

The Totoket Historical Society

My Recollections of Northford

Written by George W. Cooke

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(1847 – 1938)

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Introduction:

This article was transcribed from a "verifax" copy of the original printed document found in the archives of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Northford, CT. The copy was annotated in pencil with dates and comments. I have incorporated them into this document by including them within parentheses, [---]. The annotations were added on January 15, 1964, author unknown.

While searching the archives of the Totoket Historical Society it was learned that this was a speech given by George W. Cooke (1847-1938) as a portion of the program at the Connecticut Tercentenary Celebration at Northford, Connecticut on July 27 to 28, 1935.

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You must consider it has been a long time and I have kept no diary.

Beginning at the Durham town line is White Hollow, so called as the houses were all painted white. There were seven houses in 1846 and only one of the original buildings is now standing.

William Elliott [1773-1858] lived in the last house in Northford on The Middletown Turnpike, his brother Henry lived on the old road east and both were money lenders, and it was said that William sometimes drank to excess

George Fowler [1803-1850] lived where the bungalow now stands on the Durant farm [Bozzuto, white Hollow Rd.]. He had two sons, Charles M. and Sereno, and one daughter [Melinda, 1791-1868] who married Julius Maltby [1787-1872] who built and lived in the house where Dr. Clara E. Smith now lives.

Sereno went to Wisconsin and died there. His son [brother] Charles (who married my aunt, Emily Cooke) went out there to settle his estate and liked the country so well that he bought 5000 acres of government land and moved his family there.

Amos Harrison [1774-1846] lived where Mr. Bianchi now lives and kept the toll gate.

Thelus Todd [1802-1876] lived next, a good farmer, and owned the the Grist Mill. His son Milo [1833-1907] ran the mill for a time and had a good business. Farmers raised much grain in those days. There was a boy who came for his grist one day and it was ready in the bags but the bags were not tied and he could not find strings for some time so he wrote on a piece of paper "My dear Miller, in the name of all that's lovely do leave strings with you bags."

Mr. Todd brought in from New York State many cattle in the fall of the year and it took 21 days to drive them through. Farmers bought them to feed their hay.

During the Civil War, straw paper which was used for wrapping everything was very profitable to manufacture, so Milo Todd built a large building and installed expensive machinery only to find he did not have water power enough to run it, so he traded with D. S. Stevens for his property in Quinnipiac and the Stevens family came to Northford. He had a nice family of girls and boys, also a spoon business which employed about 30 people.

The schoolhouse in the 7th district was built in 1850. It had 42 desks and stood on land now owned by H. C. Miller [father of Gordon S. Miller]. It was a good school and we always fine teachers. I don't remember ever seeing a scholar whipped.

A little episode happened when I was about 15 years old. Celestia Foote taught that winter, she was a pretty girl and a fine teacher. It was right after the January thaw and from the school house steps it was glare ice, you could slide most down to Sol's Path,

and I wanted very much to have her slide down with me on my sled. After much urging she sat on the sled and we were off, but when we were in front of Henry Maltby's [1799-1872, or 1828-1878] house there was a steep bank and it was so icy in spite of all I could do we went off the bank and over and over and over. Well, we got up and she was pretty mad and I was scared white; she walked up to the school house but not hand in hand.

Willis Tucker [1821-1906] had a blacksmith shop and when you went to get a horse shod the first thing he had to do was to make the nails to shoe him with, but about this time, 1862, I think, Thaddeous Fowler who lived where Mr. McNarama now lives, invented the Fowler horse shoe nail made by machinery, and the same nail is made today under the name of Capewell horse shoe nail.

Jonatho[a]n Fowler [1797-1865] lived in the big house on the corner afterwards owned by John Wood [1837-1920]. He had a button shop in the rear where they made wooden buttons. Next came Jacob Harrison [1781-1855] who had a tannery.

In the Linsley homestead at the fork of the road were three brothers, Eliakim [1794-1862], Erastus [1806-1865, and Jared [1803-1887]. Jared attended school in Wallingford walking back and forth every day a lonely road five miles long. He became a celebrated physician and practiced his profession in New York City

The first store in Northford was kept by Lorenzo Harrison [1820-1906] in the house where Cicerrilli now lives.

The Barber House [Amatrudo] was owned by Julius Maltby and stood around the corner by Eddie Anderson where Mr. Ryder lives [Ryden, Dayton Hill Road – Division Street area, sold to Dwyer, now ('66) Helms – but must have been a larger house than now extant]. He got my father (Philander Cooke) to move it to its present site and it took 100 yoke of oxen to do it.

Chapman Maltby [1828-?] owned the brick shop and made axe handles and other tools; the first wheel horse rake was invented here. He made the first desiccated cocoanut; the meat taken out, grated and sweetened, kiln dried, and put up in packages as it is today. At first they did not save the shells, but later they polished them and put on a wooden handle and made a useful dipper.

Pins and hooks and eyes were made in the old river [rivet] shop. Hooks and eyes were put on cards by women and children. They were sent to their homes and if they had nimble fingers and by working very fast they could earn from six to twelve cents per day.

The tin shop employed twenty-five or thirty hands, and made pails and pans, cake boxes, cash boxes, and everything in that line.

Then came the card business — Stevens Brothers and several others. It was a mail order business and it did so much that it made the Northford postmaster a high salaried man.

Reverend William Boardman [1794-1849] was the first Congregational minister that I remember and a Mr. French of New Haven preached at the Episcopal Church.

A Mr. Baldwin from Fair Haven taught singing school in the basement of the Congregational Church in the winter, which accounts for the good chorus in the churches.

Reuben Augur [1823-1898] was a prominent man, loved and respected by all. He lived in the house now owned by Mr. Whiting. He was a good farmer and dealt in horses and cattle extensively, and was an honest man.

Deacon Charles Foote [1815-1886] was an old school teacher and a prominent man of the town, as was deacon William Maltby [1825-1908] and others.