

*Pictures of the Past***Rice was town's first non-Yankee selectman**

During the last half of the 19th century, many immigrants arrived in Branford, and the first of these groups was the Irish, who came as early as 1850. Edward Rice was one of the many natives of Ireland who came with Edward Kennedy in 1862 to work at the Branford Lock Shop.

Michael P. Rice (known as M.P.) was the son of Edward and Ellen Rice. He was born in 1866 and at a young age began a livery and carting business. He built a large barn behind the stores on Main along Veto Street and would enlarge the complex many times for his growing business. With his partner John T. Sliney, he built the railroad bridges at Kirkham and Montowese Streets, worked on the Blackstone Library and did much of the road work for the Town of Branford.

In 1896 they each formed their own companies and Rice purchased a motorized truck for his business, the first in Branford. M. P. Rice laid much of the roadbeds for the trolleys in town and was awarded the contract for Branford's water system in 1898.

M.P. Rice was active in town affairs and served as Branford's first "non-Yankee" selectman in 1889 at the age of 23. He served until 1893 and was elected again in 1899 until 1904. He was also an incorporator of Branford Savings Bank and a member of St. Mary's Church.

Perhaps Selectman Rice is best known for his role in the formation of Branford's Fire Department. He was a charter member in 1900 of the department that bears his name and was chairman of the board of fire commissioners. A contest was held to see what the department should be named and each ticket cost five cents. M.P. Rice received 1200 votes more than twice the number of the nearest competitor. The M.P. Rice Fire Department is the oldest fire company in Branford. Michael P. Rice died Jan. 15, 1927 at the age of 61.

Jane Peterson Bouley
Branford town historian



M.P. RICE was a successful businessman in Branford and was active in town affairs. (Photo from Beer's Commemorative Biographical Record of New Haven County.)

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