

English Language, Large Print

Creating Community: 400 Years of Fairfield Stories

**Topographic Model, Timeline, Serving Your
Community, Building Economy & Other Hands-on
Interactives**

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Fairfield Museum
AND HISTORY CENTER

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Ahkee, The Land

Present-day Fairfield is located on the ancestral land of the Sasqua, Unquowa, Pequannock, and Paugussett people.

This land informed their ways of life. In a time before written language and maps, the physical characteristics of the land itself or how the land was utilized were often used to identify places. The presence of waterways, plants, animals, cleared fields, hunting areas, fishing locations, shelters, or ceremonial landscapes could all lead to the creation of a place name. Look for these names below on the topographic map and see how features of the land informed, and continue to inform, how people live here.

Indigenous place names you may recognize in the area (Name, Meaning, Location):

Aspetuck – High Place, High Land – Northern Fairfield

Connecticut – Long Tidal River – Connecticut River Valley

Housatonic – Beyond the Mountain – North of Stratford

Machamux – The Beautiful Land – Greens Farms to Southport

Munnacommuck – Island Place, Sanctuary – Southport

Pequonnock – Cleared Planting Land – East of the Mill River

Samp – Cracked Corn – Samp Mortar Rock

Sasquanaug – Marshy Land, Wetland – Southport

Saugutuck – Outlet of a Tidal River – Westport to Redding

Uncoway – Beyond the River – Eastern Fairfield

Land Acknowledgement

The Fairfield Museum acknowledges that our community sits on the ancestral lands of the Sasqua and Paugussett people, as well as that of other tribal nations indigenous to this region. We seek to honor past, present, and future generations of Native people who have, and continue to maintain, an intimate spiritual and cultural connection to this land and waters, despite the suffering and intergenerational trauma caused by war, displacement, and colonialism. We seek to build meaningful relationships

with and elevate the visibility of Native nations and people through our educational programs, exhibits, and community partnerships.

Study on Long Island Sound at Darien, Connecticut, 1872 (detail). John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872). Oil on canvas. Private Collection. Courtesy: Private Collection. © Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.

Fairfield's Reverend Samuel Osgood commented on how Connecticut artist John Frederick Kensett's paintings treated "God's common and abounding gifts—the water, the rocks, the trees, the light, the sky" truthfully and beautifully. Osgood confirmed the accuracy of Kensett's paintings, saying, "I have lived for over twenty years within a short distance of Kensett's summer house [on Contentment Island in Darien, Connecticut], and I have watched month after month the effects of earth, sky, and water which he treats. His rendering of them is satisfactory, suggestive, and imposing."

Topographic Model

Indigenous Location Names

Pre-1630s

How did people who lived here use and alter the land?

Building communities means making changes to the world around us, particularly to the landscape. Each layer tells a story. Watch what is now the town of Fairfield grow and change from the original Indigenous settlement to the development of the suburbs in the 1950s.

Glimpses of Fairfield History

Fairfield's landscape is home to the growth and development of many communities. Between the area's natural resources and the people who settled and lived here, Fairfield has a rich history.

Take a look at select moments in time across the top and explore how local events often had national and global connections.

Henry Hudson sailed up the waterway known today as the Hudson River. This painting depicts his landing in 1609, several years before Adriaen Block documented the Connecticut coastline for the Dutch. Hudson encountered Native Americans in the area and traded European knives, hatchets, and beads for Native American corn, bread, and oysters.

Landing of Henry Hudson, 1609, at Verplanck Point, New York, 1835, by Robert Walter Weir. Private collection.

© Christie's Images.

Fairfield's town green was the center of the community, and was established soon after English settlement in 1639. Pictured here are the town buildings that served the residents' needs, including the church and courthouse.

“Eastern View of the Courthouse, Congregational Church, and Jail in Fairfield,” 1836, by John W. Barber in *Views of Connecticut*.

1767–1846: In 1767, Redding was the first town to break off from Fairfield. Westport was carved from both Fairfield and Norwalk in 1835. Half of Weston separated to become Easton in 1845. In 1836 the city of Bridgeport is founded, formed from lands that were previously part of Fairfield and Stratford.

Illustration from *Fairfield: The Biography of a Community* by Thomas J. Farnham, 2000.

December 1848: The first train comes through Fairfield on the New York and New Haven Railroad. Residents could work in New York City and return the same day if they chose. The arrival of the railroad transformed Fairfield into a resort destination.

August 14, 1901: German immigrant and inventor Gustave Whitehead reportedly makes his first flight in Fairfield.

Fairfield Museum Manuscript Collection, William O'Dwyer—Gustave Whitehead Research Collection, Ms B1 07.

July 4, 1947: Margaret Rudkin of Fairfield opens a modern commercial bakery in Norwalk and names it after her Fairfield estate: Pepperidge Farm.

Fairfield Museum Manuscript Collection, The E. Lee Schneider Pepperidge Farm Collection, MS B106.

October 29, 2012: Superstorm Sandy hits the coast. In Fairfield, more than 1,000 homes were damaged by flooding, 5,000 people were evacuated, and six homes washed out to sea. The storm, which resulted in \$500 million of private property damage in Connecticut, was followed by months of cleanup and years of longer-term recovery and rebuilding.

Resilience of Native Communities

Members of the Golden Hill Paugussett tribe have led their community through obstacles caused by colonization and discrimination in order to maintain their traditions and culture.

“Believe that, if you have strayed from the teachings of your elders, you are not lost. Readjust your ways, and the creator will give you the vision and power to believe in yourself. Acknowledge the creator through thanksgiving and prayer, for the strength to do what is right. Ask for the elders for counseling to guide your life back to the wisdom of our old ways.”

—A prayer told by Chief Big Eagle to his daughter and Clan Mother of the Golden Hill Paugussett, Shoran Waupatuquay Piper.

Aurelius H. Piper, Sr.
Chief Big Eagle
(1916-2008)

Aurelius H. Piper, Sr., or Chief Big Eagle, was the traditional hereditary chief of the Golden Hill Tribe of the Paugussett Nation. Named chief in 1959 by his mother Ethel Sherman Piper (Chieftess Rising Star, Clan Mother), Big Eagle was proud of his Indigenous heritage, and dedicated a large portion of his life to the preservation and teaching of Native American history and cultural traditions. He founded and served as a consultant and instructor for an “Indian education” program in Bridgeport Schools, was a master beadworker, and was the founder of the White Buffalo Society, a federally registered non-profit intertribal organization that strives to retain a heritage passed down from the elders.

Chief Big Eagle continued the Paugussetts’ unrelenting efforts to preserve their quarter-acre reservation in Trumbull, fought for federal recognition of the tribe, and led the effort to acquire a 106-acre reservation in Colchester.

Shoran Waupatuquay Piper
Clan Mother
(1981-present)

Shoran Waupatuquay Piper is the present-day tribal leader of the Golden Hill Paugussett Nation, based in Trumbull and Colchester. She followed her father Chief Big Eagle Piper as leader of the tribe. As Clan Mother, Shoran Piper is the overseer of the tribe, entrusted with passing on cultural traditions including spirituality, cooking, stories, songs, ceremonies, and teaching tribal history. As part of her work in maintaining cultural heritage and community, she wrote *Red Road: Traditional Voices of Afro-Indigenous America* to highlight the experiences, history, and ancestral teachings of the tribe.

Piper continues the work of previous generations of Native women across Connecticut in preserving and revitalizing her culture. In Connecticut's tribal communities, women often had a voice in negotiating land rights, and citizenship was matrilineal. Native women have also contributed to the artistic and material culture of the tribe and served as

medicine women. Today, Clan Mother Shoran Piper upholds her community, which is recognized by the State of Connecticut and now numbers roughly 200 people.

Understanding Tribal Leadership of the Paugussett Nation

Native community leadership relied on a sachem, or tribal leader, whose role was passed down from one generation to the next, like a king or queen. Unlike a king or queen, a sachem did not have absolute power. The sachem needed to consult the council of Elders and the whole community would try to reach an agreement through discussion and consensus-building. In the Golden Hill Paugussett tribal nation, the community could have several leaders in different roles, including Clan Mother, Tribal Leader, Chief/Co-Chief, War/Peace Chief (and/or Council Chief), and Tribal Chairman.

Reservations and Land Claims

While the story of Native people has often been erased from American history, Indigenous communities have consistently proved their resilience and perseverance.

When Fairfield was settled by the English in 1639, Native people agreed to live on an 80-acre tract of land west of the Housatonic River. Other parcels of land in the Fairfield area were reserved for Native communities to farm and to hunt, leading to nicknames for places such as “Old Indian Field” that are still in use today. A retroactive land deed in 1656 confirmed the occupation of Fairfield lands by the English and established parameters for land use by Pequannock people. Soon after, a formal reservation for the Paugussett was established in 1659.

With land loss and displacement, many of the Indigenous people of Sasquanaug and Uncoway joined Native communities immediately north at Aspetuck. Others moved to neighboring Golden Hill in Trumbull, while some traveled north along the Housatonic River to Paugussett or

beyond. The social structures of local Native communities like the Paugussett, Sasqua, and Pequannock were greatly impacted by colonization. Despite this, they continue to fight for their rights, land, and culture.

Have You Eaten Yet?

Sharing food is one way to bring communities together. Food can offer comfort, help us celebrate, and pass down stories and traditions. Explore the diverse communities of Fairfield through its different dishes, and discover the history of certain ingredients and the cultures who use them.

Ingredients in just one dish can come from all over the world. Where do some of these ingredients come from?

Pick out a dish you'd like to try. Have a seat and put together each of these local dishes. Each dish is like a puzzle—put together the four parts of a dish and enjoy!

Be sure to take a close look at each ingredient for fun food facts, including their role in different cultures and connections to Fairfield. Enjoy a full “plate” when you are done!

Serving Your Community

Mastering a craft was one way to make a living in Fairfield.

While many early settlers in Fairfield made their living through farming, craftspeople also created goods or provided services, using their skills to provide for their families and their community.

For instance, blacksmiths used iron ore and wood to operate forges, creating metal goods including shoes for horses and nails and hinges for structures like barns and houses. With blacksmithing and other crafts, novices would apprentice with an experienced craftsman, learning to use the tools and techniques before they worked on their own. Many crafts were brought from artisans who came from Europe, who then passed their traditions down through families. As the town's economy expanded, and Fairfield residents acquired purchasing power and the desire for luxury goods, the need for craftspeople like furniture or clock makers grew.

What kind of makers offered goods and services to the community?

Meet the craftspeople that served Fairfield and the region. Craftspeople learned skills passed down from experts (who were often family members), finding ways to be creative while playing an important role in the community.

David Bulkley (1711–1804)

Cabinetmaker and carpenter

David Bulkley had ten children with his wife Sara Thorp, who was born in Mill Plain, a mile west of the center of Fairfield. David Bulkley passed down his carpentry skills and knowledge to his son Joseph. Joseph Bulkley continued the family tradition of cabinet-making by crafting case clocks, also known as grandfather clocks. On display here is a mirror attributed to Bulkley that dates from about 1760 to 1800. According to the family who owned it, this mirror was used in Samuel Penfield's Sun Tavern located on the historic town green behind the Fairfield Museum.

Justin Hobart, Jr. (1772–1830)

Furniture maker and storekeeper

Justin Hobart, Jr. was born in Fairfield to Justin Hobart, Sr. and Hannah Penfield. His father came to Fairfield from Hingham, Massachusetts and became a farmer and storekeeper. His sister Mary operated the family store while he was in New York City serving as a journeyman (or trained artisan) under cabinetmaker Thomas Burling. While he was in New York, Hobart, Jr. also obtained goods for the family store in Fairfield, but he shared his desire to return to town in letters to his sister. In October 1804 he and his sister agreed to take over their father's store as partners. It is very likely that the store was also Hobart, Jr.'s workshop, where he crafted furniture for local residents.

Look Closely! What kinds of materials were used for chairs? Who harvested the wood, wove the fabric, or made the nails?

Hezekiah Banks III (1812–1900)

Cobbler

The original owner of this cobbler's bench, Hezekiah Banks III, lived in Fairfield's Greenfield Hill neighborhood. He was accepted as an apprentice at the age of eighteen to learn the cobbler's trade from his uncle Charles Nichols, whose shop was located at Nichols' home on Congress Street (near the Merritt Parkway today). In 1832, at the age of 20, Banks went into partnership with a Mr. Jennings of Southport and purchased his own bench to cobble shoes. He worked for Jennings until about 1837, but continued to make and repair shoes until his death in 1900.

Look! Shoes made by cobblers were designed to be repaired. Do you repair your old shoes or just buy new ones?

Molly Hatchett (1738–1829)

Paugussett basket maker

Molly Hatchett, a member of the Paugussett tribe from the Bridgeport/Derby area, was a basket maker who traveled throughout western Connecticut selling her work. As Native Americans such as the Paugussett had their land taken from them and saw their culture and way of life threatened, weaving and selling baskets was one way to keep their ancestral traditions alive and financially support their communities. Like many artisans, Hatchett's hand is visible in her work in her unique use of patterns and color along with a signature design on the basket lids in her work.

Henry Harris (b. 1817)

Schaghticoke basket maker

Henry (Hen Pan) Harris was born in Stratford or Milford, and was likely part of the Paugussett nation, though he joined the Schaghticoke community in Kent when he married Abigail Mauwee, a Schaghticoke woman. There,

he made a living as a basket maker, tinsmith, and itinerant farmhand.

His particular baskets were distinct from many Schaghticoke baskets made in the 1800s. Possibly influenced by Shaker baskets, his were made with white oak splints, with sturdy handles, simple weaving patterns, and minimal decoration. Harris likely also took stylistic cues from his wife Abigail and her sisters Rachel Mauwee and Viney Carter, making this a unique kind of Schaghticoke basket.

What's it Worth?

How do we assign value to items? How does something's value affect how we interact with it?

There are many factors that go into deciding the value of an object. Beyond what is needed for sustenance and shelter, people might determine that resources or goods are important because they can improve their way of life. When the English first settled Fairfield, for instance, their homes were more utilitarian, furnished with simple objects. Later, as their wealth grew, the English began purchasing decorative objects, fine furniture and other luxury items. This led to increased demand for precious imported goods such as silk, as well as spices and tea, driving up their value. This concept of supply and demand is one way that merchants in the 1700s, manufacturers in the 1800s, or even today's large retail stores determine what something is worth.

How do you determine the value of an object?

Take a close look at the different objects in the bin. Which objects are worth the most to you? Think about what they are made of and how they are used. Are some of these objects harder to find? Does that make them more valuable? Compare what you found most valuable to what your family or friends chose.

Building Economy

How do you build capital to start a community?

Fairfield's economy originally operated on bartering and trade throughout the 1600s and 1700s. With fertile fields and deep-water ports, the town first relied on agriculture, then maritime trade to flourish. In the mid-1800s, Fairfield attracted wealthy New Yorkers and the community capitalized on its idyllic setting to become a resort destination. During both World Wars, mass production meant factories, particularly in Bridgeport, could employ thousands of workers, creating profits that benefitted the industrialists who resided in Fairfield. With access to New

York City, suburban growth, and development of businesses on Post Road, Fairfield cemented its economic strength.

Building Wealth

Signs of a strong economy include taking advantage of robust natural resources, a manufacturing sector, and services like retail and entertainment. Follow the timeline to see how Fairfield was uniquely positioned to support an agricultural economy, then significant shipping and trade, and later, a prosperous downtown with a variety of retail stores.

Pre-1630s

Ahkee, The Land

For thousands of years, the geography and its abundant natural resources have brought people to what is now Fairfield. Its rivers, harbors, and coastline supported travel and trade for Native Americans, while providing abundant marine resources. Further inland, wild game like deer and

elk, plentiful forests, and the rich soil near its waterways provided resources for Native communities as well as for later European settlers.

1630s-1700s

Trading with Europeans

The Dutch thoroughly explored and mapped the Connecticut coastline, developing trade relationships with Native communities. Europeans valued beaver fur for hats and clothing, and in the early 1600s, the Dutch discovered that they could exchange wampum (strings of white and purple beads made from whelk and quahog shells) for beaver fur. Wampum was already widely valued by Native people for its rarity and was used for ceremonies and storytelling, but it soon became an important trade item.

At what cost? Because of their control of the fur and wampum trade, the Pequot gained political dominance throughout much of Connecticut. Surrounding tribal leaders (known as sachems) sought to challenge the dominance of the Dutch and Pequot, and invited the

English to settle the Connecticut River Valley. Their arrival increased tensions in the area, leading to the Pequot War.

1700s-1800s

Living Off the Land

From English settlement in the 1600s to the 1800s, agriculture was the heart of Fairfield's economy. Crops were grown for export as well as for local consumption. Farmers in the area carted their produce to merchants located along the wharves in Southport and Black Rock Harbor. English and Scottish immigrants were among the earliest settlers, many of whom were skilled artisans, and they needed resources such as timber, iron ore, and leather to fashion goods for sale.

At what cost? As Fairfield became more heavily populated in the 1700s, its need for labor grew. Some of that labor was provided by enslaved Africans brought against their will from the West Indies as part of the Triangular Trade. While some enslaved people were

taught trades, like Boston Smedley of Fairfield who learned to cobble shoes, others took on farming or daily domestic tasks so that members of Fairfield's upper class could enjoy more leisure time.

1800s-1900s

Life on the Water

Fairfield profited from deep-water harbors in Southport and Black Rock (now a part of Bridgeport). These became important sites for shipbuilding, whaling, and the maritime trade, as merchants sold goods and stored them on vessels. By 1803, Black Rock Harbor boasted six stores, five wharves, and four vessels regularly sailing out of its bustling harbor. In the mid-1800s, four shipyards in Black Rock's harbor and union warehouses in Southport supported maritime commerce. By 1870, trade began to give way to the rise of industry, and towns like Fairfield and Black Rock became residential.

At what cost? Maritime trade connected local farmers and artisans with a global network, including the West

Indies, Italy and China. Eventually, shipbuilding and whaling industries severely impacted the environment, from the increased harvesting of trees for lumber to the drastic effects to marine life such as whales that were hunted for their blubber.

1840-1930

The Rise of Industry

Progress in transportation, including the development of canals and railroads, allowed goods from Fairfield to reach even farther. Advances in agriculture, including the development of the Globe onion, which was easier to store for overseas export, boosted the agricultural economy in the 1800s. Farming was viable, but by the 1900s, land was more valuable for developing homes, factories, and more. At the same time, the arrival of the railroad in Fairfield in 1848 spurred a shift away from handmade goods toward industrialization, which increased production and efficiency, lowered prices, and improved wages.

At what cost? Industrialization helped Fairfield to grow, but factories also polluted the air and dumped toxic waste into the ground and waterways. Those chemical footprints are still being addressed today, including the environmental cleanup of the former Exide Battery factory on Fairfield's Post Road in the early 2020s.

1930s-1970

Building Capital

The World Wars caused a boom in manufacturing in Fairfield and the surrounding areas, but by the 1950s, the area was experiencing deindustrialization. Factories began moving south or overseas to take advantage of lower wages and operation costs and fewer regulations. Communities increasingly turned toward retail as an economic driver. These local stores tended to cluster on town main streets, centralizing the shopping experience until shopping malls, national chains, and online retail offered easy alternatives to strolling store to store on Main Street.

At what cost? Family-owned businesses once made up the backbone of American commerce. While they can struggle to compete with larger chains and big box stores, small businesses and farmers' markets have seen a resurgence in recent years.

1970-Present

Suburban Development

Fairfield County's proximity to New York City attracted companies to build headquarters in the area.

The landscape of suburban towns like Fairfield changed with the arrival of corporate campuses and office parks, due to improved access to the area with the Connecticut Turnpike and the Merritt Parkway. Though these new corporate developments drew people away from city and town centers, companies specializing in technology, financial services, and healthcare all help drive the area's economic success. Fairfield County is also thriving with a mix of retail, restaurants, cultural organizations, and educational institutions.

At what cost? Corporations help build wealth for the towns and cities in which they are based, but local economics can become reliant on this continued operation. In some cases, as with General Electric leaving Fairfield in 2016, companies move elsewhere for lower tax rates, proximity to entrepreneurs, or increased visibility in up-and-coming areas.

Means of Exchange

People have exchanged or bartered goods and services for thousands of years. From wampum to dollars today, there have been different ways to attach value.

Pre-1630

The Value of Wampum

Wampum was a crucial trade item between the Dutch and Native Americans. The Dutch determined wampum to have monetary value soon after their arrival in 1614. By 1650, the Massachusetts Bay Colony officially declared wampum as legal currency.

1630s-1700

Bartering and Trade

Most early Fairfield residents were farmers who could grow or make many of the things they need for daily life. For other items, they would barter, or exchange their goods and services with friends and neighbors. Bartering remained important after the American Revolution in the 1780s because European currency was scarce, Continental paper money was devalued, and the social connection from bartering maintained a sense of community for residents.

1700s-1800

Currency in the Colonies

The use of paper money was one solution to a lack of coins and the less structured process of bartering in the American colonies. Paper money was easy to produce, carry, and use, so it fostered business and exchange as long as people had confidence in its value. Before the introduction of a universally accepted national currency,

colonists in Fairfield used European coins, pounds and shillings, and Connecticut currency.

1800-1840

Managing Money

Banks were integral to the development of the shipping industry and other businesses, and provided residents with a way to manage their money. Shifting away from colonial methods of barter and loaning money to family and friends, banks provided people a way to deposit funds and obtain loans. As currency became more standardized in the later part of the 1800s, and industry and trade grew, other banks opened in Bridgeport in 1807 and Southport in 1854.

1840s-1930

Scarcity of Currency

The Civil War ended the era of locally printed bank notes, and the federal government began printing paper currency in 1862. Although paper money was not backed with gold or silver like coins, it was accepted as legal tender. When

currency was scarce during the Civil War, people hoarded coins because the metal was worth more than the cent. Other financial crises, like the Panic of 1873 or the Great Depression in the 1930s, forced people to evaluate how they saved, invested, or spent money.

1930s-1970

Loans and Credit

As the state and nation grew in economic strength, new ways to invest and borrow emerged. People could purchase stock in companies to share in their success. During World War I and World War II, civilians could buy Liberty Loans and war stamps to contribute to the war effort. As communities shifted from industry to retail as an economic driver, credit cards became a new way to make purchases.

1970s-Present

New Ways of Buying

While cash had become the primary mode of exchange by the 1900s, banks offered new ways for customers to use

their money. Checking accounts allowed people to pay for larger sums without carrying cash, and credit cards meant purchases could be made and paid off incrementally. Other forms of money like bitcoin continue to develop today, with their value based on speculation rather than being attached to a commodity.

What Did Fighting for Freedom Look Like?

As tensions between Great Britain and the American colonies grew in the 1700s, Fairfield—like many other communities in the colonies—became a part of the fight. While many people known as patriots wanted independence from the British, others, known as loyalists, wanted the continued protection of the Crown. But patriot or loyalist were not the only positions one could take during the American Revolution. Many people had unique perspectives that influenced their fight for freedom.

Pick up the panels. Read about individual perspectives on freedom and the American Revolution.