2007 Archaeological Investigation at the Richard Smith Forge Site Colebrook, Connecticut

Interim Report

Site of the Richard Smith Forge as seen from the bridge at Old Creamery Road

Prepared for the Farmington River Coordinating Committee
the Barkhamsted and Colebrook Historical Societies and
The Colebrook Land Conservancy

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and
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Acknowledgements

I will always be indebted to Walter Landgraf for asking me to work with him at the Richard Smith Ironworks. As I learned more about the forge and the history of Colebrook, it became clear to me why Walt was so passionate about this project. Sadly, we lost Walt a short time before the fieldwork was scheduled to begin. However, he is always there with us in spirit. Not a day goes by at the site that we don't wonder what Walt would have thought about this find or wish we could ask him his opinion regarding countless questions. Our work at the forge is dedicated to Walt.

I am thankful for the extensive documentary and archival research that Walt and his research team accomplished. The information they compiled formed the basis for the archaeology that was conducted this past fall. The research team included Colebrook Historian Robert Grigg, economist David Ingram, archaeologist Dr. Frederic Warner, English genealogy and historical researcher Ray Wheeler and university student David Veiling. Dr. Robert Gordon, Linne Landgraf and Anne Fenn also contributed to this effort.

I would like to thank Marcia Marsted and William Currier for granting us permission for the archaeological investigation on their property along Robertsville Road where buildings associated with forge were located. They share our interest in learning more about the history of this property.

I would also like to acknowledge the support the FRCC has provided in the form of grants for both the documentary research and the archaeology at the site. I would also like to thank the BHS, the CHS and the Colebrook Land Conservancy for their interest and financial support with this project.

I am very grateful for the all the help Paul and Kathy Hart, Bob Grigg, Roger Dietlin, Linne Landgraf and Fred Warner have provided with the archaeology at the site. I would also like to thank Eric and Helen Landgraf, Bob Camire, Larry Hilt, Eileen Fortier, Friday Easton and Steve Drayer for their help with the field work and Will Richardson and Barbara Fuller for the days they spent processing the artifacts recovered from the site.

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Introduction

Walter Landgraf's work at the Beckley Furnace in East Canaan and research into the iron industry in the Northwest Corner of Connecticut led him to the Smith Forge in the Robertsville section of Colebrook. Walt recognized the historical importance of this ironworks and put together a research group that included Colebrook Historian Robert Grigg, economist David Ingram, archaeologist Dr. Frederic Warner, English genealogy and historical researcher Ray Wheeler and university student David Veiling. Dr. Robert Gordon, Linne Landgraf and Anne Fenn also contributed to the Colebrook forge research. An extensive search of the local land records, histories and archives provided information on various aspects of the Colebrook Forge and the iron industry. With the help of a grant from The Farmington River Coordinating Committee (FRCC) a review of documents in the archival collections at Harvard's Baker Library and the Archibald Library at Rutgers University was undertaken. Sources in England were also investigated to obtain additional information on Richard Smith. The data collected by the research group fills over eight banker boxes presently stored at the Barkhamsted Historical Society. This research guided the archaeology at the forge site that was directed by archaeologist Dr. Marc Banks. Ultimately, these materials and data obtained as the research continues will be sent to the Dodd Center at the University of Connecticut where they will be available for future study.

This report summarizes the archaeological investigation conducted during 2007 at the Richard Smith Forge site. The project was funded by a grant from the FRCC, the Barkhamsted and Colebrook Historical Societies and the Colebrook Land Conservancy. The site is located in the southeast corner of Colebrook, Connecticut immediately south of Robertsville Road between the intersections of Route 8 and Old Forge Road (see Figure 1-Topo). This property is owned by Marcia Marsted and William Currier and is bounded on the south by the Still River, a major tributary of the Farmington River, and the eastern boundary abuts Northeast Utilities property. A number of buildings associated with the Richard Smith Forge were located here. Presently, the artifacts

recovered at the site are being processed and analyzed. A detailed report including the history of the Colebrook Forge and a full analysis of the materials that were recovered at the site will follow the completion of fieldwork planned for 2008.

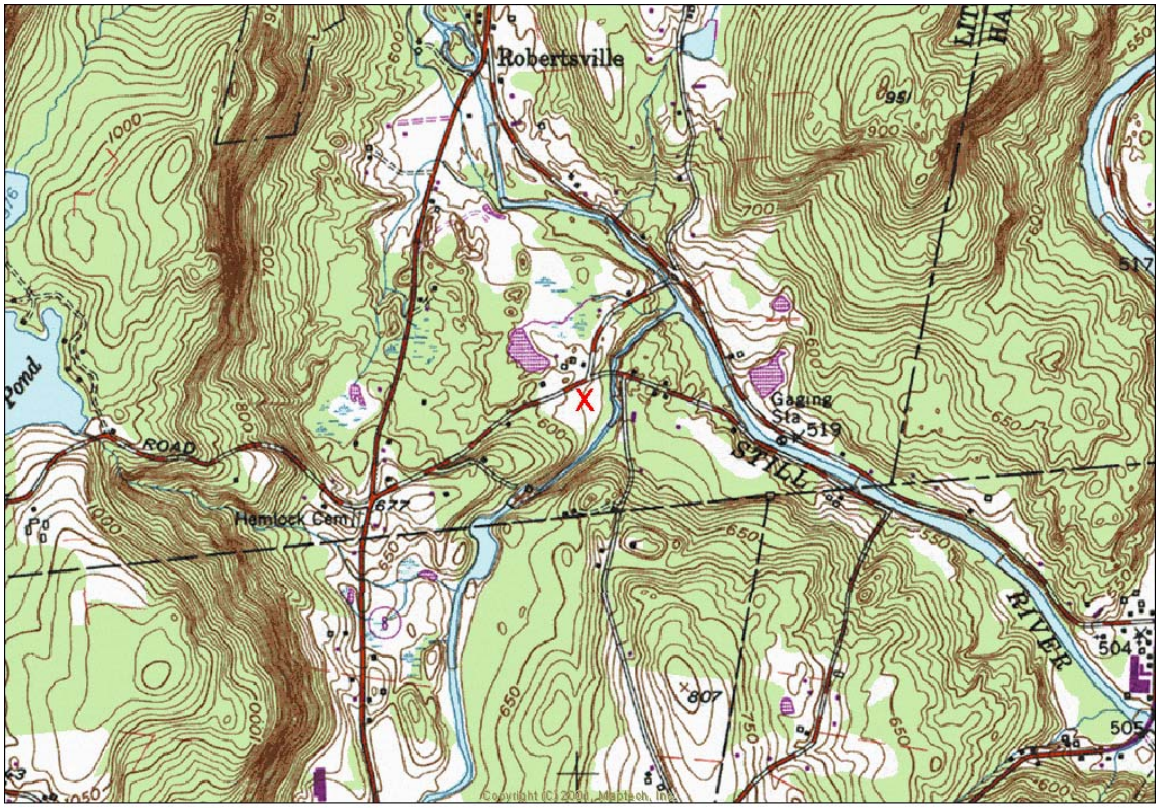

Figure 1. USGS Topographic Map of project area (X) and vicinity.
Colebrook, CT Winsted Quadrangle

The Colebrook Forge

The following history of the Colebrook Forge was written by Walter Landgraf based on the work of the Richard Smith Ironworks research group.

The Richard Smith Ironworks was constructed in 1771 following the destruction of the ironworks at West Simsbury, now the Collinsville section of Canton. The *Connecticut Courant* reported on January 15, 1771, "We hear that the ironworks at Simsbury are entirely swept off in the flood, together with one or two houses which stood contiguous to the river there with several bridges of considerable importance that stood upon the same river, and with great difficulty the large and commodious store which contained a great

quantity of English goods was saved." The same article reported that the rains had started on Saturday, January 6. Nine days later, the Connecticut River and its tributaries experienced a flood of historic proportions.

At the time of the flood the ironworks in West Simsbury (now Collinsville) were owned by Richard Smith, a British merchant living in Boston. Starting in 1768, Smith began to acquire the ironworks, along with the furnace and iron mines from George and Charles Caldwell in Salisbury, Connecticut. The Connecticut public records covering 1768 to 1771 detail how Richard Smith took deeds from Charles and George Caldwell for the ironworks, in both West Simsbury and in Salisbury, to cover the debts the Caldwells were not able to pay off.

The Simsbury land records (Simsbury Land Records Vol.16 pages 36-37) show that Richard Smith took a deed from Charles Caldwell (iron master) of Hartford for the iron house, forge, utensils, coal house, dwellings, and rights to the river in West Simsbury on December 16, 1768. Smith then invested £127 into the building of a new store, making improvements to the iron house, and the breast works in the river at West Simsbury (Connecticut public records and the Richard Smith Collection in the Baker Library at Harvard University). Also between September and November of 1768 Smith delivered 2,200 pounds of goods to the new store at West Simsbury for Charles Caldwell.

Smith had made similar investments at the Salisbury furnace, also owned by George and Charles Caldwell, who were having trouble managing the ironworks to pay Smith back. Charles Caldwell had built the ironworks in West Simsbury starting in 1766 (Simsbury Land Records, Vol. 10, p. 8).

The ironworks at West Simsbury (Collinsville) refined pig iron, which was shipped from the Salisbury furnace, into wrought iron bars and products, greatly increasing the value of the iron. Thus, when the ironworks were destroyed in the flood, Smith immediately made plans to rebuild.

Smith's eyes turned to a site on the Still River in southeastern Colebrook. This site was just up the Still River from its junction with Sandy Brook and offered dependable waterpower, less flood threat, and large forest stands for making charcoal. It could be

joined to the Old North Road, thereby, providing a connection between Salisbury and Hartford. Starting on March 21, 1770, Smith executed the first of eight deeds with the Wolcotts, Drakes, Kingsbberrys, Filleys, and Mathers. He purchased 289 acres with rights to the Still River. These deeds are referenced in Elijah and Joseph Buell's deed from Smith on May 12, 1784 (Colebrook Land Records, Vol. 1, p. 102).

In 1770, Smith hired Jacob Ogden to manage, and perhaps oversee, the construction of the new ironworks. Experts in construction, workers, and materials were assembled at the site. This was not an easy task given the lack of an established road to connect the site to the Old North Road. This was, at best, a poorly maintained road over very steep terrain. Before the end of 1771, the new ironworks were functional and a November 11, 1773 advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant* describes the ironworks as follows: a forge with four fires (forges with extensive stonework and chimneys), two hammers (which likely had 500 lb. heads), waterworks, canals to handle surplus water, a two-floor dwelling house with four rooms per floor, a store, "compting" house (which was the business office) with a deep basement for provisions, four worker houses, a coal house, an iron house, a blacksmith shop and a barn (see Figure 2a). Fifty acres of the 289 acres were under improvement in 1771 and there was also a saw mill and house nearby.

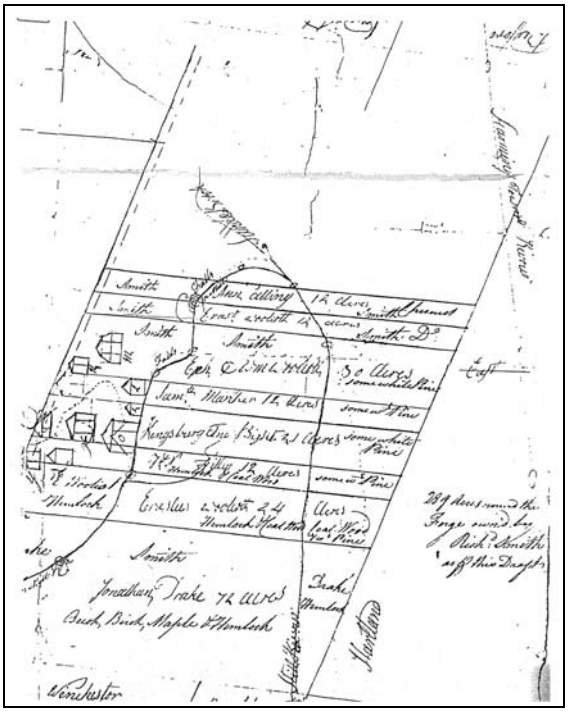

Figure 2a. Detail from the map of Richard Smith Ironworks c.1771. Curved lines are the confluence of the Still River, left, and Sandy Brook, right, providing waterpower for

the bellows and hammers. J. Lane Papers, Archibald S. Alexander Library, Rutgers University.

A special feature of the ironwork was the water privileges to Long Pond (Highland Lake) granted by the Winchester proprietors. At a June 1771 meeting, Smith was given the right to draw down, or lower, Long Pond by one and a half feet for the benefit of his ironworks "during the pleasure of the Proprietors... (Boyd 1873p.22)". The four waterwheels were enclosed and heated with large woodstoves to allow winter use. Between 600 and 1,000 cords of wood had to be cut and converted into charcoal to run the forge. Oxen and teamsters moved over 100 tons of pig iron from Salisbury to Colebrook during 1771 (based on a January 15, 1772 letter in Folder 10 of the Jared Lane Papers in the Archibald S. Andersen Library at Rutgers University). All of the above was accomplished during 1771.

Also in 1771, Smith requested that the General Assembly build a second county road through Colebrook, Barkhamsted, and New Hartford. The new road branched off the Old North Road as Deer Hill Road in Colebrook, passed by the forge and then the east side of the Farmington River through Barkhamsted to rejoin the Old North Road just past Satan's Kingdom. This road provided a more direct route with fewer elevation changes for transporting iron from Salisbury to the port at Hartford. The road was completed in 1774 and named the Wolcott Road. Later, portions of this road would become part of the Farmington River Turnpike. Before, during, and after the Revolutionary War, hundreds of tons of iron moved over this road, past the future site of the Squire's Tavern. Imported and manufactured goods then made the return trip along the road.

In an April 6, 1775 advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant,* Jacob Ogden offered for sale at the Smith forge refined and bloomed iron suitable for guns, scythes, cart tires, and shear molds for which he offered to take pork, wheat, rye, or Indian corn in payment. The production of bloomed iron at the forge indicates they were reducing some raw iron ore into wrought iron. A *Connecticut Courant* advertisement on July 1, 1778 confirms the need for raw ore: "…seeks teamster to move fifty tons of iron ore from Salisbury to the forge at Colebrook." There are several unconfirmed reports that some local ore was also used at the forge.

In the spring of 1775, Smith purchased nine ships in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and filled them with New England goods, which were to be traded in the Caribbean for rum, sugar, and molasses and then sailed to England. Smith traveled to England in 1775 to meet the ships and sell many of them along with their cargo. He remained in Europe for most of the Revolutionary War, leaving Jacob Ogden to manage the ironworks.

On April 4, 1777, Jacob Ogden placed an advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant* announcing that he had produced steel at Colebrook in the German way and had steel to sell, after meeting the war needs of the colonies. This steel was a top quality tool edge product and was one of the few sources available to Americans during the war. The importance of the ironworks to the war effort was shown by the fact that Ogden and his workers were exempted from serving in the war (*Records of the State of Connecticut 1778-1780*, Vol. 2, p. 387).

The forge burned on August 31, 1781 and was rebuilt, with State financial help, in three months. The rebuilt forge had five fires, two of which were dedicated to anchor production, two large hammers, and a rebuilt steel works.

The steel works, which were rebuilt in the fall of 1781, are not mentioned in the May 12, 1784 deed by Richard Smith to Elijah and Joseph Buell (Colebrook Land Records, Vol. 1, p. 102) nor are they listed in the *Connecticut Courant* July 16, 1787 advertisement offering the ironworks for sale.

It was basically this forge, without the steel works, that David Squire bought in 1802. A possible explanation for the disappearance of the steel works could be that the Rockwells bought them from Ogden and moved the steel works to Colebrook Center. Jacob Ogden was the son-in-law of Joseph Rockwell of Colebrook.

1771 Map of the Richard Smith Ironworks

Among the goals of the 2007 archaeological investigation of the Richard Smith Forge was the verification of the 1771 map found in the archives at Rutgers University (Figure 2a). The map depicts the original road (Kellogg Road) to the forge and the layout of the buildings associated with the forge. The map includes the original proprietor's lots and shows the building in the northern portion of the project area. The structures included a

coal house and four dwelling houses. A store, blacksmith shop and iron house that were part of the forge complex are shown just north of the Forge. These buildings are identified in the Robert Grigg rendition of the map below (Figure 2b).

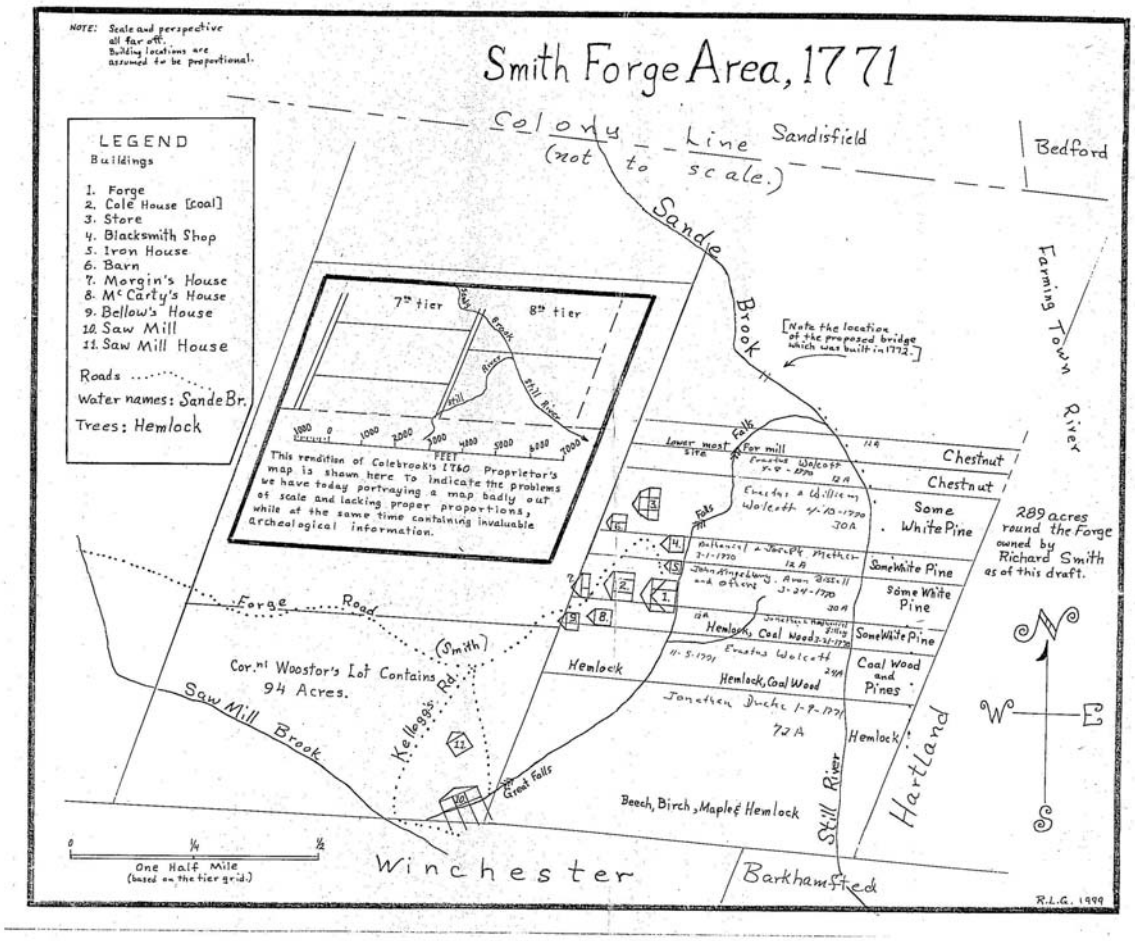

Figure 2b. Map of Forge Area by Robert Grigg based on the 1771 Rutgers map.

The cellar hole for the store and stonework related to the other two buildings are still visible within a small triangle of land that lies between Old Forge and Old Creamery Roads, just outside the 2007 study area (see Assessor's maps Figures 3 and 4). It is assumed that other buildings were built during the years the forge was in operation. The steel operation, not depicted on the map, has yet to be located. Economically it would have made sense to incorporate this operation with the forge; however, steel products may have been stored in another building possibly located in the pasture that is the focus of this investigation. Locating this structure would be very important as early steel works were very rare in North America. The identification of these structures and the recovery of materials associated with them can provide a greater insight into the

operation of the forge, the lives of forge workers and the role of the forge and the Still River during the early history of Colebrook.

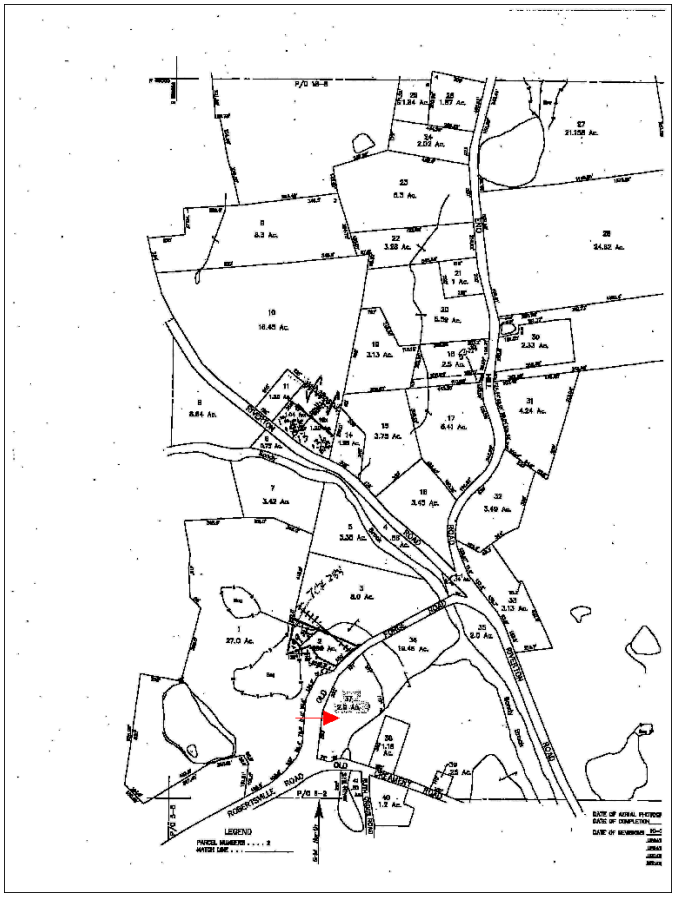

Figure 3. Assessor's Map, Lot 37 (Additional Structures).

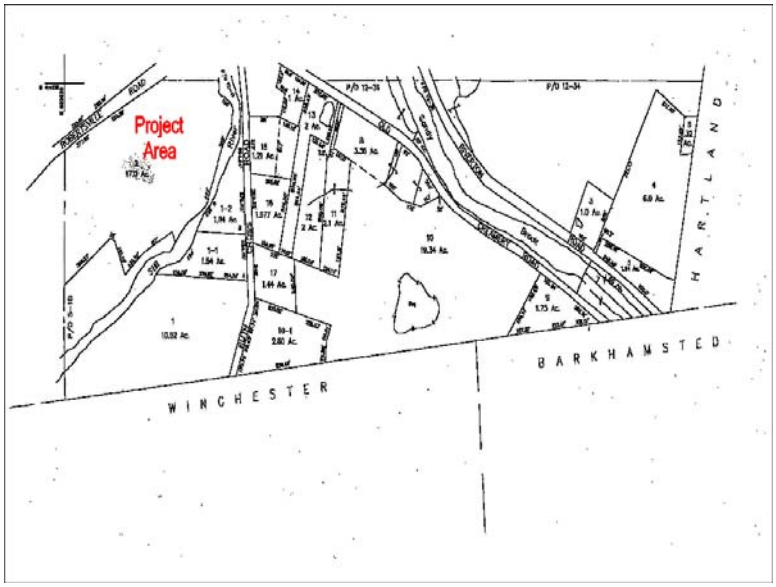

Figure 4. Assessor's Map, Lot 2 (2007 Project Area).

Testing also attempted to determine the age and function of the barn whose foundation is located at the northern edge of the property and any other below ground features related to the Richard Smith Ironworks.

2007 Subsurface Testing

The remains of the forge are presently buried under tons of rock brought to the site for the reconstruction of the Old Creamery Road Bridge. Since this would be very difficult and expensive to excavate, the focus of the 2007 archaeological testing was just west of the forge on the property described above. At the end of September Dr. Marc Banks with assistance from Paul Hart, President of the Barkhamsted Historical Society, established a grid with a baseline parallel to Robertsville Road at the northern edge of the property. Subsurface testing was conducted along this baseline and perpendicular lines running southward across the field. The grid was measured off in one meter squares. The base line is shown on a survey map of the project area and the immediate vicinity (Figure 5) created by Roger Dietlan of New Hartford. Pins driven into the ground at the points along the baseline will permit the grid to be re-established for any future archaeological work. Eventually, this map will be expanded to include the structures on adjoining parcels.

Fifty-centimeter shovel-dug test pits were dug at 5 and 10 meter intervals across the grid with some adjustments made to avoid rock outcrops and trees. Each test pit represents one quadrant of a one meter square which allows them to be incorporated into any expanded block excavation that might be required. Test pits were dug in arbitrary 10 cm levels following the natural soil stratigraphy. The matrix of all test pits was screened through one-quarter inch hardware cloth to recover any cultural material or ecofacts that were present. Soil stratigraphy was recorded for each test unit. The soil profiles of many of these test units were also photographed. Test pits were terminated upon reaching glacial sediments, bedrock, the water table or after a minimum of twenty centimeters of sterile subsoil. All recovered materials were packaged for analysis. Subsurface testing continued until snow covered the field in late November. By that time 131 of the planned 150 test pits had been completed. Additional test pits will be dug this spring. Figure 6 shows locations of test pits, existing structures and areas of interest across the grid.

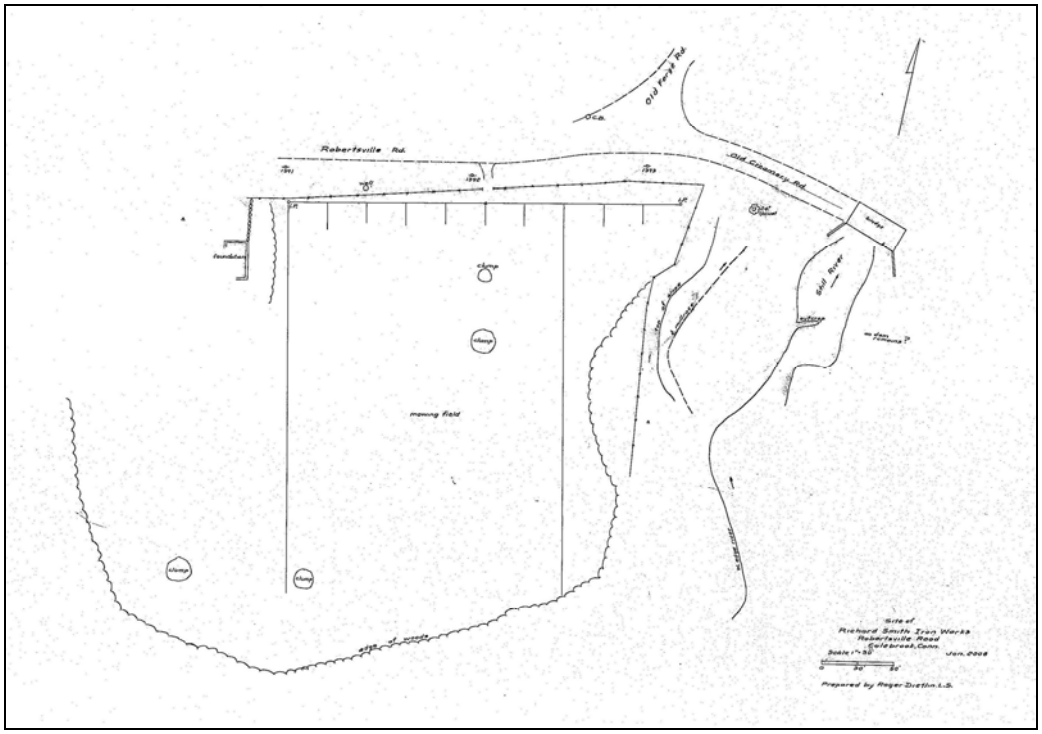

Figure 5. Drawing of project area and immediate vicinity.

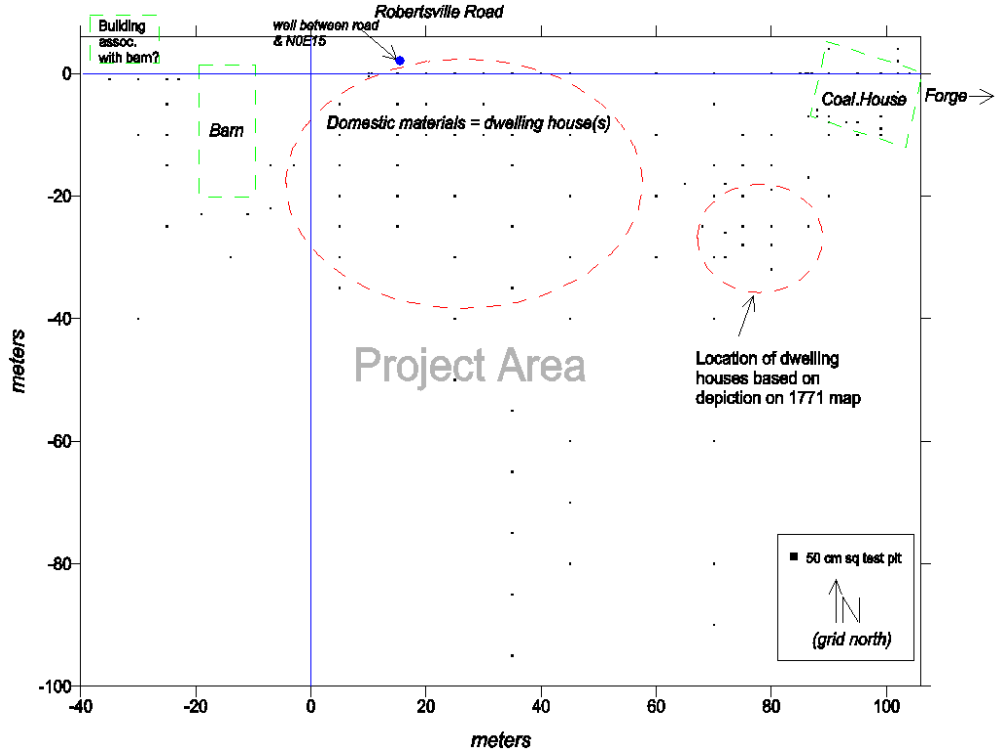

Figure 6. Plan drawing of archaeological grid established at the project area.

Structures within and adjacent to the 2007 Study Area

Evidence of a number of the buildings that appear on the 1771 map was located. These structures include the coal house, the forge, the store, the blacksmith shop and the iron house. The approximate location of one or more of the dwelling houses was identified by a concentration of domestic and building materials. A well discovered immediately north of this concentration may be associated with this house(s). Stonework from the dam and piers for the gates to the raceway are still visible east and west of the Still River respectively. Many of these features lie just outside the area investigated in 2007.

The forge was located immediately west of the Still River and just south of the bridge on Old Creamery Road. Some stonework from the forge foundation is still intact along the edge of the Still River. Portions of the forge and/or the channel leading from the race may actually lie beneath the road. The stone remains of the structures (store, blacksmith shop and iron house) within the triangle of land east of the Putnam's House were examined. Preliminary measurements taken of these buildings correlate well with the 1771 map. Rough dimensions of the store and forge were taken that closely match the scale of the map. More exact measurements are planned.

The Coal House

The approximate location of the Coal House had been established about four years earlier by Walter Landgraf and Robert Grigg. Using a soil auger, they dug approximately 12 cores across the northeastern corner of the open field. A number of the cores revealed charcoal concentrations below the upper soil horizons. These cores were assumed to be within the coal house. From these test holes the dimensions of the building were estimated to be 29’ by 55’. The larger 2007 test pits provided a better view of the soil stratigraphy across this part of the site. These test units revealed that the charcoal deposits were as deep as 2’ in places and that the layers of charcoal were separated by layers of sand and gravel in other locations. The sand and gravel was probably used to cover over charcoal that had become wet. Dry charcoal was then placed over this new floor. Since time didn’t permit the excavation of trenches, test pits were placed at intervals in the four cardinal directions across this area to determine the extent of the charcoal deposits and thus the walls of the building. Based on these units the building appears to have been somewhat larger than first believed, at least 60’ (east

to west) by 40' (north to south). The structure may actually have extended further east on to property owned by Northeast Utilities that was not tested. Testing also indicated that rather than being parallel to Robertsville Road, the coal house was oriented on somewhat of an angle running from northwest to southeast. This would suggest a discrepancy with the 1771 may which shows the coal house in line with the forge. The forge's layout was dictated by the surrounding geology.

Dwelling Houses

A concentration of domestic and building materials uncovered near the northern end of the project area suggest the location of one or more of the dwelling houses depicted on the 1771 map. Historic ceramics recovered from this area included: English Trail Slip c.1675-1710 (production dates); white salt-glazed stoneware c.1720-1770; Whieldonware c.1740-1770; hand-painted creamware c.1760s-1820; and redware c.1780s-1840. Other varieties of stoneware and bottle glass shards that were present have yet to be analyzed. Items of apparel included a cufflink and a shoe buckle. The latter artifact usually dates between 1700 and 1815 in America. This buckle appears to be made of brass or copper and may have been plated with tin to resemble silver. The artifact assemblage also included kaolin pipe bowl and stem fragments. Although no evidence of intact house foundations were located during subsurface testing, building materials including wrought nails, brick and window glass further support the presence one or more houses in this part of the field. The wrought nails and very thin window glass fit well with the time span during which the forge was in operation. Brick fragments found throughout area are undoubtedly the remnants of chimneys from these buildings. A crane fragment indicates that cooking vessels were suspended within ovens or fireplaces. During subsurface testing evidence of filling was indicated by voids amongst stone fragments. It has yet to be determined if this fill is covering the remains of cellar holes. It is hoped that future excavation can resolve this question. It is believed that the stone that served as piers/foundations for these structures were removed during the two centuries of farming that followed the demise of the forge. These materials probably were used in the construction of later buildings on the property. Some may have found their way into stone walls as the field was cleared for agricultural purposes.

A well was also identified immediately north of this latter concentration. While a well would be expected near the dwelling houses, it remains to be determined whether this

well is related to these occupations or later farming activities. The well was almost entirely covered over with modern roofing materials. Enough of this debris was removed to determine that it was in fact a well and to measure its diameter which was just over 3 feet. Future excavation at the well might reveal other earlier materials that could help determine the age of this feature.

The Barn

The stone foundation of what appears to have been a two-story barn is located just south of Robertsville Road near the northwestern corner of the project area. The entrance to the upper level was at the north side. The eastern wall contains many large stones. The interior is filled with many smaller cobbles. The Rutgers map does depict a barn; however, it is shown near the store. A land transaction from 1810 includes a barn which is quite likely the barn whose stonework is still present near the northwest corner of the field (Colebrook Land Records, Vol. 4, p.421). Interestingly enough, this land record makes no mention any dwelling houses or the coal house. The forge ceased operation in 1811. Materials recovered from test pits dug on the east and west sides of the barn and just outside the opening to the structure on the south side yielded primarily building materials, handmade and cut nails and window glass. If this is the barn referred to in the 1810 document, it was probably built after the 1771 map. Evidence of what appears to be an out building was found between the field and Robertsville Road just west of the barn. The function of this structure has yet to be determined. Test pits near this structure yielded primarily animal bone and building materials. Domestic materials were noticeably absent.

Earlier Occupations within the project area

A small quantity of stone flakes and chips recovered during testing indicates that Native Americans camped in the field. This is not surprising as the Still River would have afforded excellent fishing opportunities. Expanded testing across the field, especially those portions bordering the Still River, may provide further evidence of these occupations.

Analysis and disposition of artifacts

All materials recovered during the archaeological investigation of the Richard Smith Irownworks are presently in the possession of the principal investigator. Upon

conclusion of the analysis, the disposition of the artifacts will be determined in consultation with the property owners and the State Historic Preservation Office.

Future research at the Colebrook Forge

The 2007 archaeological testing was seen as the initial step in the study of the forge site. While a number of the goals were achieved during this investigation, it is clear that much more remains to be learned about this site. Given the importance of the forge during the Revolutionary War and to the histories of Colebrook and the surrounding towns, the site warrants further study. Presently, efforts are being made to obtain funding and expand the archaeological investigation on to the adjoining Northeast Utilities property so that the study can include the entire forge complex. Future archaeological work at the site would include the following:

- locating stonework associated with dwelling houses of forge workers;
- expanded testing across the present grid to locate additional structures and features associated with the forge;
- determine the orientation and dimensions of the Coal House;
- identifying the location of the steel operation;
- map layout of forge, raceway and other features;
- test near the store, blacksmith shop, and iron house and record data on remnants of stone work;
- create a site map showing all identified structures within the project area;
- analyze the materials recovered and conserve unstable artifacts; and
- the documentation of the history and archaeology of the Richard Smith Forge.

Beyond learning more about the Richard Smith Ironworks from the below ground archaeology, it is hoped that this research will help determine those areas within the property that should be protected and possibly considered for an archaeological preserve given the historical significance of the forge.

Photo Index

Photo 1 The Still River provided the power to turn wheels used to operate the hammers and bellows of the forge. A race on the other side of the rock outcrop in the right of the picture diverted water to wheels on the west side of the forge.

Photo 2 View to the southwest across the project area (from Robertsville Road)

Photo 3 Rubble across the site of the Richard Smith Forge

Photo 4 Remnants of forge foundation near edge of Still River

Photo 5 Nose piece of hammer from Colebrook Forge (Colebrook Historical Society)

Photo 6 Stone pillars used to support the gates to the raceway

Photo 7 View northward down the raceway, the bedrock outcrops formed a natural path for the water

Photo 8 Testing across the grid

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Photo 10 Testing near coal house

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Photo 13 Well near dwelling house(s)

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Photo 18 Lamp glass (upper left) and various bottle glass shards

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Photo 21 Shoe buckle fragment

Photo 22 Crane fragment, unidentified iron object, iron rod fragment

Photo 23 Wrought nails found near dwelling house(s) and barn

Photo 24 View to northwest from bridge at Old Creamery Road towards blacksmith shop, iron house and store

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