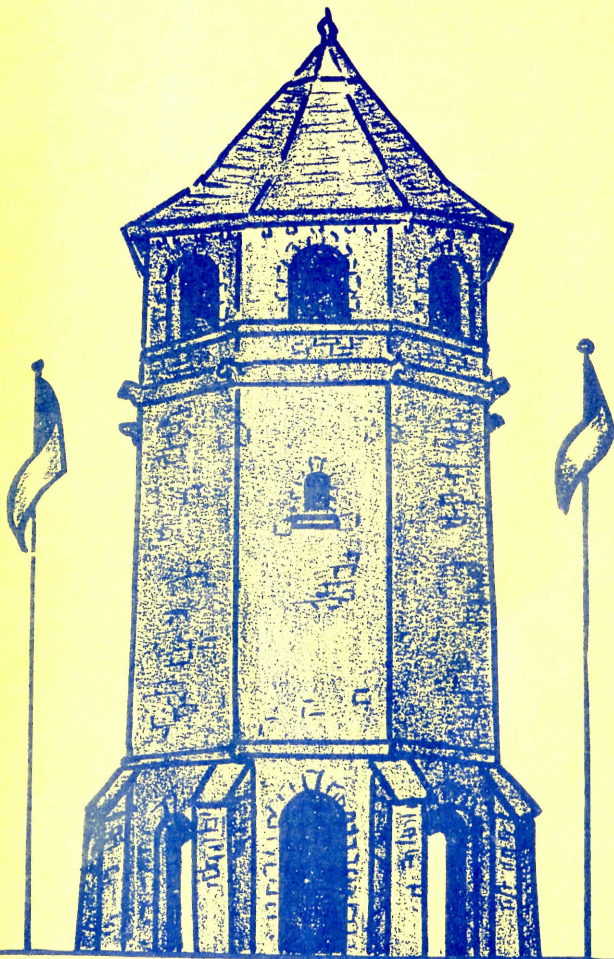


VERNON VIGNETTES



VERNON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Vernon, Connecticut

VOLUME II

V E R N O N V I G N E T T E S

Volume II

by

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FORWARD

Vernon Vignettes, Volume II
is a companion piece to Vernon
Vignettes, Volume I. It gives
more glimpses into Vernon's
past through the memories of
its life-long citizens.

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contribution to the 1976
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Hazel P. Lutz

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Vernon, Conn.

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THE BENJAMIN TALCOTT HOUSE

One of the first houses marked by the Vernon Historical Society is the Benjamin Talcott house on Route 83 across from the Southwest Cemetery in Talcottville.

During the eighteenth century, Samuel Talcott of South Windsor deeded to his son, Benjamin, land adjoining South Windsor on the west, toward the east by a road no longer existant which paralleled Kelly Road, on the north to land adjoining the McLean property and on the south by a road now known as Dobson Avenue. The property was subsequently deed to Benjamin's son, Benjamin Talcott, Jr. and by him to his son Benjamin. These deeds were dated 1810 because at this time Vernon was part of Bolton and was not set off as Vernon until 1808.

In 1789 Benjamin Talcott III built a large house for his family on his farm. This house which still stands contains ten large rooms about fifteen feet square. A woodshed and tool house is connected with it. The house has four large fireplaces of stone from the nearby quarry very carefully laid up by an expert mason.

It is a fine example of early Connecticut domestic architecture. Originally it was sheathed in hand-hewn clapboards.

The central fireplace contains an oven and cranes for cooking over its fires. In the attic a section of the chimney has a niche used for smoking meats. Also in the attic can be seen beams of solid oak, eleven inches square. On one is carved " '89 B. T. ".

The front parlor is paneled in pine. The wide floor boards of oak have withstood over one hundred seventy five years of traffic and its stone foundation is still in good condition.

Deacon Talcott, as he was called, for he served as a deacon in the church, was a veteran of the Revolutionary War. He died in 1811 and was buried just across the road from his home in the Southwest Cemetery.

THE MAXWELL MANSION

The main building of the Rockville General Hospital was once the Maxwell residence. It was built in the early 1900's by William Maxwell, a wealthy mill owner and his sister, Alice. In those days it was considered the most elegant house ever built in our town.

Within its walls were fifty-two rooms and ten baths. Its portico faced south toward Kellogg lawn and overlooked a swimming pool, a gold-fish pond abloom with water lilies and a large rock garden in which little life-like figurines of gnomes imported from abroad peered around bushes and shrubs. Its rear or service entrance faced on Union Street. Here deliveries were made and the servants entered. At the ends of the main building were the East and West Loggias, whose glass enclosed walls housed palms and exotic plants.

On the first floor the main hall boasted a hand-painted ceiling and a terra cotta tiled floor. The staircase was of Italian marble and on its walls hung a huge tapestry which was removed each summer and returned to its place each fall.

The library, now the hospital's gift shop, had its red leather walls lined with row upon row of books. Mr. Maxwell spent many hours here with his rare volumes. Almost every room had a fireplace in it and tapestries on its walls. A pipe organ and a grand piano graced the music room.

An elevator served the upper floors where the bedrooms were located. An extensive collection of foreign dolls was displayed in a wall case on the second floor. On the top floor the recreation room housed a shooting gallery in which iron objects in the form of squirrels, rabbits and game birds moved along on an endless chain in the target area. Slim twenty-two rifles were provided for use of the guests.

A greenhouse on the grounds furnished cut flowers and blooming plants the year round. The vegetable garden in the rear of the Rockville Public Library produced fresh vegetables for their table.

Here in the beauty and elegance of this mansion the Maxwells lived out their lives in a splendor that marked the end of an era.

THE VERNON CREAMERY

In the days before mechanical refrigeration, the making of butter was a local industry. Farmers would save their milk for several days, skim the cream off the top, and make butter of it. This they would peddle to their regular customers on their weekly shopping trips to town.

However, there were farmers who produced too little milk to bother to make into butter, but too much to use themselves. These farmers sold their milk to the Vernon Creamery. A driver in a one-horse wagon collected cans of milk from farms in this vicinity daily. The Vernon Creamery was an early form of farmers' cooperative.

The building that housed this enterprise still stands at 121 High Street in Rockville. The bottom part of the building is of brick and the top part of wood construction. It was built over a little stream that flowed from the meadow in back of the Henry farm, now Henry Park. This little stream provided endless ice cold water to refrigerate the cans of fresh milk that stood in a trough in the creamery basement. It also filled

a shallow well where finished butter was stored.

Along the wall in the basement stood the settling tanks where the milk was placed while the cream was rising. Beside these were a row of round, wooden butter churns whose dashers were run from overhead shafts. A huge cheese press and a large tank to hold buttermilk occupied space there. A stove at one end of the room supplied heat to boil water used to keep the butter-making tools sterile. Butter was made fresh daily.

Grocery storekeepers had their teams pick up the butter they sold to their customers, while people who lived within walking distance came to the creamery to buy their butter and buttermilk which was dipped out of the vat to fill the pails the customers brought with them.

Mr. Annis was superintendent and Mr. Walker and Mr. Thrall were in charge at other times. This creamery employed about four men and did a thriving business. Its finest quality butter commanded a higher price than its competitors.

THE POLLIWOG SCHOOL

In 1870 the Northeast School District built a school in the north-east section of town. It was a wooden structure twenty-six feet wide and fifty feet long. It cost \$3000 and accommodated sixty pupils. Architecturally it was a three room school typical of that period. Each room housed two grades of elementary school pupils. Seats were fastened to the floor and light entered from windows on three sides of the rooms. There was no artificial lighting.

A belfry was mounted on the ridge. A basement under one part of the building contained a furnace and toilet facilities, and boasted a gravel floor. On one side of the basement were windows with area-ways that furnished tempting play spots during recess periods. It was officially known as the Northeast School, but for generations it has been referred to as "The Polliwog".

Down the hill toward East Street ran a little brook surrounded by a swamp. Here an enterprising fisherman built a small box in the stream to hold the minnows he used for fishing

bait. Through the years it had fallen into disuse and frogs had taken over. Frogs and polliwogs could be found in it every Spring. The "Minnie Box" was explored by every child who went to school there. Each year some of the frog's eggs were brought up into the classrooms and placed in fish bowls where they grew into polliwogs. Hence, the name, "Polliwog School", is still the affectionate name by which the Northeast, now called the Northeast Annex, is still known.



QUARRIES

It was quite logical that Rockville should abound in rocks. In days gone by large quantities of rock was quarried here. Outcroppings of ledges all along the east side of Fox Hill and Gaynor Hill indicated to the early settlers where quarries might be located.

In opening a quarry all the earth surrounding the ledge had to be removed by hand with pickaxes and shovels. Then with crowbars, shims, wedges, hand stone drills and at times a little black powder to open up a seam, slabs of granite were mined.

Mr. Farrell's quarry on White Street was equipped with a tall wooden derrick operated by two men turning cranks, for there were no gasoline engines or electric motors to furnish the power. This derrick lifted huge stone slabs out of the quarry onto wooden horses where it was dressed by hand with chisels. The slabs were then again picked up by the derrick and lowered on to heavy ox-drawn wagons to be hauled to their destination.

The stone mason was an important and necessary craftsman at the

quarry. These were very powerful men who mined from the earth great stones using only the simplest of tools. If one inspects the curb stones in the center of Rockville today he can still see the holes which were drilled in quarrying them. There were about fifteen holes drilled in a straight line to the depth of four inches. Then with shims and wedges inserted in these holes the stone was sliced to size. These curb stones were cut about three feet wide, eight feet long and about ten inches thick. To cut the arc or curved stone needed for all the places where the curb turned a corner was the job of an expert craftsman such as Mr. Gunderman of Germantown who working only with levers and bars set the corners so tightly that they formed a wedge themselves.

Rockville was one of the first cities in the State to install curbs so that the water rushing down the hillsides after a storm would not flow over the sidewalks. Much of the output of our local quarries was used for this purpose. On Union, West Main, Prospect, Park, School and Village Streets as well as Talcott Avenue and many others heavy curbs were installed over

one hundred years ago and are still in good repair, while the cement curbs poured seventy-five years later have crumbled.

Rockville's largest quarry at the end of Quarry Street, just north of Gaynor Place, furnished great quantities of building stone, much of which was used to construct the "Great Walls of Rockville" on High Street, Prospect Street, Lower and Middle Road. All these were built over one hundred years ago by workers under the direction of Mr. Fitzgerald, a master stone mason, and are still in use. Today, under the stress of a constant flow of heavy traffic, undreamed of in the days in which they were constructed, they still stand solidly, a sturdy monument to those craftsmen of long ago.



SAINT BERNARD'S TERRACE LONG AGO

In all the early accounts of the appearance of Rockville each writer mentions with great pride "its triple streets, surpassing anything near or far".

One writer recalls that before the 1840's all the land from Saint Bernard's Terrace to School Street was a "cultivated cornfield". He tells that the first building to be erected there was a small shop built for Mrs. Hoffman on the site where the church now stands. She rented it to Hawley King who ran a drug store in it. He later sold it to Drs. Jennings and Bailey who continued doing business there for many years.

The first dwelling house on the Terrace was built on the site of the church parking lot by Elijah Hulburt. The home next to this was erected for Philo Ford and later owned by Gilbert Ransom. Nelson Kingsbury, the first agent for the American Mill, built a long house on the East corner.

On the other corner Horace Vinton's house stood. It was later moved to make room for the Rectory. Mr. Vinton conducted a grist mill and saw mill on the site

where the American Mill was built later. When land in the far West was opened for settlement, Mr. Vinton sold the property and left for those distant parts. Harvey King, who owned a number of stage-coaches that accommodated passengers in and out of Rockville, purchased it.

The corner house with its buildings and land, from the Terrace to School Street, was sold for \$3,000. On this parcel of land four large brick schoolhouses, a hotel building, many fine houses and the first St. Bernard's church were erected.

Below the Terrace and above East Main Street, Middle Road ran. Strong supporting walls made of stone blocks from local quarries, laid without cement, still hold back the banks above them. The stone steps of the stairway between the three levels are twelve to fifteen inches apart. Perhaps men in olden days took longer strides than men of today.

Although the troughs used by horses and oxen have vanished the heavy rings to which they were tied still remain implanted in the lower level wall on East Main Street.

THE IRON FOUNDRY

Have you ever noticed the great number of cast iron fences and railings in the center of Rockville? These were made in the Rockville Iron Foundry in the 1800's. This factory was located on East Main Street between the American Mill and the Rockville Leader building at about the spot where Court Street begins. It was owned and operated by Herbert B. Murless in its later years.

It consisted of a little cluster of buildings with a driveway between them. On the street side of this passageway, below street level, was a large pile of scrap iron, a pile of pig iron and one of coke as well as smaller mounds of coal, saltpeter, charcoal, vitrol, lime and clay, all the materials needed to make the grey iron castings for which the factory was noted.

In one of the buildings facing the Hockanum River the pattern and mold makers worked making wooden molds by hand. Heat was provided for this building by large coke-burning salamanders. Hanging from pegs on the walls were patterns for parts of textile making machines in use in Rockville. These patterns were used to make damp clay molds.

of the parts to be cast in molten iron. At the close of each day the men working here would have a great number of these clay molds ready for the next day's pouring.

Another of the buildings housed the thick walled furnace. Into the blazing coke fire within it were dumped scrap iron, pig iron and flux. With huge bellows furnishing a forced draft it attained a great heat, hot enough to melt the iron. The slag was tapped off the top and the molten iron poured from the base of the furnace into ladles and from them into the clay molds. It took all night for it to cool. The next morning the castings were broken from the molds and placed in the tumbling mill.

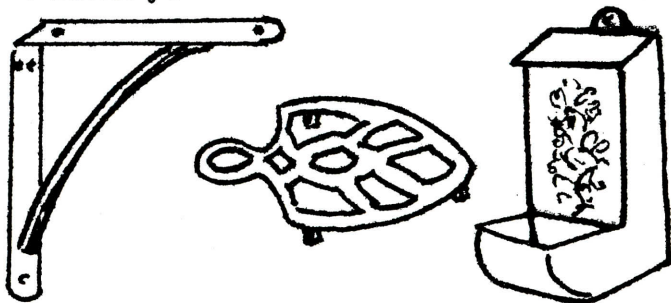
The tumbling mill was a large revolving barrel, powered by an electric motor and filled with rawhide strips. Here, clanging about all day to make their surfaces smooth, were the many pieces of hardware cast the previous day.

This foundry was the principal source of the many machine parts, pulleys, gears and cogs used in the textile industry locally. It also made parts for grindstones, lawn mowers and wood planes as well as

parts for cotton mills in other sections of the country. Hardware items such as vises, hinges, coat hooks, barrel swings, match boxes, clamps, chest handles and shelf brackets were produced in large numbers. Stove, furnace and factory grates were among their large products.

About 1924 Mr. Murless sold the factory and retired. The new owner specialized in making large factory boiler grates for paper mills all over this country, and tripods or legs to support the clothing racks used in retail stores.

Although it has been over fifty years since this foundry closed, to this day the manhole rims and covers that dot the streets of Rockville still bear the imprint "H. B. Murless", mute evidence of his handiwork and the lasting quality of the products of the Rockville Iron Foundry.



PAPER MILL POND SAW MILL

In its earliest days Vernon needed the many saw mills that were built along the banks of its two rivers, but as the building of houses slowed down, and the population gradually changed from agriculture to manufacturing, the need for mills to saw logs into lumber decreased. Finally, the one on Paper Mill Pond alone remained.

During the winter months farmers spent much of their time in their wood lots cutting trees for use as fuel and lumber. Many of the farmers in Tolland, Bolton and Coventry as well as those of Vernon brought their logs to the mill on Paper Mill Pond. It was a common sight to see teams of oxen pulling heavily loaded pungs over the hard packed snow down Grove Street on their way to the mill. It was great fun for the boys of those days to "hook" a ride on a pung while the driver trudged along close by his animals.

At the mill the large, long logs were carefully marked and sawed into boards and slabs. Its last owner, Mr. Bradley, with typical Yankee ingenuity, had an arrangement whereby the saw dust the saw made in cutting the log was blown upward through a long chute, across the

driveway and into the furnace. This fire heated the water in the boiler. The steam thus produced pulled the big saw. Often the farmer paid for the sawing of his logs with boards that had been sawed. Thus, the saw mill soon became a lumber yard too.

A sight long to be remembered was the five pair of oxen Jim Lathrop drove in from Tolland. His best pair were on ahead and his youngest pair nearest the load. The drivers deep-voiced "Gee" and "Haw" brought the youngsters all along his route to their front gates to watch such an unusual sight.

The population of the Town of Vernon remained about the same for many years as young men left the farms for work in the cities. Coal gradually became more widely used as fuel and the demand for wood to burn diminished. Thus the number of loads of logs brought to the mill dwindled until at last the town had little need for such a large, stationary saw mill. The site of the mill on the south side of the pond is now occupied by a varied group of businesses.

VANISHED MARKET STREET

From very early days Market Street ran from 2 East Main Street across Brooklyn Street up the hill to 56 High Street. It served as the business hub of Tolland County until 1966 when Redevelopment obliterated it. This street crossed the Hockanum River at a point where the river cut a deep gorge between huge rocks. A stout key-stone arch bridge supported this stone-paved street and its stone slab sidewalks.

Down the center of the street ran the tracks over which the inter-urban trolley passed on its way to Stafford Springs. On each side of the tracks there was just enough room for a team of horses to pass. In the early 1900's on Saturday nights this street was crowded with shoppers from all the towns around. The teams that came in were tied up all along the lower wall on East Main Street, for it was but a short walk from there to all the stores in Rockville center.

At the south end, at the corner of Market and Brooklyn Streets stood White's Opera House, a huge wooden structure that had once served as a church in Ellington. In its large hall all types of enter-

tainment, including some of the first motion pictures, were shown. The ground floor in the front of the building housed several retail shops.

Across Brooklyn Street the railroad yard was located. The passenger station stood next to the road. Inside were benches for waiting passengers, a pot-bellied stove and a ticket office. The Railway Express Company had its office building next to it and a freight house along the tracks to its rear. Here all the cloth made in the local factories was loaded into railroad cars and shipped to all parts of the country. At the height of the woolen industry as many as six carloads, solidly filled with bolts of the finest wools, left the station each day. As all the mills burned coal to fire their boilers, the sidings were filled with coal cars. The coal was unloaded into large wagons drawn by two horses. In the process some coal was dropped between the tracks. Many a child from homes near the tracks scavenged these pieces for their family.

There was but a single track from Rockville Depot to Vernon Depot, and as there was no turn-

table in the railroad yard the locomotive had to back up to Vernon. Most of the freight cars came in to the station at night with bells ringing and lanterns swinging. During the day a flagman stood by the tracks where they crossed Market Street and halted traffic. This train was famous because it employed the first black conductor in the country.

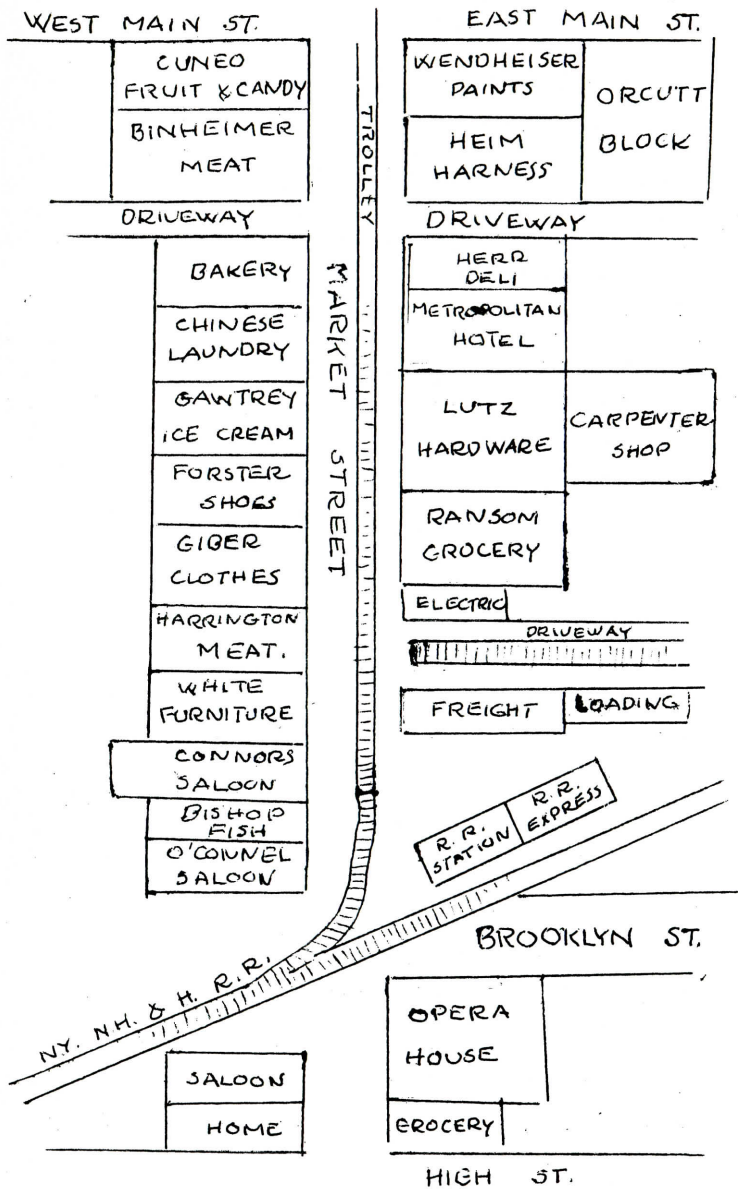
It was about 1914 when Market Street was at the height of its growth. At that time next to the driveway that led to the railroad tracks and yard was an electric shop. Next door Orlando Ransom operated a grocery story that gave away green stamps and delivered orders to the homes in Rockville. Then came a large wooden block once owned by the Robertson family but at that time owned by George W. Lutz. Here he ran a hardware store and a carpenter shop. Under the store the river rushed and turned a huge overshot water wheel that furnished power for the machines in the basement shop. Window frames, sash, doors and interior trim for houses were turned out there. Over the stores were several apartments.

The Metropolitan Hotel and Herr's delicatessen shop were beside the woodworking shop. A driveway into the back yard of the stores on the boardwalk entered beside it. Across the drive the four-story brick Doane's Block stood. In its Market Street level basement Heim's harness shop and Wendheiser's paint and wall paper stores did business.

On the west side of the street on the corner opposite the railroad yard O'Connell had a saloon. This was followed by a row of stores, a fish market, another saloon, a barber shop, a furniture store, a meat market, a clothing store, an ice cream parlor, a Chinese laundry, and a bakery.

A driveway to the rear of the Exchange Block separated a meat market and a fruit and candy store from the row of stores that lined the street.

A rare camaraderie existed among the people who owned and operated the varied stores. Once a year they declared a "Merchant's Day", closed their doors, and with their families went to a nearby resort for a day of fun. They loyally traded with each other and if misfortune struck one all offered assistance. Competition did not come before friendship.



VALLEY FALLS

Near the southern boundary of the Town of Vernon, a picturesque, tumbling stream cascades down from the hills of Bolton, winding its way over boulders and around steep outcroppings of rocks to join the Tankerhoosen River. The area it drains is known as Valley Falls. Hills rise sharply on both sides of this hurrying riverlet, creating a story-book type of valley. This part of Vernon is located on the very edge of the Eastern Highlands of Connecticut where the land drops off quickly from an elevation of several hundred feet to the sandstone valley below which averages only forty feet above sea level.

In Colonial days a busy factory was located on the stream at the point of the greatest drop, for all mills were run by water power at that time. In 1740 Thomas Johns erected a sawmill just above the pond. In 1790 Joseph and Samuel Carver together with Zekiel Olcott of Bolton bought the mill and its water rights and transformed it into an oil mill. Here they pressed linseed oil from the seeds of the flax plant which was grown extensively for its linen fiber. When cotton and wool fabrics made by machine took the place of homespun "linsey-woolsey", the mill was closed. During its last years it was converted into a grist mill and

was operated by Charles Ladd. Its foundation can still be seen amid the undergrowth which has since grown up in the valley.

In 1849 the Hartford, Providence and Fishkill Railroad began to construct a line of tracks from Manchester to Willimantic. Railroads generally followed along the sides of streams but Valley Falls presented a different problem. Box Mountain rose sharply from the plain, hence a shelf or terrace for the tracks had to be carved out of the side of the hill making the stretch from Vernon to Bolton the most expensive part of the operation. To obtain a gradual ascent a huge mound of earth had to be built up. This man-made hill covers the hundred and eight foot tunnel on Tunnel Road. In its day this was a great engineering feat, for all the work was done by hand with pickaxes and shovels and horse or ox drawn carts. Newly arrived immigrants from Ireland worked on this project. The sandstone blocks used in building the tunnel were cut and laid up in the form of thirty keystone arches. The surface of each block was textured with a hammer and chisel.

The first train passed over this route in 1850. It was a very precarious run for stones on the side of the mountain above the tracks were often jarred loose and fell down on

the tracks. The Railroad Company employed a steady track walker to go over this section of track each time a train passed. It was a hard uphill pull for the heavy steam locomotives to get to Bolton Station, then called "Quarryville". At times the train seemed to just crawl along its shelf cut in the side of Box Mountain. Thus, Valley Falls became a "station" for hobos who could easily jump on to freight trains as they toiled along and in this way they got a free ride. Passengers riding the train from Willimantic to Vernon Depot got a thrill for at Bolton the engineer would disengage the engine and let the train coast down through the valley at breakneck speed thoroughly frightening even the most composed of its riders.

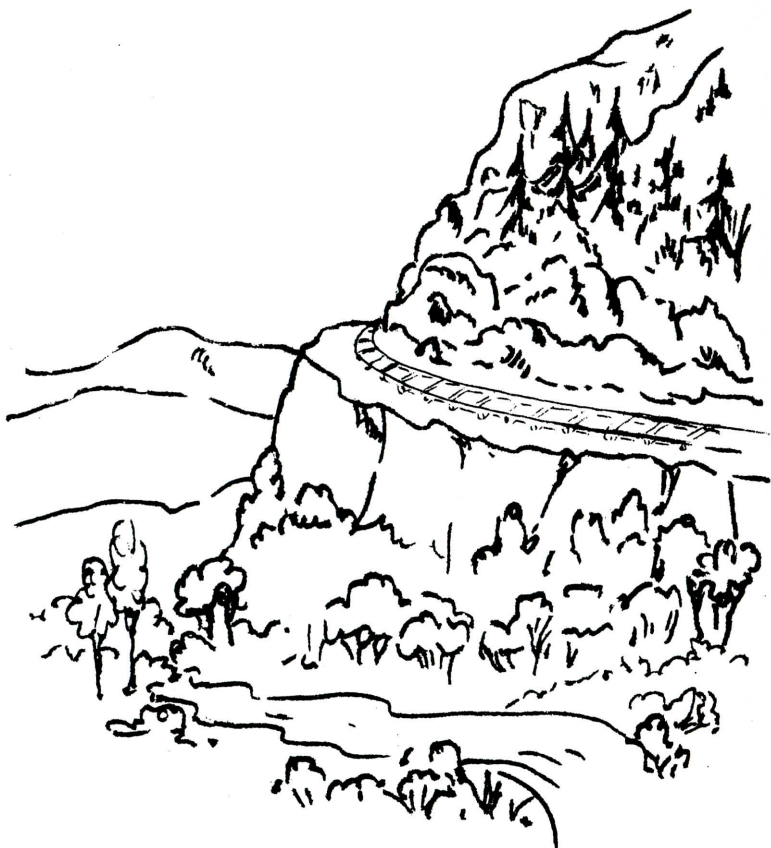
One of the early Colonial homes along Valley Falls Road is located opposite the pond. In the late 1890's it was owned by Count Muncho, a Hungarian nobleman who lived the life of a gentleman farmer there. It was he who built the large, elaborate stable at the crest of the hill to house his fine horses. The interior walls are made of matched boards and its stable accessories are custom made.

The Count, some recall, was a tall, well-groomed man with a neatly trimmed Van Dyke beard, who sat up straight

in the narrow carriage with a seat just wide enough for two, himself and his Great Dane dog. This turnout was drawn by a lovely dappled grey horse. At times he rode his saddle horses along the trails through the woods nearby. The Count was responsible for bringing other Hungarian families to Vernon to work as masons, cooks and caretakers on his estate. Legend has it that he suddenly auctioned off all of his farm tools, sold his property and went to Hollywood where he became a successful movie producer.

Dr. Charles Beach acquired the little Colonial house at this time. It was used for many years as the home of the caretaker for the Beach estate. The stream and Valley Falls pond were also a part of the Beach property. Here the doctor's family fished and swam in summer and had ice cut on the pond in the winter. As the family grew up they built houses on the estate as well as a guest house close by the family mansion with its famous sunken rose garden. Horses, cows, chickens and a large vegetable garden occupied other parts of this estate. Several years ago this property was put up for sale. The town bought the pond and some of the surrounding land for a recreation area.

At this time Mr. and Mrs. Peter Darico obtained the Munchow stables and the Colonial house in the valley. Avid bell collectors, they have the old Springville Mill bell mounted in its cradle on the grounds in front of the stables and a bell from an old steam locomotive that may have echoed through the nearby hills a hundred years ago now stands by the stable door.



OLD EAST CEMETERY

In a clearing in the quiet woodlands on Bamforth Road there has nestled since Colonial days little East Cemetery, surrounded by a stone wall and over-arching trees. According to legend this gravelly site was chosen when a child riding on a load of household belongings as his family made their way from Bolton to Vernon, fell to the ground and was killed. His gravestone may still be seen there.

On this plot with its quaint gravestones are interred twelve of the Vernon patriots who answered the Lexington alarm. Each of these graves is marked.

Those who study gravestone art can identify the work of three of the early stone cutters there. The "Hook and Eye Man", so called because of the odd way in which he made a line from the eyebrows down around the nose, always made the heads round with a serrated chin. The stone of Mrs. Hezekiah King and her two children who died within a week of each other is a good example of his large lettering style. There are six stones done by this cutter dating from 1751 to 1769.



Two stones by Zerubbabel Collins who lived from 1733 to 1797 are also located in East Cemetery. These are some of his early work for they are dated 1767 and 1776. The stone of Mrs. Martha Talcott with modelled head and detailed wings and ornate leaf border, are good examples of his work.



There are several stones in this old cemetery which were done by the Mannings. Josiah and Samuel Manning were brothers. Rockwell and Frederick Manning were sons of Josiah. Their work is indistinguishable from one another. Large wings, curled hair and the three semicircular shapes at the top are all typical of the Mannings work. Most every stone done by the Mannings has an epitaph. Their borders are simple in comparison with Collin's borders. They are dated from 1798 to 1808.



At one time there were over eight hundred stones in this cemetery but of these only four hundred fifty survived time and vandalism.

Mr. Lebbeus Bissell, who owned the land surrounding the cemetery left \$5000 in his will to have the remaining stones straightened. Under the supervision of the Vernon Public Works Department this work was done during the summer of 1974 and a gate added. Now Vernon citizens can once more be proud of this long neglected spot.

JOHN WARBURTON, PIONEER MANUFACTURER

In the little cemetery across the road from the Benjamin Talcott house at the corner of Route 83 and Dobson Road is the tombstone that marks the grave of John Warburton.

John Warburton came to Vernon from the English town of Blackburn, the same town from which Peter Dobson was to come later. He had been a millwright in his home country and came to the new world to establish a mill for the manufacture of stocking yarns and thread. He set about building his factory on the banks of the Tankeroosen River, but his money gave out before he had constructed a dam across the river which was to furnish its power. The farmers nearby had little faith in his ability to make yarn as good as their wives could spin it at home. Hence, when he asked for their help in constructing the dam he received little cooperation. With wheelbarrow, pick and shovel, he tackled the job himself.

When the mill was complete, he and his family lived in part of it. In order to give his wife time away from caring for their baby, he built a large cradle and connected it with a machine of his own invention to keep it rocking. So odd did this

seem to the local folk that they came to see this innovation and some even stayed to learn to spin cotton on Warburton's spinning jenny.

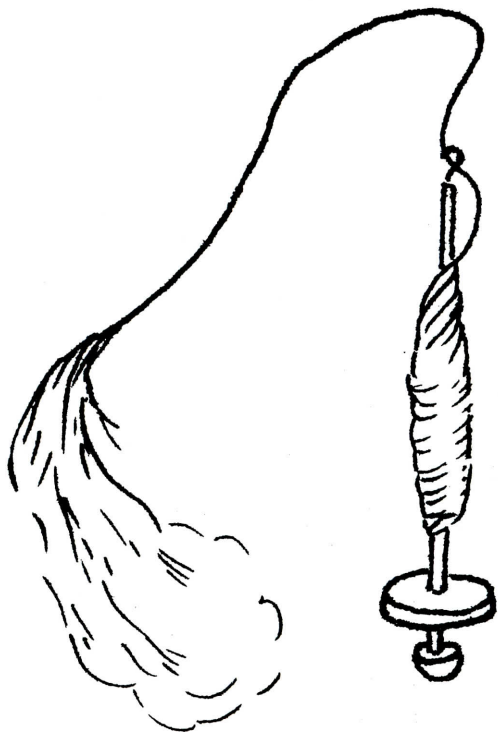
The stocking yarn that Warburton's mill produced was purchased as rapidly as it could be spun. Housewives enjoyed their new freedom from endless hours at their spinning wheels and in the process Warburton became wealthy.

In 1804 he built another shop and installed wool carding machines. This was located a little further down on the river. He sold his two mills in 1809 to Col. Francis McLean, Lebbeus B. Tinker, Irad Fuller and Alexander McLean who operated them for several years.

In 1810 Warburton built a large brick house at the end of the bridge in what is known as Talcottville. It was a solid structure with huge chimneys at the four corners. At first it was used as a dwelling, then an inn, and finally as a mill boarding house. A few years later his son built an impressive house on the opposite bank of the river. It still stands and is in an excellent state of preservation. The so-called "Warburton Inn" was demolished.

John Warburton passed away at the early age of thirty-eight and was laid to rest beside his four-year old daughter and his mother in the Southwest Cemetery. His quaint marker bears the verse:

"O Life, how soon of every
bliss forlorn
We start false joys and urge
the devious race
To all a prey that cheer our
youthful man
Then sinks untimely and
defrauds the chase."



YANKEE PEDDLER, "JIM" FISK

James "Jubilee" Fisk, financier, who with Jay Gould, in attempting to corner the gold market, precipitated the stock market disaster known as "Black Friday", September 24, 1869, was once a regular peddler in Vernon. When Elisha Pember kept the Rockville Hotel during the 1850's, he employed George E. Brown as a stable hand in the hotel barn. Brown, the last driver of the Rockville stage, often told of the days when big Jim Fisk and his retinue stayed at the Hotel.

There was much excitement when Fisk drew up with his large and handsome wagon, its running gear bright and its sides sparkling under fresh varnish. Drawn by four matched bay horses, wearing harness with silver mountings, it had both a driver and a footman. This wagon was in fact a small-sized dry goods store. Fine silks and Paisley shawls from the Orient were his specialties. A Paisley shawl in those days was as much desired as a mink coat is today. Often he would send a man on ahead of the wagon with such a shawl and present it to a beautiful well-known woman in the town so that she might wear it to the envy of all of her friends. Then when he arrived with his wagon he would find many waiting customers.

When the Fisk wagon pulled up in front of a house "Jim" would alight and gallantly address the lady of the house, while the driver would remain with the team and the footman would carry such goods into the dwelling as he would call for from within. It made one feel very proud to have such a fine turnout stop in front and women just couldn't refuse to buy.

Fisk and his partner had two other similar teams and several single wagons peddling about the country. Once a year they would all meet at Rockville for a general good time and stay at the hotel for nearly a week. "Jim" was very generous with the hotel help and when he gave a tip it was not small change but in a bill. Little wonder they all remembered him so kindly.

It was the money Fisk made as a peddler that gave him his start in the stock market. In association with Jay Gould and Daniel Drew he took part in the "Erie War" for control of the Erie Railroad in 1866 and other financial manipulations. As the result in later life he was much despised but in his early days as a peddler he left a good impression on the Rockville townsfolk.

TRAVELING MEAT MARKETS

In 1844 Jabez West, father of Orrin C. West, moved from Colechester to Vernon and in the following year to Rockville, where he was the first butcher in the city. In those days a butcher bought his cattle alive and slaughtered them at night and the next day peddled the meat. Refrigerators were unknown, and Western dressed beef unheard of. Traveling meat markets such as Mr. West's continued to serve the housewives of Rockville until the early 1920's.

The butcher cart was an enclosed wagon drawn by one patient horse. It covered its route regularly two or three times a week. When the cart drew up in front of a house it was usually the children of the family who spied it first and alerted their mother of its presence. In minutes she, too, with shinningly clean platter under her arm and her pocketbook, stood in place in back of the cart. The butcher would unhook two catches and release the tailboard to reveal the heavy chopping block which was attached to it. He then raised the upper portion of the

back of the wagon to form an awning over the block. At once he would reach for a long knife and his sharpening steel and begin whetting it with long, rhythmic strokes, first to one side and then the other. Dressed in a long white, blood-stained frock with straw gauntlets that reached to his elbows, he would slightly lift his hat and wish the gathering "the time of day".

Inside the cart bologna of various types and sizes hung from the roof, knives, saws and a pack of butcher paper rested in the racks along the side walls. On the floor of the cart lay great sides of beef, and in their season, pork and lamb. Under the driver's seat rested a tub of sauerkraut or pickles so that it might be more easily dispensed from the front of the wagon.

When the lady of the house had made known her wants and asked the prices, the butcher drew forth the carcass and wielding the sharp, sharp knife cut off the size piece desired. If he encountered a bone, a meat saw, which resembled a huge hacksaw, was removed from its hook and the bone deftly severed. A slit was cut in the piece of meat to be sold and into this he inserted

the hook on the end of the steel-yard which dangled from the roof and served as a weighing device. After the meat was duly deposited on the platter, the purchaser opened her pocketbook and paid him. He lifted a corner of his long frock and extricated a bag of cash from his trouser pocket. After untying the draw string that secured it he would pour the coins out into his palm and from them select the correct change, retie the string and return the bag to its protected place.

The children who had stood quiet and wide-eyed all during this process were often rewarded. The butcher would take a bologna from its hook and with one deft stroke cut off a diagonal slice for each child in his audience. With the knife replaced he would take a swipe with his fly swatter at an invading fly, close up the rear of his cart, mount the driver's seat and urge his patient horse on to the next house.

In 1910 there were sixteen meat markets in Rockville, most of which delivered their meat in carts such as these.

THE TIN PEDDLER

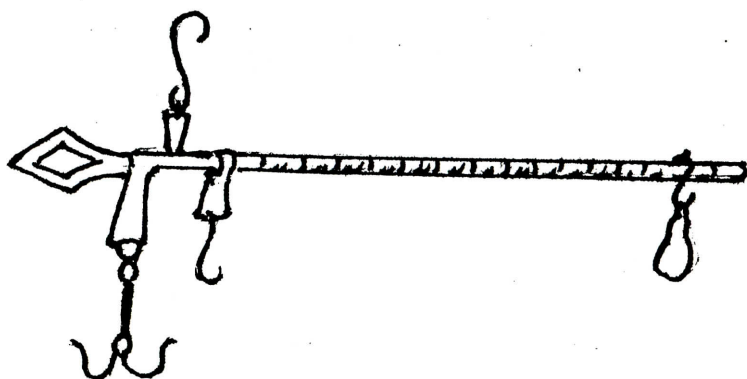
Many of Vernon's residents still remember John Collum, the tin peddler. Each Spring after the house cleaning was completed all rags and worn clothing were carefully sorted and bagged. It was then that the coming of the tin peddler was eagerly awaited.

On some pleasant morning the tall tin peddler's cart, drawn by a thin horse, would pull into the yard. The spry little man would alight from his raised seat at the top of the wagon, procure an iron horse-weight from its depths and clip its strap to the horse's bit. This was hardly necessary for the horse was always most patient.

The tall, box-like wagon had a dash board in front that curved forward over the horse like the one on Santa's sleigh. Its body contained many compartments which opened on both sides. Each had its own door and catch. Inside were pots, pans, brushes, colanders, flour sieves, strainers and a variety of other kitchen wares. Around the top of the cart, along its outer edge were arranged a fence of brooms, mops, corn poppers and carpet beaters. From its bottom edge dangled buckets, pails, kettles and dustpans. It was truly a store on wheels.

After the housewife produced her bags of rags, the peddler would hook them, one at a time, on the end of his steelyard and weigh them. A bag of rags was good for a pie tin, but it took several to purchase a broom or larger item. The bags were then tossed to the top of the load, where they reposed in the hollow behind the fence of brooms. Bargaining over for that season, the horse's weight was lifted, and the wagon was on its way to the next house.

John Collum's route covered not only all of Vernon and Ellington, but Somers and Tolland as well. On a pleasant day his high, red cart could be seen making its leisurely way along East Street returning to his home there heavily laden with the day's gleanings.



THE SCISSORS-TO-GRIND

The tinkling bell of the "Scissors-to-Grind" could be heard a block away. This little man with a big foot-treadle grind-stone strapped to his back rang his bell with vigor as he call out, "Scissors to grind". On hearing his call, the children in the neighborhood ran home to tell their mothers of his arrival. Quickly she gathered together all her dull knives and scissors, broken umbrellas and leaking pots, for here was a jack-of-all-trades who could mend almost anything.

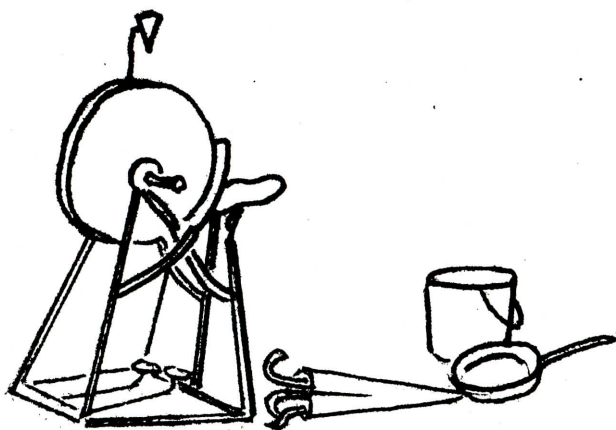
On arriving at the back door of each house he would unstrap his wheel, mop his brow, and survey the collection of broken objects presented to him. From his little bundle of umbrella ribs he would extract one of just the right size to replace the broken one and with needle and thread insert it to make the umbrella as good as new.

After filling the little container that hung above his wheel with water, he would treadle his machine to a busy hum and grind to a fine edge the knives and scissors. The knives were

always very dull from slicing all the bread and meat used by the family in those days before ready-sliced baker's bread and machine sliced meats. Scissors, too, were nicked and sprung from cutting all the cloth used by the family in making clothing, table linens and bedding.

Holes in pots he mended as if by magic as he inserted tiny rivets of copper and hammered them tight against the stand on his wheel.

When the "Scissors-to grind" left, the kitchen cutlery, sewing tools and umbrellas were in fine shape for another season and the workman was richer by the few cents he charged for such necessary services.



VERNON'S CRANBERRY INDUSTRY

Swamp cranberries, so called because of the crane-like curve of the flower bud stem, grew wild in the Town of Vernon in the early days.

Each fall many a family made an outing of a trip to bogs on the town's outskirts to garner enough of these berries for the Thanksgiving feast. The bog on Route 30 was one of the last to be destroyed.

Wild cranberries were cultivated by spreading sand among the plants and providing them with a series of ditches and dams to permit flooding or draining as needed. It was necessary to flood them to control insect pests and always before a frost to protect the fruit. At times they had to be harvested from the flooded bogs by using boats. With large, rake-like scoops men in boats reached over the sides and with an upward sweeping motion raked the cranberries off the plants.

The Maxwell brothers, Francis and William, owned two cultivated cranberry bogs. One was located on Goehring Road in Tolland, and a larger one in Coventry. William Benton Martin was in charge of them. Three or four men were needed to work at the bogs during the growing season.

Each fall before the first killing frost, the berries were picked and stored in sheds on the edge of the bog until enough to fill a farm wagon had been gathered. In horse-drawn wagons they were carried to the Saxony Mill on West Road to a building which has since been torn down. Here they were sorted and picked over by a group of twelve or more girls, who worked at this task only a few weeks in the fall.

Sorting cranberries was light work. The berries rolled down over a slat-like arrangement on a table in front of each girl. She removed the bad berries and twigs as they passed downward into the tray beneath. The perfect berries were then packed in barrels, "headed up", and transported by wagons to the depot in Rockville center. From here they were shipped by train to the markets in New York.

Between 1910 and 1920 these bogs ran out and as the Maxwell family divested themselves of their various enterprises, the bogs were sold. The farmers who purchased them put the land to other uses or let it return to its original wild state--a tangled swamp.

TUCH SCHUH (Cloth Shoe)

A by-product of the woolen industry that flourished in the Town of Vernon during the late 1800's and the early part of this century was the "Tuch Schuh" or cloth shoe.

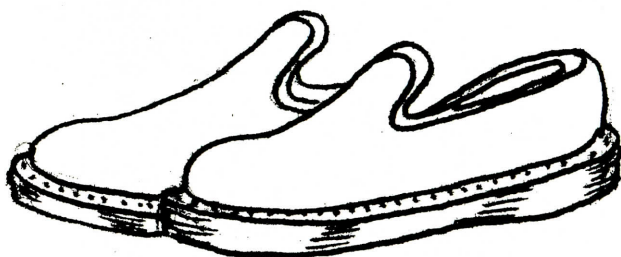
When a new warp was set up on the loom in the woolen mills, the loom fixer or boss weaver wove a six inch strip of cloth to see that the pattern and tension were correct. This small trial piece of material was trimmed from the cut before the cloth was packaged. It was referred to as a "listing". Mr. Hoffman, who lived on Windermere Avenue, was one of the artisans who created many a pair of "Tuch Schuh" from these listings.

Upon a visit to his home to order this type of shoe, one was asked to stand on a piece of wrapping paper and have the outline of each foot carefully traced. This paper became the pattern for a custom-made pair of shoes. The uppers, made of two or three thicknesses of woolen cloth, resembled the loafer type of shoe in use today. The soles, often an inch or more in thickness, consisted of dozens of layers of this same cloth. They were sturdily attached to

the uppers with strong thread sewed on by using a hand sewing awl.

These cloth shoes were very popular with the mill workers, for the mill floors were very oily. Along with store and schoolroom floors they were oiled to help keep the dust down. When the worker arrived home he liked to find his "Tuch Schuh" in the "entry" of his house where he exchanged his oil-soaked shoes for them.

So stout and long-wearing were these cloth shoes made of Hockanum woolens that one pair outlasted several pair of "store bought" slippers.



THE FRESHET OF 1869

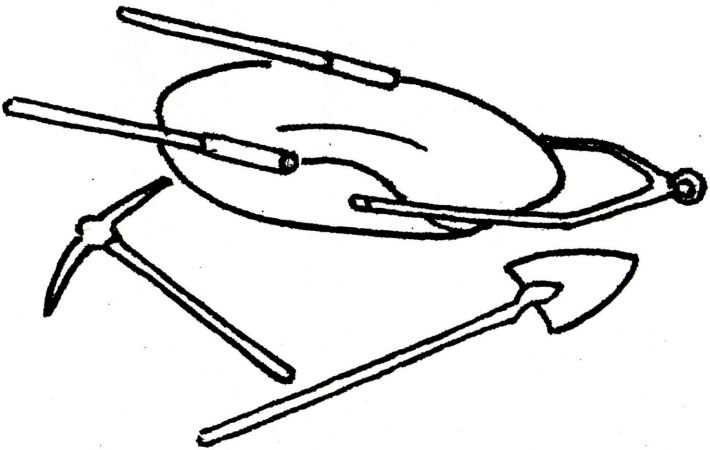
Vernon has had its share of natural disasters. The freshet of 1869 is the one most often mentioned. According to Cole's History of Tolland County, Vernon suffered incalculable damage in it.

The rain began on Sunday, October 3 and continued at intervals until Monday morning, at which time it commenced to pour in torrents and continued for about twelve hours. Lakes, ponds and streams filled up rapidly. Soon they over-flowed their banks and began sweeping down bridges and carrying away embankments and any moveable property along their banks. Railroad tracks were undermined to such an extent that trains could not run for several days. The mill at Talcottville was partially destroyed. Mills in the southern part of Rockville were severely damaged.

"Highways suffered greatly. Paulk Hill on the road to Tolland became simply a succession of gulches from three to ten feet deep for more than a quarter of a mile." On Tolland Avenue an impassable gulf twenty to thirty feet wide extended across the road.

As roads in those days were made of gravel brought from drumlin hills left by prehistoric glaciers, repairing them was a gigantic task. With no mechanical equipment and only horses, oxen and hand tools it took months to get them passable again.

At that time the Snipsic Lake dam was a natural one, hence it held while the man-made dams of all the mill ponds along the Hock-anum River let go and flooded the factories below them. It is little wonder that the dread of a flood still hangs over Rockville.



THE YELLOW DAY SEPTEMBER 7, 1881

On Tuesday morning, September 7, 1881 the sun rose like a ball of fire. A smoky fog covered all the town. As the sun ascended higher a disagreeable bright reddish yellow light was everywhere. People complained of not being able to distinguish colors. The grass seemed to have a bluish tone.

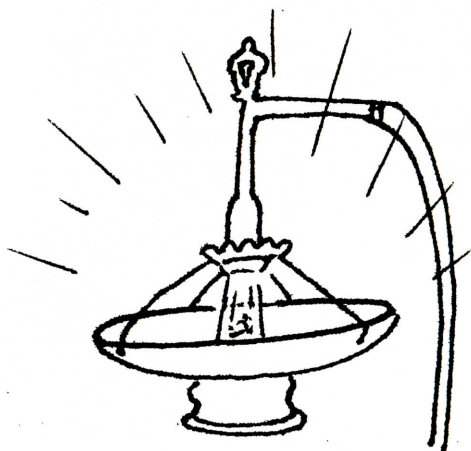
Lamps were lit in homes and stores. The gas lights in the mills hardly helped at all for they looked like weak white electric lights. It was with great difficulty that the workers carried on their tasks. Even the chickens went back to their roosts, perhaps thinking that they had made a mistake and got up too early.

The acrid smell in the air made eyes and noses smart. Farmers cutting tobacco complained that it would not wilt so great was the moisture content of the air. Many were scared that this might be the end of the world.

During the afternoon it gradually wore away without explanation. In retrospect it seems to have been

what we now know as "air polution". An air inversion probably kept the fumes of a large forest fire far to the north blanketed close to the earth.

This day left a profound impression on the residents of Vernon who experienced it. For a very long time events were referred to as having happened "before or after the Yellow Day".



NUTTING

Soon after the first hard freeze in the Fall, as the yellow leaves of the nut trees turned brown and began to drift earthward, the nutting season began.

All Summer long on walks and hikes the boys of the community would make mental notes of where nut trees grew and which trees seemed to be abundantly blessed with fruit. Sometimes a single tree stood by itself along the roadside, while in other places small groves of a dozen or more stood in a copse along the edge of a field. The shagbark hickory was most easily identified by its shaggy, rough bark. Its nuts were much sought after for they were easy to crack and just the thought of a hickory nut cake made one's mouth water. Nuts from the butternut tree were encased in a greenish brown husk. The juice from this hull left a dark brown stain on the hands of those who gathered them. Although they were collected for their sweet kernels they were much harder to crack, but by placing them in a vice with the pointed end up a hammer blow opened them.

There were many varieties of nuts available for the taking but

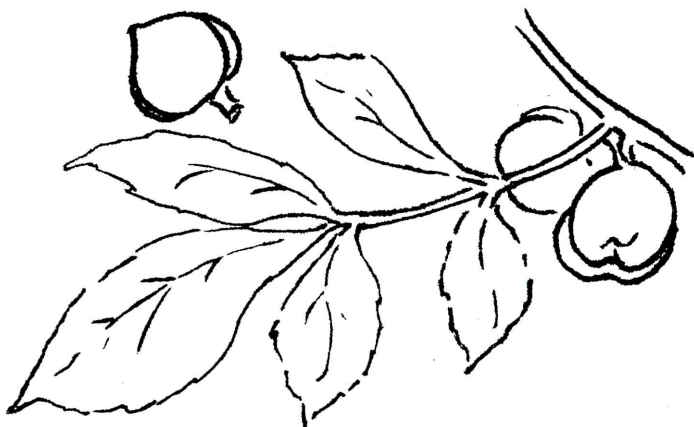
chestnuts were the favorite of all. Enclosed in a burr of sharp green prickles nearly one-half inch long, they were unobtainable until a heavy frost opened them. Then each individual nut, lined with red fuzz, fell to the ground.

At nutting time boys carried folded salt bags in their pockets just to hold their finds. Salt in those days came in fine textured cloth bags just the right size to hold treasures. The technique of gathering nuts was very simple. A group of boys made their collections together. The smallest boy was sent to climb to the highest branches of the tree, those that would not support the weight of a larger boy. The others climbed to the lower branches and shook them by jumping up and down on them or by beating the ends where the nuts clung with a stick. Then all would descend and pick up the fallen nuts from the ground.

Hickory nuts were stored in the attic and opened as they were needed. Chestnuts, on the other hand, were eaten soon after gathering. Placed on the hot top of a black kitchen range they popped off as their skins burst revealing the sweet white pulp within. Chestnuts boiled in

hot water provided the stuffing for many a Thanksgiving turkey.

The deadly chestnut bark disease killed the stately chestnut trees and man with his bulldozers is doing the same to the once plentiful hickory trees. Nutting has become but a memory.



BERRY PICKING

Gathering berries and preserving them for winter use was a happy task participated in by the whole family in the days before tin canned and frozen foods.

The season began in July with the picking of the low-bush blue berries which grew in the pastures on the hillsides. These were large berries with a frosty bloom and a sweet flavor. The high-bush berries ripened later. They grew in thickets and shaded, swampy pastures and were much easier to pick.

Shortly after sunrise on a pleasant day whole families, armed with empty ten-quart pails and smaller pails in which lard had been purchased, made the long trek from the town to farms near Snipsic Lake or New England Hill. There they spent the day in the berry patches. Some carefully plucked each berry, one by one, into their "picking pail", while others, less meticulous, brought along an umbrella and placed it open under a bush, then beat the berries off into it with a stick. These required much picking over before using.

Red raspberries which grew along road sides and fences were not plentiful but made a choice jam, as did the more prolific black cap raspberries. As the summer drew nearer its close, huckleberries and elderberries were garnered for pies and jam.

Many were the hazards of the berry picker. At times contented **cows** finding their pastures invaded by pickers, charged them with the ire of a tormented bull. Snakes taking a midday nap in the branches of a tall berry bush resented being disturbed, retreated toward rather than away from the startled picker. Mosquitoes, bees, flies and gnats followed them. Nettles, poison ivy and poison oak had to be given wide clearance. As the largest berries often grew in swamps, wet feet were the price to be paid for capturing these beauties.

As the sun set the berry pickers trudged homeward laden with pails heavy with berries. If the expedition brought home more than could be used immediately, the surplus was prepared for winter use. This was a long process. First they had to be picked over. Then they were boiled and placed boiling hot into hot jars and sealed. The pies they made had no rivals.

CIDER MAKING

As soon as the early apples were ripe cider making in Vernon got underway. The windfall apples were raked together in a pile and packed into burlap bags and loaded into a farm wagon for their journey to the cider mill.

Some householders brought their apples to the Tucker Mill just over the line on Vernon Street, others to the Crandall Cider Mill in Tolland where two cents a gallon was the standard price. However the majority of the people who lived in Rockville patronized the Larch Mill on Windemere Avenue.

Customers approached the mill along the Larch driveway. Here the empty kegs and barrels were removed from the load, and the wagon, or truck, its driver and apples were weighed on the scale at the entrance. The load was then driven back to the mill and the apples unloaded into the apple bin. The driver then returned to the scale and had his empty vehicle weighed. The barrels and kegs were then brought back to the mill to be filled with cider.

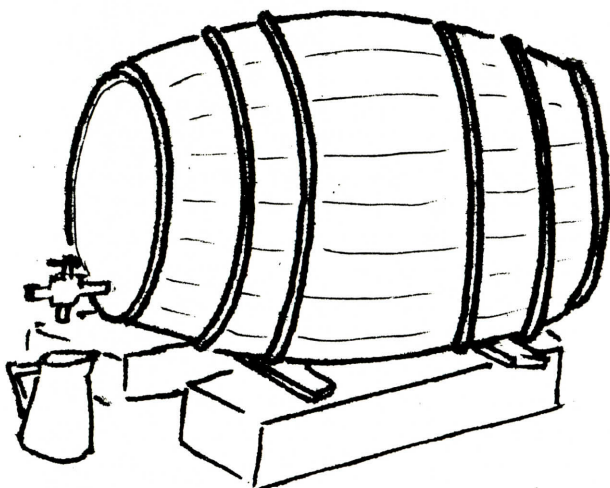
Inside the mill a wooden hand press was operated all day long

during the fall months. A full season generally ran from October first to Christmas. Apples from the bin were first ground into a pulp by a grinder. They were then placed on a large piece of burlap directly under the press. All the corners of the burlap were folded over the mass to make a "cheese". Another piece of burlap was placed over this, more ground apples placed on it, edges folded over to make another "cheese". This process was repeated until ten or twelve "cheeses" were stacked on the bed of the press. The screw of the press was then tightened and the juice flowed downward from all sides into a trough below and out into the underground cider vat. This vat was rigged up with a wooden hand pump.

For every sixty pounds of apples Mr. Larch pumped three or four gallons of cider into the receptacles the customer had brought. The person who brought the apples, hence, did not get the juice from his own, but that which was in the vat from the previous pressing. A "fussy" customer could by waiting until the last pressing of the day, get the liquid extracted from his own apples. The pulp left after the

pressing was called "pumice". It was used by farmers as a tonic for their cattle.

Cider fresh from the press, provided an enjoyable drink for the whole family. Most often, however, it was allowed to ferment with molasses or sugar added. When the fermentation was over the bung was driven into the barrel and it was ready to use as "hard" cider until it gradually turned into vinegar. According to the Old Farmer's Almanac, cider was "the" drink in olden days as many a man found it better for his constitution and his pocket than West Indian spirits.



EXCURSIONS TO PINEY RIDGE

Soon after the Warehouse Point trolley was put into operation in 1906, an amusement park at Piney Ridge was opened. Sundays and holidays it was well patronized by Rockville residents. Families boarded the trolley at the terminus (Center Park) in the center of town.

As the trolley coasted down Union Street it picked up speed. At the corner of Union and West Streets it made a sharp right turn and headed north for Ellington along Route 83. It added passengers at the many marked stations on its way. At Ellington's East Side Station it made a sharp left turn and coasted down the incline to the center of Ellington. From there it went up over Sand Hill and on through Sadds Mills to Melrose. At Grant's Corners it went up over a high trestle to cross the New Haven Railroad tracks. Another turn to the left brought it down hill and across Highway #6, and then to Balf's Corner in Warehouse Point. There transfers were issued to those who were bound for Springfield. The seats in the trolley were reversed and it headed back to Rockville.

Among the trees at Piney Ridge stood a large pavillion managed by the trolley company. In a large hall roller skates were rented for use on its smooth dance floor. A well-stocked refreshment stand sold soda and candy. At the far end of the grove were five or six high slides called the "bumpty--bumps". The slider would sit on the top of the long slide and coast down on its shiny surface to land in a pile of sawdust at the bottom, only to climb up again and repeat the thrill.

Close at hand stood a merry-go-round. This required a ticket for a ride but catching the golden ring gave one a free ride. A smaller, foot-propelled merry-go-round was free.

Picnic tables were distributed among the pines. Benches surrounded the band stand where bands, famous in this area, gave regular concerts. In the evening movies were shown on a screen strung between two trees. Many a Sunday School picnic and club outing was held in this now abandoned but not forgotten amusement park.

SKATING AT THE "SNIP"

After a week of freezing weather the word was spread that the ice at Snipsic Lake was safe for skating. Then, on any clear, moonlight night a steady stream of skaters with their skates over their shoulders could be seen toiling up the hills making their way to the lake. When they arrived at the "lower landing", near the dam, they would sit on a log at the lake's edge and clamp or buckle on their skates for there were no shoe skates in those days at the turn of the century. After a long day's work in the factories this was recreation for Rockville's young people.

Couples or small groups would strike out for the "head" of the lake along four miles of glistening, dark ice. It was quite a long pull to skate against the wind. It was also dangerous as fishermen's holes and large ice cracks that opened with deep booms, had to be avoided as did the open water where ice had recently been harvested.

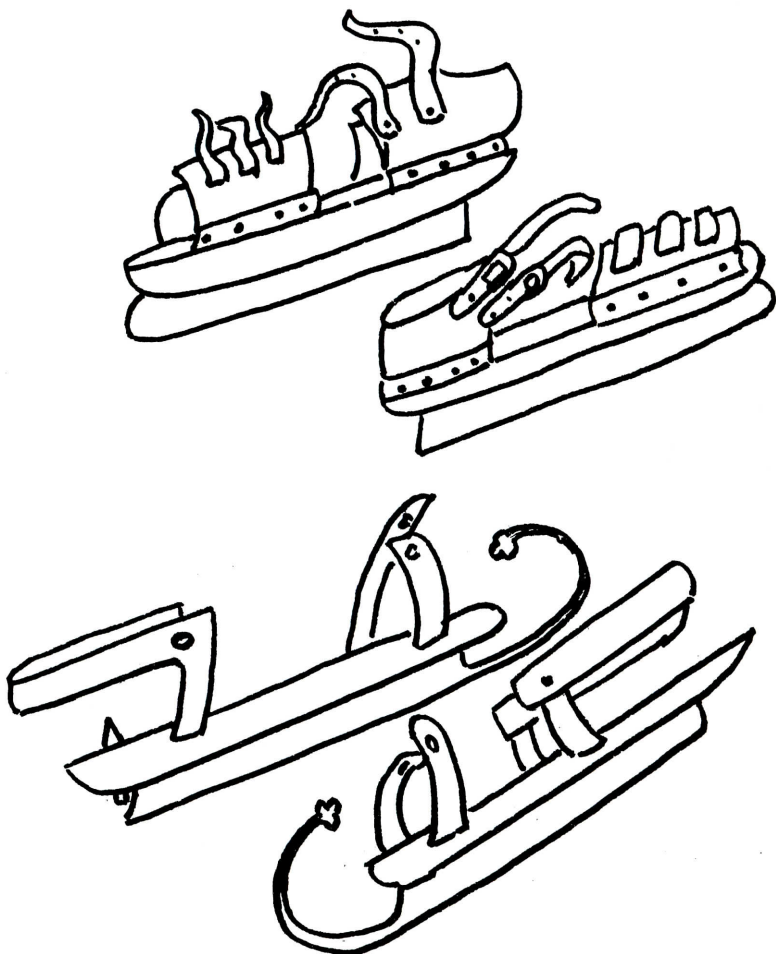
Once their destination had been reached they warmed themselves at a bonfire some earlier arrivals had kindled with the wood that had been washed up on the lake's shore.

The skates they wore were often makeshifts handed down from eldest to the youngest member of the family. Men's skates were attached to the sole of regular shoes or "high cuts" and tightened on by the use of a key. A few had folding skates whose blades folded in the center so that they might be carried in the pocket. Some among those early skaters were experts. These figure skaters, as they were called, wore skates that had only about an inch clearance from the ice. The front end turned up in a graceful curve and extended out beyond the length of the shoe. They, too, were attached with straps and buckles. "Figure Eights" were a specialty.

The girls of those far-away days wore long woolen skirts that extended down to "shoe tops" and high laced shoes. Their skates fastened with clamps at the sides of the toe of the shoe and with a strap and buckle at the heel. They were at best rather insecure and accounted for many a tumble.

The trip down the lake was easier, for opening the coat and spreading the arms wide it acted as a sail and the north wind literally blew them along. Back at the dam near where the pump-

house now stands, they warmed themselves at a bonfire there and wended their way back to their homes along the stream. With lungs filled with fresh air they slept deep and fast for they had to be at work in the mills at six-thirty in the morning.



CUTTING ICE

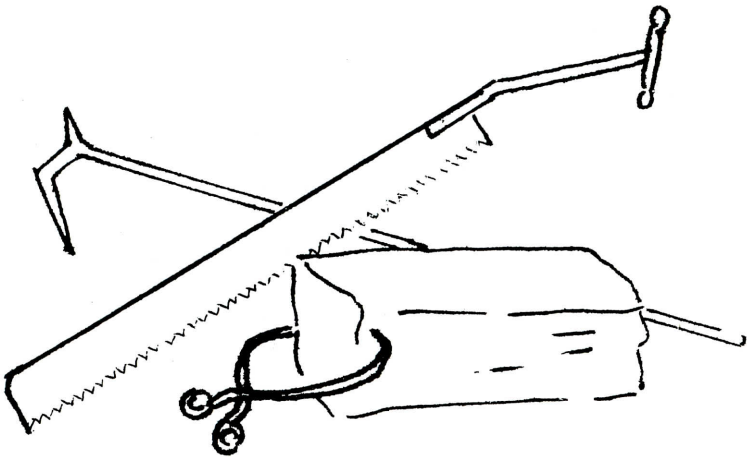
Before the days of mechanical refrigeration, natural ice was used to keep food cool. Each winter most of the ice used in the Town of Vernon was harvested at the "Snip". On either side of the lake, near the lower landing were located two ice houses. One was owned by Orren West and later by Alfred Ludwig. The other belonged to Frank Willis and later by Howard West. These were huge sheds, about three stories tall, in which cakes of ice were piled.

As soon as the ice was ten to twelve inches thick the cutting began. Work had to be done rapidly before a thaw set in. Then, too, there were times in winters past when the ice was too thick to cut. The saws were not long enough to reach down to the water. Rare indeed was the season when the ice did not reach a thickness right for cutting. The operation began by marking the ice with a marker drawn by a horse. A long, hand cross-cut saw was then used to cut the blocks of ice along the scored lines. With long pikes these large cakes were prodded along the channel cut in the ice, to the conveyor and hoist that pulled them into the ice house. Men

inside the house piled the cakes in layers and spread hay or sawdust between the layers.

Cutting ice was a hard and a dangerous task. Sometimes horses were lost under the ice when they made a misstep during the marking. Men had to be strong and hardy to work in the face of the cold north wind that swept across the lake. For the skaters, the open spaces in the lake where the cakes of ice had been removed, were always a hazard.

Natural ice, being of such a great density, melted more slowly than manufactured ice. The ice in these ice houses kept through the following summer and some until ice was harvested again.



CHAUTAUQUA: CULTURE IN A CAPSULE

Each July during the late teens and early twenties Chautauqua came to Vernon. On the lot on Park Street where the Sykes School now stands a large, two-pole circus tent was erected and surrounded by a high canvas fence. The tent, equipped with a stage and dressing rooms at one end, seated several hundred people on folding wooden chairs. Here culture reigned, twice a day for six inspiring days.

Mornings were set aside for the children. Each day they met with leaders who taught them games, dances, songs and plays. Thus they prepared them for their part in the "Children's Night Pageant" which took place at the end of the week. Their one dollar ticket also allowed them to attend all afternoon and evening performances. This was a real bargain even in those days.

The two dollar and a half adult ticket entitled the purchaser to attend all afternoon and evening sessions for a whole week. One year the program advertized nine lectures, twelve musical concerts, an operetta, a play, the children's pageant, a juggler and a cartoonist. Well-trained stock companies brought the most popular plays of the day,

such as, "It Pays to Advertize", "The Fortune Hunter", "The Old Homestead" and "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm". "The Bohemian Girl", "Robin Hood", "Pinafore" and "The Mikado" were among the operettas presented. The world famous lecture "Acres of Diamonds" and the poet, Edmund Vance Cook, reading his poems were memorable programs.

The performers started out on their circuit from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania and made one night stands all through the eastern part of United States. They came to Rockville by train, stayed overnight at the Rockville Hotel, next door to the Chautauqua lot, and were off early in the morning for the next stop as a new set of entertainers arrived. All programs went according the schedule until one day a violent thunderstorm blew the tent down. The show went on as usual that evening but in the Town Hall.

To the culture-hungry citizenry of those pre-radio days, Chautauqua filled a vital need by introducing them to the magic world of entertainment.

CHRISTMAS IN ROCKVILLE LONG AGO

Since Rockville's beginning, Christmas was always observed. Until about 1840, the population was composed almost entirely of people from England and descendants of the Colonists. Their Christmas celebration was religious in spirit as it was in origin. After the coming of immigrants from Germany, followed by the Irish, Hungarian and Polish, the celebration took on some of the customs brought by them from their mother country.

Preparations for the Christmas feast were begun shortly after Thanksgiving. Nuts which had been gathered from the many trees that grew in the town were gathered. These had to be cracked by the children in the family and the meats removed with a pick for use in Christmas goodies. Gingerbread men, cookies, stollen and Christmas bread were baked well in advance and carefully wrapped so that their flavor would ripen.

In those days there were few stores in which to buy gifts and even fewer people with money to buy them. The most desirable gifts were made by hand. The little girls in the family would expect a doll. If it were a new one the mother still had to make the clothes for it. Often last year's

doll was refurbished with a new wig and wardrobe. The mother, sewing in secret by the light of a kerosene lamp, after the children were in bed, produced dolls that were a labor of love and often a work of art.

The father, also working to keep his handiwork secret, constructed a doll house, furniture, a pig-sticker sled or wagon for his little boys.

About a fortnight before the big day the family treked out to their woodlot to gather greens. Princess pine and ground pine were plentiful. In the evenings that followed they fashioned greens into wreaths for every window in the house that faced the street as well as garlands for the graves of their dear ones in the cemetery. A rose bowl was filled with mosses, berries and wintergreen for the parlor table.

Another trip to the woods, just a few days before Christmas produced a Christmas tree. It was as tall as the high ceiling of the room, and as full-branched a one as could be found. The tree was set up in the "front room" after the children had gone to bed. Strings of popcorn, tinsel and ornaments rested on its branches. Small tin candle holders were clipped on at the ends of the limbs and small candles inserted in them. It was

often after midnight before each gift was in place.

Before dawn the little folks tiptoed down the stairs and peaked in at the wonders Santa had brought. While they examined the contents of the stockings they had hung on the mantel the night before, the father produced a match and lighted the tiny candles on the tree. The presents under the tree were tried on, fondled or tasted. As dawn came, the candles were blown out, breakfast eaten and the children dashed out of doors to try their new sleds or mittens while mother and father got ready for church. Some families went to church on Christmas eve while others went on Christmas morning.

Christmas dinner was truly a feast with plum pudding, stuffed fowl, real oranges and ribbon candy. The afternoon was reserved for visiting. In the evening the tree was lighted once more and when the candles burned down they were extinguished and the holders removed to be used again another year.

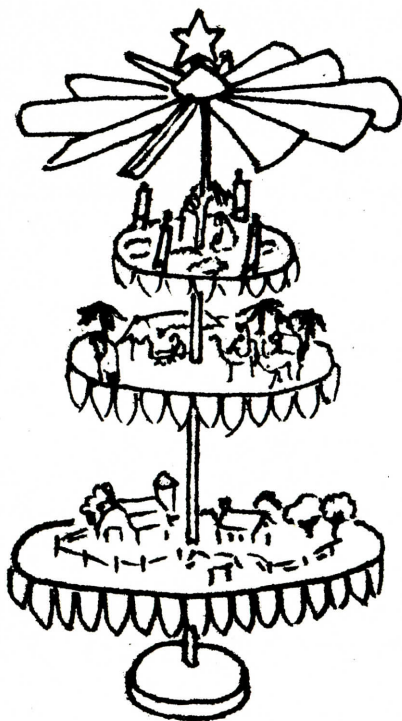
In some German households the father had another task for it was he who set up the Christmas Pyramid. It consisted of three or four large disks of wood arranged in progression

of size on a broom stick set in a base. At the top of the pyramid a metal disk shaped like a propeller was made to rotate the whole structure by the heat that rose from the candles that were set on the top circle just beneath it. The lower disk had figures of animals and buildings arranged like a farm on it. On the one above little figures of shepherds and sheep were placed about a manger scene. The other shelves sometimes held skating scenes or knights on horseback.

Many and varied were the holiday decorations used by other families. One house had its "Hohenzollern" which all the neighbors visited regularly. One whole corner of a room was built up to form a mountain, covered with painted paper mache to represent rocks, cliffs, caves and fields. The whole was surmounted by a medieval castle complete with draw-bridge and moat. Water flowing through a hose attached to the kitchen faucet filled the moat and then cascaded down to make a water fall. This in turn set the water wheel of a little mill along the stream in motion. The water fell still further down the slope to make a small pond on which ducks and geese floated. A tiny farm house with its barns, a garden and a farm family gathered about a wee Christmas tree were grouped at the pond's edge.

Higher up on the mountain, in a grotto, posed the Holy Family. Knights on horseback rode the trail down to the valley "to rob the poor farmer" as this neighbor often explained. The water from the pond returned to the sink via another well concealed hose. The motion and soothing sound created by the flowing water cast a spell of mystery over all who visited it.

Christmas in days gone by was not only a day of giving but a day of sharing.



WHERE THEIR NAMES ORIGINATED

- FOX HILL:** According to legend foxes had their dens at the crest of the hill. They could be seen from the village below leaving their dens at twilight.
- STICKNEY HILL:** The Stickney family built their home overlooking the village.
- LAFAYETTE PARK:** When Lafayette visited America in 1824 he had breakfast in King's Hotel opposite the park.
- COGSWELL FOUNTAIN:** Dr. Cogswell, an early dentist, gave the fountain to the Town of Vernon.
- KOSCIUSZKO CLUB:** Tadeusz Kosciuszko was a Polish patriot who fought in the American Revolution.
- FAIR GROUNDS:** An Agricultural Society held a large fair here on Hyde Avenue each year.
- PAPER MILL POND:** A paper mill was located on the banks of this pond during Colonial days.
- WALKER RESERVOIR:** Frederick Walker operated a sawmill just below the dam here.

LOTTIE FISK MEMORIAL BUILDING:

Mrs. Lottie Roberts Fisk was the wife of John E. Fisk, Judge of the City Court for many years.

TURN HALL: The German Turn Verein, an athletic society, built this hall.

FERGUSON MEDICAL BUILDING: Dr. Roy Ferguson, a general practitioner in Rockville for many years, had his home and office at this spot.

BROOKLYN STREET: As seen from the valley, it resembled the hills of Brooklyn, New York.

REGAN ROAD: This was a part of the J. J. Regan farm.

PILLSBURY HILL: Dr. Pillsbury owned a fruit farm here.

SAXONY MILL: Workers in this mill came from Saxony, Germany.

LINCK'S HALL: Built and owned by Ernest Linck, this hall was used by many different organizations.

MCLEAN HILL: Colonial Francis McLean was a mill owner.

HAMMOND STREET: The Hammond family were manufacturers of woollens.

HALE STREET: David Hale owned a large farm which ran from the Hockanum River to South Street, including the land on which Grove Hill Cemetery is located.

REED STREET: Loren Reed owned the land from Grove Street to South Street.

LAWRENCE STREET: Lawrence Young built houses along Lawrence Street.

GRANT STREET: Samuel Grant was Rockville's first settler.

TALCOTT AVENUE: The Talcott farm contained much of the land in the northwest corner of Rockville including Talcott Park.

KELLY ROAD: The Kelly family owned the land on both sides of the road.

PITKIN STREET: The Pitkin family farm was located here.

WINDERMERE: Immigrants from Windermere in England settled in this section of Vernon.

