

# Stratford History - Always Amazing

By **David Wright, Editor**  
Stratford Historical Society's  
**UPDATE**



Brewster Pond, September 18, 1937, Courtesy of the Stratford Historical Society

For those of us who grew up fishing in, ice skating on, playing in, and picnicking along Brewster Pond in Longbrook Park, it's hard to imagine the pond and park as anything other than the beautiful gem in Stratford that it's become. There was a time, however, as shown in the photo above, when Brewster Pond was much more of a swamp than a picturesque, placid pond. Equally hard to envision is Roosevelt Forest as a large stone quarry

and a major construction zone.

By 1935, with the Depression raging through America, President Franklin Roosevelt, with Congressional approval, created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to put unemployed men to work. Stratford, at the time, had 700 unemployed men, many of them fathers of small children. When the WPA came to Stratford in 1936, jobs were sorely needed by these men.

One of the first projects undertaken by the WPA was the construction of sidewalks and the landscaping at the newly built Town Hall which opened in 1937.

The Department of Public Works needed a building to store and repair its growing inventory of trucks and other large equipment. The Public Works building on Patterson Avenue was erected from stone quarried at Roosevelt Forest. Roosevelt Park, as it was known at that time, was swampy and marshy lacking in the many large trees we find in the Forest today. Roosevelt Forest had just been acquired by Town Manager Donald Sammis through the negotiating of property tax forgiveness on the delinquent acreage.

William McCracken, working on a WPA grant, painted the picture of the settling of Stratford which has hung in the

Council Chamber at Town Hall since 1937.

Next up was the building and landscaping of the stone retaining walls around Brewster Pond. All of the stone used in the construction of walls and buildings at Longbrook Park was quarried, by the WPA, from Roosevelt Forest. The sidewalks at Longbrook Park were also laid at that time.

The WPA made many improvements to our streets and roads over many miles of roadway in town. Storm sewers were constructed in areas with poor drainage.

Many of our major thoroughfares through town lacked bordering sidewalks causing pedestrians to have to walk along muddy edges of the roadways exposing themselves to oncoming traffic. The WPA built over 15 miles of sidewalks throughout Stratford.

The final WPA project was the removal of the trolley tracks running down Main Street and Barnum Avenue. The tracks had been paved over, but the federal government was in need of iron during World War II, so the tracks were torn up and sold as scrap iron.

All-in-all, from 1936-1942, the WPA had a major impact on shaping the Stratford we take for granted today.