

R E P O R T
of the
Colebrook Historic District Study Committee
December 19, 1962

The above-named committee, appointed at a special town meeting June 12, 1962, respectfully submits its recommendations for the Town of Colebrook, as provided under Public Act No. 430 (1961), An Act Concerning the Establishment of Historic Districts.

The Historic District Study Committee has during the period since its formation:

Photographed all of the buildings recommended herewith and researched the historic background of each.

Prepared posters on which these photographs are mounted along with the applicable historical information, and placed this material on display along with explanatory leaflets, in the Town Hall.

Discussed with and received agreement from all of the owners of the buildings involved.

Conferred at length and on frequent occasions with the Chairman of the Connecticut Historic Commission.

Benefitted by the assistance and educational bulletins of the National Trust on Historic Preservation (of which the Colebrook Historical Society has become a member).

A booklet has been issued by the National Trust entitled "Criteria for Evaluating Historic Sites and Buildings." These criteria seem to be thoroughly applicable to the districts which the Study Committee is recommending for Colebrook, and read in part as follows:

"A structure or area should have outstanding historical and cultural significance in the nation or in the state, region, or community in which it exists. Such significance is found in:

Historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the.....community is best exemplified, and from which the visitor may grasp

in three-dimensional form one of the larger patterns of the American heritage.

Structures or areas that are identified with the lives of historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, state or local history.....

Preference should be given to those structures or sites where there is a preponderance of original material or other physical remains which have retained their integrity. (Integrity is a composite quality derived from original workmanship, original location, and intangible elements of feeling and association)....."

Therefore, the Study Committee recommends the designation of the following two separate historic districts:

One. The immediate vicinity of Colebrook Center, to be known as the Colebrook Center Historic District. This includes the following buildings and their adjacent property lines, all within view from the Church Green:

The Church, the Norman Thompson house, the Margaret Thompson house, the Kochey house, the Cooper house, the Town Hall, the Firehouse, the grey barn, the Parsonage, the Prentice house, the Pruyne house, Rockwell House, the Store, Woodbine Cottage, and Rockwell Hall.

This district is approximately described as follows:

Beginning at the point of intersection of the westerly line of the Highway leading from Colebrook Center to North Colebrook (State Highway 183) with a line parallel to and 50 feet distant northerly from the northerly face of the Prentice house, so-called; thence running westerly along said parallel line and partly along a stone wall approximately 225 feet to a corner of stone walls; thence running southerly along a stone wall about 65 feet to a corner of stone walls; thence running easterly along a stone wall about 18 feet to the end thereof; thence running southerly in a straight line about 105 feet to the westerly end of a stone wall which runs easterly and westerly; thence running easterly along said last mentioned wall about 110 feet to a point in the prolongation northerly of the line of a stone retaining wall; thence running southerly along said last mentioned line and wall to the end of said wall and land of Elizabeth B. Dribben; thence running westerly along said Dribben land to a stone wall and land of Carolyn P. Pruyne; thence running southerly along said Pruyne land, partly along a stone wall and partly along a wire fence, to the northerly line of the Highway leading from Colebrook Center to Norfolk (State Highway 182A); thence running easterly along the northerly

line of said Highway about 100 feet to a point in the prolongation northerly across the said Highway of the line of a stone wall on the Rockwell Hall premises; thence crossing said Highway on said last mentioned line and continuing southerly along said last mentioned stone wall and along a wire fence and the prolongation of the line of said fence to the northwesterly line of the Highway leading from Colebrook Center to Winsted (State Highway 183) at or near a culvert under said Highway; thence crossing said Highway to a corner of stone walls on land of the Thompson Corporation; thence running southeasterly along a stone wall and the prolongation of the line of said wall about 300 feet to a stone wall; thence running easterly along said last mentioned stone wall and the prolongation of the line thereof, which line runs approximately parallel to and about 15 feet distant from the southerly wall of a red barn on said Thompson Corporation premises, to a point in the prolongation southerly of the line of the easterly wall of said barn; thence running southerly in the prolongation of the last mentioned line about 90 feet to a point; thence running easterly in a straight line parallel to and about 50 feet southerly of the southerly wall of the dwelling now occupied by Margaret S. Thompson to the westerly line of the Smith Hill Road, so-called, at the southerly end of a white picket fence; thence crossing said Smith Hill Road to the northerly end of a stone wall at the southwesterly corner of land of Edward L. Kochey; thence running easterly along the same line 100 feet to a point; thence running northerly in a straight line to the southeasterly corner of the lot on which the Grey Barn is situated, being a corner of stone walls; thence running northerly along the easterly line of said barn lot and a stone wall to a corner of stone walls; thence running northerly along a line, which line is the prolongation southerly of the easterly boundary line of the lot on which the Parsonage is situated, to the southeasterly line of the highway leading from Colebrook Center to Sandy Brook; thence crossing said highway in the same line to the southeasterly corner of the Parsonage lot; thence running northerly along the easterly boundary line of said Parsonage lot to the northeasterly corner thereof; thence running westerly along the northerly boundary of said Parsonage lot to the easterly line of said Highway leading from Colebrook Center to North Colebrook; thence crossing said Highway to the westerly line thereof, and thence running northerly along the westerly line thereof to the point or place of beginning.

Two. The immediate vicinity of the area known as Phelps Corners (or Phelps Farms) to be known as the North Colebrook Historic District. This includes the following buildings and their adjacent property lines at North Colebrook:

The Phelps Tavern, the Coach House, the Yellow House, the Blum house, the General Phelps house, the Chimney House and the North Colebrook Baptist Church.

This district is approximately described as follows:

Beginning at the point of intersection of the westerly line of the Highway leading from North Colebrook to Sandisfield, Massachusetts (State Highway 183) with a line parallel to and 175 feet distant southerly from the southerly face of the General Phelps house, so-called; thence running westerly along said parallel line approximately 225 feet to the easterly bank of the Sandy Brook; thence running northerly and northwesterly along said bank of said brook approximately 420 feet to the point where the easterly bank of Sandy Brook meets the southerly line of said State Highway; thence running westerly along the southerly line of said Highway, crossing said brook to land of the North Colebrook Baptist Church Society, Inc.; thence running southerly, westerly, northerly and easterly along the easterly, southerly, westerly and northerly boundary lines of the land of said Church to said State Highway; thence running northeasterly in a straight line crossing said State Highway and said brook to the westerly line of the Prock Hill Road, so-called, at a point 10 feet distant northerly from the northerly face of the garage building on the land on which the building known as the Yellow House is situated; thence running southerly along the westerly line of said Prock Hill Road to the point of intersection of said road with the northeasterly line of said State Highway; thence crossing said Prock Hill Road on a line parallel to the northerly face of the building known as the Phelps Tavern and running easterly on said line to the point of its intersection with a line which is parallel to and 60 feet distant from the easterly face of the said Tavern; thence running southerly along said last mentioned line to the point of its intersection with a line parallel to and 125 feet distant southerly from the southerly face of said Tavern; thence running westerly along said last mentioned line to the easterly line of said State Highway; thence crossing said State Highway to the westerly line thereof and thence running southerly along the westerly line thereof to the point or place of beginning.

The Study Committee's reasons for feeling that portions of the Town of Colebrook should properly be declared an historic district stem from the historic nature of the town itself, and from the present aspect of Colebrook Center and of Phelps Corners.

Historically. Governor Roger Wolcott and several members of his family were original Windsor proprietors and personally concerned with the establishment of the town. Colebrook's oldest building, Rockwell House, included in the proposed district, is the only remaining home of a first settler, and for many years after it was built in 1767 it was

headquarters for the people who made the town's earliest history. The sites of at least three important Revolutionary iron forges lie alongside the town's streams. Thirteen Hessian soldiers lie buried in an unmarked common grave in the old South Cemetery at Colebrook Center; they had been members of a contingent of the five thousand men surrendered by Burgoyne at Saratoga in October, 1777, and their route of march to Boston lay through Colebrook. Jonathan Edwards 2nd lived and preached here from 1795 to 1799. At North Colebrook, in the proposed district, the tavern built in 1789 by Captain Arah Phelps, grandson of the original proprietor, and kept by him well into the next century, is part of the farm which, a hundred years ago, was described as "one of the finest in Litchfield County." And, finally, there is the historical fact that Colebrook in 1779, was the last town in Connecticut to be incorporated, by a single Act of the General Assembly together with Barkhamsted.

The Present Aspect. It has been said of Colebrook Center that it has one of the most unspoiled town greens in Connecticut. This must be because it looks very much as it did a hundred years ago. It is pleasing to the eye; it is spare and clean; and it is authentic - the buildings date from 1767 to approximately 1845. As a town of 791 people (census of 1960) the Church, where the townspeople still vote, has always been the social, civic and religious center. The proposed districts at Colebrook Center and at North Colebrook are both fortunate in that the original buildings and their surroundings have been preserved intact for so many generations.

These two districts each lie squarely on Route 183, within two miles of one another, and, if they remain as they were and as they are,

will be a source of pride to the residents, and of pleasure to both the casual traveler and the knowledgeable visitor, for generations to come.

Because Colebrook is remarkably unchanged in a rapidly changing world, the Study Committee feels the declaration of these two areas as historic districts to be fitting and proper; that insuring the continuance of Colebrook as an historic village would enhance real estate values, and would in general be an asset to all property owners in the town.

Nancy Phelps Blum

Dorothy Cooper

Judge Erving Pruyn

Harry Williams, Sr.

Edward Kochey

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PHOTOGRAPHIC APPENDIX

To the Report of the Colebrook
Historic District Study Committee
submitted

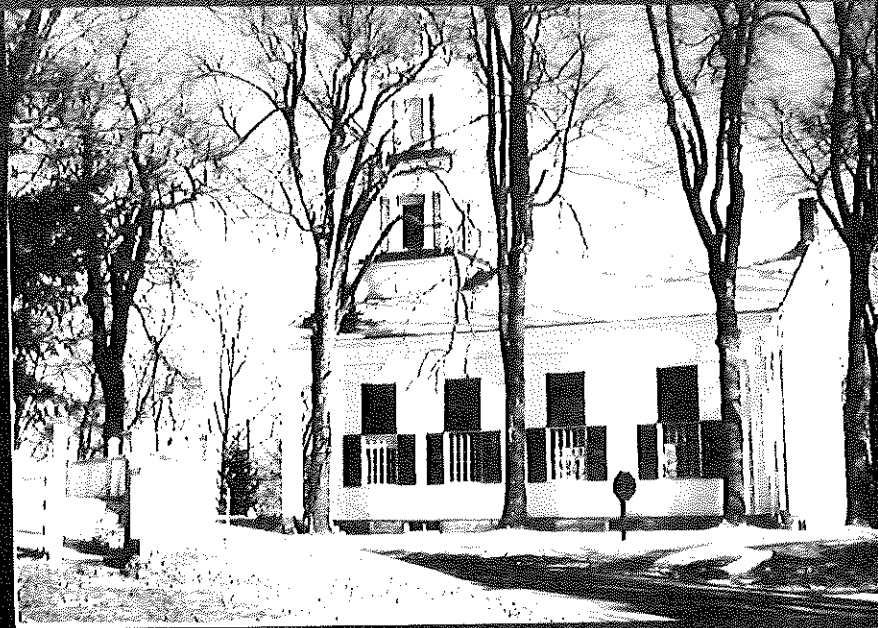
December 19, 1962



COLEBROOK CENTER - The GREEN Today
(Showing the Town Hall & the Church -
the Cooper House in the rear)



THE GREEN - 1904



THE CHURCH

In 1842, this "new" Meeting House was built, modelled after one in Unionville attributed to Bulfinch.

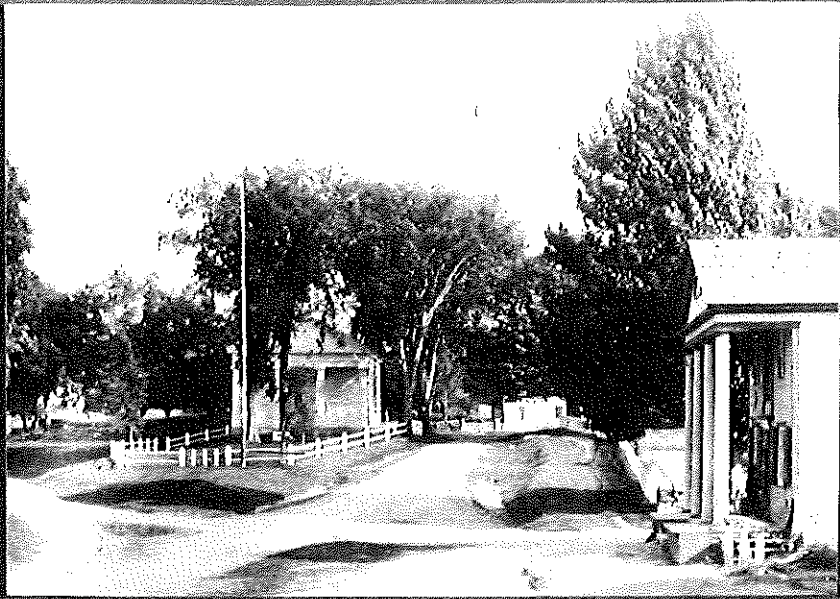
The site first chosen by the town in 1780 was north of Center Brook, but disagreement between the "northerners" and the "southerners" as to the location of their meeting house delayed erection of the original church for 14 years. It was finally built north of the present Store and on the site of the Pruyn House. Dr. Jonathan Edwards 2nd was the first pastor, installed in 1795.



THE BULLETIN BOARD

It was once the town whipping post.

From the Colebrook Records, 1st Book, August 21, 1815. "No. 117. A complaint by Martin Rockwell, Grand Juror, for the theft in taking sundry articles from the Blacksmith Shop of Elisha Sage. The defendant was arrested and brought before me, and pleaded guilty on the complaint. The court considered that the said delinquent be taken to the sign-post in Colebrook and be whipped on the naked body Ten Strips . . . "



- 1886 -



- 1962 -



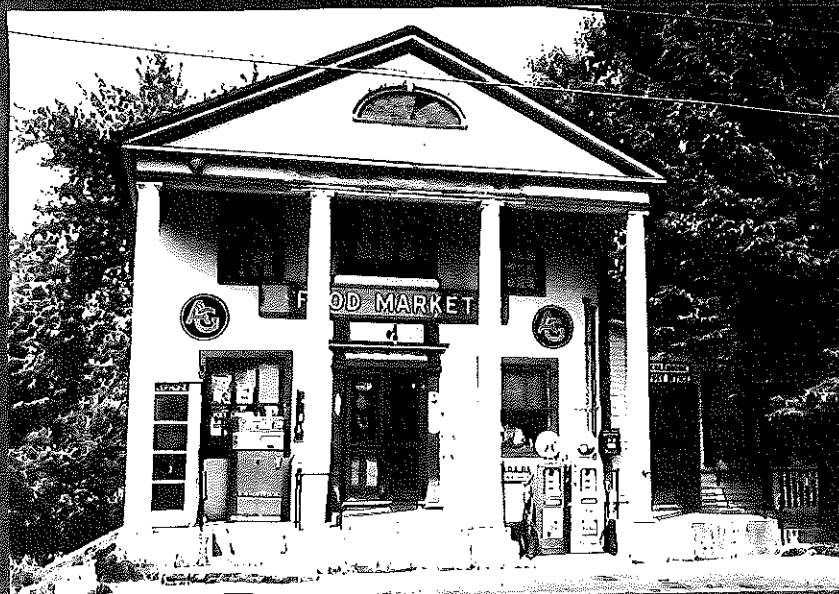


THE TOWN HALL

The Colebrook Inn was built in 1816 by William Underwood for his daughter Aphia, who married Rufus Seymour. They were the first proprietors of the Inn.

THE FIREHOUSE

This building is on the site of and incorporates many of the old timbers of one of the original outbuildings of the Inn.



THE STORE

Built in 1812 by Capt. William Swift, a farmer and an artisan of Colebrook who combined carpentry with a rare architectural instinct.

Capt. Swift is also responsible for the Squire Bronson House in Winchester (1817), and the present Winchester Historical Society building in Winsted (1813).



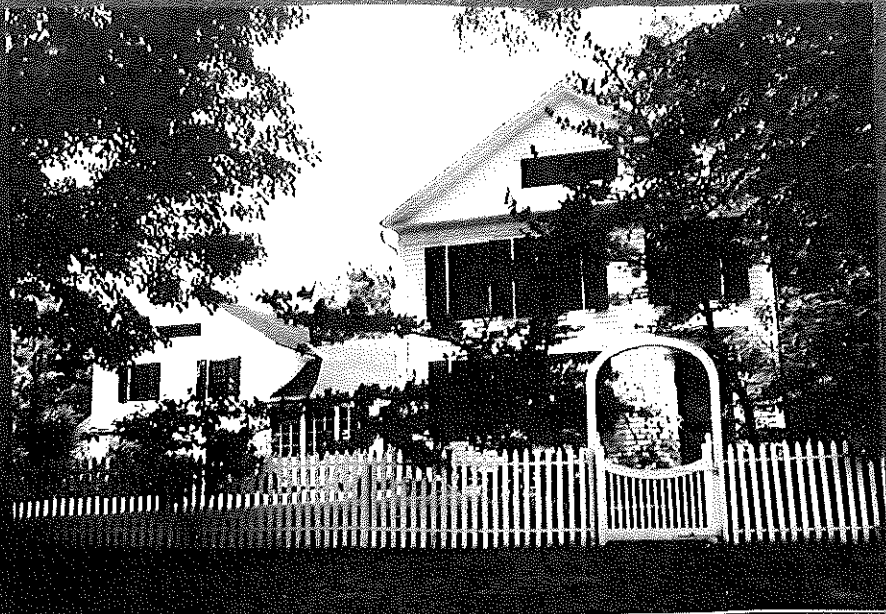
THE COOPER HOUSE

Land and water rights were acquired in 1828 by Phila M. Jarvis, who built this house about two years later.



THE KOCHHEY HOUSE

This house was built by Reuben Rockwell for his son-in-law, Giles Bass, prior to 1835.



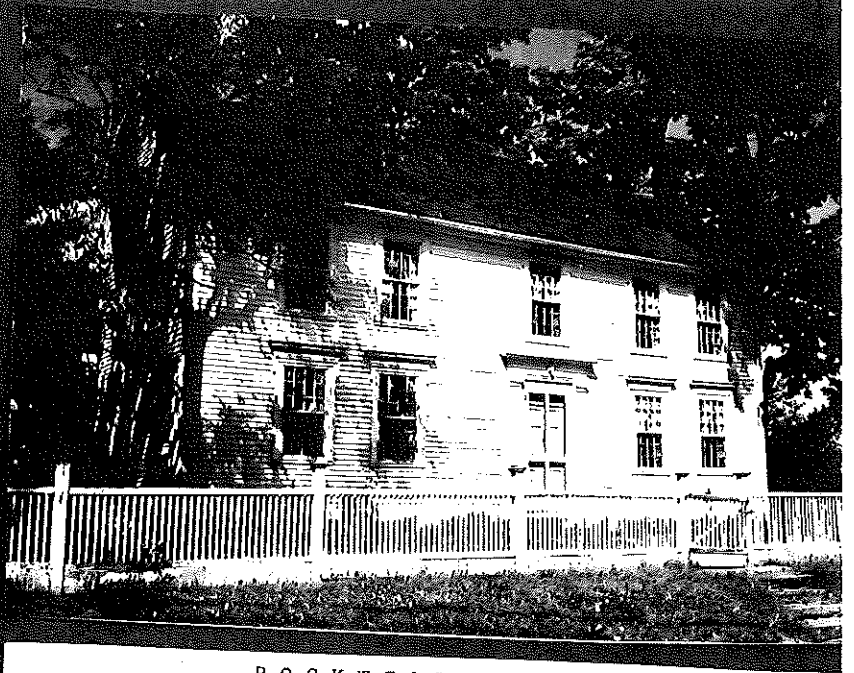
THE MARGARET THOMPSON HOUSE

This farmhouse was built by Martin Rockwell for his son William, about 1823.



THE NORMAN THOMPSON HOUSE

William Smith built this house for his parents, Mr. & Mrs. Sylvester Smith, approximately 1835.



ROCKWELL HALL

Timothy Rockwell began construction in 1793. After his death, the building was completed by his brother Martin in 1794. It is now owned in a direct line of descent by Miss Adaline Emerson Wheeler.



WOODBINE COTTAGE

Its earliest dates have not been found, but it is known to have housed Colebrook's first Post Office, and it is described as "the said Store" in a conveyance from Solomon and Martin Rockwell dated 1825.



ROCKWELL HOUSE

The fifth settler in Colebrook, Samuel Rockwell, arrived in 1767. The back part of this house was built in that year. In the large upper room, much of the early history of Colebrook was transacted. The front addition was put on in 1796.

This is the only house remaining in the town which was occupied by one of the first settlers.



THE GREY BARN



THE PARSONAGE

Once lived in by Ozariah Clarke and built about 1845, this house was bequeathed to the Colebrook Church by Miss Chloe Bass.



THE PRENTICE HOUSE

The original house was built about 1807 by Elisha Sage, who had a blacksmith shop at the foot of the hill. The present building was greatly enlarged around 1900.



THE PRUYN HOUSE

Dr. William B. De Forest acquired the "site of the Meeting-House" in 1843 from Reuben Rockwell, and built this house shortly thereafter.

In North Colebrook



THE NORTH COLBROOK BAPTIST CHURCH

Built in 1846, this was the second church of the North Colebrook Baptist Society, which was organized in 1794. The original meeting house was on Prock Hill Road, just above the present North Colebrook Cemetary.

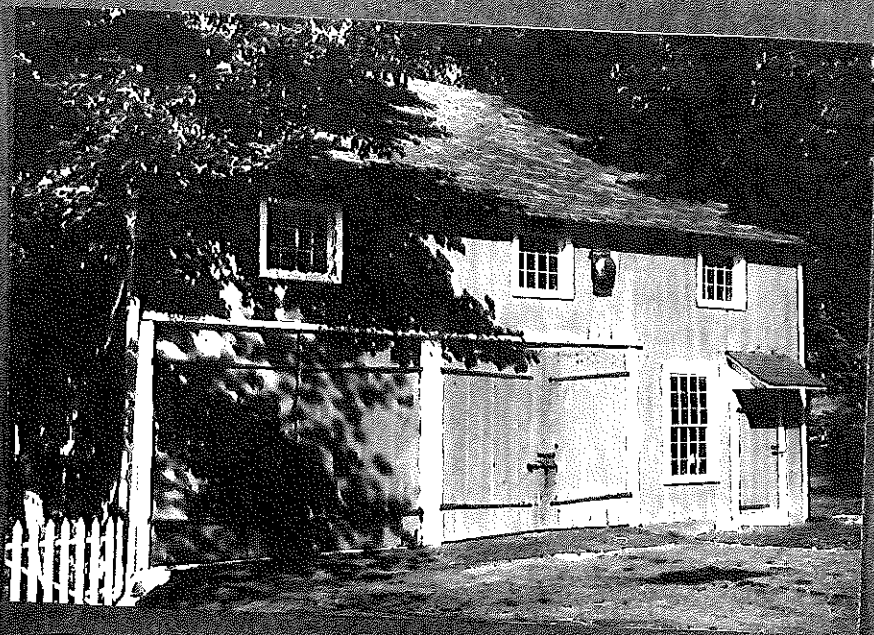
Elder Rufus Babcock, pastor from 1794 to 1828, was the first settled minister of any denomination the the town.



T H E I N N

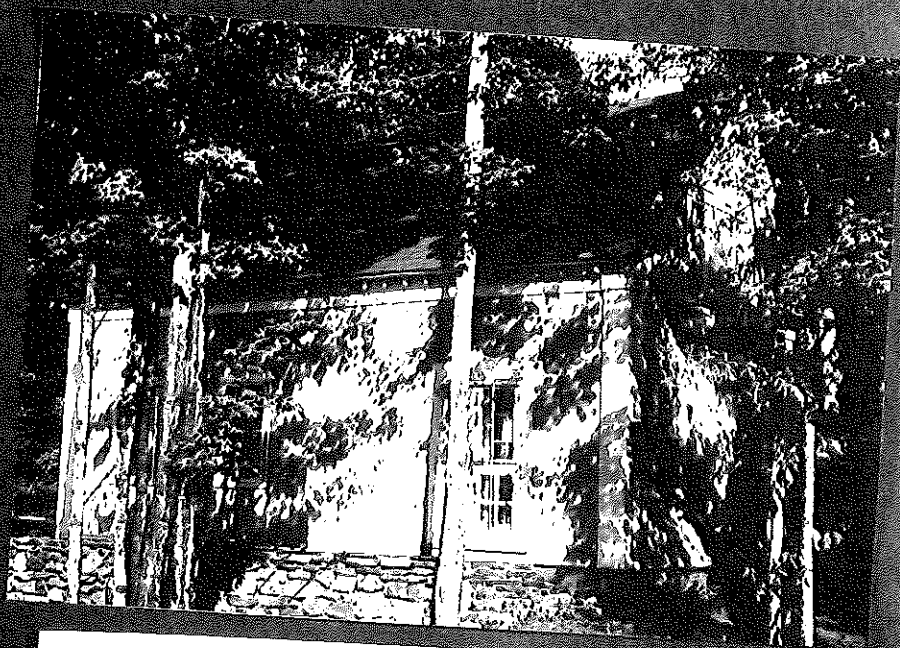
Built by Captain Arah Phelps in 1789, it was the horse change for stage coaches running between Hartford and Albany on the old post road.

A fire in 1942 destroyed the back ell and badly gutted the remaining second story, including the ballroom. The lower floor is nearly intact.



THE COACH HOUSE

This red barn opposite the Inn housed the horses for the stage coach changes. To the north foundations follow the line where the open wagon sheds stood.



THE YELLOW HOUSE

This "American Gothic" was built as a farmer's house circa 1840.



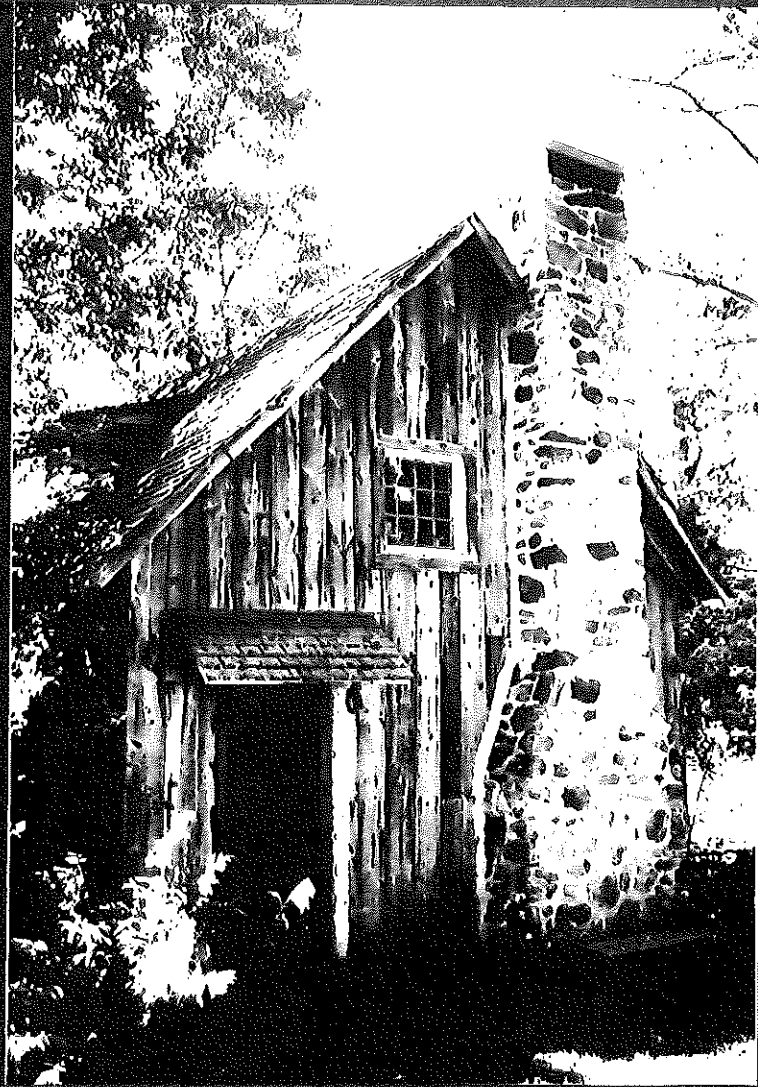
THE GENERAL PHELPS HOUSE

Greek Revival, built in 1830 for Edward A. Phelps as a wedding present from his father, Captain Arah.



THE BLUM HOUSE

Built originally as an outbuilding of the General Phelps house (specifically for pigs), this house was converted to a dwelling specifically for people after World War II.



THE CHIMNEY HOUSE

This was originally the creamery for the General Phelps house. A cool-room was obtained by diverting part of Sandy Brook under the building which also turned a water wheel.