

The oldest existing school in Branford still stands



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Bouley

The section of Branford known since colonial times as Mill Plain was settled in the mid-18th century by the grandchildren of the first settlers of Branford, including the families of Baldwin, Barker, Bartholomew, Beach, Frisbie, Linsley, Palmer and Tyler. Members of these families lived at Mill Plain for nearly 200 years.

In 1799 a one-room schoolhouse was built by the pond for the education of the children from that area of Branford. The Mill Plain School was known as an upgraded school, meaning more than one grade was taught in a room, in this case grades 1 through 6. In the early part of this century, the average enrollment was 25 students and teachers only taught at the school a few years, using it as a stepping stone to a teaching position in Branford Center. No doubt it was a difficult assignment teaching six grades in one room to children ranging in age from 5 to 12.

Little is said in the town records about the school except an occasional comment by the school visitor. The 1914 town report mentions that much improvement is needed at the Mill Plain and Damascus Schools where "the proximity and conspicuousness of the toilets suggest the lingering influence of rustic simplicity." In 1919 it is reported that Mill Plain and other small schools still had ancient double seats and inadequate lighting and blackboards. The records also name the teachers and their salaries. In 1883 the Mill Plain schoolteacher was Edna Hoadley who was paid \$225 a year and by 1926 the teacher Edith Hendrickson was earning \$900 per year.

By 1900 the Ward family had moved to Mill Plain and Thomas B. Ward would serve as the janitor of the school from that date until the school's closing. At the end of the 1927 school year the town closed the Park Street and Mill Plain Schools, realizing the need "for children to learn and socialize with



Photo courtesy of the Branford Historical Society

The Mill Plain School, now a private home, still stands by Ward's Pond.

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By 1900 the Ward family had moved to Mill Plain and Thomas B. Ward would serve as the janitor of the school from that date until the school's closing. At the end of the 1927 school year the town closed the Paved Street and Mill Plain Schools, realizing the need "for children to learn and socialize with children their own age." The Mill Plain School was sold and converted into a small private home. The building still stands today by Ward's Pond, the oldest existing school building in the town of Branford.

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