



The Stratford Historical Society

NEWS LETTER

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1980, AT THE METHODIST CHURCH HALL. Dixon Merkt, well-known authority on Connecticut waterfowl decoys, will offer a program entitled "Gentlemen Carvers of Stratford".

Duck hunting at the turn of the 20th century was important to the social and economic fiber of the town of Stratford. The small, compact marshes of the Housatonic River (Knell's Island especially) provided good waterfowl habitat and good hunting. Markets in Bridgeport, New Haven and New York purchased ducks from this area.

Stratford marshes were a retreat for the "wealthy sport" who was guided by local men who spent much of their year on the river--guiding, fishing, oystering, etc. These Stratford men often produced the technically sound and aesthetically pleasing decoys so much in demand by today's collector.

Decoy carving was one of the first expressions of American folk art. One of the earliest documented carvers of sophisticated work was Albert Laing, 1811-1886. His decoys were forerunners of the work so highly respected throughout the country today.

Currently the most sought-after Stratford carvers are: Ben Holmes 1942-1912, Charles E. "Shang" Wheeler 1872-1949, Charles Disbrow 1885-1955, Ken Peck 1887-1961, Bill Bedell 1904-1966, Roswell Bliss 1887-1967, Reg Culver 1897-1975, Lou Rathmell 1890-1976, Willard C. Baldwin 1890-1979, and Ralph Wells 1895-1980. Their notoriety extends far beyond the boundaries of the town of Stratford.

It is most fitting that the Stratford Historical Society will present this important and pertinent talk about a not-so-long-ago time in Stratford's History.

Mr. Merkt, lecturer, author, and collector, has offered to appraise decoy birds related sporting art of the Housatonic River area. The \$1.00 per item fee will be donated to the Historical Society. Please feel free to bring your treasures.

Since the decoy played an important part in Stratford's history, it is with regret that we must admit to a void in the Society's collection in this area. The Stratford Historical Society would be most pleased to accept donations in the decoy-related field for which a tax deduction will be given.

Please plan to attend this most interesting of meetings. Refreshments will be served by Mrs. Henry Van Gieson and her committee.

DOCENT TRAINING The docent training program will start its 1981 season on Thursday, Jan. 8 at 9:30 a.m. in the Museum. Anyone interested in showing Judson House and Museum, primarily to school groups, is welcome. All experienced docents are urged to attend also. It is amazing how much can be forgotten over the course of several months! So a "brush-up" will be in order. If there are any questions or any further information needed, call Barbara Olsen (378-3354) or Judy Kurmay (378-8025).

MEMBERSHIP A reminder to all that membership dues are payable now. About 200 people have renewed their memberships already, which is an enthusiastic response to the appeal sent out by our Membership Chairperson Kay Moore. In order to save further postage and printing, please send dues to Box 382, Stratford. Thank you.

WEAVING The weavers are re-warping the loom and plan to make some small rag rugs. We feel that the second-graders will be better able to see the weaving process with the wider weft. For this project we are planning to use polyester knit rags--so if you have any discarded jerseys, pants, skirts, etc. (anything of knit cloth) we'll be glad to have them.

You may bring materials to the Museum on Tuesdays from 9:30 to 2:00 or call Rosamond Dustin at 378-5997.

ENCAMPMENT AND SKIRMISH The encampment and skirmish between Delancey's Loyalist Brigade and the Fifth Connecticut Regiment, Continental Line was a glorious success! We were blessed with a bright, sunny day and a crowd of several hundred people. The displays of artifacts and crafts painted a clear picture of the life of the armies of the eighteenth century. The apple raisin cake baked over the campfire was especially delicious.

The skirmish itself was the highlight of the afternoon--complete with cannon and musket fire. (The "rebels" won!) The experience of our ancestors in sight, sound, and taste were brought to life for us by these two excellent units. A TV station from New Haven covered some of the events, so we even made the evening news!

Many thanks to all those who worked on and attended the event.

SOCIETY PRESIDENTS The new President of the Stratford Historical Society, Mrs. Todd B. Lovell, the first female president since 1947. Since that was some time ago, many of us had forgotten that women had served as President several times since the Society's founding in 1925. It seems appropriate, at the beginning of the new term, to list those persons, female and male, who have been President of our Society.

John C. Wilcoxson was elected "Temporary President" at the meeting of July 10, 1925. Regularly elected Presidents have been: Elliott W. Peck, Sterling H. Bunnell, Miss Charlotte M. Packard, Wm. Howard Wilcoxson, Edgar R. Thomas, Frank S. Bunnell, Frank H. Fargo, Mrs. Georgiana T. Greeley, Merritt D. Vanderbilt, Mrs. John D. Walker, Charles E. "Shang" Wheeler, W. Earle Hawley, Harold Sturges, Robert W. Scott, Olaff S. Solomonson, Donald S. Sammis, Donald W. Fowler, Stanley Johnson, Hildreth Winton, Lewis Knapp, Velmore Spamer, Elden Dustin, Jack Wardman, David Jenney and David Wiggin.

VISITORS TO JUDSON HOUSE In spite of excellent newspaper publicity dealing with Judson House and the Historical Society, attendance has been steadily declining for the past three years. If it had not been for the 104 visitors who came with the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society group in July and the large number of "walk-through" guests on the day of the encampment in September, attendance at Judson House and the Mitchell Museum would have been well down over previous years. Also, the decline in school population has caused an attendance drop in the scheduled tours.

If any group to which you belong (Senior citizens, Garden Club, Religious organizations, Sewing group, etc.) is seeking an activity, why not suggest a tour of Judson House and the Museum? The tour takes about an hour and a half, and the price is right (\$1.00 per adult). Our 1981 season starts on April 1 -- think about it, please. Contact Patricia Morrison (377-2146) if you would like to arrange a tour, or for further information.

TRIPS, TALKS, TOURS On Monday, October 20, the Museum of Art, Science and Industry held a resource program entitled "Trips, Talks, and Tours." It was a unique opportunity for area teachers and administrators to see what programs were available for students. Our society was well represented and received many inquiries regarding school tours--some from as far away as Hartford. Perhaps some additional visitors to Judson House will be forthcoming this Spring.

KEELER TAVERN, RIDGEFIELD--CHRISTMAS BOUTIQUE On Thursday, Dec. 11 we plan to go to Ridgefield where we will have a tour of the 18th century Keeler Tavern (admission \$1.00) and be able to enjoy purchasing items at the annual Christmas Boutique. The tentative plan is to have lunch at the Elm Inn, also in Ridgefield, where the average luncheon costs about \$5.00. Each person is responsible for his own transportation (car pool, perhaps). Please call Judy Kurmay (378-8025) if you are interested.

INTERESTING EXCERPTS FROM THE DAY BOOK OF ABNER JUDSON III, b. 1791, d. 1867 (continued)

August 28, 1827 --- sold a pair of boots to Robert Lovejoy, \$5.00
October 16, 1827 --- sold quilting frames to Isaac Fairchild.
October 21, December 10, 1827 --- Samuel Jackson's boy pair 20¢ a week for driving cows to pasture.
March 14, 1829 --- Abner sold 3 1/2 dozen eggs for 44¢.
May 28, 1829 --- Abner sold 6 pounds of butter for 77¢.
1832 -- Book records selling of hay, rye, oats and corn.
April 15, 1833 --- sold to William Gray, 2 pounds of pork for 25¢.
April, May, June, July, 1833 --- Abner paid for labor in his garden and hay fields at "66 cents for a full day's work". In 1834 labor per day was increased to 75¢.
September 12, 1836 --- mentions Washington Bridge. (Apparently taxed \$189.07 for maintenance of bridge.)
January 15, 1840 --- Abner notes that the Bridgeport Republican Standard, No. 22, was the first newspaper to be delivered to him in Stratford. Are we to believe that Abner was a member of the Whig Party? Martin Van Buren, a Democrat, was President of the U.S. from 1837-1841.

1863 --- Abner owned land near the railroad. This pasture lot was leased to Isaac Fairchild for the season for \$9.00.
Note: The first railroad to go through Stratford from New Haven to New York City was on December 28, 1848.

The year 1867 sees few entries into Abner's ledger. From 1865-1867 written instructions were given by which Maria Sherman Judson, wife of Abner III, was to be given U.S. Bonds of \$50 denomination.

We have no idea of what Abner III died. He was 67 years old at the time of his death in 1867. Maria, his wife, died in 1881. Upon her death the property of Abner III was divided into 10 equal parts between his sister Harriet Judson Curtis and his nephews. Upon Abner's death, seven generations had lived on the William Judson homesite, four generations in the Captain David Judson House.

If any of the descendants of Abner Judson III have further details about his life, the Stratford Historical Society would appreciate receiving such.

(The above excerpts were prepared by Mr. Donald W. Fowler from the Day Book of Abner Judson III).

Don't forget -- November 21 -- Gentlemen Carvers of Stratford. Hope to see you there.

Sincerely,

Carol W. Lovell, President