

A lot is happening in one of CT's smallest towns

Day Trips
Beacon Falls
 Edited by
 Marty Podskoch

The town of Beacon Falls is one of the smallest towns in Connecticut; being only 9.9 square miles Beacon Falls, was first settled about 1678 when it was part of Derby. The name of Beacon Falls first appears in 1864 when a joint school district was formed out the Towns of Bethany and Oxford. The town was incorporated shortly thereafter in June 1871 out of the towns of Bethany, Naugatuck, Oxford and Seymour, the largest sections of land coming from Bethany and Oxford.

Early in its history it was both agricultural and a 'company' town. Like most of Connecticut, it was inhabited by Native American tribes, primarily Algonquian, who lived along the Naugatuck River, which when translated from Algonquian means "Lone tree along the fishing place."

Its industrial base began c. 1848 with textiles and in the 1850s the establishment of the American Hard Rubber Co., c. 1854, which used the invention of vulcanized hard rubber by Charles Goodyear to manufacture multiple products,

such as buttons, buggy whips, and powder flasks. At this time a canal was built that ran behind the mill buildings. There is a short section of that canal behind the buildings today. Several years later the rubber company moved to Long Island, NY. The 100 acres that comprised the mill and the hill above the factory buildings became the location of the Home Woolen Co. which made blankets and shawls used by Union Troops in the Civil War. The mill complex is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. During 1870-71 when the Town petitioned for recognition by the State, the name was suggested to be "Home." Beacon Falls was the final designation in 1871.

The mill buildings would experience their greatest output with the opening of the Beacon Falls Rubber Shoe Co. in 1899. Started by George Lewis and his son Tracy, the company would grow from several hundred employees to over two thousand. When George Lewis died in 1914, Tracy became President. During the next seven years the company expanded the most. Tracy had a vision of building a fully self-sufficient community that included its own electric company, a community center, movie house, and bowling alley amongst other improvements.



Michael Krenesky

There are 300 acres in Matthias Park including the placid Carrington Pond and an island cottage that belonged to the Matthies family. In 1971 the town purchased the property which features fishing, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and picnics.



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The Volunteer Park is on Main Street behind the firehouse. It is perfect place to read or watch the river run by.

The town band would play during lunch in the summer months. Its 'fire company' would become the roots of the current fire department, Beacon Hose Company No. 1. Tracy's vision ended in 1921 when he died unexpectedly. US Rubber Company would buy the company in 1931, adding the last major holdout of independently owned rubber companies into the so-called "American Rubber Trust."

Beacon Falls grew slowly, but steadily during the 20th century to the current 6,020 residents. It merged into a regional school system in 1969 with the town of Prospect. In 2001 a new high school was constructed, and formed the Woodland regional High School.

Interesting Places

■ Matthias Park. 300-acre park purchased in 1971 from Bernard Matthies with the intent of building a high school on the property. Carrington Pond in the center has a man-made island with the summer home of Bernard

Matthies. Hiking, fishing, and canoe/kayaking in the warmer months.

■ Toby's Pond. Developed by O&G Industries as a sand & gravel operation along the Naugatuck River, the Town took possession in 2009. The site includes a nearly one-mile long pond. Fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and hiking.

■ High Rock State Park/Naugatuck State Forest. Also known as Clara O'Shea State Park. Hiking trails with small waterfalls along brook. This the former site of High Rock Grove, a recreation area developed by the Naugatuck Railroad from 1880 through the early 1900s. It had upwards of 10,000 visitors a year who came to ride the carousel and to canoe on the Naugatuck River.

■ Naugatuck River. 40-mile river passing North to South through the center of town. One of only several authorized river access points for canoe and kayaking on the river. The two access areas are one at Riverbed Park and the other at Toby's Pond and Recreational Park. There is also catch and

release fishing of salmon and trout.

Michael A. Krenesky, Beacon Falls Selectman and President of the Beacon Falls Historical Society

This is an excerpt from the book, The Connecticut 169 Club: Your Passport & Guide to Exploring CT. It was written by local residents to encourage people to visit the beautiful 169 towns & cities in Connecticut. The 8.5 x 11 hardcover book contains 368 pages and over 180 illustrations, maps, and photos. It was edited by Marty Podskoch, author of eight books including the Conn. Civilian Conservation Corps Camps, Catskill & Adirondack fire towers, Adk CCC Camps, Adk 102 Club, and Adk illustrated stories. Please specify if you want signed. The travel book can be ordered with free shipping by sending \$24.95 plus CT sales tax \$1.58 to: Podskoch Press, 43 O'Neill Lane, East Hampton, CT 06424 It is also available at local stores, Amazon, and Barnes & Noble. Information 860-267-2442 podskoch@comcast.net or <https://martinpodskoch.com>