

**A Modern History of New Haven and Eastern New Haven County, by Everett G. Hill
Chapter XXXV, Branford**

*ORIGINS OF AN IMPORTANT OLD COLONIAL TOWN, AND THE EVOLUTION FROM
THEM OF A LIVELY, MODERN MANUFACTURING AND FARMING COMMUNITY*

When, in the spring of 1644, the territory of Totoket was sold by the New Haven proprietors to Mr. Swaine and certain others who had lately come down from Wethersfield, it was described as “a place fit for a small plantation, betwixt New Haven and Guilford.” As then bounded, there were some forty-five square miles of it, and it compared well with other plantations except the very large one that Guilford was before Madison was set off from it. And it was a goodly plantation.

Branford, like Guilford, received its original settlement independently of New Haven. The New Haven colonists had land to spare, and wanted neighbors. They seem to have offered inducements to such desirable planters as Mr. Swaine and his associates from Wethersfield, and the Rev. Abraham Pierson and his followers from Southampton, Long Island, proved to be. Samuel, brother of Theophilus Eaton, had obtained a grant of the Totoket part of the second purchase from the Indians, representing that he wished it for such friends as he might bring over from England. He sailed away then, and on his return to England seems to have lost his taste for the New World; at least, he did not come back, and the land remained unoccupied.

There was an incident between this grant and the time of the actual settlement whose close approach to conditions changing the whole face of southern New Haven County seem to have been overlooked. The Dutch explorers were always prospecting, and within two or three years after Samuel Eaton sailed away, they entered the mouth of the Branford River. There they set up stakes, and established a trading post. Then they too sailed away, and virtually they did not come back. We are likely never to get the whole story of “Dutch House Wharf” at Branford; perhaps there is nothing to tell. But something seems to be lacking of explanation why the Dutch failed to retain their sense of the natural advantages of the Branford location.

Totoket, “the tidal river,” was the poetic Indian name. It still remains as a place name, still is applied to that commanding cliff which stands near the bounds between what was upper Branford and what is still upper Guilford. Brenford or Brainford, a town on the Brent close to London, was the place of origin of some of the immigrants. So, with eventual changes, Branford it became. The settlers found their Indian associates good neighbors, the latter appreciated the white man’s protection, and together they prospered.

There is a fairly good record of the names of those who came down from Wethersfield, and of those who came out from New Haven to join them. The personnel of the party that came with Rev. Abraham Pierson has not been preserved. The reason for that is, no doubt, that the stay of the latter was comparatively brief. They had come from Southampton because they preferred the New Haven style of government. But when, in 1664, by the recklessness of Charles II in bounding New Netherlands on the east by the Connecticut River, they found themselves ostensibly in Dutch territory, while the others protested but remained, the Rev. Abraham Pierson and his followers folded their tents like the Arabs, and quietly stole away to Newark.

The real leader of the Wethersfield party, who was pastor in the beginnings of the Branford church, was Rev. John Sherman. He removed to Watertown on the coming of Mr. Pierson. William Swaine, or Swain, and his sons Samuel and Daniel, Richard Harrison, Robert Rose, Thomas Whitehead, Edward Frisbie, John Hill, John Norton, Samuel Nettleton and Edward Treadwell, were among the other members from Wethersfield. Thomas Morris, Thomas Lupton, George and Lawrence Ward and John Crane came out from New Haven. There were two other early settlers whose status is of interest. The comers in 1644 found Thomas Mulliner and Thomas Whitway on the ground. The former was something of an adventurer, described as "a restless and independent spirit." He had made his purchase from the Indians, had settled near the sea and naturally regarded the later arrivals somewhat as usurpers. They never got along with him, but when he died in 1690, they made a bargain with his wife and son to trade their land at what had come to be known as "Mulliner's Neck" for a tract of 200 acres in the northwestern section of the town. From then the Mulliner name is identified with North Branford. So with the name of Thomas Whitway, who made no trouble for the early party because his place was in Foxon. But he also was independent, though some effort has been made to show that he was with the Wethersfield immigrants.

There are in the early story of Branford's ancient church features that reveal much of the human nature of the planters and their descendants, and appeal to us today with some little humor. They do not concern the pastorate of Rev. Samuel Russell, who came to the pulpit of Abraham Pierson the first in 1686, and remained until his death in 1731. His was truly one of the great pastorates of Connecticut, and his descendants are among the noblest of Branford and North Branford. It was in his house in Branford, the most authentic records prove, that the foundations of Yale were orally and spiritually, and probably legally laid. He was no small part of the force which brought Yale eventually to New Haven. He was a man of power and vision, and built as wisely for all Branford.

But before Pastor Russell there was a church period which reveals something of the unformed nature of the community from 1666 to 1686. We are told by one authority that Pastor Pierson provided a successor in the person of Rev. John Bowers, a graduate of Harvard who had been brought to New Haven as a teacher, but the further records of his work in Branford are somewhat indistinct. In fact, it appears that the twenty years between the notable pastorates was one in which the people indulged in a practice which formerly delighted New England churches, that of candidating. There were thirteen or fourteen men in that period, one authority says.

Soon after Mr. Russell's death began, in 1733, the interesting pastorate of Rev. Philemon Robbins. He was a man of power and character, we may judge, but rather advanced, in some respects, for his people and times. For about 1741 arose as nearby as Wallingford certain of a strange sect known as Baptists. There had come to Mr. Robbins congregation from Wallingford a lady who held to that faith, and she brought it about that he was invited to go up and preach, ne Sunday in the following January, to the people with whom she had worshipped. In the fraternity of his spirit, he went, and preached two sermons. The act came near to being his destruction, as far as Branford was concerned. It appeals strongly to our sense of the ridiculous that the people of the Branford Church actually called a solemn council and haled Mr. Robbins before it on serious charges of having "in a disorderly manner" preached to the Baptists of Wallingford. The

ace he cheerfully admitted; the disorder they did not prove. And instead of casting Mr. Robbins out, the result was a firm establishment of him in the hearts of those of his people who remained loyal to him. These were not all, however. A substantial number regarded his recognition of the Baptists as a mortal sin, and went away and formed an Episcopal church.

Mr. Robbins's death in 1781 closed another remarkably long pastorate. In the next century he has had some able successors, among them Rev. Lynde Huntington in the early period and Rev. C.W. Hill, Rev. Cyrus P. Osborne and Rev. Henry Pearson Bake in the later. Rev. Thomas Bickford was with the church from 1889 to 1892, and Rev. T.S. Devitt from 1893 to 1909. He was followed by Rev. Seelye K. Tompkins, who also was found a wanderer from the path of conservatism, and not all of the people followed him fully. There was not so decided a split as at the earlier time, but some who failed to approve of Mr. Tompkins's ways as to church management rather than as to belief felt for a time constrained to worship elsewhere. But he had a loyal following, and his ability seems to have been recognized in his call in 1916 to a large church in Cincinnati. He was succeeded by Rev. Theodore B. Lathrop, who has proved a most acceptable leader.

The number, it seems, of those dissenters from the liberal Rev. Philemon Robbins was not large. Probably before that there were those inclined to the Church of England form of worship, and these and the dissenters joined to form what has become Trinity parish. The date given is 1748, but it was 1784 before there was anything but a missionary church, or a church building was erected. After that was provided in 1786 there was a long succession of rectors, few of whom remained as much as ten years. In the present period the church has had Rev. Melville K. Bailey, from 1885 to 1891; Rev. F.B. Whitcome, 1891 to 1894; Rev. George Brown, from 1895 to 1898; Rev. Henry W. Winkley, 1899 to 1906, and since then Rev. George Ward Barhydt, whose present place of influence in the Branford community is a commanding one. Its first houses of worship were, like their neighbors of the time, crude pieces of architecture. Its present dignified and advantageously situated edifice was built in 1852, and its parish house was added in 1880.

Some embers of a former strife blazed up again when in 1838 some Baptists from Wallingford proposed to establish a church of that faith in Branford. There was opposition as soon as they sought a site for a building. For a time they worshiped in private houses. Their first public baptism was held in the river near Neck Bridge in 1838, and naturally attracted a crowd. Finally the town fathers kindly consented to let the new brethren build on the site of the old whipping post on the green, and there they did in 1840. The building was improved in 1866, and still serves the people. Rev. D.T. Shailer was the first pastor. There were twenty pastors from him to Rev. P.H. Wightman, who was there for several years following 1886. The pastor at present is Rev. Walter V. Gray.

The Congregational Church at Stony Creek was started in 1865, when Rev. Elijah C. Baldwin was pastor of the mother church. He assisted by preaching occasionally in the schoolhouse in that district, and a church building was erected in 1866. The church was formally organized in 1877, and Rev. C.W. Hill was the first pastor. It has done half a century of constructive work for the village, and been served by earnest and able men. The present pastor is Rev. A.G. Heyhoe.

St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church was organized in 1855, though Branford was not a parish by itself until 1887. In 1876 Rev. Joseph D. Danielson is pastor.

For its 1,600 children of school age Branford has a complete and modern equipment. The plant consists of a well equipped High school, seven graded schools and four schools in the outlying districts which, though of the country type, are well managed and taught. The superintendent of schools, who is also principal of the High school, is Herman S. Lovejoy. In the High school he has a force of seven teachers. In Center district graded school there are eight rooms, at Stony Creek school six, at the Canoe Brook school three, and at Harbor Street, Short Beach, Indian Neck and Saltonstall two rooms each. The district schools are Mill Plain, Damascus, Paved Street and Brushy Plain.

The board of citizens who direct this school equipment consists of John W. Cunningham, chairman; John Van Wie, O.C. Kelsey, J. Edwin Brainerd, H.R. Allsworth, T.G. Fisher, W.C. Higley, E.A. Kraus, and Charles Reynolds.

There was born on a humble farm just outside of the center of Branford, in 1793, a descendant in the fifth generation from that William Blackstone who was the first settler of Boston. On that same Branford farm four generations of Blackstones before John Blackstone had lived, done their work and given substance to the town. He lived there all his life, and died in Branford in 1886, at the ripe age of ninety-three. He had a son, Timothy B. Blackstone, who chose a life work that took him outside the old town where his ancestors had lived so long. At eighteen he began as a rodman in the engineering department of the New York, New Haven & Hartford railroad. By the application of that talent for industry and hard work which he had inherited he rose to assistant engineer in construction, to division engineer in construction on the Illinois Central, to chief engineer on the Joliet & Chicago, then to president of that road. At the age of thirty-five he was made president of the Chicago & Alton, and held that position for thirty-five years. Then, at seventy, he retired to a well earned leisure. It is the brief life story of one of Branford's most distinguished sons.

The career of success is marked for Branford in a manner that makes every dweller in the town proudly bless the name of Blackstone. On an eminence in the center of the town stands one of the finest library buildings in the country. It is a Grecian temple of the purest beauty, carved from Tennessee marble. Without, the architect, Solon S. Beman of Chicago, has reproduced in classic fidelity the true lines of Ionian art as shown in the Erechtheum of Athens in the days of the glory that was Greece. Within, in marble of varying tints, are wall and pier and arch and entablature, all in rich keeping with the dignity of the building. It is an edifice which has made Branford the praise of lovers of beauty and art the country over, and can never cease to exert its silent influence for the betterment of all who dwell within the town. It houses a well chosen library of 34,888 books.

So did Timothy B. Blackstone, prominent, successful and wealthy man, pay peerless tribute to the memory of the father whose simple greatness made his success possible. There have been many memorials, but few that so gracefully emphasize hidden character. The James Blackstone Memorial Library was completed in 1896, at an estimated cost of \$300,000, and Mr. Blackstone provided \$300,000 more for its endowment. It is held by the James Blackstone Memorial Library

Association, Incorporated, of which the original incorporators were Thorwald F. Hammer, Edward F. Jones, Dr. Charles W. Gaylord, Edmund Zacher, William Regan and Henry We. Hubbard. The trustees are now Dr. Gaylord, president; Edwin R. Kelsey, secretary; Alfred E. Hammer, treasurer; Mr. Zacher, Mr. Hubbard and Andrew Keogh, M.A., librarian of Yale University. The present Blackstone librarian is Charles N. Baxter.

Two banks serve the business machinery and the thrift of Branford. The older of them is the Branford Savings, which is known for its sound and conservative management, and has three quarters of a million dollars in deposits. Its president is Charles Hoadley, and its treasurer Wallace H. Foote. The Branford Trust Company, of which Richard Bradley is president, Henry F. Jourdan vice president and William R. Foote treasurer, has a capital of \$25,000 and surplus of \$14, 000.

Branford the borough was incorporated in 1893. It provides a strong central government, and has been managed largely as a business institution. Its chief executive in 1917 was Valdemar T. Hammer. The town officers the same year were: Selectmen, Louis A. Fisk, John T. Sliney and J. Edwin Brainerd; town clerk, Charles A. Hoadley; judge of town court, Edwin R. Kelsey; clerk and prosecutor of the same, John Eades and Earle A. Barker. The borough has an efficient fire department of which Wilson Thompson is chief, consisting of two hose companies, a hook and ladder company and a chemical engine.

The town has developed in the years a sufficient array of organizations and fraternities. Its twenty-five include a Masonic lodge, two lodges and an encampment of the orders of the Odd Fellows, a division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a council of the Knights of Columbus, two lodges of the Knights of Pythias, two lodges of the New England Order of Protection, a lodge of the Ancient Order of United Workmen and two camps of the Modern Woodmen of the World. There are two temperance societies, the Branford Agricultural Society, the M.I.F. Benefit Association, Mason Rogers Post, G.A.R., and two social clubs, the Branford Home Club and the Saltonstall Club.

Branford's handsome Soldier's monument, erected on the green in 1885, was provided through the efforts of Mason Rogers Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, which raised a fund of \$5,000 for the purpose. It memorializes the soldiers who have fought for Branford in former wars, but there is a larger company serving the old town now. Branford had for several decades before the beginning of this war been the headquarters of a battery of the state's artillery, and this company went out with the others under Captain Carroll C. Hincks.

Branford's industries, says the statistician, are agriculture and the manufacture of malleable iron goods. When a single concern employs upward of a thousand men in a community of some 7,000 people, that covers a large part of the ground. Branford settlers were farmers at the start, but some of them began to dabble in iron as early as 1655. They got the idea from the iron they found in the hills on the shore of Saltonstall, the noble lake on whose heights Governor Gurdon Saltonstall had his home in the colonial days. The iron miners, however, gave the name Furnace Pond to what had before that been Great Pond.

But that was only an incident. An infinitesimal part of the tremendous weight of iron which Branford has used has ever been mined in the town. Gone along with the iron mines are most of the primitive mills that used to be on Beaver Brook. The Branford Lock Works, an industry established in 1809, which fifty years later was the Squire & Parsons Manufacturing Company, has also disappeared. F.A. Holcomb, who later was a successful carriage manufacturer in New Haven, began his industry in Branford in the 'sixties. Ten years later his factory was used for a while to make safes, but those also are of the past. So is the shipbuilding yard that used to be at Page's Point. Branford's coasting trade is a memory, like the days when it was an important port of entry, and home port for deep sea sailors. Practically all of Branford's oysters are now raised at the Stony Creek side of the town.

So it comes about that though Branford today does more manufacturing than ever before in its history, it is confined to two concerns. The beginning of the Malleable Iron Fittings Company was at Page's Point in 1855, when William H. Perry, William S. Kirkham, John and Samuel O. Plant, William Blackstone, Gurdon Bradley, David Beach and William Wadsworth established a factory for the production of malleable iron. It was Rogers & Hadley afterward, but in 1864 the present corporation took hold, the far famed "M.I.F. Co." being formed. At that time the officers were: President, J.J. Walworth; secretary and treasurer, E.C. Hammer; manager at Branford, T.F. Hammer; general superintendent, R.E. Hammer.

Since then the business has developed enormously in size and even more in variety. In the heart of Branford, where railroad communication is most convenient, has been created a model of American manufacturing efficiency. It has made the significant name of Hammer the slogan of Branford. Without, the factory is an adornment to Branford. Within, it is a dynamo of production, a magical transformer of the labor of the town into an almost endless variety of useful "fittings" of malleable iron. It is a technical array of product, but the initiated reckon by signs they can understand that it is mighty excellent. The firm employs in all its departments considerably in excess of 1,000 people, and the business is rapidly growing.

The company is at present capitalized at \$125,000 and its officers are: President, A.C. Walworth; secretary, J.J. Nichols; treasurer and general manager, Alfred E. Hammer; superintendent of pipe fittings, Valdemar T. Hammer.

Branford's other going manufacturing concern is the Atlantic Wire Company, maker of iron and steel wire. It was established in Branford in 1906 with a capital of \$25,000, and employs between fifty and 100 men. Its officers are W.E. Hitchcock, president and treasurer; M.F. Hope, secretary.

In strange contrast, this hive of industry is, for a part of the year, also the abode of the supremest leisure. Branford's shore, all the way from Short Beach to Little Harbor, is a delight to the lover of the sea. It has a coast of infinite variety, indented with creeks and bays, fringed with romantic and rocky islands, a never failing mine of joy and treasure. As far back as 1852 wayfarers from far found it, and now dwellers in Branford and New Haven and the four corners of the earth come to seek its summer paradise. Short Beach, Double Beach, Branford Point, Indian Neck and Pine Orchard are a few of the shore resorts, equipped with cities of cottages and with commodious hotels, some of which are The Arrowhead, Granite Bay Hotel, the Lime Wood

House, Montasco Inn, Montowese Hotel and the Owenego House at Indian Neck, and the Sheldon House at Pine Orchard. Hither comes a multitude of pleasure argonauts that sometimes outnumbers Branford's seven thousand people.