



*LANTERNS DECORATE the Granite Bay Hotel and adjoining cottages during the annual Short Beach Illumination Day. Photo courtesy of the Branford Historical Society.*

*Pictures of the Past*

## Illumination Day precursor of present Short Beach days

### **Illumination Day**

One of the highlights of the summer season was the Illumination Day held in August at Short Beach. The event was started about 1890 by the poetess Ella Wheeler Wilcox who was an avid swimmer and enjoyed gala affairs. Swimming and canoe races were held at Long Beach (Beckett Avenue) along with a diving competition. There was also a naphtha launch regatta and many activities for the children including sack races. A concert was held in the evening followed by fireworks.

All of the cottages along Main Street (now Shore Drive) from Nellie Green's to Granite Bay were strung with Japanese lanterns also called "illuminations." All of the lanterns were lit when the bell at the chapel

rang and the illumination provided a beautiful sight. Many people took the 30 cent cruise on Edwin Baldwin's steamer "White Star" to view the spectacle. The boat owners of Short Beach also decorated their boats with lanterns and a boat parade added to the festivities.

Eventually Illumination Day became Short Beach Days and the event was moved to Labor Day weekend and expanded to include tube and running races, dances and ski shows. Short Beach Days were suspended during World War II but were resumed in 1946. This year marks the 46th annual Short Beach Days and the three day affair ends with a costume parade on Labor Day.

**Jane Peterson Bouley**