

TOUR 3: ALLINGTOWN CENTER, LONG LOOP

This tour is one of two canvassing the commercial and residential center of urbanized Allingtown as it evolved throughout the first three quarters of the 20th century. It will take you to the very place where colonial Allingtown began and familiarize you with key aspects of the community's life in the 1900's. The first three stops here are the same as on Tour 2. If you have completed them you may proceed directly to the West River bridge, travelling down or east 4/10 of a mile on Orange Avenue (the Boston Post Road.) There you can pick up the presentation narrative and enjoy the rest of the tour. Altogether, plan on taking about an hour to complete this loop.

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 so 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: a new facility, up on Milford Hill, at Ogden Street, off the Post Road was built. It had nine rooms and was named Lincoln School. This was in 1929. Long closed, the building remains in mixed usage. 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 many 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. *Tour 1, part 1*, provides a few of Forest School site and *Tour 5* passes by and informs 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 on Tour 3.

- **The Louis J. Piantino, Jr. Allingtown Branch Library** was placed, beginning in 1934, within Forest School. At first, the library was tucked into a cave like space carved out of the older building's basement. After many years, when that building was demolished, the library was relocated to the adjoining and rehabilitated 1933 Forest School building. The Allingtown Branch of the West Haven Library was a well appreciated asset shared by many. It was staffed by a dedicated group, many of them volunteers. Often, parents and grandparents who had not had much formal education themselves but, recognized its value in a newer world, could be seen accompanying their offspring as they burrowed into the underground 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. Suess, 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 the adult staffers and patrons had to keep low to avoid the basement pipes, some slathered in asbestos, the library keep busy. This Allingtown institution had a long-time patron, Louis J. Piantino had come to Allingtown about the time of the First World War. He opened up a bakery at 203 Orange, specializing in French pastries and cakes. For the next 30 years he supported the neighborhood library up the street. When funding or gifts were needed, the library staff would summon up its courage and ask Mr. Piantino to help out. The last time this exchange took place, was near the end of the baker's life. Once again coming through, this time Piantino made a request that the library be named after his late son, Louis Piantino, Jr., who

had died in 1918 at age 18. In 1978, thirty years after the request was tendered, as the library was relocating, that name change took place.

- *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 to the intersection at Admiral Street. Stop here.*
- 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 base of the Green. The Park had originally been a vaudeville venue and then went on to films, as did most theaters. All these well patronized businesses except the liquor store have passed into history. You will pass by Park Liquor's new location in just a few minutes. The generation of buildings very recently erected on both sides of Orange Avenue here in Allingtown, will continue to provide services to succeeding generations of Allingtowner's, both permanent residents and students, arriving about a century after the first row did.
- A second connected series 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' them **Mr. Piantino's French Bakery**, a dress shop and a bar/restaurant, which also had several owner/operators, mostly remembered as 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, ran a convenience store prototype operation. Such places were then often called soda shops or candy kitchens. This one was just Fater's. A typical walk to Fater's bike trip could yield a bottle of aspirin or another patent medicine, a newspaper, some smokes, a pencil box, a 5 or 10 cent Snickers Bar, perhaps a bag of marbles a yo-yo or Slinky for the kids and, 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, a bank of pay phones stood at the back of the store. One could also use these phones to get a bet down, not a rarity. Fater's and its adjoining addresses are a remaining few of what Orange Avenue looked like for a long time.
- *Please, cross the street past the Fater's building and complete the 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 was a shop selling locally manufactured **RubberCraft boats** and then, 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.

- 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**, just across from Front Road, stood for many years, the early 1950's. The Gilbert family, like the Allings, a prominent one in New Haven, had also been early residents of this gently sloping land just west of the West River but, as the Alling's came in greater numbers, the Gilberts only ended up with 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 and we will visit this area again in the return phase of the Long Loop. But, while here you can take in the handsome building directly across the street. This the early 20th century factory was erected by the **American Mills Company**, which had a long life in this building, making stretch rubber fabrics, mostly for ladies' garments. The factory employed hundreds of Allingtown residents at a time, mostly women. American Mills began here in 1902, which you already recognize was in the early part of the boom years for the community. The mill building extends back from the road for 700', more than two football fields and their endzones. It is on the National Register of Historic Buildings and, thus, protected.
- *Please continue along on Orange Avenue by crossing Gilbert Street and walk a short block to Marginal Drive. Stop here.*
- This short stretch of Orange Avenue was known for many years as home to **Pete's Spaghetti House** and **Schiefinger's Motorcycle** shop which sold Harley Davidson's and repaired two-

wheelers, including bicycles. One can just imagine how many Harley's and Schwinn's were sped up and down Marginal on test drives.

- Tour 2 goes up this tree lined avenue, while we, on Tour 3, will continue on Orange Avenue. Marginal Drive and its neighboring residential areas are interesting to visit. You may want to do that circuit later.
- *Please now keep east on Orange Avenue until reaching the West River Bridge. Stop briefly to take in the view up the river to the left.*
- What you are looking at from the **West River Bridge** is the end course of the primarily freshwater flow of lower West River. The renowned Hudson School painter, **Frederick Edwin Church** made a well-known painting of this scene, it is believed, in 1873. This is one of a few spots from which the view yet resembles his from that time, though Church was working a little bit further downstream, so the match is not exact.
- On the way to this spot from Marginal, on the left has been a portion of a parkland that is on both sides of the river, therefore partially in New Haven and partially in Allingtown/West Haven. Most of the Allingtown side is not accessible being not maintained well enough to encourage visits by the public. However, here by this ever-crowded roadway, at **West River Park**, one can still enjoy a green space and maybe even hook a fish or two. Perhaps, when you next return.
- The **West River** is neither large nor long but has served its communities well along its 13.5 mile course over the centuries it has flowed past here. The river has been a source of food for men and animal and birds as well as supplied a venue for more "modern" usages such as providing public drinking water, powering mills and factories, anchoring parkland and

preparing Yale oarsmen to out row the gentlemen from Cambridge, Ithaca and other waters of Ivy. Tour 5 will take you closer to the scene of the latter action.

- The bridge itself, dates to an installation only a year or two beyond the first Englishmen's arrival which came when their vessel came the West River to found New Haven in 1638. Apparently, these subjects fleeing their king disembarked from the starboard side, giving New Haven a leg up to faster development, an advantage never relinquished. Still, this latest span, dating from 1991, bears no name but that of the river it crosses. Puritans, after all, were not given to adornments.
- *Carefully cross the road, stop and look just a bit down river to the **West River Locks** installation.*
- These locks were installed in 1920 and, like so much of the construction of the public and private construction of the time, were meant to help the community with flood control, land reclamation, and other changes for the better. Unfortunately, the placement of these "flapper" style gates resulted in considerably more harm than good. The lower river's ecosystem was severely compromised and serious problems ensued with aquatic life, and plant growth of the wetlands and on and nearby the riverbanks. As time went on, better understandings of the negative results were developed. However, it was not until early in the 21st Century that corrective action was taken by the installation of more flexible gates here and downriver. including changes in the gates you see here, with more placed downriver. The new gates, while still offering protection from flooding in either direction

allow for more natural flow. This is slowly returning the West and its surrounding, linked environment to a more natural state, though it will take decades to determine how much recovery is possible.

- In a minute you can start back towards the Green on this side of Orange Avenue, being mindful the mail trucks and other traffic on the ever busy Boston Post Road. If you are ready for a snack, especially a sugar one, you have reached a target rich environment. In keeping with the traditional use made of the area immediate west of the river, on the south side, this section has been catering to the passing by traffic for a long time, including shops to service the vehicles themselves. One of these places, the **Dairy Queen**, is one of the first Dairy Queens on the east coast, having been opened on this spot in 1947. It may be the oldest continuing business on this section of Orange Avenue. Another of the onetime mainstay, this one no longer here, was an open theatre, **The Bowl-In Drive In** whose giant screen and equally massive marquee long outlasted the business itself, finally giving way a new development earlier this century. It has been said that more people snuck into this establishment at one time than the entire population of New Haven County but, that may not be true. All of this land and these businesses were built up over time on reclaimed wetlands. When the first bridge went up over the West River, the view on both sides mirrored each another.
- *Please walk up the gentle slope on Orange Avenue until reaching the site of the already familiar American Mills plant. Stop here.*

- A rare tragedy occurred here in 1930. The web mill, as it was known informally to Allingtowner's, regularly employed 200-300 workers. It even stayed busy during the Great Depression. On Christmas Eve, a Friday that year, -- Friday was payday and the custom in those times was to pay employees in cash -- an assistant payroll manager and a guard, were returning to the plant after a pickup trip to the bank. As they drove into the eastside lot a young man emerged, brandishing a weapon. The robber fatally shot the unfortunate guard and fatally wounded the manager, He escaped with the money, by stealing the company car. It was almost \$5,000, a huge amount in Depression America. Although the car was found not far away, the bold felon was never caught. Allingtowner is generally a peaceful place. This exception and the brazenness of how this robbery/murder was conducted are contributing factors to why, a near century beyond, the story still has the power to shock.
- We have already heard about the web factory building and business. Other factories employing many Allingtowner's are not far from here. Across Orange Avenue and a few feet up Gilbert can still be seen a large brick building. This is the former site of **the Velvet Textile Shop**, which was next to the boat manufacturers, made luxury material in this non-luxurious community. On our way, in a moment, around the corner we will see the former home of the **New England Die Casting Company**. Over its half century life, from 1941-1992, this company fabricated metal parts of all sizes and employed over 100 workers. It was also a good citizen, supporting local good causes.
- Turn left at the corner onto Front Road and walk up the street, viewing the two factory buildings until you are across from the stadium across the street on the right side. Stop.*

- **Front Avenue (originally Front Road)** connects Allingtown's center to other parts of West Haven's eastern side. It appears on some of the earliest maps of the area when there were few roads to be had. Never more than a modest passage through former marshland, it serves almost as a back alley for the area. Front Street has never had much housing, but rather, served as home to service areas. Further down the street at Allingtown's southern edge, (you will not be going that far on this walk,) the marshland was converted many years ago into a waste management area. Yep, the town dump. Here also, were and are truck depots and heavy vehicle repair services, fleet vehicle overnight lots and a mixture of small shops, most transportation Not a pretty place at all but, a pretty necessary one.
- *Please cross Front Road to the parking lot of the field.*
- The unassuming structure in front of you actually has quite a lustrous history, belying its appearance today. A local businessman, Maurice Quigley, owned a semi-professional baseball team – they were numerous in the first half of the past century. He built them a home, on a landfill, of course. It was first known as **Exhibition Stadium**. A few years later, ownership of it went over to the town and it became **Municipal Stadium**. Finally, it became **Quigley Stadium**. For its first quarter century, the stadium hosted local high school and amateur contests, mostly baseball, but football also. Several nights a week in the summer, The West Haven Twilight League, the oldest amateur baseball league in the United States, had many of its games at Quigley. Perhaps recognizing the regional appeal of baseball, the New York Yankees, yes, those New York Yankees, placed their AA level minor league team

at Quigley in 1973. The club, deemed the West Haven Yankees stayed for eight years.

Always loaded with exceptional prospects, the Bronx Bombers stationed future stars such as Willie McGee, Ron Guidry and Dave Righetti here to hone their skills. Quigley was some kind of manager hatchery as well. Buck Showalter, Jerry Narron, Bobby Cox and Stump Merrill all managed or coached at Quigley. Baseball is still Quigley's game and Allingtowners can on some nights walk down after an early dinner for a 6 o'clock Twilight League game. Though this ballpark has had many changes over its seven plus decades, there has been one constant. Throughout all this time and all these games, ex-outfielders will tell you, out by the outfield fences, after a rain, the marsh mud could both easily stop a ball and the fielder chasing after it. You could also buy your family Christmas tree here as for a few weeks each year, this parking lot, for workers during the day, spectators on nights and weekends became a staging area for homeless balsams. Few customers tied them to cars to drive home. Most carried their Yuletide firs a few blocks, either on their shoulders or in a kids' wagon. Those risking coal in their stockings, dragged them.

- *Pass to the right side of the stadium on the passageway and turn right onto Taft Avenue. Walk down Taft to reunite with Orange Avenue. Stop here.*
- Back on Orange Avenue, looking to the right (east) we get a view of the block skirted as you visited the Front Avenue concerns and Quigley Stadium. This part of Orange Avenue is also a traditional service and business strip. A couple of centuries back, a fat rendering operation operated on the near corner at Front Avenue, making waste into fertilizer in those farming

days. More recently, there was the mandatory service station. Allingtown's only banking institution, a branch of the **First New Haven National Bank** which only came in around 1960. The fact that a sizable community of some 8,000 people, as Allingtown was by the end of the Second World War, had no banking institutions for all of its prior history, perhaps is an indication of the community's lack of wealth and its use for banks, the latter condition a carryover of European tradition.

- Ready now to complete the last leg, we will be passing by the former locations of a number of Allingtown's mainstay businesses. The 200 block of Orange was, perhaps the most versatile of any. A few small businesses such as the popular **Cerillo's Restaurant** were along this block, but larger enterprises dominated it. Including some on the very short and dead-end Atwood Place in the middle of the block, little more than an alleyway, This compact area housed a four story perfume making factory, called **Cut-Rate Perfume**, which had outlets in two other businesses as, out front on Orange, **Cut-Rate Liquors** and **Cut-Rate Furniture**. The **Continental Lumber Company** warehouse/yard was across Atwood and had storefront on **Orange**. Just beyond, several competing new tractor truck outlets stretched along Orange. Many a westbound trucker, willing his old rig up Milford Hill or, heading eastbound, praying the brakes would hold when he hit the light at the bottom at Admiral Street, must have wistfully glanced over to the 12' high showcase windows with all those shiny new behemoth **Macks, Whites** and **Internationals**, looking more than ready to have their gears engaged, on display behind them.

- Most of this walk has taken us along a portion of the of Allingtown's public transportation artery, Orange Avenue, a portion of U.S. Highway 1, the Boston Post Road. In the middle of the 19th century, a horse trolley, **The New Haven & Allingtown Horse Rail Road** ran along here and then down Campbell Avenue. At the end of that century until shortly after WWII, electric cars operated by the **New Haven Streetcar Company**, plied the tracks, east toward or into New Haven's center, west and south, to West Haven's hub and then, beyond, to points at the shore. Bus service arrived in 1948. The last trolley run was in July of that year when a car, as usual, reversed direction at the Admiral Street turnaround and disappeared east over the bridge, this time heading to the barn and into history.
- *Walk up Orange Avenue to opposite the head of the green and cross with the light, using the crosswalk, over to it for a respite or to begin another tour. Congratulations, you have just aced the center long loop.*