**“Onions, Cider & Ice – Southport’s early farmers
on Mill Hill”***Reprinted from The Harbor News, Winter, 1996.*

Although most of the village’s early residents established themselves around the harbor front, some farming on Mill Hill began in the 18th century. Mill Hill had been part of the Town of Fairfield’s long lot and half-mile common tracts, which stretched from the Westport line toward Stratford. The Hull, Sherwood and Bulkley families were among the first to receive settlement deeds within its
acreage.

Throughout the 19th century, the Sherwoods and other town
farmers developed onions as the area cash crop. Their “Southport Yellow and
White Globe Onions” evolved from seed strains earlier grown along the
Connecticut River Valley. Southport’s onion growers, particularly the Sherwoods on Mill Hill and the Jennings in Greens Farms, became self-taught agronomists in their efforts to boost yields. They concocted different mixtures of fertilizers to sufficiently sour and sweeten the soil to the right growing chemistry for Globe onions. The Sherwoods were also involved in developing new plows, disks and row cultivators, which would do the job without injury to the
crop.

As the years went by disease, western competition, and changing
commodity demand slowly diminished the market for Southport onion crops.

The Sherwoods and others on Mill Hill involved themselves in the ice trade for
refrigeration, produce, timber and cider they made from the hillside orchards.
For years into the turn of the century, Gray’s Cider Mill flourished on Bronson
Road, and H. B. Sherwood had a good trade with his Pequot Spring ice business,
from a pond in the area, behind the present Mill Hill School.

Increasing demand for real estate was also a factor. By the turn of the century, most of the big field and orchard area across the hilltop was bought by Dr. Ira DeVer Warner, a founder of Warner Bros. (later Warnaco) in Bridgeport. From 1910 until the late 1960’s the Warner estate, “Restmore,” with its house, big barns and cottages, was the dominating landmark on Mill Hill. A story in itself, it became Mill Hill’s reflection of Southport’s ultimate character change from agriculture to the suburb more familiar to us now.