

Pictures of the Past

Former Connecticut governor subject of colorful local lore



Photo from New Haven by Seymour

GOV. GURDON SALTONSTALL, as his likeness was captured in an original oil painting at at Yale University.

One of the interesting characters from Branford's past was Gurdon Saltonstall, the 10th governor of Connecticut and an ordained minister. He was born in 1666 in Haverhill, Mass., and kept a permanent residence in New London. After his marriage to Elizabeth Rosewell of Branford, he built a second home on the shores of Furnace Pond between Branford and East Haven.

Not your average Branford farmer, Gov. Saltonstall must have attracted much attention on his visits to Branford with his elegant attire and horse drawn carriage. The governor's stay here though was not always pleasant and he had particular problems with the citizens of East Haven.

Some of the farmers in East Haven kept flocks of geese that seemed to prefer Gov. Saltonstall's front yard as their favorite place to roost. The noise and unpleasant mess left by the geese was more than the governor could stand and he attacked and shot many of the birds. The owners of the geese were greatly offended and it is said that not one citizen from East Haven voted for Gurdon Saltonstall in the next election. The incident became known as "The Battle of Furnace Pond."

The final skirmish as reported by Hughes' History of East Haven, took place on the Farm River by the governor's home. Deborah Chidsey ran a ferry across the river and one day was summoned to carry the governor across. He was setting out to a meeting in his finest dress wearing a red velvet long waistcoat with gold lace, purple velvet knee breeches and white silk stockings. Whether an act of maliciousness or clumsiness, Chidsey ran the ferry onto a rock stranding the vessel. "What shall I do?" cried the governor. "Do as I do" was the reply whereupon Chidsey cackled like a goose the meaning of which he well understood, jumped into the water and swam ashore. The good governor was left there to wait for the next high tide preferring not to ruin his fine clothes and Deborah Chidsey became a local folk hero. For a time that part of the river became known as "Deborah's River."

In spite of these problems, two more generations of Saltonstalls would occupy the Branford home and the lake would be renamed in honor of Gurdon Saltonstall.

Jane Peterson Bouley