

# The strawberry once placed our community on the map

The month of June brings the ripening of strawberries which serves as a reminder that Branford was a major producer of the berry in the late 1800s until World War I.

Branford-grown strawberries were shipped by train to markets along the eastern seaboard, especially to Boston. In a good growing year, 50,000 quarts of berries were shipped from Branford.

Many European immigrants were hired to pick the berries and were paid 2 cents a quart. Several

generations of families picked side by side in the fields and about 1,000 pickers were used in Branford during the season.

The largest farm in Branford to grow strawberries was that of the Plant family of Branford Hills in the section then known as Plantsville. About 15 carloads of berries consisting of 20,000 quarts were shipped to the Boston market from the Plant farm per year and



## PICTURES OF THE PAST

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accounted for about one half of all the berries produced in Branford. The Plant farm was also the largest producer of peaches in New England.

The Nichols farm on Cherry Hill was another major grower of strawberries in Branford. Thirty of their 120 acres were devoted to strawberries. The Beach family grew strawberries as did Henry Averill in Indian Neck and John Barron on his farm on East Main Street. In 1869, the farmers organized the Branford Fruit Co. in order to consolidate pricing and shipping from Branford. The company shipped 2,500 quarts of strawberries daily and were known as the largest producer in the East. The last large shipment of strawberries from Branford was made in 1916.

After World War I, some of the farms were sold and help became harder to find. A few farmers still grew strawberries, among them were John Coolac and John Johns of Todd's Hill, the Cooke and Sansone



Photo courtesy Branford Historical Society

*Workers on the Plant orchards on Branford Hills, which was one of the largest producers of strawberries and peaches in the East.*

families and Irving Field.

The times were changing and Branford was becoming less of a farming and more of a suburban community. The Plant family orchard is now Caldor's, the Nichols farm is apartments and stores, Barron's farm is now the site of Branford High School and Henry Averill's field is now the Indian Neck School and Foote Park.

Perhaps while you eat your strawberry shortcake this June, you might pause to reflect on Branford's past contribution to the strawberry industry.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is the town historian for Branford.*