



The Stratford Historical Society

NEWS LETTER

May 13, 1974

"Six Captains from Stratford" is the title of the illustrated talk to be presented by Lewis G. Knapp at the next meeting of the Society at 8:00 P.M. at the Stratford Methodist Church Hall on Friday, May 24. Mr. Knapp, a former president of the Society and currently a member of the Finance Committee, is an excellent speaker and has done much research on this topic. Please do plan to attend this last regular meeting of the year. Guests of Society members are always welcome, also.

A synopsis prepared by Mr. Knapp follows:

"Even though we are fifty per cent bounded by water, we don't think of Stratford as a seagoing town, except for our several yacht clubs. It wasn't always so. The first settlers undoubtedly came by sea. The first ferryman is believed to have also been a boat builder. In colonial times, schooners left Stratford for New Providence and Bermuda with grain, lumber, horses, and even onions.

"During the Revolution, Captain David Hawley fought under Benedict Arnold in the battle of Lake Champlain, served on the Connecticut ship, Oliver Cromwell, and commanded a series of privateers.

"Joshua Sands, lifetime navy officer, saw service under Oliver Perry at the battle of Lake Erie, commanded a gunboat in the battle of Vera Cruz, helped lay the Atlantic cable, and was Commodore of the Montevideo Squadron at the outbreak of the Civil War.

"One of Sand's officers at Montevideo was Stratford's William Barrymore. Barrymore went on to capture Confederate contraband vessels and, after the war, went into commercial service.

"...From the time he served on his uncle's ship as a boy, John Sterling carved a career at sea for himself in transatlantic and China trade...

"Deliverance P. Benjamin followed Sterling in the China trade, his ship, Helena, was a record breaker.

"In the 1850's and 1860's Truman Hotchkiss ran the schooner Coast Pilot from the Hudson to the Plata to the Thames, in search of cargo.

"There were many more - Dowdall...Barlow, Booth, Brooks, Curtiss, Gorham, Hubbell, Hull, Judson, Lovejoy, Thompson, Wakelee...."

The Judson House was opened to the public as scheduled on April 3. Because of the electrical and construction work in the cellar this winter, the House cleaning became a greater problem than usual. That the House interior was clean, artifacts polished, and curtains and rugs in good order is the result of the work of many volunteers: Mrs. Jack Wardman and Mrs. Paul Melcher, Mrs. Stephen Lawrence, Mrs. Edward Boyhen; from the docents group: Mrs. Judith Kurmay, Mrs. Barbara Olsen, Mrs. Laura Anderson, Mrs. Elli Winkle, Mrs. Mary Jane Smith, Mrs. Mary Salerno, Mrs. Doris Carson, Mrs. Sally Martin.

Thus for this visitation season 89 adults and 207 children (including eight school or scout groups) have been shown through the House. We have been disappointed that more of our new members have not come to visit; our "latchstring is always out" to all members with no fee involved.

The work of enclosing the House furnace has been completed satisfactorily and has been approved by the Fire Department. The new furnace room is neat and functional. The electrical work is also complete and approved by the town electrical inspector.

Our buildings chairman, Howard Smith, continues his outstanding contributions to the Society with the painting of the back stairs, including the stairwell walls and ceiling, the replacement of the screening in the screen door at the rear of the house, and the building and installation of a front gate in the new fence as his latest projects.

Rain on April 13 made grounds clean-up day difficult, but grounds chairman John Dolyak, aided by members Fowler, Dustin, and Williams and scout leaders Mr. Don Henault and Austin Sasso with scouts Rod Smith and Don Henault, Jr. worked most of the forenoon and accomplished a great deal. We are very grateful for this help from the Scouts, and to our member, Joseph Di Menno, who made the contacts for us.

We are grateful to the Stratford Garden Club and especially to Mrs. Anthony Musante, chairman of its civic improvements committee, for giving to the Society four old-fashioned roses, now planted along the west side fence and doing well.

Will every member please give special attention to the task of assembling a good number of items to be sold at the Society "wagon" at the Antique Show and Sale scheduled for August 10 this year? A large number of flea market articles for sale is our best "hedge" against possible reduced numbers of admissions because of the gasoline situation. A successful Show and Sale is vital to our budget. Will you also please make a special effort to make your items for sale available before the morning of the sale? Please call Mrs. Miller (378-1447), Mr. Dustin (378-5997), or the House and Museum (378-0630) to make arrangements for having articles picked up, if transporting them is a problem. Smaller items for the Sale may be left at the House during visiting hours, Wed., Sat., Sun. 11:00-5:00. If each of our approximately 500 members contributed even one item, the success of our Society "wagon" would be assured.

Tuesdays are busy days at the Museum with our library open under the direction of Mrs. Elizabeth Oakman, and with Mrs. Freda Chapman and Mrs. Alma Fowler, Accessions Co-Chairmen, directing a corps of workers in the endless task of cleaning cataloging, and storing artifacts. Current work is with china and clothing accessories (jewelry, fans etc.). April-May volunteers were: Mrs. Ruth Barrows, Mrs. Lillian Larson, Mrs. Rosamond Dustin, Mrs. Louise Brandt, Mrs. Marjorie Duffield, Mrs. Mary Salerno, Mrs. Elli Winkle, Mrs. Muriel Bardsley, and Marshall Nye. Einar Larson has nearly completed two exhibit alcove displays.

As of May 1 the Membership-Fund Raising 1974-76 Challenge Campaign stands as follows:

New members	153
Membership fees	\$1015.00
Contributions and pledges to endowment	\$13,568.30

It should be noted that two large memorial gifts account for \$10,200 of the endowment fund. This is a fine way for members to make their contributions especially significant.

Mrs. Elizabeth S. Nixdorff (Mrs. Charles Edward Nixdorff) who died on February 6, 1974, will be remembered for her moral and financial support of the Stratford Historical Society during its critical financial period in 1972. The Executive Board had voted to sell the Sammis property because the financial burden proved too great to retain any longer that portion of the William Judson land grant of 1639. When Mrs. Nixdorff heard of this

action by the Executive Board, she anonymously, offered through her broker to give the Society \$7,800.00 under the following conditions: The mortgage of \$4,000.00 to be paid off; the Sammis property to be torn down in the light of a restoration cost estimated at \$20,000.00; the property to be landscaped; the balance of the fund to be used to complete the renovation of the Museum.

The Executive Board rescinded its action to sell and agreed to accept the gift of \$7,800.00 and to comply with its conditions. Mrs. Nixdorff continued her interest in the Society, particularly in what the many volunteers were doing to restore Judson House, to catalog and preserve the Society's many artifacts, and to landscape the property in keeping with the period of Judson House.

Again, in 1973, Mrs. Nixdorff gave, anonymously, \$3,200.00 to the Challenge 1976 Endowment Drive. Mrs. Nixdorff's executor and lawyer indicate that this gift is to be designated as the Charles Edward and Elizabeth S. Nixdorff Memorial Fund.

Mr. Velmore Spamer is representing the Stratford Historical Society as a member of the town Bicentennial Committee, which is headed by Mrs. Philomena Klesper. Mr. Fowler, our education chairman, recently gave a "Judson House Restoration" illustrated lecture to this group. The Bicentennial Committee has been invited to hold its next meeting at our Museum.

We are grateful to Mrs. Mary Hardy and her committee: Mrs. Evelyn Harvey, Mrs. Sophie Lounsbury, Mrs. Dorothy Ice, Mrs. Doris Carson, and Miss Margaret Jacaruso for providing and serving refreshments at the March meeting.

PLEASE PLAN TO ATTEND THE MEETING ON FRIDAY, MAY 24.

Elden H. Dustin,
President