Fairfield Museum
EXPLORE *the past,* IMAGINE *the future*
370 Beach Road, Fairfield, CT | 203-259-1598
www.fairfieldhistory.org

My Town: Fairfield, Connecticut

Spring, 2017

Where is my town?

Pictured above: Sherman Green, downtown Fairfield, CT

Fairfield is on the southwestern coast of Connecticut and is part of Fairfield County. The 2010 **census** reported a population of 59,404. Fairfield is between Norwalk and Bridgeport. Three major roads go through Fairfield. The three roads are the Post Road (Route 1), the Merritt Parkway and Interstate 95.

Fairfield is only 50 miles from New York City. Trains connect the town with New York and other parts of Connecticut. There are two train stops in Fairfield. One is downtown and a new train station, Fairfield Metro, is located on the eastern side of the town.

At the left is a photograph of the Fairfield train station in 1941. Do you recognize any parts of it?
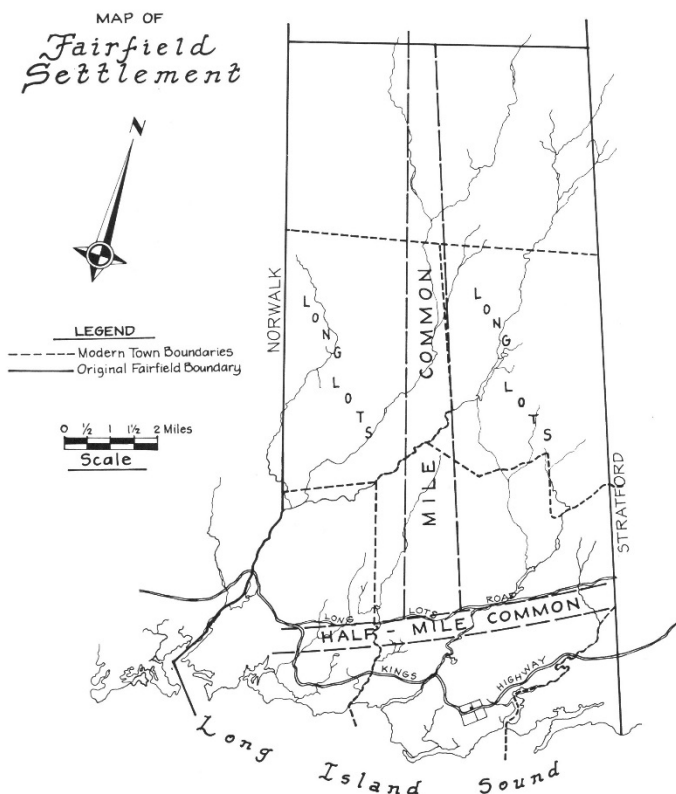
The Mill River crosses through Fairfield and becomes Southport Harbor. It then flows into Long Island Sound. Fairfield has 5 town beaches, including Jennings and Mohegan Lake. There are a lot of parks, ball fields and two public golf courses. There are two universities: Fairfield University and Sacred Heart University.

Fairfield is committed to becoming a "Clean Energy Community" which means to use 20 percent clean and renewable energy by 2018. The First Selectman has signed the Clean Energy Communities pledge.

Who lived here?

For thousands of years this area provided Native American peoples with many food sources, sweet water, and great land to farm. Before contact with Europeans, different tribes from the Paugussett Indians lived here. For example, there was the Uncowas, Sasquas, Maxumux, and Pequonnock. These small villages of **wigwams** often moved with the seasons. Tribes would move closer to the water during the warmer summer months and inland during the cold winter months.

Native Americans caught many diseases from the European explorers like smallpox and measles. The native people had no **immunity** and many died. Possibly as much as 95% of Indians died in this area. When English colonists arrived to settle more permanently, the Paugussett villages were small and scattered. The Paugussetts were not aggressive like the Pequots. They did not resist the English moving onto their land.

The Mile Common

In the 1660s and 1670s, Fairfield began purchasing additional land from the Indians, extending well into the area that is now Redding. In 1671, Fairfield set aside a half-mile wide swath of land running approximately east-west and two miles north of the King's Highway. A mile-wide tract, intersecting the **Half-Mile Common** at its center, extended to the northern boundary of Fairfield, today's Cross Highway in Redding. Land on either side of the Mile Common was divided into long, narrow parcels. These "long lots" were about thirteen and a half miles long and ranged in width from a mere fifty feet to 875 feet. Residents who already had sizable land holdings typically received the widest "long lots."

A Farming Community Grows

During the 1700s, Fairfield and its region grew because farmers found markets for their goods in the West Indies, New York, and Boston. Colonists built wharves and ships at Black Rock and Mill River harbors. They used them to take grain, flax, and animals to these new markets. In exchange, they brought back sugar, molasses, and rum from the West Indies. They also brought back goods imported from England.

Fairfield became the third wealthiest town in Connecticut. Growing wealth helped Fairfielders to build bigger houses and churches. They also were able to purchase new kinds of goods like clocks. Fairfield's land increased, as well, and included present-day Easton, Redding, Weston, Green's Farms and the Black Rock section of Bridgeport. These towns eventually broke away from Fairfield to start their own communities.

In the 1800s, Fairfield remained a quiet farming community while Bridgeport's **industries** boomed. Young people had to choose their **career**. Some traveled west during the Gold Rush. Some went to sea, or started a business. Some people became farmers.

DID YOU KNOW? In the 1800s, many people moved out of Connecticut to seek opportunities and land in other parts of the country.
Fairfield, California: 1903
Fairfield, New York: 1796
Fairfield, Ohio: 1877
There is also a Fairfield County in Ohio.

Fairfield in the 20th Century

From the late 1800s through the 1920s, immigrants from Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Ireland came to this area. They found work in area factories and shops. They made everything from sewing machines to ammunition. The trolley and the train allowed people to move around easier. Wealthy people from New York came to Fairfield to spend the summer or to establish a home. People from Bridgeport and other areas could take a trolley to go to the beach, too.

During World War II, Bridgeport's factories helped to power the war effort. They produced ammunition and other military

supplies. This drew thousands of new workers to the area. **After the war ended, thousands of people moved from Bridgeport into Fairfield**. Many people were moving to the **suburbs** after the war. In fact, Fairfield County became a symbol of the suburban dream that Americans were seeking during these years.

Fairfield grew faster than at any other time in its history from 1940 – 1970. The population more than doubled! This led to the quick construction of new houses, new streets and new schools.

Fairfield's Population over the Years

Year	Population
1640	8-10 households surrounding the Town Green
1700	150 households and about 1,050 people
1756	Fairfield's population = 4,455 people. The largest towns in Connecticut included: 1) Middletown 2) Norwich 3) New Haven 4) Fairfield
1800	3,735
1850	3,614
1900	4,489
1920	11,475
1940	21,135
1960	46,183
1980	54,849
2000	57,340