

COLEBROOK HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

Colebrook, Connecticut

Shall we Establish an Historic District in Colebrook?

W H A T - W H E R E - W H Y

WHAT?

Public Act 430 provides for the setting up of districts within the municipalities to provide for the protection of groups of old and valued buildings. (Copies of the Act available at Jackson's Store).

This means that, via home rule, any town in the State which desires the protection of the Act, may so vote.

The establishment of an historic district means:

CONTROL over a precise and carefully selected area of our town.

PROTECTION of what we have in that particular area.

PREVENTION of destruction, defacement, and deterioration.

If you vote to establish an historic district, you will then elect an historic district Commission, which will pass on all future exterior changes to be made on the particular buildings chosen, working from an historical and architectural point of view. According to the Act, establishment of an historic district requires control only over the "exterior architectural features" of the chosen buildings. The Act permits owners to do what they wish with the interiors and with the backs of buildings, and with any hidden outbuildings or any land to the rear, apart from the designated natural boundaries themselves. And even in areas which do show from the road, your Commission will have authority to permit you to make certain needed kinds of repair, maintenance and landscaping. (Read Sections 4, 5, 6, of the Act).

WHERE?

It has seemed to the historic district study committee which was voted into existence at the special town meeting held June 12, 1962, that the logical and inevitable area which the town would like to see exist as it is for all time, is Colebrook Center itself: the Church, the Green, and the houses surrounding the Green. This, therefore, is the area which we recommend be designated an historic district.

Specifically, this means the central core of buildings at the Center, i.e.: the Church, the two Thompson houses behind the Church, the Kohey and the Cooper houses, the Town Hall, Firehouse, the grey barn, Parsonage, the Prentice and Pruyn houses, Rockwell house, the Store, Woodbine Cottage, and Rockwell Hall.

WHY?

Historic preservation is the business of any place that is interested in and proud of its own history. And architecture is the living proof of the past.

It has been said of Colebrook Center that ours is one of the most unspoiled, most attractive town greens in Connecticut. This is because it looks pretty much as it did a hundred years ago, and the surrounding houses are what make it so. It is pleasing to the eye; it is spare and clean; and it is authentic - the buildings date from 1767 to perhaps 1845. And it actually is "the Center" - the Meeting House has been for generations the social, civic and religious center of the town, and it is still in the Church basement that we vote.

Because the buildings are now held either by the town or by families who care about them, we are fortunate to have preserved our Green and its surroundings intact for so many generations. But this may not always be so. We cannot relax proudly and appreciate it for ourselves, taking it happily for granted, without taking care that it will remain as it is, to teach our children a healthy respect for their heritage and to preserve the distinction of our town for future visitors.

While New England has many "restored" towns consisting of fine buildings which have been brought together from great distances and which are most interesting and educational (Mystic, Sturbridge, etc.), Colebrook is unique because it still is as it used to be. And while many of the towns in Connecticut now trying to set up Historic Districts under this Act have the problem of restoring houses, tearing down undesirable buildings, eliminating bill posters and neon signs, and so on, we have no need to restore, but only the need to retain.

We are in time, and, acting now, can sit back and enjoy our own town without fear that it will not remain like this for our children - and for theirs - to enjoy.

"Historic preservation is the business of any place that is proud of what remains in its history. What is important to me is that the wonderful heritage of beauty of design of early Connecticut towns and villages is preserved as part of our national pride. The white steeple among the elms at the end of the Green with the lovely houses behind their fences and lilacs are more than a post card or a sentimental symbol. These and many other things are part of the continuity of a culture unique in the New World, not to be disdained by later generations...."

From a paper given March 12, 1962 at the Connecticut Historic District Conference by Carl Feiss, Architect.