

TOUR 2: ALLINGTOWN CENTER, SHORT LOOP

This tour, one of two canvassing the commercial and residential center of urbanized Allingtown as it evolved throughout the 20th century. It should take you about 30-35 minutes on foot and along the way, six brief stops, noteworthy places, buildings and events will be presented. This will help you gain a better understanding of the community's environment, development and the lifestyles of many of its residents from colonial times to the busy times of the 20th century.

Before departing from the Green, take in the recently completed development, **The Park**, extending along Cellini Place and Orange Avenue from Forest Road to Admiral Street. This mixed residential and commercial complex updates a space which has long provided key services to the community but became tired as the decades rolled on. With the now totally revamped and dramatically different look, it seems appropriate to recall the area as it appeared throughout most of the past century.

Facing Cellini Place, named for the first Allingtown soldier to sacrifice his life in World War II, John Cellini, from left to right, this is what you would have seen.

- **Forest School.** At the beginning of the 20th century, Allingtown was developing rapidly. A new elementary school was needed to replace the not very old (it was built in 1893) four classroom wooden structure at the corner of Campbell and Orange Avenues, about 200 feet behind you. In 1912, the new school was completed, given the logical name of Forest School. Allingtown's latest grammar school was of brick construction and had eight classrooms, doubling the capacity. However, in the next two decades, reflecting the influx of new residents, the number of Allingtown classrooms continued to soar. As demand ramped up, a new facility, up on Milford Hill at Ogden Street, just off the Post

Road was built. The nine classroom building was named Lincoln School. This was in 1929. Lincoln was closed when a nearby middle-school was constructed but the building continues to serve in mixed use capacity. Just four years after Lincoln opened, and during the peak of the Great Recession, a second building of equal size was added at the Forest site. It was connected to the older facility, adding additional eight classrooms. Between 1911 and 1933, the number of Allingtown elementary classrooms had increased more than sixfold, from four to 25. Forest School was a mainstay of the lower community. Its teachers tended to have long tenures and taught more than one generation. Included in the long term faculty was the unlikely presence of two pairs of sisters, the Carrigans and the Squires. Many a Forest alum would tell stories about his or her time with these educators, particularly of the Squires who were, let's say for politeness sake, rather demanding, especially of the seventh and eighth grade young men in their charge. One of the Carrigan sisters, May, was the Principal of Forest for a number of decades. Years later, when the town's middle school was erected on Milford Hill, near where the Lincoln School had been, it was named for her. Forest's 1933 addition was locally famous for its separate "Boys" and "Girls" entrances, still to be seen on the building's façade. The older portion of Forest was demolished a few decades back and, in 2020, the new building, now the home of the community library, passed into private hands, ending over a century of public service at that spot. *Mini Tour A* gives a good look at Forest School and *Mini Tour E* passes by and comments on the remaining building, but, if you want to take a look now, cross Cellini Place and walk a few yards up

Forest. After visiting this iconic institution, you may return to Cellini Place, turn left and start your short loop tour of central Allingtown via Tour 2.

- **Louis J. Piantino, Jr. Allingtown Branch Library** was placed, beginning in 1934, within Forest School. At first, the library was in a cave like space carved out of the older building's basement. After many years, when that building came down, the library moved to the rehabilitated new, 1933 wing. The Allingtown Branch of the West Haven Library was another community asset shared by many grateful Allingtowners. It was staffed by a dedicated group, many of them volunteers. Often, parents and grandparents who had not had much formal education themselves but, recognizing its value in a newer world, would be seen accompanying their offspring as they burrowed into the underground location of the library. In an era when bookstores were rare--- Allingtown did not have one -- many an Allingtown youngster had her/his first exposure to Golden Books, Dr. Seuss, Nancy Drew, the Hardy boys and other formative classics in this humble space, where, if you didn't know where it was already, you would not be able to find it. So, even though adult staffers and patrons had to stay low to avoid collisions with the many pipes overhead, some of them slathered in asbestos, the library kept busy. Allingtown was often hard put for resources to administer to its burgeoning population in throughout the 20th century. Private and volunteer service was appreciated. The Allingtown Library had such a patron, Louis J. Piantino, Sr. Time and time again when funding didn't properly address need, the librarian staff would summon their courage and make the short walk down the same block you will be making in just a moment, to the French Bakery owned and operated by Mr. Piantino.

He had arrived in the village around the time many others did, the era of the First World War and the Influenza Panic. His shop was a mainstay on the Orange Avenue strip of neighborhood stores. Mr. Piantino always answered the call when the librarians came to ask. His last gift came near the end of his life. In making it, he asked that the library be named in his late son's honor. The younger Louis had died at 18, in 1918, about the time of his father's opening of the bakery. It took three decades, but, in 1978, when the library was relocated, the senior Piantino's request was fulfilled.

- *You are ready to start the exercise part of Tour B, the Allingtown Short Loop. If you have not been to see the school building, then please safely cross Cellini Place, then turn right, and walk down the hill at a comfortable pace to the intersection at Admiral Street. Stop her please.*
- Not so long ago, this stroll would have taken you past the small shops that existed here for many years. **Joe and Harry's Barber shop, the Park Liquor Store, Gabe's Shoe Repair** were the first three beyond the school. These shops occupied the former lobby entrance of the **Park Theatre**, another Allingtown mainstay, which went dark in 1943, shortly after new competition arrived in the form of the **Forest Theater**, located directly across the road from the top of the Green. All these well patronized businesses. except the liquor store have passed into history. You will pass by Park Liquor's new location shortly. The generation of buildings very recently erected on both sides of Orange Avenue here in Allingtown, replace the worn ones that served so well for many decades and will continue to provide goods to succeeding generations of Allingtowner's, both permanent residents and students.

- A second row of stores, separated by an alleyway (the original Cellini Place) featured an, **A&P Grocery, Zonder's Dry Goods**, a drugstore which operated under several proprietorships over time, Mr. Piantino's **French Bakery**, a tailor shop and a bar/restaurant, which also had several owner/operators but was most often tagged both generically and by one of its marquee names, **The Allingtown Restaurant**.
- Before leaving this corner, please look across **Admiral Street**. You see a modest appearing build on its opposite side. This is one of Allingtown's most revered spots. For a great many mid-20th century years, **Fater's Drug Store**, or just Fater's, was located here. It was the one place in Allingtown that everyone had reason to be in at one time or other. For many, it was a frequent, even daily trip. Under Mr. And Mrs. Fater, seemingly constant presence, a convenience store prototype operation was conducted. Such places were then often called soda shops or candy kitchens. This one was just Fater's. A typical walk or bike trip to there could yield a bottle of aspirin or other patent medicines, a newspaper, some smokes, a 5 or 10 cent Snickers Bar, a pencil box, perhaps a bag of marbles or a yo-yo or a Slinky for the kids. With, of course, vanilla or cherry cokes all around at the soda fountain. Traditionalists might go for an egg cream. All drinks were fresh mixed using hand pumped syrup and seltzer. And, for households without one or for folks on the move or the sly, a bank of pay phones stood at the back of the store. A good place from which to call in your day's wager. By no means was this a rarity. Fater's and its immediate neighbors to the east, are the only examples of what the area looked like for a long stretch of the 20th century.

- *Please, cross Admiral street and past the Fater's building for one block walk to Gilbert Street, on the left. Stop here.*
- On this stretch, you are passing a second bank of mostly small retail and service shops. The 100 block of Orange contained among other establishments, a hardware and paint store, a beauty parlor, a second barber shop, a men's clothing store, a restaurant or two. Further down, there were two side by side gas stations. Although Allingtown residents had relatively few automobiles until toward the end of the 20th century, the Boston Post Road/Orange Avenue corridor had enough traffic on it to support a disproportionately high number of these service stations, as they were then known. Locally owned and operated, they were kept busy. Just off Orange, visible from this corner, was a business that bridged the old and new. At **United Electrical and Fuel**, many Allingtowner's ordered their furnace coal which was piled up in a big cone behind the building. Inside, carefully saved up funds went towards the improvements delivered by washing machines, victrolas, refrigerators, stoves. Just about anything you could plug in, really, including the first TV sets sold in this part of town.
- On this block, an earlier occupant of what became a part in Allingtown's commercial hub, remained until the middle of the past century. The **stately home belonging to the Gilbert family** stood for many years, until the early 1950's, just across from where Front Road intersects Orange Avenue and where the gas stations are now. The Gilbert family, like the Allings, a prominent one in New Haven, also came early to this gently sloping land just west of the West River but, as the Alling's had greater numbers, the Gilberts ended up with only a street or two named after them and not the village.

- The other side of Orange Ave. Is part of the path of Tour 3: Allingtown, Long Loop. But, while here you can take in the handsome building directly across the street. This is the early 20th century building erected by the **American Mills Company**, which had a long life in this building, making stretch rubber fabrics, mostly for ladies' garments. This factory employed hundreds of Allingtown residents at a time, mostly women. It began in 1902, which you already recognize, was in the early part of the boom years for the community. The mill building, which extends 700' back from the street, more than two football fields, is on the National Historical Register of Historic Buildings.
- *Please continue on Orange Avenue by crossing Gilbert Street and walk the short block to the intersection of Marginal Drive. Stop here.*
- A few more shops were on this short stretch, including a motorcycle dealership/repair shop and an Allingtown mainstay, **Pete's Spaghetti House**, and **Schiefinger's Motorcycle Shop** which sold and repaired motorcycles and bicycles. One can imagine how many Harleys and Schwinn's were raced up and down Marginal Drive on "test runs."
- Before starting up **Marginal Drive**, you can glance ahead to the **West River Bridge** which marks the New Haven line and the beginning spot of Allingtown colonial history in either 1639 or 1640. From your vantage point, you might also get a glimpse, a few hundred yards beyond, to New Haven's prominent **Defender's Monument** which depicts a cannon and its cannoneers defending New Haven from the British raiders on lower Milford Hill, the spot on the Allingtown Green where you began this tour and will be returning . Take Tour 1, Part 2, the Campbell Monument for a full accounting of this

affair and/or Tour 5, North Allingtown Loop to visit this New Haven monument, part of its and Allingtown's Revolutionary War Experience.

- *Please Turn left and walk up Marginal Drive.*
- As you make your way up this street, a roadway that parallels the West River, you will probably first notice that, while only a few paces from the nation's traffic laden Orange Ave, also known as the Boston Post Road and as U.S. 1, highway you have abruptly, perhaps magically, entered a quiet and leafy space. A change and a respite. Glance to the right down the hill at the river and notice that the not so big and not so long **West River** is quite broad at this point. This is an older man-made alteration that allows the river to function as a catch point or safety net in times of high water, be it the freshwater flow of the stream, or the salty mixture from the high tides of Long Island Sound passing through the **Gates** just on the other side of Orange at the bridge. The Sound is only a mile distant. Another feature is that the river's west bank in this section of is one of the few spots where the riverbank rises significantly above the water. Almost everywhere else in Allingtown, the West is bordered by marsh, and environment that hosts a different eco-system, one that we recognize today as an essential part of nature's self-protection function. Here however, the forest could reach the water as the trees along this path testify today. An interesting fact about all of the marshes that normally border this river, is that the transplanted Englishmen mapmakers did not call them such. Today's marshlands or wetlands were then labeled as "meadowlands," likely an English colloquialism, referring here to the then predominant and native eelgrass and other similar plants growing just in and just out of the water. Once held in little regard,

we now regard the colonist's meadows as critical assets, even as, the non-native reeds that now dominate most wetlands, including Allingtown's, make a lesser contribution.

- *Continue to stroll up Marginal Drive to the corner of Orlando Street, third on the left. Stop here.*
- You can see, on the right side of Orlando Street, a neat appearing, non-residential building. This is the **Pietro Micca Hall** erected by local Italian- Americans in 1929. It is named for an Italian military hero from the early 1700's. This combination club and auditorium was a social gathering place for many of the Italian Americans in Allingtown. The hall hosted many civic and social events from meetings to dances, parties and receptions of all kinds, many containing at least one game of bocci and horseshoes. Though Allingtown was home to a great many ethnic groups, Italians were, by far the largest cohort. Today, the hall, known as West River Hall, the well maintained little building has been kept loyal to its original purposes, in service to a new cohort of attendees. A bit further down this small street was the home of young John Cellini, the district's first combat fatality of World War II.
- *Resume walking up Marginal for another block. Stop at the barrier.*
- You see here at **Westfield Street**, that Marginal Drive is blocked off. Please do not go beyond this point, as the area is unsupervised and unserved. This was not always the case. Though it can't be visually verified by from this vantage point, where you stand is quite close to some of Allingtown's more interesting areas, **Quinnipiac habitat, Derby Avenue, the Horseshoe Lagoon, Yale Field and Yale Bowl, West River History and the old Oak Street Connector** as well as those "meadows" we discussed a couple of stops

back, are not accessible from here at this time. However, most of them can be experienced on Tour 5, North Allingtown.

- Before resuming and starting to head back towards the Green, a note on the natural features and early use of the blocked off area. The landscape just ahead moves quickly from river to wetlands to forest. Ample shelter, fuel and food supply were available and the **Quinnipiacs** did not fail to notice. Many found arrowheads and other artifacts signal their frequent visits and usage of the area.
- **The Horseshoe Lagoon**, ahead to the left of the road, which currently cannot be reached from either tour, is a notable spot. (A lagoon is a smaller body of water not directly connected to, but with a relationship to a larger one in this case, the West River) Named for its shape the Horseshoe once was in use by Allingtowners' as a fishing hole, a semi-public beach and an ice skating pond. It was closed off around 1960. At the start of the third decade of the 21st Century, there is discussion of reopening Marginal Drive and the area it passes through.
- *Please make the left onto Westfield Street and another on Gilbert and proceed to the intersection with Bristol, two blocks down Gilbert. Stop here.*
- Both streets you have just traveled on are older passages. **Westfield's** name denotes its one time function of connecting one half of a district of colonial farm and pastureland with the river, on the other side of which, was the second half. **Gilbert** also likely began as a farm lane on Gilbert property. Most of the surrounding and connecting streets to these two date back to the early 1900's, while Westfield and Gilbert date back

much further. Ironically, perhaps, neither of these old-timers has ever boasted of a solid line of family dwellings, but they did become urban as the area filled in, more than a century ago. Although there are somewhat fewer houses now, much of the 20th century's representational stock remains to be seen along this route. A signature style of housing in this part of Allingtown is known as the "triple-decker." This type, with three apartments at one address, offered several advantages including the sheltering of large, extended families, lower property taxes, and the spreading of other housing costs over multiple incomes. These vertical structures also left space on the lots for other activities, including, in the early days of the neighborhood, the flower, vegetable gardens and grape arbors that many Allingtowner's were devoted to. Triple deckers were usually erected as "2 1/2 deckers with the upper level semi-finished. Many have been completed since. As you travel down **Bristol Street** in a moment, an unbroken line of these proud ladies will appear on the left side. An oddity, behind this row until the early 1950's, was a "**farmette**, a plot that was a house lot wide and a block long. 17th Century meets the 20th. Another magnificent example of a triple decker can be seen on the far corner at Admiral Street a little further down. #28 Bristol was a gold star home; Walter Kuchta, rostered on the monument on the Green, grew up there.

- The store in front of you was, for many decades of the 20th century, the home was the home of **Sanzone's Market**. Along with Fater's, Sanzone's Cash Market, is recalled as an Allingtown institution. The extended Sanzone family lived nearby, some above the store. They operated a full-service grocery store which included a walk-in meat freezer in this very small space. Sanzone's was the kind of place where people who had moved out of

the immediate area would return on a Saturday to stock up on its meats and shoot the breeze with the grocers and ex-neighbors. Though much has changed in the neighborhood, it can be noted that the market at #85 Gilbert Street, now known as **El Quetzal**, still serves local residents in much the same manner as the Sanzone's once did in magnificent fashion.

- *Please proceed down Bristol Street, then turn left on Admiral Street. As you near the bottom of the slight hill, on the right, you will see the **Allingtown Volunteer Fire Station**, Stop here.*
- This brick firehouse dates from 1928, replacing an earlier wooden structure. The fire company, itself, was formed in 1907, by a citizens committee. This was a time when buildings, large and small, were going up all around Allingtown, most of them on the plain below Forest Road. As an organization independent of the town, the Allingtown Fire District operated by levying its own tax on residents within its coverage area, a rather unusual arrangement. This did not end for over a century. In 2012, the department incorporated into of West Haven's City Fire Department. One interesting feature of the building's operation was its 1930's era Gamewell Company alarm system. Its signal was unusual brash, staccato and piercing. Its horn would go on for minutes as it coded the location of the emergency for the volunteers scattered throughout the community to respond to. This Allingtown station is still in operation, and now is partnered with one on Milford Hill at the Post Road and Fairfax Street.
- Just a few feet down the hill from the fire station on the same side, once stood a small, almost tiny building well known to mid-20th century Allingtowner's, especially its men

and boys, for, within it was **Greco's Garage**. This business was the launch pad of car #43, driven by Billy Greco, whose great success at West Haven's Stock Car Speedway and many regional tracks made him a local hero. Since the races were held on weekends, during the week one could get a glance at the car in the garage, as the Grecos worked their magical ways to keep it at the head of the pack. A perfect case of local boy making good. On some Saturday nights, when the wind was right, the muffled roar of the cars battling on the oval, some three miles distant, would come through Allingtown's open windows.

- *Continue down to the corner at Orange, make a right and return to the Green. Consider taking another mini tour of Allingtown. Or plan to come back soon for another.*

Congratulations and thank you for completing this one.