

Southbury in the 1930s - A Decade of Change

◆ Improvements began on the state and major local roads, converting them from dirt roads to packed gravel. The project lasted several years. Local men were hired to help.

◆ The Silver Bridge was constructed in 1934, replacing the old Victorian Bridge from Sandy Hook into Southbury.

◆ Route 6, traveling from the Silver Bridge to the Woodbury town line, became the major route from Danbury to Hartford. The newly improved road allowed traffic to travel at the speed of 45 mph—except during the weekend traffic jams.

◆ Services for the travelers sprung up in town, including numerous gas stations, restaurants, lodging houses, and roadside stands.

◆ Cleanup began on the burnt-out Diamond Match Factory. The State hired many men to remove the debris, in order to make Southford Falls State Park.

◆ The State purchased a large amount of property to build the Southbury Training School. Three hundred workers were employed for the project, but only six were from Southbury.

◆ Summer residential areas like Cedarland and Lakeside, along with numerous camps, lured visitors from the big cities to sample all Southbury had to offer.

◆ The improving road system throughout Connecticut, decreased the need for passenger trains to stop here.



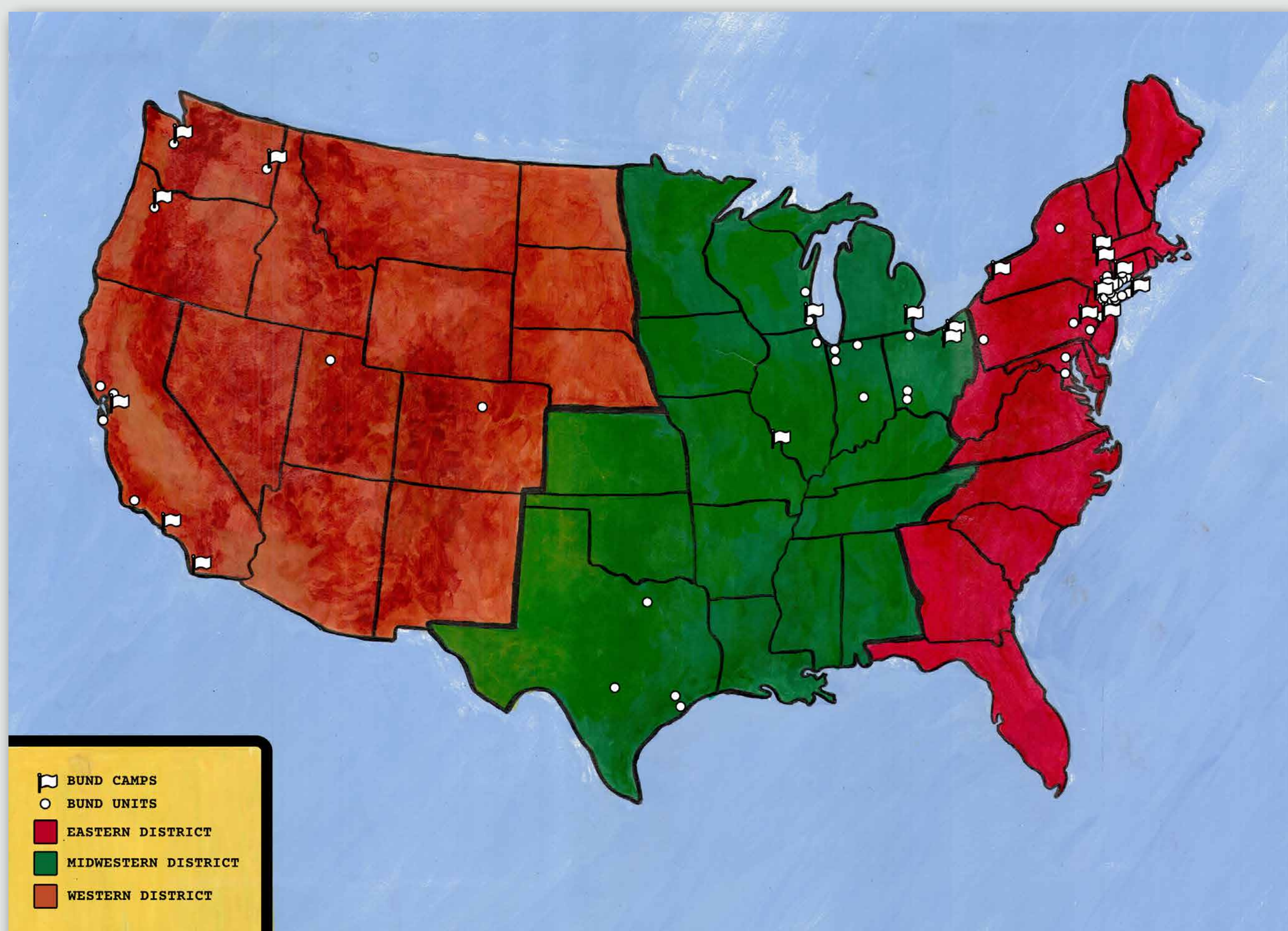
The Amerikadeutscher Volksbund

Better known as the German-American Bund, the Bund was formed in 1936 from other pro-Nazi organizations. Under the leadership of Fritz Kuhn, its influence was quickly felt throughout the USA through numerous units and recreational youth camps.



In the summer of 1937, Camp Nordland was opened in New Jersey, complete with a military guard, American flags, and German flags with swastikas. The children recited an oath to obey their leaders without question. Then with a straight-armed salute, they yelled “Heil Hitler.”

By August of 1937, an alarm was raised throughout the country in various magazine articles. A Chicago newspaper surprised the country when it declared the Bund was planning to take over the United States through internal means. It reported that the Bund had already started by training children to be good Nazis, and organizing the Ordnungsdienst or Order Police, better known as Storm Troopers.



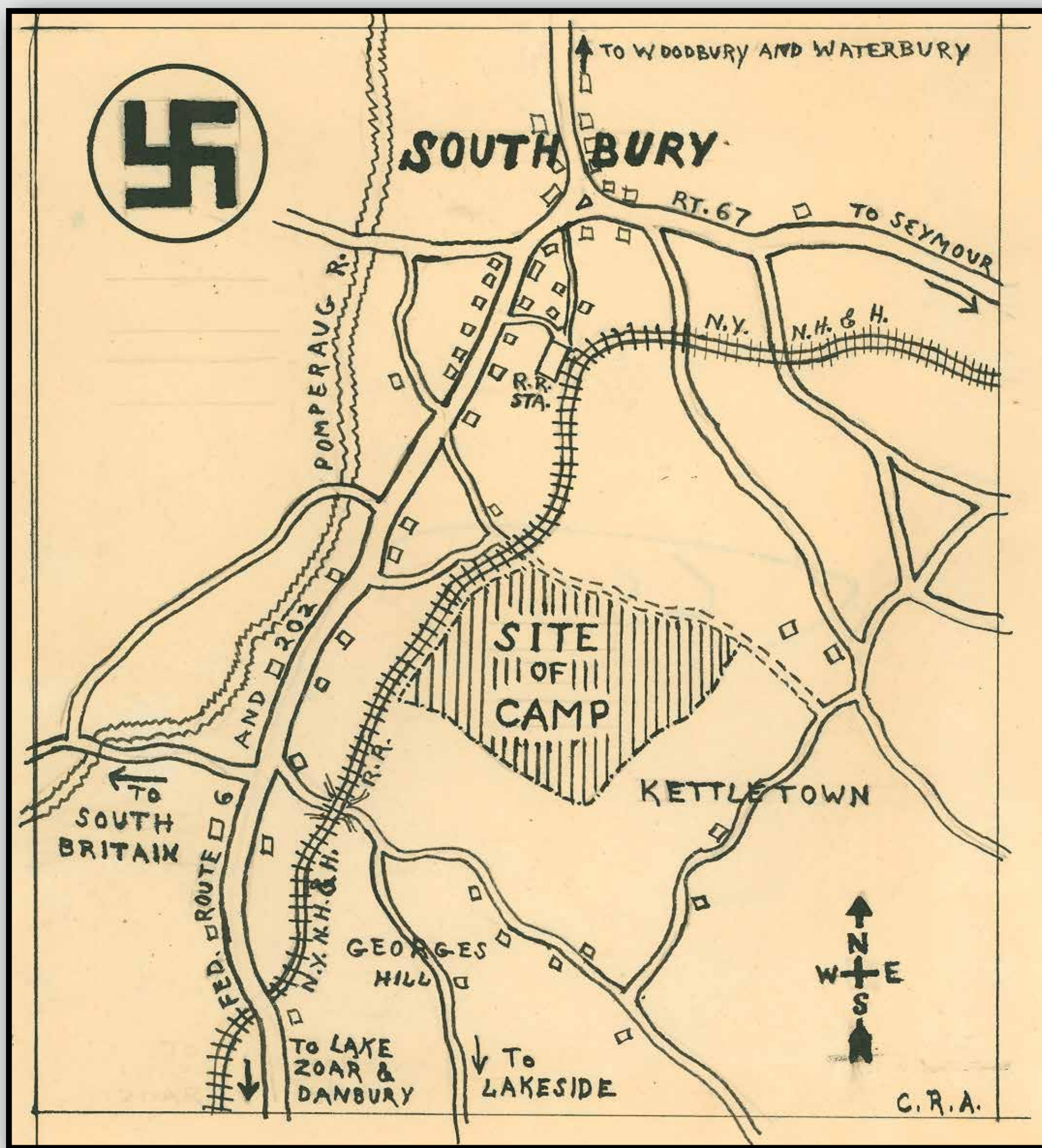
Largest Pro-Nazi Camp Started in Southbury

The Waterbury Republican's Monday morning headline shocked the residents of Southbury on November 15, 1937. Under the cover of secrecy, Wolfgang Jung, a Bund member from Stamford, purchased 178-acres of land in September for the purpose of building a Bund recreational camp.

Unknown to most of the town, Bund workers had already completed their second Sunday clearing land near N Georges Hill Road. Their first work day had gone virtually unnoticed except by a few, including a sharp-eyed young reporter. With careful research he drew a map of the camp location for the Waterbury Republican. He visited the campsite on November 14 with his editor and a photographer.

The Bund members eagerly shared that the camp was named Camp General Von Steuben, after the German soldier who helped General Washington win the Revolutionary War. The camp would include a separate youth camp, a five-acre swimming pond, and enough housing to hold 1,000 people a day, and up to 10,000 on the weekends. A special train would be arranged to bring in the guests. Wolfgang Jung claimed there would not be any Nazi uniforms or military training at this camp.

The Bund workers willingly posed for photographs. Many of the workers would return to Southbury many times over the next couple of months.



From the left front: standing, in dark pants Gustav Korn; Kneeling, D.C. Folger; John B. Unkel; Wolfgang Jung, owner of the land; Carl "Papa" Nicolay, the Bund's Eastern Division Organizer. - Courtesy of the Waterbury Rep-Am.

Southbury Reacts

Southbury residents quickly reacted to the news of the Bund camp. Intense discussions were held on street corners, while letters were sent to the editors of local newspapers in protest. George Holmes, a gas station owner, wrote intense warnings to stop the “menace of Naziism” from invading Southbury.

The town officials, with First Selectman J. Edward Coer in charge, scheduled a Special Town Meeting to establish a zoning code, saying it would keep Southbury “much the same as it has been.”

Rev. M.E.N. Lindsay, pastor of South Britain Congregational Church, pulled out his typewriter and wrote letters to every Congressman and Senator in the state. He also wrote to religious leaders and magazine publications alerting everyone to the Nazi threat.

The Kettletowners, who lived closest to the proposed youth camp, mailed a stern reminder to all Southbury residents to attend the town meeting, attaching the article, “An American Fuhrer Organizes an Army.”



Every Citizen and Resident of Southbury
ATTENTION!

The attached article describes an organization which purposes to overrun YOUR town.

Please read it and then decide whether or not you want the swastika and goose step thrust upon you, whether you want your land values depressed.

If you do not want these things, which the German-American Bund carries with it everywhere, attend the Town Meeting next Tuesday afternoon and do your civic duty.

The Kettletowners

Both Rev. M.E.N. Lindsay and Rev. Felix Manley of the Southbury Federated Church included powerful anti-Nazi messages in their Sunday sermons. Lindsay encouraged the congregation to find legal means to prevent the camp from opening.

Southbury received overwhelming support from many veteran organizations and unions throughout the state. They wrote resolutions against the building of the Bund camp, and sent them to Governor Wilbur Cross.

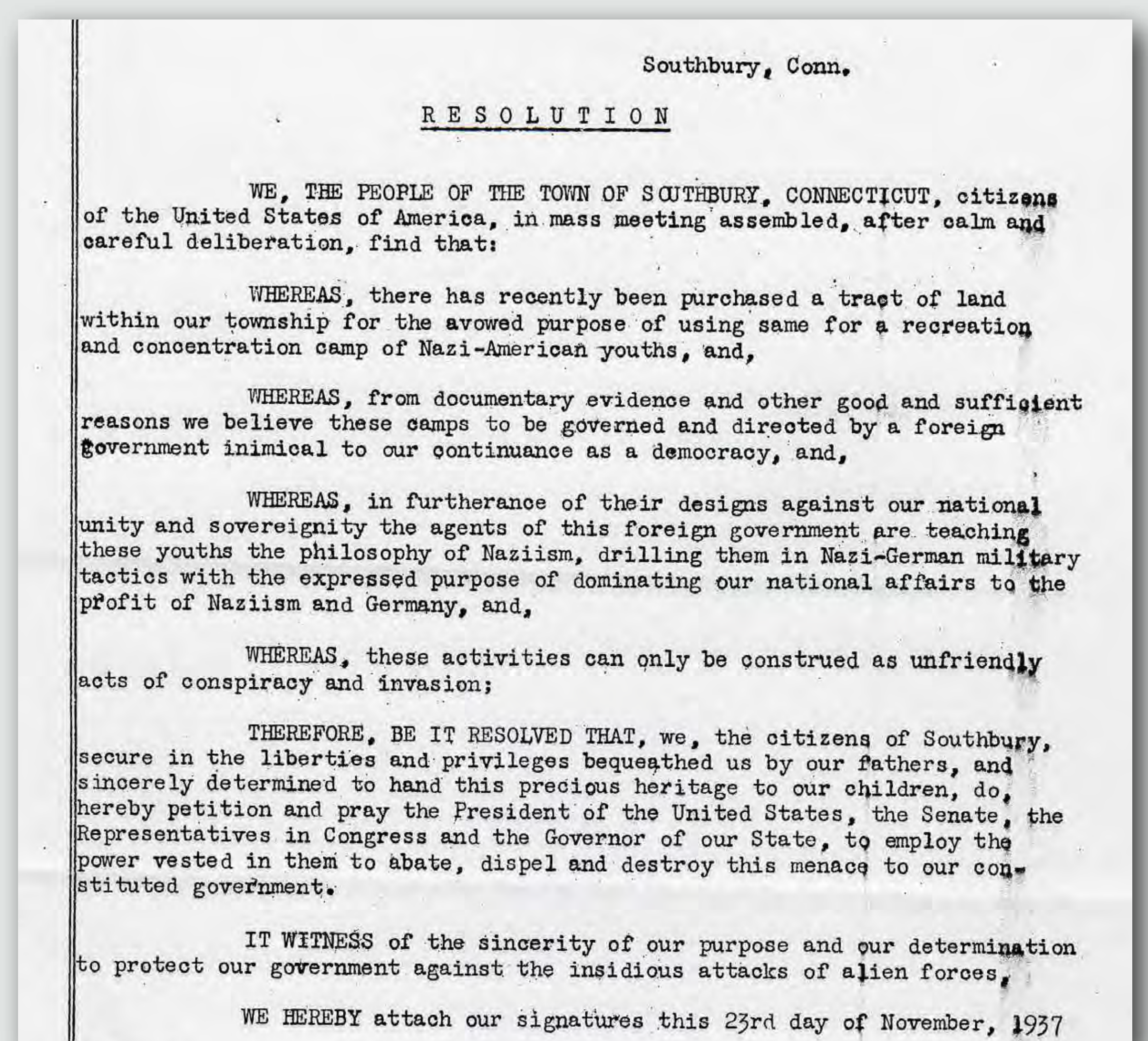
As the 2 pm meeting time arrived, the residents turned out in large numbers at the Town Hall. Noting there were too many people to fit into the building, Rev. Lindsay offered the use of the South Britain Congregational Church, and everyone walked to the new location.

The Special Town Meeting was strictly about establishing and appointing a zoning commission, with no mention of the Bund camp allowed. The vote was 122-41 to approve the zoning commission and five men were elected to write up the zoning code.

Immediately after the conclusion of the official town meeting, a new meeting began to discuss the Nazis in town. George Holmes gave an impassioned speech on the danger of allowing the camp in town. He presented a resolution to be sent to the state and federal officials. The resolution was passed unanimously.

Jennie Hinman, who was descended from the first settlers in town, suggested a resolution that, "displaying a foreign flag had to be accompanied by an American flag." She also added, "wearing any uniform indicating allegiance to any foreign power would be prohibited and forbidden" in Southbury. The resolution was passed.

The meeting closed with a stirring rendition of the Star Spangled Banner, and a prayer.



The Special Town Meeting

Bund Sends Kunze to Southbury

German American Bund

UNIT: _____ ADDRESS: **GERMAN AMERICAN BUND**
P. O. BOX 75, STATION "K"
New York, N. Y.



Application for Membership

DISTRICT: _____ Please do not use this space *) Payable when applying
UNIT: _____ No. _____ Initiation Fee \$1.00
Monthly Dues \$0.75
Voluntary Donation \$0.50 up

I hereby apply for admission to membership in the "German American Bund" the purposes and aims of which are known to me, and I obligate myself to support them to the best of my ability. I recognize the leadership principle, in accordance to which the Bund is being directed. I am of Aryan origin, free from Jewish or colored blood.

Please write distinctly.

Full Name: _____ Occupation: _____
Exact Address: _____
Born: _____ Day Month Year Place of Birth: _____ Single/Married/Widowed: _____
Nationality: _____ Telephone: _____
Two References: (1) _____
(2) _____
To what Organizations do you belong? _____
Date: _____

Paid Dues		Applicants Personal Signature _____ Chairman
Initiation Fee	\$: _____	
Monthly Fee	\$: _____	
Vol. Donation	\$: _____	

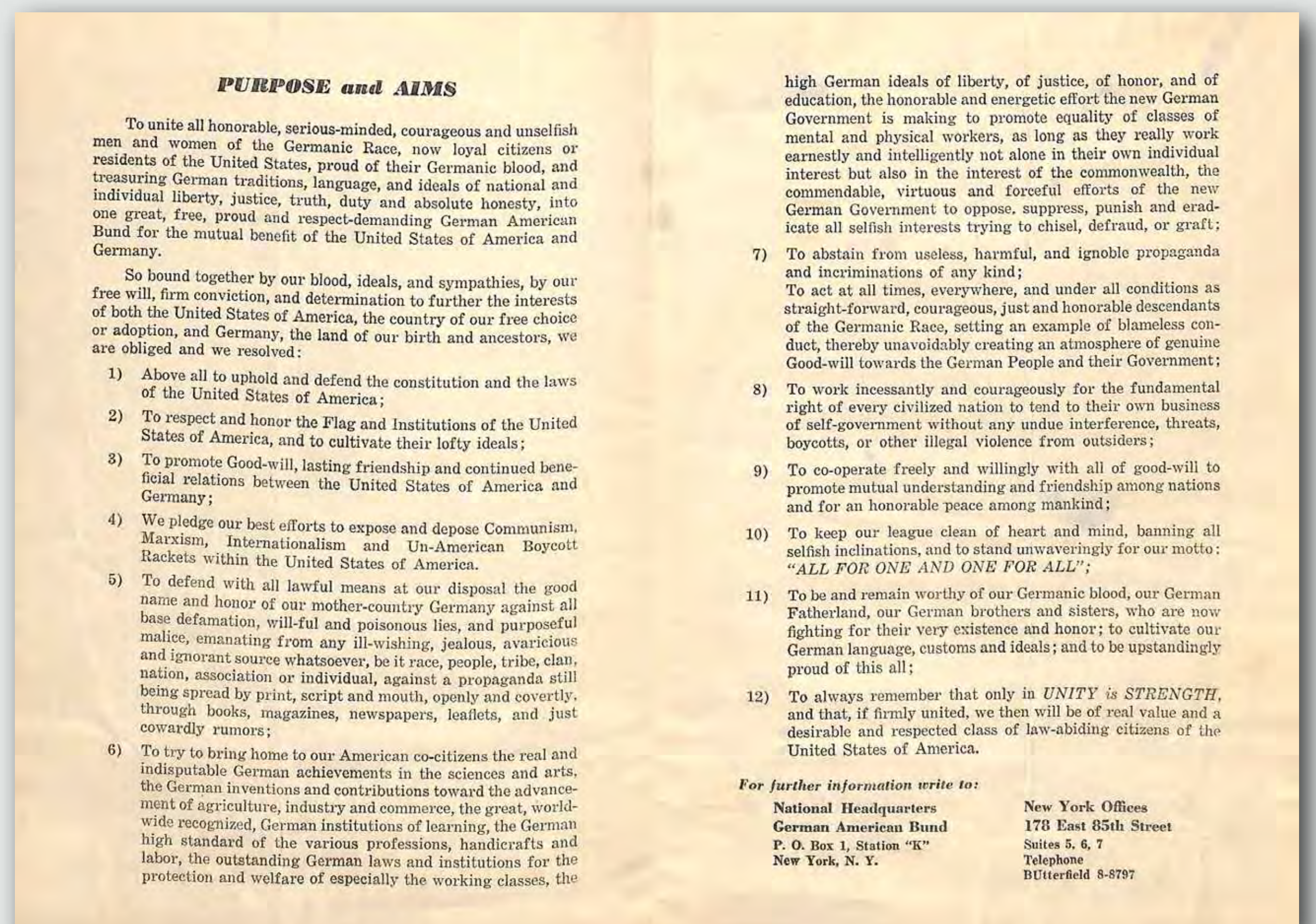
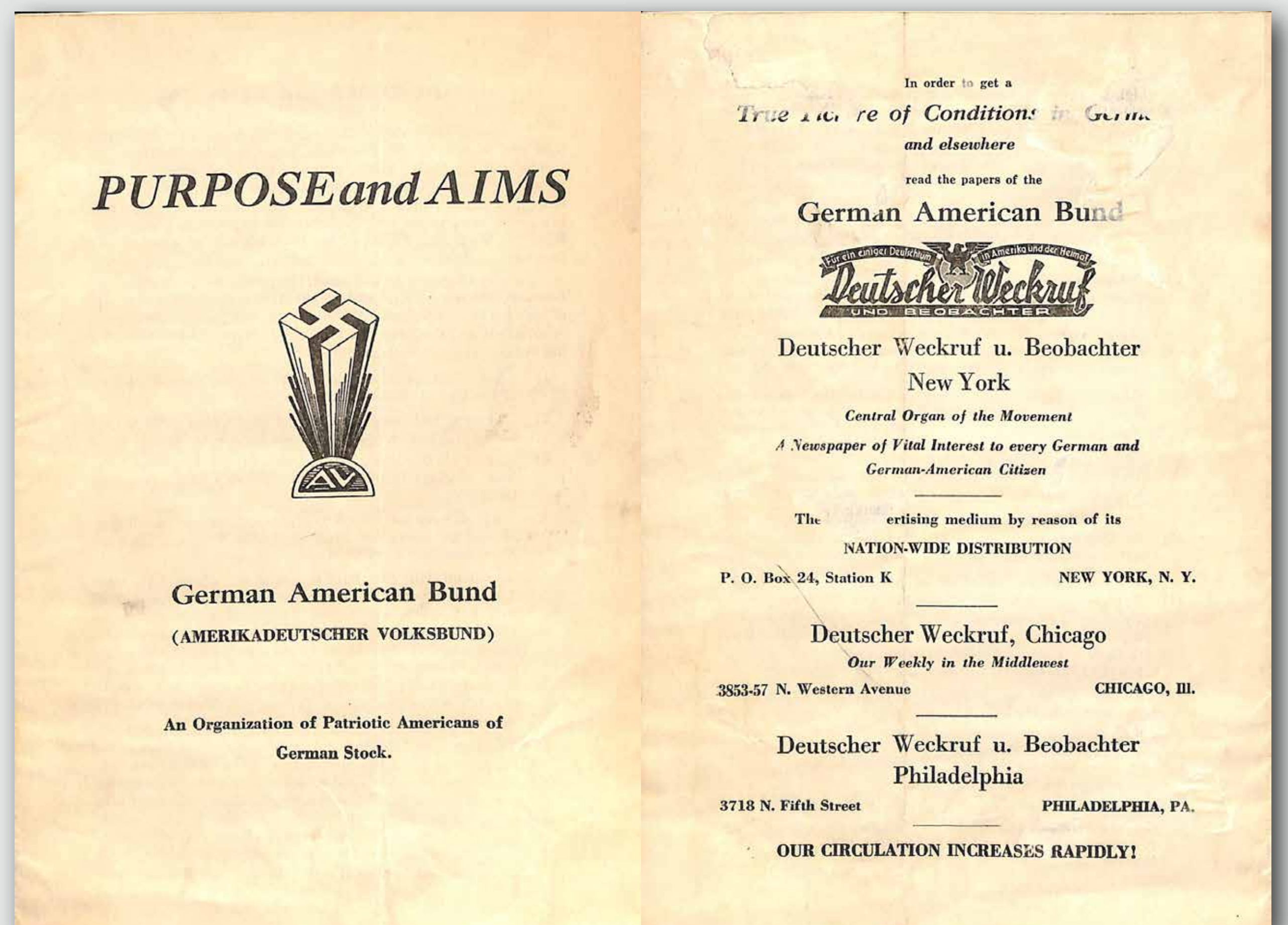
The German American Bund leaders did not consider the newly formed zoning commission a threat to their camp project. G. Wilhelm Kunze, head of Publicity, was sent to Southbury to make their position clear, and to encourage the town to accept the camp.

Herr Kunze spent two hours visiting individually with Rev. Lindsay and Rev. Manley to get their support. Several Bund members joined Kunze and stayed in town for four long days. They visited all of the town officials, making dire threats about what would happen to Southbury if the camp was obstructed.



The Bund members turned next to the local residents. Spreading throughout the town, they knocked on front doors, trying to recruit new Bund members and workers who would help build the camp. They handed out Bund applications and pamphlets on their philosophy and aims. Young boys were invited to visit the camp when it was finished and were given Bund emblem patches to sew onto their jackets. Startled mothers told their children to avoid talking to strangers and to walk straight home from school.

The frazzled Southbury residents were relieved when Bund "guests" finally left town.



Blue Law Arrests

Grand Juror Alrick Nelson, the town's prosecutor, received numerous calls the following Sunday morning about the Bund members working at the camp site. Armed with signed warrants from Justice Harold Hicock, Nelson and six constables arrived at the camp to find thirty people at work. Two men holding tools were arrested and taken to the home of Justice Hicock, where court was usually held on Saturdays.

Gustav Korn and Richard Koehler were charged with working on Sunday, and a trial date was arranged for the following Saturday. A fine was set at \$75 each, to be paid immediately or the men would go to jail. The men did not have enough money on them, so Bund members cleaned out their pockets to raise the funds.

Several newspapers objected to the Blue Laws arrests saying the outdated law was used unfairly, based on ancient rules preventing people to work on Sunday. However, the law cited by Alrick Nelson on the arrest warrants was quoted from the law books of 1931.



Courtesy of the Waterbury Rep-Am.



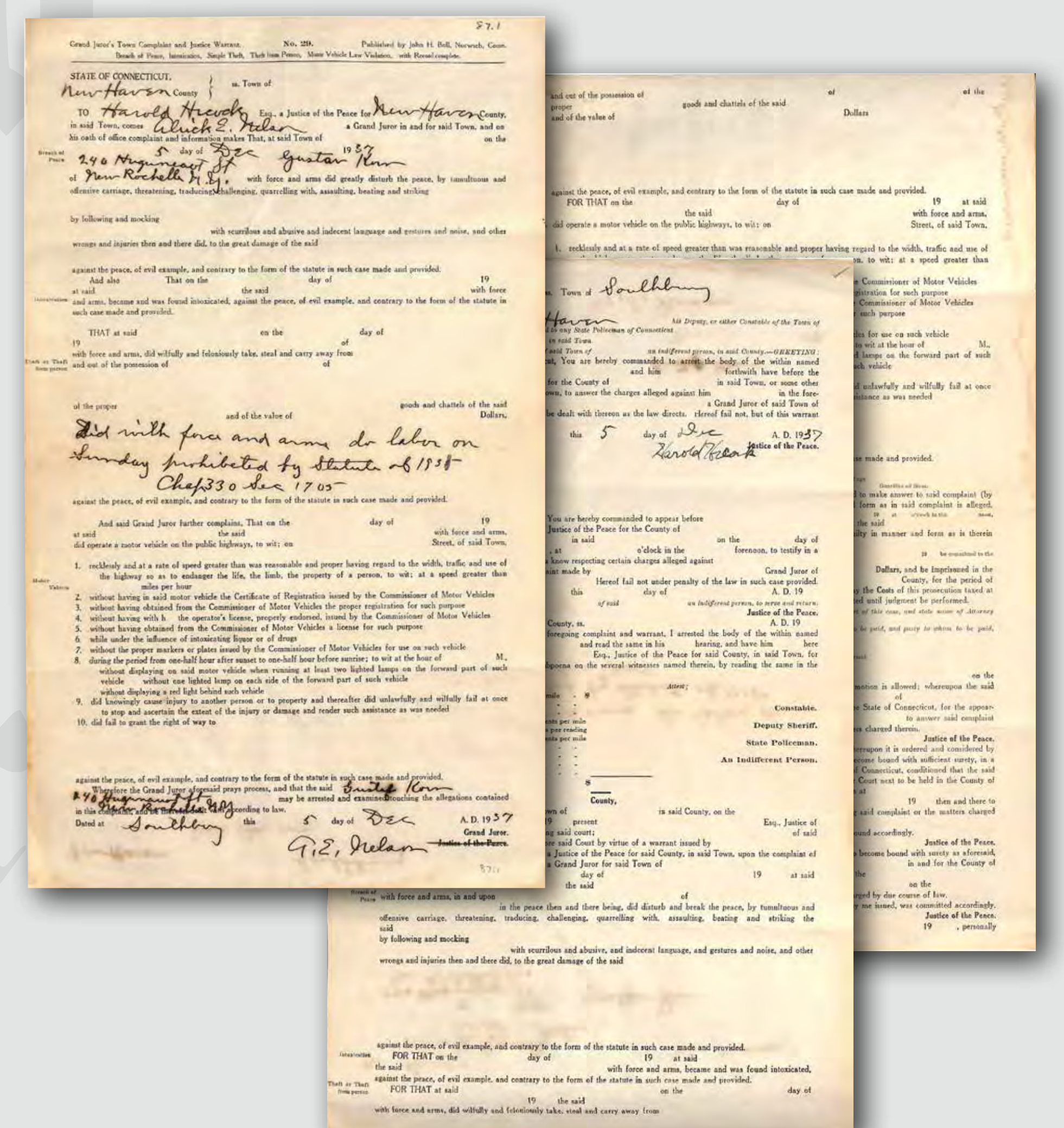
"Bridgeport Telegram"

"Did with force and arms do labor on Sunday prohibited by Statute of 1931,

Chapter 330, Section 1705."

Bund leader Fritz Kuhn was furious with Southbury when he heard about the arrests. He threatened to have everyone in town arrested if they continued to oppose the establishment of the camp.

"We'll prefer charges under the law against every man and woman in Southbury who works on Sunday. We'll stop cars, buses, and trucks and anything else that's moving." –Fritz Kuhn





Trial of the Century

A crowd gathered at the Community Hall long before the trial was scheduled. Reporters from all major Connecticut newspapers were represented, along with the Associated Press, and several New York metropolitan papers. Pathe News, the newsreel company from London, set up a movie camera and microphones to capture the trial on film.

To meet the needs of the reporters, additional telegraph lines were installed, and extra telegraph operators were on standby. A few clever reporters arranged to use the neighbor's telephones after the trial to be the first to call their editors.

Gustave Korn and Richard Koehler entered through the building's side door to avoid the press, and took their seats at the front of the room. Promptly at 10 o'clock, Justice Hicock and Alrick Nelson entered the room. The spectators grew silent as there was a short private discussion with the defendants.

To everyone's surprise, Justice Hicock announced that the trial was postponed because several state witnesses failed to appear. The new trial date would be on December 27. The trial of the century would have to wait.

Outside, members of a new organization, the United Americans, carried signs in protest of the Nazi camp.

Final Trial:

On December 27, the trial was held with a small audience of fifty people, half of them Bund members, and several reporters. Grand Juror Alrick Nelson said that he would not prosecute the defendants, stating that the arrests "had served their purpose" because the zoning code had been approved, and the camp construction halted. The case was dismissed and the fines returned.

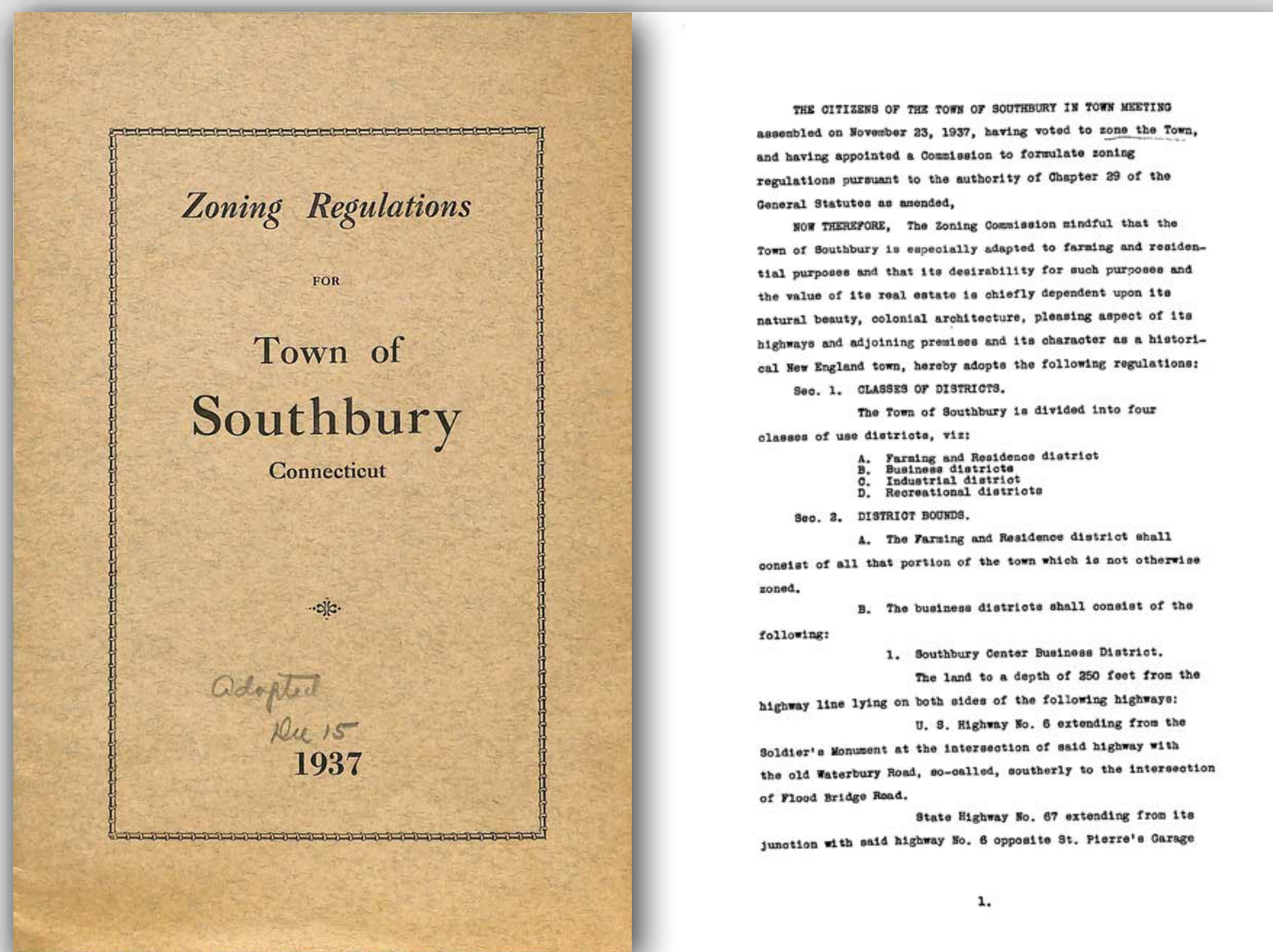
Photos courtesy of Waterbury Rep-Am.

Special Zoning Meeting

A Special Town Meeting was called to review the newly drafted zoning code. Albert Aston, the chairman of the Zoning Commission, read through the entire zoning code booklet.

The town would be divided into these four categories:

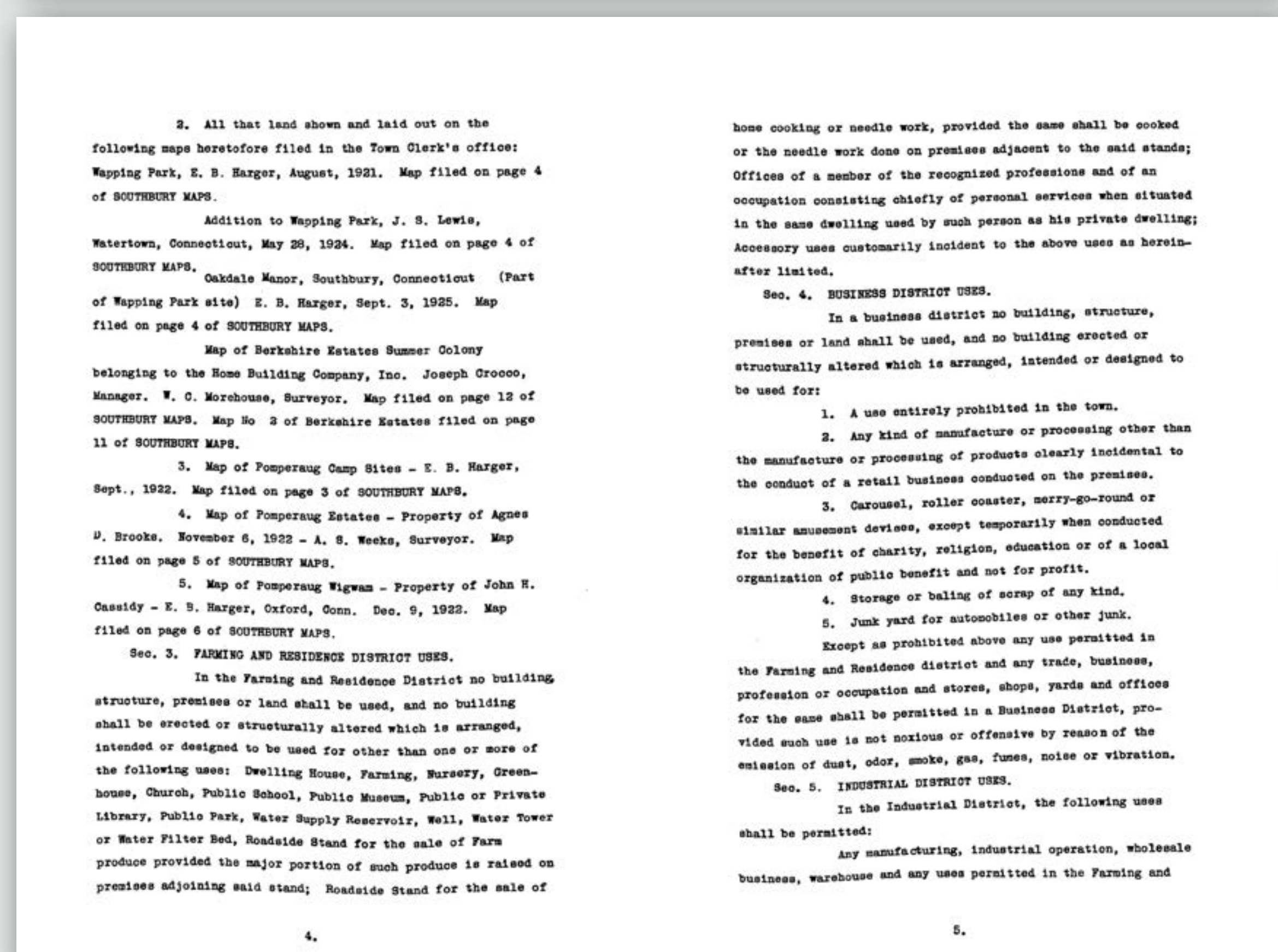
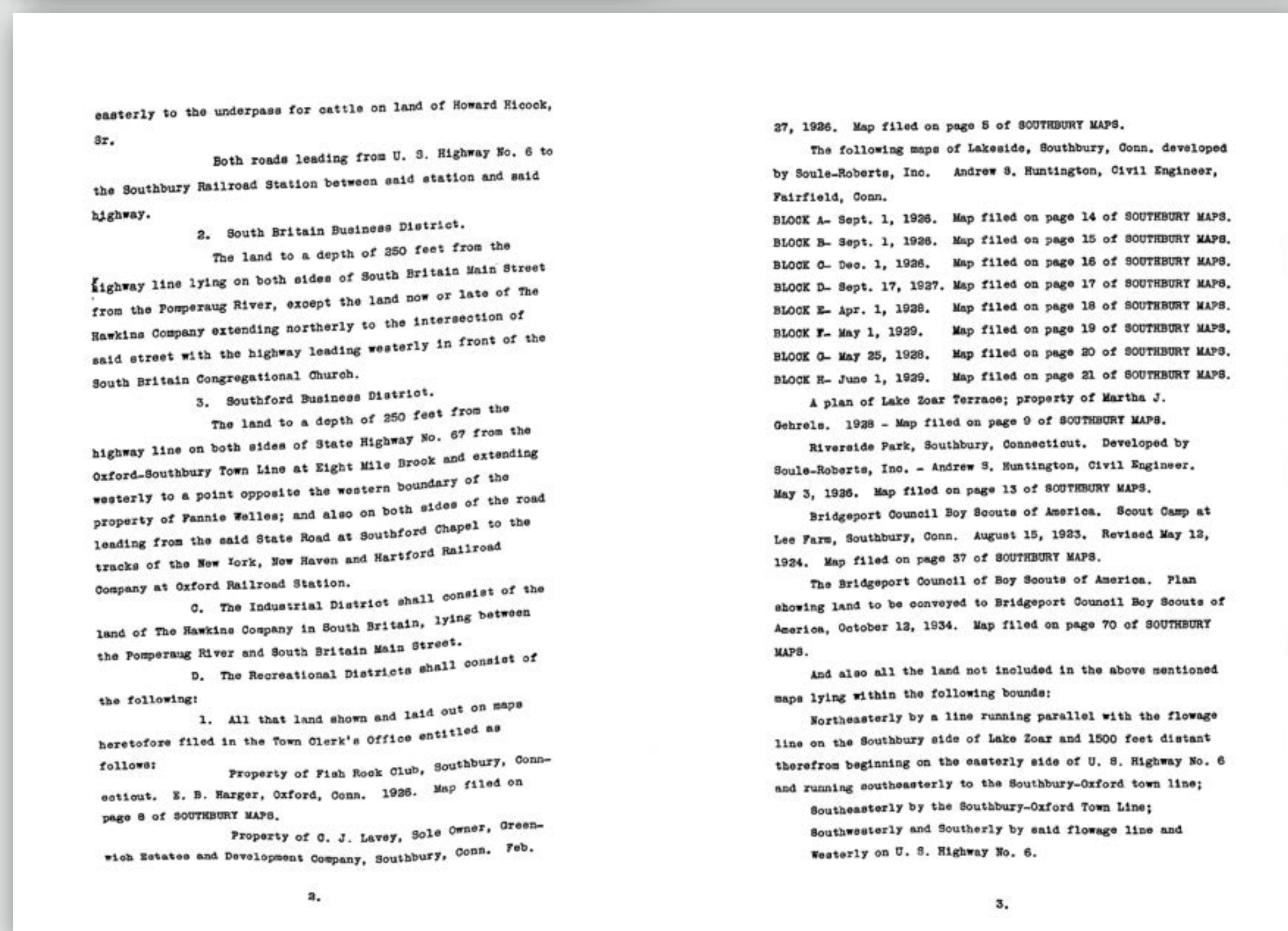
**Farming and Residential
Business
Industrial
Recreational**



The Bund camp was placed in the farming and residential zone. Also in the code was a section against “military training or drilling with or without arms except by the legally constituted armed forces of the United States.”

When the meeting was opened for comments and questions, A. Ewing Barclay, a town carpenter, raised many good points. He noted that nothing was in the zoning code concerning land for cemeteries. Barclay said, “Well, we can let those who are there stay, but we can’t bury anyone else. Don’t any of you die, for heaven’s sake.”

The vote was called and the decision was to cast ballots instead of raising hands. The voters passed by the town clerk’s desk and dropped their folded ballots into an old box labeled “Canned Tomatoes.” The Zoning Code was accepted by a vote of 142 to 91.



142 to 91

Not The End

Even with the zoning code in place, the Bund was not ready to give up on the camp in Southbury.

- **December 24, 1937** – Bund leader, Fritz Kuhn threatens to sell property to Father Divine (a cult leader) if the town of Southbury continued its “persecution.”

- **May 30, 1938** – “Arrangements were being made to continue the organization’s plans (in Southbury) before summer,” stated Carl Nicolay. When questioned about the zoning laws, he said, “that will be fixed.”

- **September 1939** – The land came under the control of Gustave Buckel, head of the Hartford Bund. He claims the Bund will build a “model community” with a central community building, a school and a church, surrounded by homes of Bund members.

- **1976 – 1980** – George Munk sells off the property in several sections.

- **March 1938** – Carl Nicolay says the Bund has not given up their plans for the camp. They will be back in Southbury after the winter thaw.

- **March 1939** – Sheriff J. Edward Slavin of New Haven offered to purchase the land to make a camp for underprivileged boys. His goal was to keep boys from turning to a life of crime. The Bund was not interested in selling the property.

- **May 28, 1940** – Senator Dickstein presented evidence that the Southbury property would be used for the Bund National Headquarters.

- **August 8, 1940** – The land was transferred from Wolfgang Jung to George Munk, the former leader of Stamford Bund.

United Americans

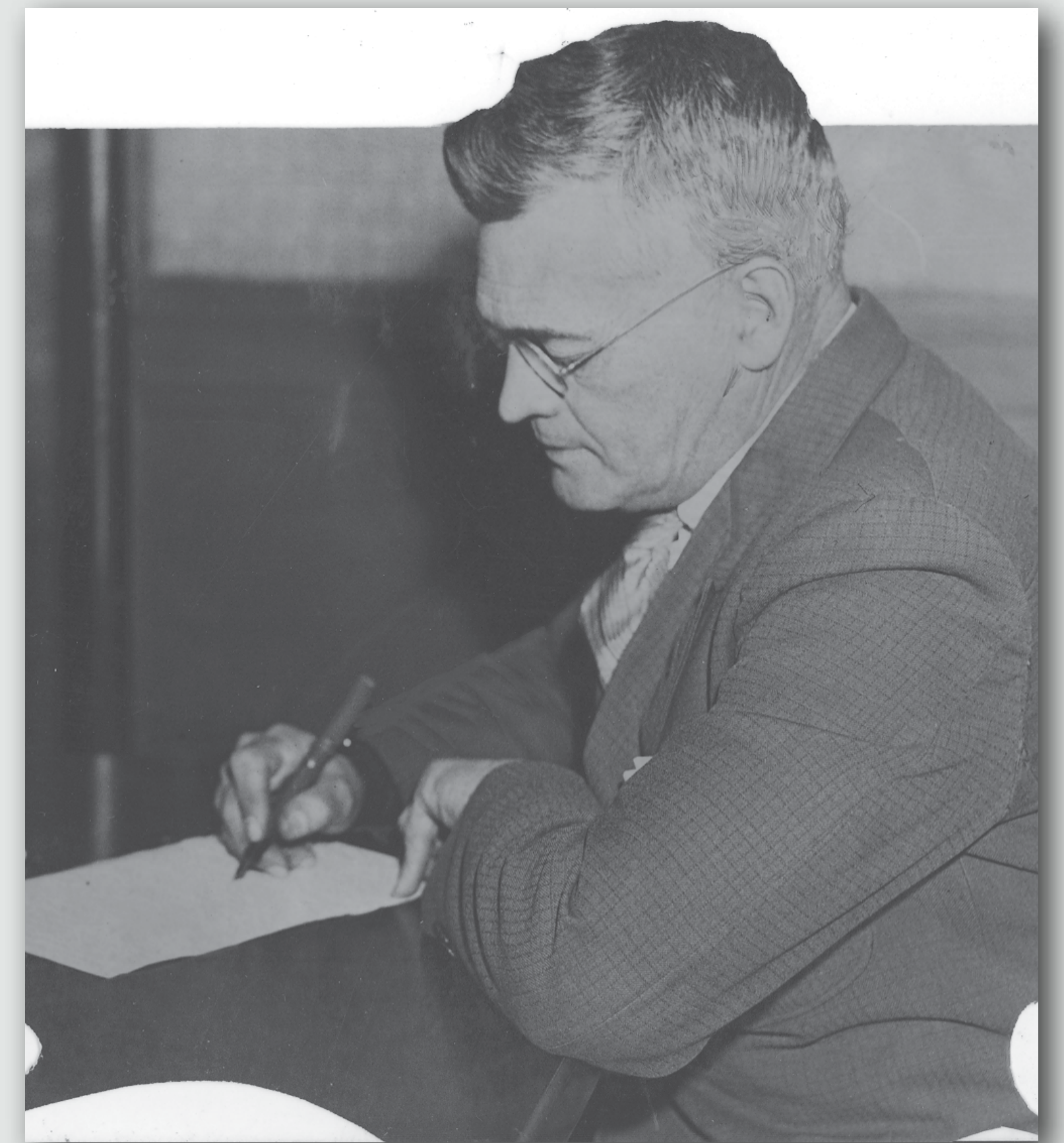
George Holmes was determined to stand against the Nazis and any organization that held un-American viewpoints. He wrote strong letters to the Editor of the local newspapers and presented an anti-Bund resolution to the town. His mission was to protect Americans from outside forces.

Holmes was always ready to talk with the press, and became a self-appointed spokesman for Southbury about the Bund. He received a large volume of mail in support of his actions, and was invited to speak at various organizations.

George Holmes started an organization called the United Americans. The initial meeting was held in the Southbury Community Hall, with over 100 people attending from twenty towns. The organization spread throughout Connecticut and to several neighboring states.

Members of the United Americans patrolled the campsite most Sundays. They never again saw any Bund members working on the land. However, the area became a popular picnic site.

The United Americans disbanded at the beginning of World War II.



Courtesy of Waterbury Rep-Am