



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:

- Horribly burned when her clothing caught fire early on January 7 as she stood before the fireplace of her home, 92 (967) Academy Hill, Cornelia Curtis, 83, died shortly afterwards despite the efforts of her maid, Dr. George F. Lewis, and neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Sammis. **The Stratford News**, January 13, 1934.

The Curtis sisters, Cornelia and Celia, donated their home to found the Stratford Historical Society.

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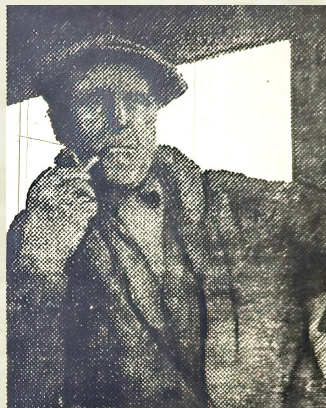
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STRATFORD: THE STORIES WE TELL

During our Historical Walks throughout town, some of our walk attendees expressed an interest in holding the walks in a meeting room as a slide show presentation to better accommodate those with limited mobility, or for those for whom the average walk was too lengthy.

We've spent a great deal of time considering this request, and we wanted to respond with a slight derivation of the request, at least initially. Beginning in January, we will be hosting a series of five monthly slide show presentations at the Stratford Library. All presentation will be held in the Lovell Room.

We've determined that the



Theodore Judson, 1919

best way to begin this monthly series is to reprise Stratford's greatest storyteller, and longest serving lighthouse keeper, The-

odore Judson.

"Mr. Judson's" presentation schedule follows.

- January 29th, 6:30 pm, **Love Stories for All**
- February 26th, 6:30pm, **Amazing Black Citizens**
- March 25th, 6:30pm, **Women of Distinction**
- April 29th, 6:30pm, **Homes with History**
- May 13th, 6:30 pm, **Legions of Legends**

Based on demand, we will present our Candlelight Historical Walks in slide show format in the near future. Let us know what you think, and any suggestions for topics you may wish for "Keeper Judson" to cover.

POST OFFICE DESTROYED BY FIRE

January 1924 was a devastating month for fire in Stratford. Cornelia Curtis was killed by fire and Stratford's Post Office was destroyed. It had only been three years since the high school/Center School burned in a February snowstorm. Since a new high school had not yet been built, Stratford was still dealing with the after math of that fire when the Post Office went up in flames.

The Post Office stood on the corner of Main Street and Selleck Place 9n 1924. The building had originally been the mansion of Edward Allen Powers. In 1924 the Post Office, and the office of **The Stratford News**, were located on the first floor, and an apartment was on the second floor.

The building was a complete loss estimated at \$30,000 (\$540,000 in 2023). The "Selleck Building", in which the post office was a tenant, was built just after the Civil War. The small hydrant next to the post office was too small to provide the required fire pressure to fight the fire effectively.

Firemen fought the fire from 6:00 pm on the 26th until 2:00 am on the 27th. The temperatures were just above 0 degrees. Firemen were soaked to the skin and their coats froze to their backs.

Miss Peggy Reed lived above the post office and was lying in bed with a broken ankle. Policeman Victor Marcus, and Editor Mike J. Goode of **The Stratford Times** were credited



Post office after the fire. Photo from The Bridgeport Telegram, January 28, 1924.

with carrying Miss Reed down the back stairs to safety. The front stairs were cut off by smoke and flames.

The Post Office was relocated to the old Town Hall in Stratford Center.

A CHRISTMAS SCANDAL

Any time Stratford made the front page of the **Bridgeport Herald** in the late 1800s and early 1900s it was almost always for some salacious or scandalous news. Such was the case in December of 1898 when the **Herald** ran the following headline as their cover story for December 25th: **RUINED IN THE HOUSE OF GOD.**

James Peet of 692 East Broadway was the janitor of a new church in town, the Advent Mission Church. The Advent Church was a newly created mission of the church by the same name on Barnum Avenue in Bridgeport.

James was 47 when he met Maud Beebe, his neighbor on East Broadway, at the Advent Church in Stratford. They began to spend time together to the degree that other church members began noticing and talking about the couple. The new Advent Church had become the church home of some of Stratford's leading citizens.

After an event at the church on Wednesday, December 21st, James walked Maud to her home. Upon arriving at her home, Maud found she was locked out of her house. James offered to assist her, but told Maud she could not stay at his house due to his wife being ill. He offered to take Maud to the Advent Mission Church on Church Street in Stratford where she could spend the night.

"They remained within the sacred walls of the edifice all that night. What happened it is not necessary to say, but the reader can draw his or her own inference."

The next morning James took Maud to Harry Lane's bar in Avon Park where they stayed for several hours until Maud went back to her home.

The following Monday,

James took Maud to Mrs. Buckman's on State Street in Bridgeport where he rented a room telling Mrs. Buckman Maud was his wife. James paid for the room for a week asking Mrs. Buckman *"not to let Maud have any beer or go out on the streets."* James went about his normal routine in Stratford while Maud remained at Mrs. Buckman's.

The good people of Stratford began to worry about the disappearance of Maud, and members of the Advent Church began speculating about Maud's relationship with James Peet. Josie Freyre, a student working for the law firm of Peck and Kane, said he knew where Maud was. Josie went to Mrs. Buckman's where he convinced Maud to accompany him back to the law firm for which he worked.

At the law firm, Maud tearfully explained her liaison with James. Maud cried, *"My life has been wrecked; I am a ruined girl."*

Maud was reunited with her

grief stricken parents, and Mrs. Peet fainted when she heard the news of what had transpired between her husband and Maud. Maud immediately left home for her sister's in Brooklyn, New York.

James Peet was worried he'd be arrested, but Sheriff Charles Stagg said there was no law under which he could arrest James. James claimed that Maud had seduced him. *"That girl has a sort of charm about her that catches me and I can't avoid going with her. I never asked her to go away with me. She just showed the way. I followed. I don't know where she gets the control over me but I know she has it."* James desired to escape to Florida.

Time passed, James remained with his wife in Stratford, members of the Advent Church were scandalized, and, once more, the **Bridgeport Herald** had a salacious story from our staid old town with which to adorn its Christmas 1898 edition.

"When the story is told the readers will throw up all hands and offer up a silent prayer asking the Lord to deliver their daughter or sister from the wiles of a fiend who hides his true light under the cloak of a church."



The Advent Christian Mission Church, also known as the Neighborhood Church, originally stood behind the Congregational Church on Church Street. The church was sold to the International Order of Red Men in 1913. In 1955 the church became the home of the Polka Dot Playhouse.

"Mrs. Buckman says that as soon as she discovered that Peet and Miss Beebe were not husband and wife she ordered them out."

CORNELIA CURTIS DIES JANUARY 1924



Cornelia Curtis (left) and Celia Curtis at their home on Huntington Road c 1890. Photo from the Stratford Historical Society family photos archive.

Cornelia Curtis (1840-1924) and Celia Curtis (1837-1925) were descended from two founding Stratford families: the Curtiss family and the Judson family. They were born and raised in the home at 47 Huntington Road where they lived until they purchased the Captain David Judson home on Academy Hill Road in 1891. Cornelia and Celia were the ninth generation of Judson descendants to live in the Captain David Judson home.

The sisters purchased the David Judson home in order to preserve it for posterity. Both sisters lived in the home until their passing. Their wills

named one another as their sole heirs, since they had no children, and both sisters agreed that the Captain David Judson home would be donated to the Stratford Historical Society upon the passing of both sisters.

The Stratford Historical Society was formed in January 1925, and the Captain David Judson home formally passed to the Historical Society with the passing of Celia Judson November 14th, 1925. Celia died of natural causes at the age of 87. Cornelia preceded Celia in death as the result of a very unfortunate accident which occurred in January of 1924.

The Hartford Courant

January 8, 1924

AGED STRATFORD WOMAN BURNED TO DEATH

Stratford. Jan. 7—Miss Cornelia Curtis, about 80, who lived with her sister, Miss Celia Curtis, 82, in family homestead on Academy Hill, was burned to death today. Miss Curtis was about to kindle a fire in the fireplace and had on a kimono. She had placed papers under the wood and struck a match. A tongue of flame shot out and ignited her kimono. Death came in a few minutes from inhaled flame and smoke. The elder Miss Curtis who is somewhat infirm, was unable to assist her sister.

The Misses Curtis attended service in Christ Episcopal church, yesterday, as customary. They were members of a family which had ancestors among the founders of this town.

While we're unsure of which fireplace Cornelia was standing in front of at the time of her demise, it's difficult to look at the several fireplaces in the Captain David Judson house and not be reminded of Cornelia's unfortunate passing. Stratford is very fortunate to have had such forward looking people as Celia and Cornelia since their desire to preserve the Captain David Judson house was the impetus for the founding of the Stratford Historical Society.



Captain David Judson House c 1890. Postcard image from the Stratford Historical Society photos archive.

HOLY NAME OF JESUS CHURCH DEDICATED

The Holy Name of Jesus Church celebrated its 100th anniversary on Barnum Avenue in December. The church was dedicated December 16th, 1923, and was the second Roman Catholic Church built in Stratford.

The Bridgeport Telegram
December 17, 1923
Bishop Nilan Dedicates New Church for Slovak Catholics in Stratford District

STRATFORD. Dec 16.—(Special to the Telegram)—Solemn and impressive ceremonies marked the dedication of the new Holy Name, Slavonian R. C. church by Right Rev. John J. Nilan, Bishop of Hartford, here today. More than 1,300 persons crowded into every available space in the beautiful edifice, and saw the

dedication which took place at 10:30 o'clock.

The dedication services were followed by a high mass celebrated by Rev. Andrew Komara, pastor of St. John's Slovak church, of Bridgeport, assisted by eight clergymen from parishes in Bridgeport and Stratford. The dedication sermon was preached by Rev. Dr. Aelicka, a professor at the Catholic University in Washington, D. C.

Clergymen present at the dedication services included: Rev. Andrew Komara, pastor of St. John's church, Bridgeport; Rev. Gaspar Panik, pastor of Sts. Cyril and Methodius church, Bridgeport; Rev. Patrick J. McGivney, pastor of St. Charles church, Bridgeport; Rev. Dennis F. Moran, of St. Charles church, Bridgeport; Rev. Michael O'Connor of St. James church, Stratford; Rev. J. J.

Duggan, pastor of Blessed Sacrament church, Bridgeport; and, Father Charles of the Franciscan Order.

The new church, located on Barnum avenue a short distance from the Franklin grammar school, was built under the direction of Rev. Michael Carnicke, former curate of St. John's church in Bridgeport. Father Carnicke was appointed five months ago to form a congregation in this town composed of the persons who have been forced to travel to Bridgeport to hear services in the Slavonian language.

Plans for a new church were immediately commenced with the result that the little parish at present has a fair membership of local Slavonians who had been members of the St. John's and Sts. Cyril and Methodius churches in Bridgeport.



Photo from *The Bridgeport Telegram*, December 17, 1923

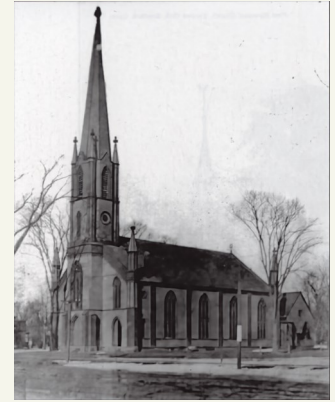
STRATFORD CHRISTMAS 1868

The Bridgeport Evening Farmer
December 28, 1868
"Ephriam's" Stratford Gossip

We neglected on Saturday to mention the interesting exercises which took place at the churches on Christmas Eve. However, we believe in the old saying, "better late than never," and therefore note as follows of the exercises at Christ Church, which was most elegantly adorned with evergreens, in nearly the same style as last year. On either side of the galleries were numerous appropriate mottos, on white cloth, in black and gilt letters. There were two triangles of wax candles suspended from the wall, the base being trimmed with greens, while the chandelier, of three rows of kerosene lamps, forming a pyramid, in the centre, together with numerous other "lesser" and "greater" lights, made a brilliant and dazzling show. The tree, about ten or twelve feet high, placed immediately in front of the broad main

aisle, and just outside the chancel, was heavily laden with some very rich and valuable presents for the scholars and teachers. The discourse, delivered by the rector, Rev. Dr. D. C. Weston, was an able, illustrative and interesting production, and was listened to with deep interest by the large audience. The music, under the superintendence of Miss Carrie Hurd, (who presided at the organ,) assisted by the scholars and teachers, was of a fine selection, well rendered, and appropriate to the occasion. The whole amount of offerings was \$273.84, which is satisfactory evidence that the scholars love their Sunday School, and those connected therewith. The numbers of the school presented the reverend doctor with a very handsome black gown, which he received in a manner betokening surprise, closing his remarks by saying that he hoped he might "be spared to minister unto them that which pertains to everlasting life" in years to come. At an early hour, the exercises

were finished, when a large number of those present proceeded to the Methodist Church, where exercises were taking place similar to those we have above described.—The tree here was also abundantly loaded with rich, ripe fruit for the scholars, which was gladly received by them with sunny smiles when plucked from the bending branches. In the basement of the church, there had been prepared a table, sumptuously spread with almost every variety of cake, beautifully iced, of which the children, young and old, were invited to partake, and to which justice was done. In behalf of the members of the Society, Mr. Walter Sanford presented to the pastor, Rev. James Smith, a purse of \$100, which was thankfully received by the latter. There were other and valuable presents given, which were gratefully received by the recipients. The exercises closed at about eleven o'clock, all feeling that they had spent a very pleasant and enjoyable Christmas Eve.



Christ Church c 1858. Photo from the Stratford Historical Society photos archive.

THIS OLDE HOUSE

Originally the home at 1995 Main Street was the William Walker Tavern. The home was built approximately 1806 in the Gothic style.

The Walker Tavern stands opposite Christ Episcopal Church, and was built by William Walker.

The Tavern "was the scene of Stratford's gayest balls during the years following its erection. The great ball room extended the length of the house on the second story. An invitation from that period reads: "Mr. Armour's Public Evening. The attendance of Miss D. Benjamin is desired at Mr. Walker's Ball Room, this evening at 7 o'clock, August 7, 1807. Managers: Shelton, Ad-

ams, Walker and Lovejoy." After the death of Mr. Walker and his wife Eunice, the house was purchased in 1833 by Henry Jackson at a public auction. It was the home of the Jackson's until 1908, when Ella H. Jackson the last of her family, sold it to Edith H. and Emma Allen. Miss Emma Allen was the First Vice-President of the Stratford Equal Suffrage Association. She also served as the Town Recording Clerk.

The exterior walls are shingled. The cornice is narrow at the rake and eaves. A porch with four columns extending three-fourth's way across the front has been added. The

house is set back about 40 feet from the road.

The doorway is a sunken paneled door with a fanlight above it.

The lower front rooms have sunken panel fireplaces with long dentils. The hall, which is one-half length, ends in two doors, side by side; the left leading to the kitchen, the right to an enclosed stair. The kitchen, southwest, has a fireplace and brick oven covered with doors. Later, a kitchen was added behind the home.

The ballroom on the second floor is now divided into bedrooms.



1995 Main Street c 1966. Photo from the Connecticut State Library photo archives.

1924 POST OFFICE FIRE PHOTOS



Photo shows tons of cold water which froze immediately upon being sprinkled on the burning building, and hampered firemen to a great extent.

Photo from *The Bridgeport Telegram*, January 27, 1924.



All that is left of the Stratford post office, built shortly after the Civil War at a total cost of \$25,000.

Photo from *The Bridgeport Telegram*, January 27, 1924.

A small hydrant near the Post Office produced only a tiny stream of water to put out the fire.

STRATFORD CHARACTERS

Charles E. Stagg...was one of Stratford's prominent citizens and well known public men. A native of that town, he was born October 21, 1851, a son of Joseph and Helen B. (Curtis) Stagg. He was educated in the public schools of Stratford, where he was reared to manhood. He held the office of bridge commissioner and likewise served the town for several years as constable and in 1894 he was appointed deputy sheriff under High Sheriff Sidney Hawley, filling that office of responsibility with credit to himself and satisfaction to the public. As deputy sheriff he did his full duty as he saw it and his name became a menace to evildoers, for they knew that he would not rest until he had carried out the law. He made all alike respect the law and never permitted gambling nor illegal liquor selling to go unpunished. While deputy sheriff he figured in the horse car riots of Bridgeport and other towns and also in the big strikes at the plant of the American Tube & Stamping Company. He was in almost every raid and every big demonstration held in Fairfield county during his term of office and became a most valuable official by reason of his energy and promptness. In fact his reputation spread throughout the state as that of a fearless sheriff and loyal official. He stood high in the estimation of those who knew him and he had a very wide acquaintance. Among the noted arrests which he made may be

mentioned that of Tod Sloan, the notorious jockey, who on July 19, 1904, was speeding from New York to Boston in a forty horse power Decouville racer, a seven thousand dollar machine, at a mile a minute. The sheriff stopped him at Washington bridge. Another arrest was that of the noted horse thief, Murty Savage, whom he drove out of Stratford, and Leonard Davidson, an equally notorious burglar. Mr. Stagg figured in the raid on the Modoc Club and other places of similar character.

He served as a member of the board of relief of Stratford for several years and for two years occupied the position of tax collector. He was popular with all classes and he took a deep interest in his town and its institutions, doing everything in his power to promote their upbuilding and progress. He possessed a very genial manner, was kind and generous to a fault and was greatly devoted to his home and family.

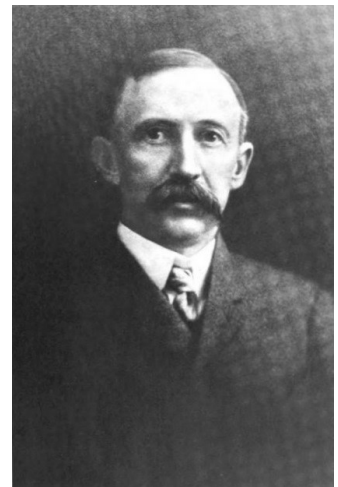
It was on October 26, 1882, that he wedded Miss Emma E. Moore, a lady of refinement and culture, who was born in Ottawa, Canada, and was a daughter of James and Margery Moore. They became parents of one child, Pauline Moore, who married Frank H. Weller, of Palm Beach, Florida, and has one son, Charles Stagg Weller, born January 24, 1916, in the home of his grandmother on East Broadway, Stratford. The family are members of

the Congregational church. In the later years of his life Mr. Stagg spent the winter months at Palm Beach, Florida, where he built a home which is still owned by the family. He also erected a fine residence on East Broadway in Stratford, where his widow still resides. Mr. Stagg passed away in Stratford, March 13, 1914, and was laid to rest in Union cemetery. On the day of the funeral all business was suspended in Stratford as a mark of respect. The Bridgeport Post, under the head of "A Town Leader," said editorially, in part:

"The death of former deputy sheriff Charles E. Stagg of Stratford removes from the active every day life of that town a man who has played no unimportant part in its affairs for nearly a quarter of a century.

..."Mr. Stagg belonged to a race of political leaders such as our town system has produced for years and although their methods may not always have been of the highest ideals, yet they were strong factors in securing for Connecticut those many advantages she has enjoyed over other states. He at no time sought high office, being content to serve in comparatively humble positions, while at the same time he was the real party leader in his community."

Foregoing from *A History of Bridgeport and Vicinity Volume 2, 1917.*



Charles E. Stagg
Photo from *A History of Bridgeport and Vicinity Volume 2, 1917.*



Charles Stagg built the home at 868 East Broadway which, today, is the Helen King Reynolds School.

NEW IN TOWN 1949



Picture of one part of store photographed at pre-opening. Photo from *The Stratford News*, January 7, 1949.



In the foyer of the new Hi-Way theatre at Boston and Bruce avenues can be seen at the right Sperie Perako, general manager of the Elmwood Theatre corporation, which owns the Hi-Way theatre, and at the left James Landino, manager of the theatre, as they plan for the opening next Thursday. Photo by Shepard. Photo from *The Stratford News*, January 14, 1949.

— Our Opening Week Specials —

MEAT DEPARTMENT	GROCERY DEPARTMENT
CENTER CUT — BONE IN CHUCK POT ROAST.....lb 55c	SCOT TISSUE..... 10c
LEG OF SPRING LAMB.....lb 65c	CAMPBELL'S TOMATO SOUP..... 3 cans 28c
WHOLE or HALF PORK LOINS..lb 49c	DEL MONTE RED SALMON..... can 63c
SMOKED SHOULDERS..... lb 49c	CLIFTON CRANBERRY SAUCE..... lge. can 10c
READY-TO-EAT HAMS.....lb 65c	ZELO & DIANA CANNED APRICOTS.. 2½ can 19c
FRESH/NATIVE FRYING CHICKENS..... lb 49c	DEL MONTE FRUIT COCKTAIL..... jar 33c
ASSORTED COLD CUTS, Sperry & Barnes.. lb 49c	HUNT'S PEARS..... lge. can 33c
	GOLD MEDAL FLOUR..... 25 lb. \$1.99
	SUPER SUDS..... 29c

PLENTY OF PARKING SPACE

Stratford Food Center opened 11 Wood End Road, and Hi-Way Theatre opened on the corners of Bruce and Barnum Avenues in January of 1949. Fred Shannon was responsible for the opening of the Stratford Food Center.

STRATFORD'S MUSEUMS

Stratford is blessed with many wonderful resources and one group of Stratford's resources is its 10 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. The Museum is currently closed for the winter and will reopen in May (boothememorialpark.com).

Boothe Memorial Railway Society is also closed for the winter. They will reopen in May (bmrailways.com).

Connecticut Air & Space Museum has events throughout the year. Their next event is March 16th at 1:30: **Howard Hughes: Madman, Genius, or Both?** <https://www.ctairandspace.org/events>.

The Igor I. Sikorsky Historical Archives has relocated to the Sacred Heart University campus. Well no longer be covering the Archives since they're no longer located in Stratford (sikorskyarchives.com).

The Merritt Parkway Museum is located at Ryder's Landing Shopping

Center and is open Monday-Friday from 9am until 5pm (<https://www.merrittparkway.org/>)

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. They will reopen on Memorial Day (<https://nationalhelicoptermuseum.org/>).

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 (<https://www.putneychapel.org/about>).

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 (<https://africanamericanmuseumct.org/>).

The Stratford Historical Society and Museum is open on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10am until 2pm, and by appointment (stratfordhistoricalsociety.org)

The Stratford Veterans Museum is located next door to Putney Chapel at Boothe Park. The Museum is open Wednesday from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. (<https://stfdveteransmuseum.org/>).

The Historic William Perry House is hosting a Valentine's Day Tea Party, Saturday, February 10th at noon (<https://www.perryhousestratford.org/programs-events>).



<http://weloveourmuseums.com/>