This is the plant on which monarch butterflies lay their eggs. The pupils of the Colebrook schools during the Second World War collected bags and bags of the seedpods in the autumn, which were collected and used to provide the filling for life jackets used by our armed forces.

**Wild Lettuce** This is the tallest weed having a single stalk, which grows to more than six feet tall, that we find growing in Colebrook. It doesn't look much like the lettuce we buy at the store or vegetable stand, but they are closely related, and can be used as greens if you can find them when they are young.

**Wild Mint** There are several mints that grow around here such as spearmint, peppermint and catnip, to mention a few. Look for ours alongside Sandy Brook Road.

**Horse Tails** When this plant is young, it resembles a horse's tail. Pull out one of the needle-shaped leaves and see how they fit together. This is one of the oldest forms of plant life that has remained little changed for at least 300 million years. We know this because their impressions are found in coal beds that we know to be that old. When camping, you can use a fistful of them to scour pots and pans. They really work very well.

**Dew Berry** This plant creeps along the ground and if you looked quickly at it, you might think you were looking at cinquefoil, but the runners have little thorns on them, and when mid-summer comes, the fruit looks and tastes like raspberries.

**Twisted Stalk** This isn't a common plant, and we are lucky to have one or two growing next to the foundation on the east side.

This list consists of 10 trees, 8 shrubs and 49 flowering plants and is not complete. For example, there are several kinds of mosses and grasses, as well as ferns. Also, there is a plant that has leaves similar to parsley that grows along the north wall half way between the schoolhouse and Colebrook Road. What is it? Surely one of you could find out.

The Colebrook Historical Society knows that you have a wonderful time at Rock School Day, but we also want you to feel free to explore the grounds any time of the year. It is remarkable that a list of growing things as long as this one could be compiled from such a tiny plot of land, and as we have said, it is by no means a complete list. You can also look for birds, butterflies, moths, beetles and other insects, mushrooms, lichens and fungi.