

Scandinavians immigrate to Branford



The Scandinavians were among the many Europeans to immigrate to Branford in the late 19th century and all four countries of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark were represented.

The first Scandinavian to come to Branford was Thorvald Hammer, a native of Denmark, who in 1864 was one of the founders of the MIF (Malleable Iron Fittings Company). The family was associated with that company for three generations. Many Scandinavian immigrants found employment at the MIF and lived along Indian Neck Avenue past the factory.

According to the 1880 census, there were only a few Scandinavians in Branford besides the Hammer family. Alfred Lundquist, 33, his wife and daughter, all natives of Sweden, were listed as residing in Stony Creek. He was a stone cutter at the quarry. There were also five young Swedish men working and boarding at the Kelsey Fish Factory in Short Beach. Among them was Claus Johnson, 22, who would make Short Beach his permanent home. Many of Claus' descen-

dants live in Short Beach today.

Over the next 10 years, more Scandinavians would come to Branford. In 1883 they began holding church services at the Congregational Church on the Green. The Swedish Church was officially organized Jan. 2, 1888 with 40 charter members, and they made plans to build a church on Hopson Avenue.

The church on Hopson Avenue was built in 1889 by Benjamin Hosley, a local contractor, but the building burned in 1892 and had to be rebuilt. For a brief period there was a Swedish church in Stony Creek that was abandoned and the furniture was used at Hopson Avenue. The Hopson Avenue church would serve the needs of the parish until 1957 when they moved to larger quarters on Tabor Drive.

Many descendants of the early Scandinavian families still reside in Branford today. Some, including the children of this writer, represent the fifth generation.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is the historian for the town of Branford.

Photo courtesy of Branford Historical Society
Tabor Lutheran Church on Hopson Avenue burned in 1892, was rebuilt and served the congregation at this site until 1957. The church then moved to larger quarters on Tabor Drive.