

HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Winter 2007

Renée Kahn, Editor

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The Last of Stamford's Great Factories: former Pitney-Bowes site is demolished

By the mid 1800s, Stamford was on its way to becoming a bustling "factory town." The expansion of the canal in 1832 and the arrival of the railroad in 1848 provided easy means of access for raw materials and finished goods. In addition, a ready supply of both farm and immigrant labor gave Stamford a highly-desirable work force. Many industries, primarily Yale & Towne, world-famous lock makers, grew up here and a good portion of the South End became known as the "factory district," producing everything from billiard tables to typewriters.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Yale & Towne employed several thousand people, close to 25% of Stamford's work force, but by the mid-1950s it began to move to more modern facilities and cheaper labor elsewhere, primarily in the South. Its departure left a void in Stamford's work force that was soon filled by a dynamic new corporation: Pitney-Bowes.

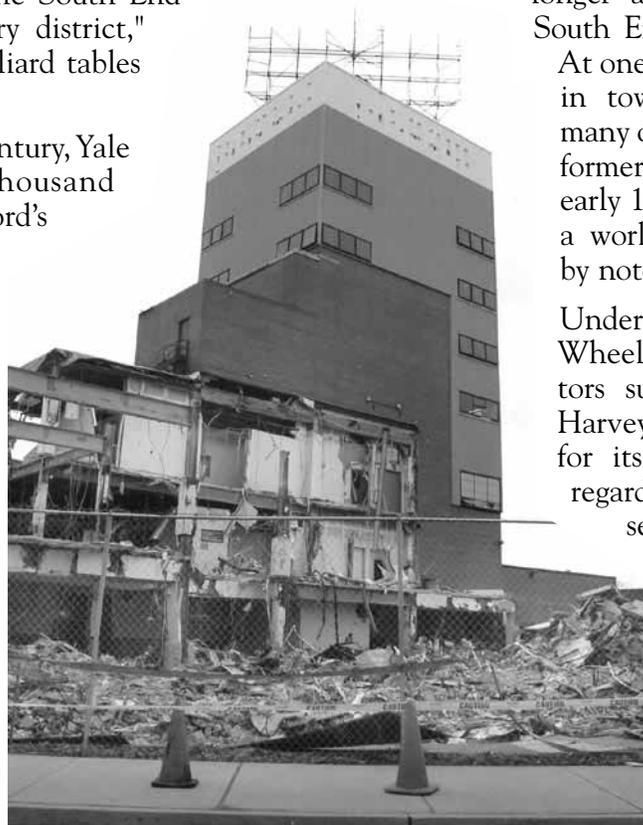
In 1917, Walter H. Bowles moved his Universal Stamping Machine Company from New York to an empty factory on the southwest

corner of Walnut (now Walter Wheeler Drive) and Pacific Streets. In 1919, he merged his firm with the postage meter company of Chicago inventor Arthur H. Pitney to form Pitney-Bowes, a company that brought about a revolution in postal service. Little by little, as PB grew and expanded its product line, new factory buildings spread west and south along Walnut Street to Washington Boulevard. When space was no longer available, additional sites in the South End and Waterside were acquired.

At one time, PB was the largest employer in town with over 3,000 employees, many of them skilled machinists who had formerly worked at Yale & Towne. In the early 1980s, it capped its expansion with a world-headquarters building designed by noted architect I.M. Pei.

Under the 40-year leadership of Walter Wheeler, Jr., and other dynamic directors such as Fred Allen and George Harvey, the company became famous for its enlightened employee policies, regarding itself as a "family" with job security, innovative profit sharing, pension and health plans and scholarships for employees' children.

During the past decade, PB gradually transferred its manufacturing operation to new plants in the



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Naugatuck Valley, leaving the factory portion unoccupied. New owners were found for most of the peripheral sites and in 2006, the Antares Corporation purchased the entire two-square-block factory tract along with the nearby Admiral's Wharf project (the former HELCO property) and the 20-acre Yale & Towne site. As part of the first phase of their plan for the South End, Antares is demolishing Pitney-Bowes' 850,000 square foot factory complex - all but the former Straw Hat Factory on the corner of Pacific and Crosby Streets. The I.M. Pei World Headquarters Building overlooking Koszkiusko Park is still occupied by the company, although rumored to be for sale. The



Pitney Bowes' World Headquarters building designed by I.M. Pei is still occupied by the company.



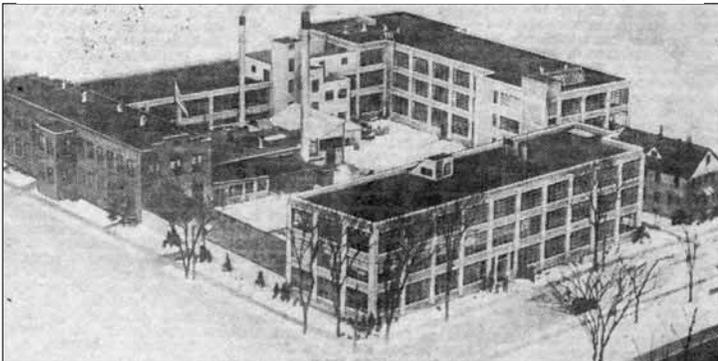
View from Walter Wheeler Drive. Demolition of 650,000 square feet of manufacturing space is currently underway.



Former Straw Hat Factory at corner of Pacific and Crosby Streets will remain.

TERCENTENARY EDITION, STAMFORD ADVOCATE, 1941.

Pitney-Bowes Postage Meter Company



Pitney-Bowes Postage Meter Company as it appeared in 1941 in the Tercentenary Edition of the Stamford Advocate. The horseshoe-shaped site contained 150,000 square feet of floor space at that time.

How Pitney-Bowes got its start

In 1917, Walter H. Bowes moved his Universal Stamping Machine Company to Stamford, merging it in 1919 with Arthur H. Pitney's American Postage Meter Co. Both entrepreneur-inventors had been experimenting with practical ways in which to stamp and postmark large amounts of mail in a speedy and efficient manner. Their big break came in 1920 when Congress enabled the Postal Department, now convinced of the safety of the process, to authorize the new metered mail postal system. This allowed machines to do the herculean task of stamping, mailing and collecting payment for what soon became billions of pieces of mail. 🍀



City Child

- excerpts from reminiscences by Constance Miller Krehbiel

I grew up in Waterside and went to St. Clement's Church on Fairfield Avenue, which at the time was a small basement-like building. Later, as I grew older, I went to Holy Name Church for CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) because they had better parties and my friends went there. I know the South End, Waterside, and the West Side very well. Many of my relatives, both sides, lived in the area, and most of my friends lived in these areas. My cousin's family lived on Greenwich Avenue above a bar called The Old Dutch Tavern. My maternal grandmother lived on Melrose Avenue and two uncles and my older brother bought houses on the same street. One of my German-American cousins married an Italian girl (in those days that was considered a mixed marriage!) and bought a house on Elmcroft near her family. I had other relatives on Selleck Street, West Avenue, Taff Avenue, and Orchard Street.

I had relatives on Davenport Street, too, right across from James' Boatyard, where my maternal step-grandfather kept his rowboat. He fished and clammed about 350 days per year - all kinds of weather. He used just a drop line with a lead weight and earthworms for bait to fish and he used a clam rake at low tide to get clams. Incidentally, the best time to dig earthworms is at night. They are called night crawlers! I ate lots of fish, mostly flat fish, now called flounder, and clams, in those days. My cousins used to go crabbing and swimming off the stone wall by the Pulaski Street Bridge. I spent most days

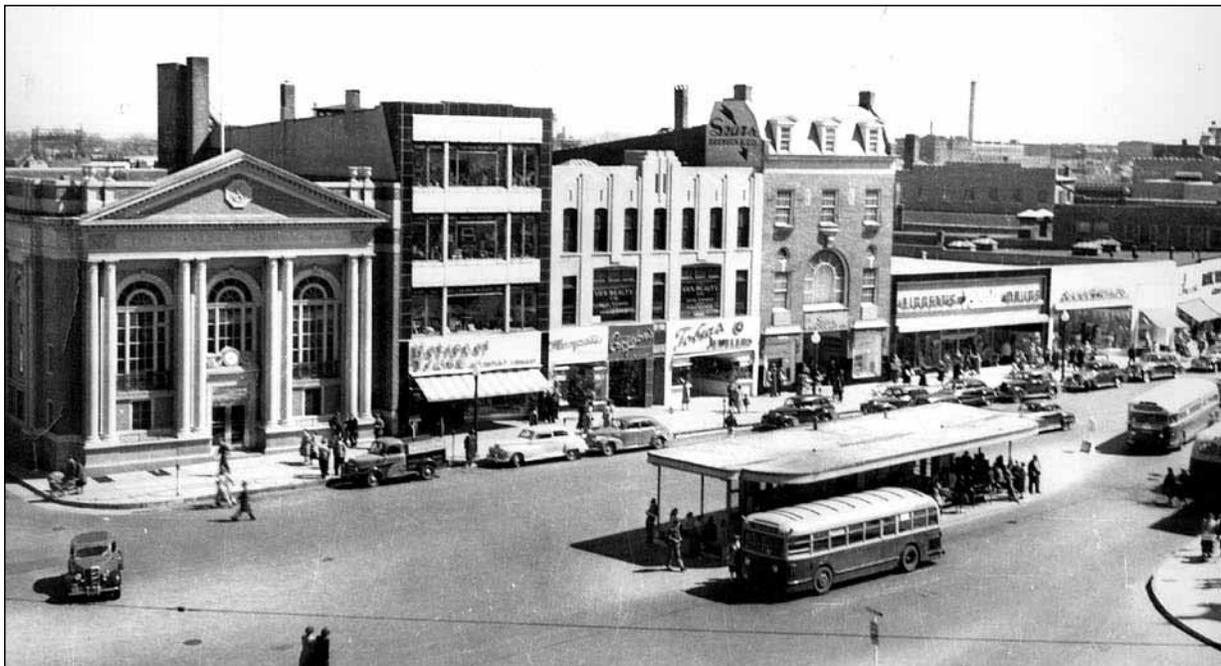
in the summer at Cook's Beach (now closed because of pollution) with my older girl cousins who flirted with the lifeguards and the neighborhood boys. I am sure it was polluted then, but nobody seemed to notice.

Many of my cousins and I went to Ryle School (now torn down and condos are there) and then Cloonan (now a community center) on Henry Street, but some went to Holy Name School. My parents did not want to send me to Holy Name because it was an ethnic church school (Polish) and they wanted me to be an American girl. Many of my aunts and uncles worked in the buildings in the South End for Yale & Towne and other sweatshops down there. Everyone could walk to work as nobody had a car or even a driver's license. Yale and Towne moved out in the 1950's and many got laid off and had to seek employment elsewhere in town. Then they commuted to work by public bus.

Sometimes my mother would take me to Woodland Cemetery to visit her relatives' graves. We would walk there from Waterside and my mother would bring along in a large canvas bag a small hand shovel and some plants to plant on the graves. She would even bring our lunch, which we ate at the grave site.

I always enjoyed my mother's trips with me to town. Usually we would take the bus from Waterside. We waited in front of the Hoffman Fuel office across the street from the Plotkin Lumber Yard. Occasionally, on a really

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Atlantic Street, c.1950.

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fine day, we would walk to town along Southfield to Greenwich Avenue through the old road bed where the Rippowam Diner used to be and then up Washington Avenue to Federal or Bell Streets. We would have lunch at the K & J (a pseudo-Asian restaurant) on Atlantic Street and then go to Slavin's Drug Store (next to the Stamford Theater) for a pineapple ice cream soda. Sometimes we would go to Karp's Bakery on Pacific Street to get a loaf of Jewish rye bread. It was never sliced; my mother thought it stayed better that way. I was always given the heel with lots of real butter.



Atlantic Market.

Perhaps, once a month in the winter, we would stop at the Atlantic Market across from the post office and get some home-made German wurst and cold cuts. They always gave me samples of the sliced meats to try. I especially loved the veal loaf. It was still warm when we purchased it. Then we would go to either the Federal Bakery or the New York Bakery (where I was sure to get a free cookie) to get charlottes russe. That had to be our last stop before going home as the pastries were fragile and would spoil if we did not get home quickly. The Waterside bus came at 20 after and 20 of the hour. Funny how I still remember that.

Sometimes, my mother, who could speak fluent Polish, would stop and talk to someone in Polish. She knew it always bothered me when she spoke this foreign language in public. Being a precocious child, I hated not knowing what she was saying and I felt as though everyone around was staring at us because she was not speaking English. After she finished her conversation, she would tell me that the person was a "DP". I had no idea at the time what that was, but it was her excuse for her embarrassing conduct. In fact, I did not learn that "DP" meant a refugee from Eastern Europe until I was in college studying World War II. It was my mother's way of letting me know why that person could not yet speak English and had not become assimilated into her new country.

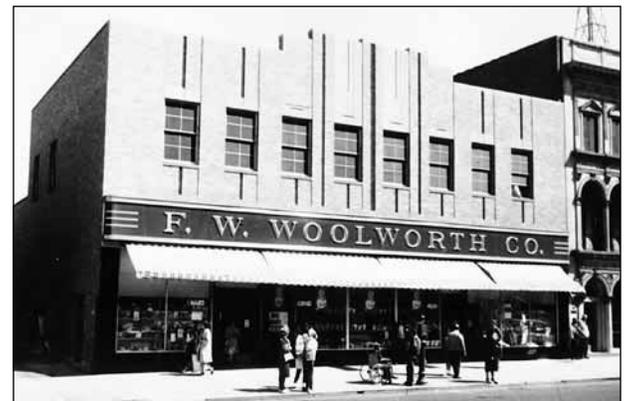
As I got older, around 10 or 11, I could go downtown by myself. It was perfectly safe, even in the evening. I even went to dancing school and the library by myself at night,



Atlantic Street Bus Stop.

taking the bus back and forth. My dancing school was in a hall in back of the Woman's Club building. What a great house (now gone) that was! Now there is an ugly bank building there next door to the Unitarian Church on Prospect Street. In those days I used the children's entrance to the library on Bedford Street; it no longer opens. At Christmas time in Latham Park there would be a real live manger set up with real farm animals and fake people. They were safe, too. All us kids from Phil Jones' School of Dance would go over there to pet the animals. There were two dancing schools in Stamford in those days: Bill D'Formato's School of Dance and Phil Jones'. Both men were wonderful teachers and dancers. Phil was a bit like Gene Kelly and Bill more like Fred Astaire.

My first job at age 16 was Christmas help after school and on Saturdays at Woolworth's on Atlantic Street, just across the street from St. John's Church. I couldn't get working papers until I turned 16 in early December. It was a great store and sold all sorts of wonderful things like Evening in Paris perfume and goldfish and canaries and fabric, etc. I got paid in cash each week in a brown envelope. It seemed like so much money back then but it was probably only about \$10. The store always smelled of popcorn and hot dogs and coffee and cheap perfume. I loved the place! ☛



F.W. Woolworth on Atlantic Street.



Country Child by Gwen June Ketchum

- excerpts from a letter to her grandchildren

I don't think I ever thought about the definition of *play*. I just did it. You see, I did not have brothers or sisters to play with and other children lived quite a distance from my house. I had to make up my own *play*.

At age 6, when I lived next door to my older cousin, Allen, we built huts all day long day after day; in the driveway, from a pile of scrap lumber; in the woods with the smell of pine needles from the tall trees overhead; behind the stone wall where someone had dug out part of the hillside to collect the gravel. That work was *play*. We explored all the woods and huge rocks and small caves. I still feel like a child when I step on a fern in the woodland and smell its aroma. We explored and gathered and were busy all day long.

In the winter, *play* was ice skating and making angel etchings in the snow by lying down and fanning our arms so that our outline looked like angel wings. We built igloos and snowmen and skated again. That was cold *play*. We didn't mind until we came inside to thaw and the pain as our feet started to warm made us cry. We also were able to sleigh ride down the hills on the road. My mother would be at the bottom and a neighbor's mom would be at the top to watch for cars. Very few cars ever traveled on June Road. That was really big time *play*.

Before my father finished building our house, when it had just the sub-flooring, I was allowed to chalk hopscotch squares all around the living room floor. That was a big deal! I also thought the game of jacks was fun. Board games, especially Bingo and then later Monopoly were favorites. Berry picking up the road was also *play* and most delicious.



Horse stable on June Road.

Swimming in the river, rowing the boat, swinging from the rope in the tree, cannon-balling from the diving board and floating along in an old tire tube...what a summer! As I grew older, the river never lost its charm. We would *play* cards at the picnic table, throw each other into the water, try to perfect our diving, and canoe down to the dam. I knew where every underwater big rock was. We did not scrape the bottom of the rowboat or canoe. We would pretend we were Indians and not even allow a drop from the oar or canoe paddle to splash the water. That would have given away our location.

Play was going to the horse stable close by to watch the blacksmith shoe a horse or to watch a large wagon of hay being pitchforked into the hay mound above the stable. Then, when no one noticed us, climbing to the hay mound and skating in our socks on the wooden floor. The floor was as smooth and slippery as ice from the hay sanding that it received. We sneezed from all the dust and it was hot but still fun *play*.

There was only one girl in the neighborhood. Didi and I would *play* together mostly outside until she had a severe case of poison ivy and was not allowed to be near sunlight as her new skin appeared. We walked to her house from mine straight up a hillside that we called the "short-cut". When I look at it now, I groan just thinking about trying to manipulate that climb. When I was young it was *play*. As teenagers, we rode no-speed, heavy bikes for miles and miles, up and down very steep hills. We were never driven to *play*. Gasoline was a luxury and automobiles were driven to work and home only, unless there was an emergency.



Swimming in the Mianus River.

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The three next-door neighbor boys had a goat that they hooked up to a cart. When the goat would not move, they'd get out and crank its tail. That was *play* as they'd zoom down the dirt road. They also had what we called an "Irish mare," a push-pull type of handle on a sit-down wheeled cart. Your legs would be out straight in front of you as you *played* with this.

Now that I am older, I can *play* whenever I want. Any time of day or night, any time of year. *Play* doesn't seem quite as much fun as it used to. My neighbors are too busy driving their big cars. They don't ever seem to *play*. I think I'll go *look* for my jacks.

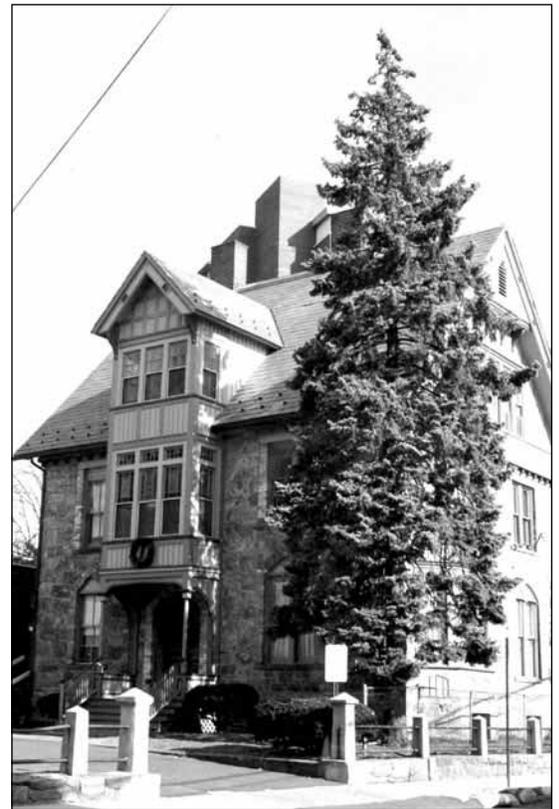


Riding the "Irish Mare."

Metcalfe House Restoration Complete

You've probably noticed the spiffy new paint job on the former Unitarian Universalist Church Rectory at 20 Forest Street. The colors were chosen by Elena Kalman, architect for the \$127,000 exterior restoration funded by the Stamford Community Development Office. In addition to repainting and replicating the original front doors, new interior storms were installed so as not to spoil the appearance of the original 125-year-old windows.

In 1995, members of the church decided that they wanted a more socially useful purpose for their 1880 rectory, converting it to 10 units of permanent supportive housing called Metcalfe House. The units are now overseen by St. Luke's LifeWorks, one of several similar housing projects they administer. We'd like to praise everyone involved, especially Ms. Kalman, Charles Connor of Emerson Construction Company, and Ralph Mastromonaco of the Stamford Community Development Office.



Built in 1880, this handsome former rectory is a mix of Late Victorian Gothic, Queen Anne and Eastlake styles. The locally-quarried stone trimmed in brick-repeats the materials of the adjacent c.1870 English Country Gothic Church.



E. Kalman, AIA



Barn Lovers: Take Out Your Cameras! Statewide Survey Underway

The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation was recently awarded a grant to document significant barns throughout the state. These once-commonplace structures are rapidly disappearing, some overnight, for new construction, some after years of slow decay. Residents of the state are being asked to participate in the first phase, a "windshield" survey which will hopefully lead to an increased interest in (and funds for) the study and preservation of historic barns.



The C.J. Starr Barn and Carriage House at the corner of Strawberry Hill Avenue and Fifth Street currently houses the Stamford Theater Works. This photo, taken in 1979 when the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, shows an outstanding example of a c.1860 Victorian barn. Since it is located on the property of the recently closed Sacred Heart Academy, its survival is uncertain.

You can download information and a survey form from www.connecticutbarns.org. Your job in this first phase will be to list and digitally photograph barns in your community, a barn being defined as a building that once housed animals, farm equipment or grain, even if it now serves another function. You will be asked to drive around and take down the addresses and photograph the barns from the street. You will not be expected to go onto private property unless invited. And don't climb around the interior. We won't bail you out for trespassing or pay hospital bills if you fall through the floor!

can with a digital camera at 300 dpi's and use your zoom lens to highlight interesting details. Download these images into the computer with the following information: town, street name, street number, your initials and photo number. For example, when I document my former chicken coop, I will label the photos as follows: Stamford, Webb's Hill Road 78 RK (my initials) 1 (or 2, depending on photo number.)

Remember, this is only Phase I. In Phase II, we will try to document each barn's history, perhaps leading to listing on the National Register of Historic Places. As Todd Levine, CTHP project manager says "whether this prompts more advocacy to protect old barns or merely results in a documentation of 'what was once there' is difficult to determine at this point. Potentially an extinct building type, the barn in Connecticut will at least have a place where it can be celebrated." Photographer Don Piper has offered to co-ordinate Stamford's survey, assigning "territory" and sending data to the CT. Trust. If you'd like to participate, call him at 323-5347 or e-mail dgpiper@localnet.com.

Ask a friend to help you "spot." Take as many views as you



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The HNPP is a non-profit, tax exempt 501(c)(3) organization dedicated since 1977 to the preservation of historic buildings. We would appreciate your help in achieving these goals.

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SAVE THE DATE



Donna Callighan, Photographer

Featuring:

Robert Metzger, Ph.D., moderator
art and photo historian and curator
Michael De Feo, street artist and muralist
Lisa Paul Streitfeld, art critic and writer
John Farr, film historian

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION and RECEPTION

Saturday, March 24th,
2-4 p.m.

The Historic Neighborhood Preservation Program and the University of Connecticut, Stamford Campus will be hosting a roundtable discussion: ***The City as a Work of Art*** featuring a noted artist, an art and film historian and an art critic.

The symposium will be held at the University of Connecticut Stamford Campus, Washington Blvd. and Broad Street.

It will be followed by a reception in the art gallery for an exhibit of Renée Kahn's photographic

sculptures entitled:

"Dreamscapes: Stamford as a Work of Art."

The program is partly funded by a CAPP grant from the City of Stamford, Dannel Malloy, Mayor.



THE HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD
PRESERVATION PROGRAM, INC.

78 Webb's Hill Rd., Stamford, CT 06903

