

Thanks to a Legacy

Stratford Historical Society Opens New Academy Hill Museum on Friday

By ANN V. MASTERS

Old Stratford in its history traditions and ways of living of its early families will be proudly shown to succeeding generations in the The Museum of the Stratford Historical society which opens to the public Friday.

The new Building was made possible through the legacy of \$25,000 left to the society by the late Mrs. Catherine T. Mitchell for that purpose. A Monday opening from 7 to 9 p.m. is reserved to members and their guests; Friday the museum will welcome the public.

A tide of interest is sweeping the town which has a proud and venerable historical past as the new museum prepares to open its doors. Fourteen townspeople have been working for weeks sorting gifts and exhibits.

Judson House Restored

The Judson House of the Stratford Historical society at 967 Academy Hill formerly held the exhibits. The home will now be furnished with early American furniture, and will look as it did when the Judson family lived there.

The new museum has been built to the rear of the Judson House. The two will serve as companion pieces with admission to both 50 cents. Museum, hours will be from 2 to 5 p.m. on Monday, Friday and Saturday.

Visitors from all over the United States have come to the old Judson House to view the Stratford society's exhibits. Many more are expected with the new facilities. Special appointments may be made by phone outside of museum hours for those coming a distance.

A colonial building of cement block construction, the new museum is very attractive, both inside and outside. Two

stories high, its size 25 by 50 feet, the museum has an inviting colonial type porch on which are old fashioned wooden benches.

Exhibits Recall History

Stratford's history will be seen through the interesting exhibits on display. Sets of old china, silverware, collections of old dolls, costumes of the 17th and 18th century, hats, old and valuable books, will tell their story of the past.

"In the old building we couldn't emphasize anything," said Olaff S. Solomonson, president of the Stratford Historical society. "Everything was much too crowded."

The Historical society already has an impressive collection but many old residents, now that a new home will offer room for improved display, are planning to contribute important historical material. Curiously, although the collection has attracted those in the know from all over the country, lots of people in Stratford are unaware of the fine historical momentoes [sic].

Among these is a beautiful collection of early American fireplace accessories and kitchen utensils. The Judson House contains old slave quarters downstairs with a handsome and large fireplace. For the past two months, a director of the historical society, Robert Beardsley, has engaged in a labor of love cleaning, sorting and making racks for the display of these objects in the slave quarters.

Curator Resides There

Upstairs in the Judson House lives the curator of the society's two houses, Frederick Booth, who has, resided on the premises for about three years. Before that, Mrs. Frank Sammis, performing another labor of love, was curator for some 30 years. The venerable lady, who is 97, is now curator emeritus as well as chairman of the House committee. Her son, Donald Sammis, serves as co-chairman while her daughter, Mrs. John W. Richardson, is chairman of the memorials and relics committee in charge of soliciting and receiving gifts.

The Stratford Historical society was founded in January 1925, when the late Miss Celia Curtis bequeathed her homestead, the historic Capt. David Judson House on Academy Hill to a historical society which would preserve the venerable 200-year-old house.

A charter was granted on Feb. 4, 1925, when the State of Connecticut, based on Articles of Association filed Jan. 17, 1925. Among the stated purposes of the society were the preservation of all material and written matter relating to the history of Stratford. On July 10, 1925 a meeting was held at which 55 persons were enrolled. By September, the number had increased to 189.

The membership today numbers some 200 and includes many of the most prominent families in the town as well as its oldest residents.

Slaves 'Carvings' Seen

The Judson House was formally opened by the Historical society on May 28, 1926. Here is found one of the few remaining slave kitchens in New England, dating from the

days when northern families maintained slaves as house servants and farm workers. Crude carvings on the stair rail are the work of slaves. The collection of some 65 kitchen utensils is reputedly one of the finest of its kind. The fireplace is enormous, ten feet wide and seven feet high.

Besides the maintenance of its two houses, The Stratford Historical society carries on an exceedingly interesting program. At its meetings held every other month, in the Methodist Church hall, an average of 100 attend. On Nov. 22, "Early American Tools," will be discussed; on Jan. 24, 1959; slides, on "Antique Glass" will be shown. "Antique Snuff Bottles," "Early Days on the Housatonic," "American Colonial Arms and Armor," are events slated for the future with qualified speakers on each subject.

Officers of the Stratford Historical society are:

Mr. Solomonson, president; Donald Sammis, first vice president; Donald Fowler, second vice president; Robert W. Scott third vice president; Miss Anne Richardson, recording secretary; Mrs. Rexford Nettleton, corresponding secretary; Rexford Nettleton, treasurer; and chairmen, Mrs. Clark Lane, membership; Miss Lucy McCabe, program; Mrs. Edmund H. Judson, Jr., publicity; Mrs. Robert W. Scott, hospitality; Mrs. John Richardson, memorials and relics; Mrs. Frank Sammis, House committee. Historian is Howard Wilcoxson and directors are Frank Bunnell, Stanley E. Johnson, Harold Sturges and Robert Beardsley. Mrs. Ethel C. Hawley is Connecticut League of Historical Societies representative.