

The History of Brookfield, Connecticut

Brookfield in the 1700s was an area of rich farm lands, forests filled with game and streams abundant with fish. This area was called Newbury, a name derived from the three towns from which its land was taken (New Milford, Newtown, and Danbury). Here lived a hardy breed of people.

They believed in hard work six days a week, and on the Sabbath they rested and attended worship, even though it meant an arduous ten mile trip to either New Milford, Danbury, or Newtown. Because of the hardship of traveling in winter, 1752 saw the introduction of winter church privileges.

Worship was permitted in the homes from September through March.

In 1754, the General Assembly finally granted the petition for the Parish of Newbury to build their own meeting house and call their own minister. On September 28, 1757, the first Congregational Church building was dedicated, and the Reverend Thomas Brooks was ordained as the first settled minister. In 1778 the Town was incorporated; the name Newbury was changed to Brookfield in honor of the Reverend Thomas Brooks who was still the minister. The first town meeting was held on June 9, 1788.

As early as 1732, there was industry along the Still River in an area that became known as the Iron Works District. Found here were the furnaces for making iron, the ever important grist mills, sawmills, comb shops, carding and cotton mills, a paper mill, knife factory, hat factories, and others. Still standing today is the grist mill (now the Brookfield Craft Center) and the Iron Works Aqueduct Company. This company was formed in 1837 to supply water from the mountain springs to the Iron Works District and today it still supplies water to the area under the name of Brookfield Water Company.

Indian trails were the first roads for travel. As the area became more populated, roads were laid out with wagons and stagecoaches the main means of transportation. Toll gates were used on some main roads to pay for the upkeep of the roads and salaries of the gatekeepers. The dividends went to the owners and stockholders of the roads. Travel was slow and it took three days to travel to Bridgeport, conduct business, and return home.

Before 1912 there were two train stations: 1) Iron Works District, located approximately where the Brookfield Market currently stands and was primarily a freight depot and 2) Junction Station located near the corner of Junction Road and Stony Hill Road was Brookfield's passenger station. The trains carried freight and visitors into and out of Brookfield. Young people in Brookfield traveled from the Junction Station daily to attend high school in Danbury.

During early Colonial days it was required by law to establish a school if a town had at least 50 families. In January 1756, it was voted to maintain such a school for six months each year; two

months in New Milford, two months in Danbury, and two months in Newtown. By 1808 the new town of Brookfield had eight school districts of its own.

After many heated debates over taxes, the Brookfield Consolidated School was built in 1938 (now called Center School) to replace all the one room school houses. In addition to the Brookfield's public schools, there were four private schools: Saint Paul's School for Boys, Curtis School for Boys, Town Singing School, and Greene School of Music.

Danbury & Bethel Gas and Electric Company connected the homes in Brookfield Center to their electric lines and brought the first electricity to Brookfield in 1915. By the late 1920s electricity was more in demand. The Connecticut Light and Power Company built a hydroelectric plant at Rocky River just north of New Milford. Land from Danbury, New Fairfield, Brookfield, and Sherman provided a reservoir for the water which also included large ponds named Neversink, Bares, and Squantz. By 1928 the project was completed with the formation of Candlewood Lake. It is the largest man-made lake in Connecticut. Brookfield maintains a town park on Candlewood Lake beachfront.

For many years a small parcel of land that was part of New Fairfield was separated from the rest of New Fairfield when the lake was formed. In 1961 this land was annexed by New Fairfield to Brookfield and is now called Candlewood Shores and Arrowhead Point. This property includes many antique homes in the Kellogg street area.

Brookfield is a growing community with a population of 15,664 (2000 U.S. Census). Instead of one church, there are now many churches of all denominations. There are four schools in the public school system, one private school, and several nursery schools. Many of the historic structures have been preserved and in 1991 most buildings in Brookfield Center's Historic District were named to the National Register of Historic Places.

(This article courtesy of the Brookfield Museum & Historical Society)