



The Cupheag Crier

T H E O F F I C I A L V O I C E O F S T R A T F O R D 4 0 0

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- 1923 Stratford elects first female State Rep, Helen Lewis
- 1823 Monroe separated from Stratford
- 1723 Christ Church Burying Ground created

GOODY BASSETT MEMORIAL

The opening line of the 1953 novel, *The Go-Between* by L. P. Hartley, reads, “*The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.*” This is a well-considered thought to bear in mind as we look back on Stratford’s long and storied past.

The year 1651, much like the preceding 12 years since Stratford’s settlement, was a year of intense and palpable fear. Influenza was claiming victims, wolves stalked livestock, native Americans were seldom seen and little known, the Dutch were threatening invasion of Fairfield County, and Satan ruled the forests and all its denizens.

When Thomas Bassett moved to Stratford with his wife approximately 1647, he purchased property on Tanner’s Brook. Tanner’s Brook flowed through what today we think of as Stratford Center. In 1647 the brook abutted the

“devil” ruled forest and was located outside the stockade the first settlers had created to protect themselves from the Dutch, wolves, and the native Americans.



Goody Bassett Memorial placed at the north end of West Broad Green, across from the Perry House, October 26, 2023.

When Nicholas Knell’s young son suddenly, and inexplicably, passed away, it was natural to assume preternatural forces were at work. The newly arrived couple in town, the Bassetts, came from Windsor,

Connecticut. Alice Young had been hanged on a charge of witchcraft in 1647, and Goody Bassett had been a neighbor of Alice Young. Goody Bassett (as she was known) may well have learned healing skills from Alice as Alice was known as a Windsor healer and mid-wife.

As other unusual occurrences happened in Stratford, it would have been only natural to assume Goody was responsible for those as well. Reverend Adam Blakeman, who led Stratford’s first settlers to the banks of the Housatonic River, likely assembled, and fortified, the suspicions pertaining to Goody (Goody was a title and not her first name).

Goody was accused and tried by Governor Hopkins on a charge of witchcraft on May 15, 1651. She was subsequently

Continued on page 2.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| This Olde House | 2 |
| Looking Back | 3 |
| Stratford Characters | 3 |
| Stratford’s Museums | 4 |

LIBRARY TIME CAPSULE OPENED

On April 28th of this year, the personnel in the Tax Collector’s Office were tidying up the Tax Collector’s vault when they encountered a sealed lead box approximately 15”l x 4”h x 6”w in size. Attached to the top of the lead box was a handwritten, yellow note which read, “Time Capsule from Library dug up 9/4/80—Library”.

The Tax Collector’s office

thought it best to contact the Stratford Library to see if they knew anything about this sealed, “mystery” box, and to see if the Library would like to take possession of the box.

Stratford Library Director, Sheri Szymanski, and Assistant Director, Geri Diorio, were very much interested in this mysterious phenomenon. The box was delivered to the Li-

brary a few days later.

The staff at Stratford Library determined it would be best to have this sealed box opened as

Continued on page 2.



Sealed lead box discovered in the Town Hall’s Tax Collector’s vault April 28, 2023.

LIBRARY TIME CAPSULE (CONTINUED)

part of a special ceremony to be held honoring Stratford Library volunteers on September 29th. Sheri had prearranged to have one end of the box cut so as to expedite the extraction of the contents of the metal box.

The contents of the box included several items which appear to indicate the box was created, filled, and sealed at the time the library annex was added to the Library in June 1955. The Library will have the complete list of all the contents which we do not possess. However, we were able to record and photograph some of the contents as Sheri removed and displayed them on an overhead projection screen.



Sheri Szymanski and Library Association President Maria Ferrera prepare to open the lead box

The contents included photos, newspaper articles, and documents pertaining to the Library's founding and history. The photo at the right shows the groundbreaking for the Library annex in 1955. Pictured are (l to r) Harold Lovell, Donald Sammis, general contractor John Zandonella, and architect C. Wellington Walker.

The Library is creating a webpage dedicated to the time capsule's contents which you'll be able to view soon.

View the Library's time capsule inventory <https://bit.ly/slitc>.

View photos from the overhead library presentation at <https://bit.ly/slptoc>.



The Bridgeport Post, June 17, 1955.

GOODY BASSETT MEMORIAL (CONTINUED)



hanged from a gallows roughly located at the intersection of West Broad and Linden Street. The wording on the plaque reads:

Near this spot, then known as Cupheag now known as Stratford, it is presumed Goodwife Bassett was hanged as a witch in 1651.

Goodwife Bassett, otherwise known as Goody Bassett to those living in Stratford, was alleged to be a witch according to historical documents.

Goody Bassett's story has added

great value to the rich history of Stratford and the folklore surrounding her has remained relevant throughout generations.

May her value never diminish, may her existence never be forgotten, and may her soul rest in peace.

Town of Stratford & Stratford Historical Society 2023

You may view the video of the memorial's unveiling on October 26th at <https://bit.ly/gbmuv>.

The State of Connecticut

cleared the names of all the accused witches this past summer. Mayor Hoydick issued a Mayoral Proclamation on May 25th of this year proclaiming that day Goody Bassett Day in Stratford. You may view the proclamation at <https://bit.ly/gbmp2023>.

While no formal action has been taken by the town to exonerate Goody Bassett, we're hopeful that may one day still happen.

THIS OLDE HOUSE

The is a home on Huntington Road that's easily missed when you pass by in your car. Walking by the home, however, you notice the face of the home seems to be facing Freeman Avenue as opposed to facing Huntington Road. This may not seem quite so strange were it not for the fact that several homes sit between 47 Huntington Road and Freeman Avenue.

The house was built in 1743 most likely by Abraham Curtis. Upon Abraham's passing his son, Levi, inherited this house. Originally, Abraham

owned 60 acres of land which surrounded the house at 47 Huntington Road. All homes in Stratford were built facing south from Stratford's founding through at least 1750, regardless of whether the home faced the street or not.

Two of the residents of this home, Celia and Cornelia Curtis, were the great-granddaughters of Abraham Curtis. Celia was born in this home in 1838 and Cornelia was born in 1840.

The two sisters lived in this home until they purchased the Captain David Judson home in

1891 from John Wheeler who had made some extensive modifications to the home. Celia and Cornelia were also descendants of Captain David Judson and part of their justification in buying the home was to maintain and preserve it.

Meanwhile, their former residence at 47 Huntington Road went through various modifications by its various owners over the ensuing years.

You may read the 1936 history of the home at <https://bit.ly/tlch>.



Levi Curtis home at 47 Huntington Road as it appeared c. 1936. Photo from the Connecticut State Library archives.

LOOKING BACK

1723

- Captain David Judson house built on Academy Hill.

1765 October-November

- William Samuel Johnson's good friend, Jared Ingersoll, is chosen to enforce the Stamp Act in the colonies.

1823 September 23

- Lawsuit regarding Lovejoy's (of Lovejoy's tavern) coach seat design

1848 October-December

- Van Buren for President county meeting
- Train comes to Stratford December 31st

1873 October-November

- George Dunbar's barn on East Broadway burns.
- Lewis C. Allen, retired merchant, dies from falling backwards while carrying coal up from his cellar.

1898 October-November

- Emory Judson opens carriage painting shop at Paradise Green.
- Extensive work on Fairchild family plot in Congregational cemetery. Stone wall placed along southern boundary.
- Horsemen enjoy races at Nutmeg Park (today's Sikorsky airport).
- Basement of congregational

church converted to kitchen offices for a truck company.



Edna Brown and Wesley Lund dance Minuet at St. James Bazaar. Photo from *The Bridgeport Telegram*, November 26, 1923.

1923 October-November

- \$250,000 bond floated for Stratford schools.
- Mill River Country Club is formed from the disbanded Weatogue Country Club.
- Colorado Governor William E. Sweet visits Stratford.
- St. James annual bazaar held at Sterling Memorial hall.
- Construction contract for new Stratford High School awarded.

1948 October-November

- Committee looks to fill empty

Chance-Vought factory since the company relocated to Dallas.

- Holy Name of Jesus Church celebrates 25th anniversary.
- Boothe Homestead willed to Town for use upon David Boothe's demise.



After 20 years, Short Beach Park a reality. Donald Powers, Joseph Venables, Robert Sammis, and Edward Yeomans plant a tree. Photo from *The Stratford News*, November 15, 1973.

1973 October-November

- Short Beach improved; no longer barren.
- Joseph Verner Reed, co-founder of the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre, dies.
- Public Forum proposed to occur before Town Council meetings.
- Stratford begins dealing with the energy crisis by cutting

fuel usage at Public Works.

- Residents fight building apartments on Broadbridge Avenue near the Bridgeport line.
- Historical Society launches major membership, fund drive for the preservation of the David Judson House.

1998 September-November

- Construction begins on Boothe Park Model Train Museum.
- Beautification Committee created.
- Girl injured at Soundfest during Navy Seal hostage rescue demonstration.
- \$1.5 million Duke Energy settlement allocated to organizations and committees.
- Economic Development summit held at Town Hall.



Drawing of Boothe Park Model Train building. Photo from *The Stratford Star*, September 10, 1998.

STRATFORD CHARACTERS

Since we opened this newsletter discussing the library's history, we thought it might be appropriate to continue in that vein with some additional information on Stratford Library's first, official library director, Frances Russell (pictured at the far right outside the Stratford Library in 1936).

Miss Russell served as Library Director for 40 years. She was one of the very first women in town to align herself with the Women's Suffrage movement. She was also a notable historian and possessed many priceless

artifacts from Stratford's past which she loaned to the Stratford Historical Society.

Miss Russell was born in 1859 and she lived to be 100 years old. Her home for many years was at 913 Judson Place in Stratford. The home Miss Russell resided in was very historic as it was built in 1756 for the Congregational Church Parson Izrahiah Wetmore.

Rev. Wetmore served as Pastor of the Congregational Church from 1753 until 1780, and was a friend of William Samuel Johnson. The irony,

here, is that both William Samuel Johnson, and Frances Russell, were members of Christ Episcopal Church in Stratford.

We located a wonderful article pertaining to Miss Russell that was published in *The Stratford News*, March 13, 1936. The photo to the right is from that newspaper article. If you're interested in reading more about Miss Russell, you may download *The Stratford News* article at <https://bit.ly/frussell>.



FIND US AT
WWW.STRATFORD400.ORG



VOICE OF STRATFORD 400

Stratford 400
Attn: Stratford Town Historian
2725 Main St
Stratford, CT 06615
Phone: 203-381-2052
Email: historian@townofstratford.com

Celebrating Stratford's 400 Year History from Forest to Shore

Stratford is 400 years young in 2039. Stay with us as we prepare for Stratford's 400th anniversary.

Should you desire to receive a copy of this newsletter as each issue is published, please join our mailing list by going to <https://bit.ly/cupheagcrier>.

STRATFORD'S MUSEUMS

Stratford is blessed with many wonderful resources and one group of Stratford's resources are its 11 museums and historical venues. We will use this space with every newsletter issue to highlight these resources. You may also learn more about Stratford's museums at www.townofstratford.com/museums.

Boothe Memorial Park & Museum is hosting [Holiday at the Homestead](#) December 1st through December 4th.

[Boothe Memorial Railway Society](#) is closed for the winter, but they will be participating in the Holiday at the Museum event as well.

[Connecticut Air & Space Museum](#) is featuring Twelve Days Lecture & Book Promotion November 18th from 10am until 4pm.

The [Igor I. Sikorsky Historical Archives](#), located at the Sikorsky Plant on North Main Street, is open by appointment only. However, by becoming a member, you'll be able to enjoy their bi-monthly newsletter.

The [Merritt Parkway Museum](#) is located at Ryder's Landing Shopping Center and is open Monday-Friday from 9am until 5pm.

The [National Helicopter Museum](#), in

the New Haven bound side of the train station is closed for the winter due to a lack of heating facilities in the building.

The [Putney Chapel](#) Association is generally only open to the public as part of Boothe Memorial Park events, but is also available for special events.

[The Ruby and Calvin Fletcher African American History Museum](#) is located at 852 East Broadway, Stratford Center. The Museum is generally open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Check their website for their operating hours each day.

The [Stratford Historical Society and Museum](#) is open on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10am until 2pm, and by appointment. Carolyn Ivanoff will be presenting "We Fought at Gettysburg on November 12th at 2pm at the Museum. The Society will also be hosting a Christmas event entitled "Fire and Ice" on Saturday, December 9th.

The [Stratford Veterans Museum](#) will be participating in the Veterans Day parade stepping off from Town Hall on Veterans Day, as well as the Holiday at the Homestead at Boothe Memorial Park.

[The Historic William Perry House](#) will

be hosting "A visit with Mrs. Claus & Santa too!" on Sunday, December 9th.

In the very near future Stratford will be blessed with its 12th museum. The Womens National Softball Museum will be opening at DeLuca Memorial Field in the not too distant future.

Please enjoy any, or all, of these amazing venues.



Holiday at the Homestead, Boothe Memorial Park, December 2021