

The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

## History of North Branford

by

Janet Gregan

May 1980

## HISTORY OF NORTH BRANFORD

In 1638, soon after Theophilus Eaton and John Davenport had purchased from Momaguin, the Indian Sachem at Quinnipiac, all the land that would become New Haven Colony, Montowese approached them and offered to sell them the area called Totoket. Montowese was the leader of a small tribe (only 10 braves) and was eager for English protection from the raiding Mohegans. The area of Totoket (bounded on the south by Long Island Sound, on the west by Stony River (Farm River) and Great Pond (Lake Saltonstall) , on the east by Guilford, and on the north ten miles from the 'Sound) was bought for twelve coats made in the English fashion. This would become Branford including what is now North Branford.

After an earlier unsuccessful attempt to attract settlers, in 1643, when Eaton was called upon to settle a dispute among the people of Wethersfield about who should be allowed to vote in Society matters, the area was offered to Matthew Swain and his followers. For £12 or £13 the Wethersfield band was granted the right to settle Totoket under the jurisdiction of the New Haven Colony. A year later they arrived with all their belongings, began to clear the land and build their homes. They also employed their first minister, John Sherman.

The population of the little settlement doubled in 1645 when the Rev. Abraham Pierson and a group of colonists, aggrieved that their town of Southampton on Long Island had put itself under the jurisdiction of the Connecticut Colony based in Hartford and allowed non-church members to vote, moved to Branford. The Rev. Mr. Pierson became the first regular minister and served for 21 years while the town grew and prospered. It is believed that the name of Branford is derived from Brentford located west of London, the native of own of some of the colonists.

In 1665, Connecticut, Colony and New Haven Colony were united under the charter from King Charles II. The Rev. Mr. Pierson, upset with the idea that non-church members would be allowed to vote in Parish matters, gathered his group of like believers, pulled up stakes and left Branford to move west and found the town that would become Newark, New Jersey. This exodus left Branford with a depleted population and no regular minister. Gradually though, the town was repopulated and in 1687, the colonists successfully petitioned the General Court for the liberty to embody themselves into a

## 2.

church. The Reverend Samuel Russell accepted the invitation to become their minister and settled with them on Sept. 12, 1687 to serve a ministry that lasted 43 years.

The third division of land took place in 1679 and was surveyed in 1692. Second and third generation colonists needed more farmland, so the limits of the town stretched north taking in the lands around the two ponds (Cedar and Linsley Lakes), the Bare Plain area, and along the Stony River (Farm River) almost to what is now Northford. At first temporary shelters were built while the land was cleared and farmed but the farmers of these northern lands would be reluctant to settle away from the amenities of town life, especially in the winter.

Tradition says that the first permanent home built within the bounds of modern day North Branford was one built by Captain Jonathan Rose in Hopyard Plains. If this is true, the house is no longer in existence, but there is one early house built by a Rose on Valley Road in the approximate location and Rose descendants still own land in the area. The oldest house still in existence is believed to be the house at Bare Plains built in 1699 by John Linsley for his grandson, John, who married Mary Harrison. The

The house was originally a saltbox with four main rooms surrounding a large fieldstone chimney but it has been expanded and renovated as the families grew and prospered.

The population continued to increase and in 1704, the fourth division occurred. Fourteen more allotments were laid out to include most of the land within the town's limits. An additional 200 acre piece in the farthest northwest corner had been allotted in 1694 to Thomas Mulliner, son of the Thomas Mulliner who had staked his claim to the point of land now called Branford Point prior to 1643 and proved to be the village blacksheep. This allotment settled all Mulliner claims to land, houses, etc. within the township.

Settlement first took place on the land that was easiest to clear and along the river banks where dams could be built to set up mills. Josiah Rogers, who first settled near Linsley Lake, moved early in the 18th century to build a saw and grist mill on the Farm River (by Mill Road). In 1707, Joseph and Isaac Foote built a sawmill further north on the river (at Old Forest Road). The house Joseph built about 1708 is still standing.

### 3.

Even further north on the river in Fourth Divisions lands an earlier house and barn built by Benjamin Howd are extant (on Sol's Path).

The northern farmers found it difficult to maintain the close ties with the village of Branford as they established their homesteads several miles away. It was particularly difficult to attend Sunday meeting, especially in inclement weather. They requested that winter preaching be provided, but the request was denied. So, in 1717, seventeen men sent to the General Court in Hartford 'the humble petition of the Northern farmers

living remove from the meeting house.....under great difficulty in going to attend the Publick worship there.....such a number of families and such estates as we think ourselves able to maintain a minister.....petition to become a distinct Society.' The Court investigated and decreed that there were not enough people to maintain a separate Society but the town should provide a minister during the four winter months for three years. Boundaries were established 'East on the Guilford line ..... On southerly side at Roses meadow and so running westerly by the rocks called Rattlesnake, taking in some of Jonathan Rose's land and so to the sawmill, near Jonathan Linlys and so westward taking in the farms of Samuel Pond, Josiah Rogers John Tyler, Benjamin Barns and Isaac Bartholomew.....on the west, north to Great Hill by the New Haven line running on the north side of said Great Hill to the Guilford line.' But in 1722, when it was voted to set up a Second Society in North Farms, a dispute about the boundaries erupted. It was settled by agreeing if the north farmers would be content with the original bounds, the town would help pay for the construction of a meeting house.

On May 12, 1724, it was voted to build a meeting house and hire a minister to be paid for by a rate on the whole town. Immediately a committee was chosen to supervise the building, a location 'on the knoll by Samuel Harrison's' was decided and the frame was raised with a ceremony that included prayers offered by- the Rev., Samuel Russell , A problem arose six months later when the townspeople revoked their agreement and refused to pay. The building committee appealed to the General Assembly and the town was ordered to levy a rate to defray the charges already expended. The town complied and in May 1725 the Second Society was established to maintain their own meeting house and minister. The Rev. Jonathan Merrick was invited to become the first minister. He built his homestead, now gone,

on part of the 200 acres by Great Hill deeded by the Proprietors for parsonage lands (where Central Shopping Plaza is). The meeting house was eventually completed in 1731, a 35x45 barnlike structure, with galleries on three sides, bench seats and diamond paned windows.

With the organization of the church in 1727, more and more settlers were attracted to North Farms. Some of the houses built in the succeeding years are still standing. Many of, these homesteads were as far away from the Second Society meeting house as the original north farmers were away from Branford. These farmers began to petition to form a Third Society as early as 1734, but not without opposition from the people of the Second Society who disliked the thought of losing the tax money. Finally, in 1746, the northern north farmers were granted the right to form the Third Society of Branford. It was commonly called Northford, either because it was north of the ford on Farm River or it was a shortened version of north North Branford.

The Third Society meeting house, a simple structure, built on a hill above the main road heading north '20 rods north of' Samuel Bartholomew's' was erected in 1747.

Warham Williams, chosen to be the first regular minister, was ordained on June 13, 1750. He bought land from Samuel Bartholomew on the east side of the road just south of the meeting house and built a most elegant high style Georgian house. Unfortunately, it was sold and removed to Roxbury in 1978.

The boundaries dividing the two Societies lie between the old School districts #3 and #4 or between the present police station and Totoket Valley Park in a straight line west to east to Totoket Mountain, then follow the ridge north and east. This division into two Societies created two villages, each with its own distinct personality, and continues through the fabric of the town's history into the modern era.

The economic wealth of the community was mainly agricultural with the growing of wheat, rye and corn. North Branford climate was found to be most suitable for growing apples and cherries. Large orchards were planted and cider mills were built for the making of cider and brandy. Other mills were also built - grist, fulling and bark - sometimes sharing the same dam as the saw mills. The produce was exported through the thriving port at

the mouth of the river in Branford.

The winding paths through the woods were widened to make roads to carry the produce to the seaport. One road headed northwest from the village of Branford, passed through the center of the Second Society, and wended its way to North Guilford (now Branford Road, part of Foxon Road and Sea Hill Road). A second road branched off the main road between Branford and Guilford, wound north between the two ponds up to Northford and on to Durham (now Northford or Queach Road, Forest Road, Old Post Road, and Middletown Avenue). The third road left the center of Branford crossing Brushy Plain, zig-zagged over Lid Hitt's hill and continued along the side of the lesser Great Hill near New Haven to the center of Northford (now Brushy Plain and Totoket Roads).

As Branford harbor was one of the northern ports for the West Indies trade, slaves were brought to North Farms and the Negro population, both slaves and free numbered close to 50 prior to 1800. Most of the slaves were emancipated long before the Civil War and many of the Blacks made a significant contribution to the history of the town. Gad Asher served as a servant of General Greene in the Revolutionary War, won his freedom but lost his sight, and built his home on the lane that bore his name (now Water Company property). Another lane is named after Pomp, who lived nearby.

Education of the young was always of primary importance to early colonists, and the New Haven Colony had ruled that each town should provide a common school. Branford had complied with this ruling as early as 1678, and in 1679 had laid out "forty acres of land.....the other side of Pine Brook.....lying between Guilford road and Great Rive.....and it shall belong to such School masters as shall teach school in the town successively." The earliest records of the Second Society are lost but at the annual meeting in 1731 a School Committee is elected, so it is safe to assume that a school was provided in North Farms as early as 1725. One of the prime concerns of the Second Society was to get their fair share of the school lands, as showed by a vote in 1734, "Voted, that in case any man renting the school land meets with difficulty from the South Society in this town and is forced to defent himself by the law, that the necessary charges be paid by the Society." There is no record where the first

school buildings were located; probably the first classes were taught in a house, but gradually through the 18th century, land was acquired and schoolhouses were built. By 1797 there were four schools in the Second Society (and for a short period around 1800 when there was dissension in the Center school, there were five) and four in the Third Society. In 1850 there were seven school districts. (See Beers Atlas) Most of these one-room schoolhouses or their replacement's are still in existence today. Two are used as residences, one has been expanded for use as a hall, two or three have been used as additions to other buildings, and one which is the oldest, built c. 1805, has been restored and is used as a museum by the Totoket Historical Society.

In 1769, the Rev. Mr. Merrick became too feeble to continue preaching and, the Rev. Samuel Eells was chosen as his successor. He built his home, still in existence, on the road that headed north from the village center.

North Farms also had its share of people who professed to the Episcopal Church of England and in 1763 they decided to tax themselves in order to build a church on a tiny plot of land they purchased from Benjamin Howd (where William Douglas School playground is located) to worship in their fashion.

By 1770, northern Branford had a population of approximately 1,000, much of the land was under cultivation and life was prosperous. But the focus moved from the local scene to national issues. Rebellion against the King flared into action in Lexington and Concord and the Connecticut General Assembly raised units to send to neighboring Massachusetts. William Douglas of Northford was appointed captain of the 6th Company of the 1st Regiment. He had served in the campaign against Quebec at age 16, made a fortune in the West Indies trade and had retired at age 32 to the Northford farm he purchased in 1772. He led his Company in the two-pronged attack on Canada, traveling north along Lake Champlain while Benedict Arnold led his forces through the Maine woods. The Colonial forces had to control

the lake, and Douglas was given the command of the gunboat and became commodore of Lake Champlain. He returned home to Northford for the winter but soon was appointed major of a unit of 750 Volunteers to prepare the defences of New York, serving at Ft. Sterling in Brooklyn for three months. He was elected as representative to the Connecticut Assembly, but in June 1776,

when the British began a full-scale assault on New York, the Continental Congress sent out an appeal and the Connecticut Assembly voted to raise eight battalions. Douglas was made Colonel of the 5th Battalion which was sent to New York with five others to defend Manhattan. His regiment was known as the "Leather Caps" because they wore leather hats, the leather for which was tanned locally. The enlistment period of his battalion ended Christmas 1776 and William Douglas returned to his Northford home expecting to take over a new unit in 1777 when his health failed. He died in May and is buried in the Northford cemetery.

During the skirmishing and retreat in New York in late 1776, the Connecticut Assembly called for more volunteers. The Rev. Samuel Eels made the announcement from the pulpit calling for the volunteers to meet on the green after the service. Sixty men responded and a company was formed with Eells as Captain and served for a short time. Approximately 115 men from the Second and Third Societies served during the Revolution, some for as little as 3 days. Two were with General Washington at the surrender of Cornwallis and there were a few in North Branford who remained loyal to the King but they soon sold their property and moved to Nova Scotia.

The period after the Revolutionary War was a period of recovery and adjustment for northern Branford as well as the rest of the nation. Some returning soldiers settled down and built their homes, but many Branford people succumbed to the lure of rich western lands and moved away. Yet, others took their place and as times became more prosperous, built new homes or improved the old ones. Many of the homes built during this period are still standing.

The turn of the 19th century ushered in a new era for North Farms; an era of continued peace and prosperity, an era of growth, and an era of renewed religious fervor. This fervor manifested itself in revival type meetings as evidenced in quotes from Deacon T. R. Palmer's diary, "March 1821 - Whoever saw in this place such an attention paid to religion: such numbers flocking to the church of Christ." and "April - Last evening there were three prayer meetings held in different parts of the Society, notwithstanding the weather being bad." This religious fervor inspired the church members to extend their 'watch' more firmly over their fellow members and the church records show numerous instances where members were chastised



for their behavior, resulting in some cases in excommunication if sincere or complete penitence was not shown.

At this same time, there was a move to separate church and state, first indicated in the federal Constitution that was ratified in Connecticut in 1788. North Branford showed this separation for the first time in 1797 when the school records were kept separate from the Society records. The final separation came in 1818 when the state constitution was adopted. This promoted freedom of religion, especially for the Episcopalians who were so persecuted during the Revolution. In the Second Society, the Episcopal church was organized in 1812 and their church building was erected in 1820 and completed in 1840 a short distance west of the Congregational meeting house, The Congregationalists, not to be outdone and finding the old meeting house inadequate and in need of repair, replaced it with a new structure in 1830. This was finished just in time to hold the first town elections in its new basement.

The move to make the northern part of Branford into a separate town was first attempted in 1799, but the petition to the General Assembly was denied. With continued prosperity, the population grew and the tax base increased, and the Second and Third Societies became one town, North Branford, in May 1831, but they still continued to function as two distinct communities.

Early in the new century, the need for improved transportation increased. The British blockade of Long Island Sound during the War of 1812 had hampered shipping and commerce was slow to recover. North Branford, being an interior town needed better roads. In 1812, the Middletown Turnpike was built from New Haven through Northford to Middletown. The Fair Haven Turnpike was built between New Haven and Essex in 1824 passing through the center of North Branford. With the improved transportation service, agricultural products could include beef and dairy products. It also promoted the growth of industry, particularly in Northford' where a portion of the turnpike lay alongside the Farm River.

In 1830, Maltby Fowler opened a shop for making buttons, producing enough to keep four peddler carts, on the roads. His six sons, William, George, DeGrasse, Horace, Frederick and Thaddeus, all showed great mechanical ingenuity and produced astonishingly varied inventions, including a press for perforating tin, a machine for drawing out brass tubing, a screw

## 9.

maching which turned out 6,000 screws per minute, a machine for making the common pin, cigar and cigarette making machines, a washing machine, a power press, the Fowler horseshoe-nail machinery, a machine for embossing silk, a reaper and binder and other smaller or less successful inventions. Some of these machines were used in the manufactories along the Farm River to produce pins, rivets, horseshoe-nails and tinware. Northford had had a successful silk industry earlier growing mulberry trees for the silkworms. One of these trees remains today growing by a house on Forest Road. '

Prosperous times promoted the building of many homes between 1820 and 1870, most of them in the popular Greek Revival style and many of them are still standing. The congregation of St. Andrews Episcopal Church decided to build a new building in 1845 on a different site at the intersection of the Turnpike and the Old Post Road and the Congregationalists replaced their old meeting house with a new one, designed by Henry Austin, in 1846. Increased travel on the turnpikes prompted the building of taverns, many of which survive and are now residences.

The Civil War did not interrupt the growth of prosperity in North Branford. Milo Todd built a paper mill in northern Northford to provide paper for ammunition wrapping. This mill was later purchased by David Stevens, who produced spoons; later this operation became part of the International Silver Co. Stevens developed a metal called 'Brittania' which was used by E. Chapman Maltby to trim his dippers. Maltby imported coconuts from the West Indies and produced 'dessicated coconut' and dippers were made from the shells. His shredded coconut won first prize at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Fair. His factory was located at the, dam where the "Millpond Taverne" restaurant is now, and was called familiarly the 'Brick Shop' as it was a large brick structure and later, the 'Brush Shop'.

North Branford sent its share of volunteers when Lincoln called for 75,000 men to fight the Confederate forces. Approximately 50 men served and when the war was over, North Branford built in 1867 one' of the first memorials in the nation honoring its dead.

In 1871, the railroad which had been in the planning stages for several years and expected to pass through Northford, was laid - two miles to the west through Clintonville. This marked the beginning of the end for industry in Northford. No longer able to compete because of higher

transportation costs, the factories closed or moved away. The only substantial industry operating in the last part of the century was the greeting card business run by the Stevens Brothers. First started at Todd's paper mill, and later located at the 'Brick Shop', the printing of ornamental greeting and picture post cards gave Northford the title 'Christmas card Capital of the World'. Much of the work on the cards was completed in the homes of Northford involving many residents in this cottage industry.

With the closing of most industry, North Branford reverted to a farming community and the population declined from 1,025 in 1880 to 825 in 1900 as the young people emigrated' to cities to work in factories or went to homestead in the west.

The women's movement showed a small gain in the latter part of the century when the Ladies Sewing Society was organized in 1878. It met in the North Branford Congregational Church but was interdenominational. It was through the efforts of the ladies that the Chapel or 'Ladies Parlor' was built in 1887. The organization is still meeting - 102 years later.

As the 20th century opened, North Branford and Northford were still small villages each maintaining its own identity in a farming community. Then several events promoted a growth spurt. In 1910, the Shoreline Electric Railroad built its tracks through the center of North Branford, opening the whole shoreline from New Haven to Weekapaug, R.I. It was now easy to get to and from North Branford. The trolley system had, functioned only for a short time when a terrible accident occurred in North Branford, a head-on collision that killed 19 and injured 22 people. A few years later, in 1919, caught by post-war inflation and a poor accident record, the system folded. By then the increasing use of the automobile made it possible to live in the country and commute to a city job.

The New Haven Trap Rock Co., opened a quarry on Totoket Mountain in 1914. Men came to work the quarry, bringing their families to live in housing provided by the company or in homes they built themselves.

Many of these newcomers were from central and southern European backgrounds and of the Roman Catholic faith. By 1920 there were enough Catholics in town to consider building a church. Erected in 1925 near the center of North Branford St. Augustine's Church served at first 22

families, but soon others of that faith were attracted to the farmlands of North Branford.

A number of North Branford men enlisted to serve in the armed forces during World War I. A monument to the seventeen who lost their lives was erected near the Civil War monument in 1935.

With the state starting to supervise education in 1911, it was decided to replace the three one-room schools in the First District with a consolidated three room\_ - Center School which was occupied in 1920. Five years later, William Douglas School was built in Northford to replace the four schools in that district.

Women were beginning to' playa more active role in town affairs. In 1909, when the North Branford Congregational Church burned, the Ecclesiastical Society allowed the women to vote for the first time - on the style of the new church building. With the constitutional amendment passed in 1919, a League of Women Voters organized and became the first League of Women Voters to be incorporated in 1925. It was through their efforts that the 1805 little Red Schoolhouse was moved from its Forest Road location to the present site in Northford center and restored to become the town's first library.

The New Haven Water Co., needing to expand the water system that served the metropolitan area of New Haven, decided to locate its new reservoir in North Branford, and by doing so changed the geography of the town. In 1925 the company started to acquire land in the valley between Totoket Mountain and Sea Hill, and by 1933 when the dam was complete and ,the reservoir filled, North Branford had not only lost one third of its total area, but Lake Gaillard had cut off any eastern access between the

two ends of town and the road to North Guilford., The lake also covered 22 homes and farms. Many of the construction workers who came to build this massive project settled in town further increasing the population.

A third school, the Jerome Harrison School, had to be built in 1929. The three town schools contained the elementary grades 1-8 only. Tuition was paid to surrounding towns where high school students were sent. Education of the young had always been important to the people of North Branford and Northford. As early as 1768, young men from the town were graduated from Yale College having continued their education there and,

by 1825 there had been 60 Yale graduates. In 1929, a report by the State Supervisor, W. S. Dakin, corroborates the interest in continuing education stating "pupils of the local schools are most ambitious to attend High School. The number from this town is unusually high for its size. The pupils' scholastic standing is so high that they are admitted without examination to New Haven and North Haven High Schools. Today 65% of the high school students continue their education at colleges and technical schools.

North Branford citizens have always been concerned about the quality of life in their town. In 1870, the Northford Store was built, financed by selling \$3,000 worth of shares, to provide a store and a hall or halls for town events. The North Branford Civic Association, formed in 1921, took over the old Center School building and put on two additions to make a hall with a stage and a kitchen, and financed it by running very popular weekly dances. It is still being used as a meeting place for two organizations and Senior Citizens' programs. The main reason for organizing the Village Improvement Society in Northford was to bring electricity and telephones to the area. In 1924, after the William Douglas School was built, the Society acquired the old District #6 school and in 1927, built a large hall with the old school attached as a kitchen wing. The "Community House" was sold and moved west onto private property when the School was expanded in 1952. The kitchen wing was attached to the first Co. #2 firehouse and destroyed when the current firehouse was built.

In the 1930's the depression hit, but agricultural North Branford struggled through without too much hardship. Church and community groups were very active in helping those in trouble, and the town with a population of 1,329 was able to maintain its tightly-knit community feeling in both ends of town. In 1931 the town celebrated its 100th Anniversary with a parade, a pageant and a dance. Three thousand people attended the festivities, many returning to their native town from all over the country. Another celebration was held in 1935 with an historic pageant for the Connecticut Tercentary.

The Volunteer Fire Dept. was founded in 1938. Their request at a town meeting for an appropriation of \$3,000 to purchase a fire engine created an incident that has become one of the town's favorite stories.

### 13.

Opposition to the request was expressed by one irate lady who declared she would sue the town for wasting the taxpayers money for an engine that would never be needed. Needless to say, the first call responded to by the new fire engine was for a fire at the lady's house.

World War II started and 76 men and 2 women from the Town enlisted to serve in the armed forces, but the tenor of life in North Branford did not change much. The Red Cross established branches at both ends of town, The Atwater Memorial Library was built in 1942 on the little common with funds left to the town by a grandson of the Rev. Charles Atwater, the third minister of the Congregational Church. And at the end of the war, another memorial was placed on the Green, west of the North Branford Congregational Church.

The greatest changes in North Branford occurred in the 1950's and 60's. The population exploded from 1,438 in 1940 to 10,778 in 1970, making it the fastest growing town in the East. Housing developments built on the farmlands proliferated all over the landscape starting with a development of Cape Cod style houses on 1/4 acre lots near the Jerome Harrison School just off the road to New Haven.

With this population spurt, more schools were needed, and, as quickly as possible, the town embarked on a school building spree. In 1955 two rooms were added to the William Douglas School and a new Junior High was built. 1958 saw the building of Cedar Lake School, an addition of eight rooms to Jerome Harrison, and an addition to the Junior High. In 1959, the Stanley T. Williams School was built in Northford with twelve rooms. The High School was built in 1965 and added to in 1970, as was the Stanley T. Williams School. And in 1971 the Northford Intermediate School was built.

A two story fire-proof vault was added to the former Center School in 1960 when it became the town's first Administration Building. Before then, all town business was accomplished in the homes of the officials, particularly at the Town Clerk's.

The churches also showed the effects of this tremendous growth. By 1962 there were so many Roman Catholic parishioners that they had outgrown St. Augustine's and the Junior High cafeteria was rented for Mass. A large and beautifully designed new St. Augustine's Church was soon built

on Caputo Road. In 1964 (or 1951) St. Monica's was organized to serve the Northford communicants. Zion Episcopal Church was moved off its small site on Route 80 to its present location on Notch Hill Road in 1957 and the parish hall was added. The North Branford Congregational Church built its new parish house in 1961 and St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, added their parish house in 1965. The Northford Congregational Church acquired the house just north on Old Post Road to use for parish affairs.

The Edward Smith Library was built in 1957 to replace the inadequate one in the old one-room schoolhouse with a legacy from Clara Smith in memory of her father. The libraries at both ends of town were added to in 1968, more than doubling their size.

The Volunteer Fire Dept. expanded to three companies, each building their own firehouse. It is still a Volunteer Fire Dept. and each company supports itself through fund raising events such as annual drives, carnivals, etc. The Ladies' Auxiliaries are very active, and a Junior Firemen's program was instituted in 1972

In 1963, for the first time in the Town's history, Democrats were elected to office making the two-party system effective as the elections have been divided between the parties ever since.

After a study done by the League of Women Voters, a group of citizens led by the League campaigned for a new town charter providing for a Council- Manager government rather than one run by three Selectmen. The charter was adopted in 1970, and in the following year North Branford was declared an All-American City. This was duly celebrated with week-long activities including a parade.

Parades are always held on Memorial Day, and are held alternately in each end of town.

The first police force was organized in 1970 to replace the resident state policeman and the Constabulary. First located in the basement of the Administration Building, they moved to a new Police Station built in 1975 on Forest Road at the line between the two town districts.

North Branford participated in the 1976 nationwide celebration of the Bicentennial with various activities, the most interesting being a display of oldtime crafts sponsored by the North Branford Garden Club and an old house tour by the Women's Clubs of Northford and North Branford. As a

## 15.

lasting commemorative, a 77-acre tract of land on the Branford River was purchased for a park and, in a town-wide contest named North Farms, the original designation of the area. Earlier, in 1965 the Totoket Valley Park had been established astride the Farm River on the north side of the district line.

A new Town Hall to house the administrative offices was built in 1979 directly in front of the Administration Building.

Yet with all its population growth and development tracts of houses, North Branford still retains the small town country feeling. A quote from the 1971 Plan of Development presented by the Planning and Zoning Commission, June 7, 1971 states, "The country atmosphere is an attraction for present and new residents and should be preserved as representing the fundamental character of North Branford." One hundred and thirty-six years earlier the Rev. Jonathan Maltby described life in North Branford, "In the houses - in the furniture - in the equipage - in the dress and address - in the diet - in the social intercourse there was much solid comfort without extra elegance - with but little splendor or show." This fundamental character of comfortable living in a country atmosphere - with little splendor or show - true today as it was over 200 years ago, is reflected in the architecture. No matter what the prevailing style of the period (and in many cases the styles often lingered longer here than in places that were nearer to main transportation routes), the local carpenter, builder, craftsman - more often than not the homeowner himself - adapted it to suit his way of life. Most of the buildings in North Branford are simple, unpretentious and a testimony to the fundamental character of the town."

Janet Gregan

May, 1980