

The Community House at 210 South Main Street

The Knights of Pythias was a fraternal and benevolent order founded in 1864 with lodges throughout the United States and Canada. The Branford branch was established in 1882 with 29 charter members and was called Woodland Lodge #39. In 1895 Woodland Lodge purchased land on South Main Street from the Wilford family to build a new hall and armory for their organization. The architect for Pythian Hall was William H. Allen of New Haven. The builder was Benjamin F. Hosley, who was also the first commander of Woodland Lodge.

The building was two stories 41-by-70 feet. The front door was entered through a large hallway and had maple floors. The 16-foot high ceiling was made of pine sheathing. There were ten large windows on the first floor and eight on the second floor. The second floor contained closets for member's saddles, a smoking room and a lodge room with 15-foot high ceilings. The cellar housed a boiler room, storeroom, dining hall and ten pin bowling alley.

All of the woodwork and interior finishes were done by G.A.R. Hamre of Branford. A trap door led to a hayloft on the side of the building. The building had a furnace, indoor plumbing and electricity with eight chandeliers in the main hall.

The Knights of Pythias used this building until 1920 and later met at 8 Svea Avenue until the 1960s. The I. Newman Corset Co. of New Haven purchased Pythian Hall in 1920 for their factory. At this time the Branford Community Council of Branford had leased the Henry Harrison House on Main Street as a recreational facility. The Hammer family purchased the old Pythian Hall in 1925 and donated it to the town with the express purpose of providing a more permanent location for a recreation facility in Branford.

The Branford Community Council hired Harry Brazeau in 1928 as recreation director. He established the Community

Players, aquatic meets, grammar school programs and is credited with keeping a number of teenagers out of trouble. Older residents still recall with delight the minstrel shows performed at the Community House.

Before the High School was completed in 1928 on Eades Street, the Community House was used as the school's gymnasium. Branford High School's basketball team played at the Community House, producing the town's first championship team in 1927. Harry Brazeau continued as recreation director until 1944.

Joe Trapasso came to Branford as recreation director in 1951 and built one of

the finest recreational programs in the country. Many activities and programs were instituted under Joe's leadership, including the first outdoor basketball court in Connecticut.

The Golden Age Club was the first one in the country. Branford was among the first in the country to provide sports activities for special education students. During the 1950s the Community House, along with other town organizations, sponsored the Easter egg hunt, Halloween window painting, little league, basketball tournaments, dance lessons, swim meets, dog shows, talent shows, movies, roller skating, summer playground and art classes.

The Community House received a fresh coat of paint through a volunteer effort by the Lions Club and the children of Branford. Despite their efforts, the Community House on South Main Street, which by now was called the Dust Bowl, was showing its age. A town wide effort was underway to build a new and state of the art Community House which would open in 1962.

The town decided it was too expensive to maintain the old Community House and it was torn down by Bradley & Upson in 1963. Today, the site on South Main Street is a town parking lot.

Editor's note: Jane Peterson Bouley is the historian for the Town of Branford.



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Bouley



The old Community House at 210 South Main Street, as looked just before it was torn down in 1963.



Both photos courtesy Branford Historical Society.

Members of the Knights of Pythias Woodland Lodge #39 standing in front of Pythian Hall on South Main Street. The building became the Community House in 1925. Photograph by Harry O. Andrews.