



Storybooks Through the Ages Historical Landmark- History Worksheet

Courtesy of the Torrington Historical Society

Christmas Village

Christmas Village was the brainchild of Carl Bozenski, Torrington's first Park and Recreation Dept director. Each December since 1948, Alvord Playground has been transformed into a magical Christmas wonderland complete with Santa Claus, elves and reindeer. To this day, Christmas Village remains as it was envisioned, a non-commercial enterprise free to all.

Coe Memorial Park

Coe Memorial Park, which straddles South Main and Litchfield Streets, stands on the former site of the Coe family residence. Lyman Coe, owner of the Coe Brass Company, and his wife Eliza lived on this property for over 40 years. In 1906, after the death of their parents, the children of Lyman and Eliza offered the town of Torrington this property. The children wanted to establish an appropriate and lasting memorial to their parents "who loved Torrington and its people." This gift, which established Torrington's first municipal park, stipulated that the land was to be "held and used for park purposes only". According to the terms of the gift, the town was required to remove the Coe family residence and outbuildings. Torrington accepted the gift and hired Thomas R. McClunie, a Hartford landscape architect, to create the park. The park, which opened to the public in 1908, has since been enlarged with the addition of several acres to the south and west. It also contains several war memorials.

Conley Inn / Yankee Pedlar Inn

Frank Conley was a hotel keeper in Philadelphia when, in the late 19th century, he met a group of men from Torrington. The group recognized the need for a first-class hotel in Torrington and convinced Conley to relocate to the town. In 1891, Frank and his wife Alice opened The Conley Inn at the corner of Main Street and Maiden Lane. The new hotel housed 52 rooms and was billed as 'equal to any in Connecticut'. In 1918, the Torrington Company purchased the inn and two years later, added a three story addition which served as a boarding house for female employees. Ownership of the inn changed through the years but many remember the Rubens brothers, who operated the hotel from 1948 to 1987. They changed the name of the hotel to the Yankee Pedlar Inn.

Fuessenich Park

Fuessenich Park, originally known as League Park, was an early baseball field in Torrington located on private property. In an effort to keep the land from being sold and developed, Frederick Fuessenich purchased the property in 1912. Six years later, on his 70th birthday, he donated the park to the town in memory of his wife, Elizabeth Blake Fuessenich. At the time of the gift, Fuessenich stated "*while it is offered to all the people of this town for their use it is intended nevertheless more particularly for the children.*"

John Brown Birthplace

Noted abolitionist John Brown was born in this West Torrington house on May 9, 1800. The Brown family moved to Ohio in 1805 and over the next century, the house was occupied by several families. However, it was John Brown's association with the home that transformed it to an historical site. Interest in Brown and his birthplace led to the eventual restoration of the house in 1901. Although tragically destroyed by fire in 1918, the birthplace remains a site of important historic significance. It is listed on the African-American Freedom Trail and is also a Connecticut State Archaeological Preserve. Today, the site is owned by the Torrington Historical Society.

Six of the earliest industries in Torrington were: the woolen mill (later Warrenton Woolen Mill), Coe Brass Company, Excelsior Needle (later Torrington Company), Union Hardware Company, Turner & Seymour and Hendey Machine Company.

Warrenton Woolen Mill

The beginnings of woolen manufacture in Torrington date to 1813 when the first woolen mill was built along lower Water Street. The mill was started by the Wolcott family and soon afterwards, the downtown area came to be known as 'Wolcottville', a name which was in use for over a century. In 1845, another woolen company, the Union Manufacturing Company, was established on Water Street. This firm was succeeded by Warrenton Woolen Mill in 1894. The Warrenton Woolen Mill soon built a new factory complex on North Main Street but in 1982, the company ceased operation. Today, the Warrenton Woolen Mill buildings are condominium units. These structures are a fine example of historic buildings that have been repurposed for a new use.

Coe Brass Company

The Coe Brass Company, established in 1834, once occupied an expansive piece of property on the current site of the Torrington Commons (Stop & Shop plaza). Initially, the product line focused on the manufacture of brass kettles and other wares made by the battery process. In 1863 the business was purchased by Lyman Coe, son of the original owner, who transformed it into one of the most successful brass companies in the country. The company manufactured sheet brass, wire, tubing, and other items. Eventually Coe Brass became a division of American Brass Company and later, a division of Anaconda Brass. In 1961, after 127 years of brass manufacture, Anaconda closed the Torrington Brass Mill. The Coe Brass Company office building still stands; it is the headquarters of Susan B. Anthony.

The Torrington Company

The Torrington Company's beginnings date to 1866 when the Excelsior Needle Company, a maker of sewing machine needles, was established in Torrington. In 1898, Excelsior Needle became a division of the newly incorporated Torrington Company. The company's product was diverse and included bearings and needles. The Torrington Company was purchased by the Timken Corporation in 2003 and in 2006, the Torrington offices ceased operations.

Turner and Seymour Company

The beginnings of the Turner and Seymour Company in Torrington date to 1864, when a Waterbury company moved to this town. The firm operated under several names until in 1874, it was incorporated as the Turner & Seymour Manufacturing Company. The company was first located on Water Street but in the 1890s was forced to relocate to South Main Street after a fire destroyed their complex. T&S manufactured a variety of products including hooks and eyes, curtain hardware, upholstery tacks, window chain and a popular line of kitchen utensils.

Union Hardware Company

Union Hardware was established in 1864, primarily for the manufacture of ice skates. Although the company later produced a wide variety of items, the skate line remained its most popular. In fact, for decades the company was locally referred to as "the skate shop". By the mid 20th century, Union Hardware was the world's largest manufacturer of roller skates and ice skates. In 1960s, Union Hardware became a division of Brunswick, a maker of sporting goods.

Hendey Machine Company

Brothers Henry and Arthur Hendey started the Hendey Machine Company in 1870 for the manufacture of precision machine tools. The lathes, shapes, and milling machines that were produced at Hendey were highly sought after and were sold to companies throughout the world. By the late 19th century, Hendey had outgrown their wooden factory buildings and built a new, modern, brick complex on Summer Street, a complex that continued to grow. The company closed its doors in 1954.

Naugatuck River / Flood of 1955

The Naugatuck River has played an important part in the history of Torrington, first shaping the landscape and later, but also as a source of food for Native Americans and later settlers. The Naugatuck River was also used for another purpose that played a major role in Torrington's history: waterpower. A main waterwheel, connected to equipment inside a factory, allowed machines to operate and products to be made. This use of waterpower led to the establishment of many industries in Torrington. Job opportunities in the factories attracted many people including countless immigrants who have made, and continue to make, Torrington their home.

However, the Naugatuck River had a history of flooding. The flood of 1955, one of Connecticut's worst disasters, occurred in August of that year after two hurricanes deposited record amounts of rainfall and caused catastrophic flooding. In Torrington, seven people were killed, the downtown was severely damaged, and property damage was in excess of \$13,000,000. Flood control projects began after the waters receded. Old dams were removed, the river was widened and new flood control dams were constructed north of the center.

North School (Torrington Police Department)

The North School was completed in 1904. This was one of several schools to be built in the early 20th century as Torrington's population dramatically increased, due to large numbers of immigrants who settled in Torrington. The new, larger brick North School replaced an older wooden schoolhouse which was dismantled. The school removed in use until 1986, when the North School officially closed. Soon after, the building was renovated for the Torrington Police Department which had previously been housed in City Hall. In 1990, the Police Department relocated to the former North School building.

Skee's Diner

Skee's Diner has been an icon in Torrington since 1945, when it was moved here from the Saybrook area. This barrel-roof diner was built in the 1920s by the Jerry O'Mahoney Co. of Elizabeth, NJ and is one of the few known O'Mahoney diners in existence. Upon arriving in Torrington, the diner was placed at the corner of North Elm and North Main Streets. In 1946, the diner was acquired by brothers Tony and Edmund Cisowski who named it 'Skee's' and continued operating the diner until 1975. During this era, Skee's had a variety of customers but in particular, was frequented by employees from nearby industries including The Torrington Company, Warrenton Woolen Mill, Fitzgerald Mfg. Co. and Union Hardware Company. From 1975 to 2001, the diner had several owners but in 2001, it closed. The following year, Skee's Diner was listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*. Skee's was later acquired by the Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce and in 2013, the Chamber donated the diner to the Torrington Historic Preservation Trust. The Torrington Historic Preservation Trust is currently overseeing the restoration of Skee's Diner.

The Jacob Strong House

The Jacob Strong House, built in 1750, is believed to be the oldest house still standing in Torrington. Jacob Strong arrived in 1739 and like most early settlers, first built a log house. In 1750, the log house was replaced by the current house, which sits at the top of Highland Avenue. The house was later occupied by the Fowler family and in the 20th century, became the home and studio for noted artist Paolo Abbate. It was Abbate who added the columns to the front of the house.

Torrington Firehouse

Torrington's Fire Department, organized in 1887, initially consisted of two volunteer departments. The town relied solely on volunteer firemen until 1916, when the first paid fire department was instituted. The first firehouse used by these men was a wooden structure, located on Water Street. However, in 1900, the second firehouse, a brick building, was built to replace the older structure. This building was in use until 1980, when a new building was dedicated. The new firehouse stands next to the historic building.

Torrington Historical Society / Hotchkiss-Fyler House Museum

One of Torrington's oldest cultural attractions is the Torrington Historical Society, which was founded in 1944. Since that time, the Society has been collecting, preserving and sharing Torrington's history with the community through exhibits, programs, research and tours. In 1956, Gertrude Fyler Hotchkiss bequeathed the use of her impressive Main Street estate to the Society. Today, the Society operates the Torrington History Museum, the

Hotchkiss-Fyler House Museum, and the John H. Thompson Library and Archives. Visitors may view a permanent exhibit of Torrington history as well as a machine shop exhibit interpreting the Hendey Machine Company. Visitors may also take a guided tour of the house museum or research various aspects of Torrington's history at the John H. Thompson Library and Archives. The Society's three buildings are listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*. The Society also owns the birthplace of abolitionist John Brown in West Torrington.

Uriel Tuttle House (Underground Railroad house)

The Uriel Tuttle House on Torrington Street became a place of refuge for escaped slaves in the early half of the 19th century. Such places of refuge are often referred to as being part of the 'Underground Railroad', a network of people, both black and white, who offered shelter and assistance to escaped slaves from the South. Uriel Tuttle was one of Torrington's most important anti-slavery activists. He helped found the Litchfield County Anti-Slavery Society which was organized in Torrington in 1837. At the time of his death in 1849, Uriel Tuttle served as president of that organization and the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society.

Warner Theatre

Built by the Warner Brothers Studios, the Warner Theatre opened on August 19, 1931. The new theatre, which replaced several Victorian era commercial structures, was designed by noted architect Thomas Lamb. Lamb incorporated many modern design elements of the era into both the interior and exterior decor. The Warner operated primarily as a movie theatre until 1981 when it closed its doors and was threatened with demolition. The following year, a group of preservationists and theatre enthusiasts spearheaded a grassroots fundraising campaign to purchase the theatre. Today, the Warner Theatre is operated by the Northwest Connecticut Association for the Arts which has completed the theatre's exterior and interior restoration.

***For more information, please visit the Torrington Historical Society, 192 Main Street, Torrington.
www.torringtonhistoricalsociety.org***



Storybooks Through the Ages Made in Torrington- Scavenger Hunt

Courtesy of the Torrington Historical Society

CLOCKS

During the 1830s, several Torrington clockmakers made shelf clocks in Torrington. These clocks contained wooden movements.

BRASS KETTLES

The production of brass kettles began in the early 19th century and gave rise to a major industry in Torrington. Later, Torrington's 'brass mill' produced sheet brass, tubing and other products that were sold throughout the country. These materials were used to produce various types of products.

GUITARS

Did you know that guitars and banjos were once made in Torrington? During the 1850s, James Ashborn manufactured guitars in a shop, located in the north end of Torrington. He was the first American maker of guitars to mass produce guitars.

ORGANS and MELODIANS

In the 1840s and 1850s, not far from the Ashborn guitar factory, was another shop which manufactured musical instruments. In this shop, Arvid Dayton made melodeons and organs. Dayton's shop was located in the north end of town, in an area that was once known as Daytonville.

ROLLER SKATES & ICE SKATES

The Union Hardware Company was established in the mid 19th century. Their main products, for nearly 100 years, were roller skates and ice skates.

NEEDLES

One of Torrington's biggest manufacturers was the Torrington Company. This company began as the Excelsior Needle Company. Their first products were sewing machine needles. This company later evolved into the Torrington Company.

LATHES

The Hendey Machine Company was started in 1870 and remained in business until the 1950s. This firm manufactured machinery, most notably, lathes. Lathes turn metal and for this reason, were necessary to produce all types of items including screws and more.

WOOLEN CLOTH

One of Torrington's oldest industries was the manufacture of woolen cloth. Later known as the Warrenton Woolen Mill, the company was originally located on Water Street but moved to the north end of Torrington. Today, the former factory complex is a condominium complex.

***For more information, please visit the Torrington Historical Society, 192 Main Street, Torrington.
www.torringtonhistoricalsociety.org***