

Fourth of July always eventful in Branford



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Peterson Bouley

BRANFORD - The celebration of the nation's independence has always been a joyous occasion in Branford, but not without its pranks. At the turn of the century the old Branford Battery marched on the Green and sounded the cannon. Young boys shot off firecrackers often scaring unsuspecting pedestrians until the noise-makers were banned from use in 1939.

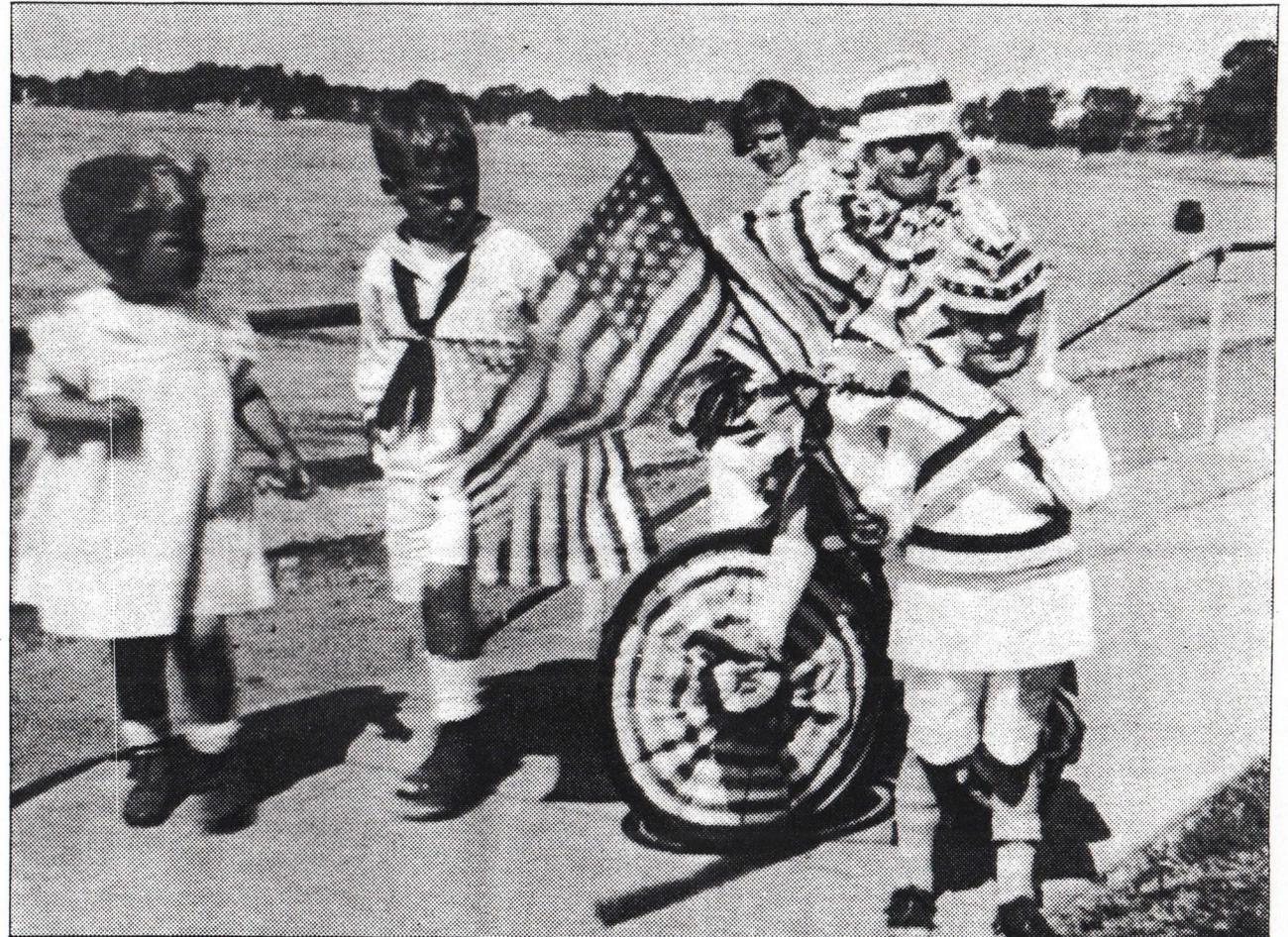
For many years the town was awakened at the stroke of midnight on July 4 by the tolling of the Trinity Church bell; yet the constables, Billy McKee and Joseph Schenk, never caught the perpetrator. Branford dentist Dr. Wilson "Deke" Thompson had a key to the belfry of the church and rang the bell every Sunday and admitted later in life to be the one whom the constables longed to catch.

He never rang the bell, however, if a town resident was gravely ill. On July 4, 1912, a group of boys burned down the old horse sheds which stood behind the Town Hall and is now the site of the World War I Cenotaph.

Early this century the shoreline cottages were decorated for the holiday with flags and incandescent lights.

In 1896, 1,000 people came to the Driving Park on East Main Street to hear a band concert followed by a fireworks display.

The longest continuous running celebration is the annual July 4 parade at Pine Orchard, now in its 77th year.



Children in costume for the 1920 Fourth of July parade that proceeded along the walk from the Pine Orchard Club to the Anchorage (courtesy of Polly Bradley Sherk)

The activity was started by the son-in-laws of A.M. Young and featured a children's costume parade along the walk from the Pine Orchard Club to the Young home, the Anchorage.

Following the parade, everyone was invited by the Youngs for food, games and the awarding of prizes.

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