

A STUDY OF
DANBURY'S INDUSTRIAL TRANSITION

AN ABSTRACT OF
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The intent of this thesis is to provide an account of the industrial change which occurred in Danbury, Connecticut, from a thriving single industry community to one of balanced and diversified manufacturing.

The writer's first area of concern was the background of hatting in Danbury. An attempt was made to show that the town with its reputation as the "Hat City of the World" had other successful industries which in earlier years were overshadowed by the hat concerns.

Danbury's industrial history is a classic example of "rags to riches" and back to rags again, only to be saved by the exercise of wisdom, courage, and labor. These latter virtues were demonstrated by those far-seeing citizens in the community who formed the Danbury Industrial Corporation.

This study includes an account of the program inaugurated by a group of industrialists which was one of the first community-development corporations in the country.¹

An effort has been made in this thesis to show that the formation and success of the Industrial Corporation did not come easily. The early years of its operation were filled with public criticism and many obstacles had to be overcome. The fact that the decline of hatting in Danbury occurred at

¹Monthly Review, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

a period of national economic growth in other fields of industry was an influencing factor. The same workers who formed the background of hat manufacturing made easy adjustments in the new technical industries providing a labor force necessary for success.

It is the writer's opinion that some of the projects attempted by the early companies sponsored by the Danbury Industrial Corporation might have been premature. Instant foods provide an example. What was a failure in Danbury in the Twenties became a national food product in the Fifties. Molded insulation--a failure in Danbury in the Twenties--became a big success elsewhere in the Forties.

The early standards of the Danbury Industrial Corporation were found by the writer to have been set high, perhaps too high by the Corporation officers. These demands discouraged many out-of-town concerns from considering Danbury as a prospective location and delayed the successful initiation of diversification in Danbury until the Thirties.

In the final chapter the writer attempted to show that the new complex of highways around Danbury and its availability to good plant sites added to the town's attractiveness. A wide awake Chamber of Commerce and a well organized and influential Danbury Industrial Corporation spared Danbury the problems which occurred in other cities where mills and industries moved to the south or other areas.

The rise in new industrial opportunities in Danbury

during the years 1932 to 1965 more than offset the loss caused by the closing of hat shops. The success of the new diversified industries was accepted by the old-time residents of the town and the influx of new people has caused hatting to become a memory of the past.¹

¹George F. O'Brien, Jr., "The Decline in the Hatting Industry, Danbury, Connecticut, 1940-1967," p. 52. (Manuscript)