



Built 1723

*The Stratford Historical Society*  
*Stratford, Connecticut*



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STRATFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS LETTER

JANUARY 1966

Next Meeting, Friday, January 28  
Christ Church Hall 8:00 P.M.

PROGRAM: Early Connecticut Glass  
SPEAKER: Mr. Jesse A. Brainard of South Coventry  
and Supervisor of Training at Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation

Our speaker will bring some of the Coventry, Willington and Westford flasks from his fine collection.

Mr. Brainard will be glad to evaluate any Connecticut glass members and their guests may bring to the meeting.

This will be an enjoyable evening. Please bring a friend with you.

MEMBERSHIP

Miss Harriett V. Ryan, chairman of the membership promotion committee has developed a number of constructive plans to increase membership which I have requested her to present at the Friday Meeting.

It is surprising to find so many people who have an interest in Old Stratford who have never been invited to become members. Without waiting for the many suggestions Miss Ryan will offer, won't you make it a point to invite a friend to the next meeting. There is a good chance they may find an interest in the society's work.

\$10,000 EARL D. SPRAGUE BEQUEST TO ENDOWMENT FUND

The City Trust Company, co-Executor with Mrs. Edna A. Sprague under the will of the late Earl D. Sprague of Jefferson Street, Stratford, has informed the Society that under Mr. Sprague's will a trust is established, to which Mrs. Sprague has the life use and at her death the Stratford Historical Society Endowment Fund shall receive the sum of ten thousand dollars.

Since the Society now has a little over \$21,000 in its Endowment Fund, this gift represents a very important addition. It is gratifying to find citizens who have not been active in the Society who recognize the Society's present and potential contributions to the community. Generous gifts of this kind go a long way to assure us that ambitious plans for the future adopted last year were made with prudence. Certainly a society that is active inspires support.

## STRATFORD HERITAGE

There was an admirable self-sufficiency about the early settlers of Stratford. Many families owned a wood lot in Putney or Oronoque, and a few acres in the great salt meadows where they harvested salt hay for their cattle.

While the salt hay was used mostly for bedding, or packing against the north side of the house foundation in winter it was, never-the-less, highly valued. I date myself a little when I recall the scows the Boothe Brothers, David and Stephen, kept at the point where Pecks Mill Pond empties into the river. The scows, if memory serves me, were at least forty foot long - of shallow draft - heavy wood planked bottoms caulked with oakum - square at both ends. They had to be big boats to float two horses, a mowing machine, hay rake, a few ton of hay and a crew of men. Just think of all the vagaries of nature these early farmers coped with in harvesting salt hay. Harvest time was in the summer - the hay had to be cut often by scythe for the ground would be marshy. It had to be dried in the sun, tossed or turned over, raked, stacked, loaded aboard the boats, transferred to wagons and stored in the barn. Thunder storms originating in the North West seemed to follow the river valley down and into the Sound. Rain on cured hay was tragic for even bedding had to be kept dry lest it become moldy and a hazard to livestock.

The hay scows had no mechanical means of propulsion. Diesel or gasoline motors were not available. It took an uncanny knowledge of tide and wind to scull, row or tow by row boat a heavily laden scow from one bank of the river to the other. Stand still high tide afforded but a short, precise interval at which a crossing could be made. A strong headwind could make crossing impossible.

From this distant point of time the harvesting of salt hay seems to have been an overwhelming task - yet in a horse, cow and farming era it must have been the economical thing to do. Our forbears worked hard. They took full advantage of the resources Stratford offered and they prospered.

I once heard a lecturer say that if he knew the ratio of cows to humans in a country he could quite readily tell you of the well being of the country's population. This ratio was good in Stratford in those days. They lived a sometimes stern, but wholesome good life.

Hildreth Winton  
President

