

Lake Saltonstall

The 'Great Lake' that was home to a governor

The body of water between the towns of Branford and East Haven was known to the Quinnipiac Indians as "Lonotonoquet" or Tear of the Great Spirit. The English settlers who came in 1644 to Branford called it the Great Lake and after an iron works was established on the shore, the lake became known as Furnace Pond. After the iron works closed much of the land along the lake was owned by William Rosewell of Branford, a wealthy ship merchant. In 1700 his daughter Elizabeth married Gurdon Saltonstall, who would become governor of the Connecticut Colony.

Gurdon Saltonstall was born in 1666 in Haverhill, Mass. and attended Harvard College. He was ordained as a minister in New London in 1691 and soon gained a reputation as a dynamic preacher. After his marriage to Elizabeth Rosewell he built a mansion along the shore of Furnace Pond, which was one of the most elegant homes in the area. The windows were adorned by tapestries woven to depict a hunting scene and were imported from England. The house had a massive oak stairway and brass doorknobs and fixtures.

Saltonstall made his permanent residence in New London, but probably stayed in Branford for short periods as business dictated. He was elected governor in 1708 and served until his death in 1724. He was an influential and powerful politician and was most famous during his term of office for the Saybrook Platform, which provided for a consociation of the state's churches and was also the chief



PICTURES
OF THE PAST

Jane Bouley



Courtesy of the Branford Historical Society

The Saltonstall Mansion stood on the east side of the lake between Branford and East Haven.

proponent of bringing Yale College to New Haven instead of Hartford.

At Saltonstall's death the mansion would pass to his son, Rosewell Saltonstall of New London and Hartford, and was managed for Rosewell by local farmers. The last of the Saltonstalls to own the farm was Rosewell Jr., who was a recluse and made the Branford mansion his year-round home. Rosewell Jr. died in 1788 in Branford at the age of 56 and is

buried at Center Cemetery.

The farm was sold by the Saltonstall family and was occupied by several families, the last of whom was William Hartley. The house burned to the ground in 1909 but the foundation can still be seen on the east side of the lake named in honor of Governor Gurdon Saltonstall.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is the historian for the Town of Branford.