



The Town of Columbia, Connecticut Historical Archive and Collection

The Town of Columbia, Connecticut Historical Archive and Collection is a non-circulating archive comprised primarily of one of a kind 19th and 20th century documents, photographs, news clippings, announcements, programs, letters, books, maps, and scrapbooks pertaining to the governance of the Town, Town events, religious and social institutions, family genealogies, and individuals. The materials include Selectmen's orders; School Committee orders; family bibles; materials pertaining to the development of local roads, highways, and railroads; minutes of Town Committees and societies; church histories; National Register designations and National Park Service studies; summaries of old houses dating to the early 1700s; and articles concerning Columbia's 19th century pre-industrial revolution commerce; Columbia's 19th and 20th century agricultural activities; and the development of Columbia Lake from a 19th century reservoir for American Thread Company in Willimantic, Connecticut to a 20th century residential community. The 20th century collections focus on WWI, WWII, and the Korean Conflict and how it affected families, individuals, and institutions in Columbia. There are very few materials pertaining to Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan. We would welcome additional information.

Together with Columbia Historical Society, this archive houses the Richardson and Smith Collection of diaries. This remarkable collection consists of 19th century family diaries, letters, personal books, account books, bibles, digital photographs, an extended family genealogy, and furnishings. The core of this collection is 19 volumes of journals written from 1849 – 1894 by Columbia resident James Henry Richardson (1825 – 1894). These journals record his daily activity and observations as well as the lives of his immediate family, friends, and acquaintances in the Town of Columbia (and local area) over a continuous 45 year period. Of interest are his reflections on specific events during the Civil War and also the gradual industrialization of the area. Included in the collection are letters, bibles, and personal books belonging to his daughter Alice Elizabeth Richardson Palmer, as well as letters of granddaughter Annie Belle Palmer Smith, also of Columbia. The index to the diaries of Henry James Richardson, compiled by great-grandson Bradford E. Smith of Middlebury, Connecticut, identifies approximately 880 local individuals.

The Richardson family is among the first families of Columbia, Connecticut, formerly known as the village of Lebanon Crank or the Second Society of Lebanon, in the Colony of Connecticut until 1804. Ebenezer Richardson settled in Lebanon Crank in 1708 and was among 24 petitioners in 1714/15 who appealed to set off the North Parish (eventually the Second Society) as a separate entity. This collection is the gift of Edward Bradford Smith of Glastonbury, Connecticut.

As of May 1, 2017, the Town of Columbia Historical Archive and Collection is co-located with the Columbia Historical Society's main archives in the original 1903 Saxton B. Little Free Library, now known as The History Place, originally designed by architect Wilton E. Little. Both organizations' collections are non-circulating, but are assessable for on-site research. Please contact Ingrid Wood, Town Historian, Columbia, Connecticut; Townhistorian@columbiact.org or at 860-228-0110. Columbia Historical Society may be contacted at ColumbiaCtHistoricalSociety@gmail.com .