

# Pictures of the Past

The Leather Man first appeared on Connecticut roads about 1857 and was a familiar sight during the next 30 years. As his name implies, he wore only leather from his head to his toes and his clothes were sewn together by leather thongs. He also carried a large bag which held his few possessions and the entire outfit weighed over 60 pounds.

The Leather Man followed a precise 360-mile course through southwestern Connecticut into New York which took exactly 34 days. From New York he crossed into Connecticut at Harwinton and came southeasterly to Middletown. He then followed the Connecticut River to Chester and Deep River and swung west along the shore. After passing through Branford he went on to North Haven in order to avoid New Haven and continued to Fairfield County over the border to New York where the cycle began again. He averaged over 10 miles a day and avoided thickly settled areas and well traveled roads.

Short of stature, the Leather Man had black hair and dark eyes. He rarely spoke and seldom entered the homes along his route. He slept in caves or made rustic shelters and families along the route left him food on their doorsteps. In Branford he stopped for sardines and bread at Harding's Grocery Store at 116 Montowese St. One mile down the road he ate stew at the Chidsey house at the corner of Main Street and Home Place. An old Branford newspaper reported the teacher would call a recess during a lesson if the Leather Man was coming down the road.

During the blizzard of 1888 his health began to fail and it marked the first time he diverged from his precise course. On March 24, 1889 his body was found in a cave near Ossining, N.Y. and he was buried in Sparta Cemetery in an unmarked grave. There was much speculation as to his identity which will forever remain a mystery but the legend of the wandering Leather Man will be passed on for generations to come.

-Jane Peterson Bouley



Photo courtesy of Branford Historical Society