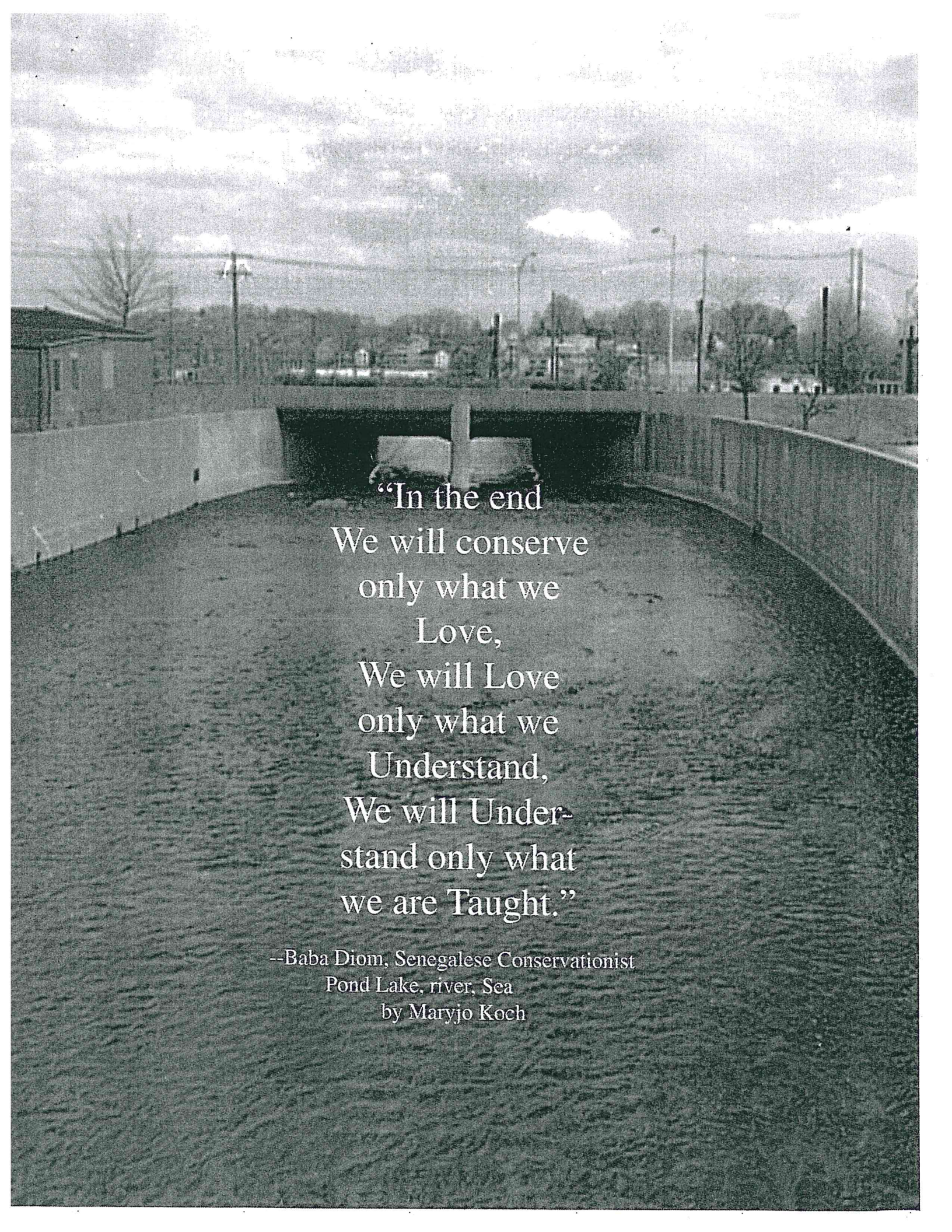




A River Runs Through It

“In the end
We will conserve
only what we
Love,
We will Love
only what we
Understand,
We will Under-
stand only what
we are Taught.”

**The Urbanization
Of Danbury's
Still River**



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--Baba Diom, Senegalese Conservationist
Pond Lake, river, Sea
by Maryjo Koch

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"A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT"

JUNE 2 - SEPTEMBER 29, 1996

at the Danbury Railway Museum - Union Station

PRESENTED BY:

DANBURY PRESERVATION TRUST

HISTORY DEPARTMENT - WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

EXHIBIT HOURS: Wednesday through Sunday, 1:00 To 4:00 p.m.

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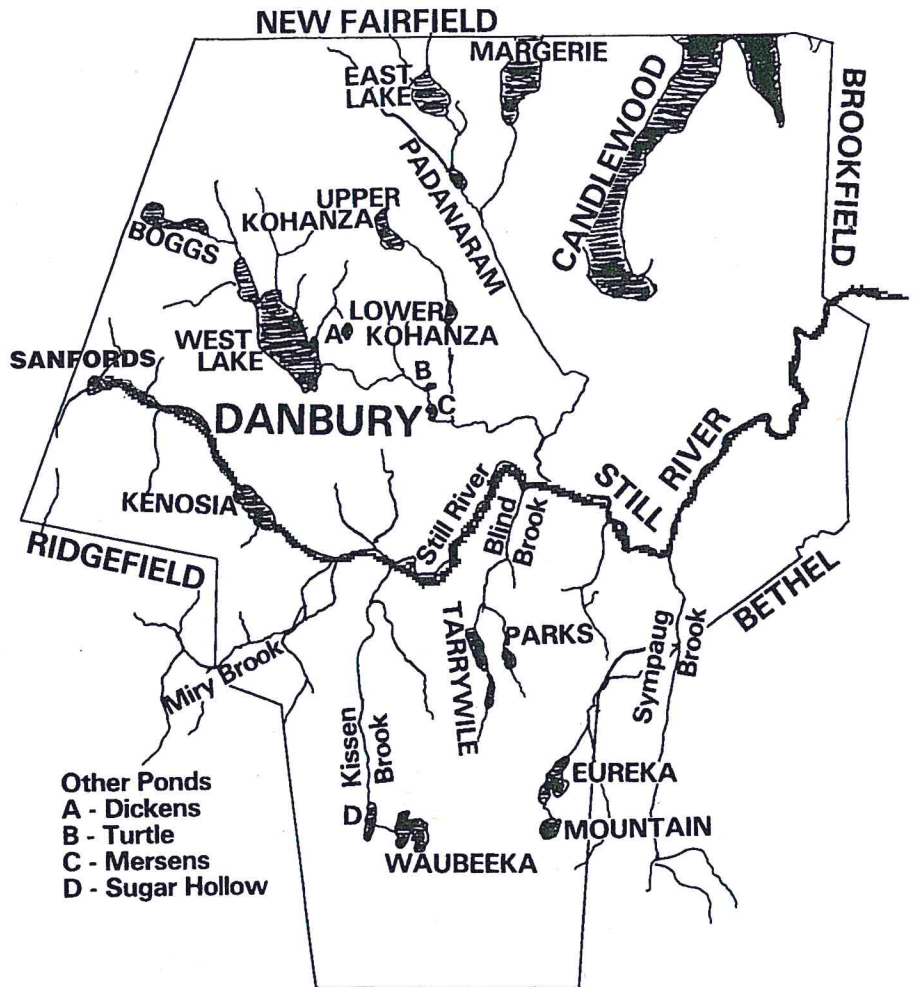
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INTRODUCTION:

When this project was conceived in early 1995 it had a narrow focus. The intention was to commemorate the Fortieth Anniversary of the August and October 1955 flooding of the Still River, the most devastating natural disaster in Danbury history. However, after several months of research, the exhibit team realized that the floods were only a recent chapter in a continuing story. It became clear that the Still River, the 19 mile long segment of the Housatonic River system that today meanders almost invisibly through the city, has always had a major influence on life in Danbury.

The Danbury Preservation Trust concluded that a more comprehensive treatment was required; that the organization had an opportunity to present the flood, not as a unique happening, but as an episode in the ongoing process of interaction between human beings and the natural environment. Consequently, this exhibit has an ambitious goal. It seeks to explore the more than three-hundred year relationship—sometimes cooperative, sometimes antagonistic—between Danburians and the Still River.

The dialogue between nature and culture, that is illustrated in this exhibit and is explored in detail in the following essays, is illuminating and hopeful. It reminds us that for hundreds of years Danbury settlers lived in harmony with the river. The scale of industrial development and the pace of urban growth did not disrupt this balance until the late nineteenth



century. For roughly a century, from the 1870's to the 1970's, the city despoiled the river. Hat factories used it as a gigantic sewer for industrial waste. A burgeoning municipality built on its flood plain and extended building piers, and sewer and water lines into the river bed. When the river rebelled against this treatment in the 1955 floods, it was imprisoned in a concrete channel and banished from the city. Recent experience, however, runs counter to this shabby narrative. Since the 1970's Danburians have rediscovered the river. The last section of the exhibit and catalog document some of the recent efforts to re-integrate the Still River into the

life of the community.

The Danbury Preservation Trust appropriated the title of Norman MacLean's book *A River Runs Through It* as the name of this exhibit because his succinct phrase highlights the dominant theme that emerges from the local historical record—the interdependence of stream and people. History confirms that the quality of life in Danbury has been enhanced or diminished by the prevailing attitude of residents towards the Still River. The Trust hopes that this exhibit and catalog will convince Danburians that the inconspicuous river that runs through their community should be con-

sidered a friend rather than an enemy.

THE SETTING:

The characteristics of the Still River, along with its smaller tributaries, are the key to understanding the destructive flood waters which surged through Danbury in August and October 1955. The event left many Danburians shocked and amazed. They were aware of the heavy rains, but were surprised that the storms could result in such disastrous conditions.

But the 1955 flooding in the Still River valley was not a unique event. The historic record reveals a variety of similar flood-related episodes. For example, as early as 1777 a Revolutionary diarist wrote "...it Rained last Knight very Smarly and made a Sort of a flood." In October of the same year he noted "...and then it began to Rain and Rained and Rained about 2 hours I guess and the Sun Shined, and we Drove the Cattel over the River of Jordan of Danbury island for now theres' a flood here now." In 1801 the local Farmers Journal reported a great flood and 22 years later a local hat entrepreneur penned a letter to his brother stating that, "It has rained incessantly since last Evening and carried off the principal part of the snow a great flood is the consequence which will probably sweep away many bridges."

The Still River overflowed its banks regularly in the nineteenth century. Floods struck the community in 1843 and 1846, followed in Novem-

ber 1853 by a storm so heavy that the dam at White's Pond broke and released its water to inundate the Borough. Less than a year later in April 1854 three dams were destroyed and once again extensive destruction resulted. The most dramatic event was the flood of 1869, when both the Upper and Lower Kohanza dams burst and water, ice, and eventually, buildings crashed into the bridge on White Street. Several people lost their lives. The waters of 1875 appeared to surpass in depth previous flooding. The Danbury News reported:

The streams which flow through the town over-run their banks, flooding the low land, houses and shops. The loss to the town by bridges and roads beings washed away is considerable... Mallory's, Tweedy & Co.'s, Rundle & White's and the other shops along the banks of the stream, were flooded so work had to be suspended... It...flooded...the engine room of the Hull & Belden factory, putting out the fires and suspending work entirely. The water in the cellar...was over eight feet deep.

Damage to farm crops was extensive also, but it probably was the railroad line throughout the entire region which suffered the greatest loss.

The hurricanes of 1938 and 1944 again resulted in extensive flooding. Despite the 1940 warning by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that serious trouble lay ahead if the channel was not improved, the city failed to take action.

It is the geology of the region that sets the stage for these repeated floods. The Still River begins in Sanford's Pond near the New York border and empties into the Housatonic River in southern New Milford. In the early 1700's, however, the inhabitants were not in agreement as to which possible water ways constituted the main stream and which were feeders. The relatively flat valley floor through which the river now flows defines today's accepted route. This valley is confined between hard crystalline rock and underlain by a soft carbonate. The crystalline rock is granite and gneiss. The carbonate is marble - metamorphosed-- limestone, whose origin was a shallow sea 400 million years ago. The sea sediment and rock to the east and west of the river were uplifted, folded, and recrystallized into durable bedrock one sees today. East and west of the Still River, as it flows northward from Danbury, there is soft marble, which was carved by glaciation to accommodate perhaps hundreds of feet of glacial sediment. Today this sediment underlies the Still River floodplain.

The river flows generally east and then north, contrary to the north-south orientation of other drainage systems. Geologists are not in complete agreement as to its direction in glacial times. It is the near proximity and gradients of adjacent watersheds that prompted the opinion, almost 100 years ago, that the Still River in western Connecticut had flowed southward prior to the end of the period of deglaciation about 10,000 years ago. Ice flow in the waning stage

of glaciation is controlled largely by the nature of the underlying rock. The soft marble between ridges of crystalline rock became a natural avenue for movement of ice and sediment-ice transport. In the Danbury area the ice crunch foundered, owing to the turn of that soft rock westwardly. Somewhat confined there and impounded, glacial Lake Danbury developed in this area, deepened by scour and trapped between the resistant ridges. Through increased melting Lake Danbury reached sufficient height to develop an outlet to what we think of today as the Croton River. Ultimately, as ice abandoned the landscape, outlets further north of Danbury were uncovered. One of those was developed in till material at the present outlet for the Still River in New Milford. Water spilled over this barrier and carved its path into the present

site at the Housatonic River. Areas such as Mill Plain, the airport and Danbury Fair Mall, the central city area and its adjacent "plains", and the section north of the city paralleling Route 7 are also products of this glacial and post-glacial activity.

From its source to the Housatonic River, the Still River is only about 19 miles long, but when all the bends and meanders are measured the distance is almost 30 miles. The profile of the river shows a drop of only 256 feet from beginning to end with an average gradient of 13.9 feet per mile. But even this latter figure is deceptive, for much of the path through the community is very slow, gentle and shallow. Nowhere is the stream itself wide and to the casual observer its presence is not obvious. The Kenosia and Brookfield flood plains' grades are 2.4 and

2.3 feet per mile. However, the portion that flows through the city proper drops 18 feet per mile and may have been influential in the selection of Danbury as settlement. Nevertheless, the descriptive term "still" reveals its usual placid state. During some dry summers the flow is almost non-existent.

Nature—the varying types and hardness of the underlying bed rock, the topography of hills and flat lands, the gouging and deposits caused by the glaciers, the tilt of the land, the climate and weather, the soils and vegetation — thus provided the setting for the repeated floods. But in addition the impact of the human inhabitants on this natural order of things adds another and vital dimension to the explanation of why these events occurred and why they were so destructive.





HARMONY:

The story of human life in the Still River valley is more ancient than is commonly known; tools shaped painstakingly from native stone as long as 10,000 years ago have been collected in the valley. The first residents of the area, small bands of Indians, occupied upland areas then later moved into the valley as glacial lake waters subsided. Lake Kenosia and Mill Plain Swamp survive today as reminders of what this entire area must have looked like on a larger scale to the humans who first set foot here.

Indians lived at many sites in the area in small "wigwam clusters" of three to five families. An early artifact collector, Henry Fanton, listed sites along the river in Danbury where artifacts had been collected during his lifetime: Sanford's Pond (source of the Still River), Lake Kenosia, Oil Mill Pond to the West Street bridge, Seger Street, the Fair Grounds, Beaver Brook, East Swamp and Brookfield.

Until the industrial age, the relationship of people - both

Indian and early Yankee settler - with the river was symbiotic. The river, with its fish and waterbirds, broad floodplain and rich topsoils, was a source of food and furs, a travel route and a part of everyday life in a variety of ways. But at no point was human occupancy without some impact on the river and its valley. Even the Indians cleared land by burning. The original Algonquin Indian name of Danbury - Paquig or Paquioke - means cleared land.

The valley's attributes, along with the potential for wa-

ter power, drew the first colonists into the hills of the southern Berkshires to settle Danbury in 1684. Thus Danbury is a contemporary of such towns as Woodbury and Colchester, a part of the "push" of English colonial settlement inland from the coast and the Connecticut valley some fifty years after Connecticut's founding. The areas surrounding Danbury are hilly and generally have soil types less well-suited to agriculture. Danbury's agricultural attractiveness is further suggested by the regional place-names for flat areas: Mill Plain, Great Plain, Barren Plain, Grassy Plain, Boogs, East Swamp, etc.

Colonists were less certain about what to call the river itself; old deeds record almost a half dozen general or localized

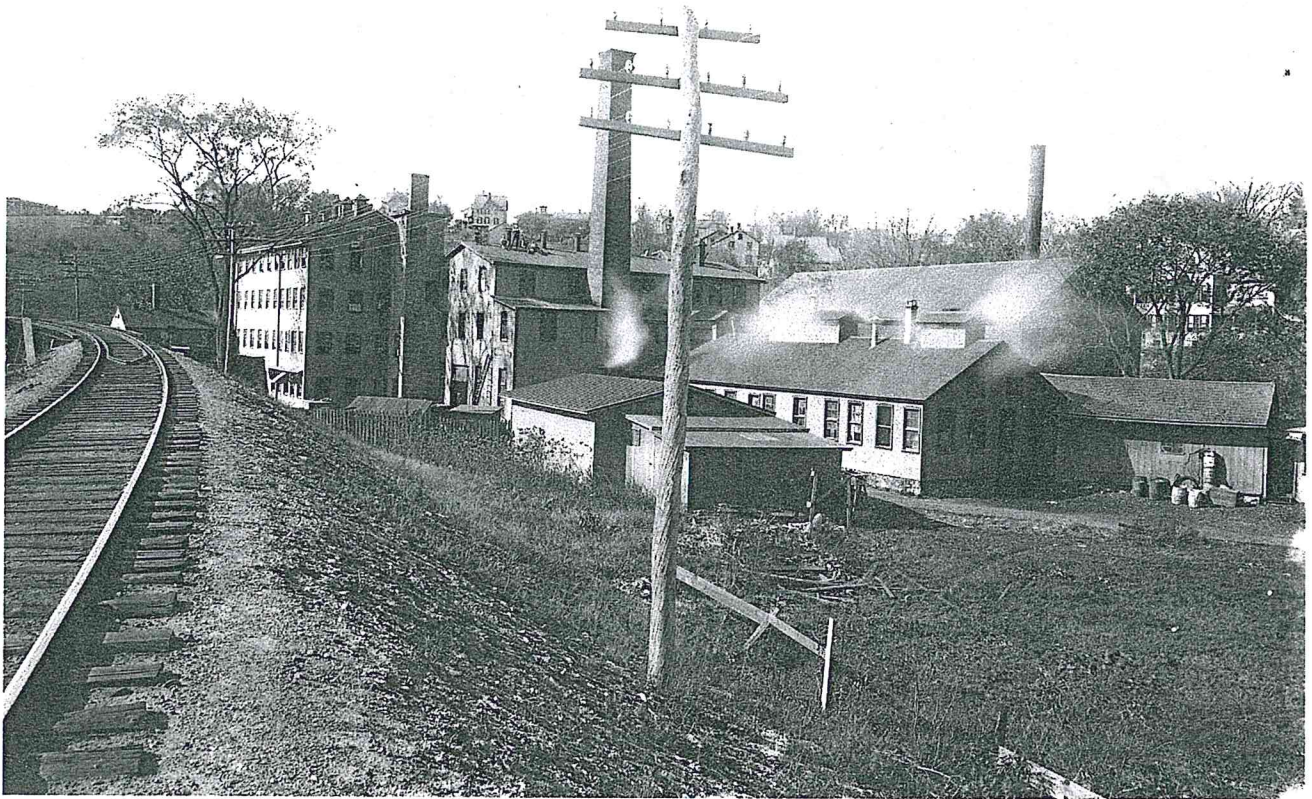
names for the Still or pieces of it: Cranberry, Fishweir, Mill River, The river, and finally the Still, because of its general lack of current. Despite this name that has persisted, it does have rapids. And as early as 1702 a water-power site in Beaver Brook, northeast of the city, was developed for a grist mill. By the end of the 1790's there were at least 15 "water privileges" or mill sites on the Still River, five of them in Danbury. Although this figure averages about one per mile, the sites were really clustered in a few locations where the river narrows and falls—notably Beaver Brook and above Mill Plain around Seger Street, while several dams for industrial water power were constructed within the city itself during the nineteenth century.

A variety of enterprises made use of these mill sites, and also the ponds created by their dams. Ice was harvested from the ponds during the winter into the twentieth century and residents trapped fur-bearing animals, particularly muskrat, for sale to hatters. The limestone and marble of the valley's floor were actively quarried at least as early as the nineteenth century, as its sand and gravel continue to be today.

In Danbury's early days, when it was a quasi-rural town, people commonly used the river for recreation. Fishing, poling or rowing small boats, and skating in the winter made the river a convenient outlet for many. Lake Kenosia was even developed by the local trolley company into a remarkable Victorian resort in the 1890's.

But Danbury was no Arcadia, and the industrial revolution in New England had no mercy on small rivers like the Still. The river's history in the nineteenth century, despite its transformation upstream of the city as a recreational center, was one of intensifying pollution and destruction. Prior to the Civil War, human use of the river, even by industries, had altered the river and its ecosystems, but had not destroyed them. Except for a late eighteenth century paper mill, which was burned to the ground by neighbors angered at the foul smell of the rotting rags used as its raw material, and the emptying of dye kettles and washing of wool and furs in the stream by hatters, these uses produced comparatively little pollution. The following years would be different story.





ABUSE:

When Scottish-born immigrant George MacArthur came to Danbury in 1868, the Still River was, he would later recall in court testimony, "so clear and pure that he and others had been accustomed to drink from it." MacArthur and his three brothers purchased a small paper mill on the river in the rural Beaver Brook section of town northeast of (and downstream from) the rapidly growing central Borough of Danbury. The brothers built a successful business, buying hay straw from farmers and drying it on a nearby hillside before turning it into strawboard they would sell to boxmakers to fill the insatiable

need for hat boxes. After a time they converted the mill to steam power and began manufacturing rolls of wrapping paper for hardware stores.

MacArthur settled into his little community of Beaver Brook. He became the founder of its Sunday school, and a principal in establishing the nondenominational chapel that still stands there. George MacArthur was the kind of individual that post-Civil War industrial America professed to admire most: a successful businessman and a devout Christian, devoted to his community.

It is ironic, then, to find this upstanding citizen strolling one day in 1893 with an official

from the State Board of Health. These men walked from his blackened, grossly polluted millpond, tracing MacArthur's problem, a 42 inch metal pipe located at Cross Street, where the sewage of almost the entire borough of Danbury spilled untreated into the waters of the Still. George MacArthur would become one of industrial Danbury's major sources of annoyance, a leader in lawsuits that would force the city to begin to deal with its major pollution problem - the Still River.

The transformation of the Still River from a viable ecosystem and economic asset to a floating sewer did not happen overnight. It did, however, accelerate rapidly, during the



1870's and 80's. Degeneration of the river came to a head in a series of crises in the 1890's - crises that would be repeated again in the 1930's, 40's and 50's.

The main culprit in the death of river was urbanization. Fueled by a boom in hatting and railroads, the new urban center of Danbury grew rapidly inside the confines of the old Borough producing a bewildering array of novel problems. Many of the city's needs: new streets, pavement and sidewalks, municipal buildings, fire protection, housing, and a police force took precedence over public sanitation. The lack of knowledge, law, or even consensus about public health contributed to this low priority. In the end the city and its citizens followed the time-honored expedient of using the conveniently located river to carry away its problems.

As the borough's population doubled between 1870 and 1890, pollution of the Still River intensified from three

sources: industries, casual dumping by residents and businesses, and the city public works facilities, including the municipal gas works and the sewer system. Fundamental changes in the river's economic role made matters worse. The first change occurred in the 1840's and '50's, with the advent of steam technology in the hat industry. Rail transportation and new mass production machinery truly industrialized the manufacturing process. Then, in 1860 the borough began a program of reservoir building, mainly to supply the increasing needs of hat manufacturers, who had situated themselves on the Still or its tributaries. Once clean water from Kohanza and later reservoirs poured into Danbury's enlarged hat plants, manufacturers no longer needed the rivers and streams that flowed outside their walls for the manufacturing process, or for any purpose but to carry off wastes.

As the number of hat factories in Danbury grew from

eight major shops in 1856 to 33 in 1896, the river became the receptacle for the contents of privies that served hundreds of employees in each plant. Dyes were the chief source of industrial water pollution, but acids, sulfates and mercury also found their way into the river. The Still River downstream of Danbury became an eerie technicolor show that reflected whatever color or colors hats were being dyed that day. Through the 1880's the city's hatters relied on huge quantities of traditional, organic dye sources, chiefly tropical woods. The State Board of Health reported in 1886 that almost two and a half million pounds of these dyestuffs were being used annually by Danbury's hat factories. The same report also estimated that "over six hundred pounds of fatty and other organic matters washed daily from wool and fur." After 1890 hat manufacturers adopted the benzene-based aniline textile dyes that had been developed in Germany some 30 years before. These were used in less quantities, but were more toxic to river life. Yet hatters weren't the only culprits. George MacArthur's paper mill contributed copper as - cooper sulfate - which turned water gray-green and acted as a rapid anesthetic to fish. But like George MacArthur, who believed his chemicals were somehow good for the stream, many people did not know the effects of these industrial pollutants. Many people assumed such chemicals were harmless or even good, disinfecting the organic wastes that also fouled the river.

More repulsive to Danbury's residents of the time was the wholesale dumping of

household and commercial wastes. The city's rapid growth and lack of planning had resulted in widespread encroachment on the river, with some building actually erected over the river itself. The river became a vast, slow-moving dumping ground for everything from decaying vegetables and fruit, broken baskets, bottles and barrels, old clams and fish and even dead horses, dogs and cats. Not surprisingly, it stank.

Debris tended to collect between the White Street bridge and Main Street, an area described by earlier residents as a place of beauty. In an 1891 article, one of many on the same subject that periodically appeared, *The Evening News* referred to this location as Danbury's "plague spot." Despite a borough and a later city ordinance calling for a \$50 fine for anyone caught, the casual dumping continued throughout the century, apparently an embedded custom immune to law, threat, or municipal action. In 1899 the city's public works department even took money from its street appropriations and began a cleanup of the river between White and a dam under the Main Street bridge. Superintendent Richard Meany of the department began negotiations with property owners on the south side of White Street to erect a billboard south of the White Street bridge to block the black, fouled river bed from the public. But only two weeks after it began, the department abandoned the effort, terming it "useless" and "not appreciated" as "people, and especially storekeepers began to throw refuse into the water again" even before

the workmen had completed their task.

Yet the biggest factor in turning the Still River into a virtually dead stream were the actions of municipal government itself. The municipal gas works was blamed for the presence of tar and a kerosene-like smell. Far more vexing, and ultimately more destructive was the problem of sewage disposal. The same rapid population growth that propelled Danbury into city government in 1889, also created a public health crisis that the authorities of the time could not control.

Fear of infectious diseases spreading from the sewage that was collecting in privies or on the ground prompted a civic-minded group called the Village Improvement Society to recommend sewerage for the borough in 1880. A canvass of the borough done a few years later, in 1885, found that of 2,800 families living in the borough, 1,100 discharged sewage either on the ground or directly into a stream. Only 600 had underground cesspools. In June, 1886, after a lively debate, the borough voted to build a sewage system designed by A.B. Hill, a New Haven engineer. The plan called initially for 18 miles of sewers combining both street and sanitary drainage which would tie into a main "outfall sewer" to be located near the White Street bridge. As more sewers were built the outfall sewer would be moved farther out of the borough, and, if necessary, would be provided some purification of the sewage at an indefinite future time.

The borough adopted it

despite the advice of its own consultants, Eliot Clarke of the Massachusetts Drainage Commission and Col. George E. Waring, founder of New York City's Sanitation Department, that "the tendency of public opinion, and of legislation, is towards restricting and preventing the pollution of streams by crude sewage." Several writers to the editors of *The News*, including Arthur Averill, warned the borough that it had "underestimated the cost" of their course of action, and was inviting litigations from every property owner on the Still River downstream of the outfall sewer. Ammon T. Peck, a civic gadfly who had attempted to moderate a borough meeting at which the sewer issue was debated "thick and fast" before the call had even been completed, pointed out one obvious point: "The difference between the discharge of our hat factories is, their acid and dye stuff don't create any smell and malaria ... see the statutes and read them carefully. Oh, you open sewer men, who seem to be deficient in the sense of smell!"

Objections to the sewer proposal had been based on two points. Some complained that assessments were unfair, while others found the idea of pouring sewage on downstream owners outrageous. But when one man attempted to say this at a borough meeting, "a learned gentleman ended this discussion by saying, 'Never cross a bridge until you get to it,'" The same year, George McArthur and several neighbors sued hat manufacturers for polluting the river with dyes. The suit was withdrawn when the newly-formed Hat Manufacturers Association paid McArthur to purchase a



new source of water.

But in 1893, after the city moved the outfall sewer a mile to the east near Cross Street where it emptied just above Beaver Brook, McArthur joined with another mill-owning Beaver Brook neighbor, George W. Morgan, in suing the city for polluting the river. Morgan had been forced to abandon his cider mill operation because of the sewerage in the river. Other property owners, including many farmers as far away as Brookfield, organized an "alliance" and joined the suit seeking an injunction to compel the city to stop polluting. The group's lawyers, John

McMahon of New Milford and Charles W. Murphy, a former hat manufacturer, had to accept a cow from one farmer as partial payment of their retainer. At the same time, farmer Henry Starr filed a suit against the city for alleged damage to his land from untreated sewerage.

The city fought the suits. The rights of downstream owners to use clean water was well-established in state law, but the city argued that the hat industry had already polluted the river, and pleaded that construction of a purification treatment facility might be prohibitively expensive. The city hired the best legal minds in the area and

brought in renowned experts on sewage and public health. A parade of witnesses, mostly farmers, testified to the slow death of the river. Meanwhile in an effort to defuse opposition, Danbury installed a rudimentary lime treatment plant to deodorize the sewage during the summer months when the river was low.

The court was not impressed with the city's arguments or actions. In August 1895 Judge George Wakeman Wheeler issued a permanent injunction against further municipal pollution of the Still River, and ordered the city to build a sewage treatment plant within

two years. Following appeals and a flurry of damage suits, the city was forced to purchase a farm on Plumtrees Road and to extend the outfall sewer pipe over the river to this property where it would be dispersed down the hillside before being given primary treatment in sand filter beds. Danbury became only the third city in Connecticut to treat its sewage before discharge.

The 1895 suits did not end the city's abuse of the river. The sewer plant could not handle heavy use during rainstorms or during the night. At those times untreated effluent emptied into the river. Hat factories continued to release dyes into the streams that flowed by their doors. In 1902 Attorney McMahon threatened to sue the city again, claiming it was not operating the filtration plant

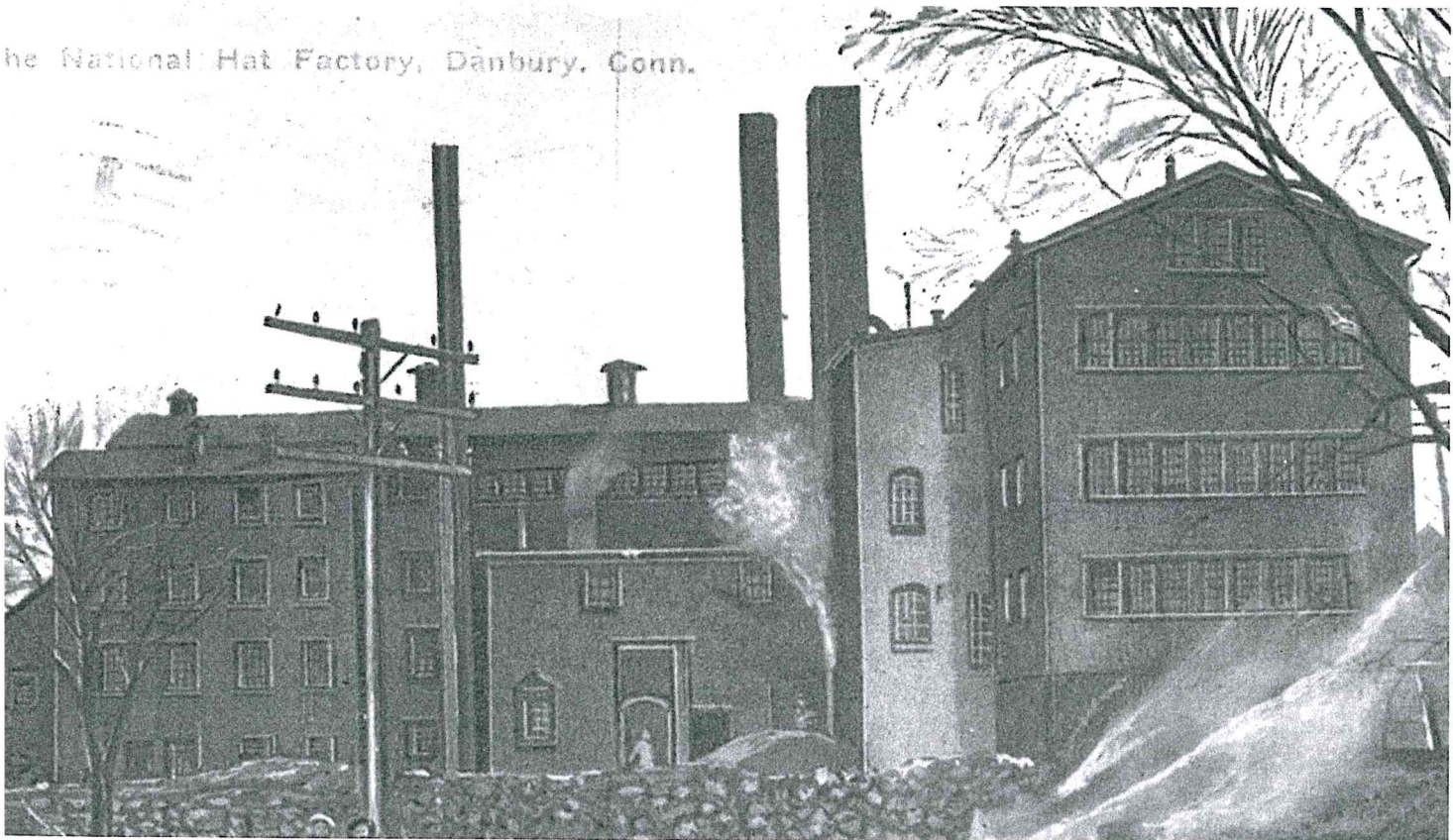
properly. In 1931, a group called the Beaver Brook Taxpayers Association did just that, invoking Judge Wheeler's injunction. A 1933 report on the river found that hundreds of privies in Danbury continued to empty into the Still River and its tributaries. The river was still filled with household wastes, industrial dyes, and unsavory items like bad batches of glue and rabbit claws.

Having been chastened by previous legal actions the city settled with the Association agreeing, in 1933, to force all city homeowners to connect with the sewer system. At the same time it allocated New Deal Civil Works Administration funds to the construction of a secondary waste treatment mechanism, which was completed in 1935.

The same familiar

storyline of citizen outrage and city intrasigence was repeated in 1949 as downstream property owners in Brookfield, led by Attorney Leroy Jackson and gentleman farmer Wendall Davis, sued over river pollution and forced the implementation of more sophisticated sewer treatment methods.

Even the declining hat industry ultimately improved its sanitation procedures. Manufacturing dyes were filtered before they were directed into the city sewers. By the time the city's last hat factory was closed in 1987, George Rafferty, former manager of the Stetson plant recalled that some of the company's Southeast Asian workers were catching and eating fish from the nearby Still River. But before the river would reach this point, it would exact a revenge on the city that had tried to alternately tame and neglect it.





REVENGE:

In 1955 Danbury was in the process of shedding its past as a one industry mill town, and moving into a more promising future as the home of many sophisticated hi-tech industries. Two years earlier the Wall Street Journal had reported that this type of innovative company had been moving into the community at the rate of about five per year since the end of World War II. Two years later the head of the Connecticut Development Commission identified Danbury as the "hottest spot" in the state for new industry. The Barden Corporation, which would soon be the largest single employer in the city, had expressed its confidence in the economic health of

Danbury by investing 2 million dollars in 1951 to modernize the former Tweedy Silk Mill on Franklin Street.

Population growth mirrored this optimism. In 1957 Lawrence Moore of Technical Planning Associates of New Haven, hired to guide the new Planning Commission, put the local population surge in historical perspective. He pointed out that over a 30 year period, from 1920 to 1950, Danbury grew by just 8,000 people. In contrast, from 1950 to 1957, the city population expanded by 9,000 people. Equally robust growth lay ahead. If the state government could be trusted the long promised Danbury Expressway, which would divert Routes 6 and 7 around the city, would

soon be constructed contributing to the city's attractiveness as a place to live and work.

The Still River was barely noticed in the euphoria of the mid 1950's. Those who paid any attention to it considered the wispy stream to be a polluted, multi-colored health hazard, devoid of all but the hardiest aquatic life. After a rain its sulfurous smell permeated the area. Tires, old household appliances, and other discarded items that were dumped into the river routinely, washed downstream, collecting behind bridges and abandoned mill dams. In the downtown the growing city encroached on the river by extending building foundations, and sewer and water lines into the river bed.

On August 18 and 19, 1955 the Still River reminded Danbury of its power. In a 24 hour period spanning those two days, Hurricane Diane dropped more than five inches of rain on the city, bringing the total for that month to over 15 inches. Believing its name, the Still River surged over its banks and inundated the bowl shaped downtown causing an estimated 3 million dollars in damages. The water flooded stores, factories, and homes along the river from North Street to Beaver Brook. Retail stores, many with apartments on upper floors, on White Street between Main and Maple were the hardest hit. Twenty-five families had to be evacuated

by boat from City Hamlet a low area on North Main Street.

The flood water receded quickly, but the merchant's recovery was slow and costly. The experience of Ben Doto, the owner of Ben's Workingmen's Store at 42 White Street, was typical. He had received a large shipment of winter clothing, valued at between \$25,000 to \$30,000, shortly before the flood struck. Mud and water ruined about 10% of his inventory, and so badly damaged the balance that he was forced to dispose of it at special sale prices that netted only 40 cents on the dollar. His neighbor Lou Ginsberg, the owner of Connecticut Hardware, had to discount his merchandise

up to 75% after water filled the cellar and rose several feet on the ground floor of his store at 47 White Street. The basement of Feinson's Men Store on the corner of White and Main was also flooded forcing the company to sell \$10,000 worth of merchandise at similar deep discounts.

These losses were dwarfed by that suffered by the Barden Corporation. The ram-paging water of the river that flowed along the back of the leased plant on East Franklin Street smashed windows in the process of inundating such vital areas as the tool making department, the grinding room, and the storage area for precision



gauges, as well as the plant cafeteria. Approximately 300 machines and 1000 electric motors had to be rebuilt. \$50,000 worth of gauges were taken by boat to Henry Abbot Technical School where employees worked around the clock to clean and dry them. It required five fire trucks to pump out the building before a squadron of male employees could begin scrubbing floors and walls. For three

grew worse on Saturday night forcing the Still River over its banks for a second time. When the rain finally ceased on Monday morning more than 12 inches of rain had soaked Danbury in four days and the city had suffered the worst flood in its history.

This time flood waters cut the city in two. All bridges over the river were damaged.

lake. On the other side of Danbury water spilled into factories in the Leemac and Shelter Rock area keeping parts of the large Frank H. Lee Company out of operation for a week. The entire city was without power at the height of flood when the Housatonic Electric Power Company abandoned its sandbagging precautions and shut down the Triangle Street Substation.



weeks the plant could not operate.

Little wonder the community was jittery on October 13 when heavy rains began again. By Saturday morning, October 15 almost 4.5 inches had fallen, close to the amount that had triggered the August disaster. Instead of subsiding, the storm

For several days the only way for essential traffic to get from one side of the city to another was via the battered Cross Street bridge. Sections of the city that had not been touched by the August flood felt the river's rage. Railroad freight cars marooned on tracks in the Mill Plain area were almost covered by water. The nearby Fairgrounds resembled a

Even though more of Danbury was harmed by the October flood, the most vulnerable sections were the same ones that had suffered in August. Main Street on either side of Wooster Square, Elm Street and River Street to the west, East Franklin Street and Patch Street to the north, Delay Street and Chestnut Street to the east were



all reflooded. Once again White Street, this time as far east as Osborne Street, was devastated. Carrara's Fruit Market, a 100 foot long metal structure, was lifted from its foundations by the flood waters and slammed against a neighboring building 20 feet away. Harry Harris, whose auto parts store escaped harm in August, estimated that water flowed through his store to a depth of four feet and was as high as seven feet in an adjacent storage building. Ralph Urban measured 69 inches of water in his White Street appliance store, compared with 24 inches in August. A stunned Danbury News Times reporter, getting his first look at the flood damage after the waters had gone down, declared that White Street should be renamed "Black Street" because everything was covered with dark, sticky mud.

The same factories were

devastated. The Barden Corporation had to repeat the process of rescue and rehabilitation of delicate machinery, and cleanup of their leased quarters for a second time within as many months. Aging hat factories in the Beaver-Rose Street area were badly battered. Portions of the walls of both the American Furriers and Hatters factory, and the Mallory backshop were turned into rubble by the surging waters. An estimated 6 million dollars in damage was caused by the October flood.

For three days downtown Danbury resembled a war zone. Large dump trucks, the only vehicles that could navigate the flooded streets, evacuated those marooned in apartments. Others, such as 13 year old Eugene Ward, were snatched off the roof of a Main Street building by a US Army helicopter from Sikorsky Field. The displaced residents were cared for in an emergency shelter set up in the War Memorial in Rogers Park. On Sunday night a fleet of 22 fire trucks from the New York City Fire Department rolled into Danbury to assist in the cleanup.

This flood did not spare human life. Robert J. Keating, a 40 year old Danbury policeman,

died of a heart attack while attempting to rescue a family on Thorpe Street extension. After the flood waters subsided the body of Christopher Wheeler, who lived on Rowan Street, was found partially buried by mud and debris near the Chestnut Street bridge.

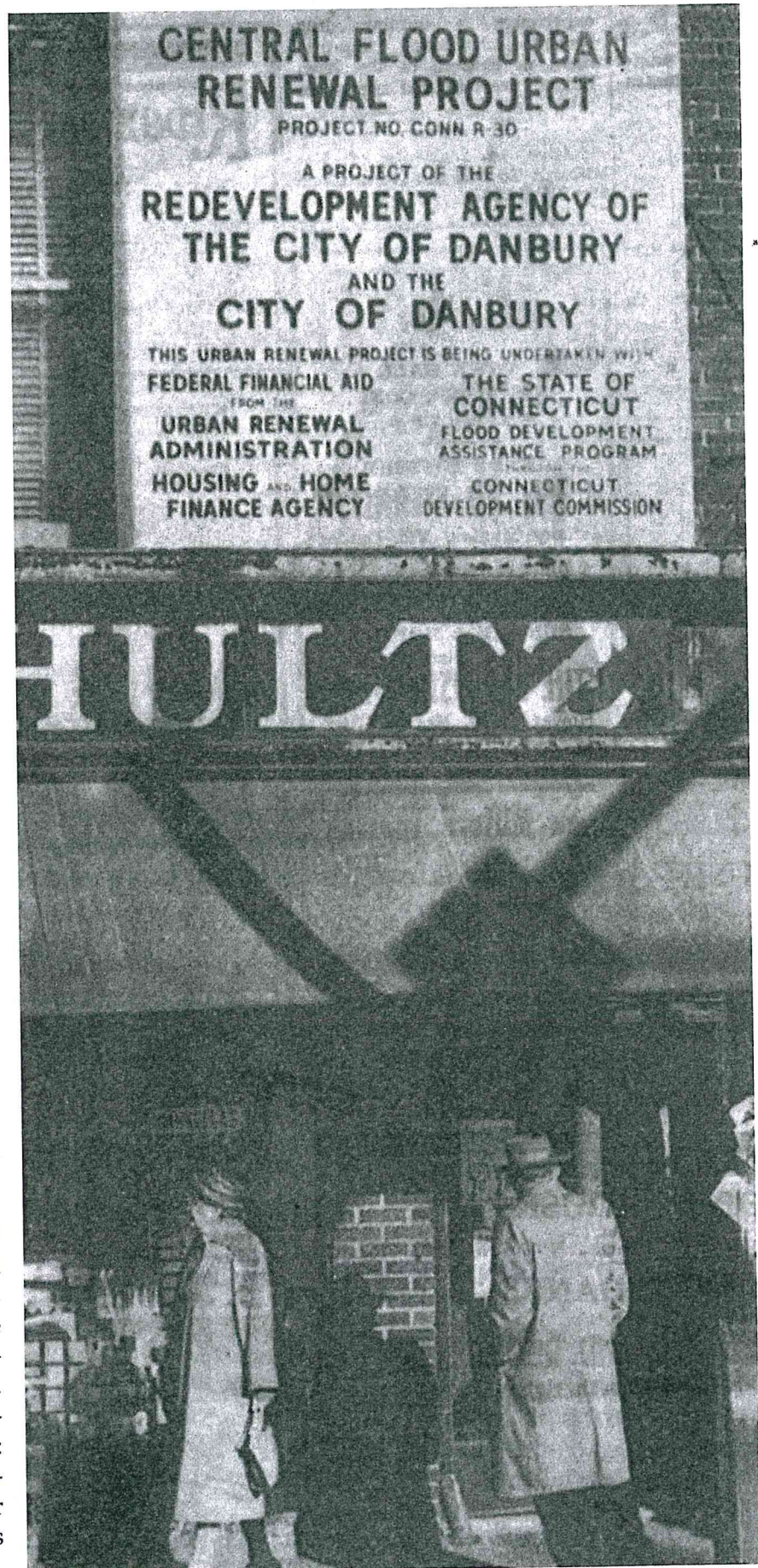
The twin floods left behind badly damaged roads, buildings, and spirits. Looking back the community realized that, at least since the minor flood brought on by the 1938 hurricane, they had been courting trouble. It was apparent that the Corps of Engineers had been correct in a 1940 report that warned about the danger of covering the river and permitting obstructions to block the river bed. Before the last basement had been pumped dry Danbury residents reached a conclusion about the flood that would change the city forever. On October 19 the Citizens Committee for Flood Control Action, representing the major economic forces in the community, declared war on the Still river. For the next 25 years the primary goal of urban planning in Danbury was to banish the unpredictable stream from the community.



BANISHMENT: The Changing Face of Danbury

The impetus behind this very necessary project to widen and rechannel the Still River, was the local businessmen and industrialists, particularly the representatives of the newly arrived companies like Barden, who had formed the Citizens Committee for Flood Control Action in October 1955. This group pressured city government; state government (Governor Abe Ribicoff visited Danbury and pushed for action); and the federal agencies (Congressman Albert Morano and Senator Thomas Dodd also offered support.) The threat of new companies abandoning Danbury, which would have killed the post hatting renaissance, motivated the city administration to initiate flood control.

The Redevelopment Agency (RDA) was established in June 1956. Joseph Canale was hired as the part-time Executive Director of RDA because, as the Danbury Housing Authority Director, he was the only person who had experience in dealing with the federal government. This was extremely important because all of the initial programs under which the RDA operated were governed by federal regulations. Canale served in this capacity until February 1980, when he resigned to assume the office of Commissioner of Housing for the State of Connecticut. The first Redevelopment Commission was composed of: George F. O'Brien, first chairman; Edgar T. White, Treasurer (served in this capacity until his death in late 1979); William W.



Sunderland, Assistant Treasurer; Frank S. Stevens; W. Edwin Harrison; Lazarus S. Heymen (served until his death in 1968); Louis T. George; Henry N. Blansfield. Later in 1959 when the RDA became responsible for relocating the many businesses and families located in the flood area, the agency hired Jeremiah Lombardi as its Relocation Officer. Lombardi would spend over twenty-five years endeavoring to accomplish the goals of the RDA.

The process of widening and rechanneling the Still river was the primary objective of the Redevelopment Agency. Though the Army Corps of Engineers made a detailed study of the flood damage, and proposed a \$16 million, 500 year flood control project, they were unable to carry out the project. Federal regulations governing the cost-benefit ratio under which the Corps was working required that the value of the rescued land had to be more than the cost of the flood control. Therefore, the RDA and the City of Danbury had to seek other means to finance the project. By agreeing to follow the Housing and Home Finance Agency's provisions (e.g., declaring the damaged downtown flood area—a blighted area), the RDA was able to secure federal financing for the flood control project. Under the direction of the City Engineer, Sidney Rapp, Phase I of the flood control project in the downtown commenced in 1962. Although the Corps did not finance Phase I (Rose-White Streets), and Phase III (Cross-Triangle Streets), they did provide the plans, specifications, and technical assistance. With the

change in federal regulations in 1965, the Corps did pay for Phase II (White to Triangle Streets), which was constructed between 1974 and 1976. After twenty years the RDA had successfully achieved its goal of flood and erosion control.

Urban renewal, a by-product of flood control, concerned not only the revitalization and economic stimulation of the community, but the importance of providing adequate housing for all Danbury's citizens. The dynamic new Republican mayor, Thayer Bowman, who had been elected in 1961, encouraged the RDA to aid in helping the city find an appropriate site for the Federal Low Income Housing project. A citizens group in the Beaver Brook area opposed this project and appealed to the Connecticut State Supreme Court. However, through the efforts of the RDA, the Danbury Housing Authority and the city, low income housing was built in the Beaver Brook area on Eden Drive as well as on lower Main Street (i.e., Laurel Gardens), and in the upper sections of Elm and Spring Streets.

During the early stages of the Still River's restructuring, the RDA began the process of revitalizing the rescued land in the Central Business District (CBD). In the early 1960's the CBD was thought of as the principal hub for retail shopping, integrated with office and professional buildings. This concept prompted the RDA to seek development of a shopping mall in the downtown. After much intense and at times harsh negotiations with the developer the mall finally opened in 1968, only

to close within ten years. There are several reasons why the downtown mall failed, including the poor quality of the anchor store, the lack of security, and its non-integration into the fabric of downtown.

With the sale of the old downtown mall to a Wilton corporation in 1977, the RDA began to concentrate its efforts on its expanded urban renewal program. This Neighborhood Development Program (NDP), originally the "Mid-Town East Redevelopment Project," which encompassed some 200 acres, was initiated in 1964. The intention of the 1964 project was to solve many of the city's problems: completion of flood control, improvement of the roadway system in the CBD, provide new housing sites and industrial development to generate employment opportunities. For most of the 1970's limited, but successful, redevelopment took place. Land was acquired for flood control. Patriot Drive, a north-south connector road was completed in 1976. On the southeast corner of Patriot Drive and Pahquioque Ave., Sieburg Industries (BRT) built Patriot Manor in 1979, a 32 unit apartment that was the first constructed on RDA land. All but the first of these projects were united under the NDP Program. The remainder were completed with Community Development Block Grants (CDGB) funds. The NDP project was eventually closed out in 1983. How successful was urban renewal under the NDP program? Many of the individuals who lived in the neighborhoods encompassing Liberty Street and Railroad Avenue considered this area as their home, and not as a

slum, and resented the destruction of their neighborhood. Was this obliteration of an entire neighborhood necessary? In some respects, it was. The CBD would not have survived, if a new access roadway system had not been constructed, and these neighborhoods stood in its way. However the CBD is still surrounded by blighted and unsightly neighborhoods, which need attention. Certainly this could be another significant use of CDBG funds not only to revive these neighborhoods, but retain their sense of community and historic character.

While the NDP Program was drawing to a close, the RDA began to concentrate its efforts on the new Parcel A, extending from Liberty, Ives, and Delay Streets east to Patriot Drive. In 1979 the RDA commissioned a market study, which was completed by Gladstone Associates, Washington, D.C. This was the first time the RDA had been told that this site should be developed as Mixed-Use (i.e., substantial commercial-office space, moderate retail and housing.) Undoubtedly, this mixture would be the key to economic growth and viability for the downtown. The RDA was also told that the project must have sufficient parking, must be an integral part of the downtown, and the land use must respect traditional patterns of style and scale in the downtown. Although the RDA acknowledged Gladstone's recommendation concerning the importance of integrating new construction with the older structures on Main Street, the agency was very leery of the new historic preservation movement, which had

come into focus in 1980. The agency's suspicion and misunderstandings of the Danbury Preservation Trust's motives in applying for a National Register Historic District on Main Street, were exemplified in the RDA opposition to the application as well as the renovation of the Hull building. According to the RDA the historic preservation program was not a source for fostering or generating the rejuvenation of the CBD, but a movement that could be a deterrent to the RDA's long established goal of urban renewal and downtown commercial revitalization. In spite of the RDA's initial resistance, historic preservation has proved to be an asset to the economic and cultural revitalization of Danbury's downtown.

After much discussion and review among the RDA, TPA, Gladstone representatives, and the new city administration under Mayor James E. Dyer, the RDA decided to offer Parcel A to developers and went out to bid in 1981. The RDA was seeking a developer who understood the Mixed-Use concept and had a strong financial base. In November the RDA chose Sefrius as the developer of Parcel A, with the understanding that the project was to get underway as soon as possible. The early 1980's saw the possibility of a major mall being built either in Danbury or Brookfield. The RDA knew that this could be a disaster to the economic rebirth of the downtown. Even though the RDA knew that time was of the essence, they allowed Sefrius, who by now had re-incorporated itself as United Synetics, Inc., to waste two years updating Gladstone's market

study and feasibility study, and securing financing. It is possible that the RDA thought that United Synetics, Inc. would be the proverbial fairy godmother, because they were associated with Ting Pei, the son of the renowned architect I.M. Pei. The RDA might have been dazzled, but the scales fell from their eyes in late 1983, when Pei was unable to secure financing.

The opening of the Danbury Fair Mall in 1984 made action on the development of the downtown parcel an urgent matter. Consequently, the RDA wasted little time producing a rigorous "Invitation To Bid" (IFB), and once again offered Parcel A to prospective bidders in May 1984. By the late summer the RDA had only two proposals, one from Waterbury developer, John Errichetti and another from a Danbury firm, the Nolan Brothers. Both proposals had some merit. Errichetti, had a strong financial base, having a net worth of \$30 million, and experience, but little commitment to the project. His IFB included a Star Wars modernistic design, devoid of any relationship to the historic character of Danbury's downtown, and deficiencies in the number of parking spaces available within his design. Sufficient parking was a major factor in the revitalization of the downtown. The other proposal by the Nolan Brothers showed a strong commitment to downtown and Danbury, and was enhanced by a magnificent design, with sufficient parking. But there were two major drawbacks, a weak financial base and far less experience than Errichetti. In September 1984 the RDA chose Errichetti as the developer of Parcel A, basing their



decision, on his financial worth and experience.

Controversy greeted the RDA's announcement of its selection of Errichetti. Many Danburians, including the Danbury Preservation Trust and a local group called The Committee for the Proper Development of the Downtown, were shocked and appalled at the RDA's decision, and aggressively lobbied the Common Council to reject Errichetti. But,

with pressure from the RDA, the mayor, and the newspaper, that this was a "Do or Die" situation, the Common Council approved Errichetti in February 1985. Within a month Errichetti and Mayor Dyer signed the Master Agreement for the development of Parcel A. Throughout most of 1985 Errichetti stayed on track with the RDA. By early 1986 he had redesigned the project to fit the scale and character of the downtown, and had added sufficient parking. At this point

the RDA lost control of the project. Errichetti had a master plan, but it was hazy on the financing for Phase I (a condominium high-rise and parking garage), and did not provide the RDA with stringent finance requirements stipulated by the IFB. The RDA was so anxious to have Errichetti build this project that in the summer of 1986 it actually allowed him to come on the site and begin construction, without the property being transferred to him.

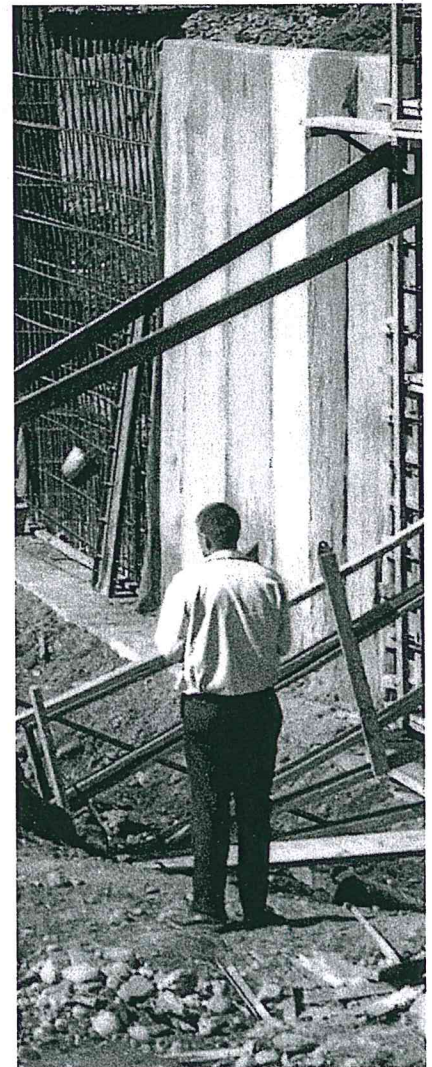
For the next three years there were constant problems with Errichetti and the project. The beginnings of a disastrous slide in the condominium market worsened Errichetti's financial position. The phase agreement had to be amended so that Errichetti could provide an alternative performance bond. Market-rate housing had to be changed. CHFA financing was sought, and new market studies had to be obtained. Then soil contamination was found on the site, and construction had to cease, while the site was examined and eventually approved. By the beginning of 1989, nearly 4 1/2 years after his selection as the developer of Parcel A, Errichetti signed the Phase I agreement, knowing that he had lost his mortgage commitment. From March until October Errichetti tried to secure a mortgage for Phase I, but was unable to do so. The RDA met on October 12, 1989, and asked Errichetti for his mortgage commitment. He admitted he had none, and requested an indefinite extension until the condominium market turned around. This was the last straw. The RDA lost all patience with Errichetti, the downtown was in rapid decline, and there was no other choice but to terminate Errichetti, which the RDA did accusing him of breach of contract. Within a month Errichetti sued the RDA and the city to recover expenses from the preliminary construction of his high-rise and garage. The suit went into arbitration in 1990 and was not settled until the late spring of 1995, in the city's favor, in that the city did not have to pay Errichetti anything. But this horrendous epi-

sode in the history of the RDA cost the city nearly half million dollars in legal fees and as much to demolish Errichetti's concrete slab.

Though the RDA has placed itself in these dire situations with developers for the past thirty years, the new direction both the RDA and the planning department are taking is productive, positive and reassuring. Until very recently, the RDA has concentrated only on developing large tracts of land in the downtown. The records indicate that they have never truly considered the concept of having a master plan and soliciting bids on small portions of the property, thus allowing each small portion to fit into the whole - master plan. This is the policy that the present city administration headed by Mayor Gene F. Eriquez, and the RDA initiated in 1990, under the direction of the Planning Department's Director Dennis Elpern. The RDA closed its office in 1993, and only the board continues to exist. The RDA is under the auspices of the Planning Department and its director.

This new direction has been a major factor in the revitalization of the downtown. All new construction (the parking garage, the Galleria, the hospital's physical therapy building, and Liberty Terrace; including the restored Union Station) as well as future endeavors (the Ice Rink Complex, and the Village Bank and Trust building; along with the DOT's new computer railroad station on the corner of Pahquioque Avenue and Patriot Drive) have and will become an integral part of the

downtown in design, scale and historic continuity. After almost forty years the RDA, and the citizens of Danbury may finally see an economically vital downtown. It is even possible that the Still River, "The River that Runs Through It," could become part of these plans, with thoughts of parks and solitude created along the river's banks near the new Danbury Railway Museum. Moreover, the downtown will be revitalized, not as a retail hub, but as a source for commercial business enterprises with some unique high quality retail, and entertainment. It is hoped that it soon will become a comfortable place for people to live, work and play.



REDISCOVERY: New Life for an Old River

With the onset of the 1970's came the "dawning of a new age" and a new way of looking at our environment in general and the Still River in particular. While there were always some enlightened citizens who made valiant attempts to inspire others to consider the river as a vital and integral part of the city, it was the federal, state and local regulatory efforts which began to reverse the trend of pollution in the Still River. With the Clean Water and Clean Air Amendment of 1972 as the catalyst, came pollution control programs and regulations mandated by the federal government to protect the environment. The new laws required the issuance of permits and the treatment of all waste water to remove pollutants before they were discharged into the rivers. Also required was extensive testing of waste water to ensure that it would be toxic-free before entering the rivers.

This legislation ushered in a new way of thinking concerning our natural resources and a change in environmental philosophy. Enlightened to the dangers of abuse, there was a shift in the collective mind-set of the people to return to the harmony between humans and nature. There was an understanding and realization that natural resources were precious, that a mutual dependency exists; humans need clean air and clean water and the environment needs protection. The balance

needed to be restored.

City government accelerated its efforts to purify municipal sewage before discharge. In the nineteenth century there was no treatment of sewage; raw sewage was dumped directly into the river. Later sewage was collected in sewer lines and chlorinated, followed by an improvement that allowed solids to settle before discharge. In the 1930's tertiary treatment was added to remove phosphorous which causes blooms of algae to grow. Finally, in the 1990's the City of Danbury improved the process to provide advanced secondary treatment that removed ammonia from the water, which is toxic to fish. This new process has been effective beyond expectations. For the first time in recent memory, fish have been observed in the Still River downstream from the plant and in the effluent channel immediately downstream from the outfall. In fact, part of the monitoring requirements for the treatment plant's discharge is to place fish and other aquatic life in the treated water to prove that they can survive. Indeed, fish can be viewed at the treatment plant lobby living in an aquarium filled with treated sewage water.

In 1995 the City of Danbury, intending to capitalize on these water quality gains, designed a project along a 2.2 mile segment of the Still River in eastern Danbury from Commerce Park to the Brookfield border. This focus area is the model for extending the restoration efforts to other sections of the river. The city was awarded a grant of \$83,000 from the Connecticut Department of Environmental

protection to create a "showcase" to demonstrate what a municipality can do to transform a river from a virtual sewer into a community resource that is a wildlife habitat, recreational and aesthetic jewel. This segment had been classified by the Department of Environmental Protection (EDP) as one of the most degraded areas in the state. As a direct result of cleaning up the industrial discharges and improving the sewage treatment plants, the water quality has rebounded to a healthy state; one that has created conditions in the river that will support fish and other aquatic life.

There are four main themes to the Still River Restoration:

- Wildlife Habitat Restoration
- Cleansing of Stormwater Discharges into the River
- Shoreline Stabilization
- Recreational Development

Starting with wetland restoration, there are three floodplain areas along the shoreline of the Still River that will be reconstructed. One exists behind Pathmark Pharmacy on Route 6, and a second zone lies between the Cine Theater in Commerce Park and the river. A third zone is situated in the floodplain that is located near the parking lot of Pitney Bowes in Commerce park.

Environmental consultants are bio-engineering a design that will provide two separate improvements to the wetlands. First, road drainage that normally carries salt, oils, metals and other contaminants directly to the river will be channeled into a series of treatment cells

that will settle out or absorb these pollutants during storms so that they do not contaminate the river. Second, the vegetation and water regime of these zones will be helped to attract waterfowl and other wildlife to the area.

The second restoration project will address erosion. The rush of water from paved sections of the urbanized parts of the city during storms result in "undercut banks," and the shoreline throughout the river restoration corridor is severely eroded. The eroded banks do not provide a good habitat for fish and waterfowl, as there are no quiet areas to feed or hide. The consultant is designing a vegetative mat that will be anchored to the shore and the river bed. This mat consists of a biodegradable fiber that is imbedded with plants that are rooted in shallow water and whose shoots emerge above the water. After the vegetative mats have successfully established themselves, that section of the river will be transformed into a lush, shallow water area where finfish will feed on insects and where waterfowl will find cover and nesting sites.

Just downstream from the shoreline stabilization site, a "river Porcupine" structure will be built. The effect of this structure is to scour the center of the river channel to create more areas of gravel for the spawning of fish.

The final aspect of the River restoration project is recreational and environmental education. A continuous hiking trail will be developed, starting

at Commerce Park. At the beginning of the trail a handicap access point to the river will be constructed; a wheelchair accessible base will lead to a platform for observation and fishing. Along the hiking trail there will be signs and trail brochures to explain the restoration project and discuss the ecology of environmental characteristics of the area.

The project's plan to accomplish all of these goals consists of three phases: design, issuing permits and construction. The project design phase has already been initiated and the wetland reconstruction will be completed by the end of the summer of 1996. Following the completion of the design is the permitting, and the necessary environmental permits will be obtained from the Army Corps of Engineers, the DEP and the city's Environmental Impact Commission. This phase is expected to be completed by the end of 1996.

In the early spring of 1997 there will be a ground breaking ceremony for the construction phase of the project. Construction involves everything from the drainage improvements to the wetlands areas, removal of invasive vegetation and planting of healthy species to attract wildlife, installing the shoreline stabilization mats, marking the hiking trails with signs and markers and building bridges which cross the river. The completion of the project is slated for the summer of 1997, and when complete, Danbury will not only have a linear park to proud of, it will know that through the investment of much time, money and effort, the Still

River will again reach that delicate and very necessary balance of harmony between human-kind and the environment.

The restoration of the Still River will supply the citizens of Danbury with a recreation area which can be used for education, fishing, boating, nature walks and quiet retreats. However, this "gift" comes with a price. All must do their part to ensure that the river remains clean and healthy by using environmentally safe products, cleaning up after their pets, following city guidelines for disposal of toxic wastes such as motor oils and anti-freeze, and making a commitment to live in harmony with nature. The Still River is coming full circle back to when it was a pristine waterway supplying life and beauty to Danbury's original inhabitants. It is up to each citizen to ensure that the legacy left to future generations is one which reflects the care and effort needed to bring new life to an old river.

Still River Brookfield, Vt.
PROJECT "CLEAN SWEEP"
 Research by Boy Scout Troop 8 and Troop 5, Brookfield
 Logistics planning and Map prepared by Erik Zawacki
 Feb. - July, 1992

