



Built 1723

The Stratford Historical Society
Stratford, Connecticut



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News Bulletin
November 1968

Mr. Eddie Welch, auctioneer and antique dealer from Southport will be our speaker on Friday, November 22 at 8:00 P.M., Methodist Church Hall. Mr. Welch is well known in the Bridgeport area for his knowledge of antiques and his keen sense of humor. Mrs. Leo Miller, Jr. will be in charge of the program. Members of the Society are urged to bring as their guests prospective members. In this way we may be able to interest others to join and increase our membership from 300 to 500 in 1969.

From the beginning the Stratford Historical Society has been a "do it yourself" organization. The Society has been able to avoid making serious mistakes because it was wise enough to seek advice from those who were experienced in historic house restoration and had a good knowledge of museum techniques. Among the well known authorities who have been our consultants are the late Elmer Keith, Dr. Abbott Cummings of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Mary Allis of Southport, Hank Schnabel, now director of the American Museum in Bath, England, and Mr. John Kirk, former curator of the Garvin collection of furniture at the Yale Museum. Our most recent consultant was George Wrenn III.

Mr. Wrenn III, at no expense to the Society, met some of our members at Judson House on November 7th to advise us on further restoration, lighting, museum techniques and the preservation of our valuable historic documents and fabrics. Mr. Wrenn is a graduate of Harvard University, School of Architecture, and has been trained in Museum procedures through the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. He presently is Supervisor of Property (60 historic houses), for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

A report of Mr. Wrenn's recommendations will be released to Society members.

The Beatrice Beach Lovell and Harold C. Lovell Endowment Fund is established for the benefit of the Stratford Historical Society.

The will of the late Beatrice Beach Lovell has left \$5,000 to the Stratford Historical Society, the income of which may be used for general expenses.

Mrs. Lovell's death has saddened all of us who have known her. Those who have been closely associated with Mrs. Lovell have been aware of the many hours she spent as Acquisitions Chairman, accepting, cataloging and preserving Stratford Historical Society's artifacts. All of this was done in spite of declining health. By this legacy Mrs. Lovell's work will be perpetuated. A beautifully worded Memorial to the late Mrs. Lovell was read at the Annual Meeting in September.

Mr. Lewis Knapp, past-President of the Stratford Historical Society, is receiving many favorable comments for his Twenty Year Long Range Plan concerning the future growth of our Society. At a recent meeting of the Connecticut League of Historical Societies in Guilford, attended by Mrs. Nettleton and Mr. and Mrs. Fowler, several copies were distributed to those in attendance. One of the League Members spoke of the need of other Societies to do long range planning similar to that of Mr. Knapp's. Interest was so great that Mrs. Nettleton took orders for additional copies, but at a price.

Members of our Society who did not receive a copy of the Plan at the Annual Meeting in September may obtain a copy at the November 22nd meeting.

Donald Fowler, President

STRATFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November 7, 1968

Meeting with: Mr. George Wrenn, III, Property Supervisor (60 historical houses), Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Boston, Massachusetts, at the Judson House and Museum, November 7, 1968, 10:30 A.M. to 2:15 P.M.

Present: Mr. and Mrs. Fowler, Mr. and Mrs. Judson, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Miller, Mrs. Cox, Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Applegate, Mr. Beardsley, Mr. Bassett, Mr. Booth, Mrs. Cruikshank.

Recorders: Mrs. Cruikshank, Mrs. Fowler

Mr. Wrenn was recommended by our good friend Dr. Abbott Cummings, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Boston, who has done so much to advise and encourage us in the restoration of Judson House.

Philosophy of Restoration 1968. Mr. Wrenn discussed the change which has come about since 1957 and may even change in five years. In short he said: "Each period has its own validity."

Hawley Room. Mr. Wrenn felt that it was not possible to put it back as it was, as it is "representative of an era". Glorianna Peck La Count, adopted daughter of Abner Judson, speaking before the Stratford Historical Society in 1926 made the following comments concerning the Hawley Room:---the northeast front room was never finished. It was whitewashed all over. There was no closet in the upstairs front hall and the partition (west) was close to the top of the stairs dividing the hall from the room above this."

Whether or not there is a fireplace behind the chimney in what is now the hall leading into the "kitchen chamber" (Mr. Booth's room) is easy to determine. Count the number of flues and there are as many fireplaces as there are flues. There are six fireplaces and six flues. Deduction - there is no hidden fireplace.

During the tour of Mr. Booth's living quarters Mr. Wrenn pointed out one way by which the Society could earn money. The S.P.N.E.A. rents an apartment in 50 of their 60 historic houses, open for exhibition, to a custodian or a man and wife, for a nominal sum of \$45.00 a month.

- (1) The utilities for the apartment are pro-rated.
- (2) The custodian (male) mows the lawn if not too extensive.
- (3) The regular cleaning is done by the custodians for the house, museum and their quarters.
- (4) The custodians act as guides, when the house is open, usually three days a week, some special days and week-ends. If they are not able to do this, then someone, at their expense, replaces them temporarily.
- (5) They report any maintenance problems.
- (6) The Society pays for the telephone.

Mr. Wrenn reported that the S.P.N.E.A. has no problem in getting tenants, there is a waiting list.

Parlor Chamber. Mr. Wrenn suggested we try to find the original paint, preferably behind one of the doors. He said when restoring a room it was a good idea to have a patch of the original paint. (This was done in the parlor on the advice of Dr. Cummings).

Parlor. Mr. Wrenn asked about a humidifier and was told we had none in Judson House. He felt that one was necessary to protect the furniture from damage due to excessive heat. Mr. Wrenn also advised that we have a dehumidifier for summer in the House to avoid excessive dampness.

Mr. Wrenn discussed at length the stone hearth. He pointed out that the present grey cement could be chipped off around the stones on the hearth and replace it with a layer of white cement. In other historic houses they have used this and it is "as close to the old mortar as we can get - the original mortar was white lime and sand."

Mr. Wrenn urged that the wooden grates in the parlor and hall be replaced with 19th century registers. He was particularly concerned with the wooden grate in the hall - "very hazardous".

Old Kitchen. Mr. Wrenn was most interested in the stone and mud plaster and the lintel at the west end of the fireplace. He was distressed that it could not be seen, because of the lack of light, and the chairs and artifacts hanging on the wall. He suggested spot lighting from the ceiling to correct this deficiency, and the removal of all displays in this area. He said Dr. Cummings would be interested in studying the tree rings in the lintel. Mr. Wrenn felt the improved lighting would also reveal the plane marks on the panelling. He suggested it might be a good idea to move the Moses Wheeler Cradle to some other place before someone falls over it. In examining the cradle Mr. Wrenn did not believe it was 17th century, but nearer the 19th - therefore, it could not be that belonging to Moses Wheeler the ferryman. There were three descendants named Moses Wheeler and it could have been associated with one of them. Finally Mr. Wrenn felt we should "rotate" the exhibits to enable visitors to see better what there is. So much both in and about the fireplace and annex is confusing.

Borning Room. Again Mr. Wrenn suggested uncovering the original paint in some obscure place in this room. He advised us not to install an electrified sconce here as it was too artificial. It would be better to use the present wiring for a spot light on the north wall; this same wiring could also be used for a spot light in the kitchen.

Dining Room. Mr. Wrenn advised: "Don't touch this room". There have been so many changes it would be too expensive and difficult to do. Use the room to show changes during the time when the house was occupied. The mantel was added early in the 19th century; the windows were changed; one cupboard, northeast, was reproduced to match the older one in the southeast corner; even this latter cupboard has evidences of replacements.

It is possible to use in this room what are "thought to be" mid 19th century Venetian blinds as they are interesting and unusual. He said the elaborate scroll work in the valence of the blinds signify that they are stylistically different from 18th century. The very name Venetian is a reminder that such slatted blinds were used in Venice centuries ago. They were introduced in this country after 1781 when Jefferson acquired some. According to an article in a 1931 issue of the Antiquarian Magazine there exists a bill of sale to Jefferson for "slatted blinds". Because this room is not all 18th century, blinds will not be out of order.

Again Mr. Wrenn suggested research on original paint color. As to wallpaper - "don't take it off until you have something to put in its place" (which might be a copy of what was on the walls when first papered). (We have a scrap of paper discovered in the kitchen when it was restored).

Slave Quarters. Mr. Wrenn stressed the need to preserve the torn profile of the slave "Flora", done by Asa Benjamin, her owner. He pointed out the danger of complete deterioration of both Flora and the bill of sale unless they were better preserved. He suggested we contact Captain George Kunha of the Boston Athenaeum for information regarding a process that is now being used to reduce "acidity". For the ordinary filcher, Mr. Wrenn suggested a larger hook on back of "Flora's" profile and bill of sale to make it difficult for the filcher. Mr. Wrenn estimated cost of Flora's preservation \$50.00; bill of sale \$35.00.

North area of cellar. The furnace room should be enclosed as per instructions of the fire marshall. Pegboard can be placed on the outside wall (east) which can then be used for exhibits. The east side of the dining room floor needs bracing before another party is held. If jacks or posts are used to brace up the floor, then they can be hidden from view by pegboard and used for displays. Can the exit in this area be eliminated? (Consult with fire marshall).

12:15 time out for lunch! (Good food and coffee - wonderful home made cakes, kindness of Mrs. Cruikshank.)

1:00 P.M. Question and answer period. Mr. Wrenn summarizing Contracts of Gift and Contracts of Loan should be used at all times.

"There is too much in the Museum, therefore visitors see nothing - visitors run away from too many exhibits".

Group furniture to simulate a room instead of spotting it throughout the museum. It is distracting to have too many things.

Textiles are subject to air pollution. No costume should be displayed for too long a time. The lighting should also be checked as some kinds of light can damage fabrics.

Plastic is also a means of preservation. However, investigation should be made as to the kind used. Some types damage rather than protect.

Mr. Wrenn particularly spoke about the hat boxes on exhibit in the museum, which are uncovered. He said that all of those in possession of the S. P. N. E. A. have been covered with plastic.

Lighting. Make use of what you have except install in the "egg crate" a series of hooded spots. This type of a spot is flexible and can be used to light different exhibits.

Mr. Wrenn advised using torch lamps for lighting in the rooms of the house.

Conservation of our historic documents is most important and should have priority. Air pollution and wooden backing used in framing eats the paper, and once this deterioration sets in, these records are gone forever. This acid condition can be neutralized, or as Mr. Wrenn said, "de'acidified". This process is a skilled job. He suggested Captain George Cunha of Boston as he knows of Cunha's work. Suggested we consult at Yale or the Hartford Library where they would probably know of an equally qualified person.

Storage. Mr. Wrenn recommended, as did Hank Schnable some years ago, that we store collections on the lower floor of the Museum. Removal of the present collections to the basement would relieve congestion and would give an opportunity to do exhibits, upstairs, which tell a story. These exhibits should be frequently changed. There would also be some permanent exhibits on the second floor of the museum. Collections stored downstairs could be arranged for study and research by visitors to the museum.

Cases. Aim for unity, one kind, less variety. Keep display area fairly high, keeping in mind, however, the difference in height of adults and children.

Ceremonial Stones (front steps). Mr. Wrenn agreed some railing is necessary for visitors. Ceremonial stones could be better placed elsewhere, possibly arranged as they were used by Indians. Suggested using a simple railing, post and rope on one side of front steps, undisguised, but useful.

Subject Index File. Mr. Wrenn approves of such a file for an Historical Society, especially one having a large number of acquisitions.

Labels. The sticky type used to mark portraits should be removed because the gold leaf on the frame is damaged by the tape. He advised typed cards and displayed at one side of the portraits, containing essential information.

Labels on the furniture should be eliminated and acquisitions number painted, with a fine brush, in an inconspicuous place.

Suggested Improvements to be Considered and Studied for the House and Museum.

1. Custodians Quarters.
2. Lighting in the House and Museum. Use of spots and torch lamps.
3. Use of restraint in doing exhibits.
4. Rotation of exhibits.
5. Research on paint and paper.
6. Aim for unity in type of display cases.
7. Brace Judson House structure.
8. Enclose furnace.
9. Preservation and restoration of historic documents and fabrics.
10. Use of basement of the Museum for library and storage. Upstairs of Museum for displays.
11. Storage of unimportant items in Sammis House.
12. Replace obvious labelling with that which is inconspicuous.
13. Contract of Gift and Contract of Loan used at all times.
14. Replace wooden grates in parlor and hall.
15. Humidifiers and dehumidifiers in Judson House.
16. Subject index to locate artifacts and know what we have to exhibit.