

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name

other names/site number Colebrook Center Historic District

2. Location

street & number see continuation sheet

NA not for publication

city, town Colebrook

NA vicinity

state Connecticut

code CT

county Litchfield

code 005

zip code 06021

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- X private
X public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
X district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official (handwritten signature)

Date 6/21/91

Signature of certifying official

Date

Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- X entered in the National Register.
See continuation sheet.
determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain):

Signature of the Keeper (handwritten signature)

entered in the National Register

Date 7/26/91

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/animal facility  
COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty/general store  
RELIGION/church  
EDUCATION/school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/animal facility  
COMMERCE/TRADE/general store  
RELIGION/church

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL  
EARLY REPUBLIC/Federal  
MID-19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE/granite  
walls WOOD/weatherboard  
BRICK  
roof asphalt  
other wood shingle roof

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Colebrook Center Historic District encompasses the main village of the Town of Colebrook, which is located in northwestern Connecticut. Situated in a small valley surrounded by wooded hills, it consists of an isolated cluster of historic residential, commercial, and institutional buildings and sites dating from 1767 to about 1920. The district expands upon the present historic district, established pursuant to state enabling legislation, to contain 63 contributing and non-contributing resources. Although some of the contributing barns were built between 1880 and about 1920, all of the other contributing buildings were built by 1880. Only 12 resources (19%) are non-contributing, modern outbuildings and two sites.

Except for the intrusion of paved roads and automobiles, the center has changed very little since the mid-nineteenth century. From the south the Greek Revival-style Colebrook Congregational Church dominates the historic townscape, overlooking a small Town Green, a colonnaded general store, and large white houses, many with white picket fences and period outbuildings (Photographs #1, 2, 3). Even the Town Hall is located in an early nineteenth-century building, the Colebrook Inn, also the home of the Colebrook Historical Society; the fire department is next door in a former outbuilding (Inventory #s 14, 17; Photograph # 4).

The majority of the buildings are found on either side of Colebrook Road (State Route 183), which runs through the village generally from south to north. At the southern end of the district, Colebrook Road intersects with Smith Hill Road, entering from the southeast, to form an elongated triangular area, the site of the green and the church. Proceeding northward the highway descends to cross Center Brook before continuing uphill to the north. On either side of the bridge over the brook are the sites of several former water-powered industries (Photograph #5). The Town Pound was also in this area west of the highway. On the east side of the village, Schoolhouse Road and Center Brook Road join together to complete the district.

There are 23 houses in the district, a number which includes the Colebrook Inn. All of these are contributing wood-framed buildings set on stone foundations, some with large added wings or original ells. Three were built before 1800, with the majority constructed in the nineteenth-century (84%). Only one house was built in the district in the twentieth century: a 1978 non-contributing ranch on School House Road (Inventory #45).

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Location

Center Brook Road: 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Colebrook Road: 549, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, Map 21: Lot 28, 564, 569, Map 21:  
Lot 15, Map 21: Lot 14, 579, 590, 593, 597, 603.

Rockwell Road: same lot as 561 Colebrook Road

Schoolhouse Road: 11, 12, 16, 17, 20.

Smith Hill Road: 464, 467, 471, 474.

Thompson Road: 1.

Property Owners' List (as of 1/21/91)

<u>Inv.#</u>	<u>Street Address (Map/Lot)</u>	<u>Owner (s)</u>	<u>Mailing Address</u> (if different)
1.	1 Centerbrook Road (21/31)	Robert J. Fallon	
2.	2 " " (21/16)	Ronald & Pauline Abbott	Box 142 Colebrook, CT 06021
3.	7 " " (21/30)	Germaine Lemieux	Box 80 Colebrook, CT 06021
4.	7 " " "	same as above	same as above
5.	8 " " (21/17)	George & Holly Bodycoat	Box 41 Colebrook, CT 06021
6.	8 " " "	same as above	same as above
7.	8 " " "	same as above	same as above
8.	9 " " (21/29A)	Michael & Maureen E. Judge	34 Topfield Road Wilton, CT 06897
9.	9 " " "	same as above	same as above
10.	10 " " (21/18)	Trudeau Horrax	121 Chicora Point, Data Island, Frogmore, S. C. 29920

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11.	10 Center Brook Road (21/18)		same as above	same as above
12.	549 Colebrook Road (15/6)		Debra & Bradley Wheeler	302 Somerset Street Baltimore, MD 21210
13.	549	" "	same as above	same as above
14.	558	" " (15/14)	Town of Colebrook	
15.	558	" " "	same as above	
16.	559	" " (15/11)	Richard D. Blitz	Pie Hill Road Goshen, CT 06756
17.	560	" " (15/13)	Town of Colebrook	558 Colebrook Road Colebrook, CT 06021
18.	561	" " (15/10)	Draper, James L., Jr. & Shirley A.	
19.	561	" " "	same as above	
20.	562	" " (15/12)	Town of Colebrook	558 Colebrook Road Colebrook, CT 06021
21.	563	" " (15/9-1)	Jeanne R. Jones	
22.	564	" " (21/28-1)	Colebrook Congregational Church	471 Smith Hill Road Colebrook, CT 06021
23.	564	" " "	same as above	same as above
--.	--	" " (21/28)	(vacant) Justine Trowbridge	c/o Bank of Boston 51 West Main Street Waterbury, CT 06702
24.	569	" " (21/1)	Daniel & Ellen B. Strickler	1165 Fifth Avenue New York, N.Y. 10029
25.	569	" " "	same as above	same as above
26.	--	" " "	same as above	same as above
27.	--	" " (21/15)	Debra & Bradley E. Wheeler	302 Somerset Street Baltimore, MD 21210

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28.	579	Colebrook Road	(21/2)	Ronald & Janet Spencer	1112 Park Avenue New York, N. Y. 10028
29.	579	"	"	same as above	same as above
30.	579	"	"	same as above	same as above
31.	579	"	"	same as above	same as above
32.	--	"	(21/14)	Town of Colebrook	558 Colebrook Road Colebrook, CT 06021
33.	--	"	"	same as above	same as above
34.	590	"	(21/13-1)	David A. & Sue Bloom	Box 27 Colebrook, CT 06021
35.	590	"	"	same as above	same as above
36.	593	"	(21/4)	same as above	same as above
37.	597	"	(21/5)	Ronald J. Aubel	
38.	597	"	"	same as above	
39.	603	"	(21/6)	Harry A. Rich & Mallory Bratton Mercaldi	
40.	603	"	"	same as above	
41.	603	"	"	same as above	
42.	--	Rockwell Road	(15/10)	Draper, James L., Jr. & Shirley A.	561 Colebrook Road Colebrook, CT 06021
43.	11	Schoolhouse Road	(21/27)	John Wright & Michael Casper	
44.	12	"	(21/26)	Steven R. Butler & Hope A. Payson	Box 134 Colebrook, CT 06021
45.	16	"	(21/25)	Richard E. Blankenship 3 & David Luchs	
46.	17	"	(21/19)	Vicki L. Harder	6922 12th Street Brooklyn, N. Y. 11228

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47.	17	Schoolhouse Road	(21/19)	same as above	same as above
48.	17	"	"	same as above	same as above
49.	17	"	"	same as above	same as above
50.	17	"	"	same as above	same as above
51.	20	"	(21/24)	William S. & Evelyn S. Riddle	
52.	20	"	"	same as above	
53.	464	Smith Hill Road	(15/16)	Judith C. Kochey	Box 66 Colebrook, CT 06021
54.	464	"	"	same as above	same as above
55.	467	"	(15/22)	Norman & Elizabeth Thompson	
56.	467	"	"	same as above	
57.	467	"	"	same as above	
58.	467	"	"	same as above	
59.	467	"	"	same as above	
60.	471	"	(15/23)	Colebrook Congregational Church	
61.	474	"	(15/15)	Christopher Little & Elizabeth C. Kittridge	
62.		Smith Hill Road and Colebrook Road	(15/23)	Colebrook Congregational Church	471 Smith Hill Road Colebrook, CT 06021
63.	1	Thompson Road	(15/24)	Jonathan Thompson	

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Two eighteenth-century houses built by the Rockwells, a settler family, illustrate the evolution of style in the Federal period in Colebrook. Both have large main blocks with ridge-to-street gable roofs. The 1796 Samuel and Reuben Rockwell House is more Colonial in appearance, with a center chimney and multi-paned transom over the front door (Inventory #18; Photograph #6). The ell was the original house, the oldest remaining in the district. It was built in 1767, probably in the Cape style. Martin Rockwell Hall, at the southern end of the district across from the church, has two end chimneys at the ridge (Inventory #12; Photograph #7). Federal features include a finely detailed doorway with narrow pilasters and a pulvinated frieze and again a five-pane transom over the door. There is a very delicate dentil course under the eaves and shaped lintels over the second-story windows, but the heavy molded lintels of the first-story windows appear more Georgian in style. This house also has an extensive attached wing on the south side, with some of the first story walls executed in brick, the only known case where this material was used in the district. The last house of this period is a small circa 1790 one-story Cape in the northern end of the district set back from the west side of Colebrook Road (Inventory #36; Photograph #8).

The culmination of the Federal style in the district is the Colebrook Store store built for Reuben Rockwell in 1812 (Inventory #16; Photograph #9; NR 4/46/76). Anticipating the form of the coming Greek Revival style, it presents a flushboarded facade pediment to the street with a key-stoned fanlight. A Federal-style doorway at the center is approached from an open two-story colonnaded porch. Above the entrance is a loading door at the second story. A small shed-roofed addition on the north elevation houses the Colebrook Post Office.

Two other later buildings display features of the Federal style: the Colebrook Inn and the Phila Jarvis House. Although the 1816 Colebrook Inn retains the plan and form of a center-chimney Colonial house, it is embellished with a few period details: a fanlight in the gable peaks and modillions under the eaves and cornice of the entrance (Inventory # 14; Photograph #4). The Jarvis House, not built until about 1830, still displays a fanlight in the facade gable peak (Inventory #61; Photograph #10).

The broad range of the Greek Revival, the predominate style and form in Colebrook Center, extends from the fully realized Congregational Church and the Calvin Sage House to more vernacular farmhouses scattered through the district. The church, built in 1842, is believed to be a copy of the Unionville church which has been attributed to Charles Bulfinch (Inventory #60; Photograph #1). Its pedimented flushboarded facade faces south. The Doric order colonnade shelters an entranceway framed in a simple molded architrave with corner blocks, which surrounds double-leaf panelled doors. The two-stage square tower displays smaller engaged Doric columns

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on the south face, pilasters on all outside corners, and mutules under the cornice. The simple entablature of the main block is repeated on both sections of the tower, which is capped by a decorative wooden parapet.

Most of the residential examples of the Greek Revival style have a main block of the temple form with a kitchen ell extending from the rear of a side elevation. Characteristically, these houses quite often have full pediments with multi-paned rectangular windows, a glazing pattern often repeated in the transom of the main entrance, as is found in the Calvin Sage House, the most fully detailed domestic example of this style in the district (Inventory #28; Photograph #11). Here the main door is sheltered behind an entranceway of the Doric order in antis with a high entablature. The first story of the south wing is recessed behind a Doric colonnade and its attic windows also repeat the design of the pediment window. Other details include facade pilasters and the molded architrave of the pediment window.

Similar though less detailed examples are found throughout the district. Some nearly identical houses, all built in the 1830s, include the Giles Bass House on Smith Hill Road, the William Carrington House on Schoolhouse Road, and the Gilbert House on Colebrook Road (Inventory #s 53, 46, 37; Photograph #s 12, 13). All feature a large rectangular pediment window. This detail was added to an earlier 1804 house built by William's father, Jesse Carrington, directly across the street (Inventory #51; Photograph #14). The doorway of the Gilbert House with its sidelights and transom is a standard feature of the vernacular Greek Revival throughout Connecticut. It defines the stylistic period of a Cape built about 1840 for the Whitney family at the corner of Schoolhouse and Colebrook roads (Inventory #22; Photograph #15). The large facade dormers of this latter house appear to be a later addition. It is now used as the Congregational parsonage; the former parsonage, no longer extant, was located to the south of the church at the other end of town. The 1843 Pease House directly across the street employs the temple form and wide pilasters, but has prominent cornice returns rather than a full pediment; the frieze board, which appears on the side elevations, and the cornice at the base of the pediment may have been removed (Inventory #21; Photograph #16). Behind this gable-roofed main block is a one-and-one-half story rear wing, possibly an earlier house, which is joined on the south by an extended ell and attached barn.

There is a group of houses along Center Brook Road which were associated with historic water-powered industry and a District School on School House Road, all generally built in the mid-nineteenth century. Several houses are identified on the 1859 map of the the town by names of individuals who lived elsewhere in the district. Because of this fact and the generally vernacular character and smaller size of these buildings, it is presumed that they functioned as workers' houses. Some, like the Carrington Millhouse, may have been rental property (Inventory #3;

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Photograph #18). The Vernon Brothers House, directly across the brook from a former industrial site, is another vernacular cottage embellished with decorative bargeboards (Inventory #2; Photograph #17). The District School is now used as a residence (Inventory #43; Photograph #19).

The last nineteenth-century house built in the district was the circa 1860 Elisha Sage House (Inventory #24; Photograph #20). It has been extensively remodeled, especially in the early twentieth century, and also has a large recent rear addition (not visible in the photograph). Colonial Revival features include the Palladian window in the facade gable and a coved-ceiling entrance portico on the south side.

More than a dozen large barns are found in the district associated with most of the principal houses. The majority have at least one; the William Rockwell House has four (Inventory #s 56, 57, 58, 59). All have gable roofs and vertical siding and some are exceptionally large. Several are the so-called "bank barns" which have a room under the main floor formed by the high stone foundation walls, a type usually built on sloping sites. Local barn builders Orrin and Edward Oles, noted for this type of construction, may have been responsible for several in the district. The three-story Grey Barn in the center of town, which has been dated to 1843, is the oldest known example. It has a dry-laid rubblestone foundation with two lower levels; stables were located directly below the street-level main floor (Inventory #20). One of the largest barns in the district is associated with the Jesse Carrington House (Inventory #52).

The banks of Center Brook near the highway contain the standing ruins of several buildings. These sections of low stone walls were probably the foundations of the the Sage Tannery and the Sage Blacksmith Shop (Inventory #s 26, 27; Photograph #5). Sites are located on the district map and generally agree with locations found on the 1859 map of the village. The tannery was located in the same area as the short-lived circa 1790 Rockwell Forge and may have occupied the same building, but only one foundation wall is visible.<sup>2</sup>

A complete inventory of the buildings and sites in the district follows. Dates of construction were taken from local history or estimated in the field, and generally confirmed by tax assessor's records and/or the 1859 map of the center.

1. Local tradition holds that the church is a copy of the Unionville church attributed to Charles Bullfinch but this has not been substantiated.
2. The presence of standing ruins and the reported recovery of artifacts along the brook indicates that this site has some limited archaeological potential. The proper evaluation of this area was considered to be beyond the scope of this nomination and these sites are listed as non-contributing in the inventory.

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## INVENTORY OF CONTRIBUTING AND NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES \*

Inv.#	Address	Name/Style/Date	C/NC	Photo #
1.	1 Center Brook Road	E. RYAN HOUSE, Greek Revival, c. 1850	C	
2.	2 " " "	VERNON BROS. HOUSE, 19th-c. vernacular c. 1830	C	17
3.	7 " " "	CARRINGTON MILLHOUSE, 19th-c. vernacular, c. 1850	C	18
4.	7 " " "	19th-c. shed associated with #3	C	
5.	8 " " "	Greek Revival house, c. 1850	C	
6.	8 " " "	19th-c. barn associated with #5	C	
7.	8 " " "	shed associated with #5	C	
8.	9 " " "	M. BARRY HOUSE, mid-19th-c., vern., c. 1850	C	
9.	9 " " "	Early-20th-c. barn/garage assoc. with #8	C	
10.	10 " " "	L. BEACHER HOUSE, Federal, c. 1830	C	
11.	10 " " "	modern garage associated with #10	NC	
12.	549 Colebrook Road	MARTIN ROCKWELL HALL, Federal, 1794	C	7
13.	549 " " "	19th-c. barn/garage associated with #12	C	
14.	558 " " "	COLEBROOK INN/Town Hall, Federal, 1816 Colebrook Historical Society	C	3,4
15.	558 " " "	garage, c. 1950, associated with #14 and its use as Town Hall	NC	
16.	559 " " "	COLEBROOK STORE, Federal, 1812 Listed on National Register, 4/46/76	C	2,9
17.	560 " " "	COLEBROOK FIRE STATION, 1816/1890	C	4
18.	561 " " "	SAMUEL & REUBEN ROCKWELL HOUSE, Cape/Federal, 1767/1796	C	2,6
19.	561 " " "	Garage associated with #18, c. 1930	NC	

\* Archaeological sites are considered non-contributing. See footnote #2, 7.4.

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20.	562	Colebrook Road	GREY BARN, 1843 formerly associated with #22	C	
21.	563	" "	S. PEASE HOUSE, Greek Revival, 1843	C	16
22.	564	" "	WHITNEY HOUSE/CONGREGATIONAL PARSONAGE, Greek Revival Cape, c. 1840	C	15
23.	564	" "	modern garage associated with #22	NC	
24.	569	" "	ELISHA SAGE HOUSE, c. 1867; remodeled Colonial Revival, c. 1900	C	20
25.	569	" "	19th-c. barn converted to apartment associated with #24	C	
26.	--	" "	site of cattle pound/Elisha Sage black- smith shop	NC	
27.	--	" "	site of CALVIN SAGE TANNERY (standing ruins)	NC	5
28.	579	" "	CALVIN SAGE HOUSE, Greek Revival, c. 1835	C	11
29.	579	" "	garage associated with #28, c. 1930	NC	
30.	579	" "	shed associated with #28, 1986	NC	
31.	579	" "	20th-c. barn associated with #28	C	
32.	--	" "	CENTER CEMETERY, 18th & 19th centuries	C	
33.	--	" "	19th-c. shed associated with #32	C	
34.	590	" "	early-20th-c. garage/barn associated with #36	C	
35.	590	" "	19th-c. barn associated with #36	C	
36.	593	" "	A. BAILEY HOUSE, Colonial Cape, c. 1790	C	8
37.	597	" "	MRS. GILBERT HOUSE, Greek Revival, c. 1840	C	13
38.	597	" "	garage associated with #37, 1987	NC	
39.	603	" "	L.N. SAGE HOUSE, 19th-c. vernacular c. 1850	C	

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40.	603 Colebrook Road	early 20th-c. shed associated with #39	C	
41.	603 " "	19th-c. barn associated with #39	C	
42.	--Rockwell Road	POST OFFICE/STORE, c. 1820	C	
43.	11 Schoolhouse Road	COLEBROOK DISTRICT SCHOOL, c. 1850	C	19
44.	12 " "	late 19th-c. vernacular house, c. 1880	C	
45.	16 " "	Modern ranch, 1978	NC	
46.	17 " "	WILLIAM CARRINGTON HOUSE, Greek Revival, c. 1830	C	12
47.	17 " "	stone platform, associated with #46 1990	NC	
48.	17 " "	19th-c. shed associated with #46	C	
49.	17 " "	19th-c. barn associated with #46	C	
50.	17 " "	modern gazebo and attached bridge associated with #46	NC	
51.	20 " "	DR. JESSE CARRINGTON HOUSE, vernacular c. 1805	C	14
52.	20 " "	19th-c. barn associated with #51	C	
53.	464 Smith Hill Road	GILES BASS HOUSE, Greek Revival c. 1835	C	
54.	464 " "	early 20th-c. barn/garage associated with #53	C	
55.	467 " "	WILLIAM ROCKWELL HOUSE, Greek Revival c. 1835	C	
56.	467 " "	19th-c. barn associated with #55	C	
57.	467 " "	19th-c. barn associated with #55	C	
58.	467 " "	19th-c. barn associated with #55	C	
59.	467 " "	19th-c. barn associated with #55	C	

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60.	471 Smith Hill Road	COLEBROOK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH Greek Revival, 1842	C	1
61.	474 " "	PHILA JARVIS HOUSE, Federal c. 1830	C	10
62.	Smith Hill and Colebrook roads	COLEBROOK TOWN GREEN	C	
63.	1 Thompson Road	SYLVESTER SMITH HOUSE, Greek Revival, c. 1840	C	

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1767 - c. 1920  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

William Swift (Inventory #16)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

A superior example of a isolated rural village in the Litchfield hills which flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Colebrook Center Historic District is distinguished for the exceptional integrity of its setting and the state of preservation of its resources. It is architecturally significant for the excellent design and craftsmanship of its classical architecture of the Federal and Greek Revival styles, a period authenticity which is reinforced by the group of less formal vernacular houses in the eastern part of the district.

Historical Background

Colebrook was still a wilderness when the Connecticut Colony was threatened by the Dominion of New England in 1686 but the colony's response set in motion a chain of events which lead to its establishment.<sup>1</sup> Fearing the loss its charter and jurisdiction over its unsettled land, the colonial government deeded all of the unsettled northwestern part of the colony (later Litchfield County) to Hartford and Windsor. The crisis was soon over and the colony resumed its charter in 1689, but dispute arose over the Hartford and Windsor claims. It was not until 1726 that a compromise was finally reached by the General Assembly, whereby the two towns retained ownership of the eastern half and the rest reverted to the colony. Colebrook, one of four towns allotted to Windsor, had some of the less desirable land and with Barkhamsted was the last to be surveyed and laid out.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-nine proprietors, including several from Windsor and East Windsor, began to settle there in 1765. In 1779 Colebrook and Barkhamsted were the last of the colonial towns to be incorporated in the state, but it was not until 1795 that Colebrook was represented in the General Assembly.

About 50 families were living in several scattered settlements in Colebrook in the post-Revolutionary period. Although Colebrook Center had the obvious advantage of its central location, it became the institutional center of the town largely because of the influence of the Rockwell family from Windsor. The rear ell of one of the houses in Colebrook Center was built in 1767 and belonged to Samuel Rockwell, who served as one of the early selectmen (Inventory #18). He and his descendants

See continuation sheet



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remained prominent citizens through the nineteenth century. In 1789 they exchanged their ownership rights in the timbered ridgeland for part of the public right of way which lay in the flats in Colebrook Center and built a dam and forge on Center Brook.<sup>3</sup> The flooding of the meadows there caused an epidemic of malaria and the project was abandoned in 1790, although Rockwells had interest in other forges in town and in the neighboring Town of Winsted.<sup>4</sup> The family also built an aqueduct and a store, along with several other houses in the center district.

The disputatious nature of Connecticut's frontier towns is well known but the controversy in Colebrook regarding the establishment of the meetinghouse exceeded the norm. The population had increased five-fold in the last decade of the eighteenth century, a factor which contributed to the lack of communal spirit which had characterized earlier settlements. Newcomers arrived from all over the state because of acute land shortages; outside of the core group of settlers, most people were strangers to one another. Between 1786, when the ecclesiastical society was finally formed, and 1795, the location of the meeting house was greatly disputed by factions from both Colebrook Center and North Colebrook. After being put to a vote, a site near the Martin Rockwell House in the center was chosen and the meetinghouse was constructed, possibly on the site of the present church. However, by a vote in 1793, it was decided to move the building to the north of the brook. Tradition holds that 150 pair of oxen were used but the attempt failed because of the steepness of the hill. Finally in 1795 the meetinghouse was moved to the nearest possible location that was considered suitable (site unknown). Jonathan Edwards (1745-1801), the son of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1785), the famous early-eighteenth-century New England theologian, and the grandson of Timothy Edwards of East Windsor, was hired as the first minister; he remained in Colebrook until 1799 when he became the second president of Union College in Schenectady, New York.

The early-nineteenth-century economy of Colebrook centered on the raising of cattle and the production of leather. Although a few crops were raised, such as corn, oats, and hay, principally for animal feed, it became known as a cattle town. In 1829 it was recorded that 3000 sheep and 1500 cows and young cattle were raised.<sup>4</sup> The dense woodlands supplied lumber for building, and probably charcoal, along with the raw material for barkmills, a necessary component in the tanning process. There were several tanneries in town, including the Sage (formerly Rockwell) Tannery on Center Brook in the district (Inventory #27).

With a general store for local trade and the Colebrook Inn for travelers on the old road to New Haven (Route 183; Inventory #s 16, 14), Colebrook Center grew and prospered until about 1860. The wealth of the community is demonstrated by the architectural sophistication of the Congregational Church (Inventory #60) and the number of fine houses also built in the district in this period. In the absence

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of a separate town hall, the church was used for civic as well as religious purposes, and continues to so serve today. In 1830 there were six school districts in the community, as opposed to two in 1782, and the Center School was erected in the district soon after. The townwide population peaked that year at about 160 families (1333 individuals), more than the number who live there today.<sup>6</sup> Like many towns in the Litchfield hills, Colebrook has become a mecca for seasonal residents, many from out-of state; some have restored houses in the district.

Architectural Significance

The Colebrook Center Historic District appears today as an idealized early-nineteenth-century Connecticut hill town. Rarely does a district convey such a sense of time and place or have such a limited degree of modern intrusion. Revealed to its fullest extent in winter and enhanced by snow cover, the picturesque townscape proclaims its period associations.

Although many houses have large additions, they are set to the rear and do not compete with the simple gable-roofed form of the main block, which is echoed by the unusual number of well-maintained barns in the district. Together with the picket fences and stone walls which define the property bounds, these period outbuildings contribute to the historic character of the setting.

The sophistication of some of the architecture, however, belies the isolated rural setting of the town. Instead of the modest examples that might be expected, several buildings demonstrate the finely crafted and stylish detailing found in more urban centers. Of exceptional note are the Federal-style Rockwell Store and the Greek Revival Colebrook Congregational Church (Inventory #s 16, 60). Each is an outstanding example of its respective style and sets high standards for the evaluation of the rest of the district's architecture. The pediment and colonnaded facade of the Colebrook Store is a surprising use of formal architectural detail on a rural commercial building of this period. It was designed and built by Captain William Swift, a master carpenter/builder who also designed several other fine buildings in the area.<sup>7</sup> The significance of this building is equaled only by that of the nearby church. From its slightly elevated position, set off from its surroundings by three roads and the small area of the green, it provides an architectural focus for the district. Whether or not its design is derived from Charles Bulfinch, the Colebrook Church is perfectly proportioned and epitomizes the essential geometry and restraint of the Doric order. A large addition to the rear complements rather than detracts from the main building.

While domestic examples of the the Greek Revival style abound in the district and contribute to its cohesiveness, none approach the level of the style displayed in

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the Calvin Sage House (Inventory #28). Although it clearly retains the massing of Greek Revival-style farmhouses in the district, it displays an elegance of applied detail normally found only in architect-designed town houses of the period. Of particular note is the in antis design of the main entrance. The Sage House is also distinguished by the use of Doric columns supporting the porch across the ell.

## End Notes:

1. James II of England wanted to assert his authority over the New England Colonies, New York, and New Jersey, to be called the Dominion of New England, under the rule of Sir Edmund Andros. When Andros arrived in Hartford in 1687 to assume control as governor, Connecticut's charter disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Tradition holds that it was hidden in the "Charter Oak." The colony however, remained under Andros' rule until the Glorious Revolution in 1689 when William and Mary assumed the throne of England.
2. Only 10% of the land in Colebrook is suitable for planting any type of crop. Of the remainder, which is rated as mountainous or very hilly, only half is suitable for pasture. See Bruce C. Daniels, The Connecticut Town, Appendix V.
3. "A Short Summary of Colebrook's History," Colebrook Historical Society, 1970.
4. The Lure of the Litchfield Hills, Vol. 1, #2, p. 21.
5. From Agriculture and Economy, 1935, cited in Alan Delarm, Colebrook Stories.
6. Although a few summer people began to appear in the late nineteenth century to offset outmigration, by 1960 the population had dropped to 791. In the next decade it reached 1020 (the 1800 population) and increased to 1221 by 1980. With the increase in population has come a demand for improved town services. Construction for new facilities for a town hall (mandated by the state) and fire station are in the planning stages.
7. Swift is credited with the 1817 Squire Bronson House in Winchester and the present home of the Winchester Historical Society in Winsted built in 1813.

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UTM References:

A	18	656960	4650680
B	18	657136	4650750
C	18	657420	4650610
D	18	657790	4650600
E	18	657800	4650820
F	18	657890	4650840
G	18	657880	4650500
H	18	657920	4650480
I	18	657900	4649950
J	18	657640	4649920

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List of Photographs

Property: Colebrook Center Historic District,  
Litchfield County, Colebrook, Connecticut

Photographer: Cunningham Associates Ltd.

Date: 1/91

Negatives on file: Connecticut Historical Commission

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| 1. Colebrook Congregational Church<br>Facing: SE         | 2. West side of Colebrook Road<br>Facing: NW               |
| 3. Colebrook Road from Green<br>Facing: N                | 4. Colebrook Inn &<br>Colebrook Fire Station<br>Facing: NE |
| 5. Center Brook<br>Facing: NE                            | 6. Rockwell House<br>Facing: NW                            |
| 7. Martin Rockwell Hall<br>Facing: NW                    | 8. Bailey House<br>Facing: SW                              |
| 9. Colebrook Store<br>Facing: W                          | 10. Phila Jarvis House<br>Facing: N                        |
| 11. Calvin Sage House<br>Facing: W                       | 12. William Carrington House<br>Facing: N                  |
| 13. Gilbert House<br>Facing: W                           | 14. Jesse Carrington House<br>Facing: SE                   |
| 15. Whitney House/Congregational Parsonage<br>Facing: NE | 16. Pease House<br>Facing: W                               |
| 17. Vernon Eros. House<br>Facing: NW                     | 18. Carrington Millhouse<br>Facing: SE                     |
| 19. District School<br>Facing: N                         | 20. Elisha Sage House<br>Facing: SW                        |

**COLEBROOK CENTER HISTORIC DISTRICT**  
Colebrook, Connecticut

- Contributing Resources
- ⊙ Non-contributing Resources
- ↗ Photograph Views

District Boundaries in Bold

SCALE



Note: Inventory numbers only approximate the location of the resources.

Drawn from the Colebrook Tax Assessor's Maps  
Cunningham Associates Ltd. 1/91

