

Sandy Brook Area in the 19th Century

The present-day traveler along Sandy Brook Road would have great difficulty recognizing the historic sites that once graced the area. Primarily this is due to Mother Nature's having taken back all the cleared land that had been wrested with so much toil and sweat from her by our pioneering forefathers. Another important factor is the present road itself. The original road was as picturesque as a highway could be. Its builders took the course of least resistance to the obstacles that confronted them every few yards. This allowed for a multitude of very handsome views, but I doubt that the struggling traveler looked upon it with appreciation. It could only be described as an impediment to travel. The road along Sandy Brook, as well as the other two routes connecting Colebrook River and Robertsville with the rest of Colebrook, bore the responsibility of the isolation of our various localities.

The portion that is today part of Algonquin State Forest supported, during the 1800s, a sizable neighborhood. Starting from the intersection of Conn. Route 8 at Tom Bell's lumber mill and proceeding northwestward up the stream to the vicinity of the sharp curve, a distance of some two miles, there were some 22 or 23 dwellings, mills and shops built along this and three other roads that tied into it. Two of these roads were on the right side as you ascend Sandy Brook. They branched off from Sandy Brook Road just a few feet apart and climbed Corliss Mountain. Both were dead end. The second one, still very easily seen today going up the mountain at about a 45 degree angle, appears to be the southern end of what today is Chapin Road, but this never was so. Near the summit of Corliss Mtn. there is a very steep section, nearly a cliff, which was impossible to traverse. Two dwellings were built on this road. The first road, more difficult to see, is shaped like the letter "Y". The left branch possibly used to connect with the previously mentioned road. At any rate, there were three houses on it. The right hand branch had two houses, one of which belonged to Henry Manassa, the last Native American to have lived in Colebrook, and who had been accused (falsely), as was ultimately proven some 16 years later, of being one of the murderers of Barnice White in 1851.

Two hundred yards or so upstream from the point of divergence of these two roads, there was a bridge across Sandy Brook that connected a road that ran up the hill, known by the name of Taintor Mountain, and connected with Pisgah Mountain Road near the bridge in front of 36 Schoolhouse Road. This was built in 1853, and had three houses on it, two of them were along Sandy Brook, and the third was near the summit, at the present site of Otis Berger's home.

There is an interesting aside to this bridge, or rather the bridge site. The original bridge, through lack of use, was allowed to deteriorate, and probably went out during a spring thaw around the turn of the 20th century. In the mid 1930s, someone purchased land on Taintor Mountain and contracted with Uno Stenman to build a bridge across Sandy Brook so that he could access his land. The bridge was essentially completed in 1936, only to be washed out by the flood of that year. The feeling at the time was that this flood was something like a hundred year storm, and the landowner was persuaded to replace it during the summer of 1938. Of course we all know what happened in early September of that year; the term "Hurricane of 1938" is known to every old-timer in these parts. That was the end of any attempt to bridge Sandy Brook. The land on the

other side of the stream was sold to the State and became part of Algonquin Forest. It is interesting to speculate as to what the area would look like today had not nature interfered with man's plan to develop it.

I, for one, am happy it turned out the way it did, and my father, who was employed at the time by Stenman during those difficult years of the Great Depression, was employed for two summers building two bridges that were never to feel the weight of a wheel.

The Sandy Brook Bridge shown here is the one leading from Sandy Brook Road up to Beech Hill, as it appeared in the 1890s. It was digitally copied from a post card from the files of the Colebrook Historical Society.

There were two basic bridges in use around here prior to the twentieth century; the king post, having one vertical post in the center, supporting the rafters, and the queen post, shown here, having two vertical support posts.



Queenpost Bridge over Sandy Brook, c. 1890s