

The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

Connecticut Tercentenary Celebration  
at  
North Branford

July 27 and 28, 1935

2012-056-001

# Connecticut Tercentenary Celebration

AT

## NORTH BRANFORD

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THE ROSE HOUSE (*circa* 1720), BUILT NEAR SIBBIE'S HILL  
BY JONATHAN ROSE, GREAT-GRANDSON OF ROBERT ROSE OF BRANFORD.  
Rooms from this house have been installed in the Yale Gallery of Fine Arts. The pen and  
ink drawing was made by the great-great-great-granddaughter of the builder.

## *Program*

**SATURDAY, July 27**

- 10.00 A.M. Parade, featuring horse-drawn floats, *Village Center*.
- 10.45 A.M. Exhibition drills by the local and visiting fife and drum corps, *Old Training Ground, Village Green*.
- 11.00 A.M. Hobby show opens, with over one hundred exhibits on display, including antiques, scientific, artistic, educational, and whimsical objects, livestock, etc., *Town Hall and grounds*.
- 11.45 A.M. Luncheon served by the ladies of the community, *Congregational Chapel, Village Green*.
- 1.30 P.M. Baseball game, Colored Thunderbolts of Connecticut vs, North Branford Town Team, *Trap Rock Field*.
- 4.00 P.M. Historical pageant in nine episodes, with orchestral accompaniment, Clinton Julian of Branford, conductor, *Trap Rock Field*. 7.00 P.M. Hobby show, closed during the pageant, reopens, *Town Hall and grounds*.
- 8.30 P.M. Street dance, with fifteen-piece orchestra, *Village Center*.

At intervals throughout the day, sight-seeing trips may be taken to points of interest. These will include a visit to the Indian Well; a tour of old houses, of which North Branford has several, built between 1700 and 1800; inspection of the old cemetery opposite the Green; a seven-mile drive around Lake Gaillard, through the courtesy of the New Haven Water Company.

**SUNDAY July 28**

A.M. Tercentenary commemorative services in the churches. P.M. Hobby show in the Town Hall.

The area now known as North Branford was a part of the territory of Totoket purchased from the Indians in 1638 by Theophilus Eaton and his associates. As the original settlement of Branford grew, the sons and grandsons of its founders pushed to the north and established farms. The first house in this district was built in 1680. By 1724 there were enough inhabitants in the "North Farms," as the settlement was called for many years, to warrant the building of a meetinghouse in their midst. The parish remained a part of Branford, however, until 1831, at which time a separate township was incorporated, including within its boundaries the present villages of Northford, Totoket, and North Branford.

## HISTORIC GLIMPSES OF CONNECTICUT

### *A Pageant in Nine Episodes and Finale*

*Episode I: The Coming of the White Men to the Connecticut River Valley.* John Oldham and his men from the Massachusetts Colony were made welcome by the Indians, who had heard of their firearms and hoped for their protection.

*Episode II: Copper Mining in Colonial Days.* The Connecticut Colony produced more copper than any of the other colonies. Because of the high cost of production the mines were abandoned. The Granby mines were used as a prison for Revolutionary War captives.

*Episode III: The Call to Arms.* More recruits were needed for the ranks of the Colonists. The call reached the Reverend Samuel Eells of North Branford on a Sabbath morning. He answered the summons in a stirring manner, later attaining the rank of Captain.

*Episode IV: Westward Ho!* In 1800, and for years preceding and following it, hundreds of families from Connecticut migrated to Ohio. A definite likeness in customs and manners as well as family names resulted.

*Episode V: Effects of a Connecticut Invention.* Eli Whitney, who received his education at Yale, taught school in Georgia, and invented a cotton engine to extract the seeds from the fiber. This engine was later called "gin."

*Episode VI: Brotherhood.* A state of war was declared between the North and the South in 1861. The usual agonies of war were increased by the fact that oftentimes brother was fighting against brother. This episode deals with the experience of Samuel Hall, a member of Company A, 20th Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers.

*Episode VII: Newcomers.* The latter part of the nineteenth century saw thousands of emigrants from Europe enter the United States. With them came new customs and ideas.

*Episode VIII: World Safety.* During the World War Connecticut poured her sons into the trenches of Europe. Industrial and economic progress was halted, and the pangs of war were again felt.

*Episode IX: Modern Trends.* Today we believe in world brotherhood. This idea is being developed in the minds of our children through playground and school activities,

*Finale: Connecticut.*

## EARLY NORTH FARMS

It is excessively difficult for the modern, brought up with radios, motor cars, airplanes, bathtubs, and all of today's living equipment, to visualize the conditions that existed when the country was originally settled. The first frame house in the limits of North Branford was built by Captain Jonathan Rose about 1680, in the section known as Hop Yard Plain, just outside the present Branford line. He was a ship captain and brought home rare woods for trim and furniture from different parts of the world. He was a grandson of Robert Rose, one of the original settlers of Branford in 1644.

Whether the trails to Sibbie's Hill, which is the hill to the right of Lake Gaillard, were up the present road to Branford or through the Queech (Twin Lake) district is not known, but they were originally footpaths. The evident trail to Northford was over the "Lid Hitt's Hill" from Branford. Settlers, when they went to church at Branford, as they had to, rode on horseback. The good man was in the saddle, the wife on a pillion behind, with the baby or little child in her arms. Luckily there was no trouble with local Indians, but there was distinct apprehension of raids from other Indians, particularly the Mohawks, and there was constant danger from wolves and panthers.

It was a rough existence, with every household almost entirely sufficient unto itself. It raised its own foodstuffs and its cattle, hogs, and poultry. It salted down and cured all the necessary meat supplies for the winter and dried fruits in the summer.

About 1703 the land south and east of the Great Hill, in the present limits of North Branford, and north and northwest, in the present limits of Northford, was drawn by lot for different settlers.' By that time a good many had evidently pushed into the "North Farms" section.

By 1715 the population had grown to such a point that a petition was sent by the settlers around Sibbie's Hill to the Branford Church asking for permission to build a meetinghouse at the present North Branford center. This was refused at first, as Branford was loathe to lose so many members. In 1724 it was finally agreed upon, and the church was built and dedicated in 1725. It was located within a few feet of the present building. The Reverend Samuel Russel of Branford offered prayer at the erection of the frame. The structure was 45 feet in length by 35 feet in width and contained many small windows, with diamond-shaped panes, and doors east, west, and south. The floor was sunk below the level of the door, leading to many falls as people entered. They were immediately brought to their knees. A sounding box over the pulpit is said to have been a home for bats, which on dark days flew out over the worshippers' heads, much to the amusement of small boys. The first minister was Mr. Jonathan Merrick, who served the people for forty-three years. His descendants still live in the town.

Mr. Merrick was succeeded by the Reverend Samuel Eells, who was ordained in 1769. He was minister during the Revolutionary War. When the call came from General Washington for more men, he was in the middle of a sermon. He stopped, called for volunteers, adjourned the meeting to the open fields by the church, and formed a company which he led during the war.

Churchgoing in those days was a serious occupation. Sermons were from two to four hours long. There were no fires in the church during the winter. The women took foot stoves, and the men tried to keep warm as best they could. At the close of the morning sermon everyone adjourned to the "Sabbath-day houses," which were small buildings in which fires could be made. The churchgoers ate lunch and thawed out, only to attend another sermon in the afternoon, to be warmed spiritually but frozen physically.

The position of the original ministers was one of great influence. The story is told of how a schoolteacher, during the incumbency of the first

minister at North Farms, had to discipline one of the pupils. The father took the boy out of school. The matter came before the minister, who promptly called the father before him and is quoted as saying: "You teach rebellion. It shall not be so I will have you know that I will put my foot on your neck." That ended the matter.

The minister's pay was not large, notwithstanding his commanding position. In Branford the earliest minister received two pounds of butter every six months from each owner of a cow. The balance of his salary was made up of wheat, pork, indian corn, and possibly some wampum. He had to be a farmer and a business man as well as a minister.

Primitive conditions prevailed everywhere. The story is told of how a great-great-aunt of the writer was caught in a thunderstorm and crawled into a large hollow log for shelter from the rain. After the storm she crawled out, followed by a big black bear which had also taken refuge in the log. The lady ran, and so did the bear.

Town meetings were serious affairs. In Branford anyone late for town meeting was fined sixpence, and if he left the meeting before its adjournment he was fined two shillings. Such pleasant things as stocks, pillories, and whipping posts were part of the early life.

A serious problem in those days was the care of the few cattle, to keep them from wandering in the unfenced wilds and protect them from wolves and panthers. The few roads, as they were early laid out, were about two hundred feet wide. Livestock was branded and looked after by a regularly appointed cowherd who was paid by the town.

There were no "alphabets" to look after, the people in those days. They depended upon one another for succor, When they were sick the neighbors took turns in caring for them, the women helping with the housework, and the men doing the plowing or the reaping of the crops. It was a stern, hard existence which made strong men and noble women.

[This sketch was written by A. Lovell Russell, a native of North Branford and a direct descendant of the Reverend Samuel Russel of Branford and of the Jonathan Russell who built near Sibbie's Spring in 1720.],

#### HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE OF NORTH BRANFORD

The Reverend George I. Wood wrote in 1850: "Probably there are few, if any communities in the State, in which so large a portion of the *present generation of residents are the direct descendants of the original settlers of the soil.*" This statement still holds true, for many of those now living in North Branford are descended from the early Colonial families of Baldwin, Barker, Bartholomew, Beers, Buel, Butler, Byington, Foote, Ford, Harrison, Linsley, Merrick, Page, Palmer, Rogers, Rose, Russell, Todd, and Wheaton.

The first recorded partition of property in what is now North Branford occurred in 1687, when a half-dozen young men of Branford were granted "a parcel of land one mile square in the western and northerly part of the town." Some of them took up their claims and fulfilled the condition of retaining the grant by building "habitable" houses and settling on the land

within three years. We have reason to believe that this grant included most of Bare Plain, which at that time was devoid of the usual forest growth, because the Indians burned it over each year to make it a good hunting ground for deer. The Indians hereabouts were not unfriendly. In fact they looked to the white settlers, who had firearms, to protect them from the raids of roving hostile tribes. Sibbie was a petty sachem who set up his wigwams not far from Goshen Pond (now a part of Lake Gaillard), and his name survives in Sibbie's Hill and Sibbie's Spring

In March, 1703, another division of land was completed. Settlers continued to come from Branford and, later in the century, from Southampton, Long Island, Milford, Stamford and New Haven. The increase in the number of inhabitants and the difficulties involved in attending church in Branford led to the establishment of a separate parish in 1724, with the building of a meetinghouse and a home for the minister, the Reverend Jonathan Merrick. Land must have been set aside for a burying ground about this time too, for the oldest stone records the death of Isaac Bartholomew in 1727. The cemetery in the Center of the village contains many interesting stones, among them one which commemorates a granddaughter of John Davenport of New Haven Colony fame.

Early deacons of the church were Benjamin Barnes, poor but pious, Israel Baldwin, Daniel Page, Ithiel Russell, and Barnabas Mulford. Jonathan Butler was first appointed to "read and tune the Psalm." In 1775 the first singing master is mentioned and a singing school was organized. In 1792 the Musical Society of North Branford was founded, and in 1799 members were allowed ten dollars a year "in case they sing."

Up to the time of the Revolution the larger landowners became fairly affluent. Some of them owned slaves. In 1773-76 there was a colored population of between forty and fifty. About this time the Reverend Ezra Stiles, president of Yale College, and the Reverend Samuel Hopkins of Newport, R.I., issued tracts deploring the practice of slavery. The Reverend Samuel Eells preached sermons against the custom, and, as a result, most of the slaves at North Farms were given their freedom before slavery was generally abolished in Connecticut.

The story is told that one of the heirs of John Harrison, an early settler, deeded to her former slave, Cooley Mason, a small house near the site of the present Episcopal Church. When a young white woman of Branford, whose father had compelled her to discard her lover, vowed in anger that she would marry a negro, Cooley Mason offered himself as the groom, and they were married.

Gad Asher won his freedom by serving in the Revolution as the servant of General Greene. Gad's lane, leading from Beach Corner, was named for him.

The men of North Branford responded gallantly to the Reverend Samuel Eells' call to arms. Not all of those forming the company, of which he was made Captain, saw active service, but it is recorded that Jacob Page was taken prisoner and carried to England and another young man was frozen to death at Valley Forge. Butler Harrison served on the ship *Oliver Cromwell*, built in Essex. There was at least one Tory in the town, Abiather Camp

Of Totoket, who deemed it wise to go to Nova Scotia. His lands were confiscated.

Cultivation, of the land was the chief occupation of the early days, but we read that tan vats were worked by the Fords, who were saddlers, and at one time potash was manufactured in Sandy Hollow below Sibbie's Hill. The furnaces were tended by Captain Joel Howd, who lived in the Great Hill Row. A distillery for making cider brandy was also set up in this vicinity, but did not remain long. There, were blacksmiths, shoemakers, a jeweller, and a cabinet maker, and several people kept taverns. The first store was, opened by the Frisbies on the Brushy Plain road in Totoket. Hezekiah Partridge, who lived down the Branford road, ran a gristmill, and in Totoket was the Rogers mill. Several young men studied at Yale College and became ministers, lawyers, teachers, and doctors. Among them were Thomas Goodsell, Thomas G. Wolcott, Jonathan Merrick, Roger Harrison, Alexander Wolcott, Fosdick Harrison, Increase Harrison, David F. Atwater, Miles Beardsley, Lynde Harrison, and Henry Rogers.

We do not know when the first "red schoolhouse" was built on the Green, but early in the 1800's there was a division in the center district and a party seceded from the red schoolhouse and built the "white schoolhouse." Time healed the breach, and in 1824-25 the red schoolhouse was torn down and the two factions united. (The white schoolhouse now stands to the rear of Loeber's store.) One cause of trouble was said to have, been the desire of the red schoolhouse party to employ a teacher who was an Episcopalian. At that time the Congregationalists were none too cordial to other sects. When certain members of the community in 1812 expressed the wish to establish an Episcopal church they met with opposition. For some years they held services in private houses, but in 1818 their petition was granted, and the building, was begun which is still standing where the Notch Hill road and the Branford road meet the highway to New Haven. The early records of the church's formation have. been preserved.

On the Northford road a schoolhouse was built in 1805 and is one of the few early red schoolhouses still standing. It was restored and removed to the center of Northford a few years ago and is now used as a library. The desks, which were built facing three of the walls, and the backless benches have been preserved. ,

In 1831 the North Societies were separated from Branford and incorporated as a separate town. A new road, the Essex turnpike, had been opened in 1825, and North Branford village became a thriving center. The store employed several clerks and was patronized by the surrounding towns.

A stage ran daily to New Haven. The post office was located in the store for several years. People from other nations began to arrive. Some of the townspeople started migrating to Ohio and farther west, a few to California with the Forty-Niners. When the Civil War broke out, there were several volunteers from North Branford, and in 1866 the monument on the green was unveiled, the first memorial to the soldiers of the Civil War to be erected in the United States. ,

Developments during the last half century are evident around us. Many new residences have been erected, and modern schoolhouses" have supplanted



the old one-room, one-teacher type. Good roads have been constructed and the old byways made much more comfortable for traveling.

The New Haven Trap Rock Quarry, built in 1914-15, created a new industry in the town and brought many, new citizens who take an active part in the community life. A Roman Catholic Church was built in 1925 to minister to the individuals of that faith dwelling here. A spirit of friendly cooperation exists among the different sects that is far removed from the bitter rivalries of the old days, when belief in religious freedom did not necessarily imply tolerance.

In 1925 the New Haven Water Company commenced work on its large dam and reservoir. Sibbie's Hill and Sandy Hollow have changed considerably in appearance since then. Sites of many of the old dwelling places have been flooded and Lake Gaillard, cradled in the valley between Totoket Mountain and Sea Hill, adds new beauty to the scene. During the process of excavation to reach bed rock for the base of the dam, fossil footprints were discovered, left by dinosaurs some thousands of years ago. These are now in Yale's Peabody Museum.

In 1933 part of one of North Branford's beautiful streams was set aside and stocked by the State for the sole use of Connecticut's women followers of the sport of fishing. This stream enjoys the distinction of being the first in the United States reserved for and patrolled by women.

#### OLD HOUSES

Many of the very early houses built at North Farms were made of logs, but as the settlers prospered, they erected frame houses. Some of these, built between 1700 and 1800, are still standing in good condition.

On the main highway to New Haven is the Isaac Linsley house in Bare Plain, built presumably before 1700 and owned and lived in by the Linsley descendants up to the present generation. It is almost completely furnished with genuine antiques that have come down in the family.

As one approaches North Branford village, an old house with a steep pitched roof can be seen on the road leading to the Twin Lakes. When the chimney was being repaired, the present owner found in it a stone bearing the date 1701. The builder is not known.

On the Brushy Plain road leading from Totoket to Branford are three eighteenth century houses. Nearest the main highway is the Butler Harrison house on the left, possibly built in 1782, the year of his marriage to Mercy Linsley. A little farther along on opposite sides of the road are the houses owned before 1800 by Rufus Linsley and his son James. It is possible that two of these houses were built much earlier by the Frisbies, who settled here early in the century and kept the first store and tavern.

On the road that passes the mill pond in Totoket stands the house built (or bought) by Daniel Page, who was sent to the General Court each year from 1750 to 1779. The bull's-eye windows in the front door are unique features of this house.

On the Northford road is a house built by David Russell, who married in 1783.

In Hop Yard Plain, near the Branford town line, stands a house erected by Samuel Rose, who died in 1775. The house was undoubtedly built much earlier in the century, probably about 1735.

On the road leading from Lake Gaillard, an old house, protected by a great maple tree, stands on the hillside. It was built by the Reverend Samuel Eells in 1769-70 and was the parsonage throughout his long ministry. In the cellar the huge chimney forms an archway through which a cart could pass. The wainscoting downstairs and the wide boards in the upstairs rooms are other interesting features.

Farther down the street, on the opposite side, is the house built in 1764 by Timothy Russell. The front door opens into a small hall from which a beautiful stairway ascends.

The present parsonage was built by Daniel Rose, who married in 1771 and sold the place to the Reverend David Atwater in 1809. We do not know the exact date of its erection.

Justus Rose, a grandson of the Captain Jonathan Rose of Hop Yard Plain, contracted with Nathan Harrison to build a house for his daughter during the decade before 1800. This house, which stands next to the parsonage, has been restored to show the old whitewood paneling.

The house which Justus Rose inherited from his father, Jonathan, who built it around 1720, remained in the Rose family until the property on which it stood was purchased by the New Haven Water Company. Yale University acquired the house, and rooms from it have been installed in the Gallery of Fine Arts to illustrate early American architecture. A very old window uncovered when the house was taken apart has been on exhibition in the Avery Memorial in Hartford.

A house of the Dutch Colonial type, built by Hezekiah Reynolds in 1760-65, faces on the small common which was used as the training ground in the old days. The wide floor boards and the cupboards in this house are especially interesting.

Back of the Congregational Church stands a house with a gambrel roof built by Jacob Page who belonged to the Church in 1769 and was a Corporal in Captain Eells' company in the Revolution.

Near the foot of Callop's Hill stands a large old house known for many years as the Virgil Rose place. It was built long before the Roses owned it, but by whom or when we do not know. There are no town records in existence which cover this early period. Consequently, dates given above are in many cases only approximate.

[A great deal of the information given above was found in a manuscript entitled *Notes relating to the early settlers of North Branford, Conn.*, which Martha Russell, a daughter of the town and a writer of distinction in her day, compiled with the aid of Jerome Harrison of Totoket. Other source material includes *The early history of the Congregational Church and Society of North Branford*, by George L. Wood (1850), the early records of the Episcopal Church, and *History of New Haven County, Connecticut*, edited by J. L. Rockey {1892}.]