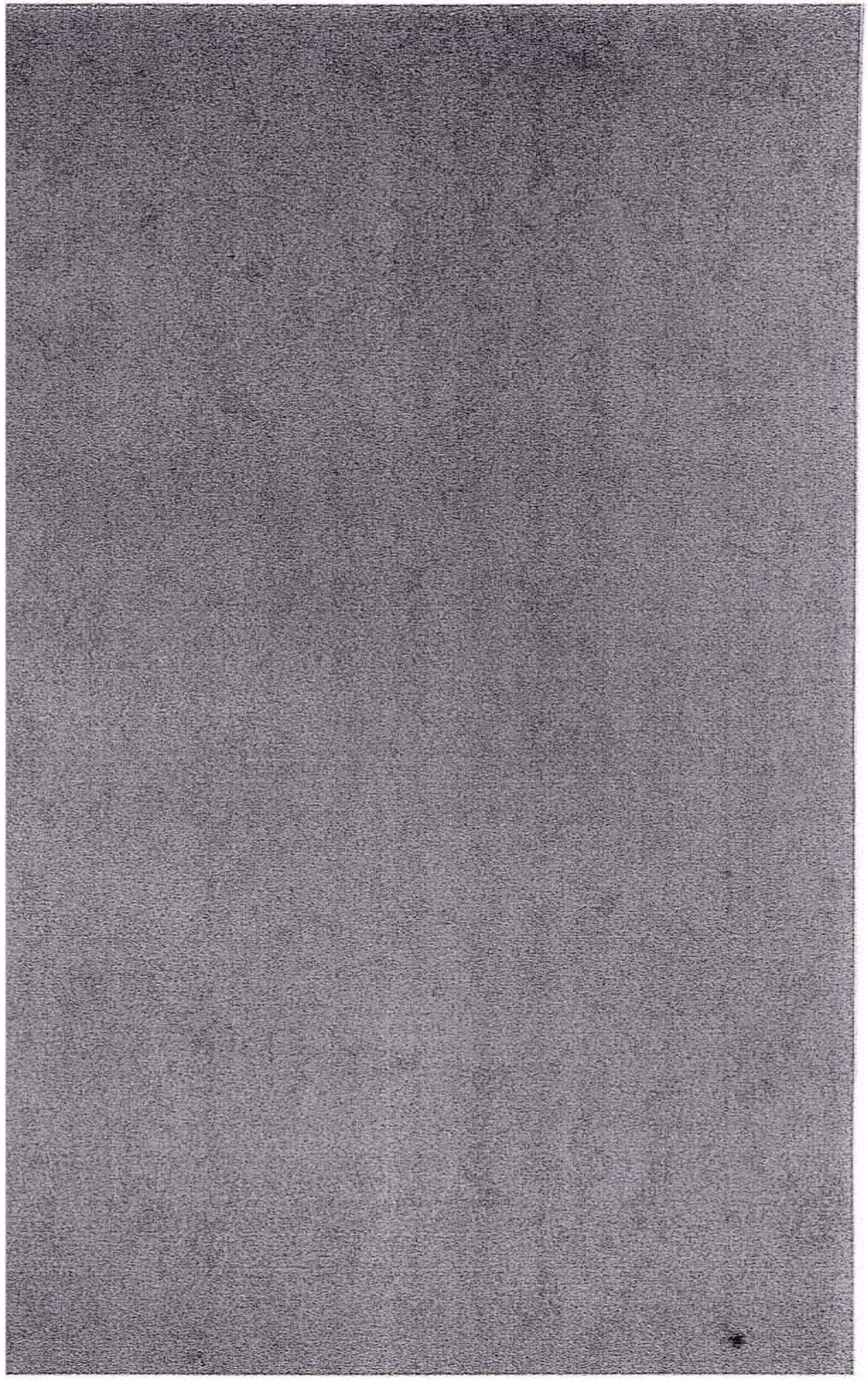

The Story of COLUMBIA

Continues ...

1954 — 1992

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DEDICATION

We dedicate this history to you, the newcomer in Columbia. You have moved here hoping to find a good life among the country fields and country roads. Whether you have come from a foreign land or a nearby city, there is much to learn about and enjoy. We hope this book will help you know your new home, perhaps understand it better — even, we hope, to love it.

This book is dedicated to the diversity of cultures you bring to this small town. Each of you has something unique that enriches the lives of all of us. Early Columbia history does not record this diversity because it did not exist then. Today Columbia celebrates and we dedicate this slim volume to the wide range of ethnic and cultural aspects of our beloved community.

PREFACE

The Story of Columbia, written in 1954, tells us that "it is the story of a beginning." This book continues the story through 1992.

Almost forty years of Columbia history are more than memory-crowded scrapbooks, photos, town reports, faded newspaper clippings and conversations with town folk. How can one who works on such a project not feel affection, satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment in a job worth doing?

As a committee, we felt the same need experienced by the small group of authors in the Women's Guild who wrote *The Story of Columbia*. It is the need to satisfy human curiosity, to know what makes our community tick. It is our hope readers may gain more insight into what has shaped Columbia since 1954. It's all told in this —

The Story of Columbia Continues ...

AUTHORS' NOTE

As a group we set out to relate the history of Columbia from 1954 to 1992. In that history are certain people who had such a monumental impact during this period they had to be mentioned. The naming of people was based on three criteria: one, if the person was the first ever to hold a specific title or position; two, if the person held a position or job for an inordinate period of time; and three, if the person was honored by having a building, site or location named for him or her. Some of Columbia's most prominent citizens had to be left out of the official story.

If there are some whom readers feel ought to be mentioned and are not — well, that's the nature of making choices.

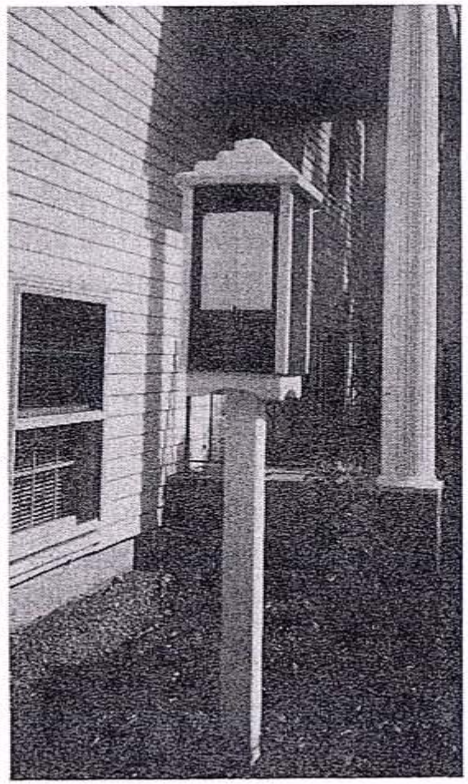
The Committee

Anita F. Ramm, Chairman
Richard A. Curland
Marjorie F. Grant
Jean I. Peters
Gladys R. Soracchi
Noreen O. Steele

THE GOVERNMENT

In December 1957 Eleanor Tuttle, Columbia correspondent for the *Hartford Courant*, summed up the year: "Growth, slow, steady and with its feet on the ground, would seem to be the pattern of this community high up on the hill ... ." This view of life in Columbia would have been appropriate for most of the years between 1954 and today. However, although the pace was slow, it was continuous. As the town grew, town government expanded and became more structured.

In early 1969, little more than a decade after Mrs. Tuttle had written this, a town charter was proposed by the Board of Selectmen, who wanted to improve town government. According to the charter itself, "... the Town shall have all powers specifically granted by this charter and all powers fairly implied in or incident to the powers expressly granted ... ." After three years and several false starts, the charter was approved by the town voters in November 1971 and took effect on January 1, 1972. The charter continued the selectmen/town meeting form of government; however, it gave more power to the selectmen, especially the first selectman. Selectmen were empowered to fill all vacancies, set up ordinances and establish new commissions.



Columbia's Official Signpost
A Modern Town Crier

This document sets forth terms of office; size and scope of all town boards and commissions; procedures for town meetings; duties and powers of all elected and appointed officials; and rules and procedures for elections.

Since 1972 the town charter has been revised no fewer than six times. Later revisions provided for a uniform fiscal year in alignment with the state's July 1 to June 30 fiscal year. Moderators, once selected at each town meeting, became a panel of three permanent town meeting moderators appointed for a term of two years. Regulations pertaining to conflicts of interest have been included as well as mechanisms for recall of both elected and appointed officials.

Considered but not included in the first charter, a Finance Board was established in the second version to oversee and monitor town budgets and spending. Controversial from the start, this board was replaced in the next revision with a financial advisory board — the Financial Planning and Allocation Commission (FIPAC). According to a 1977 newspaper account, this was "the first time any town in the state had ousted a finance board." Conflict between FIPAC and the Board of Selectmen erupted from time to time. One of the charges to the 1983 Charter Revision Committee was to define clearly where each town agency's responsibilities lie, especially FIPAC versus the selectmen. Today FIPAC reviews, evaluates and modifies the proposed budgets of both the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education before presenting them to the townspeople for a vote.

A safety commission, later renamed the Public Safety Commission, was established to "ensure the continued safety of the Town's people." In order to make it easier for firefighters and police to find the appropriate house, the Commission urged residents to place numbers on every house. In 1984 the selectmen rejected the idea of mandatory numbering, calling it "Orwellian 1984 ... there's a limit on what the government

should do." Today, however, almost all residents display their house numbers on either their house or mailbox.

In a 1977 charter revision Columbia's elected constables were replaced with an appointed constabulary. In 1982 residents voted to hire a resident state trooper. They decided to "... see what shapes up when the trooper is in place" before funding a constabulary. The constabulary was never funded and was eventually eliminated from the charter. Concerned with the growing crime rate, the Safety Commission in conjunction with the newly hired trooper inaugurated a Crime Watch program.

Two newly appointed positions were added in the last few years. In 1988 the first town planner, Mary Hocevar, was appointed. The town planner is responsible for coordinating and overseeing the Planning and Zoning Commission, the building official, the sanitarian and the Inland Wetlands Agency. De Ramm was appointed Columbia's first town historian in 1990 after the state legislature mandated every town must appoint a municipal historian.

In 1879 a resolution was passed prohibiting the selectmen from granting licenses to sellers of intoxicating liquors. Thereafter, no liquor was legally sold in Columbia until 1967. In that year, after many unsuccessful tries, the voters approved licensing package stores and Columbia's first liquor establishment in 88 years was opened. No other license was granted until 1984 when the town voted to expand licensing to include restaurants.

Early in 1961 representatives of the Lions Club met with the Board of Education to present a proposal of combining the school nurse and public health nurse duties. By late 1962 a pilot public nursing services program was formed which included the towns of Columbia, Ashford and Lebanon (CAL).

Today a variety of health-related programs for Columbia and other towns in northeastern Connecticut are administered by the Visiting Nurse and Community Health of Eastern Connecticut, Inc. This organization, headquartered in Mansfield Center, provides not only nursing services, but also such home services as home health aides, homemakers and companions. It oversees the Windham Hospice program which administers both hospice acute care as well as servicing homebound clients. This group also supports a number of health promotion services and clinics. A Healthlink van travels the area providing various screening programs.

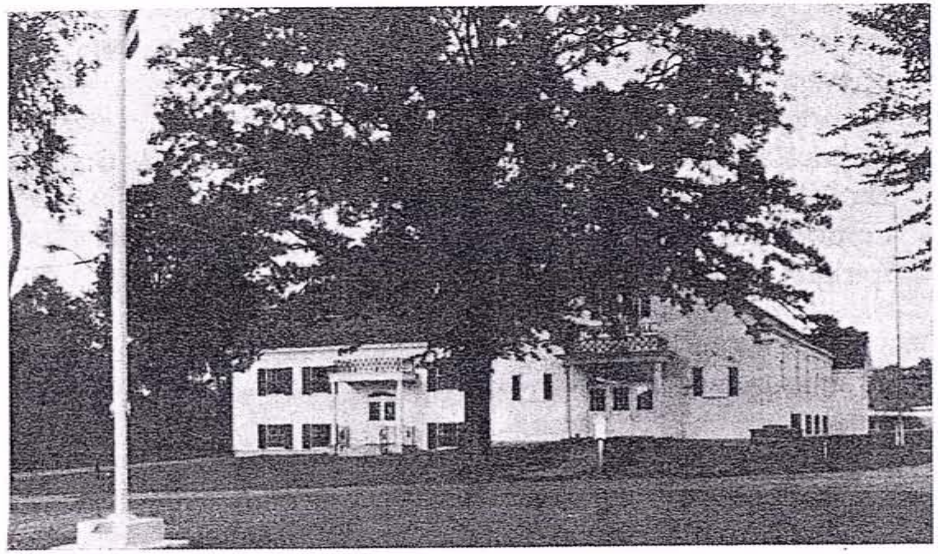
The political make-up of Columbia was also in transition during this period. In 1954 most voters belonged to the Republican party. There were nearly as many independents but few Democrats. Republicans held all major town offices. Many had been reelected several times.

1959 proved to be a year of political upheaval. In 1959 Town Clerk Hubert Collins retired after fifty years in that post. In the same year Clair Robinson completed forty years as first selectman and Henry Hutchins fifty years as second selectman. Although there were 469 registered Republicans and only 132 registered Democrats, the town's 422 independent voters joined with Democrats to elect Philip H. Isham, Sr., town clerk. Elected to the Board of Selectmen was Democrat Joseph Szegda. Republican Clair Robinson was reelected by only three votes!

1959 saw more political controversy when Columbia Democrats went to the state legislature to get a bill passed mandating minority representation on all Columbia boards and commissions. Local Republicans opposed the bill. This bill failed to become law when the legislature passed a broader bill mandating minority representation in all towns in Connecticut.

By 1961 Democrats were able to elect Joseph Szegda the first Democratic first selectman. During the 1970s the number of registered Democrats continued to increase. By 1977 they surpassed the number of registered Republicans, 707 to 646. The number of independents also continued to rise, outnumbering even the Democrats — 721 to 708 in 1978.

In fall 1991, of a total 2,743 registered voters, 788 were Republicans, 1,040 were Democrats and 915 independent.



Yeomans Hall and Town Offices
Constitution Oak planted 1902

* * * * * * * * * *

Selectmen requested an appropriation from the Board of Finance for a boat to patrol Columbia Lake. The reason given on the request form, "Inability to walk on water makes a boat mandatory."

News item October 1, 1977

* * * * * * * * * *

RELIGION

Religion continued to play an integral role in Columbia. In the late 1950s and for a score of years following, a thinking, questioning generation evolved.

Globally, the Korean War and the controversial Vietnam conflict ended. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and the Rev. Martin Luther King lost his life for a cause he spearheaded — the civil rights movement. A Supreme Court decision banning prayer in public schools became the law of the land and Pope John XXIII convened Vatican II, the first ecumenical council in almost one hundred years.

Perhaps as a result of these and other factors, the *World Book Encyclopedia* notes, "A surge of religious fervor erupted" — in Columbia as elsewhere — "leading to a reinvigoration of spiritual values."

The Congregational Church

The Columbia Congregational Church, dating back to the year 1720, looms on Columbia Green as the stalwart pillar of religious activity for families both young and old. The present church, erected in 1832, serves as a vital force in the community.

In 1955 the expansion of church facilities was imperative. Sunday School classes were being conducted in Yeomans Hall, any available space in the Chapel and even in Moor's Indian Charity School. Church suppers, receptions and fairs had to be held in Yeomans Hall.

The new Parish House, added to the east end of the church, was begun in 1959 and dedicated in September 1960. It consisted of a lounge, pastor's study, kitchen facilities, an

auditorium and classrooms on the lower floor. Exactly five years later the mortgage was burned and the church was declared debt-free.

Completed nearly thirty years later in 1990, a second story was added over the parish house lobby, thus eliminating an unsatisfactory flat roof and creating space for a meeting room, pastor's study and storage rooms.

The decade of the 1960s included spiritual, physical and personal changes within the Congregational community.

Spiritually, due to the new Parish House, all Sunday School classes were able to unite under one roof for worship services then adjourn to individual classrooms for instruction. The Church affiliated with the United Church of Christ in 1961, officially becoming the Columbia Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ. Also youth groups — the Pilgrim Fellowship and C-Teens — broadened their religious activities, forming a choir group, assisting with the building fund, attending conferences, organizing a "Work Day for Christ" and spreading Christian action to children all over the world by overseeing the UNICEF Program (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund).

On a larger scale ecumenism reigned supreme. Catholic and Jewish girls staffed the Congregational nursery on Christmas and Easter holidays, enabling those of the Congregational faith to attend services. Interfaith services were then and are still today held on significant religious holy days.

Physically, parishioners were eager to renovate and update their house of worship. A carillon donated by Homer Isham in 1964 in memory of his wife was installed to play taped hymns daily at noon, 6:00 p.m. and before Sunday worship. During 1968-1969 the interior of the church underwent a major renovation and modernization.

Significant in the history of the church during this period was the retirement of Philip H. Isham, Sr., clerk of the church for twenty-six years. As a personal token of appreciation the assemblage presented Mr. Isham a parchment scroll.

A great experience of stimulation and renewal took place on October 18, 1970 when the 250th anniversary of the founding of Columbia Congregational Church was celebrated. More than 250 persons, many in period costumes, were ushered into the church at 10:30 that Sunday morning, summoned not by the usual church bell but by the beat of a drum. A Tythingman rapped three times when all were in place, and the service proceeded, patterned after services of colonial times. Once the service concluded and all had properly filed out of the church, the congregation enjoyed a bean-hole supper, entertainment by thirty Indians in full tribal regalia, dancing, hymn singing, a modern folk sing-along, movies, slides and a display of artifacts in the Chapel. Church members considered this celebration a humbling experience in which they "paid respect to the past, gave thanks for the present, and made plans to stride into the future with vigor and courage."

Organizations within the church flourished during this period and most are still active today. In addition to the Pilgrim Fellowship and C-Teens, the Junior High Fellowship, Everyman's Fellowship for men (organized 1975), the Ladies Aid Society and the Women's Guild worked actively to assist the church. The Ladies Aid Society disbanded in the 1970s and merged with the Guild. The latter is an industrious group, organizing fund-raising activities such as fairs and chicken barbecues, catering for organizations and receptions, furnishing the lounge in the Parish House, providing monetary gifts to home and foreign missions and sponsoring the Old Homes Tour as part of the town's Bicentennial Celebrations.

In September 1987 the Rev. George K. Evans, minister of the church since 1957, retired. Many a parishioner was sad as the fourth longest pastorate in Columbia Congregational Church history ended.

The history of Columbia must also surely include mention of the Rev. George E. Peters, Jr., the first native of our town to be ordained here since 1847. The event, which took place in 1973, brought a great feeling of pride to the local community.

Today the Columbia Congregational United Church of Christ still maintains its awesome presence on Jonathan Trumbull Highway, adjacent to the parsonage and in close proximity to the Chapel. With a recorded membership of 346, there are many to join in worship, church school and child care each Sunday. A fellowship hour follows.

Congregation Agudath Achim

The Congregation Agudath Achim continues to serve the Jewish population. The synagogue, built in 1952 at the junction of Route 87 and Latham Hill Road, is currently scheduled for use only three times a year — on the high holy days of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. An occasional funeral might also necessitate building use. For these services a rabbi from Hartford usually presides.

The Jewish community greatly decreased through the years due to deaths and families moving out of state. Hebrew School was abandoned in the 1960s for lack of students. At present only twenty-two members are affiliated with the synagogue.

In taking cognizance of the Jewish holidays each year, an ancient Jewish blessing is invoked on the entire community: "May you be inscribed, once again, in the book of life for a GOOD new year."

In reciprocal community spirit during these days, the Congregational Church plays a tape of Jewish hymns on the carillon at its noontime interlude.

St. Columba Church

St. Columba Chapel, located in the center of Columbia, experienced growing pains in the fifties. The Chapel, still a mission of St. Joseph's in Willimantic, served Roman Catholics from Columbia, Andover and Hebron. Attendance had swelled since 1944 when the Chapel was established. Two masses were held each Sunday, with one added during the months of July and August to accommodate summer residents. The need for more space was obvious.

In May 1954 it was announced: "Ground will be broken during the coming summer for a new church." The Chapel was razed and work began.

The Rev. John Honan, an assistant at St. Joseph's in Willimantic who had celebrated mass at the Chapel since the early 1950s, initiated a fund drive. One year later — May 22, 1955 — the new church was dedicated. The *Norwich Bulletin* described it in the following manner: "It is a beautiful one-story structure of white painted brick, modified colonial style, designed to harmonize with the prevailing architecture of the village ... . Three hundred people can be seated at each service." Measuring forty-seven feet wide by ninety-three feet long, the full basement contains an assembly room replete with kitchen facilities and a stage.

In 1955 a list of construction costs for the project listed the number of permanent families in St. Columba's at 126, with a summer increase of eight-five, especially from around the shores of Columbia Lake.

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nity bid farewell to Father Honan who

A Parish Advisory Council was formed in the fall of 1973, Friday night Bingo games were initiated, area resident Patricia D'Auteuil became St. Columba's first salaried Religious Education Coordinator, Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve was discontinued, ten acres of land on Route 85 in Hebron were purchased in anticipation of future expansion and the entire parish joined in participation in the town's bicentennial events.

By the middle 1970s it became apparent a religious education center was badly needed. The church itself had two classes meeting simultaneously on the upper level, while the confirmation class was being taught in the church hall. In addition, private homes, the elementary schools of Andover and Hebron, RHAM High School and Horace W. Porter School were all being used for church instructional purposes. A change was clearly in order!

The parish was granted permission to proceed with the massive project of building a new facility. As the parishioners also desired to build a new rectory for the residential priest, a combined Rectory/Parish Center was designed. Construction began in 1977 and the new structure was blessed by the Most Rev. Daniel P. Reilly, Bishop of Norwich, on October 1, 1978. As local priests and parishioners inspected the new facility, they were pleased to note a bench in the vestibule of the Center was one which had graced the altar of their little Mission church.

Church members, together with long-time parishioners and senior citizens as special guests, helped to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of St. Columba Church on May 18, 1980. Five years later, St. Columba's twenty-fifth year as an established parish was commemorated.

Many special groups have kept St. Columba's a beehive of activity through the years. The Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), the Choirs, Altar Society, Youth Group, Folk Group, Catholic Ladies Society, Holy Name Society, Knights of Columbus and the Parish Council have all contributed much to parish life. Many of these groups are still in existence today.

In addition, the Christmas Fair and Raffle, conducted by the Catholic Ladies Society, is anticipated each year, as is the Three E's — Exciting Ecumenical Experience. Originally a six-week summer school activity sponsored jointly by St. Columba's and the Columbia Congregational Church, it is presently a week-long summer Bible School program held for young people each July. The Baptist Fellowship has also hosted this event.

Census for 1992 reveals approximately 440 families affiliated with the Parish of St. Columba. (This number reflects the absence of Hebron parishioners, who are currently engaged in the establishment of a new parish locally.) Daily masses are held, in addition to two masses on Sunday, one on Saturday evening and three on holy days. Religious education classes are held three days a week in the Parish Center.

Jehovah's Witnesses

A fourth religious group appeared in Columbia in September 1962 when the Jehovah's Witnesses purchased a tract of land on Route 6. Plans for this hillside property called for erecting a one-story building, thirty-six feet wide by sixty-eight feet long, including a full basement. The structure, commonly known as a Kingdom Hall, was to include two auditoriums, a library, congregation office, cloak room and literature storage space.

Following the normal pattern of the Witnesses, the Kingdom Hall was built using the skills and labor provided by members of the congregation and neighboring congregations. As work was performed largely on weekends, progress was slow but steady. Funds for this endeavor came from members' contributions and from fifteen-year bonds, paying three percent interest, that the congregation sold to friends and neighbors. (It is the policy of the Witnesses that funds not be raised through suppers, sales or collections.) Local expenses are paid with voluntary contributions, with the attitude "that each can do just as he has resolved in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion because God loves a cheerful giver."

Five years later, the Kingdom Hall was dedicated on June 1, 1968. The Hall is not a church as Witnesses do not believe in ritual worship.

Located on Route 66 East (formerly Route 6), the original congregation of seventy to eighty Witnesses has grown to include two English-speaking congregations and one Spanish-speaking congregation, or approximately four hundred Witnesses from ten towns. At present eighteen people from Columbia are affiliated with the local congregations.

Activities at the Kingdom Hall include educational meetings, emphasizing Bible study and training for their public ministry. The congregations are organized and governed theocratically, following the same pattern of operation established during the first century. Care for the Witnesses is provided by appointed men, called Elders, who meet scriptural qualifications.

The local congregations are collectively part of the international congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, its world headquarters located in Brooklyn, New York.

Baptist Fellowship

Reflecting the growing quest for religious expansion, a census was taken in Columbia in 1965 to locate persons interested in a Bible-preaching church.

Once the survey was completed and the results tabulated, the small congregation was organized as a Mission. Services were held at various locations in and around the Willimantic area. One year later the Rev. Jack M. Schneider was called to become the first full-time pastor.

In 1970 Lester and Grace Cooper donated land on the corner of Route 6 and Roses Bridge Road for the long-awaited church. Begun in 1971, the church measured ninety feet by thirty-six feet and was made of cement blocks with a concrete floor. During construction worship services were held in Yeomans Hall and prayer meetings took place midweek in private homes in the region.

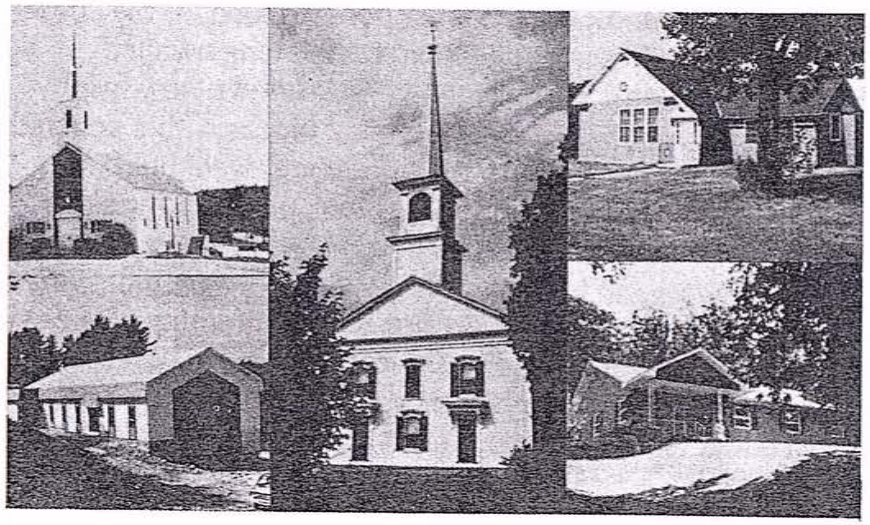
Only 130 people attended the first Sunday morning service, but attendance grew rapidly. The capacity of the building was 170 (over 200 if the porch was used) but one unforgettable service had "standing room only with people sitting in the aisles."

Realizing the inadequacy of the structure, the Fellowship expanded the facilities by adding a new building which would seat 500 and serve as the main church. This building was dedicated in 1978.

At present over one hundred families are enrolled in the Baptist Fellowship which serves approximately twenty towns. The Rev. Jack Schneider continues in his twenty-second year as pastor in Columbia.

The Lighthouse Christian School is conducted on the premises and features daily kindergarten classes and a nursery school that meets three times a week. The Women's Missionary Society and the Men's Prayer Breakfast Group are active in the church. Weekly Wednesday evening meetings are held for Pioneers, Olympians, Junior High and High School groups. In addition a Vacation Bible School is sponsored in conjunction with other Columbia churches.

Using the slogan "We Preach Christ," the Baptist Fellowship conducts a morning and evening service each Sunday of the year.



Houses of Worship

Bahaism

In early 1973 another religious group appeared briefly in Columbia — Bahaism. Originally founded by a Persian prophet who died a century ago, Baha'u'llah (meaning "Glory of God") held the major faiths were essentially the same, and Bahaism was the crowning summation of them all.

At its inception in January 1973, the Bahai congregation had a membership of two but their Bahai teachings spread. Written materials informed the town that the people of the Bahai faith are their own clergy, that children didn't declare themselves to the faith until age fifteen and that if there were nine or more people over twenty-one years of age in their faith they would constitute a Local Spiritual Assembly.

As the group expanded, religious meetings were held on a regular basis the second and fourth Saturdays of each month, usually in a member's home. These meetings consisted mainly of discussions of their teachings.

Bahai gatherings were conducted in Columbia for two and one-half years, but the group dissolved when the originating family moved from town in summer 1975.

The Burning Bush

In March 1973 yet another religious light burned in Columbia. For the first time in many years the beacon atop the "Lighthouse" at the junction of Route 6 and Route 66 was aglow, marking the birth of "The Burning Bush."

Permits and application for the new endeavor stated the building was to be used as a church and meeting hall. ("The Bush" had formerly leased a building on Route 14 in Windham, but it burned down the previous month.) Mr. John Kimlingen served as lay minister-director of The Burning Bush, an independent non-denominational organization operating in the area for three years.

Young people from Columbia, Marlborough, Hebron, Willimantic, New Britain, Meriden and Berlin worked diligently to prepare the place for occupancy. Plans for The Burning Bush called for four meetings a week, three of which

would be training sessions and on Fridays an evangelical session. The building was to be open twenty-four hours a day to provide a "hot line" with trained and untrained people manning the phones and covering referrals. The group, governed by a four-man Board of Directors, was supported by local churches, church groups and private donations.

Exactly one week after its birth here the light was extinguished when Columbia's building official stated, "All activity must cease immediately until all requirements are met."

After rethinking the situation, the thoroughly disheartened group decided to renovate the burned out building in Windham for temporary use. They eventually settled on Hanover Road in Scotland, where The Burning Bush Chapel still thrives today. No Columbia residents are members of the present congregation.

The Orange Candle

As Columbia's religious environment was expanding, recreational life for the teenage population was suffering.

In late 1964 a chance remark by a teenager to the Rev. George K. Evans, pastor of Columbia Congregational Church, led to the realization that far too many teenagers had nothing to do on weekends.

With the encouragement of the Rev. George K. Evans and the Rev. John K. Honan, pastor of St. Columba's, nine young people gathered at the parish house of the Columbia Congregational Church (occasionally at Yeomans Hall) to plan activities to fill this void. In January 1965 a coffeehouse for teenagers — The Orange Candle — was born at the parish house. Officially opening in May, the group rapidly expanded.

Early events continued to be held at the parish house of the Congregational Church. Sponsored by the Congregational Church's Pilgrim Fellowship and St. Columba's Catholic Youth Organization, teenagers gathered on Saturday nights for an evening of conversation, music and dancing. All those high school age through twenty years old were welcome. All activities were chaperoned by parents and the pastors of the two churches. Eventually the group became officially organized and officers were elected.

The Orange Candle relocated to the old state highway on Route 6A (now Route 66) just west of Columbia Center in June 1965. Mr. and Mrs. Peter Beckish, owners of the building, generously leased it to the group for one dollar per year. Excitement abounded! The accumulation of many years of dust and dirt were cleared away by the ingenious teenagers who also scrubbed, painted and even wired the building. Large cable spools were used as tables, and soda bottle crates served as chairs. A single orange candle adorned each table. Over one hundred young people from all three religious youth programs in town appeared at their new facilities on opening night!

During the summer, dances were sponsored by The Orange Candle. Often crowds of up to 250 people attended. According to Jeffrey Moeckel, first president of the group, "We are a non-profit group. The purpose of this club is to keep the young people off the street and give them a place to gather, especially during the summer when there is nothing doing and you want a place of your own. We had no idea of earning money when we began our summer dances, but they were so successful and drew such large crowds that the small admission fee we asked to pay the band accumulated far beyond anything we dreamed of."

Still under the umbrella of the two churches, The Orange Candle continued into 1966, but for safety reasons their quarters were moved to the Exhibition Hall on the Newton B. Smith Field across from the Columbia Volunteer Fire Department. As many as five constables were hired on a single night to maintain the orderly, friendly atmosphere of the club. The cost eventually became prohibitive for the teenage club and activities ceased in August 1966.

Monies earned by the group were spent on an Appreciation Dinner for their benefactors, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Beckish. Remaining funds were distributed to Columbia Congregational Church, St. Columba's, Congregation of Agudath Achim, the Saxton B. Little Free Library, Public Health Nursing Agency, the World Championship Canoe Fund, Columbia Volunteer Fire Department and Horace W. Porter School in the form of a scholarship awarded annually to the graduate who contributed the most to the class and school. Joseph Tashlik, in accepting the donation for the Synagogue, said, "This is such a wonderful surprise. It shows brotherhood, just like the ten commandments say."

The *Willimantic Chronicle* aptly stated, "The Orange Candle lighted a glow of good fellowship and fun which was felt for miles around."

The Mushroom

The last dying embers of The Orange Candle had barely flickered out when in late 1968 a new group of high-school age young people from the Pilgrim Fellowship met initially with the Rev. George Evans in the parish hall of the Columbia Congregational Church. As the coffeehouse idea was the IN thing across the country in the 1960s, the group adopted that as its theme. They named their club "The Mushroom."

Much of the continuing organizational work was done under the tutelage of Willimantic pastors from St. Paul's Episcopal Church and the First Methodist Church. Group chairmen were elected and duties assigned.

Opening night occurred in February 1969. The teens borrowed the facilities of Noble School gymnasium in Willimantic for this first endeavor and their peers eagerly responded. Subsequent activities were held at the Willimantic YMCA.

Eventually The Mushroom was fortunate enough to locate a building in Columbia on Route 66 East (formerly Route 6) which they cleaned and painted for their use. Today this building houses a flooring and carpeting company.

Little has been recorded regarding further activities of The Mushroom. It is presumed the coffeehouse existed in its casual atmosphere of friendliness for approximately two years. Replicating The Orange Candle, any monies realized from their functions were used for philanthropic purposes.

* * * * * * * * * *

Principal Bans Lipstick, School Dating

The Horace W. Porter School principal banned lipstick during school hours. He said that many girls just weren't well informed on how to apply lipstick. They put it on too lavishly. "It just isn't conducive to good taste." The principal also asked parents to see that children attend the school's evening dances individually and not in pairs. He said that there will be many chances to enjoy dating in high school "without having us stress such social amenities now."

news item November 2, 1956

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EDUCATION

From space shortages to space shuttles, from rural services to recycling awards, from PTA and PTO to CBS and ABC and from co-op kindergarten to computers — from all this, one can assume many changes have occurred since 1954 in Columbia education.

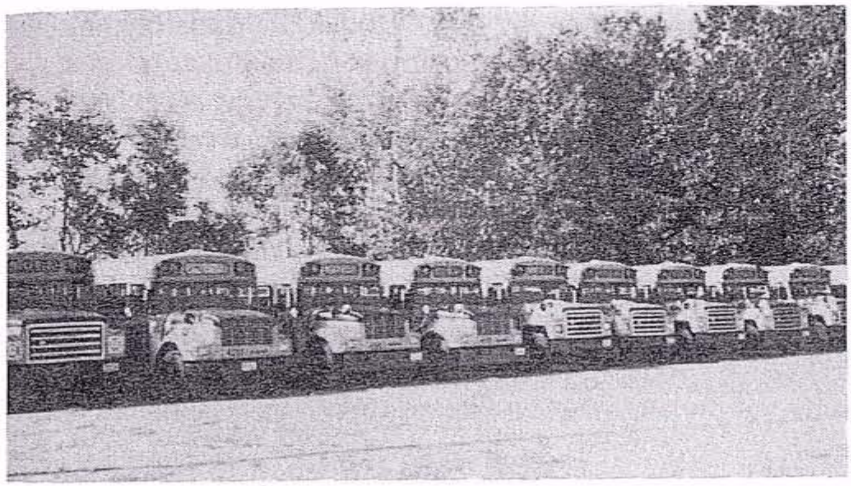
In mid-summer 1954 a co-operative kindergarten was being considered for Columbia children, as well as those from nearby communities. By the end of August officers had been chosen, committees were established, equipment assembled and a full registration achieved.

In December the Columbia Co-operative Kindergarten, located near the north end of the Green, had an open house for the eighteen enrolled students. By early 1957 there were still no kindergarten classes at Horace W. Porter School and the co-operative kindergarten officers had to consider double sessions. In April 1961 thirty children were registered for the co-op's 1961-62 school year. In that year the kindergarten moved its location to a cottage on Columbia Lake. In 1966 the kindergarten became part of the public school.

When the Horace W. Porter School opened in 1948 it housed 150 students. During the fifties space shortages were evident. The town decided to build a new school addition which was completed in 1958.

The 1960s brought changes such as the hiring of the first art instructor and departmentalization at the junior high level. A new title for the on-site school administrator, Assistant Superintendent/Principal, was created. The 1960s also saw a sex and family life education program introduced and the staff additions of a school psychologist and social worker.

As the town grew the school grew and another school addition was built which included ten new rooms plus a multi-purpose room and two kindergarten rooms. With this newest addition the school now had twenty-four classrooms.



Fleet of School Buses
Symbol of Growth

The 1970s brought immediate and profound changes. Up to this point, Columbia's school system had been a participant in the Rural Supervisory Field Services of the State Department of Education. The service was popularly known as the rural service, assisting small towns by providing a part-time superintendent. In 1971 the service was discontinued in Columbia because the number of teachers employed at Horace W. Porter School exceeded the maximum number allowed to receive this service. Since then Columbia has had its own part-time or full-time superintendent of schools.

Another significant change of the 1970s was the relaxing of the dress code. Girls were allowed to wear slacks to classes!

By the early 1970s the Board of Education's business had become so lengthy the board decided to meet twice monthly instead of the traditional once per month.

Other educational activities during this decade included Porter School's involvement in Connecticut's "Right to Read" program, portable classrooms added to accommodate special education programs, teacher in-service days called "Thinking Thursdays" and the naming of the Donald R. Tuttle Gymnasium in honor of Mr. Tuttle, Chairman of the Board of Education since 1947. A summer school program was established, the PTO replaced the PTA, a gifted program for selected students began and the new Windham High School was dedicated.

The 1980s saw weight-training classes at Porter School, the hiring of a Pupil Personnel Services Coordinator, a new consumer home economics course, computer use in remedial reading and math, elective French and pre-school health screening. Administrators were now faced with problems relating to drugs and alcohol.

In 1983 it was noted some Columbia seniors at Windham High School were taking courses at Eastern Connecticut State University since they had completed credits for high school at the end of their junior year.

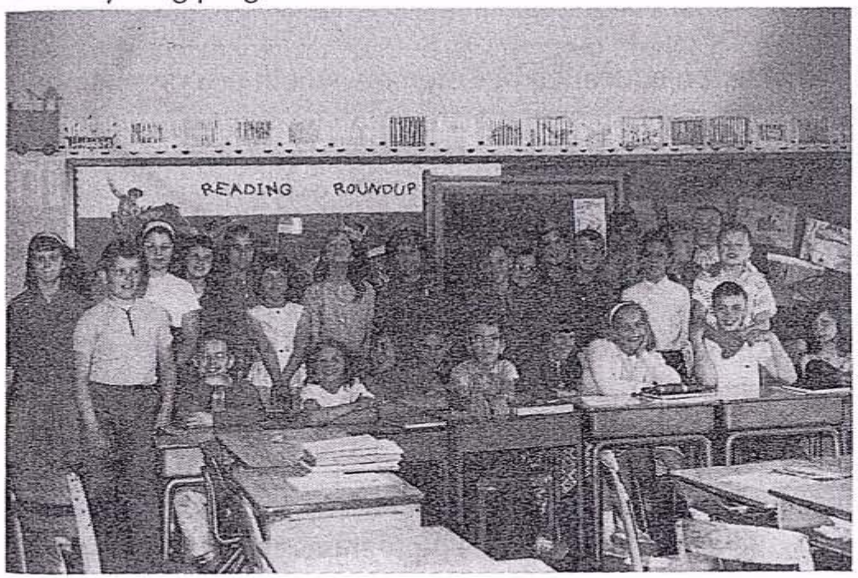
Also in that year the Eastern Connecticut Regional Educational Service Center (EASTCONN) began its Secondary Pro-Active Education Program for students in grades 8-12. This is an alternative school for selected youngsters. The school is located near the junction of Routes 6 and 66.

In 1980 three rooms at Porter School were closed for asbestos removal. In 1984 the State of Connecticut pressed the Columbia Board of Education to meet the Minimum Expenditure Requirement since Columbia was the only town in the state

that did not meet requirements. The Board then decided to spend the required dollars ($225,000) on computers, materials and carpeting in order to meet requirements.

Issues in the late eighties which reflected the times included the establishment of the Columbia Council on the Prevention of Drug & Alcohol Abuse and the opening of EASTCONN's Early Childhood Center on Commerce Drive in Columbia. The purpose of the Center was to provide a community day care program for young children with special needs.

Horace W. Porter School's cafeteria recycling efforts made TV's CBS and ABC news programs in 1989 and received a commendation from Governor William O'Neill. Students at the school had begun the first elementary school-based plastics recycling program in the state.



Classroom Scene at Porter School

In the same year the Columbia Board of Education adopted a stricter policy concerning drug, alcohol and tobacco restrictions on school property, designated a faculty smoking area and spelled out violation penalties.

Horace W. Porter School demonstrated its ability with technical topics in 1990 when fourth graders *almost* made contact with the Columbia space shuttle via ham radio equipment. Despite weeks of planning on everyone's part, communications closed down before prepared questions could be asked. Although disappointed, students did learn a great deal in the process. This included organization and communication skills, the making of videos, knowledge of newspaper publishing, research skills and interviewing tips. The most practical lesson students learned was that not everything in life goes according to plan.

With the beginning of school in fall 1992, secondary students could choose between Lyman Memorial High School and Windham High School as designated high schools.

No chapter on education in Columbia would be complete without the mention of one man whose on-site experience covered much of this period. George H. Patros came to Horace W. Porter School in the fall of 1950 as a classroom teacher in grades six and seven. The consolidated school building was less than two years old!

Mr. Patros became supervising principal in 1953 when there were ten teachers on the staff and an enrollment of 253. Mr. Patros held that title through 1966, at which time he was named assistant superintendent/principal. During his tenure the school grew from ten rooms to twenty-four rooms, he supervised three school building programs and saw the enrollment increase to 603 students.

George Patros left Columbia's school system in 1969 to continue a distinguished career in education as a superintendent in area towns.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Buildings and places make up the backbone of any town. Columbia has many interesting and useful locations, some developed recently, some very old.

They all change and adapt as the town and its population grow. A look at a few of these sites can tell us a great deal about Columbia's development.

Yeomans Hall

The need for expansion was also felt by town officials. There was no central office until 1960 — offices were located and records were kept in various private homes. After the retirement of Hubert P. Collins, a small basement room (with a vault) in Yeomans Hall served as the town clerk's office until December 1971.

A building committee worked from January 1966 until October 1969 to bring numerous proposals to town meetings for consideration. Whether to expand or remodel Yeomans Hall or to build a separate building somewhere on "Columbia Campus" — no one could decide what to do. Then a town meeting vote discharged this committee with the call to name another committee. With new members on board, on March 11, 1970, the voters approved spending $60,000 for an office building annexation to Yeomans Hall.

By December 1970 the footings for the Yeomans Hall addition were in and construction started, but only after the building had been put out to bid several times.

Success was realized in February 1972. At an open house the citizens saw the new office building containing all town offices under a single roof for the first time. Since then paint-

ing, new siding, a roof, septic system, well, oil tank and complete renovation of the lower section of Yeomans Hall have kept the heart of the town humming.

The Freedom of Information Act, in effect in 1975, also played a part in the town effort to get all records, including those of committees and commissions, into a central place and out of private homes.

In the 1980s there was evidently a need for more work area for the expanded services demanded of the government and a fast-growing town. In 1987 a conference room was carved into office workstations, creating seven offices and a central all-purpose room for a computer, copier and lunch area. The coatroom in Yeomans Hall was converted into the social services office and the old town clerk's office is shared by the resident trooper and fire marshal.

With the necessity to make the building accessible to the disabled, a carrier lift was installed, the sidewalk was ramped and a safety railing placed.

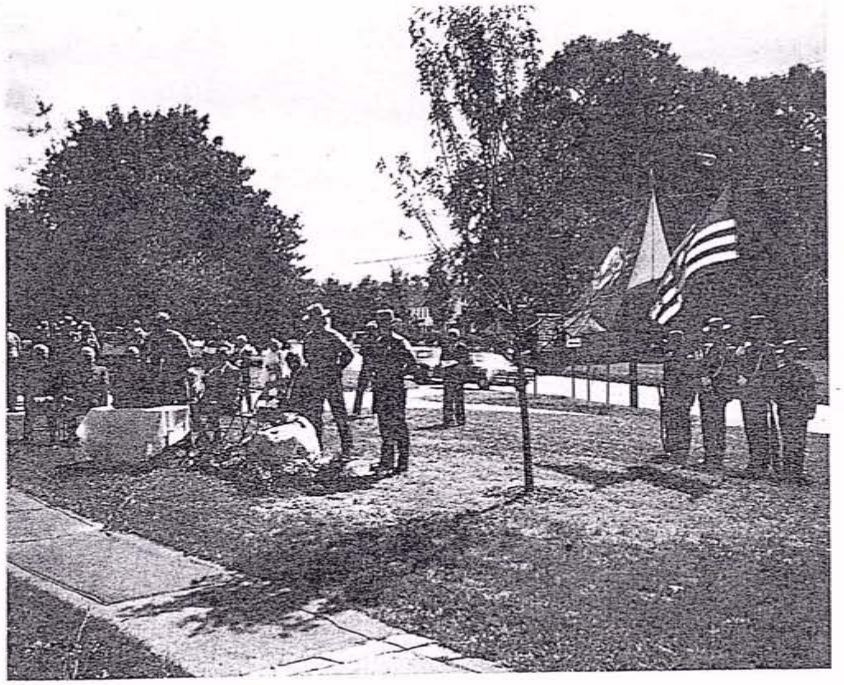
The town clerk is now feeling the squeeze for vault space even though record books are smaller and easier to store. With continued town development creating more mapping and records, it is only a matter of time before more space will be needed.

The Green

The next time there is a concert on the Green (summer evenings, sponsored by the Columbia Council on the Arts — jazz, barbershop, marching bands!), go a little early and walk around. Try to picture it as it was not so many years ago — the roads are dirt paths, phone and electric wires are not yet strung everywhere, cattle and sheep graze on the sward, the

pace of people going about their business is slower and traffic minimal. A stone wall runs from the Wheelock homestead to the Congregational Church along the Green's inside boundary. A barberry hedge skirts Route 87 marking that edge.

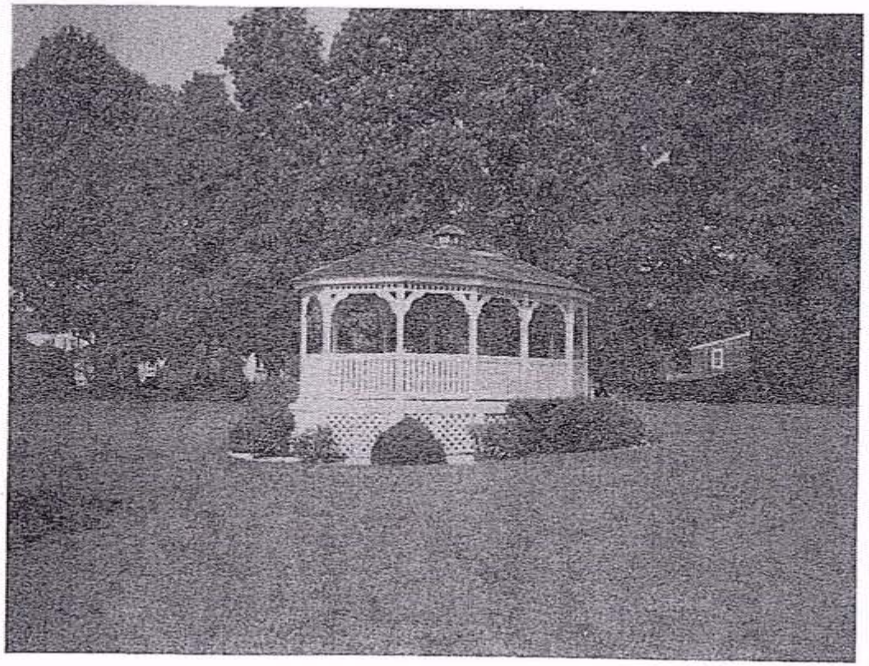
Since that time there have been many changes. Roads have been shifted several times. Churches, the town hall and the Indian school have been moved or replaced. The library has been relocated. In 1968 three large elms, affected by Dutch elm disease, were removed. One was more than 125 years old!



Memorial to Russell Bagshaw
Fallen Hero

Still, the Green remains, as it has since the early days of the town's settlement, the center of Columbia's activity. Churches, inn, library, Yeomans Hall, school and stores all cluster around the center. Parades start in this area. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts gather. Town meetings bring out the citizenry.

The bicentennial year of 1976 saw the Green cleared of old trees and new plantings were begun. The Lions Club planted a row of maple trees parallel to Route 87 to celebrate the country's birthday. Later they built the Gazebo which since 1988 has been the scene of weddings — one in a blinding snow storm in 1992! The Council on the Arts sponsors well-attended exhibits at the Chapel on the Green Gallery. There are several memorials placed on the Green. Veterans of World War I are honored by a plaque at the crossroads and the names of World War II veterans are listed on a granite stone in front of Yeomans Hall.

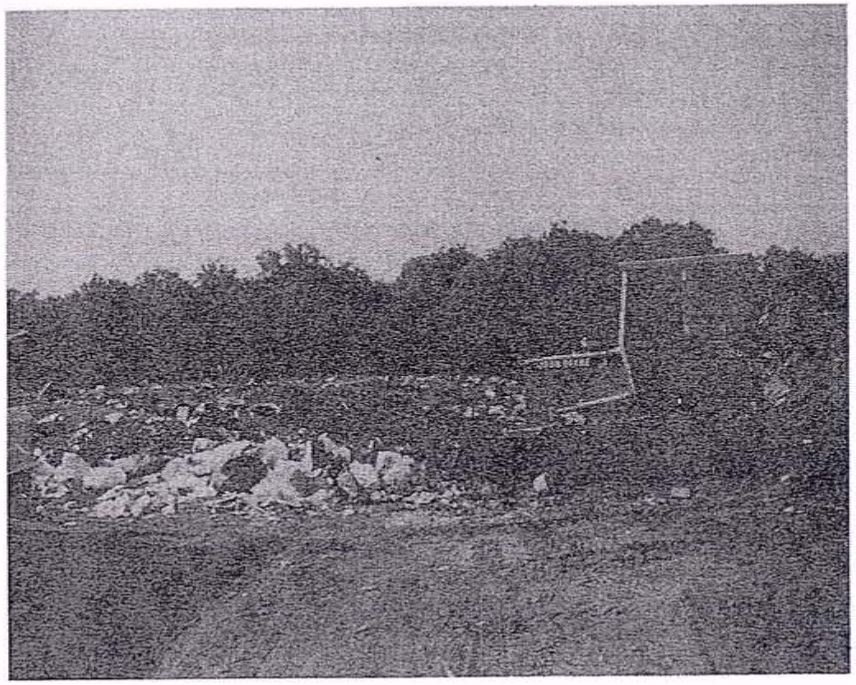


Gazebo on the Green
Another Lions Club Contribution to the Community

Recently a memorial to State Police Trooper Russell Bagshaw, killed in the line of duty, was added. A memorial stone for Eleazor Wheelock is in front of the Congregational Church. Veterans of the Korean and Vietnam conflicts are honored in listings on plaques in the town hall. The Green's four-plus acres were designated a state Historic District in 1990.

The Landmark

The Landmark, an old inn, was originally a stage coach stop on the Norwich to Hartford run. Then for years it was run by the Squier family as a small general store, where men loved to gather around the pot-bellied stove and gossip. The family also lived in the inn.

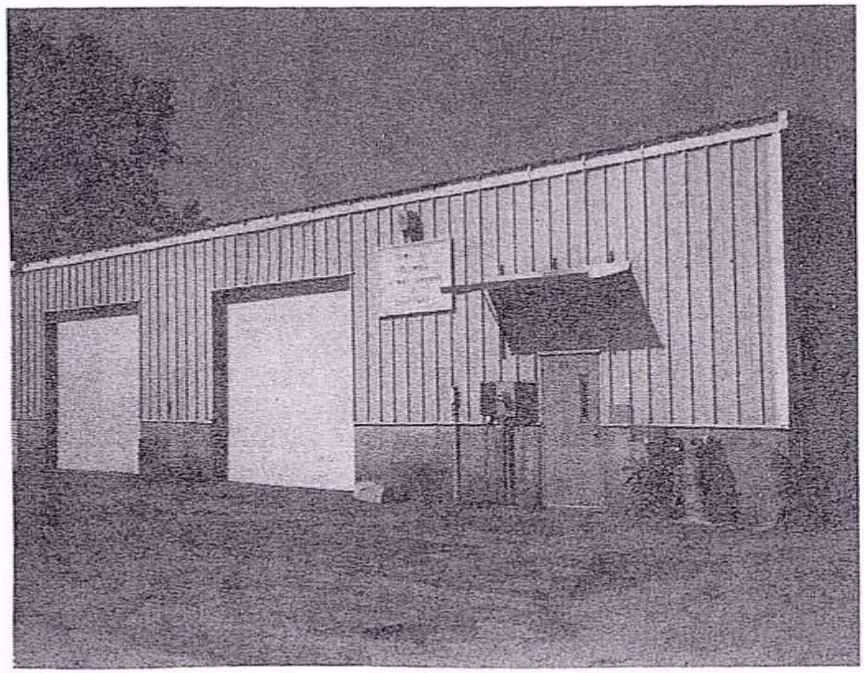


A Passing Scene

In 1962 the Squiers sold the inn to Peter Beckish who petitioned the Zoning Board to allow a drug store with a soda fountain. The grand opening came in August when the public was invited to tour both the store and other areas of the old building. Since then the inn has had several owners and has housed several businesses — a real estate office, beauty parlor, restaurant, gift shop and a health spa.

The Town Dump

We've gone from the "Dump" to the "Sanitary Landfill," but it's still THE PLACE to go on a Saturday morning. Many remember the area at Katzman's Corner, where "picking" was allowed and treasures found. By 1966 this old dump had been leveled off and cleared and the new area at Doubleday Road was in operation. New state regulations in 1967 changed this



Town Garage
Headquarters of Public Works Department

area from an open face dump to a sanitary landfill, making it necessary to purchase heavy equipment to do the work. High water levels and lack of filling materials made the Doubleday Road area obsolete by 1971, so a 20 acre state-owned parcel off Route 6 was bought in 1974 for $37,100. The gravel banks it contained were ideal for fill and it was estimated the area would last until 1991. Indeed, there also was space for a new Town Garage — built in 1977 for $32,000 (for a mere $10.67 a square foot)! The Dog Pound, previously located at the dog warden's home, was added in the same area.

Soon concerns for the environment developed and terms such as "hazardous waste" were heard. The Lions Club embarked on a glass-crushing operation, tests were done for toxic run-off and tipping fees for commercial users were initiated. Patrons of the landfill became used to separating paper, metal and plastic and making the rounds to the various dump "stations."

With the landfill about to be closed, the next step is unclear. Tomorrow's garbage and recyclables will have to find a new home.

The Post Office

Those who remember when the post office was a niche in Smith's General Store know how easy it was to mail a package and buy a steak in the same place. The first post office in Columbia was established in 1816 and moved into the store in about 1900. When it first opened the town population was about 650. In 1959 there were more than 2,000 people in town and the space in the store proved too small. So the new building at the corner of Route 6A (now Route 66) and Firehouse Road (now Schoolhouse Lane) was constructed. The post office opened in its new home in time for the Christmas rush of 1959. It still serves the community well.

Neither snow nor rain . . .
Our Post Office since 1959

The Recreation Area

Fondly known as "Rec Field," the area on Hennequin Road filled a need felt as early as 1960. When the ballfields at Fireman's Field and Katzman's Corner became crowded, the Recreation Council cited the need for a new permanent area. After much ado deciding on a site, the Tannenbaum property was purchased for $20,000 in June 1963. A committee was named to study the development of the seventy acres.

Over the next few years a road into the area was made, a well was dug, latrines were built and several ballfields were established. Much volunteer work, many contributions and town funds made this beginning possible.

In 1968 the Lions Club volunteered funds to build a hockey rink for the growing youth hockey teams. Even the National Guard was involved in this development, using heavy equipment for the project. Many hours of volunteer labor and many donations of material resulted in a hockey rink used by residents from six to sixty.

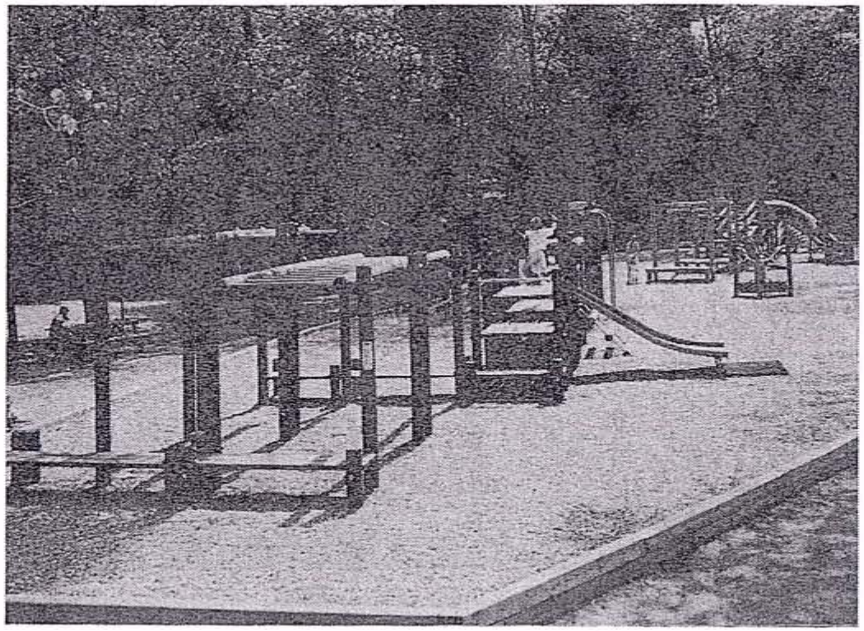
Besides hockey, figure skating was taught and the rink was open to the public for free skating. Eventually the rink was abandoned because it could not retain water. This coincided with a series of warm winters when the ice didn't hold. Today Columbia hockey is played at the UConn rink where many from town participate.

In 1966-67 a hard top area was added at the field for tennis and basketball. Pine trees at the end of the area were planted in memory of Douglas Tettelbach. More ballfields were built as needed.

1974 saw the dedication ceremony of the Jerry Dunnack Colt Field, attended by 200 players Jerry had coached. The scoreboard is dedicated to the memory of Tommy Spector. The Senior Girl Scouts blazed a trail named in honor of Wilbur Fletcher.

In 1977 the Lions Club oversaw the building of the open-air pavilion, later christened the William "Buzz" Burnham Memorial Pavilion. A new Little League field was added in 1978 and in 1981, concession stands and toilets. 1983 brought soccer and softball fields.

After fund-raising activities raised $48,000, a citizens' group erected the Playscape, the crowning touch to a recreation area that brings pride to the whole town. Today, besides a wide array of organized sports, the area is used for aerobic exercise classes, private picnics, hiking, town-wide gatherings and more.



Playscape at Recreation Park
A Favorite Spot: Effort of Many

Moor's Indian Charity School

When the small white building in the center of town was moved in 1948 to make way for the new consolidated Horace W. Porter School, it was the fourth time the building was given a new home — and, it was hoped, the last. The building, under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education, was used for a variety of educational purposes. Over the years the school was a classroom, a library, a music room and a nursery school.

In 1966, when the Columbia Historical Society was formed, it was given use of the school for its activities and memorabilia storage. The society accepted responsibility for preserving the school provided the town made any major repairs. In 1991 a team of experts began extensive preservation work. Sills were

restored, a chimney removed and rotted clapboards replaced with quarter-sawn white pine.

In 1969 the school and Columbia came into prominence when Dartmouth College celebrated its 200th anniversary. The kick-off event took place in Columbia in cooperation with the college, the Connecticut Dartmouth Alumni Association, the town and the Columbia Historical Society. Alumni and friends came to town to hear speeches by college officials, attend concerts, and see an exhibit from the Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum. That day the school and the Green were dubbed "Columbia Campus" and a plaque was placed in front of the school indicating its importance. Since 1966 many open house programs have been held at the school by the Historical Society and a number of Porter School classes have visited and held old-time school days in the building. The Indian school is featured on our town seal, adopted in 1976 as part of the country's bicentennial celebration.

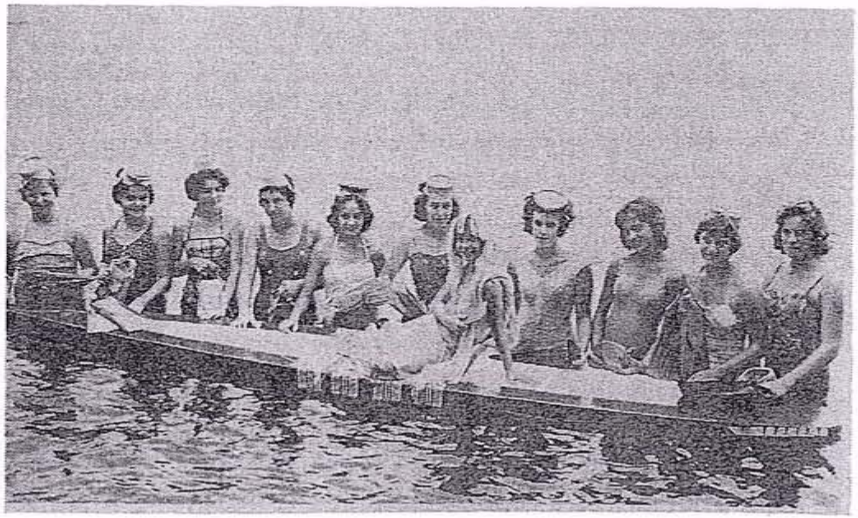
Columbia Lake and the Beach

Despite the 1976 pronouncement by the New England Council of Water Center Directors that Columbia Lake is really only a "pond," residents of Columbia feel otherwise. Created by the American Linen Company in 1865 and purchased by the town in 1933, Columbia Lake covers 282 acres and averages a depth of seventeen feet. The deepest measurement is at the dam where it is twenty-seven feet.

Although many seasonal cottages remain, a majority of homes around the lake are now year-round. Commercial ventures of the past — small stores, boarding homes and a guest resort called "The Pasture" — have been closed and are no longer permitted by zoning.

In 1957 the town spent $7,000 to purchase 180 feet of waterfront property adjacent to the road-width scrap of beach already owned by the town. It adjoined Sandy Beach, a commercial beach run by the LaFleur family. Townspeople were delighted to have this special area. The local Grange was quick to undertake area development and improvement as their entry in a National Grange Community Improvement Project. The Recreation Council went to work with the Grange committee. The first work session was scheduled on an early spring day. Women were asked to bring a picnic lunch.

Since then many improvements have been made. The Lions Club built a beach house with refreshment stand and toilets. A new T-shaped dock with docking facilities for fourteen boats was presented to the town by Kirby Tappen. A boat launch area, a picnic area, swings and boat moorings were added. Other changes were made — the raft was removed, a ski launch area was tried and abandoned, permanent moorings (awarded by lottery) were established and the lifeguard staff was increased.



Columbia's Mermaids
An Aquacade from the early '60s

Each year many Columbia children benefit from the YMCA swimming lessons. For many years the responsibility of the Rec Council and the Red Cross, the lessons are offered on summer mornings at the beach.

The Community Beach was enhanced considerably in 1990 with the $315,000 purchase of the "Murphy property," built many years ago as a boarding house. This not only adds acreage to the area, but allows a larger number of community people to use the beach at any one time.

An area of lakefront on Erdoni Road, which comes very close to the road, has been used by nearby residents and others as a swimming area for many years. Attempts to restrict this area were difficult to enforce. A final compromise to allow swimming was reached in 1989 with the stipulation there would be no lifeguard, no boat launching and no parking at the site.

In the fifties and before, sailboat racing was a great sport on the lake, with ten or more Lightnings and as many Comets out every Sunday when weather allowed. By 1990 there were only two Lightnings left on the lake as the Sunfish class became the most prominent. Over the years increasing numbers of power boats appeared on the water; skiing and tubing also became very popular. The Lake Management Committee is concerned with boating safety and works with the selectmen and the marine patrol officers to enforce boating restrictions.

Protection of Columbia Lake water quality remains a concern. During the summer of 1976 a New England Council of Water Center Directors research team studied the lake and pointed out signs the lake was becoming eutrophic. Annual algae blooms, fish kills and high coliform counts were harbingers of what might come. Lakeside construction may be hurting the lake. In June 1977 the local director of health condemned five cottages near the lake inlet for septic leakage. The cottages were demolished. A sign of increasing year-round population

was the warning in 1979 that although the water was still fine, "watch the nutrient flow."

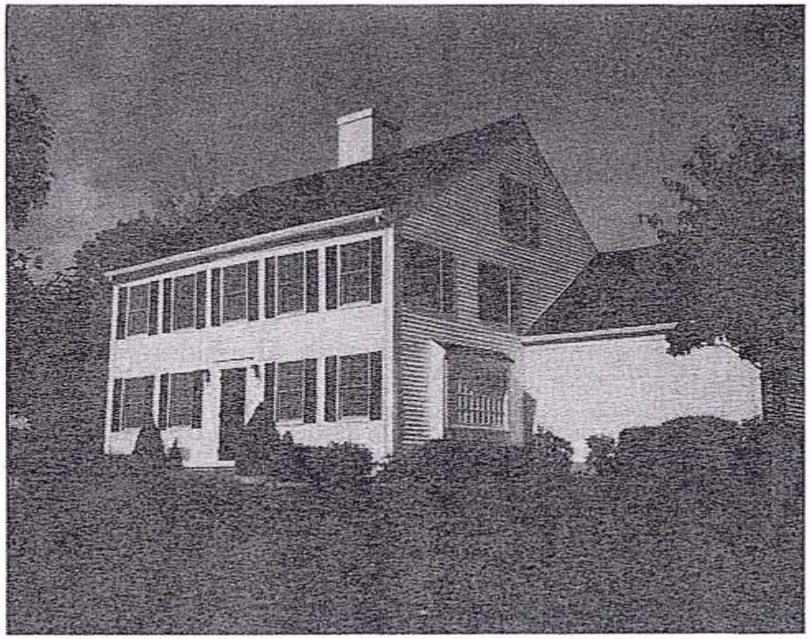
The lake is described poetically as a place for picturesque sailboats and national canoe regattas. Children learn to swim at the water's edge. Fish, big and small (including a couple of overgrown goldfish!) are hooked or evade the fisherman's lure. Families skate on large stretches of smooth ice on a bright sunny winter weekend. Columbia's "old smoothies," Ray and Junie Squier (when well into their seventies) enjoyed an annual, graceful skating outing on the winter ice. Boatloads of listeners drifted at twilight to hear barbershop choruses harmonize from the porch of a home on the east shore. We watch the sunset paint the sky and water at day's end and we KNOW — it IS a lake.

Moving Day
Library to Library and Hand to Hand

The Saxton B. Little Library

The old Saxton B. Little Free Library was a sad seventy-six years old in 1979. Its shelves were too limited for the growing town, there was neither running water nor restrooms, the heat was cranky at best and the building violated fire codes.

As with other structures in town, again came the question — renovate, build a new building or use some other building? A house-to-house survey was done and a Library Building Committee established. After a number of referendums, town meetings, petitions and four years of hard bargaining, the town voted to construct the new library at the site of the Rice homestead, saving as much as possible of the colonial house. The new Saxton B. Little Free Library, built for $472,000, was opened on November 24, 1985, with ribbon cutting and great



Saxton B. Little Free Library
A third Home

excitement. The move was a town affair with more than one hundred volunteers forming a human chain, passing the collections across the street and reshelving them in their new home.

The Board of Directors of the Library leases its quarters from the town for one dollar per year and operates the facility with town monies, state grants, private donations, income from funds and memorials and the help of an active Friends of the Library organization.

Today, in 1992, the library boasts a list of 3,000 patrons, a collection of 20,000 volumes, magazines, audio and video materials, computer facilities and more. Its circulation system is automated so inventory management and services are efficient for staff and patrons.

In December 1990 the old library building was renamed The Meeting Place. It was transformed under the devoted guidance of George Peters when the Library Board donated the building to the town and the town funded its reconstruction. It can be used by any town group by reserving it at the Town Hall.

Cemeteries

There are three cemeteries in Columbia. The oldest, The Old Yard Cemetery, is adjacent to St. Columba's church and is no longer used. The oldest grave there is dated in the early 1700s and veterans of the Revolution, as well as other citizens of long ago, are buried in its field.

The West Street Cemetery at the top of Utley Hill is overseen by the West Street Burying Ground Association. An addition of land in 1964 brought the area of this cemetery to one and one-half acres. The gate was widened and walls rebuilt.

The third cemetery, known as the Center Cemetery, is cared for by The Columbia Burying Ground Association. It is located behind The Meeting Place. In 1958 the Columbia Burying Ground Association purchased approximately ten acres for future use on the east side of Route 6 near the Andover line.

Memorial Day Observance
"Ray" Lyman — an unforgettable figure for over 50 years

On Memorial Day all three cemeteries are visited by residents of the town and with help from Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, respects are paid to former citizens. Taps is played, flowers laid and poetry read. Flags are placed on all veterans' graves.

Camp Asto Wamah

Tucked away in a western corner of Columbia Lake and far away from the main road, Camp Asto Wamah may be something of a mystery to many residents — unless they have heard

a bit of song drifting over the water on a summer evening or heard the gong of the dinner bell.

Camp Asto Wamah (said to mean "Clear Water" in the Indians' language) is run by the First Church of Christ of Hartford. Started in 1910, the forty-five acre camp with 840-foot shore front has seen many changes. The canvas-sided bunk houses of old were replaced with solid wooden cabins (but the sides remain open to catch that cool night air!). In 1956 a new facility housing arts and crafts, recreational activities and the camp dining hall was dedicated. Also a new Hungerford House, sleeping twenty-eight, replaced the old house. A building completed in 1976 has a large all-purpose room for a variety of activities. There is a five-room infirmary and a house for the year-round manager.

The camp motto, "Remember the Other Fellow," is lived by boys and girls from eight to fourteen for two-week periods. While in residence the campers enjoy swimming, boating, sailing, canoeing, arts and crafts, tennis and nature study.

Places of Business

Although Columbia is largely a residential town, there are a number of industries, particularly in the Route 6 area. In the nineteenth century, when small industry depended on water power, every stream and brook had its manufacturing establishment. Hats, linen, soap, ax helves, lumber and furniture were all made here. With the coming of electricity, these industries were eclipsed by larger city factories and the town became mostly agricultural and residential.

Today our largest employer is the Columbia Manufacturing Company located on Route 66 near Willimantic. It was founded in 1980, employs 125 workers and makes internal parts for jet engines. Besides its connection with Connecticut

jet engine manufacturers, it has world-wide involvements in its field.

Other establishments include a general store, gas stations, garages, an antique store, restaurants, beauty parlors, an oil company and a farm supply store. Columbia's first bank was Citizens Bank in 1974. Since then the building has been occupied by Connecticut Bank and Trust and the Savings Bank of Manchester, which opened in August 1991. There are also approximately 64 home-based businesses.

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Something to Crow About: Part I

Principal George Patros of Porter School has something to crow about. So friendly he must be someone's pet, a crow keeps flying in, sitting on teachers' and children's heads and shoulders and pecking away at ears and hair. One classroom was "evacuated" when the bird panicked and started dive-bombing in all directions. "He has to go — one way or the other," Patros said. He'd like the owner to take the bird in hand.

news item October 22, 1960

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Something to Crow About: Part II

The Porter School's crow, back after a weekend's rest, is what school authorities might call an all-around bird. Not only does the black feathered bird-brain visit classes on a regular basis, he (or she) has taken to extra-curriculars. In the true "feather-flocking" fashion, the crow has taken up foul catching. When baseballs get stuck on the roof, the crow has been seen to peck at them until they roll down.

news item November 27, 1960

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DEVELOPMENT

Few things remain static. We can probe what is written about our past and learn what we can from those who remember. We live with what we have become. The future remains to be molded and melded with the past. It is a delicate and challenging assignment. Can we protect our heritage and preserve what our way of life has become while we avoid disastrous incursion of our natural surroundings and our indigenous wildlife habitat?

Columbia, with an area of 21.9 square miles, was home to 1,327 persons according to the census of 1950 and grew to 4,487 residents by 1990. The biggest decade of growth came during the eighties when the number of residents increased by over 1,100.

n 1950 twenty-two housing permits were issued. Residential uilding increased gradually, reaching a peak during the uilding boom of the eighties when 113 permits were issued n one year.

he grand list in 1951 — at $2,030,027 — had just gone over ıe two million dollar mark for the first time. Forty years later, ı 1991, it was up to more than $132,000,000.

iaries written at the turn of the century, when few residents wned the "newfangled" automobile, indicate travel from ace to place might have been less convenient but far from stricted. Horse and wagon, trains from one of the two staıns in Columbia or trolleys from a nearby city could readily used for business or pleasure. In the twenties, one could en solicit transportation from Columbia's very own taxi vice run by Leslie Hill. Plans in 1968 to sell a portion of a lroad right-of-way of the former "Airline Branch" of the w York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad at Chestnut Hill ught nostalgia for the two railroad lines that once served

the town. As the railroads declined, highways were expanded to accommodate growing numbers of automobiles.

Roads and highways are interrelated with growth and development. Three state highways traverse Columbia. Route 6, sometimes called Andover-Willimantic Road, follows the Hop River along the northeast border of town. Jonathan Trumbull Highway (Route 87) and Middletown Road (Route 66) intersect at Columbia Center. Route 87 has a treacherous curve near Columbia Lake dam. In the late 1960s, the State Highway Department obtained legislation and a $600,000 appropriation to change the roadbed at that point. The proposed change would have been very invasive for area residents and would have threatened a hoped-for preservation and expansion of the ravine area by the Columbia Historical Society. For these reasons, the selectmen in January 1969 voted to "bow to the mandate of the people" and ask the legislature to rescind the project and return the appropriation. In March of 1969, fifty Columbia residents traveled to Hartford to back this request. The project was abandoned in May.

At about this time Route 6, with its curves and intersections, was becoming more and more congested and serious accidents were occurring too frequently. By 1968 plans for relocating and upgrading Route 6 were on file. Nearly twenty-five years after initial planning, relocation of the remaining section of Route 6 running northwest to Bolton Notch is still in the planning stage with four rerouting proposals under consideration as of this writing.

Route 66 also had hazardous sites. Folks can remember when a small traffic rotary and later two-way stop signs funneled traffic through Columbia Center. Short median strips on Route 87 and a traffic light now handle the flow. Another dangerous place was the intersection of Route 66 with Pine Street and Hennequin Road. Requests to the State Highway Department to install a flashing traffic light at this intersection were denied.

A safety study indicated the need for the light, the decision was reversed and approval for the light was granted.

Signs of the Times

wn roads were added as residential subdivisions carved up lumbia's farm and forest lands. In earlier years the select- n were directed by vote of a duly-warned town meeting to :ept as public highway any private road. Today developers nting to subdivide a tract of land must, according to town les, first lay out and build necessary roads. At least two ds laid out for earlier subdivisions did not originally meet cifications and were not accepted for some time. Such a ation meant inconvenient mail delivery and school bus <-ups, lack of snow plowing, etc. More than thirty new

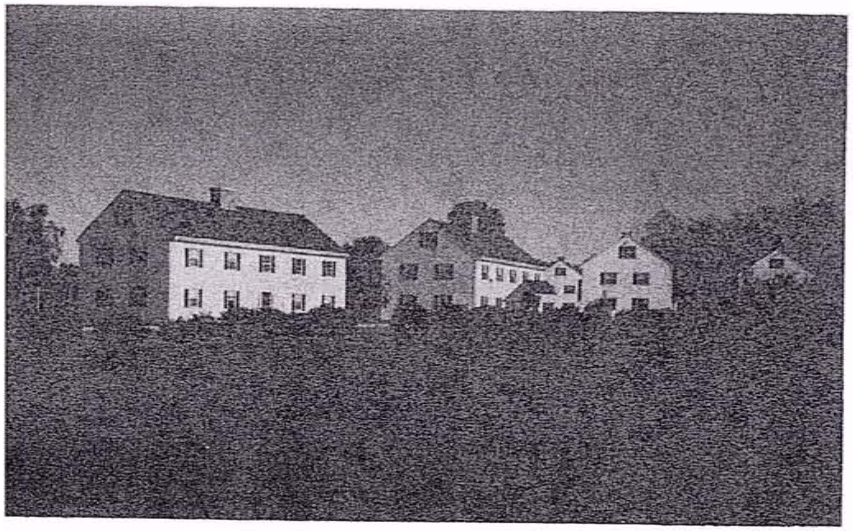
town roads ranging from "Bears Den Way" to "Yeomans Road" were added in the past forty years.

As the number of roads increased and other public property needed maintenance, it was necessary to hire the town's first director of public works, Peter Naumec.

Town officials met with the Windham Regional Planning Agency to discuss town planning in early 1976 and learned that Route 87, Lake Road, West Street and Robinson Road were designated scenic routes. The forecast was an historic district would someday extend from the center of town to Columbia Lake.

After World War II Columbia's character began to change rapidly from rural to suburban. Whereas residential homesites of a century ago were nearly all farms, today there are only three working farms. Most of today's residents do not work in Columbia but choose to live here in retirement or commit to a daily commute. Housing growth has been rather remarkable. The number of housing units grew from 1,107 in 1970 to a peak of 1,533 during the housing boom of the mid-eighties. The largest subdivision — seven new town roads and 112 new homes — is the Island Woods development near Mono Pond. More than forty subdivisions now appear in the town records.

Dartmouth Village is the town's first housing complex for the elderly and disabled. It contains twenty-four apartment units and some common areas. A long waiting list attests to the need for these homes.



Dartmouth Village

ıere has been some commercial and manufacturing develop-
ent along Route 6, in the Cards Mill Road area, on Route 66,
d at the center of town where business continues from pre-
ning days. The Columbia Shopping Center on Route 66 and
)lumbia Business Park house a variety of businesses and
ofessional offices. The garage, market and Inn are enter-
ses of long standing at Columbia Center.

veral proposed projects were not realized for one reason or
other. A proposed outdoor theater at the intersection of
utes 6 and 66 in 1951 was a subject of controversy at a
blic hearing. A proposal to construct a pet crematory in
84 was rejected. In late 1976 a plan to build a private
ortsmen's retreat called the "400 Club" in the Mono Pond
:a was proposed but never realized. This property was
ered to the town the following year but was passed over
:ause of a lack of state financing. The property was subse-
ently developed as Island Woods.

A five-hundred home exclusive development was proposed in the Post Hill area in the mid-1980s. The project was to be called the Columbia Club and was planned to include golf courses, an equestrian center and commercial center. It would have required zoning changes to allow planned area development. Residents in the area who did not welcome the proposal organized as "Concerned Citizens of Columbia" to oppose the concept. Although little has been heard concerning the proposal recently, zoning changes have not yet been made to permit this type of development.

After three years of work a new set of subdivision regulations went into effect late in 1992. One new feature allows a potential developer to submit a preliminary plan for review, affording an opportunity to clear up potential problems early in the process.

Regulatory guidelines for development are needed to control the town's growth. Zoning regulations came into effect soon after World War II and were updated several times. These regulations are formulated and administered by the Planning and Zoning Commission. There also are requirements of the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Regulations adopted in 1989.

The town's first Plan of Development was adopted during the 1991-92 fiscal year. It includes an overview of Columbia's growth and an outline of a growth plan for the future.

Regulatory agencies of the town which govern development include the Planning and Zoning Commission, Building Code Board of Appeals, Zoning Board of Appeals and the Inland Wetlands Commission. Town employees who administer the regulations include the town planner and zoning enforcement officer, building official and town sanitarian.

'en as our environment was becoming a national concern, lks in Columbia were already thinking about this land of our eritage.

r example, in the late 1950s the Tolland County Conserva-n Service was working with the U.S. Soil Conservation rvice to help four local farmers plan a farmland drainage oject near the Ten Mile River.

the spring of 1967, as well as in many subsequent years, a wn-wide "Rid Litter Day" was organized and pronounced an tstanding success. Roadsides, the town beach area and ner public areas were cleaned of litter. Even the town hall chen was scoured and cleaned. In 1970, the selectmen signated April 22 as "Environmental Action Day." School-ildren became involved in the 1970 "Earth Day" when fifth aders asked President Nixon and Governor Dempsey to peal for pollution cleanup. Spring 1991 saw Columbia's first dopt-a-Road" program with volunteers assigned to cover the wn and fill their trash bags with roadside litter.

early spring 1968, the Public Health Nursing Agency be-me concerned about an escalating odor problem from the nnecticut Bi-products Company, a subsidiary of a llimantic poultry processing plant. It was most unpleasant nearby residents on Route 6. By late summer, area resi-nts organized, calling themselves the Hop River Valley provement Association. They threatened to "storm the ice" of the state health commissioner in protest at lack of gress in cleaning up the mess at the plant. Within days, it s announced that the bi-products plant would close by vember 1 and local residents were soon "breathing easier." e problem, however, had not really disappeared. In summer 76, a representative of the association took reporters on a r of the building and grounds of the former plant. Although

the site was actually in Coventry, it was very close to homes in Columbia. After going bankrupt, the factory had been vacated and abandoned in about 1971, leaving behind cement pits half full of filthy water, weeds and trash, and barrels and piles of unidentifiable substances. The smell persisted. By December 1976, the town of Coventry reacted to pressure from Columbia officials and demolished the building and cleaned the area.

Lions Recycling Project

During the summer of 1968, the Windham Regional Planning Agency became more active. They held a meeting in Columbia to discuss our clean water and sewerage disposal concerns.

spring 1971, the "Friendship Circle," a small group of
omen at the Congregational Church, and a few other inter-
ted recruits caught the enthusiasm of Dorothy Greenway
id became very interested in conservation. Their first big
oject was a glass recycling program and their first recycling
y netted two tons of glass. (The next year three teenage
others helped with this project. It was estimated during that
ar twenty-seven tons of glass were collected!) Within two
onths the group convinced the Board of Selectmen to call a
ecial town meeting to see if the town would establish a
nservation Commission. By mid-June the newly organized
oup was ready for work. They investigated a recent fish kill
Columbia Lake. Nature walks along brooks in the commu-
y were organized. Town maps were prepared showing all
en space areas, wetlands and streambelt areas, and the
rious soil types. They met with the Planning and Zoning
mmission (PZC) to urge adoption of regulations to protect
ese areas. With the PZC they sponsored a public meeting to
ar the planning director of the Windham Regional Planning
ency speak about preservation of open space. Trees on the
wn Green were painted with creosote to deter a severe
estation of gypsy moths which stripped many trees bare of
ves. The Commission visited a Horace W. Porter School in-
vice program to acquaint teachers with available environ-
ental materials. A conservation plan was formulated and a
50 Ford Foundation grant was secured to publish the plan
pamphlet form and distribute to Columbia property owners.

e Conservation Commission became inactive during the
ly 1980s, but in January 1984 the selectmen reactivated the
up with a full slate of seven members. One of the first
ions of the revitalized group was to recommend the estab-
ment of an Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commis-
n. This group prepared regulations approved by the Con-
cticut Department of Environmental Protection and adopted
the Commission in 1989. These regulations require ap-
val before the start of any work within seventy-five feet of

any wetlands in town. In 1991 the town sanitarian was appointed the agent of the Commission.

During 1968 and 1969 a Columbia Historical Society committee recommended that the "Ravine," the town-owned property at the outlet of Columbia Lake, be designated as open space and that the area be cared for and preserved. The property covered about an acre and was deeded to the town by the American Thread Co. when the lake was purchased. Arrangements were made to purchase an additional approximately thirty-six acres of adjoining land south of the Ravine for $9,000. An undetermined amount on the north side was also under negotiation. It soon became apparent that plans to straighten the roadbed of Route 87 at that point would severely impact this project. By summer 1969, the project was tabled pending further information, and the abutting parcel of land was no longer available as it had been sold. But a positive result of this effort was (at the request of the Columbia Historical Society) a designation change on the Planning and Zoning Commission map from "Mountain Reserve" to "Open Space" — terminology necessary to receive any federal or state open space funds.

In 1977 the owner of a large undeveloped area around Mono Pond offered to sell the acreage to the town for recreation purposes for three-quarters of the appraisal price of $900,000. The Conservation Commission was in favor of the purchase, but hoped-for federal assistance of up to fifty percent of the purchase price, plus twenty-five percent from state funding, was unavailable and the opportunity was missed. The area, now called Island Woods, was then extensively developed with residential housing. The town still hopes to negotiate with the state and the present owners for purchase of the pond and the remaining approximately 180 acres of undeveloped land.

ıree areas within the town are natural preserves and are vned by Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust. This ganization was formed in 1966 and takes its name from shua, son of Uncas, the Mohegan chief. Joshua bequeathed ract of land in eastern Connecticut (which now comprises e ten towns in the Windham Regional Planning Agency ea) to sixteen settlers from Norwich.

ıe Utley Hill Preserve, located off Lake Road across from doni Road, was given to Joshua's Trust in 1978 by George d Patricia Becker. This Joshua's Trust tract at one point uts "Rec Field" off Hennequin Road. It consists of about 125 res and adjoins an additional approximately forty-seven res purchased for $75,000 in 1987. These two tracts comise a precious ecological and historical treasure. The upland amp which drains into Columbia Lake Brook and Columbia ke constitutes a very large portion of the watershed area of e lake. A century or more ago, the significant vertical drop the stream was utilized for water power and the remains of ır dams can still be seen. At least two mill sites existed ong the brook. One was probably a sawmill and another an -and-down shingle mill which later was used as a grist mill. ıe entire area is beautiful and a wonderful habitat for a riety of wildlife.

two and one-half acre parcel was given to the trust by nnie Goldberg and abuts the Hop River across from the lumbia Shopping Center. This area is inaccessible except water, but a Hop River excursion is recommended for even vice canoeists.

ıother preserve known as the Potter Meadow was the gift of hiteall Properties, Ltd. to Joshua's Trust in 1988. It consists a flood plain at the confluence of the Willimantic and Ten le Rivers at the point where Windham, New London and lland Counties intersect. It is accessible from the parking lot

of the Columbia Business Park off Cards Mill Road. Trails and floating bridges were built by Boy Scouts. The area supports a variety of wildlife. As early as the 1830s the land was used by the Potter family to graze farm animals. Before then it was owned by the Buckingham family. The Buckinghams were among Columbia's first settlers and were conservators of Uncas, father of Joshua.

* * * * * * * * * *

Draw Fast But . . . Tree Was Loaded

Two Columbia men made the fastest draw in the woods when they came upon a loaded tree. The men were sawing down a tree when they struck metal. They stopped sawing and started digging and found a cache of nine .22 caliber bullets in the tree trunk. The pocket hiding the bullets was covered with dirt. The "quick draw" of the saw paid off. Six of the bullets were "dead." With the other three, the tree might have shot back when the saw hit.

news item March 23, 1962

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A trip down memory lane would surely be incomplete if our friendly traveling vendors of the '50s and '60s were omitted. How often did the Good Humor or A & W truck reach the ears of our suddenly hungry youngsters? How convenient it was to enjoy fresh bread and pastries when the Viking or Bond Bread vehicles appeared in our driveways! Pickup trucks or vans bearing vegetables, meat and fish were eagerly awaited by residents, eliminating many a trip to the local store. Today, the sole survivor of those cherished days is Mountain Dairy, which after forty-five years, still makes twice-weekly deliveries in Columbia.

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OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Storms

We all know if you dislike New England weather, you only have to "wait a minute." In January 1967, Columbia had a reported record-breaking temperature of 65 degrees that brought snowdrop flowers into bloom! Two years later, during a post-Christmas storm that dropped twelve inches of snow on the town, an ice-covered (but still singing) bluebird was found and brought inside to thaw out in its rescuer's Christmas tree!

Hurricane "Carol" blew across Long Island and New England in August 1954, killing sixty people and injuring about a thousand. Columbia suffered considerable damage to trees, power lines and at least one home. A building at "firemen's field" was demolished, a newly built ten-acre pond on Route 66 overflowed and water cascaded over a small dam.

After a summer of drought and heat waves, August 1955 brought hurricane "Diane" hard on the heels of her somewhat lesser sister "Connie." "Diane" gathered momentum for two weeks, wandering up the east coast of the United States causing about 400 deaths. She dumped 12.7 inches of rain on Connecticut in a twenty-four hour period on August 19, causing widespread flooding. Locally, severe flooding occurred along Route 6 and the Hop River in Columbia. Businesses, a vacant home and a seasonal cottage were inundated — at one time by more than six feet of water.

Hurricane "Donna" came along in 1960, but caused little damage except to trees. Road crews and firemen were kept very busy in the spring of 1970 when roads and cellars were flooded during very heavy rains. A guard dog at Connecticut Auto Sales was rescued by firemen from the rising water of the Hop River.

The late seventies saw very diverse weather. Hurricane "Belle" blew in during August 1976 causing about 500 power outages. The gate in the Columbia Lake dam was opened as a precaution. The following May, when lilacs and apple trees were in full bloom, two to three inches of snow dropped on our town, weighing down the fully leafed trees! Winter storm "Larry" arrived in January 1978, shutting down much of the state, collapsing the roof of the newly-built Civic Center in Hartford and keeping crews busy clearing roads of snow. Locally, the fire marshal checked the roof of the Horace W. Porter School and was satisfied the school could be safely reopened.

In June 1982 we saw rain — so much that the water crested twenty inches over the spillway at the dam and volunteers had to be called out to help put sandbags in place. Also, a section of Jones Road washed out.

In fall 1985 Hurricane "Gloria" caused damage to power lines and trees and blew a bumper crop of acorns to the ground.

War

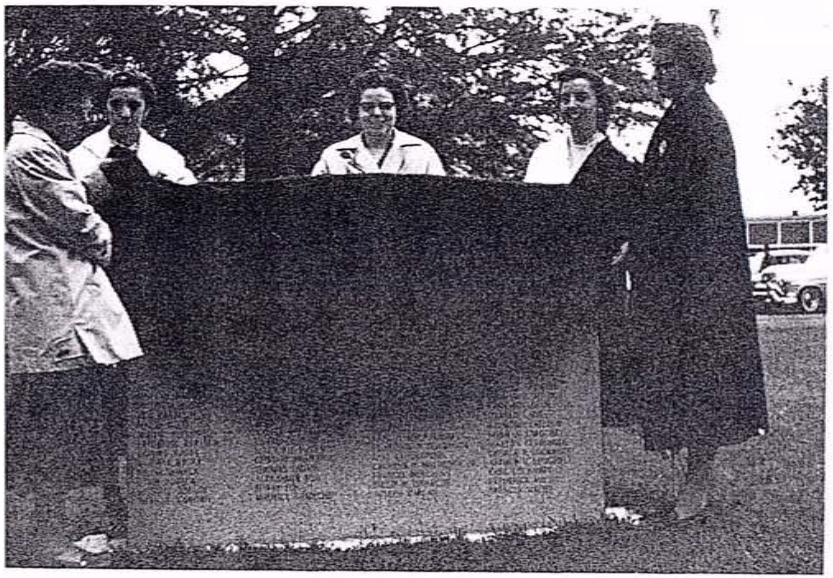
After World War II the effects of war and threat of war continued to be felt in Columbia as well as in the rest of our country.

In 1950 the United States was drawn into the Korean conflict, and our military units fought there until war ended in 1953. According to a plaque presented to the town in 1974 and displayed in the Town Hall, thirty-three Columbia residents served their country during the Korean War.

The Vietnam War lasted an interminable fourteen years — from 1961 to 1975. The names of twenty-seven men and one woman military nurse appear on the Vietnam honor roll in the

own Hall. Later it was determined eighteen additional names ere inadvertently omitted and should be added. In Septem- er 1968 the Columbia Chapter of the American Red Cross nt a shipment of "Santa Claus Bags" to American servicemen Vietnam.

t least eight Columbia men and women served in the Persian ulf War in 1991.



World War II Memorial dedicated

ter World War II, a local civil defense program planned fety measures applicable at the home front in the event of an nergency. Yearly air raid alerts were held until about 1961. early July 1957 Columbia participated in a two-day national vilian defense test — "Operation Alert." A control center as set up at Yeomans Hall. Key personnel were to report to e control center at the start of the "take cover" alert, when traffic was stopped for thirteen minutes.

Public buildings and private homes were surveyed during the Cold War for possible use as nuclear fall-out shelters. Local civil defense directors and school administrators were invited to attend a workshop on the implementation of a state survival plan. School systems were required to prepare emergency plans for natural or man-made disasters and civil defense alerts were routinely practiced.

From 1961 and for more than thirty years, John Sullivan served as civil defense director. During his long service Mr. Sullivan, a ham radio operator and member of the American Radio Relay League, was instrumental in organizing the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES), an emergency radio communications network. These capable amateur radio operators participated in periodic tests of equipment and skills while encamped on Post Hill, Columbia's highest elevation. The June 1971 nationwide short-wave exercises continued for a twenty-seven hour period. The following June three complete radio stations were set up to participate in what was then called the world's largest test of non-commercial emergency communications.

Improved Telephone Service

On June 2, 1954, the cornerstone for Columbia's very own telephone building on Route 66 was laid. It would house dial switching equipment. Sealed into a special copper box and mortared into the cornerstone by Selectman Clair Robinson were copies of area newspapers, a telephone directory and other documents of interest. Mr. Robinson reminisced that when he was a child, all telephones in Hebron and Columbia were on the same line with three telephones in each town. Telephones in Columbia were located in George Fuller's post office, the home of Mary Yeomans and the Robinson home.

At 7:00 on a Sunday morning in early December 1954, the cable was cut separating the Columbia "**AC**ademy" office from the Willimantic "**HA**rrison" office, and Mr. Robinson dialed the first call to open the new system. Approximately seven hundred telephones were then controlled from the new office, including private, two-party and four-party lines.

Further improvements were made in 1960 after new equipment was installed in the local telephone building, enabling Columbia to become a completely separate exchange. An enlarged local calling area and reduced rates to nearby exchanges now became possible.

During 1989 the enhanced 911 emergency telephone system went into effect for Columbia, enabling residents to obtain quick and efficient assistance using the national emergency number.

If we reflect on the growth of communications technology over these past forty years, we could ponder the wonders that lie beyond our present portable phones, cellular phones, direct long-distance dialing and machines that answer and take messages for us!

Electricity

A century ago most sources of power came from the fuel that drove engines or lit lamps, the rushing water that drove mill wheels, and the muscles of work animals or a person's own back.

Today most of Columbia's electrical power is distributed through the Northeast Utilities electrical substation at the corner of Route 87 and Szegda Road. In 1990 there were 2,769 metered customers in Columbia.

Underground electrical installations started in the late 1960s and included a half dozen or fewer homes. After 1972 most new housing developments were built with underground installation.

A 345,000-volt electrical transmission line traverses Columbia from east to northwest. This line carries power from the Millstone plant in Waterford to the electrical complex on Silver Lane in Manchester.

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A motorcycle skidded under a cow.
As a motorcyclist neared the top of a knoll on Flanders Road, he saw a herd of cows crossing the road in front of him. In an attempt to avoid the herd, he tipped his vehicle which skidded between the cow's legs. The rider suffered eye injuries. No one was sure what happened to the cow.

news item

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Between the state and the town, the cart got placed firmly before the horse in the summer of 1978.

What happened is that federal money, and apparently state highway crews, were expended on painting the yellow stripes on town secondary roads. That would have been very nice, except that the town roads were scheduled to be tarred the first of the next month, a job that eliminated the new road stripes.

news item July 20, 1978

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ı contrast to the earlier years of the 1900s when Columbia ad relatively few, today the town has a variety of organiza- ons and community activities. This could be explained by ıe town's more recent growth and development resulting in a reater number of people with more diversified backgrounds, ılents and interests.

A busy Place most every Night

ıerican Red Cross

ways alert to the needs of the community, the Columbia ıapter of the American Red Cross served the people of ɔlumbia for seventy-two years. Originating in 1917, the ganization consisted totally of volunteers who met annually Yeomans Hall to elect officers and deliver reports of chapter tivities performed during the year.

In 1989 the Columbia Chapter, which also included the towns of Hebron and Andover, merged with the long-established Willimantic group, and the Greater Willimantic Chapter of the American Red Cross was born. It is this philanthropic group which today makes itself available to Columbia residents through its office in Willimantic.

Services of the Red Cross include: disaster relief; community education; assistance to military families; international tracing of family members; classes in swimming, first aid, CPR and water safety; blood drives; and AIDS prevention and awareness information.

Bicentennial Commission

Columbia's participation in the American Revolution Bicentennial celebration was coordinated by the seven-member Bicentennial Commission. The Commission invited representatives from all town organizations to join with them to plan and oversee a variety of activities over a three-year period. From 1973 to 1976 the number of events continued to increase, culminating in a week-long celebration in June 1976.

In 1974, 1975 and 1976, the week of June 10 was designated as "Bicentennial Week." Bicentennial Week 1974 included the announcement of the Bicentennial Seal contest. Chosen from many entries was Barney Spector's design depicting Columbia Lake and Moor's Indian School. This seal became the official town seal and is still used today on all official documents and publications.

Bicentennial Week 1975 gave Columbia residents several opportunities to celebrate together. Whether it was attending a band concert on the Green, watching a craft demonstration or enjoying an old-fashioned beanhole supper, almost everyone found a way to take part in the festivities.

One of the largest parades ever held in Columbia was the climax of the 1976 Bicentennial Week. Most local organizations, as well as those from surrounding towns, sponsored floats, bands or marchers.

One of the most memorable events was the 1976 "melting pot-luck supper." The supper honored "twentieth century pilgrims" — those Columbia residents of foreign birth. Each person attending brought a native dish. Many dressed in native costumes, while others entertained with native dances, songs and music.

On July 4, 1976, residents of Columbia gathered on the Town Green to join with citizens all over the country in one simultaneous event. At exactly twelve noon, everyone rang bells, blew whistles or banged on pans to celebrate the birth of our nation.

Other Bicentennial activities included an old house tour featuring a progressive dinner, colonial crafts, adult education classes, a flag display and many, many picnics and suppers.

Funds were made available to restore the Moor's Indian Charity School. The Bicentennial Commission oversaw the project. Later the town gave the Historical Society the responsibility for maintaining the school.

As one of their contributions to the celebrations, the Columbia Historical Society sponsored the publication of *School Memories 1732-1948*. This book describes education in Columbia during the era of the one-room schools.

Boy Scouts of America

Scouting has had a strong influence on our young people over the years. Many great experiences and memories resulted from Scouting's character development, citizenship training and personal fitness programs for both boys and adults. Numerous service projects contributed to the town, including holiday parades, glass recycling, collections for the needy and marking trails in the Joshua Trust tracts. At least thirty young men have achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, including the five brothers of the Clarence Grant family — a local Scout council record. The Columbia Boy Scout troops have been well represented at various district and council activities, taking home far more than their share of honors and awards. Their performance can be attributed to the many adults who dedicated their time to lead young people along the path to adulthood.

Family of Eagle Scouts
The Grant Family

In 1946 Dr. Ralph Wolmer, President of the Parent Teacher Association, started a Cub Scout program in Columbia. Membership has fluctuated from a low of seven Cubs in 1981 to a high of seventy-six Cubs and Tiger Cubs in 1992. In 1975 the Columbia Volunteer Fire Department assumed the charter for Cub Scout Pack 62, and in 1977 it was passed to the Knights of Columbus. In 1987 the Lions Club became the chartered organization, now serving both the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts in town.

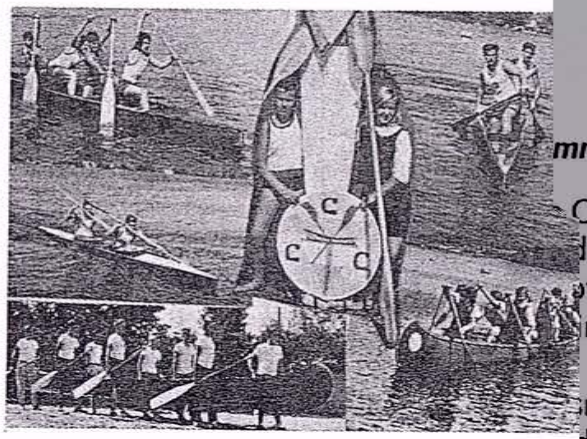
Boy Scout Troop 62 was originally chartered to the Parent Teacher Association in December 1942. For fifteen years Scoutmaster Wilbur Fletcher introduced the young men of Columbia to the great world out-of-doors through the Boy Scout program. Fletcher also oversaw an Exploring program for older Scouts during all the 1950s. Membership in the troop ranged in size from eight Scouts in 1948 to sixty Scouts and

Explorers in 1959. In fact, Troop 62 became so large it was necessary to form a second troop in 1959. Among the many memorable outings and expeditions over the years, the highlight must be winning first place in competition with 60,000 other Scouts, in the monkey bridge-building competition at the 1960 National Scout Jamboree in Colorado Springs, Colorado. In 1965 the Lions Club assumed the responsibility of being the chartered organization. Troop 62 continued its strong traditions until March 1979. Declining enrollment caused it to cease operation and merge with Troop 162.

Through the years Boy Scout Troop 162 had a very active outdoor program that included major canoeing and mountain-climbing treks all over New England. Membership in the troop fluctuated from a low of nine Scouts in 1983 to a high of forty-two in 1968 and 1969. In 1973 Scoutmaster Herbert Winkler led a contingent of Scouts to the National Scout Jamboree at Morraine State Park in Pennsylvania, where they joined with approximately 30,000 other Scouts for a week of Scouting adventures — and rain. After several years of planning and fundraising, Scoutmaster Morris Stewart led an expedition of older Scouts to the Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimmaron, New Mexico, where they hiked the Sangre de Cristo mountains for ten days.

The Canoe Club

The Columbia Canoe Club was organized in 1961 under the leadership and coaching of Delthena "Pat" Murphy. During the 1960s it participated in and sponsored a number of local and national regattas. Early morning and late evening, members practiced daily in kayaks and canoes, pacing to the call of Pat's "Stroke, stroke." They collected bottles and papers to purchase the many elegant craft of their fleet.



Columbia Canoe Club
Champions All!!

any in town remember the 1964 National Canoe
eld on Columbia Lake, with participants coming f
very state in the nation. Homes or camping spots
r all and race lanes were set up on the lake. The
on a number of top honors in these races.

1967 parents loaded the "war canoe" and other
cars and vans and headed for Canada where me
mpeted in the Expo held in Montreal. At other ti
urneyed to the Bear Mountains, Washington D.C
nnsylvania, camping out with their families.

1966 two members of the Columbia club were n
e United States team for the World Championshi
rlin, Germany. Participating were Dennis Murph
bert Fletcher.

unded as an independent club, it was for a perio
der the sponsorship of the Recreation Council. A
again independent, operating at the Mansfield Da
ere is a Pat Murphy trophy.

mmunity Players

Columbia Community Players, organized in 1954, con-
d of people from the towns of Willimantic, Coventry,
over and Columbia. They had a common bond — per-
ng for the public.

small stage and pine panelling in Yeomans Hall always
d a challenge to the enthusiastic members of the organi-
n. These thespians staged one or two productions each
for the ten years of the Players' existence. The plays were
ly sponsored by one of the local organizations, such as
.T.A., Lions Club or Fire Department.

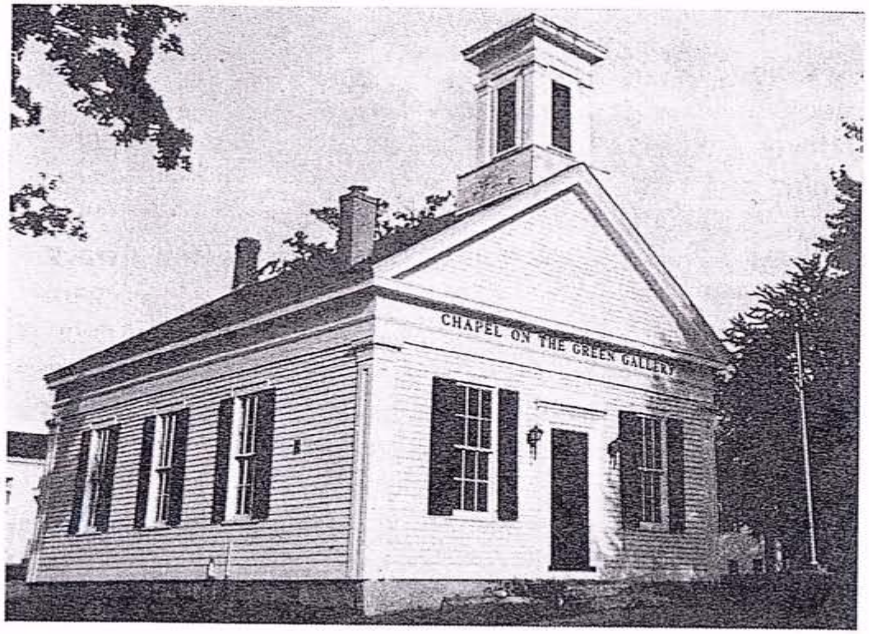
ences usually found the acting, singing and dancing good
re and wholesome entertainment.

cil on the Arts, Inc.

Columbia Council on the Arts, organized in 1982, is
ated to the enhancement of all forms of art in Columbia.
group invites individuals or organizations interested in
ving this goal to join their membership.

Council has a seal, designed in 1982, with four quadrants.
quadrants depict the Greek masks of comedy and
dy, Moor's Indian Charity School, the lamp of learning
grapevine representing the growing interrelationship of
ts in Connecticut.

82 the Chapel on the Green Gallery was leased from the
regational Church and remodeled and refurbished by
bers of the Council. It is the only professional art gallery
lland County and regularly features exhibits by artists,
ns and craftsmen.



Chapel on the Green Gallery
Tolland County's only professional Art Gallery

Other events sponsored by the Council include the Summer Concert Series, a Summer Music Theatre for children and youth and organized trips to places of cultural interest or performing arts events. The Council also presents scholarships and awards to Columbia students in the performing and creative arts.

4-H Clubs

During the 1950s and 1960s many Columbia 4-H clubs gave boys and girls opportunities to participate in a variety of projects such as gardening, woodworking, cooking, sewing and dairying.

In 1976 a group of 4-Hers added crafts to their traditional 4-H projects. As part of this project, they organized and sponsored an annual Festival on the Green. Columbia craftsmen and gardeners were invited to set up tables on the Green to display and sell their handiwork. Today the Festival on the Green continues under the sponsorship of the Columbia Historical Society.

The Garden Club

The Columbia Garden Club was organized in 1987 to foster local interest in home gardens, annuals, perennials and landscaping. Among its activities are several annual community projects which include planting around the two War Memorials on the Green and a Christmas decorating contest. The group also sponsors trips to special gardens and nature preserves.

The Girl Scouts

The Girl Scout movement in Columbia began in 1938 when Leona Wolmer, assisted by Jean Natsch, organized the first troop. From its modest beginning, members increased through the years to well over one hundred girls participating in the Scouting program today.

Jean Natsch's many years as leader of Girl Scout activities constitute an important part of this organization's history. Her dedicated service was honored by the town in 1974, when a special "Jean Natsch Day" was designated. Five years later, a ceremony was held when she was awarded a pin in honor of her fifty years in Girl Scouting.

The Girl Scout troops of the 1950s were divided into Brownies, Juniors, Seniors and Cadette Scouts. All units were mem-

bers of the Eastern Connecticut Girl Scout Council. Weekly troop meetings were held in Yeomans Hall.

In the 1970s Girl Scouting was updated. Nationally, the Girl Scout Laws and promise were revised in 1972, resulting in a change in programming. Keeping to the motto "Be Prepared," the local troops reached out more to ethnic and minority groups. International presentations were held each February to emphasize this theme.

A Cup of Tea with the Girl Scouts

During the bicentennial years, the troops carried out a special project of learning colonial crafts, while the older girls took many backpacking trips to the Adirondacks. Other programs included a water conservation unit, a folk dance festival with thirteen troops from area towns participating, blazing a nature trail in the Recreation Field area and enjoying some shared activities with the Boy Scouts. The highest award at that time was the Curved Bar, which remained a goal yet to be achieved by Columbia Scouts.

In 1992 approximately 120 Girl Scouts from Columbia were registered at the Connecticut Trails Council office in North

Haven. Each of the seven local troops operates independently. Weekly meetings are still held at Yeomans Hall, and all Scouts join together at a closing ceremony in the spring when Scouts "fly up" to the next level. International programs have been expanded into "Thinking Days." Columbia activities are focused on cookie sales, participation in the Festival on the Green, parades, summer attendance at Camp Laurel in Lebanon, and earning awards in pursuit of the coveted Gold Award.

Supervision of Columbia's Scouts and the most recently formed "Daisy" troop is now under the leadership of the Jonathan Trumbull Service Unit of Lebanon and Columbia. A Christmas party and an annual camporee are held jointly by Columbia and Lebanon Girl Scouts.

Grange #131

The Grange is a fraternal organization that evolved out of the many farmers' clubs organized after the Civil War. It is national (with state and local chapters) and offers members opportunities for socialization, entertainment and community service. The progression of attainable degrees and the secrecy of the ritual contribute to the status of being a Granger.

Columbia Grange #131 was organized at a meeting held at Bascom Hall (today's Landmark) in 1892 and was a major local organization through the World War II era. The Columbia Grange sponsored scholastic awards, gave financial assistance to local disaster victims and donated many gifts, including a new stage curtain for Yeomans Hall. Columbia has enjoyed many imaginative programs through the years. Picnics, musical programs, three-act plays, a mock trial, a wedding gown pageant and a fiftieth anniversary production of the first local Grange meeting were created and produced by a succession of local Grange Lecturers.

Grange #131
Nearly 100 Years of Service

A diminished local focus on agriculture and the competition of other activities took their toll on local Grange membership and attendance. It became increasingly difficult to meet National Grange-mandated quorum requirements. Sadly, on January 15, 1992, less than two months shy of its one hundredth anniversary, the Charter of Columbia Grange #131 was revoked. Plans for the anticipated anniversary celebration had nowhere to go.

The Historical Society

In 1966 a small group of interested residents organized as the Columbia Historical Society — its principal goal the restoration and maintenance of Moor's Indian Charity School. Since then many timely exhibits and programs were held in the

Indian School on holidays and during special town events, such as the Festival on the Green. In addition a collection of Columbia artifacts and memorabilia is maintained and preserved there. During the year Historical Society meetings encourage historical research through programs and speakers on various subjects.

They also sponsored the writing and printing of several studies. These include *School Memories 1732-1948*, a history of the town's one-room schools, and *Columbia Libraries 100th Anniversary 1883-1983*. The Society financed a reprint of *The Story of Columbia*, written in 1954 by the Women's Guild of the Congregational Church and sponsored the writing and printing of this volume, *The Story of Columbia Continues ...* .

In 1982 when the mechanism of the original dam gate at Columbia Lake was restored, the Society presented a plaque dedicated to the former keepers of the dam. A major history preservation project, being conducted by the Oral History Committee of the Society, is the taping of interviews with Columbia people recalling their experiences of earlier days in town.

Homemakers Extension Groups

Under the aegis of the Extension Service at the Tolland County Agricultural Center (TAC), three Columbia groups formed dedicated to furthering homemaking skills — the Columbia Homemakers, the Calicoes and the Villagers. Leadership training was given at TAC headquarters and those skills were brought to local groups who met in private homes. Sewing, reupholstering, canning and quilting were studied. Many were group members for thirty or more years, enjoying the companionship of friends while learning the homemaking arts. Today two groups remain, although they are no longer affiliated with TAC.

The Lions Club

The Columbia Lions Club was organized in August 1955 when the twenty-one original members and their guests met at the Willimantic Country Club to receive their Charter. William S. Burnham provided the inspiration for starting the club and served as the first president. The club's gong and gavel were presented by the Lebanon Lions who, with the Willimantic Lions, acted as the club's sponsors.

The club is part of Lions International. Its name (**L**iberty, **I**ntelligence, **O**ur **N**ation's **S**afety) and motto, "We Serve," indicate its emphasis on service. Fellowship, locally as well as world-wide, is also an important factor. Vision conservation is a particular focus of all Lions Clubs. The local club conducts annual eye research fund drives, sponsors glaucoma screening and offers financial assistance for vision care in cases of local need.

Among the many community projects sponsored by the Lions are the annual good citizenship and outstanding athlete awards to graduates of Horace W. Porter School. They have donated an audiometer to the school. The club has presented a service truck, an ice rescue sled and Scott Air Packs to the Columbia Volunteer Fire Department. They built a skating rink and the William "Buzz" Burnham Pavilion at the Columbia Recreation Area. They awarded a $5,000 grant to the computer program of the Saxton B. Little Free Library. To enhance the attractiveness of the Green, they planted rows of maple trees and donated the gazebo, the lighted flagpole at the World War II Memorial, outdoor benches and the landscaping at the Meeting Place. The club built the original beach house at the Community Beach and purchased tables for Yeomans Hall.

The Lions fund their various projects by sponsoring pancake breakfasts, barbecues, auctions and entertainments.

Independence Day Parade

For more than thirty years, Columbia has celebrated the Fourth of July with a community parade sponsored and organized by the Lions Club.

The Recreation Council

From the time of its organization in 1946, the Recreation Council was a vital part of the community life. Its goal is "to promote and sponsor recreational activities for the people of Columbia." In a report given at its twentieth anniversary observance it was noted sixteen different types of recreational programs were in operation at that time.

What started as weekly square dances for teen-agers expanded to programs of softball, baseball, hobby shows, Fourth of July

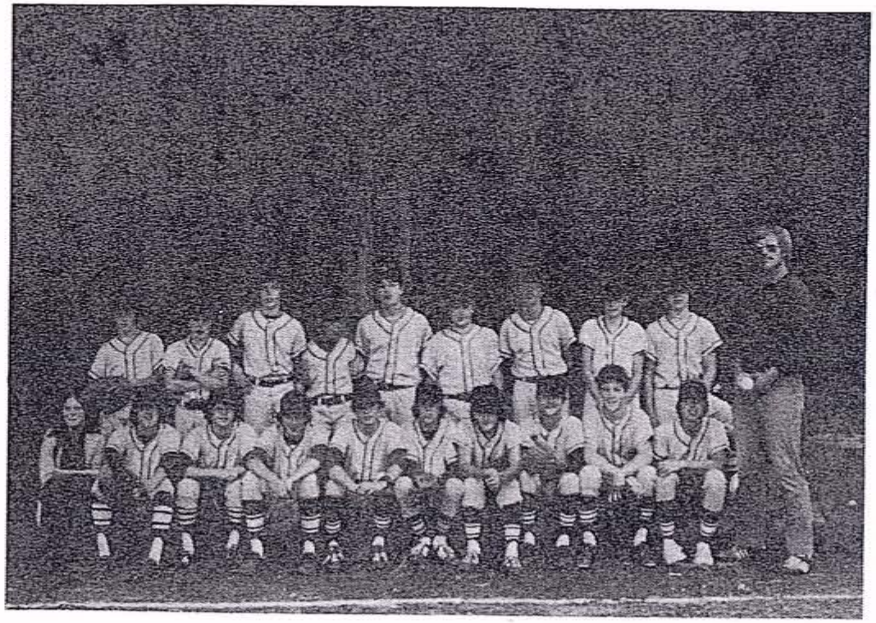
parades, "Rec" nights at the high school and town hall, a photography club, skiing, archery, hockey, canoeing, art courses, swimming lessons, ballroom dancing, Christmas tree lighting and caroling at the Green — and more!

Slow Dancing at "Rec" Council Social

Two members who devoted many years of service to the earlier days of the Council were Dr. Ralph Wolmer, founder of the organization, who served for twenty-four years on the Council, and Jean Natsch, who was secretary for thirty years.

Today the Council sponsors both adult and youth programs. Open men's basketball takes place in the school gym on Monday evenings and a Sunday evening group plays adult volleyball. The youth program offers fall soccer for boys and girls, basketball and baseball (in steps of T-ball, Farm Team, Little League, Pony and Colt teams). At the end of each summer since 1990 they have offered "Rec Week," a day camp of various activities for children three through ten.

Starting in 1982, soccer camp is held in the fields at Recreation Park, culminating in the Nassiff Columbus Day Soccer Tournament. This contest started as a one-day event with twenty-four teams participating and has grown to several days, with 116 area teams competing.



A Champion Pony League Team — 1976

The Retirees' Leisure Club

The Columbia Retirees' Leisure Club was organized in 1979 to provide a means of social and recreational life for seniors. It is open to all Columbia residents at least sixty years old.

The semi-monthly meetings are social hours where members can share activities and conversation. The club sponsors field trips throughout the year to places of seasonal or scenic interest. A special annual Christmas program is held and includes dinner and entertainment.

The club's programs feature speakers on health-related topics. They also sponsor flu shots and blood pressure clinics.

The Volunteer Fire Department

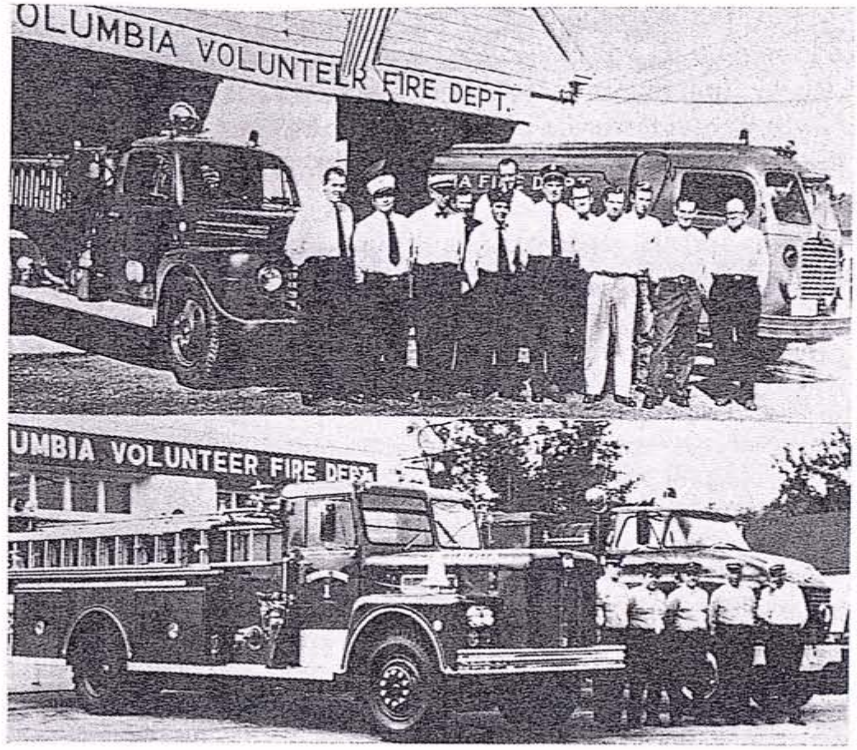
The Columbia Volunteer Fire Department, organized in 1947, has delivered forty-five years of outstanding volunteer protection and security for the residents of Columbia.

Constructed in 1947, the original firehouse on Route 66 was enlarged twice. The 1967 and 1972 additions provided more space for emergency equipment, as well as kitchen, dining room and meeting hall facilities.

As the local area serviced by the fire department grew, equipment was replaced and updated. Columbia now has an impressive fleet of six vehicles including three engine tanks, a service truck, an ambulance and a rescue truck. With the acquisition of the ambulance, the town discontinued its membership in the Inter-County Ambulance Association and entered into an agreement with the fire department to provide the community with emergency service. All such calls are now handled by specially trained Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs).

In 1969 the Columbia Volunteer Fire Department transferred from its Tolland Mutual Aid System affiliation to the Willimantic area switchboard. When the fire alarm sounds, the firemen respond promptly — all active members are equipped with pagers for instant notification.

The department holds frequent drills in methods of fire-fighting and rescue work for its members. Additionally, a trained corps of Fire Police controls traffic at calls where such protection is needed.



Forty-five Years of Service

Other activities of the firemen were and are many and varied. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the Annual Fair was the social event of the summer season and a major fund-raising activity for the community. The firemen provided entertainment for the children of Columbia by holding Easter Egg Hunts and Halloween and Christmas parties. Instructional open houses are held at the fire station for school children in the lower grades. The Christmas season is enhanced when "jolly old Santa" climbs atop a fire truck and visits town shut-ins.

From 1964 to 1979 an active Women's Auxiliary aided the department financially. In situations involving long hours of fire-fighting or prolonged emergency calls, refreshments for

the firemen were provided by the group. Due to a lack of active participants the Auxiliary eventually disbanded, but those remaining were rewarded with honorary memberships in the Volunteer Fire Department.

Admission to the Columbia Volunteer Fire Department was opened to women in 1975. The current membership reports 106 men and six women on its roster — trained, equipped, and ready to respond when catastrophe strikes.

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What goes "Beep, beep, beep" at 5:00 am at the Porter School? For a month, the school principal, fire chief, a State police officer, the Board of Education chairman and others pondered the question. Theories considered and rejected were a device on the school boilers, the school fire alarm system, some sort of signal at the firehouse, a Volkswagen horn, a particular bird scratching his feet while perched on a TV antenna and the mating call of the woodcock. After a month of trying to track down the sound, it was finally determined to be a nearby neighbor's snooze alarm which went off every morning at 5:00 am.

news items April 7 & May 3, 1967

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When a fire broke out at 8:20 one morning, two volunteer firemen answered the call. It was a car fire, so the two men had jumped quickly into the pumper, driving less than a mile in response to the alarm. When they arrived, they looked in the truck and found no hose, no ax, no pick or shovel — no equipment whatsoever!!! All the two could do was watch! Mother Hubbard had nothing on these two men. Footnote: That's all anyone could have done — the car was too far gone anyway.

news item

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To anyone whose name we have missed, our apologies. The collecting and preparing of material took place over a two-year period and it is possible we have overlooked a few names.