

Branford's origin reflects Indian roots

BRANFORD - The first settlers of New Haven negotiated the purchase of a tract of land from the Mattabesech Indians in December 1638 which included the territory of "Totokett" later called Branford. The Totoket Indians who lived here



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Peterson Bouley

retained for their own use the peninsula known as Indian Neck but eventually sold all of their land to the white settlers. There was an attempt to settle Branford by the English in 1640. The plantation of Totokett was granted to Mr. Samuel Eaton of New Haven; however, he went to England and did not return. Before the English came it is possible that the Dutch set up a trading post at the mouth of the

Branford River and the name Dutch Wharf remains today.

In 1643 New Haven granted to Mr. William Swayne and others of Wethersfield the plantation of Totokett whose boundaries were the Stony River and Great Pond (Lake Saltonstall) north to the Wallingford line (including the present day North Branford and Northford). Totokett was bounded by Long Island Sound on the south and the Guilford line to the east. The Wethersfield settlers came in the Spring of 1644 and were joined by an equal number from New Haven. The Rev. John Sherman was the first minister and a meeting house was built in what is now Center Cemetery. Eventually the plantation known as Totokett or Totoket became Branford. According to tradition, Branford is named for Brentford, England; however, the connection of the early settlers to the English town is lacking. There is no exact date in the records in which the name change took place.

The early settlers were concerned with the dividing



The earliest known view of Branford is the 1838 engraving by John W. Barber of the Green. The buildings from left to right show the original Episcopal Church, the Academy and the Congregational Church. Both of the church buildings have been replaced by the current structures. The Academy was moved to the rear of the Congregational Church in 1857 to make way for the Town Hall and was moved again to its present location in 1973.

of the land, building homes and fences and the branding of livestock. Farming was the mainstay of Branford family life for more than 200 years. Branford was also an accessible port and many boats traded along the eastern seaboard and to the West Indies exporting lumber, livestock, brooms and

produce in return for molasses and rum. The shipping era in Branford ended at the turn of this century.

Onward to the 350th!

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