

# OLD GAS SERVICE STATIONS- COVENTRY CONNECTICUT

By Bill Jobbagy September 2016

Automobiles began appearing in Coventry in the early 1900's. The first was a Stanley Steamer purchased in October of 1903 by a foreman at the silk mill on Mason Street. George Phillips, the druggist, purchased a Locomobile a few weeks later. John Champlin purchased a Cadillac in June of 1904 at the opening of his ice cream parlor on Main Street. By 1912, automobiles outnumbered wagons and carriages. Henry Frink was a Ford dealer as early as 1922. In the 1920's and 1930's there were at least 24 different models of cars owned by Coventry residents.

The popular gasoline distributors of today had not yet been created in the 1910's and '20's. Brands sold early in Coventry included Socony (Standard Oil Co. of New York, the precursor to Mobil Oil) and Tydol (Tidewater Oil Co. the precursor to Phillips Oil.)



The "brand name" gasolines began appearing in Coventry in the 1930's such as Gulf, Texaco and Esso.

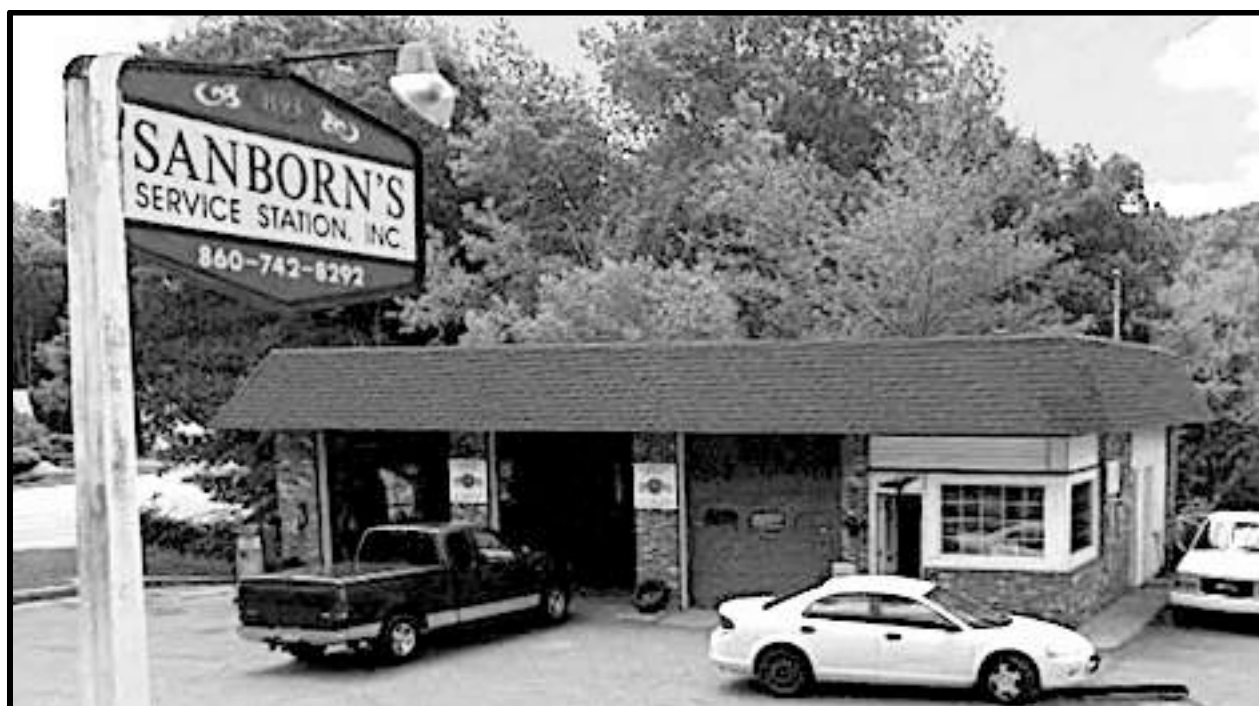
## FRINK, WILEY, SANBORN- Main Street in the Village, 1922 to present

Henry Frink (1889-1961) was a chauffeur in his early life and in 1916 was living in South Coventry and was a chauffeur for the Kingsbury Box & Printing Co. He married Florence Dean in 1920. In 1922 he purchased, from E.A. Tracy, a building on a raceway of the Mill Brook that was the previous home of the bankrupt Washburn Silk Co. The building, which served as a car garage had burned in 1917 and he renovated it for car repairs. The old mill had a raceway from the mill brook underneath it which was earlier used for water power. That raceway was in place through the 1940's!! Henry was also a Ford dealer in 1922 and sold Model T's.

He ran an auto repair business and sold Gulf then later Amoco gas for a time. He is listed in town Directories as owner of the business, as well as the garage mechanic, in 1930, 1940 and 1944.

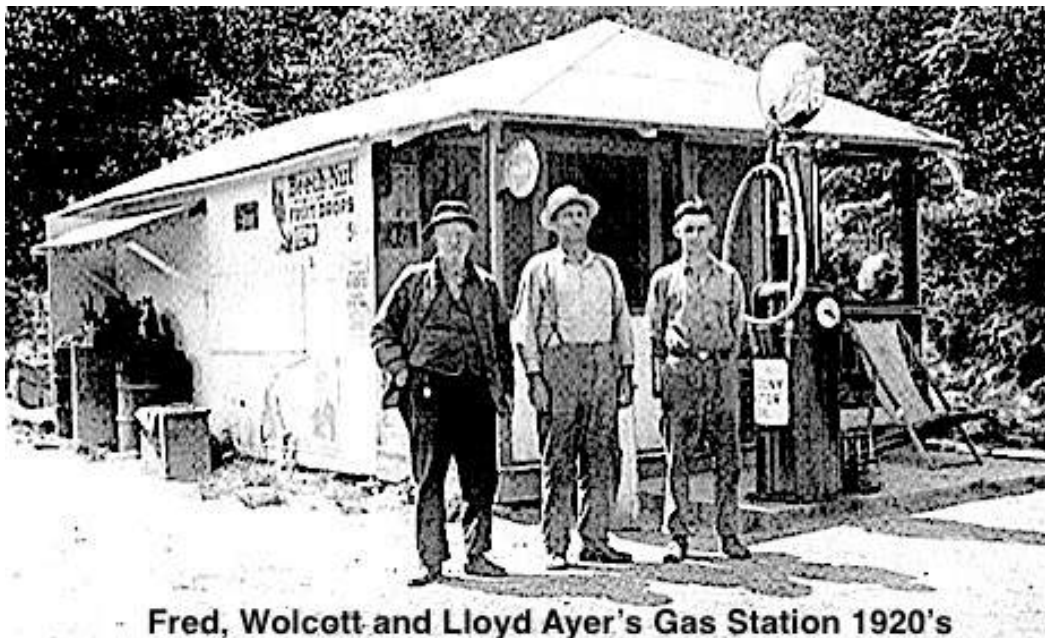
The business was sold to Floyd Wiley, an employee, in 1945 who maintained the repair and auto agency. Town Directories show Floyd and his brother Robert, operators of Coventry Garage here 1947 through 1958. Callahan Oil of New London was involved for a while.

In 1960 the Sanborns started operating a gas and service station here. They bought in a substantial amount of fill, as the terrain here was well below the street level. They opened November 1960. They served Atlantic, then Phillips 66, then Texaco gas until the 1980's when they stopped selling gas and became a service-only station.



**AYERS GAS STATION, Corner of Daly Road and Route 31, 1920's, early 1930's, later STEVENSON'S ca 1960-1970**

They sold Socony Oil and gas (Standard Oil Co. of New York, the precursor to Mobil Oil)



**Fred, Wolcott and Lloyd Ayer's Gas Station 1920's**

Fred Ayer lived on Daly Road and his son Wolcott and grandson, Lloyd, lived on Main Street west of the Skungamaug River. Lloyd was born in 1906. Frederick's probate listed this building, worth \$100, in 1935.

Stevenson's Texaco- Daley Road, 1970 gas & oil, Al Stevenson purchased site on Daly Rd. 1956 from Herb Gable. Jan. 1960- Thomas Stevenson opened a filling station on the corner of Rt. 31 and Daly Road; he operated a variety store in the block owned by his father Albert, a grocery store followed. Stevenson's gas station noted in the 1970 Directory.

1965 aerial- corner Daly Road and Rt. 31.

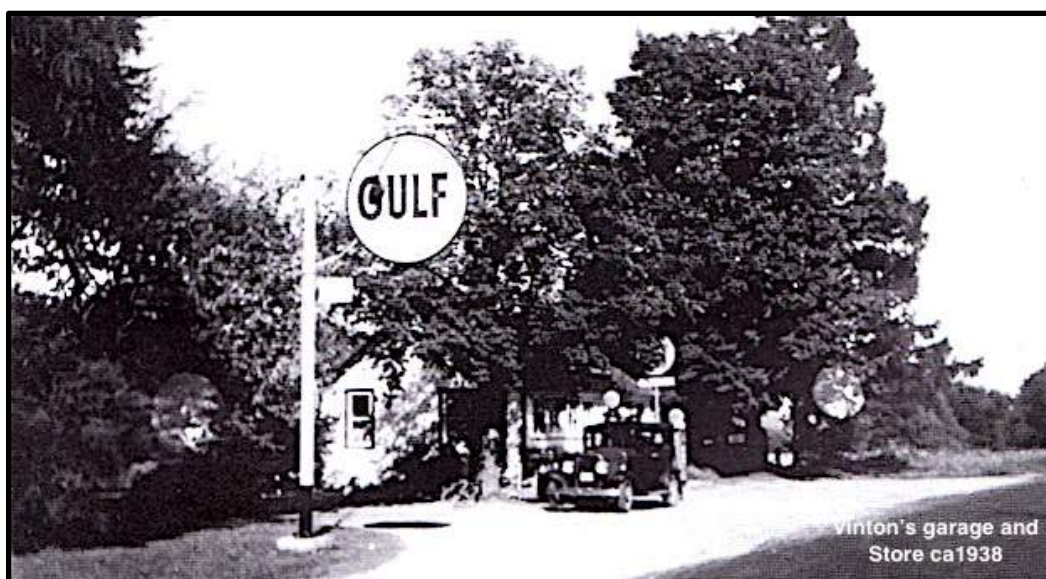




## VINTON's, Main Street North Coventry, ca 1923 to 1970

Arthur Vinton was born in Coventry in 1892 to Winfield and Charlotte Vinton who had a large farm on Grant Hill Road. He married Zoetje Schell in 1923.

In 1923 Arthur bought a wood frame garage 12' x 16' from his brother-in-law which was located near the Second Church and moved it to the Main Street site where Dimitri's Restaurant is today. He put in a gas pump and set up a garage to service cars. Quickly he expanded to ice cream and candy. He also handled a milk route. He then expanded to flour and grain and sugar, then coffee, then groceries and, by 1946, radios and refrigerators. By 1930 Zoetje was running the store from 8am to 11pm. An addition was put on and the garage eliminated. In 1947 he raised money to buy an army surplus fire truck, and in 1950 a two-stall volunteer fire station was built on land donated by Arthur across the street. He sold Gulf gas. After 1962, the store was leased. He died in 1974 after being struck by a car in front of his home. The site is now occupied by Dimitri's Restaurant. The old building was renovated years ago.



Vinton's store and garage ca 1950

### **UNCLES- Just east of #1343 Main Street in the Village, ca1925- 1970**

**William Kennedy Uncles** was born about 1862 in Norwich and came to Coventry with his parents between 1870 and 1880. He married in 1881 Mary Jane Dailey. He worked in Kenyon's jean mill and later Tracy's Shoddy Mill to about 1905. He lived in Willimantic and was a watchman in the thread mill in 1910 and 1920. In 1922 the family purchased the old colonial house at the curve in the Village just adjacent to the old trolley right-of-way.

About 1925, they built a small building adjacent to their house and opened a grocery and gas station. In 1940 he was selling Texaco gas there. By that time William was age 76, and his daughter, Mary Smith was the station attendant. His grocery and station is noted in the 1942, 1946, 1950, 1956, 1958 and 1962 Directories. His date of death is not known, but the building and home was sold in 1976 by his daughter Mary Smith. There is no evidence of this station today.



### **GASLAND, ON THE GO- Corner of Boston Turnpike and Main Street, 1969 to present**

Approval for this station was granted in June of 1969 to W.H. England. Its current name, "On The Go", was preceded by others such as "GasLand" in the 1970's. It sold Getty gasoline early and then switched to a generic brand.



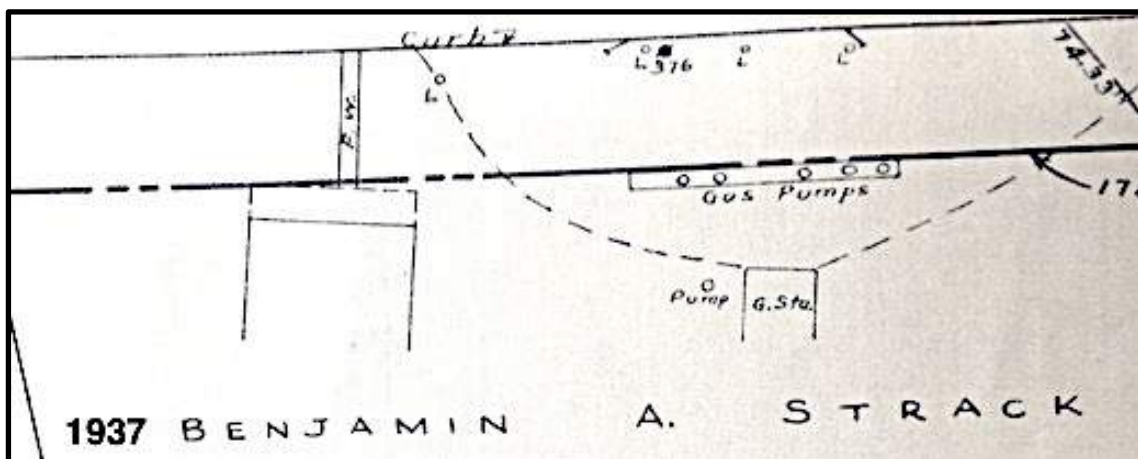
## **STORRS AND VINTON (BENTON) GAS AND OIL. Corner of Boston Turnpike and Grant Hill Road, 1924-1927**

The Hartford Courant reports in early 1924 that Gilbert Storrs and George Vinton are building a new store and gas station at the center of North Coventry. It was lighted by a private lighting plant. There is no George Vinton noted in Coventry in 1924. Gilbert Storrs (age 38 in 1924) was part of a line of ancestors who owned the property for decades. The site was located where the Walgreens is today on Boston Turnpike. It was a small farm with many outbuildings and had been a merchandizing site in the mid 1800's.

The 1926-1927 Willimantic-Coventry Directory lists "Storrs & Benton (Gilbert Storrs – George Benton) gasoline and oils, North Coventry" (It is believed that the name Vinton is an error and should have been Benton.) A George Benton was living in Stafford Springs and was an auto mechanic. There is no mention of this business in any succeeding directories.

## **STRACK'S ROAD SIDE STAND AND GAS PUMP, 2191 Boston Turnpike 1927- 1940+**

Benjamin Strack came to Coventry from Astoria, Queens in 1925 when he bought the house at 2191 Boston Turnpike. He was employed at the Travelers Insurance Company in Hartford where he and his wife worked for many years. Written accounts and city directories note that he had a road side stand (candy & bread, etc.) and gasoline pump (glass cylinder) from 1927 to 1938, and he was listed as an auto mechanic through 1948. A 1937 right-of-way map for Boston Turnpike shows a small station with pumps in front here. Benjamin retired from the insurance company in 1955. His wife, Bessie, attended the store/station during the week. Benjamin was there on weekends. A substantial underground gasoline tank was removed from the property about 20 years ago. The adjacent picture is the old road side stand on the property today. The picture below is a 1937 map of the roadside



**1934- "PanAm"** gas pump was located in part of the livery stable at the Bidwell Hotel (Pan American Petroleum Company was founded in 1916, merged with Standard Oil of Indiana in 1954, later Amoco.)



### **CROWLEY'S FILLING STATION**

In August of 1932, Mary Crowley of West Hartford purchased a large parcel of land on the corner of today's Sam Green Road and Main Street. It was an old blacksmith and wagon shop owned by Otis Thayer. The shop and barn and a residence was existing at the time. She established a lease to Tidewater Oil of N.Y. (Tydol) for the sale of gasoline for one year on a plot 100 feet wide and 30 feet deep. Nothing ever came of the project and she sold the property in 1935. The address at the time was RFD #26 Main Street South Coventry.

### **CHAMPLIN/BURNHAM, MAIN STREET- now the Congregational Church parking lot, 1932-1960's**

John Champlin moved to Coventry in 1872 and worked in the mills as a teenager. About 1890 he purchased a small building at this location and opened a barber shop.

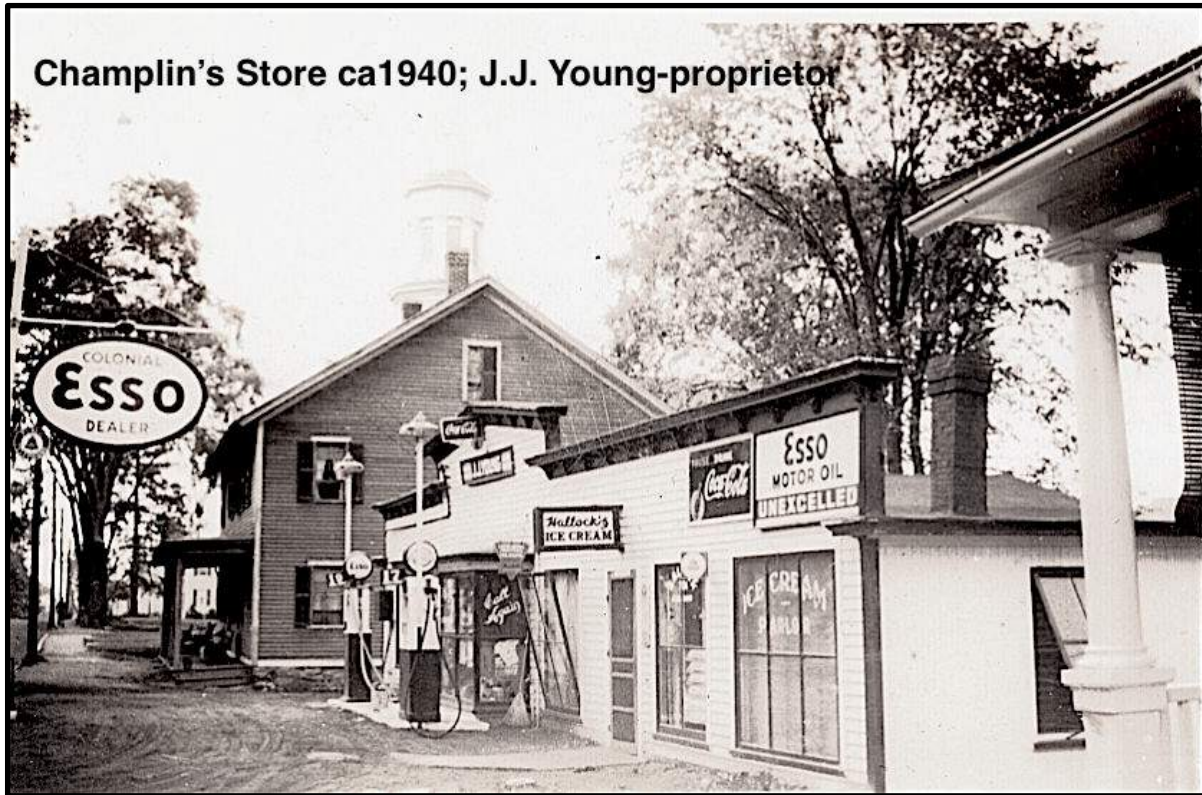
Merchandizing of various sorts occurred at the site that is now the parking lot for the First Congregational Church from 1881 to 1972. It was a barber shop, billiard room, and confectionery for most of its history. John had a wholesale/retail ice cream business in 1910. About 1920 he put in a gas pump. He expanded the building to include a pool hall and a confectionery. He was, at times, town clerk, postmaster, deputy sheriff and a stage operator from the Village to the train depot. He was a dealer for Maxwell automobiles. In 1932 he leased part of the site to Tidewater Sales. Corp. (Tydol gasoline) for a time. John J. Young was the proprietor of the shop/station in the late 1930's and early 1940's.



In 1944, just before Champlin's death, the site was sold to Lehigh Oil Company of Norwich, then sold in 1958 to Esso Standard Oil, then in 1962 to George Burnham. Finally, in 1972 the site was sold to the Congregational Church which demolished it for a parking lot.



George Burnham was born in Willimantic in 1884. He associated with his brother is a very successful wagon making business in his native town. In 1944 he engaged in the business here which was a confectionery and gas station. He purchased the building outright in 1962 continuing to sell Esso gasoline. He sold it in 1972 just several months before his death in Columbia.



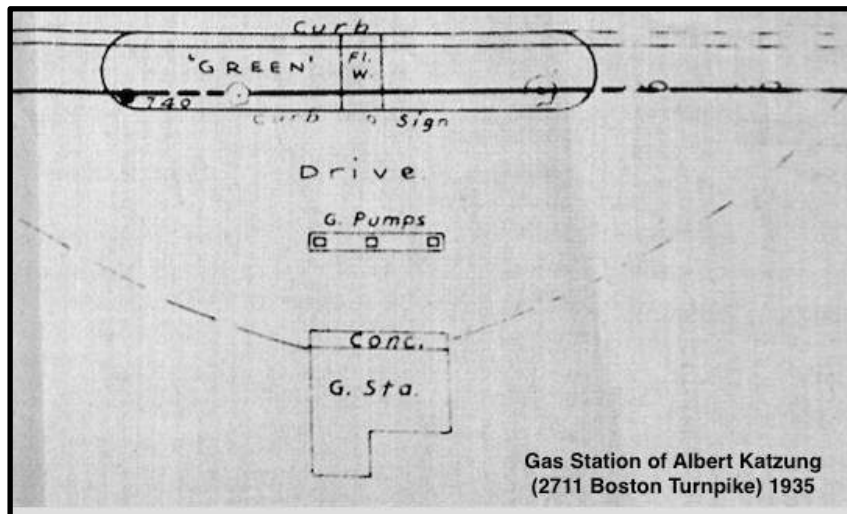
**7-11, CHRISTY'S, JASPER'S, TEXACO STATION, 2711 Boston Turnpike, 1935 to present.**

In 1934 Albert Katzung purchased 70 acres of land south of the Boston Turnpike and east of Cedar Swamp Road Extension. The site included the old Robertson mansion that Albert used as a tourist home. By 1937 he had built a small gas station. It had a small landscaped curbing island and the building was a small wooden structure. John Kozelka bought the site in 1941. He and his son (John Jr.) were senior officials in the Republic Oil Company of Willimantic that distributed Texaco products.

Leo Ducharme leased the station from 1946 to 1951 and added 2 bays for repairs. Edward Troutman ran the Texaco station from 1954 to about 1965. The site was sold in 1966 to Milton Kozelka, the grandson of the original owner. He was granted a building permit to raze the old wooden building and erect a more modern station of a "colonial style."

Through the 1970's the station was operated by a Mr. Tucker and Ernest Laplant as a Texaco station, and in 1986 the convenience store replaced the service part of the station. Milton Kozelka's estate sold the site to Christy's/Jaspers in 1994.





### COVENTRY AUTOMOTIVE, CITGO, TUTTLE'S MOBIL STATION, 2767 Boston Turnpike 1949 – ca 1980's

Leo Ducharme bought this site in 1949 and soon after registered the trade name "Leo's Service Center". In 1954 he leased the station to Socony Mobil and Louis Tuttle from Manchester was the station operator. Leo's heirs sold the station in 1963 and it was operated as a Mobil station by Ramon Menzel, then a Texaco station by Don Wilson and later Ernest LaPlant. About 1974 it became a Citgo station and continued to the mid 1980's when the station was used for repairs and sales only. Today the site is Coventry Automotive specializing in Volvo sales and repair.



## TOOTHAKER'S ESSO STATION, 2152 BOSTON TURNPIKE, 1950-1974

Grant Toothaker was a sales agent from Hartford who purchased a home on Ripley Hill Road in 1938. In 1950 he purchased the site on the Boston Turnpike and built the service station, registering the trade name "Toothaker's Esso Service Center" in November of 1951. The station was managed by other people, for example in the late '50's and early '60's the managers were David Orcutt and Louis Gill. A 1970 ad lists Nick's Esso Service Center. Following Mr. Toothaker's death in 1972, the site was sold to the Eckerts who started a lawn and leisure store. The site is now Coventry Motor Cars.



## SOUTH STREET GARAGE, D&H AUTO SERVICE, B&B SERVICE CENTER- 1988 South Street, 1950 to 1980's

This area- South Street and Camposeo Drive was part of a residential development of George Hinkel in the 1930's. A few remaining lots were sold to Nathan Hale Inc., a company formed to deal in real estate and merchandising in 1950. They leased the site in 1950 to Frances Gemma and George Topazio of Middletown who operated the Gem Top Service Station and in 1952 leased to William Dorsey of New Britain for the purpose of selling gas, auto repairs and the sale of electric appliances. In 1954 there was a gas agreement with Shell Oil. In 1954 William Hotchkiss operated the D&H Auto Service for several years, later Henry Yeomans ran the gas station for a short time.

The logo on the adjacent 1962 ad suggests the Cities Service Company, the precursor to Citgo.

**EXPERT SERVICE**  
**AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSIONS**  
FLUID CHANGED  
BANDS & LINKAGE ADJUSTED **\$12.95**  
LEAKS REPAIRED:- Fluid, Gaskets, Seals, Linkage & Band Adjustment & Labor.... All Work Guaranteed.... **\$39.95**  
4 Hour Service on Ford Products  
2 4 Hour Service on Other Makes.  
 **B & B**   
Bill Zeigler SERVICE CENTER Bert Wright  
24 HOUR WRECKER SERVICE  
SOUTH ST., COVENTRY **PI 2-8191**  
OPEN DAILY 6-9...SUNDAY 8-6



Bill Zeigler and Bert Wright owned the B&B Service Center in the 1960's and they leased the site to the Grove Corp. of Thompson, Ct. from 1970 to 1975. Later owners were Joseph Dugay who operated Robin Motors, Della Fella and Saunders. The ZBA in 1977 to Jeanette Saunders (Coventry Motors) granted an allowance to sell gas, maximum of three pumps, and maximum 20 vehicles on the lot.



**SMITH'S SERVICE STATION, 1010 Main Street, now Coventry Auto, 1959 to present**

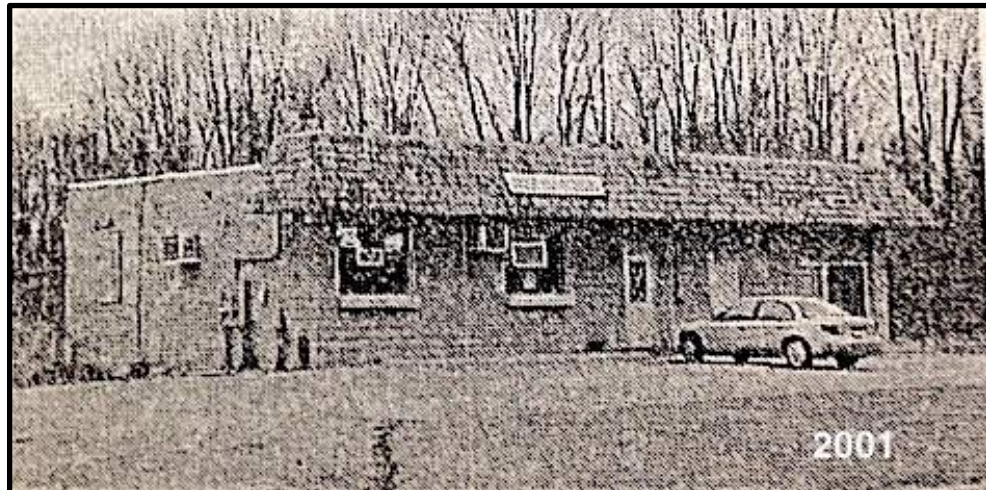
In 1955 Edward and Lucy Smith purchased a small parcel of land with a dwelling and by 1959 had built a service station here. They registered the trade name "Smith's Service Station" that year. The station sold Gulf then Mobil gas and discontinued gas sales in the 1980's. 1973 ad notes Smith's Mobil, It is currently Coventry Auto, automobile sales and repair. The original 1950's building had a flat roof.



**TOMASSI'S TEXACO, NATHAN HALE GAS SERVICE, #1467 South Street, now Coventry Pizza, 1957 to ca 1985**

Alex Haddad owned 45 acres of land here since 1918 and he was a farmer with an adjoining house. In 1956/7 the Zoning Board of Appeals allowed him to open a gas station. In 1959 he sold the small plot (~60' x 80') to Louis Tuttle of Manchester who failed to make use of the site and it was then sold in 1960 to Thomas Welles who rented it to Mr. Tomassi who operated a Texaco station. The present sign in front of Coventry Pizza was originally the Texaco sign. The site had many uses in addition to the gas service. Nathan Hale Gas Service used it for the sale of appliances and fuel oil in the 1970's, and there was a propane refilling station run by Mr. Sanford Jones in the 1980's. There was a liquor store run by Mr. Jones in the 1990's.

Gasoline service stopped in the mid 1980's and a portion of the building was used for an ice cream parlor and deli and finally became a small pizza restaurant in 1985 by Mr. Karagianus.



**YOUR STORE- Main Street, corner of Lake Street, 1962 to present**

The Gas Station and Mini-Mart was built in 1962 and originally was Pelletier's serving Calso gas (California Standard Oil) which became Chevron for many years and then Getty then to Citgo.





## APPENDIX

**Mobil-** The Standard Oil Company, started in 1870 by John D. Rockefeller, was broken up in 1911 into 34 independent companies. The Standard Oil Company of New York or Socony was then founded. They registered the name Mobiloil in 1930 and, in 1931 merged with Vacuum Oil. By 1933 they had adopted the “flying horse” logo, and in 1935 opened the huge Mammoth Oil port station on Staten Island. 1955 renamed Socony-Mobil, 1966 dropped Socony from the name. The Mobil logo below is from the 1950’s and the Socony logo is 1908-1932.



**Esso-** Standard Oil of New Jersey had the rights to the Standard Oil brand in many mid-eastern states. Esso is the phonetic of the letters “S” and “O”. It used that brand in New York and New England, and in a few states used the name “Humble”. 1972 largely replaced by “Exxon” when it purchased Humble Oil.



**Humble Oil** was founded in Humble Texas in 1911. It was acquired by Standard Oil of New Jersey in 1959 and sold to Esso, then rebranded in 1972 as Exxon.

**Tidewater Oil Co.** Founded on New York City in 1887. The Flying A brand sold gas and oil on the east coast under the Tydol brand. 1966 Phillips bought all of Tidewater’s western assets, and Getty bought the eastern assets and held “Flying A” until 1970, then purchased by Texaco in 1984.



**Texaco- Founded** in 1901 as the Texas Fuel Company, 1932 introduced “fire chief” gasoline. By 1940 had service in all 48 states.



**Phillips 66-** Incorporated by the Phillips brothers in Oklahoma 1917, started their refinery in 1927, 1930 adapted the Phillips 66 trademark (a company official was driving 66 mph on Route 66 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the name was created.)

**Gulf-** Founded in Beaumont, Texas in 1901; named after the Gulf of Mexico. Gulf introduced the first drive-in station in 1913 in Pittsburgh. It was purchased by Chevron in 1984 and is now owned by a private investment firm, but maintains its brand. The logo is from about 50 years ago.



**Cities Service- Citgo-** Formed in 1910 as a natural gas supplier, and in 1914 started in the oil business. The company introduced the Citgo brand in 1965. The company was sold in 1896-1990 to Petroleos de Venezuela.

