

Red Hill Logbook Introduction

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Way back in 1987, Rev. Frank E. Greene of Moultonborough, long-time resident and local historian, wrote a short article entitled “The Cook Family of Red Hill, Moultonborough, New Hampshire,” in which he quoted from the logbook of Red Hill hikers which was kept by the Cook family at their home in the “saddle” on the ridge of this well-known Lakes Region summit, beginning in 1833. Ever since reading Frank’s article, it was my ambition to read through the original logbook, which is in the possession of the Center Harbor Historical Society.

The logbook consists of what were apparently two original notebooks, judging by the paper size, plus several odd sheets that were added at the end when they were both rebound in a hard cover under the title of “Red Hill Hotel/Old Records/Center Harbor, N.H.” There are about 420 pages though since the pages are smaller than present-day 8 ½ x 11 pages, the transcription is only 367 pages and 47,232 words, with a solid horizontal line to denote the end of a page in the original manuscript.

Apparently because many of the visitors ascended the hill from the hotel in Center Harbor, the old books were saved under that title, although they have little to do with the hotel. The book came to the Historical Society from L. Keith Matheson, the administrator of the Fred Sumner Coe estate, the Coe family having been the original proprietors of the hotel in Center Harbor from where many visitors began their ascent. Thanks to the kindness of Shirley White of the Center Harbor Historical Society, the original has been made available for transcription, and the transcript has been posted on the Moultonborough Public Library website. After all, the hotel was in Center Harbor, but the hill is in Moultonborough!

As stated in Rev. Greene’s essay, (also posted on the website) Jonathan Cook was a veteran of the American Revolution, in which he participated in six battles. He was born on October 7, 1760 in Westborough, Massachusetts, and married to Charlotte Maynard in 1783. They moved to Red Hill sometime after their first child, Samuel, was born in 1785. Jonathan passed away on March 29, 1836, but Charlotte, often characterized as “Aunt Cook” in the logbook, lived until 1854, dying at age 89. At that point, except for a few late additions, the logbook comes to an end. Three foundations of their two houses and a barn may still be located in the open field in the “saddle” between the two higher ends of the Red Hill ridge.

The “Red Mountain Album” was presented to the Cooks by Charles A. Winthrop of New Haven, Connecticut, June 4th 1833, and if we are to believe all that is written, Red Hill was quite a tourist attraction even “way back then.” Visitors recorded their hometowns in Ireland, England,

Scotland, Rio de Janeiro, as well as many from Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Cincinnati, and New Orleans, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois, Kansas Territory, California, Maryland, the Carolinas, Alabama, even the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), as well as many towns in New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts.

Many were on their way to or from the White Mountains, with the Crawford Path up Mount Washington having been first built in 1819. The word “ascended” is almost always used-in those days one did not hike or climb, one ascended the mountain summits.

Visitors included future president Franklin Pierce, senator Daniel Webster, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the crew of the “Belknap,” first steamboat on Lake Winnepesaukee, the governor-general of Canada, and many other prominent persons whose details can be found on the internet. Henry David Thoreau is known from his own writings to have climbed Red Hill, but perhaps he was a little late in doing so, after Aunt Cook had passed away and the logbook was not being kept.

It was a pleasant surprise to me how many women “ascended” the hill, or “Mount Warren” as it was known for a short time, and also quite young children.

In some entries the handwriting is just too difficult to decipher, in which case I have left a question mark for future historians. Some visitors rather rudely wrote their entries over previously filled pages, making it that much harder to transcribe. Others resorted to flights of poetry, their own or others, or quotations in Latin and French, to express their enjoyment of the excursion. I have attempted to retain the spacing of the original handwriting on each page, as much as possible when going from manuscript to computer text, as well as the original spelling, including the “long s,” resembling the letter f, which was used at that time, especially when there was a double s in the word being spelled, such as in “Mafsachusetts.” “Do” stands for ditto, as do double apostrophes. The problem of how to distinguish the various handwritings of separate entries has not been addressed by the transcriber. I hope that all the unusual spellings are the product of the original document and not the errors of the transcriber.

Biographical notes from online sources have been added in red to the entries by well-known persons, and more could be added as time permits. Comments in parentheses are the work of the transcriber. There are also some scribbles and some names repeated over and over again, apparently a later, although still contemporary, interlining by a family member who didn’t realize that historians would be looking at their work in centuries yet to come.

The hospitality of the Cooks is frequently commented upon, and one can only wish that someone was still serving blueberries and milk as they did in the old days. Much of the land was cleared and blueberries must have been abundant, both to feed the visitors and to give the hill its name, which is now more famous for the oak trees giving it a red hue in the fall, rather than blueberries.