

The Enfield Historical Society Newsletter



News and history from *your* museums

June, 2009 Issue

Thompsonville's Boat Building Giant

For three short years starting in 1960 Thompsonville was home to a major boat manufacturing company. In April of that year the Bigelow Sanford Carpet Co., Inc. acquired an option to buy majority stock interest in Crestliner Inc., which was one of the five largest U.S. manufacturers and distributors of outboard boats at the time. The Bigelow board of directors acted quickly and the \$2,250,000 sale was completed on April 28. \$600,000 was paid up front in cash, with the remainder to be paid in three annual payments.

Crestliner was founded in 1946 and by the time of the sale employed 600 workers at its plants in Strasburg, Virginia, Little Falls, Minnesota, Morrilton, Arkansas, and Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. Approximately 40 models of fiberglass and aluminum boats ranging in size from 12 to 19 feet and selling for prices between \$215 and \$2,300 were built at the plants. Crestliner had about 1,400 dealers nationwide and annual sales of about \$5,000,000.

Why did Bigelow Sanford purchase Crestliner? According to company president Lowell Weicker (father of the future Governor) it was part of a plan to diversify Bigelow's product line, a sound strategy to increase profits and protect against future drops in carpet sales. Just a few days later, in fact, stockholders voted to change the company name to Bigelow-Sanford Inc. to reflect the company's diversified interests.

(continued on back page)

Right - A 1961 Crestliner catalog.

'61
Crestliner
GUIDE TO BOATING FUN

Falcon "14" Explorer "17"

Twenty-eight Models in... **Fiberglass • Aluminum • Royalite**

PERFORMANCE CRAFTED FOR MORE WATER FUN

Enfield Historical Society Summer 2009 Calendar of Events
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- Sunday, June 21, 2009** **Wallop School Open House** – 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. *at the Wallop School Museum.* This is your first chance to see all of the recent restoration work at the Wallop School. With new wide board wood floors, fresh paint inside and out, and countless other details carefully attended to, our one room schoolhouse has much for you to see, even if you visited last year. You will not believe your eyes when you see the changes! And, as always, our volunteers will be happy to share their school memories with you and to hear yours too!
- Sunday, June 21, 2009** **Old Town Hall Museum Closed for Father's Day** – Be sure to take this opportunity to visit the Wallop School and then come back to the Old Town Hall next Sunday!
- Sunday, July 12, 2009** **Old Town Hall Museum Closed during Enfield's 4th of July Celebration** – Take part in the town's festivities and then come back to the Old Town Hall next Sunday!
- Sunday, July 19, 2009 and Sunday, Aug. 16, 2009** **Wallop School Open House** – 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. *at the Wallop School Museum.* Did you miss the first open house in June? Even if you visited in June you will want to come back to see the new artifacts and latest finishing details of the restoration work nears completion. Come and show your appreciation for all of the hard work done by restoration coordinator Paul Batchelder and the Wallop School volunteers. Your visit is the best thank you.
- Sunday, Aug. 23, 2009** **Wild Animals from the Lupa Zoo** – 2:00 P.M. to 4:30 P.M. *at the Old Town Hall Museum.* Wild animals are coming to the Old Town Hall Museum! The Lupa Zoo Game Farm, located in Ludlow, Massachusetts, is dedicated to conservation and education. They will have several small wild and exotic animals at the Old Town Hall for this special family event. Adults and children will all enjoy this **FREE** family event! Rain date August 30.
- Sunday, Sept. 6, 2009** **FREE Pony Rides** – 2:00 P.M. to 4:30 P.M. *at the Old Town Hall Museum.* Sherry Whitmore from Rocky Acres Farm will bring her two ponies, Gypsy and Daisy, to this special family event. Both are gentle and love to give children **FREE** pony rides! As an extra special treat, "**Balloon Man**" Jim Piekos will entertain children and adults with his wonderful balloon creations. Hilarious headwear, colorful creations and clever combinations will make this a very special afternoon. Rain date September 13.
- Sunday, Sept. 20, 2009** **Wallop School Open House** – 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. *at the Wallop School Museum.* Where did the summer go? This is your last chance to visit the Wallop School this year. Rumor has it that the Wallop School volunteers are planning something special for this open house, so watch our Web site, local newspapers, and the next newsletter for details.
- Monday, Sept. 28, 2009** **Regular Meeting** – 7:00 P.M. *at the Enfield American Baptist Church.* Program details will be in the next newsletter and local newspapers, and on our Web site.
- Sunday, Oct. 4, 2009** **Antique Cars** – 1:00 P.M. to 4:30 P.M. *at the Old Town Hall Museum.* Antique and classic cars fill the lawn at the Old Town Hall for this annual fall event. We never know exactly what cars we will have, but you will almost certainly see a Model T or two, as well as cars of the 1920s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s, and an antique tractor or two. Antique trucks and motorcycles are also welcome. Come on down and enjoy the show, or – better yet – bring your antique or classic vehicle and be a part of the show! Rain date October 11.
- Sunday, Oct. 18, 2009** **Antique Engines** – 1:00 P.M. to 4:30 P.M. *at the Old Town Hall Museum.* Members of the Scantic Valley Antique Engine Club will set up and run antique engines, including "hit and miss" engines. These early engines replaced the steam engines, animals and humans that formerly powered many machines, including pumps, farm equipment, and even washing machines. The variety of these engines is amazing. Come and watch and listen to these survivors of a time gone by. Rain date October 25.
- Monday, Oct. 26, 2009** **Regular Meeting** – 7:00 P.M. *at the Enfield American Baptist Church.* Program details will be in the next newsletter and local newspapers, and on our Web site.

Programs are subject to change. Check www.enfieldcthistory.org or area newspapers for schedule and program changes and other event announcements. To find out if a meeting is cancelled due to weather tune to WTIC AM 1080 radio or watch WFSB channel 3.

Old Town Hall Volunteers Needed

Your Old Town Hall museum is open for the 2009 season and **you** are needed there! With the exception of June 21 and July 12, the museum is open every Sunday afternoon through October, from 2:00 P.M. to 4:30 P.M. A minimum of four staff are needed during those hours – one for each floor plus one to greet visitors at the welcome table. More volunteers are needed on event days to help with the crowds.

What do museum volunteers do? First and foremost, we make our visitors feel welcome. We also ensure visitor safety and the safety of our collection by making sure that nobody touches the exhibits.

Do volunteers need to know about every item in the museum, or every detail of Enfield history? Not at all. At least one experienced staffer will be available to answer questions or to direct visitors to someone who can answer their questions. That said, every volunteer has a wealth of memories of Enfield, or of what life was like in years past, and these memories often provide the answers – and lead to great conversations too!

Why should you volunteer? There are many reasons. Your time at the museum shows that you support the Enfield Historical Society and that you appreciate the work done by other volunteers to maintain the museum, the collection, and the exhibits. Your time at the museum can be fun, informative, and fulfilling. And your time at the museum gives our core volunteers a chance to have an occasional Sunday afternoon with their family and friends!

How often should you volunteer? Once a month would be great! But, even if you only volunteer once this summer it will be much appreciated. Volunteers are particularly needed for non-event days, as event days are usually well staffed.

How do you volunteer? All you need to do is call Audrey Ciccolella at 860.749.7131 or, if you are unable to reach her, Tony Secondo at 860.749.7993. We look forward to seeing you at the Old Town Hall museum!

United Way Donations

Did you know that you can contribute to the Enfield Historical Society through the United Way? We welcome all such donations and want you to know that your donations are put to work providing historical programs and events at our museums and in other locations in the community. We also provide tours to school groups at no charge to the students or schools.

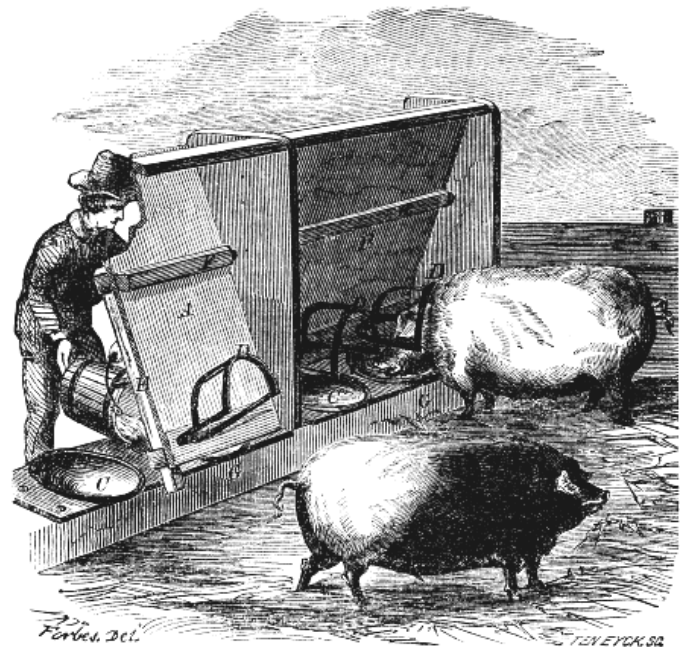
Direct donations to the Enfield Historical Society are also welcome. Checks can be sent to the “contact us” address on page 5 of this newsletter.

But did you know...

Last issue's column featured a patent for a “poultry feeding apparatus or the like” issued in 1959 to Enfield's Chester W. Pilch. At the end of the column we asked if any of our readers had ever seen the apparatus in use at the Pilch farm. We received one response, and a it is a great one! Ralph Thresher of Enfield writes: “I worked for Pilch Farms 1943-1959. Worked on the feeder project. Used a cab forward Jeep pickup 4wd. Blower with separate gas motor mounted on the rear of the truck. Lots of trouble getting proper speed and rotation to blow where needed. Changed pulleys and belts several times. Area along Washington Road had many test pens and because of the size it was easier to blow food into each pen in measured amounts.” Thank you Ralph for your response. You just saved a piece of Enfield's history!

Also in the last issue was Robert M Abbe's 1854 hog pen patent. While we still do not know how many pens were built or sold under the patent, an illustration did appear several months later in the June 9, 1855 issue of *Scientific American*. Readers who were interested in the pen were instructed to write to Mr. Abbe at Thompsonville for more information.

IMPROVEMENT IN HOG PENS.



This illustration from the June 9, 1855 issue of Scientific American clearly shows how Robert Abbe's patented hog pen worked. One hog is feeding from one of the cast iron troughs. The hog's head is inside the iron trough guard, which prevents other hogs from fighting for the food. The farmer has swung another guard out so that no hogs can get into the trough while he cleans or refills it. Does the other hog look a just a bit peeved that he can't steal anyone's feed?

Help Us Identify These Mystery Photos

The Enfield Historical Society recently acquired a collection of photos taken by the Prickett family of Hazardville during the late 1800s and perhaps very early 1900s. Many of the photos are of the Prickett home on Fairlawn Avenue. Others show scenes along either the Scantic River or the Hazard Powder Company canals. Few of the photos have any identifying information on them, but many are quite recognizable. Museum staff have not been able to identify two houses that appear in several pictures, however. Do you recognize either of the houses in the photos shown on this page? Please e-mail any information or insights you may have about the photos to mkm-of-enfct@att.net or write to the Enfield Historical Society Newsletter, 31 Bridge Lane, Enfield, CT 06082.

At first glance, the two pictures at right may appear to be of different houses, but they are two views of the same house. The distinctive chimney and matching rooflines are clues to the orientation of the two photos relative to each other. The top photo likely shows the rear and left side of the house, while the bottom photo shows the front and left side of the house. Was this house in Hazardville? Anywhere in Enfield? Does it still stand today?



The winter scene at left shows the second of the unidentified houses from the Prickett photo collection. The location appears very rural. A barn is at right and laundry is hanging on the clothesline, despite the snow on the ground. There may be a building in the far distance to the left of the house, possibly with a large cupola, tower, or steeple on it. Unfortunately, even when enlarged it is little more than a shadow.



The photo at right shows the house above in summer. A second house is visible at right in the summer photo, despite the impression of isolation in the winter photo gives.

Real Estate Prices Got You Down?

After many months of sinking real estate values, the thought of selling your home might make you wince. On the other hand, you might be excited by the prospect of purchasing a home at a bargain price. Whether or not today's real estate prices are good depends upon which side of the sale you are on. No doubt the same was true in 1868, when Hartford real estate broker C. A. Lincoln published *The Connecticut Real Estate Register*. The following Enfield properties were among the scores of Connecticut properties listed. We bet you would be happy to pay the listed prices for any of them!

12 acres, \$1,300 In Enfield, 1 mile from Hazardville; land is light, loamy soil; 1½ story house, painted white and blinded; good well of pure, soft water; barn, 20 x 24; carriage shed and workshop; young fruit orchard in bearing; located near church, school and post-office; only 1 mile from the Shaker Village.

43 acres, \$6,500 In Enfield, 2½ miles from Thompsonville, and midway between Springfield and Hartford; all choice tillable land for tobacco, fruit, or early gardening; 140 apple trees, 40 in bearing; pears, quinces, grapes, etc.; 1 story and L house, blinded; barn, 30 x 50, with basement; 2 tobacco sheds, etc.; located ½ mile east of Connecticut river. Terms, half cash. Stock and tools for sale.

30 acres, \$2,800 In Enfield, 1 mile from Hazardville, 3 from Thompsonville, and about 8 from Springfield; 7 acres to wood, balance all tillage and mowing; level and free from stone; Excellent house, 2 story L, nice barn and shed; building all painted and in first class order; location one of the pleasantest in the country; has the finest row of maples in front of the premises to be found in the state. *This farm has never been offered before for less than \$3,500, and is very cheap at that sum; we now offer it less than value of buildings; satisfactory reasons for selling.*

How did Enfield prices compare to other Connecticut properties at the time? Here are some examples:

Ann Street, Hartford, House and lot \$11,000

Asylum Avenue, Hartford, House and lot \$12,000

Chapel Street, Hartford, A snug brick house with good lot suitable for barn and drive-way; very pleasantly and centrally situated, near Trumbull and only a few steps from Main street. A bargain at \$6,700.

174 acres, \$2,000 In Chaplin, 5½ miles from Willimantic; will keep well 15 head of cattle, etc.; 1½ story home with L, newly covered and painted; new barn, 25 x 50; shed 40 feet long; considerable wood, etc.; stock and tools for sale.

50 acres, \$1,800 In Manchester, 2½ miles from Cheneyville; good house and barn; some wood and fruit; land is very good; raises excellent tobacco, etc.

Visit Us

The Old Town Hall Museum

1294 Enfield Street
Enfield, CT 06082
860.745.1729
Sundays May thru October 2:00 – 4:30 P.M.

The Martha Parsons House Museum

1387 Enfield Street
Enfield, CT 06082
860.745.6064
Sundays May thru October 2:00 – 4:30 P.M.

The Wallop School Museum

1 Wallop School Road
Enfield, CT 06082
Check our calendar for open house dates

On the Web: www.enfieldcthistory.org

Contact Us

The Enfield Historical Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 586
Enfield, CT 06083

E-mail: MKM-OF-ENFCT@att.net

Join Us

Be a part of the Enfield Historical Society! To join, send your name(s), address, telephone number, e-mail address, and desired membership type to: Enfield Historical Society Membership, 31 Bridge Lane, Enfield, CT 06082. Include a check or money order payable to "Enfield Historical Society" for the membership amount for your requested membership type from the list below. Please print clearly. Everyone is welcome!

Individual.....	\$10.00	Supporting.....	\$100.00
Family*	\$15.00	Life**	\$250.00
Contributing	\$20.00	Corporate	\$200.00
Sustaining	\$40.00	Benefactor.....	\$500.00

* Family memberships include children under 21.

** Life memberships are for individuals only.

The Enfield Historical Society Newsletter is one benefit of joining, and is mailed to members in February, May, September, and November. Questions, requests, and suggestions about its content should be sent to:

Enfield Historical Society Newsletter
31 Bridge Lane
Enfield, CT 06082
E-mail: MKM-OF-ENFCT@att.net
860.745.3835

Thompsonville's Boat Building Giant (continued from front page)

Although early reports on the purchase stated that Crestliner would be operated as a wholly owned subsidiary with no changes to management, plans were already in place by the end of June, 1960 to move Crestliner's headquarters to Thompsonville. Bigelow Sanford officials were being placed on both Crestliner's board of directors and in management positions. Lowell Weicker was named chairman of Crestliner's board of directors and Bigelow's executive vice president William N. Freyer and comptroller Robert L. MacKenzie were also chosen to be on the board. Bigelow's vice president of finance, John A. Donaldson, was to hold the same position at Crestliner. The next three years would see many management changes for Crestliner, some happening only weeks or days apart.


A major marketing and publicity event was held on September 8, 1960 when the first of two annual regattas was held on the Connecticut River next to the Bigelow-Sanford factory. The new 1961 Crestliner models were on the river for dealers, dignitaries, and reporters to see and ride in. A special red-carpeted dock had been built for the event and twenty boats were trucked in from the Virginia plant (manufacturing had not yet started in Thompsonville). Many state and local officials attended, including Governor Ribicoff. More importantly, 200 dealers from New England and surrounding states came to see the products. The day started at 9:00 A.M. with a dealer seminar at the Strand Theater. A luncheon was held at 12:30 P.M. and a barbecue near the dock at 5:15 P.M. The day was beautiful and apparently a great success.

Company officials optimistically predicted that 150 people would be employed in manufacturing boats in Thompsonville by February of 1961, with a production goal of 2,000 boats for the first year. A showroom was planned for Thompsonville to allow dealers in the region to view the Crestliner line at their convenience. A second regatta was held on September 7, 1961 to entice more dealers to carry the full Crestliner line.

Despite the public optimism, things were not working out as planned. Some employees were hired and limited manufacturing was started, but employment numbers never approached predictions, peaking at about 60, and layoffs were common. Some of Crestliner's new Royalite canoes were finished in Thompsonville, although the hulls were made elsewhere. The March 1, 1962 edition of the Hartford Courant showed a picture of a Thompsonville-made Viking 20 fiberglass boat with a 100 horsepower inboard-outboard engine cruising past the Charles W. Morgan at Mystic Seaport. Yet, just a few days later all production workers were laid off and manufacturing moved to the Virginia plant. Other operations were gradually phased out during 1963.

On March 1, 1964, Crestliner was sold to Molded Fiber Glass Body Co. of Ashtabula, Ohio for about \$2,000,000. What went wrong? Bigelow bought Crestliner just as an unexpected general slump in boat sales began. Ironically, even with lower than expected boat sales Bigelow-Sanford's overall profits went up after the purchase because of increasing demand for commercial carpeting and Bigelow's transfer of carpet manufacturing to lower-cost southern plants.

For readers who crave irony, Enfield's Board of Selectmen adopted a new town seal on January 28, 1963 that featured two boat propellers representing the local Crestliner boat plant, even as that plant was being shut down. That seal, which is still our town seal today, also has a weaver's knot representing the carpet industry and powder kegs and cannon balls representing The Hazard Powder Company.



PIONEER "17" MODEL 2201
CRESTLINER'S NEW ROYALITE CANOE

- Royalite construction is birch-bark light, yet tremendously strong
- Aluminum gunnels, braces and seat frames
- Unique stern design provides for low hp motor mount, yet does not prevent effective paddling.

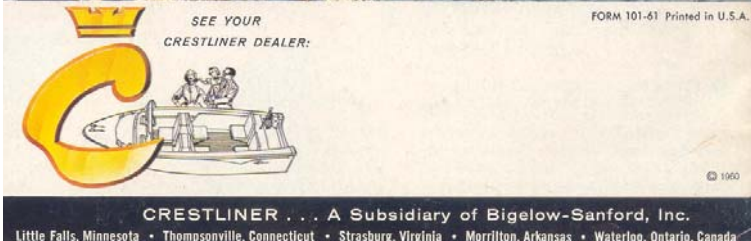
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SPECIFICATIONS

LENGTH	Center: 17'
WIDTH	Beam: 38 3/8"
DEPTH	Midship: 14 1/2" without gunnel
WEIGHT	88 lbs.
TRANSOM HEIGHT	for 15" motor shaft length
	MAX HP: 3 1/2

Above: excerpt from the 1961 Crestliner catalog shown on page 1 of this newsletter. Royalite was a laminate of layers of plastic and rubber. Beginning in early 1961 the Pioneer canoe hulls were made by a subcontractor in Rhode Island and the finish work done in the Thompsonville factory.

Below: detail from the back of the 1961 Crestliner catalog. The Bigelow-Sanford name began appearing on all Crestliner advertising very soon after the sale.



SEE YOUR
CRESTLINER DEALER:

FORM 101-61 Printed in U.S.A.

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CRESTLINER . . . A Subsidiary of Bigelow-Sanford, Inc.
 Little Falls, Minnesota • Thompsonville, Connecticut • Strasburg, Virginia • Morrilton, Arkansas • Waterloo, Ontario, Canada