

The Henry Harrison... Branford's First Community House



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Bouley

The Harrison family was among the founding colonial families to settle in Branford in 1644. Hundreds of people throughout the country descend from

Richard Harrison and his son Thomas. Among the fifth generation was Farrington Harrison, 1738 – 1808. Farrington was a sea captain who traded cattle and other products to the West Indies in return for rum and molasses. One of Farrington's vessels was captured by the British during the Revolutionary War.

About 1760, Farrington built a home at the site of the current 960 Main Street, and kept an ordinary (tavern). The house was then owned by his son, John Harrison, 1788 – 1863, and finally his grandson, Henry G. Harrison, 1831 – 1913. Henry was a farmer. He developed Harrison Avenue to provide building lots for a growing population due to the arrival of many new European immigrants.

The Branford Community Council was founded in 1921 to organize recreational activities in Branford. The Council leased the Henry Harrison House, also known as "The Old Red

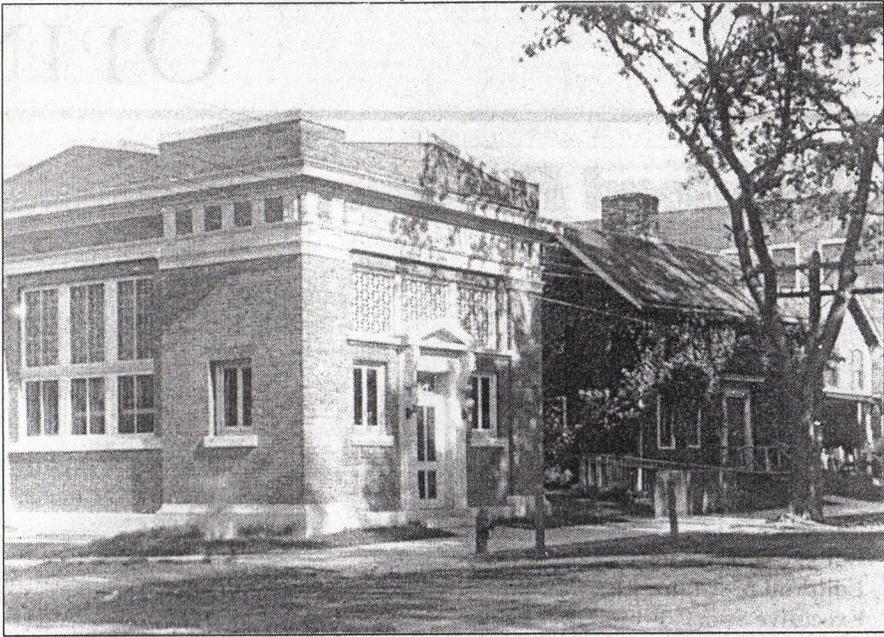
House" for a period of five years at a cost of \$500 per year. At that time, the house was owned by the Widow's Son Lodge of Branford. The space was also used by the Visiting Nurse Association and the Gaylord Health Association. The first floor contained a well-equipped kitchen and a kindergarten. On the upper floor was a sewing room and game room. Many clubs and organizations in town used the space for classes and meetings. There was also a rest room where "everybody may feel welcome."

The Branford Community Council did not renew their lease on the Harrison House when it expired in 1926. Polly's Tea Room was established in 1915, in the Hosley Block, and moved to the Old Red House in 1926. Polly served sandwiches, tea cake and sold crafts and gift cards. It was a favorite stopping place for automobile parties out for a drive.

Polly's Tea Room moved to a new building at 226 East Main St., in 1937, and closed in 1944. Afterwards, Althea's Tea Room operated briefly at the Harrison House location. The house was vacant during much of the 1940s' and its condition deteriorated.

The Henry Harrison House at 960 Main St., site of the first community house, was torn down in 1952. The Branford Food Basket and briefly, Stop & Shop, were located here in a new building from 1953 until 1965. Another new structure was built at 960 Main Street, which has been a doctor's office since 1968.

Editor's note: Jane Peterson Bouley is the historian for the Town of Branford.



Photos courtesy of the Branford Historical Society
The Henry Harrison House was the site of Branford's first Community House. To the east of Harrison Ave., along Main St., were the Branford Savings Bank built in 1911, the Henry Harrison House and John Barnes' Bike Shop.



The Harrison House at 960 Main St., was used as the community house from 1921 until 1926. Polly's Tea Room was located here from 1926 until 1937.