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This booklet is the first in a series to be published by the Historical Subcommittee of the Tricentennial Committee. Editors: Co-chairmen Imogene Heireth and Brian Cotter, and Stephen A. Collins. Also contributing, Dr. Gertrude Braun and Judge T. Clark Hull.

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Danbury Tricentennial Committee



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CITY OF DANBURY

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

DANBURY, CONNECTICUT 06810

JAMES E. DYER
MAYOR

Danbury is an exciting place to be in 1984. As we begin a yearlong commemoration of our three hundred years of existence as a community, we can take great pride in our history and the opportunities that have been presented by our development.

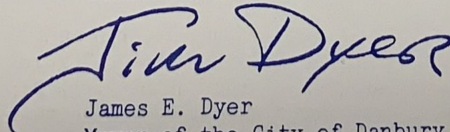
Our City is ninety-two years older than our Nation. We have experienced unprecedented growth, economic development, and the creation of a quality of life that offers many amenities. The successful evolution of our City is a tribute to our founders and the many citizens who have contributed to thirty decades of City planning.

Danbury's Tricentennial Committee has an exciting agenda planned for the 1984-85 celebration period. One of the most interesting programs is a review of our history through a series of publications. An in depth review of our history will lend new meaning to our City motto: "Continue -- We Have Just Restored."

I hope that you will enjoy the historical information that will be provided during this interesting and provocative time.

With all good wishes, I am,

Sincerely yours,


James E. Dyer
Mayor of the City of Danbury

DANBURY

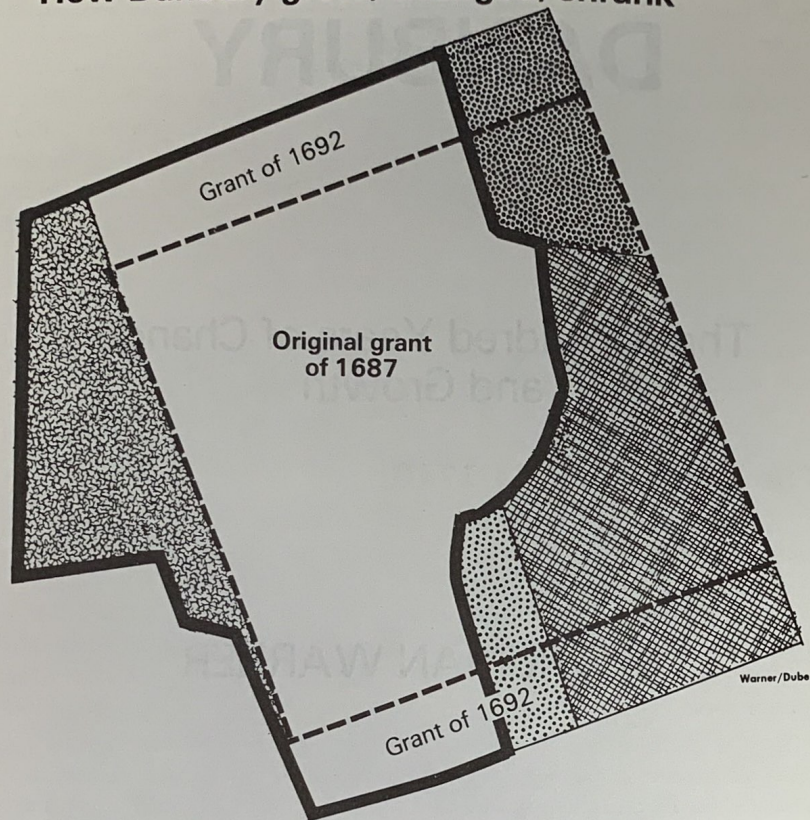
Three Hundred Years of Change and Growth







By TRUMAN WARNER

(Dr. Truman Warner is professor of anthropology and history at Western Connecticut State University. Text reproduced with permission from Centennial Editions of The News-Times, September, 1983)

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How Danbury grew, changed, shrank



-  1788 — Ceded to Newbury (later Brookfield)
-  1846 — Ceded from Ridgefield
-  1855 — Set off as town of Bethel
-  1869 — Grassy Plain area annexed by Bethel
-  Original Danbury boundary
-  Danbury's boundary since 1869

In the three centuries following the Colonial settlement of Danbury in 1684, the original village of eight families was transformed into an industrial city of 60,000. The city's direction and growth have been colored and influenced by a multitude of events, ranging from Danbury's role in the Revolutionary War to the invention of a hat-forming machine.

The 300-year time span falls into seven major periods: The Frontier (1684-1710); Colonial Commerce (1710-1775); The Revolution (1775-1783); The Beginnings of Manufacturing (1783-1850); Industrialization and Urbanization (1850-1914); The Search of Diversification (1914-1950); and The Post Industrial Society (1950-1983). The first four periods will be considered here; the second four in the Centennial Edition of Sept. 22.

Each period was marked by a different lifestyle which was related to changes in the kinds and quantities of energy sources the inhabitants were able to utilize, the technology available to harness this energy, and the numbers and types of people living in the town.

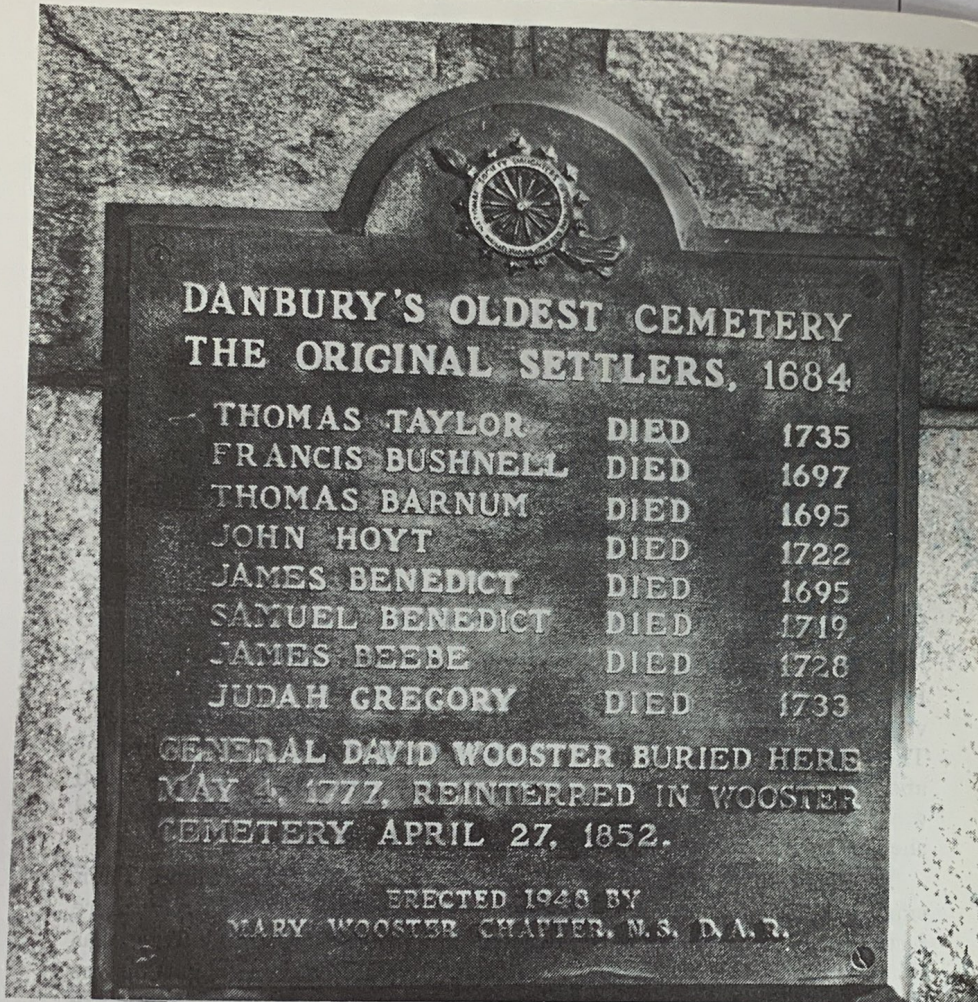
The Frontier (1684-1710)

The Indians from whom the settlers purchased the land, called the Paquioque, meaning open space, were farmers. They cultivated and harvested corn, beans and squash using such tools as hoes and digging sticks. They supplemented these foods by gathering uncultivated plants, berries and nuts, clams and mussels, and by hunting, trapping and fishing. Wood was the major source of heat and cooking fuel. Other tools, clothing and shelter came from similar easily available resources.

The Paquioque used the "slash and burn" method to clear land. Their small, temporary settlements were relocated every few years to a new, more fertile, area. Because the population in each of the scattered villages was relatively small and the amount of farmland required at any given time was limited, the Indians did not fully appreciate the changes which the white settlers to whom they sold the land would introduce.

The Colonists also were farmers, but of a different sort. The newcomers expected their homes and farm land to be more or less permanently located. They used oxen and plows. They required great acreage. They used vast quantities of wood to heat their large wooden houses and prepare their meals. And they brought many different tools and technologies with them, ranging from the production of iron tools and water-powered mills, to weaving and the raising of cattle, swine and sheep.

When the first eight families moved to Danbury in 1684 they were opening the virtually unsettled frontier of the Western highlands. Only five years earlier the Connecticut General Court had reported to England that "Most land that is fit for planting is taken up. What remains must be subdued and gained out of the fire as it were by hard blow and for small recompense."



**DANBURY'S OLDEST CEMETERY
THE ORIGINAL SETTLERS, 1684**

THOMAS TAYLOR	DIED	1735
FRANCIS BUSHNELL	DIED	1697
THOMAS BARNUM	DIED	1695
JOHN HOYT	DIED	1722
JAMES BENEDICT	DIED	1695
SAMUEL BENEDICT	DIED	1719
JAMES BEEBE	DIED	1728
JUDAH GREGORY	DIED	1733

GENERAL DAVID WOOSTER BURIED HERE
MAY 4, 1777, REINTERRED IN WOOSTER
CEMETERY APRIL 27, 1852.

ERECTED 1948 BY
MARY WOOSTER CHAPTER, M.S. D.A.R.

This plaque honoring Danbury's founding families is on the west pillar of the gateway into town's original cemetery on Wooster Street, just west of Main Street and the former Danbury jail.

Established towns lined the entire length of the Colony's land along the Connecticut River and the coastal plains, and already the inhabitants of those communities felt the pressure for additional land for their children and grandchildren.

In addition, there probably were political reasons for the settlement at this time.

The Connecticut General Court had been authorizing inland settlements near the Western border — at Weantenock (New Milford) and Powtocook (Newtown), for example — for several years but they never materialized. However, in 1684, immediately after receiving the report of the agreement establishing the boundary between New York and Connecticut, the court

ordered "the planting of a Towne above Norwalk and Fayrefield" near the New York border at "Paquiaque," later renamed Danbury. The village would serve as an outpost defense against Indian incursions from the north and west.

The original grant was an area six miles square, but the proprietors, as early as 1691, already had petitioned to push the boundaries four miles northward and three miles southward in the expectation that a portion would abut the Housatonic River. But in 1692, the General Court agreed to enlarge the bound only one mile in each direction, effectively excluding the community from direct river access.

The original eight families, plus a few others who cannot be identified with certainty, were the proprietors or owners of the entire grant. This meant that land was distributed by the vote of these proprietors who thus were a privileged landowning group within the political community. As proprietors each had a share, and each shareholder received a portion whenever the proprietors voted a new land distribution.

Undistributed lands remained as undivided or common lands until the proprietors took action. Thus, when he died in 1697, Thomas Barnum already owned not only his home lot but seven other lots scattered from Deer Hill to Shelter Rock, a mill lot, four divisions of meadow land — as well as his share of all the lands not yet divided. In other words, there had been at least four distributions of land during the past 13 years.

At the death of a proprietor his share was passed on to selected heirs, either as a unit or as several partial shares. This system continued for generations.

Newcomers, however, could be granted land without becoming proprietors or proprietors could sell already distributed land to others. Descendants of the first settlers continued as proprietors until all property was in private ownership. With land serving as the basis for wealth in this period, it is little wonder that families of the earliest inhabitants remained economically and politically powerful for many generations.

The ideal for Connecticut towns in the 17th century was that of the Puritan corporate community in which the church and state were one. But the reality of this ideal was waning before Danbury's settlement, although at first glance it might appear that the first eight families, migrating as a group and settling together, four on each side of the southern end of the valley between Town Hill and Deer Hill, were trying to reproduce this dream.

But change was already altering this idealized order. Soon other families arrived, and by the time the Rev. Mr. Shove officially formed the church in 1697, only seven people of the 24 families then in town were full members.

Within a few years some families built houses in the Miry Brook and Brookfield sections, thus breaking up the clustered, tightly knit settlement. Slowly, the population continued to increase. A mill was erected on the Still



This sketch shows the Benjamin Knapp house on White Street, near Main Street, where two British brigadier generals set up headquarters during General Tryon's raid on Danbury April 26-27, 1777. One historian reported that Generals Agnew and Erskine made themselves at home, killed Knapp's stock and "cut up the meat on the floor, and the dents thereof were visible as long as the building stood."

River. Two houses at each end of Town Street were fortified as defense against anticipated Indian attacks.

By 1700 the General Court apparently believed the inhabitants of Danbury had had sufficient time to establish themselves, for the October 1699 rate lists of Colony taxes contained their property evaluations for the first time.

By 1710 Danbury was no longer an isolated frontier community. The court granted a charter for the settlement of Newtown in 1708, and in 1710, 22 Stratford men took claim to their specific portions of land. The court officially recognized the town in 1711. In 1708 the first home sites were apportioned in Ridgefield. Settlement began in New Milford in 1707, with town privileges granted in 1712.

Colonial Commerce (1710-1775)

Subsistence farming did not satisfy all the needs of the inhabitants of Danbury: A wide variety of items had to be purchased elsewhere.

Danburians, therefore, began to raise more than they themselves needed, and traded the surplus. It is probable that Danbury's early nickname of "Beantown" is a reminder of one of the important farm products they exchanged at the coastal markets.

Such activities reflected a general trend throughout the Colony of increasing involvement with external commerce. As reported in 1729 and 1730 to the Board of Trade, Connecticut's "inhabitants import annually all sorts of woolen cloth, silks, glass, nails, scythes, pewter, brass and firearms."

Accompanying the shift from a self-supporting community to one more and more dependent on commerce were many changes that influenced the lives of the inhabitants.

First, there was a demand for roads connecting them with other towns, especially those on the coast. As early as 1702 the General Court had excused Danbury from paying taxes in order to encourage the people to make "a sufficient carway from their town . . . for transportation of what they raise to the sea."

Again in 1724 the County Court directed the sheriff to summon a jury to lay out a highway from Fairfield to Danbury. But 10 years later the agents for the town petitioned that the road be laid out again for it still had not been built, nor could they find a description of the route.

Gradually the town was incorporated into a network of rough paths and trails. Even as late as 1771, when Bethiah Baldwin rode to Danbury from Norwich for her brother Ebenezer Baldwin's ordination as a Congregational minister, the word "road" was far too grand to describe them. Miss Baldwin recorded her reactions to her first day of travel:

"Could not sleep. Extreme tired. Turned over and over. So tired with riding that I wished myself at home. After a while got asleep. Waked up. Could not sleep. After a while got asleep again. Slept till sunrise. Lay in bed till 8 o'clock. Then tried to get up. I was so tired I could not get out of bed. Lay down again. Hannah laughed at me. I, at last, with great difficulty got up. Complained but little to anyone but Hannah."

About her return trip between New Milford and Woodbury she wrote: "O! Horrible bad riding through woods & swamps. No, none: we got where there was no path; no where, so we were obliged to make one. . . . Riding under a tree I somehow held my head back instead of forward. My saddle turned back, so that I fell off backward. O! Shocking; what a fright I was in for a few minutes; but I soon found out I was alive and not hurt."

To meet the needs of the increasing number of travelers the County Court authorized specific individuals — five, for example, in Danbury in 1757 — as tavern keepers, but often visitors lodged in private homes.

The population grew rapidly. By 1756 there were 1,527 inhabitants, six years later 1,703, and just before the outbreak of the Revolution, 2,526. Part of this growth was the natural increase among the families during the period before 1710, but newcomers added considerably to the numbers.

While most of the inhabitants were descendants of the first wave of Puritan immigrants who came to Connecticut during the middle 1600s, there were 18 blacks in 1756 and 50 in 1774. Occasionally a real "foreigner" appeared, such as the Vidito family — origin not indicated — and it is likely that the town was also home to a few French Acadians.

Added evidence of the loss of homogeneity was the bitter conflict between those pushing for separation from England and those who remained loyal to the British government. Danbury and the surrounding towns were deeply split between Rebels and Tories, and the greatest concentration of Loyalists in the colony was in Fairfield County.

As the village grew, houses, shops, taverns spread farther and farther north on Town Street, and the surrounding countryside continued to fill up. By 1769 the school-age children were so scattered that nine districts were needed so a school would be somewhere near where they lived.

Land became scarce as the population increased. The not very efficient agricultural techniques of the times required large acreage. Thus, despite the relatively few people living in Danbury compared to the actual space, some felt the need to invest in land elsewhere or even move because of what they considered limited opportunities.

In 1712 the Selectmen petitioned the Colony to grant Danbury the land to the south lying between it and Fairfield, to no avail. Over the years, other attempts were made to add to the town portions of the unallocated territory north of Ridgefield, west of Danbury, and south of New Fairfield. In 1846 Danbury finally acquired a portion of Ridgebury from Ridgefield. Not until then did Danbury's boundary adjoin the New York state line.

When Kent, Conn., was sold at auction in 1738, Danbury residents, including members of the Barnum, Benedict, Starr, Canfield and Knapp families were among the purchasers. Others moved to Dutchess County in adjoining New York state. A little later in the century so many Danburians moved to Winchester that the area they settled became known as the Danbury Quarter.

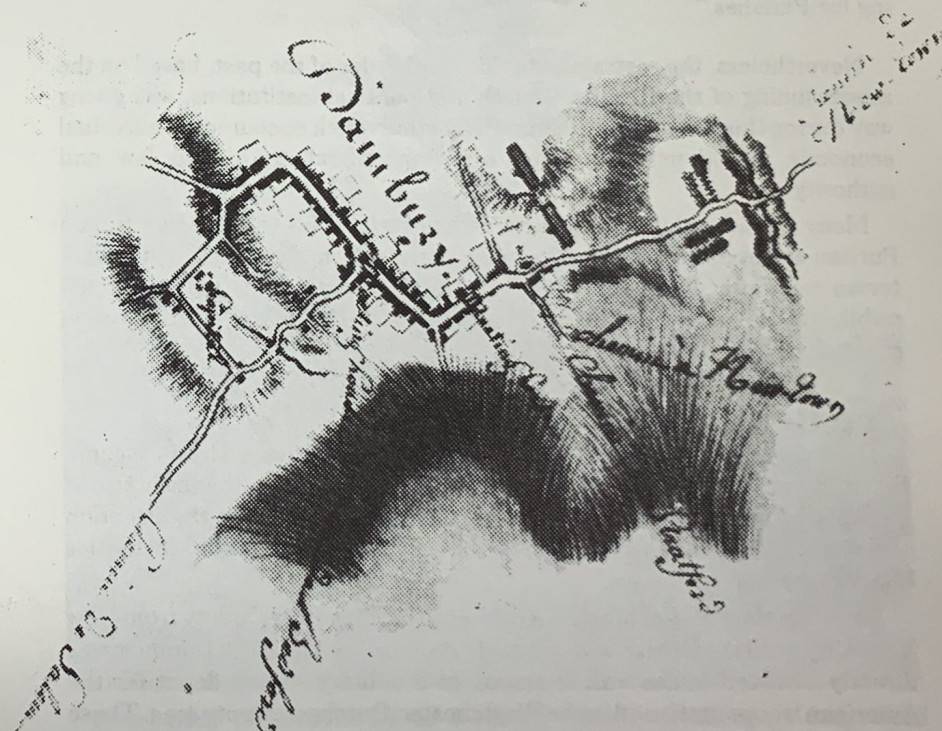
As the amount of land available dwindled, so did the other major energy source — wood. As a consequence area towns began to place restraints on indiscriminate cutting.

With the arrival of increasing numbers and kinds of people came differing religious beliefs. In 1723, although not a resident of Danbury, "Michael the Jew" was known to some of the local citizens. The first Episcopal services were conducted in Danbury as early as 1728 and a church was built in 1763. A schism in the Congregational Church led to the founding of the "New Danbury Church" headed by Rev. White, the former minister of the established church.

In 1765 Robert Sandeman came to Danbury from Scotland and attracted an active following. Any religious unity which might have existed in the past was disappearing.

Distance from the Congregational Church in the village caused additional divisions. In 1743 church members living in the northeast corner of the town (now part of Brookfield) petitioned to become a separate ecclesiastical society, or church, with those living in adjacent outlying sections of New Milford and Newtown. Eleven years later the General Court granted the request, but the land of Newbury Parish remained a part of each town until 1788, when Brookfield became an independent town in its own right. Similarly the people of Bethel were permitted to organize a separate church in 1759 but remained politically attached to Danbury until 1855.

From the time of its establishment, the central village of Danbury, and later the township itself, had served as a regional center. In the early days, for example, the mill served the neighboring towns until they could build their own.



French engineers serving with General Rochambeau drew this map of Danbury when the French forces encamped in Danbury in 1781, enroute to Yorktown and the climactic victory that brought the Revolutionary War to a successful conclusion.

But Danbury's greatest attraction was its geographic location. The town was strategically placed at the intersection of an east-west route connecting the Westchester County-Hudson River area with the central region of Connecticut and a north-south route from Long Island Sound to Litchfield County.

Moreover, it possessed a considerable amount of desirable flat land where the two routes crossed. Danbury's geographic advantages not only attracted trade but a greater number of skilled artisans, merchants and professionals than did its immediate neighbors.

Danbury, although growing and changing, was still a small town, not only in population but in style. The Rev. Baldwin advised his sister that:

"You must expect if you come to Danbury to be a good deal noticed and perhaps gazed at, for to be the Minister's sister you know in a Country Town is a considerable thing. You must therefore take care to behave circumspectly. However, I need not caution you, Young women that are looking out for husbands have as strong motives to be cautious as Candidates that are looking for Parishes."

Nevertheless, the restraint, stability and order of the past, based on the intertwining of the Puritan Church and political institutions, was giving way during this era to a new commercial ethic which encouraged individual economic ambitions and raised questions about traditional law and authority.

Many consider this the time when Connecticut was transformed from a Puritan society to one with a "Yankee" orientation, described by one historian as "defensive independence, cupidity tempered by regard for the public good, and yearning for the divine underlying hard-headed rationalism."

The Revolution (1775-1783)

Danbury's place in Revolutionary War history was assured by its occupation and burning by British troops in April 1777. This was the town's most spectacular involvement, and it focused, at least momentarily, the attention of the other Colonies and England on the town. But other wartime activities had a more lasting impact.

From the time of Washington's retreat to Westchester County from New York City until the British withdrawal from New York in 1783, Danbury was directly involved in the war. It served as a military supply depot for the American troops stationed in the Westchester-Dutchess county area. These troops monitored and controlled British army movements out of the city.

Danbury was the site of a major military hospital. It also the headquarters for a company of skilled craftsmen who produced military goods, probably including parts of the chains stretched across the Hudson at West Point.

Leather goods, especially shoes, as well as food supplies, flowed into the



Monument to General David Wooster, fatally wounded at Ridgefield while leading American forces battling the British troops who had raided Danbury in April, 1777, was erected in Wooster Cemetery in 1854. His body was moved there from the original town cemetery on Wooster Street. Dedication ceremonies for the new monument, sponsored by the Masonic Grand Lodge of Connecticut, took place April 27, 1854.

town from the surrounding countryside. A group of wagon drivers assigned to move supplies and equipment, also were lodged in town.

Hundreds of soldiers rendezvoused or passed through the town. Gen. Horatio Gates camped the left wing of the Continental Army on Eli Mygatt's farm for two months in 1778.

At least four brigades under Gen. Israel Putnam spent the winter of 1778-79 in an encampment under just over the Danbury line in Redding. And in 1779-80 a brigade of soldiers from New Hampshire wintered in the town. French troops under Jean Baptiste de Rochambeau marched through Danbury, both going to and coming from Yorktown, and on the return they camped here. Many well-known and influential people — Washington, Lafayette, Hamilton — knew the town through first-hand experience. In fact the visitors were so many that they often had considerable difficulty in locating accommodations.

Throughout the entire war period it was a place of great activity. Chastellux, a perceptive French observer, could have been describing Danbury when, in 1782, he wrote.

“Thus has the war, by stopping the progress of commerce, proved useful to the interior of the country, for it has not only obliged several merchants to quit the coast in search of peaceful habitation in mountains, but it has compelled commerce to have recourse to land transportation and to use roads which were formerly but little used.”

Because of the great movement of stores and men, the east-west road from Hartford to the Hudson through Dutchess County became a major route. To facilitate movement, Washington had his troops construct a bridge across the Housatonic River at Newtown.

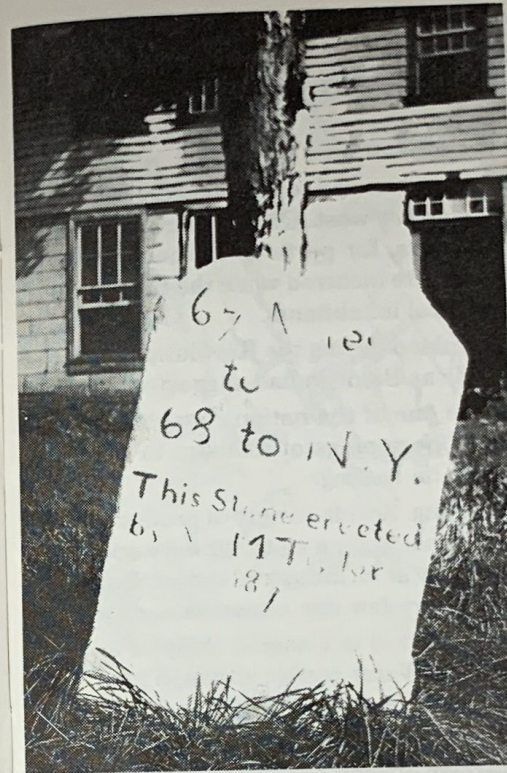
The wartime experience of producing and shipping great quantities of merchandise was not lost on Danbury when the fighting ended. These activities continued in a peace-time setting. In this sense, the Revolutionary War appears to have been a major force in stimulating the industry and commerce of Danbury.

Manufacturing begins (1783-1850)

From the end of the Revolutionary War to the middle of the 19th century, Danbury changed slowly from an agricultural community to an industrial town.

Although the war provided the immediate impetus, some of the inhabitants themselves recognized the necessity of altering the area's economic structure and deliberately set out to bring that change.

Simeon Baldwin, who as a youth had studied in Danbury with his brother, the Congregational minister, perceptively forecast the direction he felt the area must take. In 1788, in a letter to his former schoolmate, James Kent, he wrote in 1788.



Danbury was 103 years old when this milestone was erected on South Street, near Main Street. The photo at left was taken around the turn of the century. Photo at right shows the marker as it looks today.

“The situation of this state as it respects their property is far from being flourishing. We seem to have arrived at a turning point between a commerce which long has been against us and the introduction of manufacture among ourselves which will supersede the necessity of said commerce.

“The fact is we have too many inhabitants for the extent of territory considering our mode of cultivation and the employment of the people. All have not farms or can they obtain them. Of course until manufactures are introduced the people must be idle or crowd into those professions which do not immediately depend upon the soil. The people thus employed consume the produce of the farmer til nothing is left for a remittance for those articles which our stage of society has to a degree rendered necessary.”

Danbury responded to the economic challenges in a variety of ways. Farming remained the main occupation. Only very gradually did new and more productive agricultural techniques replace the traditional ones, for there was considerable resistance to new tools, seeds, fertilizer, and animal breeds.

The New York City market became the major outlet for surplus, and the local paper regularly printed the current price list for a wide variety of farm products. Many locally raised horses and cattle were transhipped to the West Indies from Connecticut ports.

Fairfield County already was within the orbit of New York City.

Some citizens joined the Yankee exodus and moved to less densely settled areas of New York, Ohio, and states farther west. Ohio in particular attracted Danburians in considerable numbers, for portions of the Ohio "firelands," given in payment for losses that were incurred when the British invaded the town, were already owned by local inhabitants.

Most, however, built on the experience gained during the Revolutionary War and turned to manufacturing and trade as Baldwin had suggested.

Because of Danbury's later reputation as one of the nation's major hat manufacturing cities, most accounts of the beginnings of industry in the community have focused almost exclusively on hatting.

The record reveals a more complex beginning. A wide variety of products — hats, boots, hoes, saddles, harnesses, combs, woolen cloth, tinware and clocks — were important in establishing the city as an industrial center. But it was not an easy task; Danbury possessed very few raw materials.

The furs for making had bodies were purchased in Canada, shipped to England, and then returned to New York City. Water power, although present, was not abundant, for the Still River was not a dependable or a fast-moving stream.

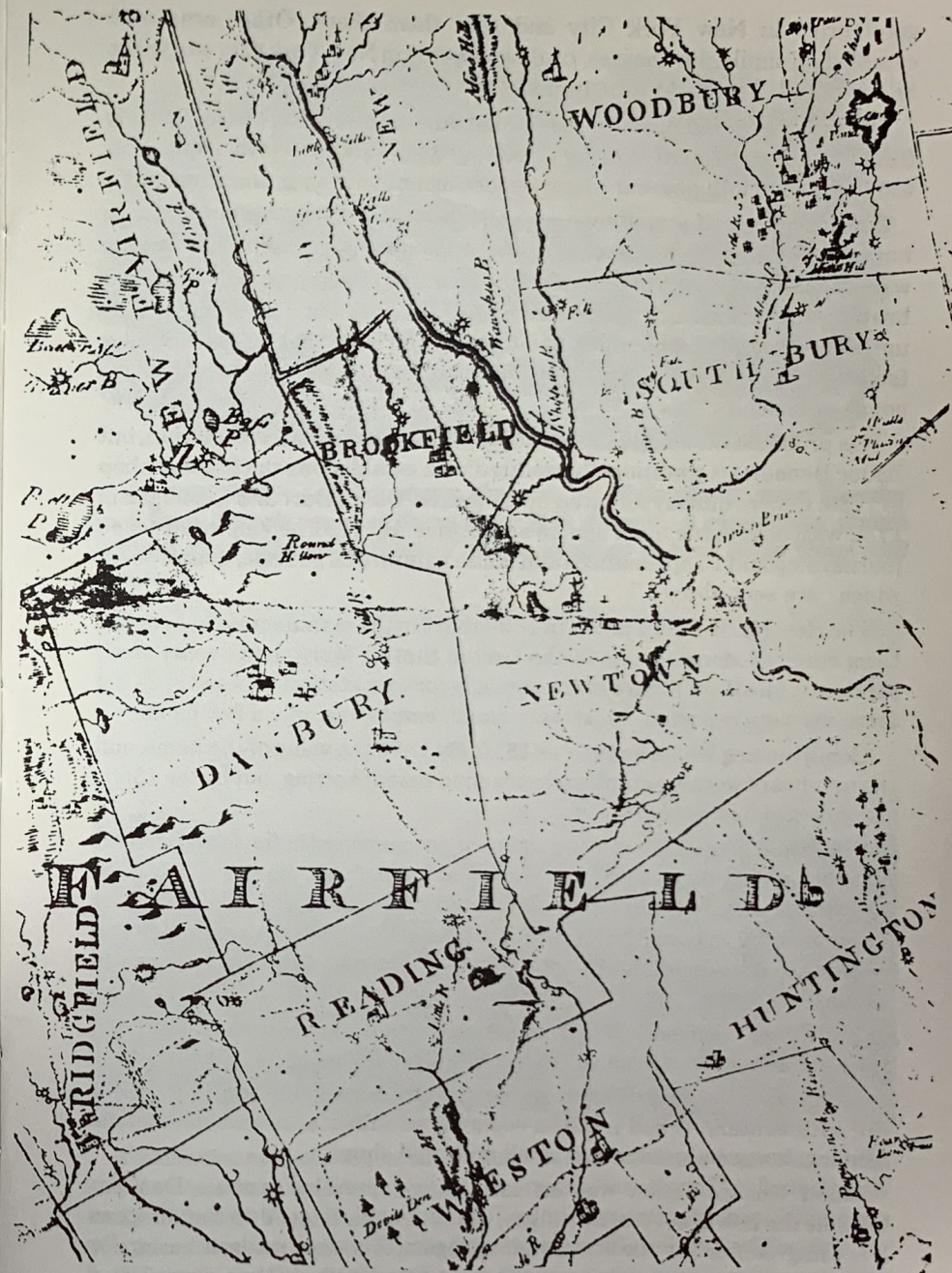
The strategic crossroads location of the town offered great potential, but the roads themselves were extremely poor. Capital was hard to come by, and foreign competition often threatened to destroy the infant industries. It was against these odds that local manufacturers and merchants strove to develop an industrial town.

Considerable credit for Danbury's early economic success must go to those enterprising individuals who were daring, who experimented with new ideas, who struggled to gather capital to expand the small shops, who helped establish a postal service and who were involved in turnpike and railway construction.

If wider markets for the products of the infant businesses had not been found, the larger industries might never have developed.

Among the more successful local entrepreneurs was Zalmon Wildman who, with other members of his family, beginning in 1802, founded stores in Charleston, S.C. and later in Savannah, Ga. When Wildman was in the South marketing items such as hats, boots, shoes and saddles made in Danbury, his brother directed operations at home, farming out orders to local workmen for the products he would purchase for the next shipment to Charleston and Savannah.

Zalmon Wildman also bought cotton or other items that would bring a



This reproduction of a portion of a framed 1792 map of Connecticut owned by the Danbury Scott-Fanton Museum and Historical Society shows town lines and spellings as they prevailed in the late 18th century.

good price in New York City and sold them there. Other area men established similar businesses, trading not only in New York City and in the South but also in the Midwestern states.

Many of the varied businesses founded during this period passed quickly from one owner to another or failed all together. Saddles, cloth, paper, cotton and linen cloth and bar iron were not manufactured in town for long.

The most plentiful resource on which the community could build was human labor, and it was this that made early industry possible. Hat making was essentially a skilled handicraft, with local forests supplying the wood for heating the kettles of water necessary for forming hat bodies. The unfinished hats could be rolled and transported with relative ease. Similar factories, again highly dependent on human labor, produced leather, tin goods and combs.

It is probable that hats were made in Danbury before the Revolution, but Zadoc Benedict is traditionally credited with establishing the first hat shop in 1780. Others quickly followed his initiative. Oliver Burr and Co. began in 1782 with one journeyman and an apprentice. By 1791 he employed seven journeymen and 10 apprentices and made hats on a large scale, quantities of which "are sent abroad."

The Rev. Mr. Robbins noted in 1800 that "In the manufacture of hats this town much exceeds anyone in the United States. More than twenty thousand hats, mostly of fur are made annually for exportation." By 1819, 28 hat factories were reported. Most were small, employing only a few hands.

Comb making began as early as 1810. By 1826 the value of the items, and the number of workers employed exceeded that of hatting, but by the 1850s the industry had disappeared.

Comb making and hat making were not concentrated in the village center. Danbury's inhabitants were now in a transitional phase, moving slowly from farm to factory. Residents supplemented the income they derived from agriculture by making things at home. Ezra Mallory, for example, began what was to become one of the nation's major hat firms on his farm in Great Plain.

Individuals also made boots, shoes, and saddles in home workshops and then marketed them through merchant entrepreneurs.

The growth of these industries changed Danbury. In the early decades of the 19th century, it had a mixed economy of subsistence and commercial farming, home industries and small mills and shops.

Good transportation was an increasingly pressing matter. Danbury became the hub of several turnpikes, which not only opened up the village as a trading center for the surrounding region, but also made it easier for manufacturers to obtain raw materials and to distribute their products.

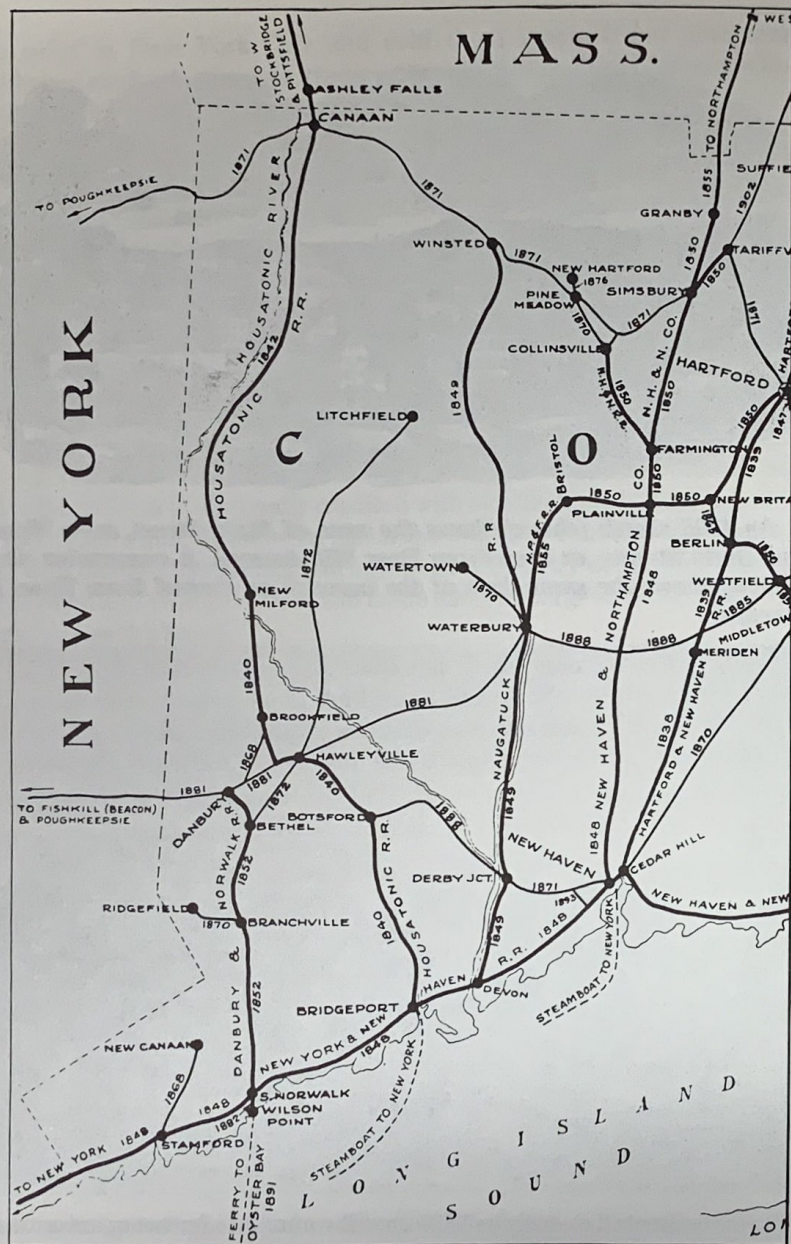
Area citizens also proposed to build a canal to Westport. But the plan was dropped because of the heavy cost of constructing the necessary locks.



An 1835 sketch (above) shows the area of Main Street, near Wooster and State Streets, as seen from Deer Hill Avenue. A companion sketch (below) shows the same area of the borough as viewed from Town Hill Avenue.



It was estimated as early as 1835 that the number of passengers annually using various means of transportation to reach New York City had already reached 10,000 from Danbury alone. The freight estimate was 7,000 tons per year from the region. These figures were offered as justification for building a horse-drawn railroad line to the coast of Long Island Sound. The project was part of a plan for a through route from Albany to New York City. Unfortunately, an alternative project connecting New Milford and



Old map shows development of railroad lines serving Danbury and other western Connecticut communities. Many lines were abandoned long ago, such as the Shepaug line from Bethel to Litchfield; others in more recent decades. All of the remaining lines shown were eventually merged into the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company, then into the Penn Central and finally into Conrail.

Bridgeport was completed in 1840, delaying Danbury's direct rail route to the sea for 12 years.

As commerce and industry expanded so did the number of inhabitants. The Town's 1790 population of 3,031 rose to 5,964 in 1850. In comparison, nearby towns grew much more slowly. For example, between 1810 and 1820, when Danbury's population increased by 420, New Fairfield added 16, Brookfield 22, Ridgefield 207, and Newtown 43. Redding lost 89.

It is clear that Danbury's drawing power was much greater than that of its neighbors, and it was to the village that newcomers were attracted and not to the surrounding farm land. Danbury was rapidly becoming the center of the region. Visitors' reports and statements in official petitions provide a picture of the changing size of the village. A 1804 description noted that "the compact part of the town contained two churches, a court house and about 16 dwelling houses."

Fifteen years later, the town evidently had grown. It was now "built principally on one street which for more than a mile exhibits almost a continued range of buildings existing of dwelling houses, mercantile stores hat factories mechanic shops etc. Within one mile and a quarter there are more than 100 dwelling houses, with a proportion of other buildings."

This concentration created a community distinct from the rest of Danbury. In 1822 a group of petitioners living in the "compact completely settled village" complained that they "had experienced a great inconvenience from the want of Borough privileges." These privileges, which were granted, enabled the taxation of borough residents for such things as fire stations and sidewalks that the more rural inhabitants of Danbury were unwilling to pay for.

The boundaries established in the previous year were enlarged in 1823. In 1838 a description claimed that the borough contained "almost 200 dwelling houses besides numerous other buildings."

Another petition in 1846 to further enlarge the borough reported "that the increase of population and business of the inhabitants of said Borough has been such . . . that it has become necessary to extend and enlarge the boundaries thereof."

The 1850 census listed nearly 6,000 inhabitants and on the 1847 grand list noted 874 houses within the town as a whole, 33 stores and 127 manufactories. The Danbury Times reported that "Main Street is filling up its few spare interstices and will before many years present a compact of array of buildings. And yet throughout its entire length there are but three brick buildings.

"It strikes us that as a matter of security, if there are no other considerations in its favor, this article should come into use as a building material. A fire breaking out under favorable circumstances for its spread would already find a connected mass of materials that would enable it to sweep the village."



Someone with a camera happened along as two farmers were busy reloading a fallen load of hay in front of the old Danbury railroad station on Main Street, at the corner of what is now Postoffice Street. Note the Belgian block pavement in use for downtown streets during that period.

The concentration of population created a new social, cultural and political environment in the village. Danbury became the center of legal activities in the northern sector of Fairfield when it was made a half-shire town in 1784. The town furnished both the courthouse and the jail.

By mid-century the people living in the community were very different from those involved in the Revolution. No longer were they essentially of Colonial stock. The 1850 census counted between 200 and 300 immigrants who had been born in Ireland, plus a small but increasing number of Germans. Religious groups, including Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, Universalists, Sandemanians, Disciples of Christ and Roman Catholics. The early homogeneity was eroding and at an increasingly rapid rate.

Some observers also sensed a change in values, especially the desire for personal wealth, handwork, and self-advancement.

An 1809 guide to Connecticut noted that "if there are any prevailing or peculiar vices belonging to the state we think that an avaricious or mercenary spirit is the most conspicuous. This probably is owing in part to the prevailing spirit and habits of trade; but principally to civil institutions and the established principals and customs of society which attach an undervalued importance to property."

P.T. Barnum, who operated businesses in Bethel before he originated "The Greatest Show on Earth," also commented on the chicanery and competitiveness of the inhabitants of Danbury:

"The slightest inattention on the part of the store keeper and he is fooled on weights or measures; the least heedlessness on the part of the farmer and he is swindled. The customers cheated us in their fabrics and we cheated the customers with our goods. Each party expected to be cheated if it was possible. Our eyes and not our ears had to be our masters. We must believe little of what we see and less of what we heard."

Julius Seeley, another native of Bethel, was more generous of his appraisal, "Hard workers as were the men and women there, sharp, too at a bargain as they were, and eager to get gain, no one with much knowledge of them but would soon discover that in their thoughts and questions the next world has no less prominence than this."

In as much as their most reliable resource was human energy, the willingness to work hard and long for success was an important aspect of Danbury's handcraft shops, for mechanization of the local industries occurred very slowly.

Only a few of the comb factories in the village used water to power their equipment. Hatting also was a hand operation until the middle of the 19th century. The use of complex machinery was limited. Two machines for forming wool hats were introduced in the 1820s and Joel Taylor's circular dye kettle and wheel came into use at about the same time.

It was a machine for forming fur hat bodies, first introduced in 1849, which created the "great revolution in the trade, altering and remodeling very much the system and process of making hats, doing away with much hand labor and enabling manufacturers to fill our their contracts more readily."

This mechanized hat former foreshadowed a new industrial era.

The rise of industry

During the 1850's, Danbury moved into the industrial era. Four factors necessary for the change fell into place during that crucial 10-year span.

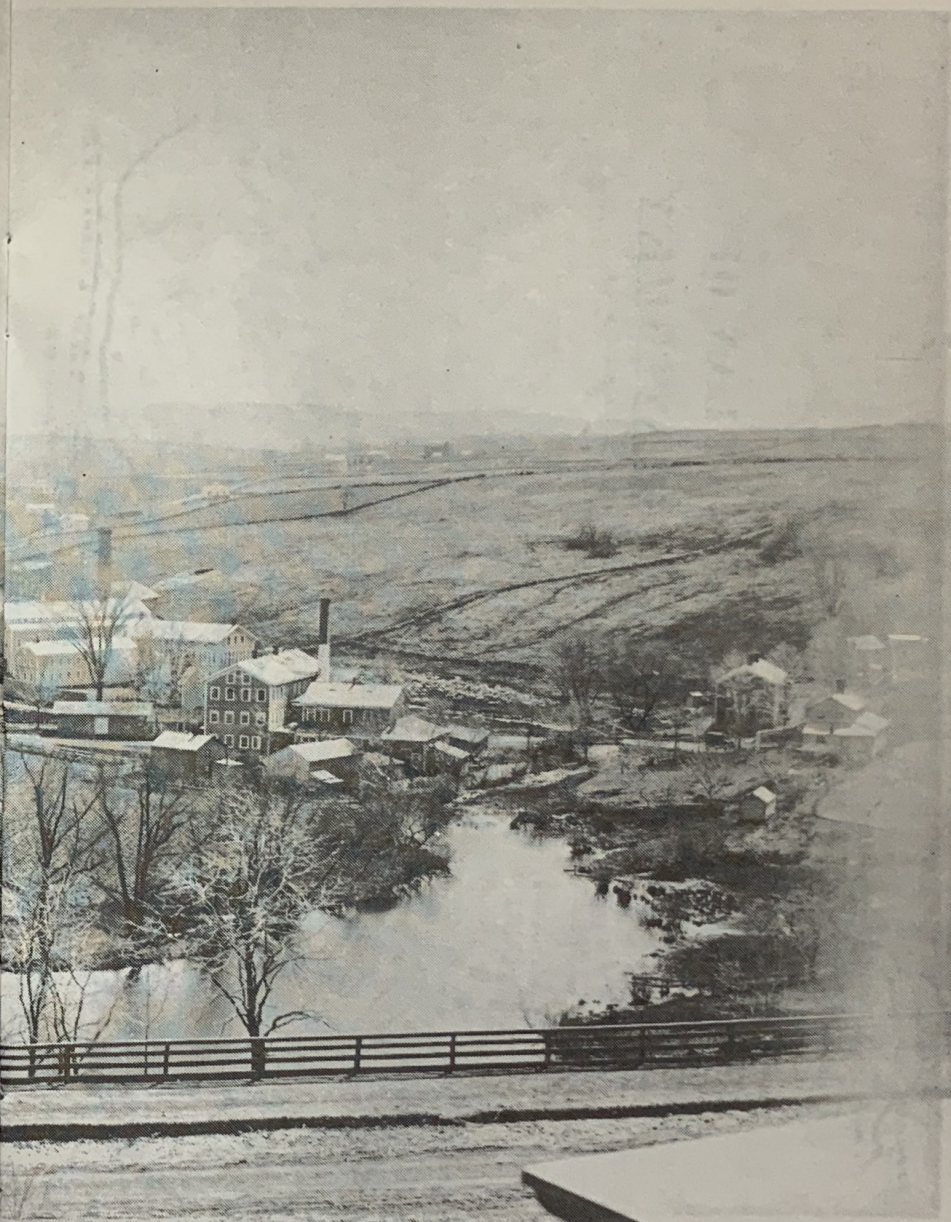
First, the railway reached Danbury in 1852, facilitating the importing of raw materials and the exporting of the end products.

Second, experience proved that the new hatting machines could be used effectively and that manufacturers were willing to put them into operation.

Third, with the coming of the railroad, coal, previously difficult and expensive to ship into the community, became readily available to power the new industrial machinery. In 1845 Danbury used only 20 tons of coal. Shortly before the railway line was completed, a Mr. Judd bought 50 tons of coal; it took him two years to sell it, the coal having cost \$2 per ton to haul from Bridgeport. By 1856, however, just one hat factory burned 700 tons per



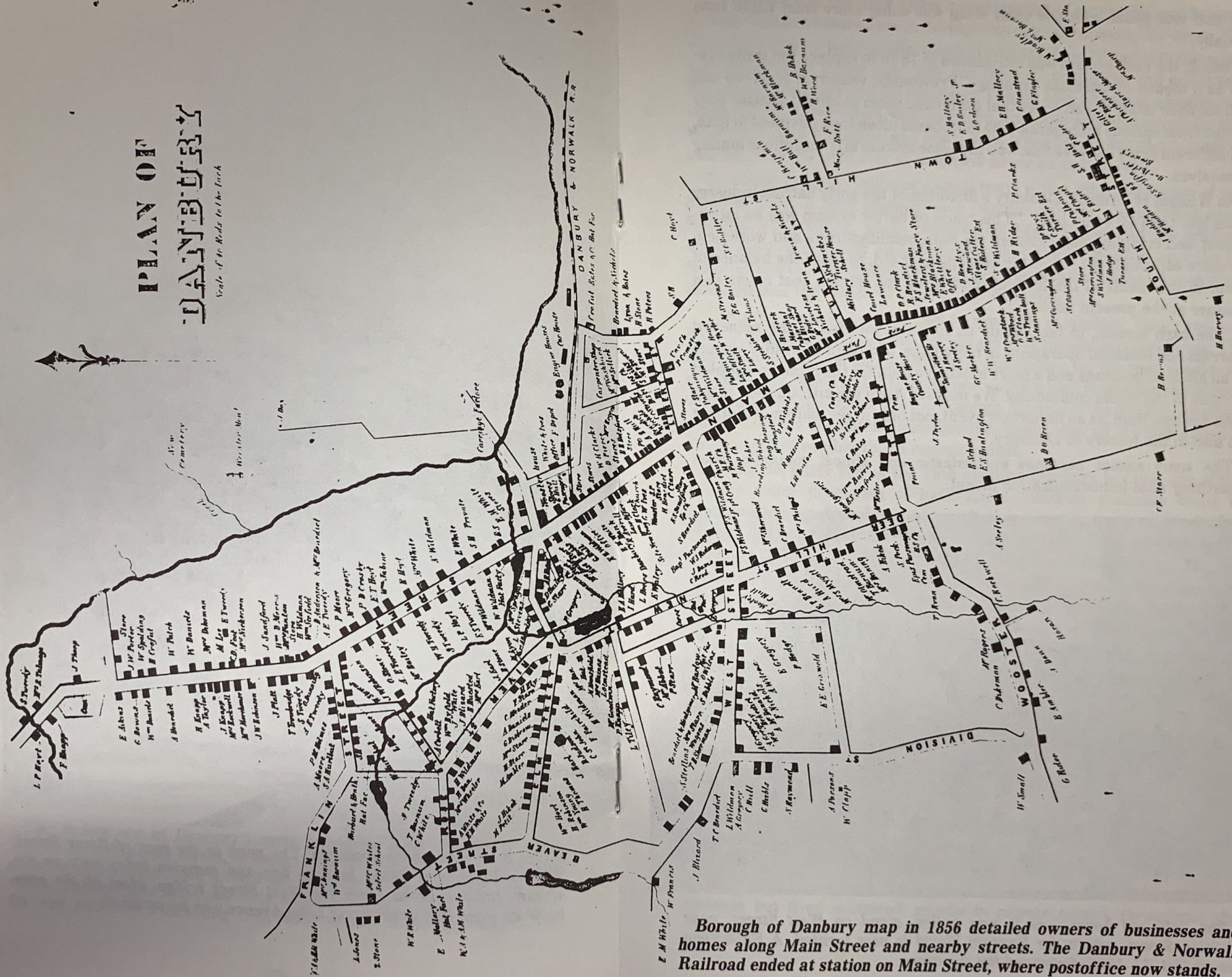
This is how one of Danbury's early industrial areas looked in 1871. View is from Franklin Street, in foreground of picture. Rose Street runs along left center of picture toward the W. A. and A. M. White fur factory, where Mallory Hats front and back shops were built (now Danbury Hat Co. and Fairfield Processing Co.). Most of the buildings along River



Street have since been replaced. The pond to the rear of River Street, White's Pond, was filled in long ago and remains today only as the stream running north from the West Street bridge. Most of the area between Rose Hill Avenue and Lake Avenue was pastureland.

PLAN OF DANBURY

Scale of 1/4 Mile to the Inch



Borough of Danbury map in 1856 detailed owners of businesses and homes along Main Street and nearby streets. The Danbury & Norwalk Railroad ended at station on Main Street, where postoffice now stands.

year and four years later the same shop was using more than 1,000 tons annually.

Fourth, the cash system was introduced in 1850 to replace the trade system as a means of business exchange. Previously, workmen received not cash for their labor but an order that permitted them to obtain articles they needed from various merchants. The merchants often took payment in hats, and different firms likewise followed the same system in transactions among themselves.

As William H. Francis, Danbury's historian of the early hatting industry wrote less than 10 years later, "This trade or barter system was an inconvenient and crippling management for both manufacturers and workmen, but more especially for the latter: tending as it did, to leave the balance of power in the hands of the former, destroying the quality that exists in a measure at the present time . . .

"The cash system, in fact, made an entire revolution in the moneyed interests and financial operations of our village, and opened a wider avenue for all kinds of business and a more extensive field for the hitherto crippled energies of the whole community. We may set down the introduction of the Cash System, then, as an important event, not only in the history of Hatting but also in the history of Danbury."

The same author becomes enthusiastic and almost romantic when describing what industrialization meant.



The "old red house," as it was called, stood on West Street, near Division Street, where the Bargain World is now located. A Halloween fire on Oct. 31, 1905, destroyed the structure.

"... There is in our little valley a vast amount of enterprise and business energy; that as a town we are in the highway of improvement," he wrote. "Let us see to it that we keep up the march of progress in solid and ever increasing column. Success to the poor man and the rich; employers and employees. Success to Danbury and all her sister Towns. May the team whistles continue to call out workmen with the morn, and busy establishments be alive with labor. May the fruits and rewards of labor fill the lap of our common country, and the right arm of its power never be paralyzed."

In reality, Danbury still was a small town, with a total population of only 8,753 in 1870. A large proportion of this number was concentrated in the Borough of Danbury, which centered on Main Street and the adjacent urbanized areas. In this geographically small central portion were the hat factories and the allied businesses, stores, the major churches, government buildings and the homes of most of the residents.

The area outside borough limits was still essentially rural, and was divided into districts. Each district has a one- or two-room schoolhouse. The districts were natural and functional communities, for the road conditions and the space required for farming prevented a high concentration of population or easy movement into the borough. Several of the districts also contained churches or chapels, burial grounds and stores, all of which added to the strength of neighborhood consciousness.

During the latter half of the 19th century, Danbury became one of the nation's major producers of hats. Large factories gradually come to dominate the smaller shops, although those employing a relatively few workers did not entirely disappear. As early as 1860, Tweedy White & Co. employed 325, Henry Crofut 120 and Benedict and Montgomery 239.

By the 1890s Danbury boasted of employing about 3,000 workers in making 5 million hats annually. In 1904 Danbury was responsible for almost 24 percent of the total value of all hats produced in the United States.

Most of the shops were concentrated in the borough, clustering along the Still River. Water, needed in quantities for hat production, was supplied by a municipal reservoir system and the river itself was used primarily for carrying away refuse.

While some factories remained consistently in the hands of the same owners or their families, many other shops opened or closed or changed ownership with considerable regularity, as enterprising workers attempted, some successfully, to establish their own businesses. A few other businesses, particularly the making of boxes and machinery for making hats, were satellites of the primary industry.

Danbury was not laid out in typical milltown fashion. Hatters, proud of their status as skilled craftsmen, were not confined residentially to workers' quarters but lived scattered, mostly in private homes, throughout the community.

Some streets catered primarily to the more affluent, including successful factory owners, but nearby, in somewhat more modest houses, lived the workers who labored at the bench. Most owners had risen from the ranks and thus were themselves closely attuned to their employees' lifestyle.

As the industry continued to expand, machines gradually reduced the need for long apprenticeships to learn hatting skills. As a consequence, workers began a struggle to maintain their status as craftsmen. The last decade of the century found labor-management tension mounting, culminating in a series of confrontations, strikes, lockouts and boycotts, which eventually resulted in precedent-setting Supreme Court decisions.

Many of the smaller mills and industries continued to use water power for a considerable period. Two examples were the sawmill along the Padanaram brook and White's fur factory near Beaver and West streets. In 1871, The Danbury News began to run its printing machinery by water, but by 1873 was using steam power for the same purpose.

The Danbury-Norwalk Railroad soon proved inadequate for the expanding economy, and in the following decades the original line was augmented by a short connector to Brookfield where it joined the Bridgeport line, by the Shepaug that extended from Bethel to Litchfield, by a line from Waterbury to Poughkeepsie, and by routes through Derby to the New Haven area. Danbury itself became a major railroad center and transfer point.

Even then Danbury had problems with adequate service. In 1907, for example, the Danbury Business Men's Association met with representatives of the New York, New Haven and Hartford about the timing of mail deliveries, additional night trains and delivery of freight at the local yards.

A spokesman for the businessmen protested that "Danbury is too large and too enterprising a city to be deprived of the opportunity to go to New York after about six o'clock in the evening or to leave New York after that hour. We want these trains and we expect to get them."

When Danbury, small as it was, thus became more extensively involved in national and international trade, its orientation to the outside world had to change. Any true isolation and self-sufficiency had disappeared long ago. For many decades Danbury had had close business and cultural ties with New York City and its ties to the Southern trade had been powerful.

But in the post-Civil War era, federal legislation relating to tariffs, commerce, transportation and labor increased outside control, not only in quantity but in kind.

The famous Danbury Hatters' Case, for example, centered around the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, which was the first federal measure for regulating trusts, and had a strong influence on the passage of the Clayton Anti-Trust Act several years after the Supreme Court decision.

Because the hatters' boycott had been interpreted as "restraint of trade or commerce," the Clayton Anti-Trust Act of 1914 attempted to aid labor by



Civil War monument at Main and West Streets was erected in 1880. The fence at left marked the garden of the Willhman house on West Street. Main and West Streets were dirt roads then. Elms arching over West Street were typical of trees along downtown streets through the 19th Century and into the first four decades of the 20th.

declaring that labor organizations or their members should not be considered "illegal combinations in restraint of trade under the anti-trust laws," and that boycotts were legal.

Growth and expansion

The rapid growth of the number of workers involved in hatting and supporting industries is reflected in the rise in Danbury's population.

In 1860, 7,234 people lived in Danbury. The figure rose to 19,473 in 1890 and to 23,502 in 1910. Of this total, 20,234 lived within the city limits.

Obviously much of the population growth was not the result of natural



A close-up view of the distinctive Wildman (later Hartwell) house on West Street, just west of City Hall. The Professional Building was erected on the site.

increase but instead resulted partially from domestic migration, particularly from nearby towns in Connecticut and New York.

As Danbury grew, the numbers living in adjacent towns, with the exception of Bethel, either remained almost stationary or declined. Danbury offered the most attractive job opportunities for factory work in the region.

Poor roads discouraged daily commuting so many moved to be near their jobs. New Fairfield, in which the number of inhabitants declined from 915 in 1861 to 551 in 1910, illustrates the trend.

European immigrants also added considerably to the population of Danbury in the 1870s and '80s. The fact that approximately 18 percent of the residents in 1880 were of foreign birth made a strong impact on the community. Most of the newcomers were from England, Ireland and Germany.

Nevertheless, a few representatives of other countries already had appeared on the scene, as indicated by a Danbury News report in September 1881 that, "Once again Danbury is infested with Italians. Twenty arrived Monday evening and 25 more again last night. They will be employed at the Main Street cut and the Padanaram dam."

A few immigrants from Eastern Europe also reached the town with the turn of the century. Vital records contain accounts of several Polish families in the last decade of the 19th century. The main influx, of course, came after 1900.

In 1910 the population of Danbury was 23,502. Twenty-three percent of this number was foreign-born and another 33 percent had foreign or mixed parents, adding to a surprising total of 56 percent. At this time the greatest number of foreign-born in the town came from Ireland, followed by Italy, Germany, Hungary, England and Austria.

The severe tensions that often disrupted some communities do not seem to have been common here. One Danburian, born in 1899 of German parents, recalls:

"There were no ghettos as such, though people from the same country did tend to live in close proximity. Most of the immigrants learned to speak English even though brokenly. The children all spoke English and there was no bilingual problem."

"Intermarriage between different nationalities was commonplace and helped the melting pot and dispelled discrimination. After all, most of our parents or grandparents had come from some foreign country, and the pooling of their skills was mutually respectful."

Judge Moss Ives of Danbury was less positive about the value of this ethnic mix when, in 1908, he wrote:

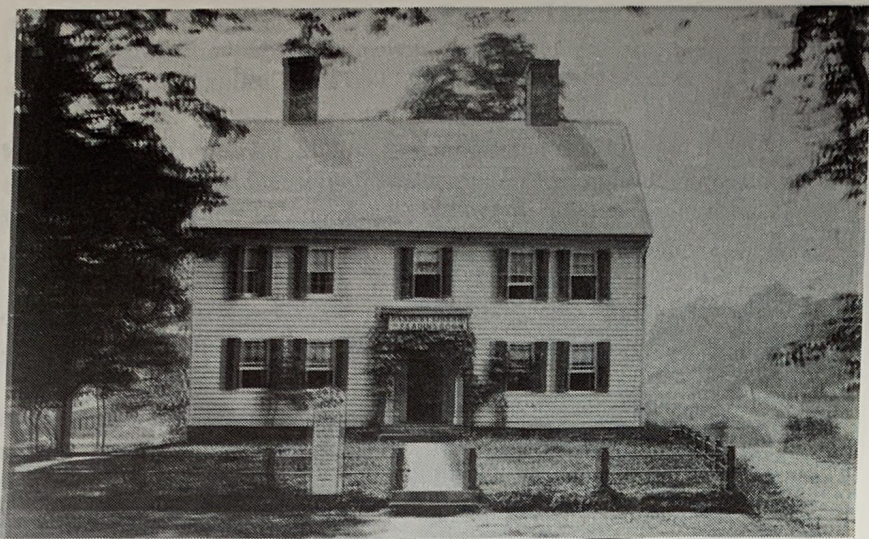
"The greatest local New England problem is this: In the face of the great increase in births of foreign heritage and the fact that the native New England stock is being overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the foreign born population and children of foreign born parents, how are we to keep alive and transmit to posterity the old New England ideals and standards."

Just two years before Ives' comments The Commercial Record noted that Danbury was a typical Yankee town "in whose social life are preserved New England's best traditions."

"The old ideals, though some what modified by the influx of foreign population, are still powerful in fixing the moral and intellectual standards of life. This can be said of few cities whose rapid industrial development or a low scale of wages, such as previously in the cotton cities, has attracted any and all kinds of labor."

Educational, political and social services enlarged to adjust to the burgeoning economy and population. The City of Danbury, replacing the old Borough, was incorporated in 1889. At that time the city proper contained 16,552 of the 19,473 people who lived in the town. The business section of Main Street spread northward, supplemented by commercial blocks on White, Elm, Liberty and West streets.

Impressive civic structures, most built of brick — the City Hall, library, large elementary schools and a high school, a new jail and the Town Farm —



The White family home on Main Street served as the public library until the distinctive brick library building was erected in 1873 at Main Street and Library Place as the gift of the White family.

added the visible accoutrements signifying the coming of age of Danbury as a city. Most religious groups built their church structures on or near Main Street.

The Danbury Business Men's Association wanted the world to believe that "the advantages and attractions of Danbury as a place of residence cannot be excelled by any city in New England." But a few shadows in the glowing picture were evident. For several years, some citizens had detected deep-seated weaknesses underlying the town's dependency upon one industry.

Isaac Ives was one of the early boosters for expanding and diversifying Danbury's economy, but he never felt himself successful. As one commentator noted, "He did all he could himself and put a big lumber business into practical demonstration of his theories, but the progressive ear was never turned his way and therefore the progressive era was long delayed."

In the same decade a correspondent to *The Danbury News* complained that "it has always been an uphill work to get Danbury people to combine their money, talent, and skill for any business outside of banking and hat-making; and from the failure in some instances to successfully establish other industries, our people have come to the conclusion that they do not or cannot know enough to make a success of other manufactures than that of hats."

Taking a cue from this letter, in 1879 the Danbury Industrial Association attempted to raise capital for giving loans to encourage new businesses to locate in the city. This effort appears not to have been successful.

Similar aborted attempts followed, when in 1904, the Danbury Businessmen's Association undertook another campaign to induce manufacturing firms to settle in the town. The association reported that in recent years, two potential industries, one making lace and the other corsets, "might have been located in Danbury had there been enough public spirited citizens."

Danbury was still locked into the single industry syndrome and it took the effects of World War I for the town to initiate the sustained effort necessary to diversify its industrial base.

The need to diversity

During the three decades during and following World War I, Danbury's industrial life still centered around hatting and its related industries, but the experience of the war had shaken its confidence.

The munitions industry that caused Bridgeport, New Haven and Waterbury to boom as they produced military supplies, first for the allies and later for the United States itself, had a negative impact on the Danbury area. The demand for hats was overshadowed by more pressing wartime needs.

Rabbit furs, essential for hat production were in short supply and many of the unemployed or underemployed hatters sought work elsewhere in war-related industries. During the years when Bridgeport grew from approximately 100,000 to more than 140,000, the population of Danbury and the surrounding towns declined.

As viewed by the editor of a newspaper in Waterbury, a competing city long critical of Danbury, "... the businessmen of the city refuse to recognize their fate and are still the selfsame, proud and haughty men who once made Danbury the foremost hat town in America. . . .

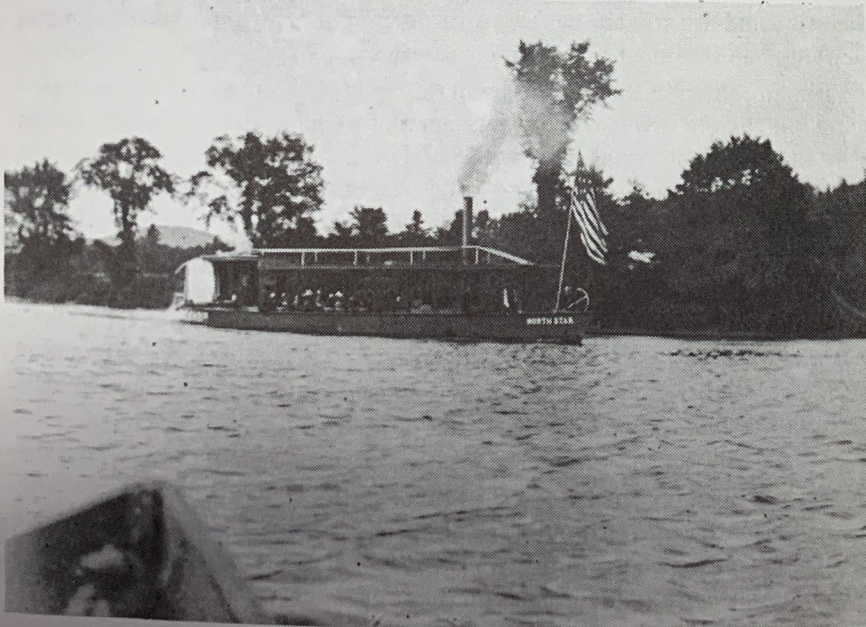
"Businessmen in the hatting town refused to admit that Danbury is anything but the old, live town of years ago before hats, strikes and starvation were the principal topics of conversation in that city. They still believe that Danbury can be made to be one of the best cities in the state, and say that they can see no reason why the city should not prosper as New Haven, Bridgeport and Waterbury have done since the war started."

One plan to tie Danbury directly into Connecticut's prosperity was to schedule daily government-sponsored trains carrying Danbury residents to factories in Bridgeport, and to provide rents in Danbury for Bridgeport workers already living in overcrowded houses. But the federal government eventually decided not to support the proposal.

Faced with these conditions, a group of businessmen in 1918 formed the Danbury Industrial Corp., one of the first of its kind in the United States. The price of a share was \$10 and by October 1919, a total of \$253,500 had been subscribed and the corporation was in a "sound position to provide modern accommodations and facilities for industries that are found to hold out promise of business success."



Lake Kenosia, with an amusement park and hotel, provided much of the recreation for Danbury folks in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Two steam powered excursion boats were popular, each in its own time — the Montgomery (above) and the North Star.



Initial efforts were made to acquire land, build factories, and encourage new companies to establish themselves. Unfortunately, none of the early enterprises — Keystone Instant Foods, Lansden Electric Truck and the American Insulation Co., — survived.

In the early 1920s, the Danbury Industrial Corp. appeared to many to be dormant. There was considerable criticism and dissatisfaction as to its viability and real intent.

During the 1920s the hatting industry gradually revived, and the craze for the Princess Eugenie hat helped buffer Danbury from the worst effects of the early years of the 1929 Depression. As late as 1950, hat making still accounted for a large fraction of the labor force in manufacturing, and the city continued to boast of its position as “Hat City of the World.”

But many changes already were occurring. The hat industry had begun its precipitous decline. To meet the needs of World War II, long-established companies had for several years diversified, and partially through the efforts of the industrial corporation new industries such as Bard-Parker, Risdon, Neuman-Endler, Hobson Flatware and Barden were born.

The whole technological lifestyle of the people also changed in the post-World War I period. Automobiles, trucks, buses, electricity, telephones, radio and movies, used sparingly in prewar years, became part of everyday life.

Gasoline and heating oil began to push aside coal as the major energy sources.

Electricity became commonplace for lighting and operating a wide variety of household and industrial tools. And to meet the increasing demand, power companies began to expand the construction of hydro-electric facilities. Candlewood Lake, created in the 1920s, was the most dramatic local example.

The dual government system, begun with the establishment of the borough in 1822 and continued with the formation of the city in 1889, persisted until the middle of the 20th century. The divided authority and duplication of effort raised many questions concerning the effectiveness, but any proposal for consolidation found vociferous opponents.

Much of the local governmental and political activity concerned municipal interests, but particularly during and after the New Deal and World War II it was impossible to function without careful attention to legislation voted at the federal level.

In dozens of areas ranging from the WPA, the CCC and the Selective Service to sugar rationing and war contracts, the local citizenry was irresistibly pulled into the orbit of increased national governmental involvement.

Of the nearly 7,000 population increase between 1910 and 1950, the greatest growth was outside the city proper. At first, most new buildings were erected near the city boundaries, but soon more and more houses



The Danbury Fair in the old days, with the grounds in front of the main tent not as crowded as they often were in later years. The horse-drawn sprinkler was probably on its way to wet down the harness race track.

appeared in what had been since the town's founding the rural portion of the community. The distinction between urban and rural Danbury was rapidly disappearing.

The trolley system, later replaced by buses, served the downtown area and the immediately adjacent areas. The tremendous increase in the use of automobiles and trucks forced the paving of roads and highways and made a traffic bottleneck of the center of the city through which funneled routes 6, 7 and 202.

Parking problems and street grade railway crossings further complicated the flow of traffic. By contrast, train transportation declined and the once bustling freight yard became increasingly less important. Service at the local airport developed slowly.

Most services — hospitals, doctors, drugstores, lawyers, government offices, churches, libraries — likewise were within the city. Most of the schools, similarly, were in the center because for years the State Board of Education had encouraged the elimination of rural districts and the consolidation of school facilities.

In 1920 there were six one-room schoolhouses in the town; by the mid-30s only four remained. The last two, Mill Plain and Miry Brook, were retained

until the 1940s as teacher-training facilities. The decline of the rural school symbolized the decline of truly rural neighborhoods and the end of an era.

Danbury's population was only a little above 30,000 in 1950 and the community continued to retain much of its small-town atmosphere. Farms, woods and the open countryside were only a few minutes drive outside the city. The major businesses and industries were in the old core city. Most were owned and managed locally and customers purchasing clothes or dry goods at Plaut's or John McLean's, furniture at Henry Dick's, hardware at Meeker's or drugs at Burns Pharmacy usually dealt with clerks or proprietors whom they had known for years.

Workers at Lee's hat factory still referred to the owners as Frank and Frankie, and the McLachlans were known as Harry and Georgie. But behind this image of small-town stability were many potential problems. By 1950 many of them were apparent, and they would have to be considered if Danbury's economic future were to be a healthy one.

Danbury's growth had not kept pace with the rest of the state. Between 1910 and 1920 Danbury lost 5 percent of its inhabitants while the state numbers climbed almost 24 percent. According to the 1930, 1940 and 1950 census the town's population increased 20.7 percent, 3.6 percent and 8.7 percent respectively, compared to the state's growth of 60.4, 6.4, and 17.4 percent.

Great expectations

Fifty-three percent of the American workforce was employed in manufacturing, commerce and industry in 1920, a greater proportion than at any time before or after.

Danbury, at the heart of the industrial Northeast, had an even higher percentage involved in the production of hats alone.

After that date, there was a steady drop nationwide in the relative numbers employed in industry and a marked increase in service and information occupations. In 1950, however, Danbury still had more than 50 percent in industrial products and thus was not synchronized with the changing economic conditions.

Hatting as an industry upon which a whole community could depend was no longer viable. There was a desperate need for continued diversification.

The city's excellent geographic location and its offering of favorable transportation routes was a decided advantage, but the highways themselves needed much improvement.

There also were other obvious pluses. A reservoir of skilled labor was present. Danbury was conveniently close to New York City, but beyond many of its major disadvantages. It had open land available for industrial development.

Once again the Danbury Industrial Corp. began to act as a powerful catalyst. Between 1918 and 1950 it had bought potential sites for factories, built 300,000 square feet of factory space in six buildings, and in the 1940s again became the agency for bringing new businesses to Danbury, including Republic Foil, Preferred Utilities, Sperry Products and Connor Engineering.

This time efforts to diversify the economy received much more substantial support from the entire community. Businessmen were well aware of the needs for the diversification of Danbury's economy and felt less threatened by the competition.

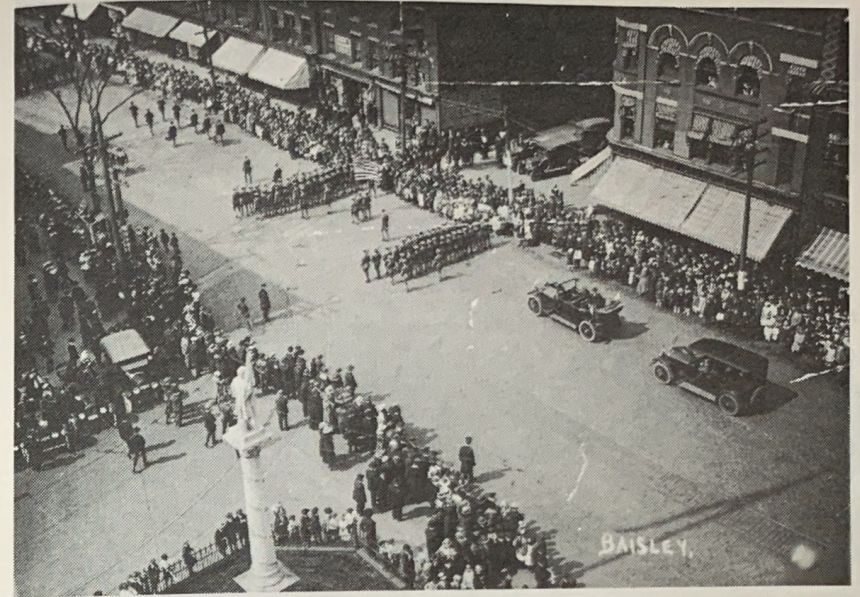
In 1918, haters had questioned the sincerity of prominent manufacturers in introducing new industry, believing the move was really aimed at controlling the labor supply. Now the old attitudes had disappeared. The negative reputation acquired through the strikes and lockouts that plagued the city at the turn of the century had been forgotten.

Danbury moved into the second half of the 20th century aware of many problems but also with high hopes and great expectations.

For more than 200 years before 1945, Danburians had become increasingly involved with people and issues far away from home, but the leap made during and following World War II was astounding.



A 1912 view of Main Street, with the southbound trolley having just passed DeKlyn's bakery, now Addessi's Jewelry Store.



World War I scene as Danbury units march up Main Street, enroute to the railroad station on White Street to embark for training and federal service.

Hundreds of veterans returned to Danbury with personal knowledge of areas of the world that in prewar days they and their families had only glimpsed through the pages of National Geographic. Following the war, the continued involvement of the United States in the economics and politics of other countries marked the beginning of a new era.

Danbury — and all other communities — were inextricably tied to the rest of the world.

The war has stimulated new technologies and introduced changed applications of older ones. Applied atomic power became a reality. Radar and new miracle drugs, television and intercontinental plane flights became commonplace. Local industries involved in the making of precision ball bearings for the Norden bomb sight and the production of surgical supplies, gun-sighting equipment and cosmetic containers, already had weaned the labor force from its reliance on the manufacturing of hats.

As the demand for hats continued its decline, Danbury was in a position to take advantage of the change of direction. The Danbury Industrial Corp. assisted new businesses in locating on the potential industrial sites already identified. U.S. Routes 6 and 7, which crossed in the heart of the city, and rail lines provided transportation access. The area was conveniently close to New York City. A skilled labor force was readily available. And at this most propitious time, the economy continued to expand.

The federal highway construction program put Danbury astride Route 84, one of the most important roadways in the United States, connecting



This scene above was a familiar one to generations of Danburians from 1885 until the 1960s. City Hall occupied the corner of Main and West Streets, with the First Methodist Church immediately to its south. In the background is the Wildman (later Hartwell) house. The ornamental street light at the corner of Liberty Street indicates the photo was taken in the 1920s. Below is Danbury's modern City Hall at West Street and Deer Hill Avenue.



New England with a vast area of the country to the west and south and further integrating indirectly into the East Coast megalopolis. Connecting Route 684 improved access to Westchester County and New York City.

But the plan to replace U.S. Route 7, the major north-south road, has been stalled for many years by political maneuvering, by claims of possible devastating environmental destruction and, most recently, by the state's fiscal problems.

Danbury's transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society was easier and more successful than might have been expected. The shift from manufacturing a few types of products to a great diversity ranging from surgical needles, hearing aids, helicopters and pencils to magnetic tapes and robots was accomplished only with accompanying changes in the skills of the personnel. More and more white-collar workers and trained technicians replaced a sizable portion of blue-collar labor.

The economic structure also changed. Most of the construction for the new industries occurred outside the center and away from the old industrial sites. Local people no longer controlled most of these businesses. When the Mallory family sold its hat factory, a family-controlled industry since the early 1800s, to the John B. Stetson Hat Co., their action was an example of what was happening to the economy in general.

Large corporate institutions from outside the community were absorbing smaller independent operations, and many of the new businesses, from fast-food outlets, motels and gasoline stations to producers of oil exploration equipment, were parts of national or international corporations with top management located elsewhere.

In other instances Danbury itself became the headquarters of international corporations.

The new businesses and industries attracted increasing numbers of people to the area. Danbury alone grew from 30,337 in 1950 to 60,470 in 1980, a year when the Greater Danbury region was home to more than 150,000 people. Reverberations from the advent of these new economic patterns and the soaring population were felt in almost all the other institutions within the community.

The once rural area that surrounded the central city became the home of thousands of new residents as it was subdivided into hundreds of home sites. Many of the old school districts, abolished years before, were, in a sense, revitalized as the Board of Education found it practical to construct large modern schools in such districts as Great Plain and Pembroke that in years past had been adequately served by one-room structures. Some of the nearby towns grew at an even faster rate.

The central business district expanded primarily at both the northern and southern ends of Main Street, and on White, North, South and West streets. Lack of easy access to and from Route 84 and inadequate parking

facilities in this rather confined area proved inconvenient for the increased numbers shopping and working there.

A partial solution was commercial development bordering Route 6 both to the east and west of the city proper, where the many individually located businesses and the several shopping centers extended the services as well as the congestion even farther toward the outskirts. A shopping mall on the old Danbury Fairgrounds entails a major highway interchange in addition to the construction of the mall itself.

There is also the expectation of revitalizing the old "downtown" area, integrating the structures already in place with a final phase of the earlier inaugurated redevelopment plan.

Physically the center of the city has taken on a new look. The floods of the 1950s brought federal funds for redevelopment of the area along the Still River, resulting in the rechanneling of the river and the bulldozing of several blocks that long had housed businesses, industries and residences. A shopping mall, built on one portion of the newly cleared land, was unsuccessful, and was converted for industrial use in the 1970s.

A large food store and parking lot occupied the corner of Main and White streets, with a small shopping plaza farther east on White Street. Another large segment of land east of Main Street, between White and Liberty streets, has yet to be developed.

Although there is fear that the area in the near Main Street may fall into decay as malls and shopping centers compete for customers, it has not yet lost its vitality. Many of the major public and governmental services still are located in the core area — the City Hall, the headquarters of the fire and police departments, the public library, Danbury Hospital, the downtown campus of Western Connecticut State University, the new Court House just completed, elderly and low-income public housing.

The old brick Fairfield County Jail was restored recently and converted into a social center for the elderly. Many religious denominations retain their inner-city locations. Several owners of older commercial structures have begun to restore their buildings while others have chosen to modernize their holdings.

There also has been considerable destruction of buildings on and near Main Street which has threatened to obliterate those architectural qualities which gives Danbury its own unique and identifiable streetscape. Many of the imposing structures built between 1870 and 1900 have disappeared. The old City Hall, the Methodist, Baptist and Universalist churches, Main Street and Balmforth Avenue schools, the old wooden hospital building and the Town Farm were razed intentionally. Vestiges of an earlier Danbury similarly were victims of modernization.

A bank has replaced the home of Col. Joseph Platt Cooke, Danbury's representative at the Continental Congress, a car lot is on the site of the Turner House hotel and weeds mark the place where the Amelia Brewster Home for the aged once stood.

But of even greater impact than the bulldozing of land and the building and destruction of houses, factories and stores, were the changes necessary to make this complex system work at all. Danbury has almost none of the raw materials or energy resources used in modern industry. It is dependent on sources of energy — coal, oil, gas, uranium — that originate far from its borders.

Likewise, practically all other resources must be imported from wherever they are found in the world. The inescapable interconnection with people and nations on all continents raises different problems from those of concern when the availability of furs for hat bodies and coal for operating the machinery was essential to the success of the local economy.

The degree to which Danbury can no longer act as if it were able to go its own way was dramatized by the unexpected blackout in the 1960s. Only then did most citizens comprehend their vulnerable place in the electric grid which tied together producers of electricity not only in Connecticut but also throughout New England, the Northeast, Canada and, indeed across the nation. Similarly the periodic gasoline shortages and the increasing cost of all petroleum products, including heating oil, emphasized for local residents that the age of apparently unlimited natural resources has passed.

Unfortunately, some shortages are even more immediate and even closer at hand. The ready availability of a plentiful and uncontaminated water supply had a major influence on Danbury's development. The public reservoir system constructed in the past to provide the quantities of water needed for making hats, in more recent years helped the community absorb the immediate post-war population influx.

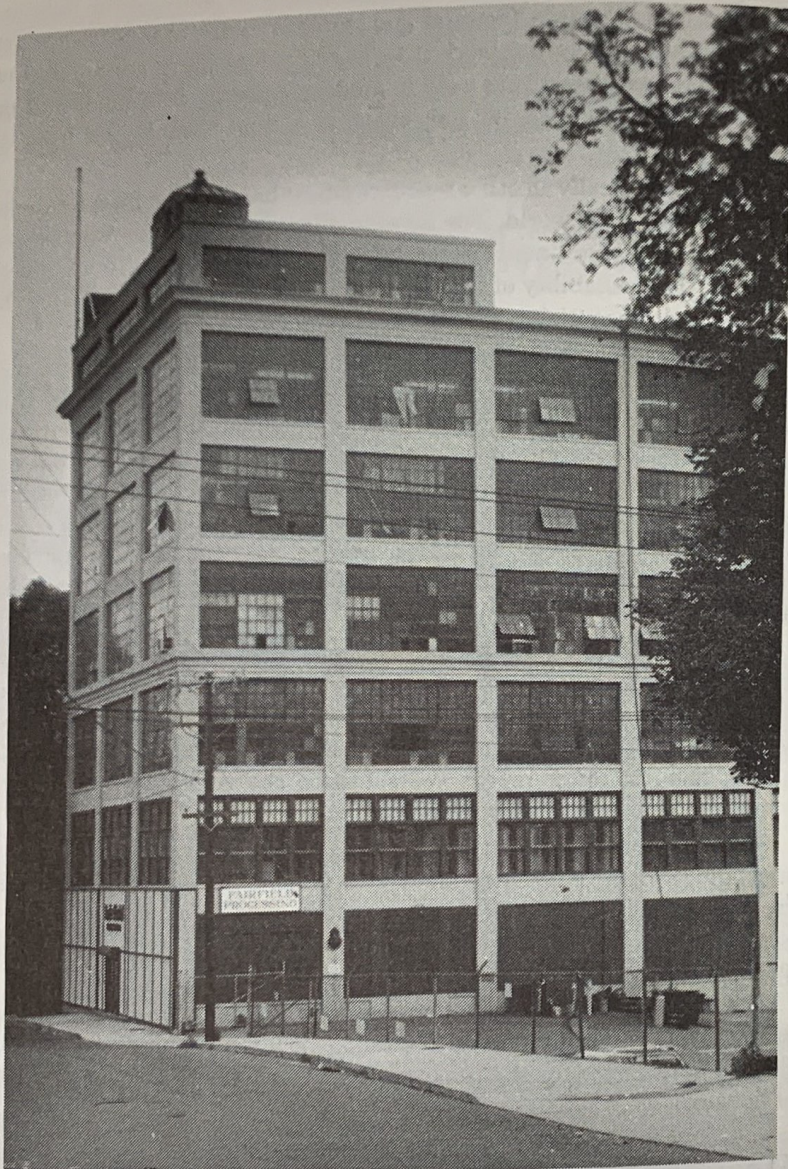
But as both domestic and industrial water usage have continued to rise, impending shortages threaten the city's economic future. Residents outside the center still use wells or small, privately owned cooperative systems, some of which have become contaminated while others supply an inadequate flow.

The concentration of population has also burdened the sewage and waste disposal facilities and caused additional pollution problems for the Still River. There is need for additional parks and open space. There is a shortage of housing.

Decisions

Many factors have made the finding of satisfying solutions to these and a multitude of other problems extremely difficult.

First, there are the changes in the characteristics of the population. Danbury added 30,000 inhabitants in a 30-year period, and some of the adjoining towns have grown proportionately even faster. To the individual this increase often is disturbing. Former Danbury Mayor Donald W. Boughton, quoted in *The New York Times* in 1978, expressed the beliefs of many:



Millions of hats were finished and trimmed in this building on Rose Hill Avenue during the period it served as headquarters for Mallory Hats. It now houses the flourishing Fairfield Processing Corporation, whose speciality is poleyster fibers and stuffing. A later booklet in the Tricentennial Committee series will be devoted to Danbury's famous hatting industry.

"I grew up in a small town where I knew everyone. Now my town is a larger community and, though a lot of people recognize me because of my office, I don't recognize them."

But a city of 60,000 is not overwhelmingly large and therefore factors other than size also are involved. The 60,000 figure is misleading, for the community in which the citizen functions is much more extensive than the traditional political boundaries of the town in which he votes and pays taxes.

A large portion of the labor force commutes from one town to another for employment, and so the numbers living in the area from which shoppers and workers are drawn add up to several hundred thousand.

Many of these residents, not planning to make the region their permanent home but instead expecting to be transferred elsewhere, really do not identify with the city. Moreover, individuals often are not personally involved with others in the immediate neighborhoods where they live: Their friends live scattered miles apart throughout the area.

Finally, the great variety of backgrounds of these residents — New Englanders, Southerners, Hispanics, Cambodians, whites, blacks, corporate executives, blue-collar workers, the wealthy and the unemployed — hinders cohesive action, especially because the groups have come together so recently.

Second, the rapidity with which the community changes has intensified the problems. New technologies create new alternatives. Television permits an issue raised in California in the morning to become a topic of concern in Danbury the same day. The adoption of computers alters the record keeping systems of both the public and private sectors within a few months. Thus, even before an issue has been faced, its complexities and dimensions have been altered.

Third, the forces which create or impinge upon local issues may originate far from the community itself and, in a broad sense, be outside community control. A decision by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to raise the price of petroleum encouraged Danbury drivers to form car pools.

The decision by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to have a mirror for a space probe prepared in a local plant kept Danburians at work. Equal employment regulations originated in Washington, as did qualifications for food stamp recipients.

The construction of a new Route 7 was hampered by actions taken by pressure groups in a nearby community. In discussing Union Carbide's move to Danbury, a New York Times article in 1978 noted that:

"The decision has not only affected the company's workers. . . it will also have an obvious impact on New York City . . . and on the Danbury suburb to which the company is moving. But the decision also had profound, though indirect, effects on a much broader area of Connecticut and on Westchester

County as well. The Regional Plan Association's president, John Keith, calls this the 'new domino theory,' in which a major decision of this type sets off a whole series of subordinate actions, often affecting residents in ways that few expect."

What happens within Danbury, therefore, has become increasingly the result of a combination of forces operating at two levels.

Within Danbury itself, government officials have long been aware of these and similar problems, and with varying degrees of insight and success, have attempted to help their constituents adapt to these radically altered conditions.

One approach is to make the decision-making process more efficient and responsive. In the 1960s, for example, Danbury's dual government, originally that of borough and town, later of city and town, was consolidated. Previously semi-rural areas, by then densely populated, were incorporated into the city proper.

Through the years a variety of plans — blueprints for the future — have established goals with suggestions for coping with the problems as viewed at the time. Current plans, for example, include improvement of traffic flow on the streets connecting with Route 84 and completion of the redevelopment plan for the center of the city begun many years ago.

However, no matter what the plans are or how well they are thought out, it has become abundantly clear that Danbury as a separate entity cannot successfully proceed on its own. Problems of the economy, jobs, housing, pollution, education, social services, leisure-time activities and the like demand regional or national solutions.

As early as 1947 the General Assembly legislatively recognized the fact of interdependence in the modern world when it pushed for regional "planning cooperation among a group of municipalities to cope with the problems and the opportunities that cross municipal boundaries".

"Its basic job? To consider the needs of an entire region . . . to see a region as an interrelated community . . . to undertake studies no single municipality could handle on its own . . . to provide a perspective so that any given municipality can see its own local problems in the light of interdependence and interrelationships." □

Suggested Reading List

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is the first in a series
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