

I would like to share some information with the people of Brooklyn and the surrounding areas. Many of us were unaware of the rare treasure that exists in our backyards and only discovered this when researching the history of the site. Please consider the following when deciding where you stand on the building of a Wal-Mart Superstore in our small town.

The History of the Brickyard:

Even before Brooklyn was incorporated as a town the brickyard existed. According to Natalie Coolidge in the Killingly Historical Journal (2005; Volume II, Number 2), it is believed that "The Quinebaug Brick Co. must have been started pre-1771 as bricks made there were used to build Old Trinity Church foundation in 1771."

The property was ideal for making bricks due to the ponds containing clay. It is believed that Native Americans, slaves, and children were used for labor in the brick making process.

The brick house on Brickyard Road was built in 1813. This was built for the superintendent or overseer of the brickyard.

The brickyard, in 1883, was reportedly so prosperous that 4,000,000 bricks were sold. They were used throughout southern New England...not only locally, but in Norwich, Olneyville, and fine stores in Providence also. Some local structures include: the former Sabin L. Sayles Co. c. 1858 (later the Wm. Prym mill), The Wauregan Company at Brooklyn, Quebec Square, and the chimney for the Dyer Dam in 1900.

In the Windham County Telegraph in 1869, the subject of the brickyard is discussed in a letter to the Editor. "Brick must have been made here at an early period of the settlement of the country, fragments of brick and pottery having been found under the roots of seventy-five year growth. Philemon Adams some sixty years ago made milk pans, jugs, and other ware from clay taken from this place and carried to Allen Hill." In 1869 they realized the historical significance of the land.

Sam Litke still lives on Brickyard Rd. He was told stories of the brickyard from an old sea captain who lived on Route 6 just before Brickyard Rd. The captain retold the history from Thomas O. Talbot who had purchased the brickyard from The Quinebaug Brick Company. In addition to the oral history, Sam has found over 300 arrowheads, pottery shards, colonial coins, and bricks with fingerprints of the workers. On a property nearby is a boulder with an arrow pointing toward Church Street. This is said to have directed the children, slaves, and Native Americans, who were performing much of the labor, on the wagon trails that led them behind Old Trinity Church to Church Street.

Sam also tells of Polish Immigrants coming to Brooklyn to be baptized in the water on the property. People came from afar to study the bible in the brick house and would come to be christened. The beauty of these ponds was appreciated then, as it should be today.

Brad and Shirley Gerrish, long time residents of Brooklyn, know the land well. Brad worked at a lumber yard that once occupied the site. He can point out where the oxen would grind out stones from the clay, where the pay office was, and the steep piles of discarded bricks that are now covered by trees and overgrowth. Walking the land was bittersweet for them; they love this area and know what could be lost.

In 1983 an Environmental Review Team issued this report:

Based upon the ERT's on-site inspection of the above-named property, it appears that the remains of the 19th century brickyard operation represent a significant archaeological resource. In particular, the surviving industrial archaeological remains, that is, the drying yard, waster piles, filled-in clay pits, pug mills, and other related features, may meet the eligibility criteria for the National Register of Historic Places. However, formal acknowledgement of such eligibility would require additional documentation concerning the site's industrial history and the integrity of the archaeological remains. This office is not aware of any other surviving 19th century brickyard operations in the state and therefore the Mercier site, despite its extensive alterations, maybe of state wide significance.

To walk these trails, you are overwhelmed by the natural beauty and awed by the history that surrounds you. There is no place else like this in our state; this is a real treasure. Our townspeople should take pride in this history. This land should be protected for generations to come. The brickyard is so rare that once it is gone, there is no replacing it.

No one is arguing that development is necessary for our town. Something as large the Wal-Mart Superstore is disproportionate to our town and diminishes our rural character, charm, and yes, our history. We become just another town with no distinction from any other. I ask you, is this truly in the best interest of our town?

Sincerely,

Alison Henault