

The following is a segment of "Bethany Is Your Town" by the League of Women Voters of Bethany, 1954. I took the liberty of numbering the paragraphs for reference and adding a few commas for clarity. I've also highlighted some parts of special significance to us in 2004.

## SCHOOLS

1. In 1650 the Connecticut Legislature enacted a law that every town having 50 or more householder must maintain a school for its children. A hundred years elapsed, however, before a school was build in the Bethany area at the corner of Amity and Russell Roads. This school was supported by Amity Parish until the Congregational Ecclesiastical Society was formed in 1762 and assumed the responsibility.
2. In 1781 a second school was built on the Litchfield Turnpike north of the Cheshire Road and served the town for nearly a hundred years. It was replaced in 1880 by the Gate School, so named from its location near the Litchfield Turnpike toll gate house. In 1789 the Beecher or Southeast District School was build on Sperry Road, and in 1800 the Downs or East District School was established on Downs Road south of the corner near Hatfield Hill Road. In 1834 the Middle District or Center School was build on the site of the present firehouse. When the little schoolhouses were abandoned, this building was used first by the Bethany Volunteer Fire Department and later moved to the baseball field to become a clubhouse for the Bethany Athletic Association. The last one room school, the Smith or Northeast District School was built in 1877 on the west side of Carrington Road just above Porter Hill Road.
3. An interesting part of Connecticut's early history belongs to any account of the first schools. The Royal Charter granted to Connecticut gave the State all land to the west bounded by the South Seas or the Pacific Ocean. In order to correct this absurd error, this land was ceded to Congress in 1786, but the State was allowed to keep about 3,300,000 acres on the southern shore of Lake Erie. Fourteen years later the Connecticut Legislature made arrangements for the sale of this land to a Company of Capitalists named the "Managers of the Western Reserve" for the sum of \$1,200,000, the interest of which was to be used for the support of schools. In 1810 the Office of Commissioner of School Funds was established, and Mr. James Hillhouse of New Haven appointed Commissioner. The funds were then distributed among the towns of the State according to population. The Town Deposit Fund is still in existence, Bethany'' interest in 1953 amounting to \$38.91.
4. Originally there were two school terms, the winter session from the first Monday in December until the first of March, the summer term from the first of May for an indefinite four or five months. Men teachers were hired for the winter term, received free room and board and about \$25.00 per month cash. The women, who taught during the summer term, received little pay, often no more than \$1.00 a week. The schools were managed by district school boards or committees who raised money for each school's expenses by taxes within each district. School supplies were furnished by the parents. The system of district school management was abolished in 1901, the town school committee taking its place. In 1903 a law was passed providing State supervision for towns having less than 10 teachers. Bethany applied in 1911 for this service and has been under a State supervising agent continuously, with the exception of the four years we were in the Regional District with Prospect and Cheshire.
5. In October of 1930, with the building of Amity Road close to Center School, agitation to build a new school started. A committee of seven was appointed to investigate this problem, but the report submitted was not accepted. Interest in a consolidated, community school had been aroused, and two years later the town authorized the Board of Education to choose a building. Land was purchased on Peck Road, and by the fall of 1934, the new school was dedicated. The building consisted of four class rooms and a semi-basement recreation room, providing ample room for grades one through eight. High School students attended Hillhouse High School in New Haven, and when that school became a three grade Senior High School, grade nine and sometimes grade eight were sent to Troupe Junior High in New Haven. Bus transportation was provided.
6. A Hot Lunch Program was started with the opening of the Community School in 1934. In was a P.T.A. sponsored program, at first serving only a hot drink, then hot soup, and finally a complete lunch. A worker was first supplied by the W.P.A. under State supervision with State aid. The program grew as the school population grew. The Board of Education supplemented the program financially and accepted it as one of its responsibilities about 1950. This has been an outstanding program, serving excellent, well-balanced meals at a minimum cost to the pupils of thirty cents a lunch. Type A lunch is served, conforming to State nutritional standards, qualifying the school for cash aid. The Federal Government provides surplus commodities. The present staff consists of a cook-manager and two assistants, plus volunteer mothers' help.
7. In 1943 the towns of Bethany, Prospect and Cheshire organized a Regional High School District. Although land was purchased for a school and architectural plans drawn up, Bethany withdrew in 1948, since the town felt the war had driven costs beyond its means.

8. Bethany's rapid growth in population soon created problems in the elementary school. In 1948 a two room wing was constructed, and in 1953 two more classrooms were remodeled from the basement area, and an auditorium and kitchen were added.

9. The problem of providing junior and senior high school education still remained to be solved, since New Haven notified the town that Bethany children could not be accommodated in the Junior High Schools after September of 1953. In 1950 studies were begun with Woodbridge and Orange for a Regional High School. A Regional Board with three representatives from each town was established on March 6, 1953, following the approval of the Regional District by separate referendums in the three towns. The junior unit opened in September of 1954, and the senior unit will be ready for September of 1955. The Regional Board voted to accept responsibility for grades seven through twelve as of September, 1954. The present superintendent was supplied by the State at the request of the Regional Board, and he is supervisor not only of the Regional School but also of the elementary schools of the three towns. The budget of the Regional School is set up by the Regional Board after a public hearing and may not be changed by the separate towns.

10. A study of the following chart provided by the [Bethany] Board of Education, indicates the rapid growth of the school population in Bethany, showing only too clearly that the problem of providing education for the town children will be with us for as long as we can predict.

Grades 1 - 6

1954-55	235
1955-56	261
1956-57	310
1957-58	338
1958-59	385
1959-60	404