

**The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.**

**TOTOKET  
HISTORIC  
ROUTE**

*THE PAST IS OUR PRESENT TO THE FUTURE*

**NORTH BRANFORD, CT**

**CHRISTOPHER DE MATTEO  
EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT  
2002**

2012-022-001

**Edward Smith Library  
3 Old Post Road  
Northford, CT 06472  
(203) 484-0469**

# **TOTOKET HISTORIC ROUTE**

1. Farm River Mill Sites
2. Linsley House
3. North Branford Congregational Church
4. Northford Congregational Church
5. Old Northford Cemetery
6. Militia Training Grounds
7. St. Andrews Episcopal Church
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20. St. Augustine's Roman Catholic Church

## *PREFACE*

From coconut dippers to the Underground Railroad to the Great Trolley Wreck of 1917, North Branford has been home to a great deal of history. In the nearly three- hundred fifty years since its settlement, many prominent people have lived and died, many buildings were constructed and many historic events transpired in North Branford.

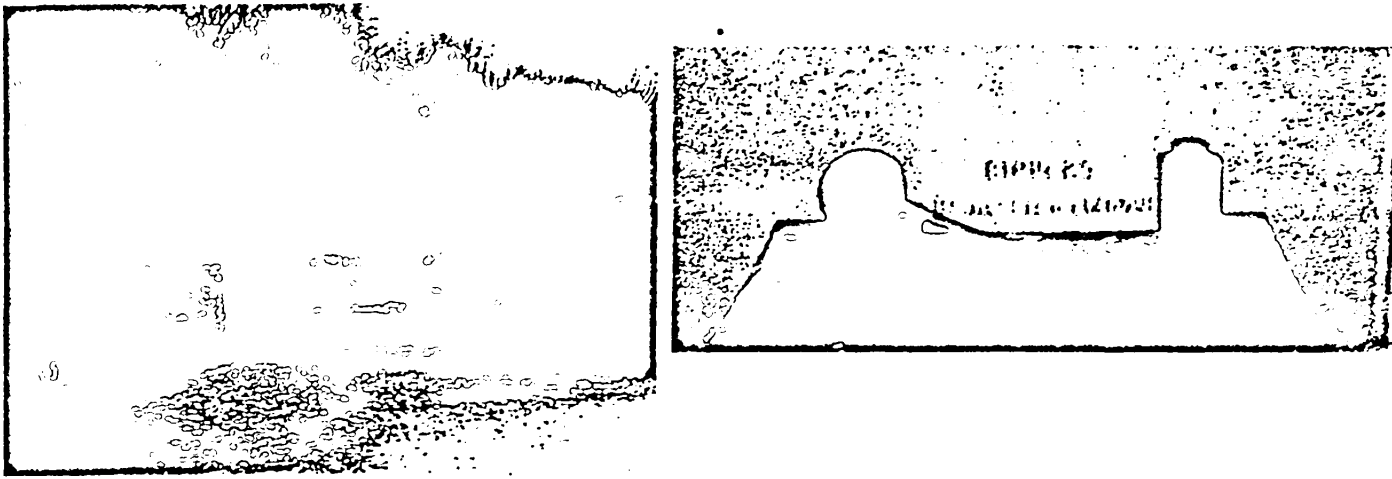
The past is the groundwork of our present and the road to our future. The purpose of this project was to recognize our town's many historic points of interest and present them to the public so that they may be preserved for future generations. Our history is shown in the historic buildings that still stand, and in the memories of the numerous historic places and people which are no longer with us. It is my wish that these historic points of the past as well as notable points of the present are maintained and survive for years to come. The past can only endure by the efforts of those dedicated to its preservation. This project is my effort to increase awareness and prevent the rich history of North Branford from being forgotten.

For over six months I and many volunteers meticulously researched and selected historic points of interest for this route. We worked hard constructing plaques to honor the points and then gave them to the property owners so that they might share in our effort of historical preservation. Finally we mapped these points on a map and composed this work to present to the public. Numerous people dedicated a great deal of their time and talents in assisting me with this project, and many others donated supplies and materials to make this all possible; to them and all others who share my appreciation for history I am forever grateful.

*-Christopher De Matteo*

## 1. FARM RIVER MILL SITES

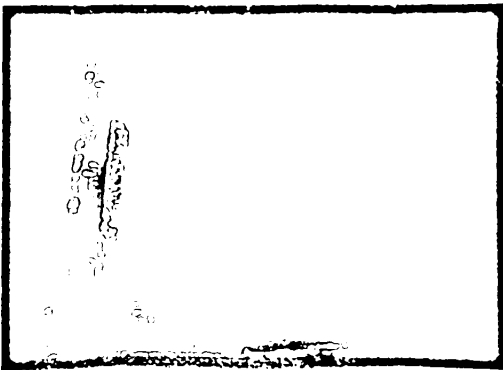
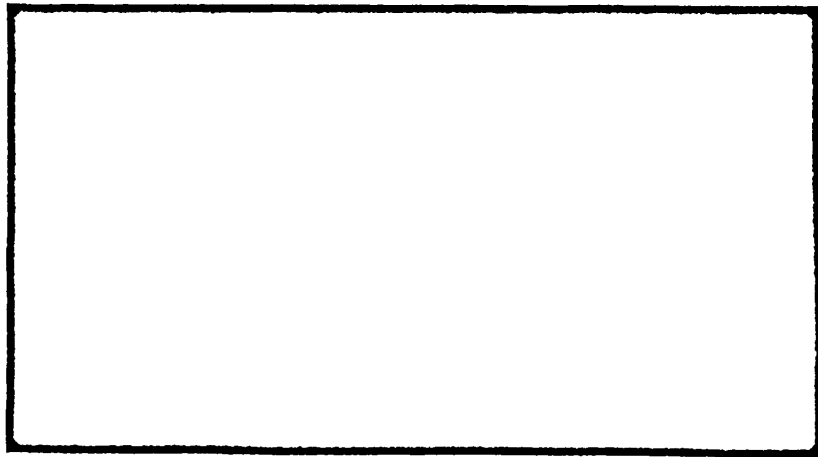
The banks of the Farm River were the center for the manufacturing economy in the early days of the town and the location of industry in North Branford. Joseph and Isaac Foote built their sawmill in 1770 near Old Forest Road and it was in operation until about 1875. Other mills along the Farm River included a cider mill from 1742 to 1784, a "fulling" mill and a "smoak" house from 1776. The most visible remains of mill activity could be seen at this site, which was home to a company that made "Coconut Dippers" -cups or ladles fashioned from coconuts. Until the early part of the twentieth century, Northford was the Coconut Dipper capital of the world.



## 2. LINSLEY HOUSE c.1690

Built in the 1690s on land deeded from the Indians in 1686 and passed down through the Linsley and Bradley families, Linsley House may very well be the oldest standing house in town. Noted for its protruding beams, Linsley House was studied by Yale and also featured in the book *Early Domestic Architecture* by J. Frederick Kelly. In addition to its architecture, it is most important historically for being a stop on the underground railroad. Slaves were smuggled to Fair Haven on oyster boats and transferred to North Branford dressed in mourning clothes. They were held

in a secret underground room originally built as an Indian cellar, accessible by trapdoor. There was also a tunnel which led out of the room but it was filled in. The next stop on the railroad was a house in the center of Durham. Linsley House stands on 394 Foxon Road.



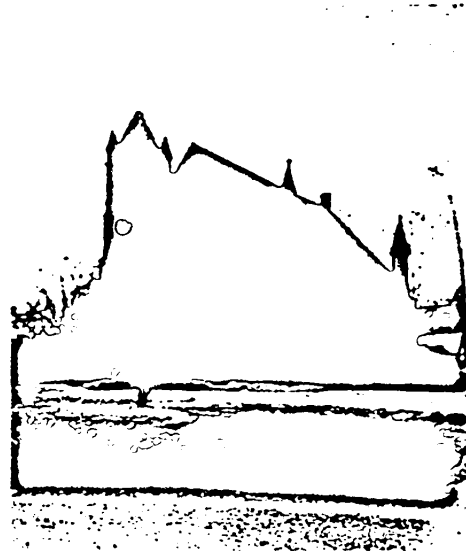
### 3. NORTH BRANFORD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 1725

The North Branford Congregational Church was the first church built in North Branford. The North Ecclesiastical Society of Branford purchased the land for the church on September 27, 1722 and Branford agreed to finance its construction which began in 1724. Services began to be held in 1725 even though the church was still not finished. The church's edifice was completed in 1732. Reverend Jonathan Merrick (1700-72) was ordained in 1729/30 as the first permanent pastor of the church, serving until his retirement in 1769. After being rebuilt in 1831, North Branford Congregational Church burned on February 9, 1908 and was then reconstructed later that year.



### 4. NORTHFORD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 1750/ STONE MEETING HOUSE

The Third Ecclesiastical Society of Branford was established June 13, 1750 with 19 members and Warham Williams as Pastor. The Northford Congregational Church was constructed in 1845 by Henry Austin as architect and George Perry as master builder. The date on the stone tower is 1846. The fire in 1906 that destroyed the two balconies inside. It was dedicated in 1908 as it stands now.



### 5. OLD NORTHFORD CEMETERY 1750-99

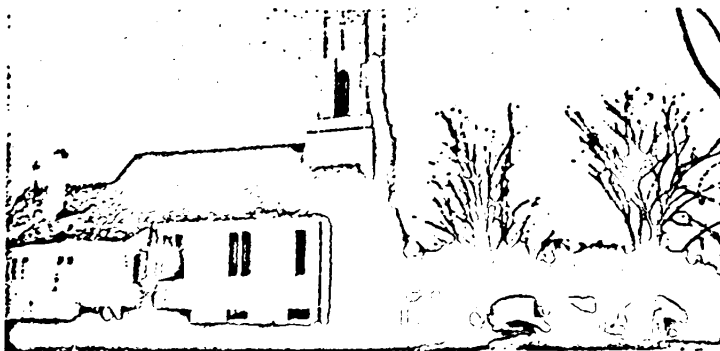
Opened in 1750 by the North Branford Congregational Church when Joseph Harrison was laid to rest, "Old" Northford Cemetery became the first cemetery in town. Among those buried in Old Northford Cemetery are eighteen Revolutionary War veterans including William Douglas, Civil War veteran Benjamin Maltby Linsley, as well as twenty-three enslaved and freed blacks and one Indian.

### 6. MILITIA TRAINING GROUNDS 1756

The Militia Training Grounds were acquired from Nathan Palmer in 1756. The grounds were used for militia exercising and training into the twentieth century. The Atwater Library was built on the fields in 1942, by money donated by the Atwater family in the memory of Reverend Charles B. Atwater- the third minister of the congregation church of North Branford.

### 7. ST. ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH 1763

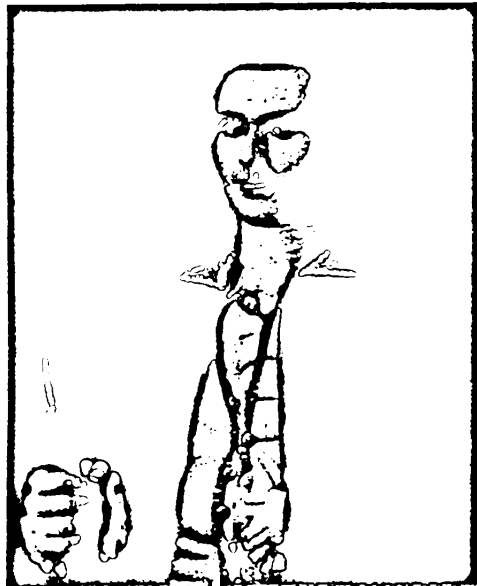
On April 20, 1763 an agreement was drawn up by Paul Tyler, Ichold Foot, Joseph Darien, Samuel Maltby, David Rogers, Jonah Todd, Phineas Beach, Joseph Finch, and John Johnson to build this church. It opened for services on December 12, 1765. John Lyin was hired as minister on December 28' 1768. St. Andrew's is located at the junction of routes 17 and 22 in Northford.



### 8. SAMUEL EELS HOUSE 1769

The Samuel Eels House was built in 1769 for Samuel Eels (son of Reverend Edward Eels of Middletown), the second pastor of North Branford Congregation Church. He purchased 10 acres and built a house on it. Samuel Eels served captain of a 60 man company in January 1777 for 28 days. The Eels house stands at 45 North Street in North Branford.

### 9. WILLIAM DOUGLAS 1743-77

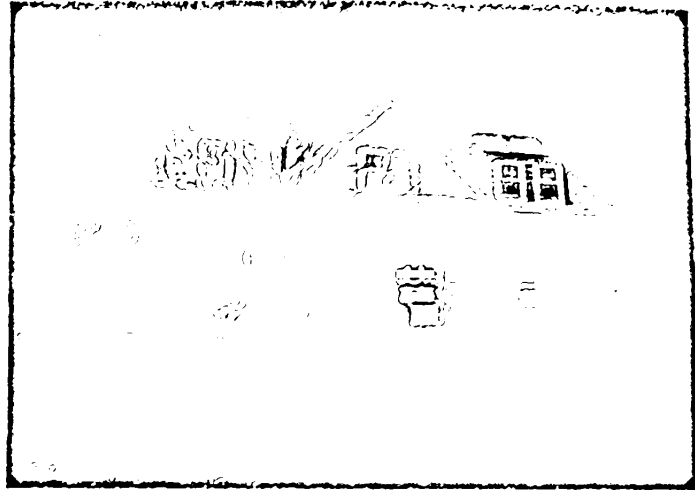


William Douglas was born in Plainfield in 1743 and enlisted as a sailor under General Israel Putnam in 1759. Douglas soon became a merchant in New Haven and prospered in trade in the British West Indies. Douglas was retired and living in Northford when he was summoned by the Connecticut General Assembly to serve as captain of the Sixth Company of the First Regiment in April of 1775. Captain Douglas and the Sixth Company served under General Richard Montgomery and successfully kept the enemy out of Lake Champlain. In January of 1776 Douglas was promoted to Major and assisted in protecting New York City with Major General Charles Lee. He returned to Northford in May of that year and served briefly in the General Assembly. In June of 1776 Douglas was called back to active service as Colonel of the Fifth Battalion under General James Wadsworth. Douglas conscribed 500 men to serve with him in the Fifth Battalion which served in the

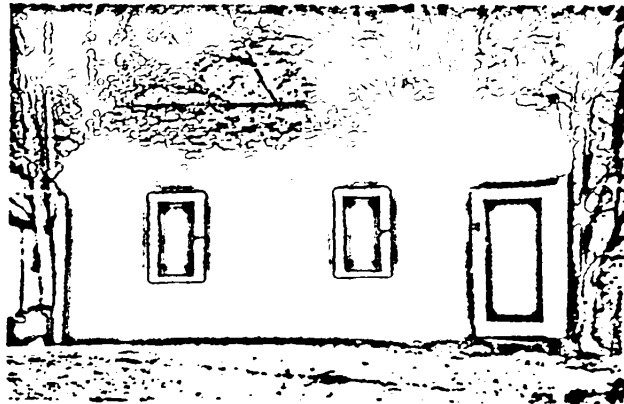
Battle of Long Island and defended Manhattan at Kip's Bay and Harlem Heights. Colonel Douglas contracted a chronic cough from which he never recovered. Northford's own Cincinnatus died in May of 1777. Douglas's house still stands at 384 Village Street.

**10. GERALD FOWLER HOUSE 1780**

The Gerald Fowler House was built in 1780 on a wood frame. After it burned down in a fire in 1910, it was rebuilt in 1930 from its own remnants. The house contains a large fieldstone fireplace. The Fowler House stands at 34 White Hollow Rd.; the large barn in the back was developed into a house in the early 1980s. The house and barn were both featured in the July 1976 issue of *Yankee* magazine.

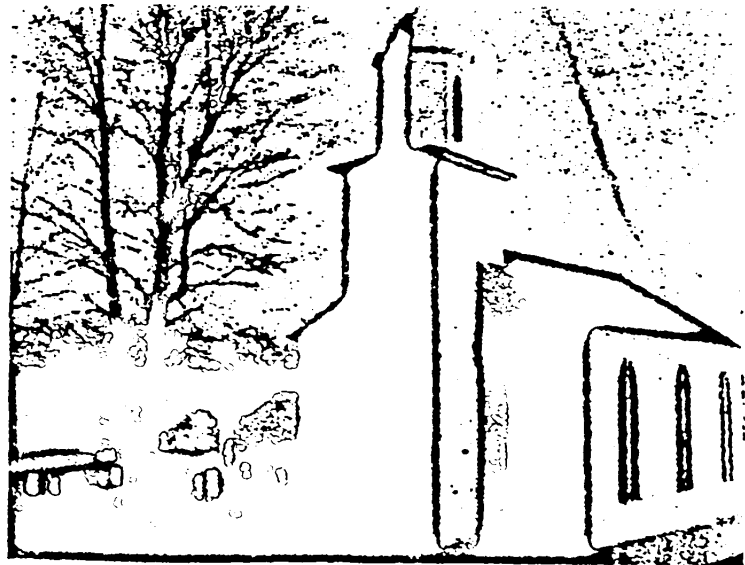


**11. LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE 1805** Built in 1805, the Little Red School House is the oldest one-room schoolhouse still standing in New Haven County and the fourth oldest in Connecticut. The School House served as a public library from 1933 to 1956 under the direction of the League of Women Voters. The Little Red School House is presently located on Old Post Road near the Edward Smith Library.



**12. ZION EPISCOPAL CHURCH 1818**

Zion Church was organized in 1812 after Roger Griswold, a non-Congregationalist, was elected governor of Connecticut. Church and state officially became separate in 1818 and construction for Zion Church began inbut was halted until 1823 due to a lack of funds. Zion Church was consecrated in 1864. It was moved from Route 80 to its present location on Notch Hill Road in 1957.



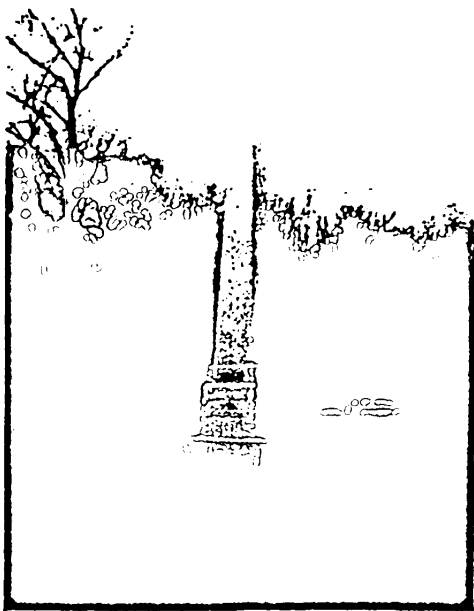
### 13. CLARA SMITH (1865-1943) AND HOUSE (1855)

Clara Elizabeth Smith, daughter of Edward Smith, received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Mount Holyoke College in 1902 and her Ph.D from Yale in 1904. Smith was a professor and mathematics department head at Wellesley College in Massachusetts and also an amateur artist.

The Smith House on 12 Maltby Lane, of Victorian Gothic architecture, is the only high style Gothic building in town. Edward Smith invented a machine to remove coconut meat from its shell and to strip its rough coating. Clara Smith willed the estate to the construction of a public library in memory of her father.



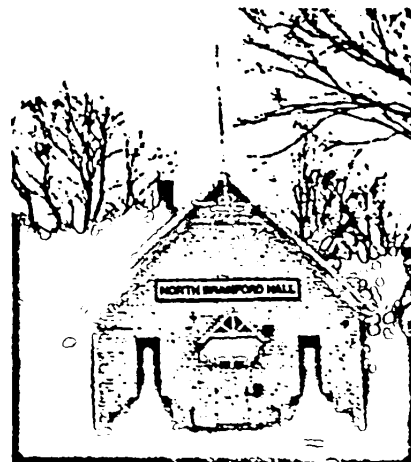
### 14. CIVIL WAR (SOLDIERS') MONUMENT 1865



In 1865 for a sum of \$2000, The Soldiers' Monument was erected in the center of North Branford for the memory of all those soldiers who fought and died for the Union in the "war between the states." North Branford's memorial for its soldiers became the first Civil War monument in the United States.

### 15. NORTH BRANFORD CENTER SCHOOL 1870

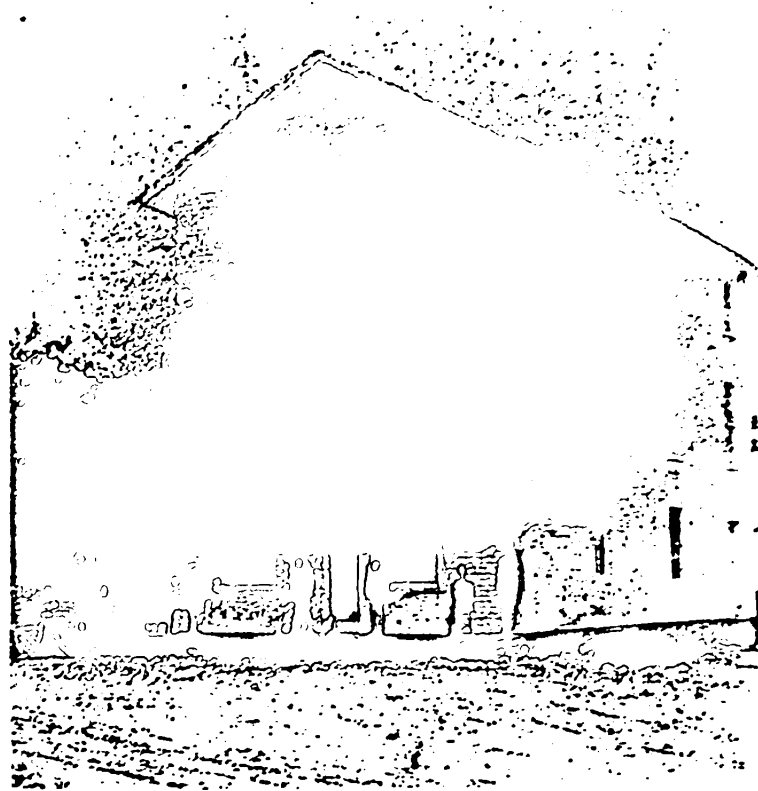
The original school was located across the street where the Civil War monument stands. It was moved its present location adjacent to North Branford Cemetery in 1867 and its current building was constructed in 1870. It was used as a school until 1920 when it became Town Hall. The North Branford Civil Association used Town Hall for meetings and social affairs. The rear edition was built in 1925 from lumber acquired in the purchase of a building in Madison. The Hall was used as a grange for many years, later as a senior citizens center and now presently houses the offices of the recreation department.





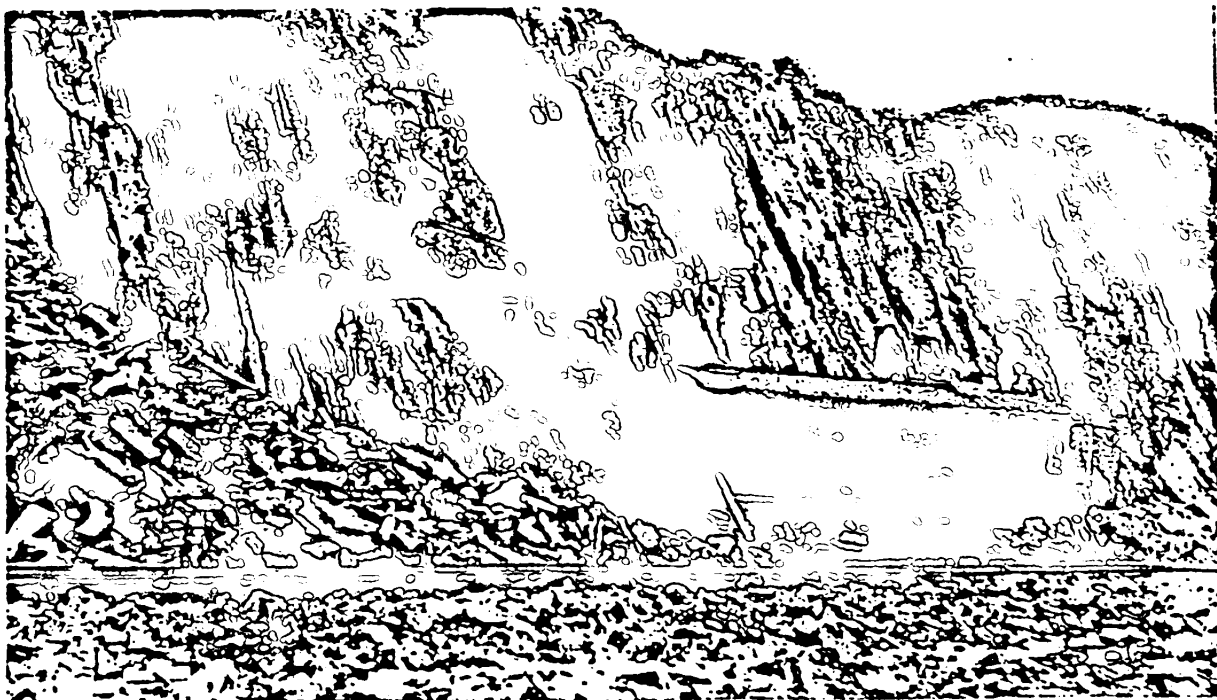
### 16. NORTHFORD STORE 1875

The Northford Store, located at the intersection of routes 17 and 22, was constructed in 1875 in close proximity to the village's churches to be a store and also public hall. The three story Country Victorian structure was used primarily as a general store and also a public hall for lectures, singing schools, town meetings and also some graduations. The Northford Store still serves as a grocery store.



### 17. TILCON 1914

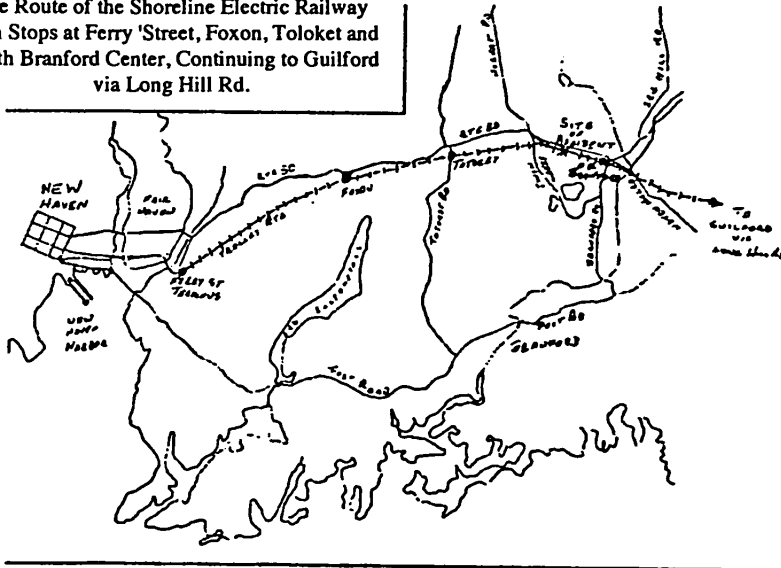
The New Haven Trap Rock Company began quarry operations on the 200 million year old mountain in 1914. The Branford Steam Railroad was added in 1915 to connect the New York- New Haven- Hartford rail line with Pine Orchards facilities. Trap Rock was sold to Ashland Oil Company in 1968 and subsequently merged to be NHTR- Tomaso. It began operating as Tilcon- Tomaso in 1979 and is now under the name Tilcon. Tilcon is one of the largest single- faced quarries in the world and since 1914 has produced enough crushed rock to construct a highway from North Branford to the west coast and back.



18. SHORE LINE ELECTRIC RAILWAY 1922 AND TROLLEY WRECK 1917 November 20, 1911 marked the first day of service for the new line of the Shore Line Electric Railway trolley company running from Ferry Street in New Haven to the Guilford Green. In ideal conditions this 13.1 mile trip would take only thirty minutes.

After nearly six years of quick and safe transportation, disaster struck the New Haven-Guilford line when at 4:55 on the afternoon of August 13, 1917, two trolleys collided in the center of North Branford near the Tilcon bridge, killing 19 people. Motorman Wesley Negus was exhausted from overwork and did not wait at the switch for another trolley to pass; instead he taped his "dead-man" control and fell asleep. Motorman Morris, coming from the other direction, was also sound asleep and never woke up. Motorman Morris stayed at the controls and was launched through the roof of the car, dying instantly. The Guilford-bound car carried 52 passengers and the New Haven-bound car carried about 12; of those, 19 were instantly killed, 9 died shortly after and 22 were severely injured. Motorman Negus survived and was imprisoned. The Great North Branford Trolley Wreck was touted by the Shore Line Times as the "Worst and Most Horrible Catastrophe in the History of Trolley Railroads in New England." The New Haven-Guilford trolley line ceased operation forever on January 1, 1930.

The Route of the Shoreline Electric Railway with Stops at Ferry Street, Foxon, Toloket and North Branford Center, Continuing to Guilford via Long Hill Rd.

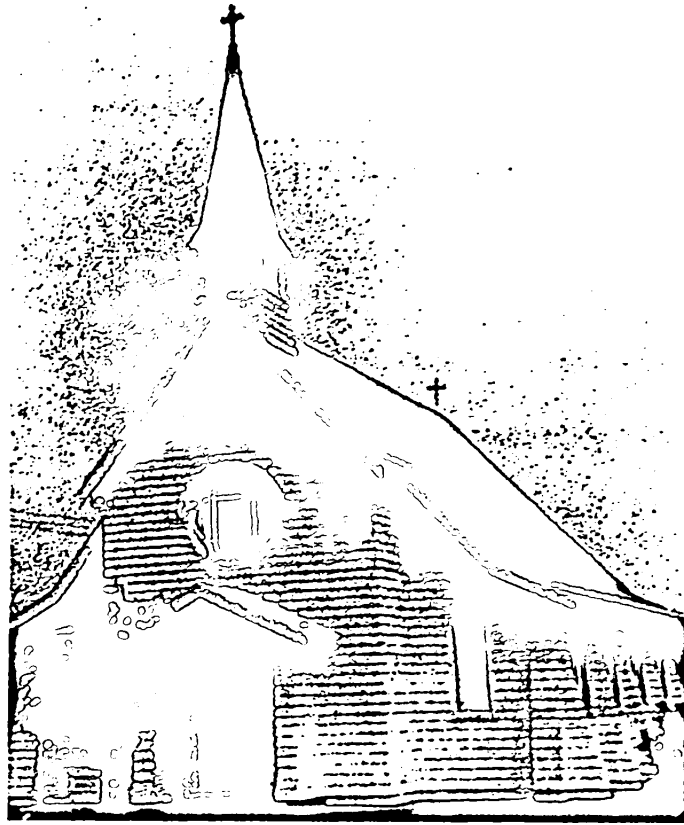


### 19. LAKE GAILLARD 1920

The New Haven Water Company started buying land in 1920 and acquired about 5700 acres to develop a reservoir to supplement other reservoirs which could not produce enough safe water. Construction of the Totoket Dam began in 1926. Lake Gaillard is three miles long and one mile wide with a maximum depth of 100 feet. Lake Gaillard, its tributaries and connecting tunnels amount to 53 square miles of watershed area.

## 20. ST. AUGUSTINE'S 1925,1961

There were Catholics living in North Branford as early as 1756. In 1920, meeting at the home of Mrs. Edward Foote with Father Thomas I. Murray of Branford in attendance, Catholic residents in North Branford unanimously voted to celebrate mass in North Branford. Mass was first celebrated in the home of Mr. and Mrs. James Walsh on February 29, 1920. Cornerstone was laid May 3, 1925 as construction began on a new church. Eighteen thousand dollars was pledged for missionary church to St. Mary's. St. Augustine's became a separate parish in 1941. Ground was broken on Caputo Rd. on April 1961 for the current church.



*(The original St. Augustine's in 1925)*

*Special thanks to the following people for volunteering their time and effort to make this project possible:*

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Totoket Historical Society

Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse New Haven, CT JB

Silk Screen North Branford, CT

Quinnipiac University

## ***CREDITS***

Gregan, Janet S. and Grace Rapone Marx. *North Branford and Northford 1850 to 1950*. Totoket Historical Society, 1998.

Miller, Herbert C., *The History of North Branford and Northford*. Totoket Historical Society, 1982.

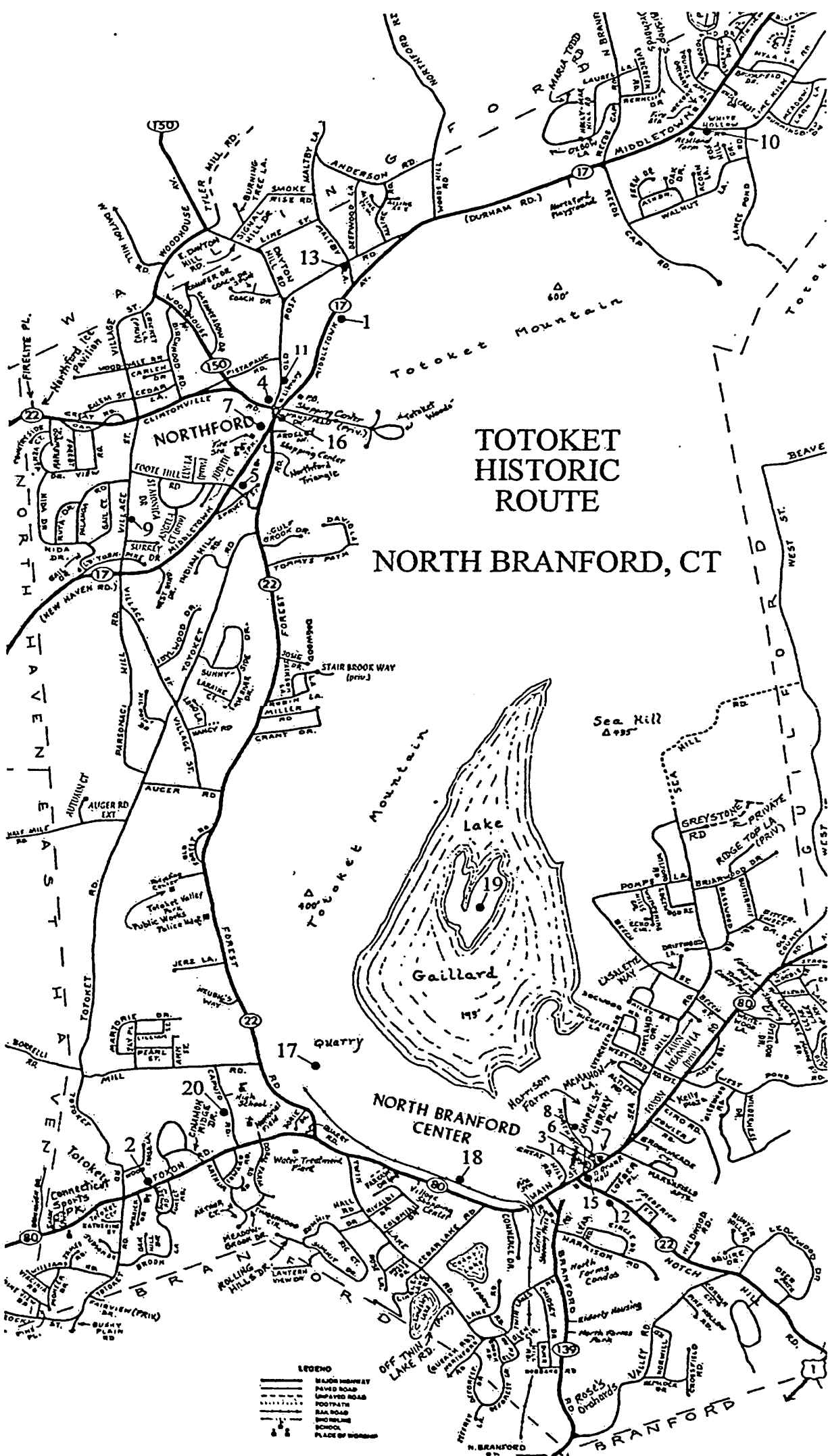
Hall, Edna. *The Shore Line Electric Railway and The Great North Branford Trolley Wreck*. Totoket Historical Society, 1998.

*North Branford Architectural Survey*

Primary records and documents held by the Totoket Historical Society

## ***PHOTOGRAPHS***

1. Carl Gunnefelt, Thomas De Matteo
2. Paul Bradley, Carl Gunnefelt
3. Totoket Historical Society
4. Genevieve Karbowski
7. Totoket Historical Society
10. *Yankee Magazine*, 1976
11. Genevieve Karbowski
12. Totoket Historical Society
14. Christopher De Matteo
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16. Totoket Historical Society
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- LEGEND**
- MAJOR HIGHWAY
  - PAVED ROAD
  - UNPAVED ROAD
  - FOOTPATH
  - RAIL ROAD
  - SCHOOL
  - PLACE OF WORSHIP