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STAMFORD HISTORICAL SKETCHES





*Stamford's War Memorial,
St. John's Park.*

STAMFORD HISTORICAL SKETCHES

BY
ALFRED GRANT WALTON



Flag
Sewer

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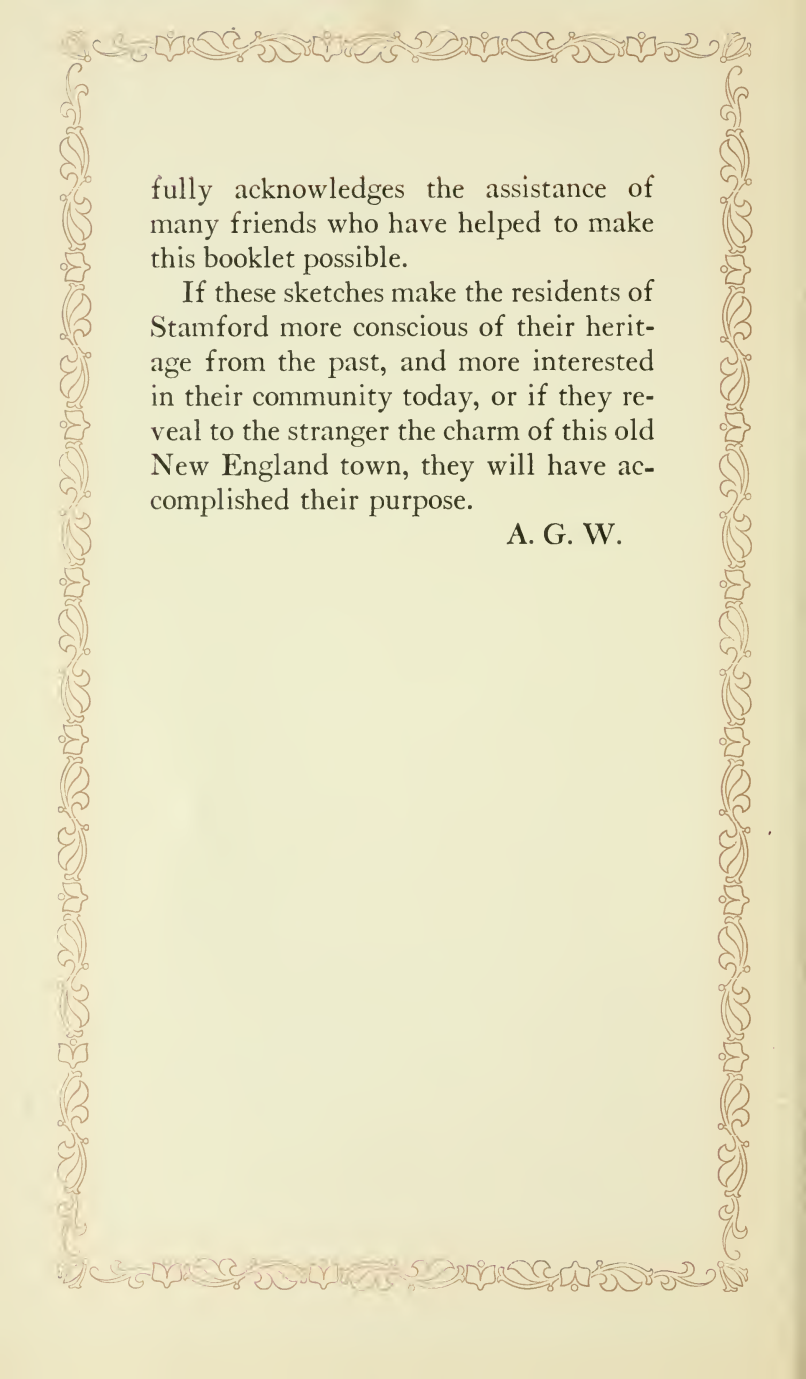


PREFACE

STAMFORD is one of the oldest towns in the commonwealth of Connecticut. Twenty-one years after the Pilgrims plied the dangerous seas to establish homes in America, settlers came to this place and established a new community. Associated with the many decades of Stamford's development are historic events, quaint legends and unusual incidents, which furnish a charming and picturesque background for the Stamford of today. Interesting histories of the town have been written, which are of permanent value to the community, but some do not find time to read them, and for others they are not easily accessible. The purpose of this little booklet is not to give a complete historical record, but to furnish the reader with brief sketches dealing with some of the outstanding events and traditions associated with the town. By means of this simple compendium, one should be able to glimpse, without too much effort, something of the life of Stamford in the long ago.

The writer has used freely all available sources of information and grate-





fully acknowledges the assistance of many friends who have helped to make this booklet possible.

If these sketches make the residents of Stamford more conscious of their heritage from the past, and more interested in their community today, or if they reveal to the stranger the charm of this old New England town, they will have accomplished their purpose.

A. G. W.

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THE LEGEND OF LADDIN'S ROCK

HIDDEN away in a wooded plot of unusual beauty, immediately westward of Stamford, is a rough promontory known as Laddin's Rock. An air of subtle charm pervades the place and bespeaks the long ago when the woodland quiet was broken only by the song of birds, the rustling noises of the forest denizens, or the occasional sound of the settler's ax as he felled the timber for his primitive home. Here stand age-old oaks that sway with stately dignity; clear, beautiful waters reflect the sky above; mosses and lichens grow riotously over the broken rocks, while wildflowers peek mischievously above the grass. With this enchanted spot, still suggestive of the virginal beauty of the primeval wood, there is associated the oldest legend of Stamford's environs.

Shortly after Peter Minuit and his company of Dutch settlers bought Manhattan from the Indians, another group of Dutchmen made their way along the waters of the Sound and built a settlement not far from the shore, in a sequestered spot among the adjacent hills. One of these adventurers was a man named

Cornelius Laddin, who came to this lonely place with his wife and daughter. The traders carried on extensive barterings with the Indians, giving knives, hatchets, trinkets and rum in exchange for fine peltries. Sometimes the white men took advantage of their savage neighbors, driving hard bargains and often cheating them. One day a band of Indians, incensed by the greediness of the invaders, determined to exterminate the little colony in which Laddin lived. Was this the massacre of 1643 which involved the settlement west of Stamford, in which fifteen were killed and others driven from their homes? It is uncertain, but at any rate, the attack came. Laddin was working in the field, when, suddenly, as he lifted his eyes, he saw some of the cabins in flames. Instinctively he thought of his wife and daughter and ran home to protect them. His horse was tethered at the rear of the cottage. Rushing in, he hastily barred the windows and doors, and seizing his old flintlock, prepared for action. He did not have to wait long. Indian after Indian approached his cabin, bearing flaming torches, but from his position of vantage he shot them down. Maddened by

the resistance, they decided on collective effort. A group seized a log and advanced together, determined to batter down the door. The situation was becoming precarious. Laddin's ammunition was giving out and he could not resist much longer. What was to be done? "Fly, husband, fly," cried his wife frantically, "they will surely respect our sex. I will open the door in the rear, and you can ride away on the horse. Perhaps you can bring assistance." The grim settler hesitated for a moment, endeavoring to decide his course, but spurred on by his wife, he finally unbarred the door and plunged into the open. That very moment the front door gave way, and the Indians rushed in. Down crashed the tomahawks with sickening thud, and the two women lay silent on the floor. Laddin glimpsed the gruesome sight for one brief moment, then turned in flight. But he was not to get away, for the savages followed in hot pursuit. Seeing that escape was impossible, he turned his horse toward the top of the rocky cliff. The shouts of the enemy spurred on his affrighted animal till the edge of the ledge was reached. Then there was a moment's hesitation,

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an ominous silence, a resounding crash, and horse and rider dashed to their death on the rocks below. Laddin had preferred to take his own life and not allow it to be taken by the savages.

And this is the legend of Laddin's Rock.



THE PURCHASE OF STAMFORD FROM THE INDIANS

THE tract of land which now comprises Stamford belonged originally to the remnants of four distinct tribes. These natives were savages of a low type, and did not possess the virility of the stronger tribes on the New England coast. Here they roamed the hills and valleys at their pleasure, hunted the wild turkey and the deer, and at night sat by the fire and exchanged tales of the hunt and the chase. In 1640, Captain Nathaniel Turner, a representative of the New Haven colony, which had been founded two years before by the Rev. John Davenport and others, negotiated with the representatives of these tribes for the purchase of their land. An agreement was made between them to which representatives of both parties subscribed.

The transaction read as follows:

“Bought of Ponus, sagamore of Toquams, and of Wascussue, sagamore of Shippan, by *mee*, Nathaniel Turner, of Quenepiocke, all the ground that belongs to both the above said sagamores except a piece of ground which the above said

sagamore of Toquams reserved for him and the rest of said Indians to plant on—all of which grounds being expressed by meadows, upland, grass, with the rivers and trees; and in consideration hereof, I, the said Nathaniel Turner, *amm* to give and bring, or send to the above said sagamores, within the space of one month, twelve coats, twelve howes, twelve hatchets, twelve glasses, twelve knives, four kettles, four fathom of white wampum; all of which lands *bothe* we, the said sagamores, do promise faithfully to perform, both for ourselves, heirs, executors or assigns, and hereunto we have *sett* our marks in the presence of many of the said Indians, they fully consenting thereto.”

The document was signed by William Wilkes and James ———, as witnesses for Captain Turner, and by Owenoke, sagamore, Ponus' son, and another sagamore, whose name is not legible, as witnesses for the Indians. The marks used by the Indians are suggestive of terror and power. The mark of Ponus is like a streak of lightning, as is also the mark of his son; that of Wacussee is a bow and arrow, and the mark of the fourth represents a war club.

The tract of land involved in this purchase extended from Rowayton on the east to Mianus on the west, and reached inland a distance of about sixteen miles. It included the present towns of Stamford and Darien, some parts of New Canaan and Greenwich, and the southern part of Pound Ridge. The portion reserved for Ponus and his Indians to plant on was the beautiful headland now known as Wallack's Point.

Other deeds were given at a later date which explained and confirmed the original one. The Indians claimed that they did not fully understand the first agreement, and that "the inhabitants encroached upon their rights." They complained "that they did not expect the purchasers were to settle houses on the land," and also objected strenuously to the Englishmen's hogs, which destroyed their corn.

The consideration paid to the Indians was valued at thirty-three pounds, or approximately one hundred and fifty dollars. The present value of this real estate would reach fully two hundred and fifty millions of dollars.

When the majority of dissatisfied church members in Wethersfield decided

to emigrate from that place with the minority of the settlers and form a new settlement, their agents obtained from the New Haven colony the right to all the land purchased by Captain Turner from the Indians. The following conditions were imposed:

(a) The Wethersfield men were to give the price paid to the Indians for the land.

(b) A fifth part of the land was to be reserved, to be disposed of by the court to such settlers as they saw fit.

(c) The settlers were to join the New Haven colony in the form of government they adopted.

Twenty Wethersfield men signed an agreement to commence a settlement in the new location before May 16th, 1641, and agreed to bring the rest of their families by the last of November of the same year. In accordance with that agreement the settlement was founded, twenty-eight men coming in the spring and others coming later. By the end of 1641, thirty or forty families were established here.

The names of the original land owners
of Stamford are as follows:

Math. Mitchell
Thurston Rainer
Richard Denton
Andrew Ward
Robert Coe
Richard Gildersleve
Richard Law
John Reynolds
John Whitmore
Robert Bates
Jeffry Ferris
Richard Crabb
Samuel Sherman
Daniel Finch
Jonas Wood, H.
John Northend
Jeremy Jagger
Edmond Wood
Jonas Wood, O.
Samuel Clark
Francis Bell
Thomas Morehouse
Jeremiah Wood
Thomas Weeks

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John Seaman

Robert Fisher

✓ Joseph Jessup

Henry Smith

Vincent Simkins

Joseph Jessup was not in the first group of twenty-eight men who arrived here in the spring of 1641, but he came shortly afterwards, and should be included among the first settlers.

Many of the names included in this list are still to be found in Stamford.



HOW STAMFORD WAS NAMED

STAMFORD was originally called Rippowam, and the small stream which flows near the center of the town is still given that name. Rippowam is an Indian word, but it is impossible to discover its origin or meaning. It probably conveyed an idea associated with this particular location, and was coined definitely for that purpose. This practice was quite common among the Indians. The western border of the original purchase was at Mianus, and that place was named after Chief Myanos, who lived there. Noroton, which was a part of Stamford until 1820, derived its name from the Indian word "Noro-tan," meaning North Star.

It is generally conceded that Stamford received its name through some association with one of the old Stamfords in England. There are three Stamfords in the mother-land, Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire, Stamford of Worcestershire, and Stamford of Lincolnshire. It is impossible to determine with absolute certainty with which of these places Stamford is to be associated, although it seems very likely that it is the quaint old

town in Lincolnshire. It was from that section of England that Cromwell recruited a large number of his followers, to which over eighty per cent of the original settlers of New England could trace their ancestry, and which gave more English names to places in America than all other sections of the motherland combined.

There is an old legend of questionable character to the effect that the people of the early settlement here decided upon a novel method to determine a name for their new habitation. There was a division among them whether the place should be called Ayrshire or Stamford. Some of the sporting element in the community secured two fighting cocks, and bestowed the debated names upon them. A cock-pit was built in front of the meeting house and a battle was fought to the finish. Stamford was victorious and the debated subject was settled.

The original Stamford in England is located on the Welland River, about ninety miles from London. In ancient times it was called Stanford from the Anglo-Saxon words "stan," meaning stone, and "ford." Some of the first records of the present Stamford give the

name as Stanford. The original Latin name was "Durobrevia," which means a hard, shelfy, crossing place or ford. During the reign of Charles II, this old place suffered persecution because of Puritan principles, and among the number who fled to America were doubtless some who finally settled in this ancient colony on the banks of the Rippowam.

At the general court of New Haven which met in the spring of 1642, the change of name from Rippowam to Stamford was confirmed.



STAMFORD'S FIRST MEETING HOUSE

ONE of the first tasks to which the settlers gave themselves was the building of a meeting house. They considered it quite as important to provide a house of worship as to build homes for themselves. The simple structure, which they erected almost immediately after their arrival, was located on a knoll of ground near the steps of the present Town Hall. Palisades extended around the four sides of the building to furnish protection against the attacks of the hostile Indians. During the services, a sentry kept watch on the outside. The meeting house itself was square and low. Its posts were twelve feet in height, and its roof was pointed, the four sides meeting about thirty feet above the ground. There was only one entrance leading to the barren interior, which consisted of a single room. Hard, rough benches extended on three sides, facing the minister's desk. The windows were plain and a movable screen was shifted about to protect the worshippers from the burning rays, which poured in upon them. The building was not heated, and in the winter

the members of the congregation had to use hand or foot stoves to keep themselves warm. Every Sunday, when the hour for service had arrived, a drummer would beat the call to worship, and, at the sound of this signal, the sturdy pioneers would leave their primitive homes along paths which led directly to the church. Every person in the settlement was required to attend.

There is an ancient tradition connected with this first meeting house, which is considered authentic, and which is particularly significant. When the building had advanced sufficiently, it was necessary for some one to mount to the top of the roof and insert the key pin in the heavy beams holding the roof together. The son of a prominent member of the colony volunteered for the task. He climbed nimbly to the pinnacle, and then became frightened. "Which of the holes shall I put the pin in?" he called to his father, with trembling voice. He had hardly spoken the words when he turned, toppled over, and fell headlong to his death. Thus did a little child consecrate, with his life, that simple building, which expressed and symbolized the community's highest ideal.

The first pastor in this meeting house was the Rev. Richard Denton. He was a gifted minister in Halifax, England, and was in the small group which emigrated from Wethersfield. He remained with his people for three years, but, becoming dissatisfied with the restriction of the New Haven colony which gave the right of suffrage only to church members, moved to Long Island, with one-third of the settlers, where many of them located in Hempstead. Cotton Mather gives a quaint description of Mr. Denton, as follows:

“Our pious and learned Mr. Richard Denton, a Yorkshire man, who, having watered Halifax, in England, with his fruitful ministry, was, by a tempest, then hurried into New England, where, first at Wethersfield and then at Stamford, his doctrine dropped as the rain, and his speech distilled as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb and as a shower upon the grass. Though he were a little man, yet he had a great soul; his well accomplished mind in his lesser body was an Iliad in a nut-shell. I think he was blind of an eye; nevertheless, he was not the least among the *seers* of our Israel; he saw a consider-

able portion of those things which eye hath not seen. He was far from cloudy in his conceptions and principles of Divinity; whereof he wrote a system, entitled *Soliliquia Sacra*; so accurately considering the four-fold state of man, 1st, in his created Purity; 2nd, contracted Deformity; 3d, restored Beauty; 4th, celestial Glory, that judicious persons, who have seen it, very much lament the churches being so deprived of it. At length he got into heaven, beyond clouds, and so, beyond storms, waiting the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven, when he will have his reward among the saints.”



STAMFORD'S SECOND MEETING HOUSE
—BUILT BY CASTING A LOT

THE second meeting house is unique because of the unusual method followed in determining what kind of a building should be erected. The first crude structure, erected on the knoll in the center of the little settlement, had served for thirty years, and the sturdy pioneers found that a larger and more commodious building was necessary. A committee was appointed, consisting of Mr. Law, Goodman Holly, Goodman Webb, Goodman Ambler and Joshua Hoyt, to build a meeting house of stone, "and, if they cannot get a house built with stone, they have liberty to get it done with timber." They were instructed to build it "with as much speed as they can with convenience." When the committee sought to carry out these orders a pronounced difference of opinion arose whether the building should be rectangular or square. Some wanted a structure thirty-five feet square, while others favored a larger building, forty-five feet in length and thirty-five feet in breadth. Being unable to reach an agreement, the devout pioneers deter-

mined to seek divine assistance. A copy of the town vote found in the ancient records is as follows:

“April 4, 1671. At a town meeting, duly warned, per vote, it was agreed that the final decision and difference respecting the form and figure of the new meeting house, is to be done by a solemn ordinance of God, by the casting of lots, and the reason of this way is, because the town cannot possibly decide it for want of a casting vote.”

Before the vote was taken, it was agreed that, in the event the decision should be for a square meeting house, the building would be “thirty and eight” feet square, instead of thirty-five feet, as originally planned. A later record reads: “The solemn ordinance being as above ordered the *lott* carried it for a square meeting house.”

The new building was placed on the spot now known as Central Park, its front door being near the location of the present flagstaff. Its roof rose by two contracted steps, and was surmounted by a cupola, giving the whole a pyramidal appearance. From the cupola the drum was sounded to give signal in case of danger, and to summon the people to

worship or to town meetings. This building stood for a period of thirty-five years.

A curious stipulation concerning the method of seating the inhabitants in church is brought out in the following enactment pertaining thereto:

“The town order that the inhabitants shall be seated in the meeting house by the following rules, viz., dignity, *agge* and estate in this present list of estate; and a committee shall be chosen to attend to it forthwith: the committee, Captain Jonathan Selleck, Lieut. Fra. Bell, Lieut. Jona'th Bell, Joseph Theale and Joseph Garnsy, who have full power to seat the inhabitants as above.”

Another committee was appointed to seat the women in the meeting house.

When this church was erected, the pastor was the Rev. John Bishop. After the departure of Mr. Denton, in 1644, two of the most important members of the church, Lieut. Francis Bell and George Slauson, started for Boston on foot to procure a new minister, in order that “this people might not be scattered and suffered to sin against the ordinances of God.” They secured Mr. Bishop, who walked back with them, bringing

nothing with him but his staff in one hand and his Bible in the other. Mr. Bishop was paid a salary of sixty pounds per year, but, as money was scarce, the amount was paid in current and staple commodities. A record of 1680 reads: "The town doth grant unto ye ministry 60 pounds for the present year, one-third part in wheat, one-third part in pork, one-third part in Indian corn; winter wheat five shillings per bushel, summer wheat four shillings, six pence, and pork at three and a quarter pence per pound, all good and merchantable, and Indian corn two shillings, six pence, per bushel."

Mr. Bishop passed away in 1694, after a continuous ministry of fifty years in this community.



THE OLD WEBB TAVERN AND THE STAMFORD TEA PARTY

ONE of the historic places in Stamford during Revolutionary days was the old Webb tavern, which stood on the plot of ground at the corner of Main and Bank streets, now occupied by the Washington building. Its large, inviting rooms and its homelike atmosphere made it an attractive stopping place for distinguished travelers going back and forth on the Post Road. General Lee and General Putnam must have been guests there, and it is commonly believed that George Washington stayed there on his journey through Connecticut to Massachusetts to take charge of the Revolutionary troops in that commonwealth. Because of the distinction of housing the great military leader, the name of the hostelry was later changed to the Washington House, which name was kept until the destruction of the old structure in 1868. The present Washington Building perpetuates these associations in its name.

An interesting event occurred in front of this old hotel in 1775, which reveals the patriotic spirit of the town. A cer-

tain Sylvanus Whitney purchased a stock of contraband tea, which the colonists had determined to reject because of the principle that there should be no taxation without representation. Two years previous, the famous Boston tea party had made clear the sentiments of the people in that city on this important issue, and, when Mr. Whitney offered his tea for sale in Stamford, public indignation rose high against him. A committee assumed charge of the affair, and brought such pressure to bear on the offender that he signed a public statement as follows: "Whereas, I, the subscriber, have been guilty of buying and selling Bohae tea since the first of March last past, whereby I have been guilty of a breach of the association entered into by the Continental Congress; and sensible of my misconduct, do in this public manner confess my crime and humbly request the favor of the public to overlook this my transgression, promising for the future to conduct myself as a true friend of my country, and in testimony of my sincerity I do now deliver up the tea I have on hand unto the said committee of inspection to be by them committed to the flames."

That night the town had a big celebration. A gallows was erected in front of the Webb tavern, and the townspeople and the soldiers, who were quartered here, assembled for a procession. Two unarmed soldiers carried a long pole, from which was suspended the forbidden tea. A group of armed soldiers under two captains surrounded the tea, lest the unfortunate "victim" should get away. These were followed by the citizens' committee who had discovered the tea and the culprit who was selling it. Then came a group of spectators, beating drums, blowing fifes, and making every conceivable noise. The procession moved in and out the streets and terminated at the tavern, where a public executioner suspended the tea from the gallows to the great delight of every one. A fire was built beneath the dangling "victim," and soon the contraband article was reduced to ashes. After the obsequies were over the crowd joined in three mighty cheers, and then disbanded. The "American Archives," which records the event, adds the significant words: "The owner of the tea attended during the execution, and behaved himself as well as could be expected under the circumstances."

When the old Webb tavern was being torn down in 1868, a group of young men determined to play a joke on the public. They secured some old paper, stained it yellow to give it the effect of great age and then forged some documents, apparently of the Revolutionary period, which purported to show that much of the recorded history of that time was false. These papers were then placed in the debris of the old structure where they could easily be found. When they were "discovered," they created a great sensation, and were written up in one of the New York papers as documents of unusual historical value. After five days the hoax was discovered, but not until the perpetrators had exacted their full measure of fun out of it.



MAJOR TALLMADGE AND HIS EXPLOITS AT SHIPPAN

PROMINENT among the associations of Revolutionary history with Stamford are the daring exploits of Major Benjamin Tallmadge, a brilliant young officer, who carried out two important enterprises from Shippan.

A group of Tory marauders were located at Lloyd's Neck, on the Sound, where they had been causing considerable trouble, and Major Tallmadge determined to capture them. Although a young man, only twenty-five years of age, he had an intrepid spirit, and arranged for an attack which older men might have hesitated to attempt. On September 5th, 1779, he assembled a group of one hundred and thirty picked men at Shippan, near the present location of the Stamford Yacht Club, and under cover of darkness started across the Sound for the camp of the enemy. He took several boats with him, which he hoped to use to bring back prisoners. Reaching his objective, his company moved stealthily on the camp of the loyalists, breaking in on them at ten o'clock at night, at a time when they

least suspected trouble. The manoeuvre was so well managed that his men were able to take the entire company prisoners. They were piled into the boats brought for the purpose, and on the following morning Major Tallmadge returned to Stamford. When the enemy were counted, it was discovered that there were more prisoners than there were men in the attacking band, and Major Tallmadge had not lost a single member of his own forces.

Two years later, Major Tallmadge assembled another group of soldiers at Shippan, seven hundred in number, for another purpose. General Washington had given him permission to use his troops to attack a large number of British soldiers at Huntington, Long Island. On a bleak night in December, his gallant company were ready to embark on their perilous task, when a violent storm developed which made the journey impossible. Rain, snow and wind combined forces against them, and the soldiers were compelled to pull their boats up on land and seek shelter beneath them. On the second night, an attempt was made again, but the fury of the storm was unabated, and the attack had

to be given up. On the third morning, six of the best boats were started, but the raging elements drove three of them back to land. The other three chanced to come upon three of the enemy's boats on the open waters of the Sound. They had been moving about, and had been forced by the unfavorable weather to seek refuge at Norwalk Islands. They were attempting a return to Long Island when Major Tallmadge's boats came upon them. Instead of engaging in a land battle, as had been originally planned, the Tories were attacked at sea. Every man in one of the British ships was killed, another ship was captured, while the third escaped.

Once again Major Tallmadge attempted to carry out his original plan to cross the Sound, but was finally compelled to give up the expedition. He was greatly disappointed by his inability to carry out his purpose, but when he reported his efforts to General Washington he received a letter of approval from him.

Major Tallmadge made his home in Litchfield. He was given the title of Colonel, and in 1812 was offered a prominent military position by President

Madison. He served as a representative to Congress with Major John Davenport from 1800 to 1816. His death occurred at his home in Litchfield in his eighty-second year.



GENERAL DAVID WATERBURY

STAMFORD has produced many men who have distinguished themselves in war, but in that galaxy of heroes no name is more worthy of distinction than that of General David Waterbury, Jr., valiant leader in the French and Indian wars, and ardent patriot and soldier in the days of the Revolution.

General Waterbury commenced his military career when he was only twenty-five years of age. He enrolled as a lieutenant in the militia, and three years later was a captain in the train band in Stamford. He participated in six different campaigns during the French and Indian wars, and was in the memorable attack made by General Abercrombie on Fort Ticonderoga in 1758.

General Abercrombie's men moved cautiously toward the fort and after a few successful exploits, arrived, on July 7th, within four miles of the French stronghold. The next day they attempted an assault, but were driven back with a considerable loss. On the evening of that day Captain Waterbury was put in charge of a party of 500 men

with instructions to hold a certain point on the lake which it was thought the French might attack. In the panic which followed the reverses of the day, four hundred of Captain Waterbury's men deserted him and he was left with only a hundred followers, many of whom were his fellow townsmen. Despite this defection of his soldiers, the Captain stuck tenaciously at his post until the morning, when he was to be relieved. When no relief came, he sent out one scout after another to discover the reason. One finally returned with the report that the army had retreated, leaving everything in their camp in a chaotic condition. When Captain Waterbury discovered that he was left alone, he ordered his men to "sling their packs" and prepare for withdrawal. The rest of the army had embarked in boats and were well down the lake, but a few battoos were still left, and under Captain Waterbury's guidance, his men were able to get away safely, the last group to leave in the enforced retreat.

Captain Waterbury's military training prepared him for valuable services during the Revolutionary War. He entered the Revolution as a Colonel, and

as early as 1775, organized a regiment for the defense of New York. On account of the indecision of the colonies he was compelled to disband the regiment for a time, but shortly afterwards, at the solicitation of General Charles Lee, he reorganized it, and this regiment was the first regiment of infantry responding to the call for volunteers for the defense of New York against the British. The standard of the regiment was white, and bore the legend "An Appeal to Heaven."

Colonel Waterbury was continually active throughout the struggle and carried out several important commissions. He was present at the siege of St. John's and the surrender of Montreal. While engaged as the second in command of the fleet operating on Lake Champlain, he was taken prisoner, but was later exchanged. Governor Jonathan Trumbull himself recommended Colonel Waterbury for the high military rank which was bestowed upon him, and characterized him as a man who "at all times behaved with bravery and honor."

General Waterbury's character is well revealed in a letter written to his wife in response to one in which she ex-

pressed doubt that she would ever see him again. He replied, to her fears, "I desire I may be in some way instrumental of overcoming this tyrannical spirit that rules in England. I put my trust in God to defend me in the day of battle. I hope I shall do my *duty*, stand or fall."



HON. ABRAHAM DAVENPORT AND THE
DARK DAY, MAY 19TH, 1780

STAMFORD'S most distinguished citizen of the eighteenth century was the Hon. Abraham Davenport, eighth child of the Rev. John Davenport, minister in the town from 1694 till 1731. His great-grandfather was the original John Davenport, who founded the New Haven colony, and whose name is intimately associated with the early life of Connecticut.

Abraham Davenport was a graduate of Yale College, and early in life distinguished himself as a man of singular abilities. He was the one person to whom the community naturally and instinctively turned during the crucial days of the Revolutionary War. His fellow-townsmen recognized his remarkable gifts and bestowed many honors upon him. For thirty-one years he served as a selectman, holding that office for a longer period than any other resident of Stamford. He sat as a member of the state legislature during twenty-five sessions, and was state senator for eighteen years. His legal gifts were recognized by his selection for pro-

bate judge, which office he held to the great satisfaction of every one. At his death he was judge at the county seat.

The passionate longing for freedom in Revolutionary days found full expression in his devotion to the colonial cause. During the war he rendered valuable assistance to George Washington and Governor Trumbull, by both of whom he was recognized as a wise counselor and leader.

Mr. Davenport will long be remembered as the principal figure in an anecdote connected with the famous dark day, May 19th, 1780. The story reveals the true character of the man, and gives some insight into his philosophy of life. May 19th, 1780, was a day long remembered by the people who were living at that time. Some strange physical phenomena occurred, which caused the day to become unusually dark. Candles were lighted, birds were hushed, fowls retired to roost; bats flitted about, and many thought the Day of Judgment had come. The state legislature was in session in Hartford at this time, and the excitement and commotion became so great that the lower house adjourned. The Senate considered the advisability

of doing so, and turned to Colonel Davenport, as he was then designated, for his advice. With firm voice and calm demeanor, he said: "I am against adjournment. The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish, therefore, that candles may be brought." Whittier has written a beautiful poem, entitled "Abraham Davenport," in which he memorializes this event. His closing lines are striking:

*"And there he stands in memory to this
day,
Erect, self-poised, a rugged face half
seen
Against the background of unnatural
dark,
A witness to the ages as they pass—
That simple duty has no place for
fear."*



A BRITISH INVASION OF STAMFORD AND
AN ATTACK ON THE CHURCH
AT MIDDLESEX

THE present town of Darien was originally a part of Stamford, and remained so until 1820, when it was incorporated as a separate town. In Revolutionary days the place was known as Middlesex. A church was established there, and the Rev. Moses Mather was made the pastor. Mr. Mather began his ministerial career when the church was organized in 1744, and under his leadership the new organization greatly prospered. During Revolutionary days he was an ardent champion of the colonial cause and used his gifts fearlessly in the support of General Washington and his troops. He was so active in his work that he aroused the bitter animosity of the Tories, and on August 3d, 1779, five members of his own parish, with three other British sympathizers, seized him and his four sons, and carried them away to New York. Later he was released, but was destined to have an even harder experience upon his return to Middlesex.

A group of Tories from Lloyd's Neck journeyed across the Sound on Saturday, July 21st, 1781, and secreted themselves in the swamp near the Middlesex meeting house. They were about forty in number and were under the leadership of one of the residents of the community which they had come to attack. On Sunday afternoon, while Dr. Mather stood up in his pulpit to preach to his congregation, the invaders closed in upon the assembled worshippers and demanded surrender. Only a few escaped. One old lady marched boldly through the ranks of the enemy, and no one dared to touch her. The minister's son made a dash for liberty, and, although he was able to effect his escape, received a bullet wound in his heel which left a scar for the rest of his life.

The men of the congregation were unable to offer any resistance, and were seized by the enemy, who bound them together, two and two, and arranged them in marching order. The women and children were placed under a special guard. The patriot preacher was placed at the head of the prisoners, and after all had been searched and deprived of their jewelry and valuables, the men

were led away. Boats were in readiness, and forty-eight were taken across the Sound to Lloyd's Neck. Here the men found some of their own townspeople and former neighbors, who were located there in that Tory settlement, but they received little consideration or kindness from them. After a short time, half of the group were sent home and the other half were taken to Provost prison in New York. Their life there was unendurable, and only nineteen of the twenty-six that were incarcerated lived to return home, when an exchange of prisoners was effected on December 27th.

Mr. Mather was among those taken to the prison. His food was insufficient for his needs, and, as President Dwight records, "His lodgings corresponded with his food. His company, to a large extent, was made up of a mere rabble, and their conversation, from which he could not retreat, composed of profaneness and ribaldry." The Provost Marshal in charge of the prison was particularly unkind to him, and sought to torture him by telling him, from time to time, that his execution had been planned for the following day.

Mr. Mather was finally released, and returned to his parish in Middlesex, where he remained in his pastorate until Sept. 21, 1806, at which time he died. He had a consecutive ministry of sixty-two years in this, the only church in which he ever served.



DESECRATION OF STAMFORD'S OLDEST BURIAL GROUND

THE two triangular greens located at the place where River and South Streets enter Main Street are interesting, not only for their present charm, but for their historic associations. These two open places, with the intervening space on the Post Road, mark Stamford's first burial ground.

The original Post Road from Boston to New York passed through Stamford, but its course was much more irregular than it is today. The highway had many a twist and turn, which added considerably to the actual distance between the two great cities. In 1795, traffic on this famous thoroughfare had become sufficiently great to bring out a general demand for straightening the road and eliminating all unnecessary curves. Many heavy stage coaches plied back and forth, and the number using the road was continually becoming larger. During the session of the state legislature in 1800, a commission was appointed to make a careful survey of the situation, and large powers were delegated to them to make such changes in

the road as were deemed necessary. The original Post Road entered Stamford on the east at Main Street, and proceeded westward to Park Place. Thence it continued past the present Davenport Hotel to River Street; thence to the right to Broad Street; thence to the left over what was known as Theale's bridge, and over Palmer's Hill, past the spot now occupied by the Stamford Hospital. The commissioners proposed to take this irregular bend out of the road by going diagonally through the old cemetery of the town, leaving two small plots on either side. The citizens looked upon the burial place as a hallowed spot, made sacred by the memory of many whose mortal remains had been placed there, and they strenuously opposed the project. But the commission felt that the public good was of more importance than the sentiment of a few villagers, and proceeded with their task, taking care, however, to move carefully the remains of the dead. When the road was finally opened, the opponents of the plan expressed their disapproval in vigorous fashion. They assembled together at night, and with their faithful oxen dragged load after load of huge rocks—

in which the town was not lacking—and placed them at either end of the entrance to the cemetery. The first piles were patiently removed by the authorities, but, before the incident was closed, four successive efforts had been made to block traffic in this manner. For years afterwards, old residents could not be induced to drive through the hallowed spot, preferring always to go around and not to desecrate the abode of the dead.

An amusing anecdote is told in connection with the removal of the remains from the cemetery. When the bones were being removed, a large hogshead was rolled to the place, and the exhumed bones were placed in it. A citizen of the village who was returning home one night, after imbibing too freely, crawled into the hogshead and, in his intoxicated condition fell asleep. A little later in the evening, two deacons of the church happened to be walking past the burial ground, and stopped for a few words of farewell by the large cask. The bung of the barrel was out, and one of the men playfully took his walking stick and thrust it through the hole. The drunken man within felt the thrust and let out a

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terrible groan, and the two deacons, thinking the dead had come to life, cried out in terror and fled in utmost haste. It is rumored that they have not stopped running yet!



GOING TO CHURCH IN STAMFORD ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

AN interesting description of the Old Meeting House which stood in Central Park one hundred years ago is given by a writer who attended services there in 1824. His vivid picture helps us to reconstruct an idea of the interior of the old edifice and the nature of the worship held there. He writes as follows concerning the place:

“That venerable building used to be called the meeting house of that time, but the term itself revealed one of the weaknesses of the old Puritans, who had contracted, we think, an unreasonable aversion toward Episcopalians, who were in the habit, from the first, of calling their places of worship churches. It is time that the awkward paraphrase of ours was dropped. The pulpit, of which Parson Smith always seemed to be a part, stood on a post, and was a little larger than a good-sized hogshead. Over it was suspended what was called a sounding board, in the shape of an umbrella, though a very solid and heavy one; and the writer, in his boy days, not understanding much of what was going

on in the pulpit on Sunday, nor feeling very much interest in what was good preaching, and was so considered by the congregation, used to sit and watch that heavy umbrella, in the expectation that it would perhaps fall some day, and then, would it kill Parson Smith? He thought not, for it would probably crowd him down into the hogshhead like a Jack-in-the-box.

“There was one box stove in the church, near the door, which supplied the congregation with smoke and with a dripping black acid that came down in gentle showers from the long stove-pipe. For heat and comfort we depended chiefly on foot stoves of all patterns. It always made quite a sensation when some one was obliged to go to the stove and fill up the foot stove with live coals, which often happened during the services.

“When there was no choir in the high gallery to set the tune, Parson Smith used to give a look toward Sylvanus and Harris Scofield in their pews, and, after a few cross fires of glances between the three parties, it seemed to be understood that they were called upon to leave their pews and walk down the aisle, out of

the door, and up the stairs leading from the entry to the singers' loft. As the floor of the aisle had no carpets, every time the boots struck the floor until they arrived in the choir we could mark progress by the noise they made. Pretty soon the sounding pipe, a kind of whistle on the note A, in the form of a small book, was produced and sounded, and after one or two 'hems' to see that everything was clear and ready for action, the psalm began, and never broke down very often till the whole was finished. High up in the wall, behind the choir, was a window through which the bell-ringer always looked down to see when the minister appeared in the pulpit, and that ended the tolling of the bell.

"In connection with this venerable old church, the writer quite distinctly remembers a certain day (week day) when there was a large crowd around the church and in the church, and on inquiry, was told that it was a court about Henshelwood and Elizabeth —.

"Right opposite, on the south side of the street, was the whipping post. At the bottom of the whipping post was a remnant of the stocks, that is, the lower part of them, the upper part having dis-

appeared before the writer's recollection of things began."

Parson Smith referred to in this description was the Rev. Daniel Smith, who was pastor of the Congregational Church for fifty-three consecutive years. An interesting anecdote is told of him which, although not related to the above, reveals something of the situation existing in his time. Stamford was taxed to support the Congregational ministry from the beginning of the settlement till 1835, and in 1802, when the church was in arrears financially, Parson Smith went to a blacksmith to collect the citizen's tax for the support of the gospel. The sum was one dollar. The blacksmith was not an attendant of the church, and responded: "I haven't attended church; why should I pay the dollar?" To this the minister replied: "The doors are always open, and you could have attended had you chosen to do so." After some argument, the blacksmith yielded and handed over the money. A few days later, Parson Smith received a bill from the blacksmith for two dollars for shoeing his horse. The parson called on the blacksmith at once for an explanation, for he had not had

his horse shod. "Well," said the smith to the parson's protest, "the door of the shop was open, and I was there, and you could have had your horse shod had you chosen to do so!" There is no evidence that the bill was ever paid.



THE VISIT OF LAFAYETTE TO STAMFORD

MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE has always been a popular idol of the American people, but never more so than to the generation immediately following the Revolutionary War. His earnest espousal of the Colonial cause made a deep impression on the people, who were not unmindful of the assistance he secured from France, and his military achievements at Barren Hill and Monmouth. His efforts were of unquestioned value in hastening the end of the struggle which made the colonies free. In August, 1824, he visited the United States at the invitation of Congress, and was given an enthusiastic reception. A gift of two hundred thousand dollars was voted him, and he was also presented with a township of land. He had lost his own private fortunes by confiscation during the Reign of Terror in France, and these expressions of appreciation were particularly appropriate, as they helped him to re-establish himself financially. While in this country he visited many cities and towns, and was received with unrestrained enthu-

siasm. It was during his triumphal tour that he visited Stamford.

During the short time that he was here, he was entertained at the old Davenport home on Park Place, which occupied the location of the present Davenport Hotel. This dignified colonial mansion was one of the most imposing in the village, and was the home of Major John Davenport, distinguished Colonial patriot and former member of the National Congress.

An eye-witness of the reception accorded Lafayette has recorded the impressions which the event made upon him as a boy, in the *Fairfield County Democrat* of March 29th, 1871. He writes: "His coming was a great event, especially for a quiet town as ours was. He wore a blue coat with buff-colored vest and breeches, and was accompanied by his son, George Washington. His carriage was drawn by four or six beautiful cream-colored horses. He went into the house and partook of some refreshments, and in a few moments came out on the piazza and a great and mighty shout went up from the people of the village, including, of course, all the boys in town, who had gathered around the

house. He walked down toward the gate, and on either side of him was a sea not of upturned faces but of outstretched hands for him to shake. The writer managed to get one shake, and to hear the idolized and noble-looking man say, when he found it impossible to shake all the hands around him, 'You are all my children, you are all my children.' Soon he came out and stepped into his carriage, an open barouche, and the driver gave a loud crack with his whip, and the beloved hero rode on his way, and my heart went after him in an unaffected boyish gratitude and admiration."



AN ADVENTURE IN EDUCATION AT
SHIPPAN—1828

JSAAC F. BRAGG, principal of the City Commercial School in New York, published a prospectus in 1828 for the Shippan Academical Institute, "intended to be established at Shippan, two miles from Stamford, Conn.", which furnishes a quaint description of the advantages of Shippan and throws considerable light on the ideals of education about one hundred years ago. The pamphlet, which is now very rare, describes Shippan's salubrity as follows:

"The situation of the intended institution is one which has been chosen after deliberate inquiry and observation of several years. The ground of decided preference over any other which the projector has been able to find is its *remarkable healthfulness*. Many places have been visited from eight to twenty miles from the city, but not one of them is untainted in some degree with *fever* and *ague* reputation; and it is his decided opinion that a more malignant enemy to the delicately evolving principles of vital energy is not to be found

in the whole catalogue of epidemic diseases—the whole system is enfeebled, both bodily and mental; and in the place of vigorous elasticity of spirit and wholesome bounding energy of every function, are superinduced a puny imbecility, sallow apathy and morbid indolence. The general reputation of Shippan throughout Connecticut (and it has been visited by thousands for several years past as a place *curiously beautiful*) is, that in healthfulness it is equal even to Newport, and surpassed by no place in the Eastern states.”

Mr. Bragg states that a portion of the garden will “be allotted to the pupils for cultivation, both with a view to promote their health and to create a partiality for one of the most innocent and fascinating of studies, that of Botany.” He promises that the cultivation of the French language will be constant and persevering, but not to the detriment of English, for he has lived on terms of intimacy with families in London, where French “has utterly unhinged the English tongue of every child in the family; where it might be said that they *mumbled* and *whined* English and spoke French very well for English children.”

Among the "By-Laws and Terms of the School" may be found the following curious items:

"None will be permitted to bathe, but at stated times, and when a teacher is in company.

"Profanity, quarrelsomeness and moroseness will be considered as decided disqualifications for social fellowship. The character of the polished gentleman will be sedulously cultivated.

"Pupils are required to wear uniform dress. The leading object with the principal in this arrangement is, to remove, as much as possible, every *trifling impediment* to brotherly harmony and self-respect."

"The terms of the school will be one hundred fifty dollars per annum, for board, lodging, washing and instruction."



STAMFORD'S OLDEST BUSINESS
INSTITUTION

THE Stamford Advocate dates its origin to 1829, and has the distinction of being the work of Stamford's oldest business institution.

In 1829, when Stamford was a village of thirty-seven hundred people, William H. Holly installed a printing press in a small office on the south side of West Park. He commenced the pub-

Stamford: Rev. Mr. Platt, Messrs. Waterbury & Wood, Dan-
wn. Pecks ton, Rev. Henry Fuller, Rev. Daniel Smith, Stam-
ford, Messrs. E. Seofield & Co 300 Pearl street,
New York.
PRICE.
North Stamford, April 8, 1833.

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charges.
VELL.

WEBB:
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and Fancy
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RAN AWAY from the subscriber on the 26th of March last, a negro boy by the name of ISAAC JOHNSON; aged about 15 years, had on, when he went away, a black Seal skin cap, black round jacket, shaggy cloth, mixed pantaloons, and boots. Whoever will return said boy, or give information where he may be found, shall receive a reasonable reward. All persons are forbid harboring or trusting, him on my account.

CHARLES W KNAPP,
Stamford, April 9, 1833

THE Court of Probate for the District of Stamford hath limited Six Months from this date for the exhibition of Claims against the Es

Old Advertisement in THE STAMFORD SENTINEL.

lication of a newspaper which he called the "Intelligencer," but after a few months was compelled to give up the en-

terprise for lack of sufficient funds. Some of the energetic citizens of the town, believing in the value of a local newspaper, determined to furnish the necessary financial assistance to carry it on, and on February 16th, 1830, the first issue of a new paper, called the "Sentinel," put in its appearance. From that time until the present, a local newspaper has been published in Stamford without interruption, giving the publication a consecutive history of nearly one hundred years.

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subject

ENIGMA.

Take the latter four-sixths
Of the Bees sweet produce,
And a thousand when short is set down;
Prefix the last to the first,
It will shew what I want,
Of my patrons in country or town
New Hope, Oct. 18. JOHN R. LEEDS.

THE Court of Probate for the District of Stamford, ~~has~~ hath limited six months from this date

Old Advertisement in THE STAMFORD SENTINEL.

Probably the oldest copy of the "Sentinel" now extant is in the Ferguson Library, and is dated June 22nd, 1830. It is marked Volume 1, No. 19. It is a simple publication of four sheets, fifteen by twenty inches in size, and six columns to the page. In the first column of the first page is a poem on "The Fall of

Sodom." The rest of the page is given over to a story entitled "Roger Dimion," a tale of the Canadian frontier, copied from the Rochester Craftsman. The motto, which was accepted as the standard for the paper, was printed at the top of the front page, and read as follows: "Pledged to no party's arbitrary sway, we follow Truth where'er she leads the way." The columns reflect the bitter anti-Masonic controversy raging at the

FLISHA SEELY, Administrator.
ELIZABETH GRAY, Administratrix.

Lyceum Notice.

A MEETING of the "North Stamford Debating Society, will be held at the Academy in that place, on Saturday evening, the 25th inst. at half past 6 o'clock.

Question for Discussion.

"Aught Females to have the privilege of voting?"
Ladies are invited to attend. GILBERT DEAN,
Dec. 18, 1841. Secretary.

NOTICE.

THE Assessors and Board of Relief for the town of Stamford will meet at the Inn of Albert Seely

Old Advertisement in THE STAMFORD SENTINEL.

time, and contain an article by a person who styled himself "Aristides, the Younger," which was a caustic denunciation of the Rev. Joel Mann of Horse-neck (Greenwich) for his anti-Masonic tendencies.

Early issues of the "Sentinel" contain many quaint advertisements of local dealers, who quote prices that would astound purchasers today. One advertisement for shoes reads as follows: "A stock of shoes of every description constantly on hand from 56 to 87½ cents. All the above articles will be sold cheaper than the cheapest." Very little local news was printed, and the columns were filled with sermons, poems, and literary "gems" culled from various sources, and some domestic and foreign items taken from city newspapers.

The "Sentinel" was later called the "Democratic Sentinel" and "Farmer's Advocate," but in May, 1848, came into the hands of Edgar Hoyt and Andrew J. Smith, who named it "The Stamford Advocate." It has retained the title "Advocate" since that time.



THE MILLER EXCITEMENT

“**T**HE Miller Excitement” is the name given to a heated controversy which stirred the whole life of Stamford in 1843, and which caused trouble that continued for nearly a decade.

In 1834, a certain Charles F. Miller of Yonkers, N. Y., married a seventeen-year-old girl named Mary Blackwell. Domestic difficulties arose between them, and eight years after their marriage the young woman, then only twenty-five, fled to Stamford, to get away from her husband and his persecutions. She sought refuge in the well known Stage House on Main Street. This was one of the popular hostelrys of its time, and was well patronized by persons moving back and forth between New York and New England towns. Mrs. Miller was exceedingly attractive, and her beautiful features and charming manners instantly won her much sympathy, particularly from the younger element in the community. Mr. Miller located his bride in Stamford, and determined to carry her away by force, but his wife had won so many friends that his first two efforts to carry out his pur-

pose were unsuccessful. The "Advocate" of the time said of him that he was "as brutal and unfeeling a man as ever bore the name of man," and "as vile a monster as ever trod the path of crime." Undaunted by his previous efforts, the persistent husband tried again on January 25th, 1843. Discovering that his wife was in the Stage House, he boldly entered her room, seized her by force, and carried her down to the waiting stage below. With hair dishevelled, amid shrieks and cries for help, Mrs. Miller was carried away toward New York.

The townspeople at once took sides on the question. Some contended that Mr. Miller was altogether right in his insistence that his wife should go away with him, while others looked upon his act as another expression of his brutality. The situation created many animosities; good friends were separated, lodges, clubs and churches found the affair creeping into their organizations, and the unfortunate incident threatened many serious consequences to the life of the town.

Albert Seeley, the proprietor of the Stage House, had furnished the woman

protection, and was considered a pronounced anti-Millerite. Some of the Millerites determined to take revenge upon him by building a larger and better hotel exactly opposite his hostelry. Thomas Dixon, the well-known architect of the time, designed the plans, and after many difficulties and obstacles the Union House was constructed. The dedicatory dinner was held in it on May 17th, 1844, and was attended by a large number of the Millerites, who were also supporters, for the most part, of the political movement known as loco-focoism. The hotel did not get the support it expected, as is indicated in an article in the "Advocate" in 1845, in which the editor speaks of the prosperity of the town, but adds the significant comment: "There is, it appears, one exception to the general rule of prosperity and progress, and that is the Joint Stock Tavern, yclept Union House, which is doing penance for its sins and must first be washed of the blood stains of Millerism."

Mrs. Miller received a divorce from the legislature in 1843, which settled the argument from a legal standpoint, but it was many years before Stamford recovered from the effects of the scandal.

The Union House was later called the Grand Union Hotel, and at the time of its demolition in 1921 was known as the Carlton Hotel. Many of the present residents of Stamford recall the Stage House and the Union House, but do not know the incident that caused them to be located exactly opposite each other on Main Street.



THE COMING OF THE RAILROAD TO STAMFORD IN 1848

IT was a distinct forward step in the life of the borough of Stamford when the railroad was built through it in 1848. Before that time the chief means of communication with the outside world were the stage coaches travelling the Post Road. Only a few were able to take the expensive stage trips, with the result that Stamford remained a provincial and isolated community. The effect which the coming of the railroad had upon the life of the borough is reflected in the marked increase in population which followed immediately afterward. During the decade following this important event in her life Stamford increased as much as she had during the thirty years previous.

The first train that entered the borough made a deep impression upon the townspeople. The Stamford Sentinel of December 19th, 1848, gives the following quaint description of the event: "The citizens of the village, as well as the horses, cattle, etc., were nearly frightened out of their propriety on Wednesday last, at about five o'clock,

by such a horrible scream as was never heard to issue from other than metallic throat. Animals of every description went careering about the fields, snuffing the air in terror, and bipeds of every size, condition and color set off at a full run for the railroad depot. In a few moments the cause of the commotion appeared, in the shape of a locomotive puffing off steam and screaming with its so-called 'whistle' at a terrible rate."

The last section of track to be laid between New York and New Haven was laid at Cos Cob, over the bridge constructed at that place. William H. Holly, the editor of the Stamford Sentinel, was a passenger on the trial trip on Christmas Day, 1848. He describes what took place as follows:

"The train had to remain at Cos Cob bridge some three hours for the last rail to be laid over it, and the delay gave ample opportunity to the surrounding people to come and witness the wonderful feat. The general impression among them seemed to be that the first train that crossed this elevated pass would be the last. All sorts of old women's stories to frighten children had been put in circulation regarding the safety of

this bridge, and many a spectator expected to see our splendid locomotive, elegant car and confiding attendants and passengers plunged into the deep below. Ten minutes before two p. m. Mr. Mason, chief engineer of the company, gave the word 'all ready.' Our prancer was let loose. Breathless anxiety pervaded the multitude on each shore. The train moved majestically along, and the next minute the western shore received its ponderous weight, and the welkin rang with the shouts of the congregated people."

James H. Hoyt, one of Stamford's prominent citizens in the nineteenth century, had an important part in the development of the new railroad. He began by contracting for bridges, ties and grading needed on the road, and in 1854 was made the Superintendent. He contracted to supply fuel for the locomotives at a time when wood was used in place of coal. His business sagacity and wise direction made possible the rapid and profitable development of the new enterprise, over which he retained direction for twenty-nine years, till his death in 1873.

CENTRAL PARK AND HOW IT WAS
SAVED FOR THE PEOPLE OF
STAMFORD

FROM the beginning of Stamford's history, the center of the settlement has been exactly where it is today. The first meeting house, which was Stamford's first public building, stood near the present location of the Town Hall; the second, third and fourth meeting houses occupied the ground now known as Central Park.

The first building in Central Park was erected 188 years before the last one located there was taken down, so that for nearly two centuries the religious life of the community centered on this green.

In 1790, the fourth meeting house of the Congregational Church was erected on this location, but in 1858 had become so old and dilapidated that it was deemed advisable to build a new one. When the old building was taken away, the ground became unoccupied for the first time in many long decades.

A question arose concerning the legal title of the property, and much discussion was aroused concerning the right-

ful claimants. An idea prevailed that the first of the contending parties that was able to build a fence about the plot would establish a claim which it would be difficult to invalidate. Immediately two groups prepared themselves with timber, shovels, hammers and saws, and proceeded to fence in the ground. The issue was a burning one, and, as several of Stamford's leading citizens were interested in it, the people of the town enjoyed the ludicrous sight of seeing some of the leaders of the community working feverishly to out-do each other in the task of fencing in the plot. Particularly active in the campaign were James H. Hoyt, Sands Seely, and J. B. Scofield. They lived near the center of the town, and were anxious that proper disposition be made of the ground. This party organized so effectively that their opponents soon gave up the struggle. Subsequently a firm known as Newman and Hughes of Mianus bought the land. James H. Hoyt started a vigorous campaign among the townspeople to raise sufficient funds to purchase the property and to present it to the town. They were successful, and the plot was given to the people with the specific designation that

it should always be used as a public park. For many years a beautiful fountain was located in the center, where it bubbled for the delectation of Stamford people.



STAMFORD'S CHURCHES

THE settlers of New England showed a stern and uncompromising spirit toward persons who had religious beliefs different from their own. Having suffered much for their own convictions, it was not easy for them to tolerate other religious ideas. Therefore, it was only natural that the early inhabitants of Stamford took an attitude which, in the present day, seems narrow and bigoted, but in their time, was to be expected from men and women who had sacrificed all things for their religious ideals.

There were members of the Church of England in Stamford as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, but there was such great prejudice against them, not only here, but throughout the whole commonwealth, that when their leaders applied to the General Assembly of Connecticut, in 1738, for freedom from the necessity of paying taxes for the support of the Congregational Church, they were voted down in both houses of the legislature. Episcopalians had occasional services of worship here from the beginning of the eighteenth

century, and by 1742 had gained sufficient strength to plan for the erection of a church. A request for a grant of land was made, and the town took action as follows: "The town agrees to put in a committee to view the place of Eliphalet Holly's, where the professors of the Church of England have petitioned for setting a church house, whether it may be granted *without damage to the town*, and to make return to the adjourned town meeting." The petition was granted, and the land given was the plot now occupied by St. John's Episcopal Church, but it was not so attractive then as it is today. It consisted of a ledge of rock, surrounded on three sides by impassable swamp, and on this place, it was thought that the church might be erected without "damaging" the town. Some of the difficulties which Episcopalians faced in the early days, is suggested in a report of the Rev. Ebenezer Dibble, one of the early rectors of the church. He writes, in 1757, "I preached on Christmas to a numerous assembly. Multitudes of the dissenters came to the church, *and behaved with great decency.*" St. John's first edifice was in use in 1747; the second church building,

erected in 1843, stood near the present location of the Suburban Club. This building burned down on January 24th, 1890, and was superseded by the present beautiful structure.

The first building of the Baptist Church was erected before the formal organization of the church itself. The house of worship was completed in 1772, and a year later, under the leadership of Ebenezer Ferris, a layman, the organization of the church was effected. Mr. Ferris was later ordained to the ministry and became the first pastor. In 1790, a second building was erected on River Street to take the place of the first one, and in 1859, under the direction of Joseph B. Hoyt and others, the present dignified edifice was erected.

The pathway of the Methodists was no easier than that of the Episcopalians. The Rev. Daniel Devinne, who was stationed here in 1830, gives us the oldest records of the Methodist Church. The church was founded in 1788, and meetings were held in an old house on River Street, which is still standing on its original location. Mr. Devinne's record states that the church made earnest efforts to secure a building, and

“after frequent petitions, the town, which at that time was under the influence of the Congregational order granted to the ‘fanatics’ a place—a mud hole on the commons—on which to build a church.” The first building was erected in 1813 on the allotted spot, which was a little to the east of the present Methodist Church. One writer of the early times refers to the spiritual progress of the town, but speaks contemptuously of the “fanatics,” who may have been a little noisy at times, by saying, “Zion continues to grow, notwithstanding the shade of public sentiment and the rude attempt of *the bulls of Bashan* to destroy it.” The second Methodist church building stood on the corner of River Street and Park Place, and the old building, now an apartment house, still occupies this same location. The present house of worship is the third edifice which the Methodists have had. It was erected in 1859, and from time to time has been altered to meet the growing needs of the church.

The churches organized in the nineteenth century met none of the severe opposition which came to those of an earlier time, although there was some

prejudice still existing at the beginning of this period. The members of the Universalist Church held their first services in the old Town House, which stood near the center of Atlantic Square, and in 1845, built a simple Gothic building on the spot now occupied by the Town Hall. This building was taken down, when the old Town Hall was erected, and the Universalists moved to their present location at the corner of Prospect and Forest Streets.

St. John's Roman Catholic Church dates its origin to 1845, when occasional priests visited Stamford and said mass for the Catholics living in this vicinity. Father John Brady was the first priest in charge of the church, and under his direction, the first Catholic Church in Stamford was erected. The location of this church was on Meadow Street. The present building on Atlantic Street was started by Father John Fagan, in 1873, but he did not live to see it completed. The basement of the church was used for a while, but on May 30th, 1886, the dedicatory services for the completed church were held.

The first Presbyterian Church was organized in 1853 with the Rev. J. Leon-

ard Corning as its first pastor. The first building occupied the same location as the present Presbyterian Church, and was in constant use from the time of organization until August 7th, 1882, when it was burned down. The present beautiful house of worship was erected to replace the original one. A large addition to the building was made in 1920, which greatly increases the church's facilities.

St. Andrew's Church was the outgrowth of a mission promoted and fostered by the Hon. John Ferguson. The church was consecrated on May 8th, 1861, and became incorporated as a parish on June 12th, 1865. The Rev. F. Windsor Brathwaite was the first rector, continuing in his office for forty-three years, until his death in 1908. He was one of the most beloved spiritual leaders the community has ever had.

Union Memorial Church in Glenbrook started a Sunday School, organized and developed by the Rev. Samuel Scoville. A chapel was erected on land given by Francis A. Palmer and in 1896, a church organization was effected. The Rev. Samuel J. Evers is the first and only pastor.

St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church was organized in August, 1907, and the new building for the use of this parish was dedicated February 5th, 1908. Father D. L. Gleason has been the priest in charge during the entire history of the church.



MARITIME LIFE OF STAMFORD

THE life of Stamford has always been closely associated with the waters of Long Island Sound. Before the coming of the white man to these parts, Wascussue, lord of Shippan; Piamikin, sagamore of Roatan, and Chief Myanos built their camps close to the sea, and their dark-skinned followers used the bays and the inlets of the Sound as their fishing grounds.

As early as 1642, Captain John Underhill, the erratic military genius and mortal foe of the dreaded Indians, sailed into the Stamford harbor after a dangerous ride from Boston in his small two-masted vessel. Navigation was a much more difficult undertaking in those days than it is now, and his trip was regarded as a memorable one.

The first steamboat to enter the Stamford harbor was the Oliver Wolcott, and it arrived in 1825. An eye-witness describes the impressions which it made upon him as a boy. "The Oliver Wolcott came up into the harbor and landed a little above Captain Lockwood's wharf. The whole population of men and boys were there. A great crowd

stepped on board as soon as she had made fast, and one boy at least had a mortal fear of going near the boiler. In a moment the steam was let off, and such a fearful scream it made to our unaccustomed ears! We concluded at once that she had burst her boiler, or was boiling her buster, we didn't know then which it was, and with our hands over our ears, we rushed ashore, to be laughed at by some of the more knowing ones."

A pronounced forward step was taken in 1833, when it was decided to build a canal into the heart of the town. Alfred Bishop was the leading spirit in the new movement. Prominent men of the town gathered their followers about them, and took up the work. The canal was 180 rods in length, 30 feet in width and 7 feet in depth, and the cost of building it, including three stores erected on it, was seven thousand dollars. The first sloop to enter the canal was called the "Mayflower," and was manned by Captain Rufus Wardwell. Two years after the completion of the Canal the "Sentinel" records: "Through the perseverance of a single individual, a ship channel has been opened and the enter-

prising Messrs. William and R. Hoyt and Co. have despatched the schooner James Star with a full freight for the West Indies. The value of this canal to this vicinity is not yet fully realized, but every day unfolds to the skeptic new evidences of its utility." The canal terminated on Main Street where the Quintard Block now stands, and often boats were anchored within one hundred feet from our present Atlantic Park.

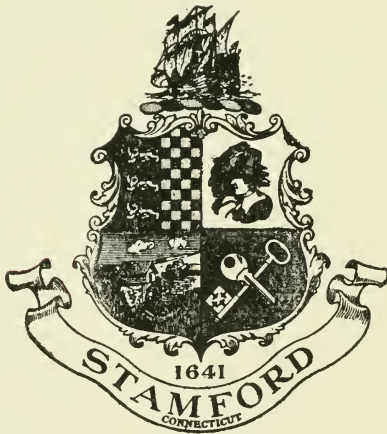
Many small sloops plied between Stamford and New York, taking the vegetables grown on the adjoining farms to the markets of the city.

Commodore James D. Smith did more than any other man to stimulate an interest in yachting in Stamford. He was keenly interested in the sport himself and established a reputation as an international yachtsman. He was one of the original directors of the Stamford Yacht Club, organized in 1891, which club has been the chief factor in fostering an interest in this sport during the last thirty years.

SEAL OF THE TOWN OF STAMFORD

AT the annual meeting of the Town of Stamford, held on October 14th, 1915, the following resolution was adopted:

“Resolved, That the following seal be adopted as the seal of the town of Stamford, to wit, a shield divided into



four quarters; the first quarter representing the coat of arms of Stamford in Lincolnshire, England, the second quarter representing in peaceful profile the Indian and the settler, the third quarter representing an old grist mill and field

of grain, the fourth quarter representing two crossed keys, one of ancient and one of modern design; above the shield an ancient ship and below the shield, in a scroll, the words 'Stamford, Connecticut,' and between the scroll and the shield, the figures—1641."

The meaning of these symbols is apparent. The ship is suggestive of the journey across the sea made by the original settlers; the coat of arms of Stamford in England is used because it was from this old town that Stamford received her name; the settler and the Indian remind us of these two groups, brought together at the time of the original settlement; the grist mill represents Stamford's first industry, built in 1641 near the present location of the bridge on Main Street which crosses the Rippowam River, an industry which had a continuous existence for 158 years; and the two crossed keys symbolize Stamford's present largest industry, the Yale & Towne Manufacturing Co.

STAMFORD'S RECORD IN WAR

STAMFORD has established an enviable record for herself in war, and one of which the citizens may be justly proud. There has never been a struggle in which the country has been involved to which her sons have not responded freely and courageously. When it was necessary to lift arms against the Indians, the men of the ancient settlement responded quickly, and under the leadership of such men as Captain John Underhill, Captain Jonathan Sellick and Sergeant Daniel Westcott, helped to drive back the dark-skinned enemy.

During Revolutionary days, the sentiment of the community was distinctly in favor of the colonies. While there were some loyalists here, as elsewhere, who did not approve of the conflict and who caused trouble for the others, the majority entered earnestly into the fight for Independence. Immediately after the battle of Lexington and Concord, when it was thought that New York might be invaded, Joseph Hoyt enlisted a company of thirty men to go to the help of that city. The defense proved unneces-

sary, and the little company returned after eight days' service, having the distinction, however, of being the first group in Stamford to take up arms in the memorable conflict. Subsequently Captain Hoyt organized another company and a third was formed later under Col. David Waterbury. Col. Waterbury later became a general in the colonial army, and his name stands out as one of the brilliant military leaders of his time.

Usual Knapp of North Stamford deserves special recognition in connection with the Revolution. He was one of the personal life guards of General Washington during the war and enjoyed his special favor. He was buried at Washington's headquarters, at Newburgh, N. Y., with special military honors.

The sentiment of Stamford during the Civil War was absolutely unified. Over one-tenth of the entire population of the village responded to the call to arms for the defense of the Union. After Lincoln's call for volunteers, a mass meeting was held in Stamford and thirty young men, headed by Theodore Miller and Theodore Delacroix, signed up for service. Stamford's first com-

pany was organized under Captain Albert Stevens, and shortly after another company was formed by Captain Lorenzo Meeker. A large number of the Stamford recruits became members of the 28th regiment, which saw active service in the siege and assault of Port Hudson in 1863. Charles A. Hobbie, captain of one of the companies organized in Stamford, was one of a family which contributed six brothers to the war and which has given the name to a local post of the G. A. R.

Stamford's participation in the World War is so well known as to need little emphasis. Her representatives were found in every branch of the service, and also in the ranks of the various organizations doing auxiliary work for the troops. There were three companies of the National Guard in Stamford at the beginning of the war. All of these companies were enrolled in the Federal service, and all of them participated in actual fighting.

Battery F, Field Artillery, had returned to Stamford from service on the Mexican border only two weeks before declaration of war with Germany. The unit immediately entered the Federal

service and became a part of the 103d Field Artillery of the 26th division. The men embarked for France in October, and saw actual service for the first time on February 14th, 1918, near the little village of Ostelt. They participated in the fighting at Chateau Thierry and helped win the second battle of the Marne. At the signing of the armistice they were actively engaged between Verdun and Metz.

Battery D, 56th Artillery, Connecticut Artillery Corps, contained many young men from the Seventh Company, Connecticut Artillery Corps, Connecticut National Guard, which was located in Stamford. The battery left New York for France on March 28th, 1918, and after considerable moving about, were finally able to participate in actual fighting starting first at Lhuys. The battery was engaged in the Argonne offensive when the signing of the armistice put an end to the struggle. The battery shared in two major offensives, in the Fismes and the Argonne-Meuse sectors.

The Ninth Company, Connecticut Artillery Corps, Connecticut National Guard, entered Federal service on August 4th, and subsequently became a part of Battery E, 56th Artillery. This battery had its baptism of fire on August 15th, near Fismes. It also participated in the Argonne offensive and was engaged in that sector at the signing of the armistice.

Stamford lost thirty-eight men during the World War. Her citizens subscribed over thirteen millions of dollars to the five government loans, in each drive over-subscribing the quota by a generous amount. In the Red Cross drives Stamford was united with Darien and New Canaan, and these groups gave \$147,-312.83 in the first campaign and \$166,059.43 in the second. These towns raised \$29,170.72 for the Y. M. C. A. war fund and \$132,920.70 for the United War Work fund.

Statistics of the actual number of participants from Stamford in the various wars in which the country has engaged are difficult to compile, but according to the records prepared for the Soldiers'

Memorial, erected in St. John's Park,
the number is as follows:

Colonial and Indian Wars---	278
Revolutionary War -----	493
War of 1812 -----	191
Mexican War -----	7
Civil War -----	700
Spanish-American War ----	142
World War -----	2637



INTERESTING DATES IN STAMFORD'S HISTORY

1635-1700

- 1635—Church organized at Wethersfield, Conn. The majority of members in this church moved to Stamford in 1641, with a minority of the planters, continuing their ecclesiastical organization here. It is now known as the First Congregational Church.
- 1640—July 1st. Original plot of land comprising Stamford, purchased from the Indians by Nathaniel Turner, representative of the New Haven colony.
- 1641—First settlers arrived in Stamford in the spring of the year.
- 1685—May 26th. Town of Stamford incorporated.

1700-1800

- 1706—April 4th. First record of services of the Episcopal Church held in Stamford.
- 1731—Separation of civil and ecclesiastical affairs of the town.
- 1743—Corner stone laid of the first building of St. John's Episcopal Church.
- 1744—Congregational Church of Middlesex (Darien) organized.
- 1758—Captain (later General) David Waterbury and men share in assault on Fort Ticonderoga.
- 1773—November 1st. First Baptist Church founded.
- 1779—March 26th. General Putnam rode to Stamford from Greenwich to get help to repulse the British.

- 1779—Sept. 5th. Major (later Colonel) Benjamin Tallmadge and 130 men, starting from Shippan, attacked a band of Tories at Lloyd's Neck, bringing back 131 prisoners.
- 1781—July 22nd. Church at Middlesex (Darien) attacked by Tories, and the Rev. Moses Mather and members of the congregation led away prisoners.
- 1788—First Methodist Episcopal Church founded.

1800-1900

- 1825—The "Oliver Wolcott," first steamboat to enter Stamford harbor, arrived at Capt. Augustus Lockwood's wharf.
- 1829—Stamford's first newspaper, "The Intelligencer," founded.
- 1830—February 16th. "The Sentinel," forerunner of "The Advocate," founded.
- 1830—Stamford incorporated as a borough. Population 663, including two slaves.
- 1830—Darien incorporated.
- 1834—Stamford's first bank incorporated. John W. Leeds was chosen president.
- 1838—Charles Hawley elected Lieutenant Governor, only Stamford citizen ever holding this office.
- 1841—Universalist Church founded.
- 1841—December 22nd. Stamford's second centennial celebrated. Historical address by Rev. John W. Alvord.
- 1842—Sept. 1st. Roman Catholic services first held in Stamford.
- 1843—Famous Miller controversy.
- 1845—Rippowam Fire Co. No. 1, Stamford's first fire department, organized.
- 1848—December. First railroad train entered Stamford.

- 1849—July 4th. Ground broken for first Roman Catholic Church in Stamford, erected on Meadow Street.
- 1853—February 25th. First Presbyterian Church organized.
- 1855—Stamford Female Seminary founded. Forerunner of the Katherine Aiken School.
- 1855—William T. Minor elected Governor, only Stamford citizen ever holding this office.
- 1861—April 20th. First Civil War meeting held in Stamford.
- 1861—May 8th. St. Andrew's Church consecrated.
- 1866—June 20th and 21st. Hoyt family meeting held in the Congregational Church.
- 1868—Ground broken for first building of Yale & Towne Mfg. Co. Factory commenced operations in March, 1869.
- 1870—July 2nd. President Grant visited Stamford.
- 1871—Sept. 1st. Old Town Hall completed.
- 1881—November. Ferguson Library first opened to the public.
- 1881—Hobbie Post, No. 23, G. A. R., organized.
- 1882—August 8th. Presbyterian Church struck by lightning, and burned to the ground.
- 1886—June 8th. Woolen mills burned.
- 1887—January 31st. Horse-drawn street cars operated between stables on Woodside Street and depot.
- 1888—March 12th. Beginning of the famous "Blizzard of '88."
- 1888—Stamford Oratorio Society founded. Alfred Hallam, conductor.

- 1889—July 3d. President Harrison visited Stamford.
- 1892—April 4th. "The Advocate" commenced publication as a daily newspaper.
- 1892—October 19th. 250th anniversary of Stamford. George H. Hoyt, chairman of General Committee. Address by Rev. R. P. H. Vail, D. D.
- 1893—Charter granted to the Stamford Hospital.
- 1893—Borough of Stamford incorporated as a city.
- 1896—June 11th. Union Memorial Church organized.

1900-1922

- 1904—February 4th. Old Town Hall burned.
- 1906—October 31st. Board of Appropriation approved purchase of Halloween Park.
- 1907—August. St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church organized.
- 1907—October 5th. Inauguration of electric train service between Stamford and New York.
- 1908—January 22nd. Betts Academy burned.
- 1909—Stamford's new Y. M. C. A. building opened.
- 1913—September 20th. Stamford Hospital dedicated.
- 1914—May 16th. First observance of Settler's day.
- 1916—June 11th. 275th anniversary of Stamford. Robert Whittaker, chairman of the General Committee. Historical address by Judge Charles Davenport Lockwood.
- 1917—June 5th. 4450 registered for the selective draft.

100 STAMFORD HISTORICAL SKETCHES

- 1918—September 12th. Five thousand eight hundred and thirteen registered under the selective draft law.
- 1919—March 12th. Opening of Nurses' Home of Stamford Hospital, presented by C. O. Miller.
- 1920—May 30th. Laying of cornerstone for War Monument in St. John's Park.
- 1920—Nov. 11th. Dedication of War Monument in St. John's Park.
- 1922—July 27th. Stamford's bathing pavilion opened to the public.









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