



Town Settled 1639

Society Organized 1925

## The Stratford Historical Society

Box 382, Stratford, Connecticut 06497  
Telephone 378-0630

Judson House, 967 Academy Hill, Built C1750  
and Catharine B. Mitchell Museum, 1958

May 1995

**NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING: Fri., May 26, 1995--8:00pm**  
Christ Episcopal Church  
2000 Main St., Stratford

### THE WHEELMEN 1880-1900

James Spillane, Madison, Connecticut, Speaker

**THREE MEMBERS OF THE WHEELMEN WILL BE PRESENT WITH THEIR HIGH-WHEEL BICYCLES AT OUR MEETING ON MAY 26!! THIS WILL BE A FUN EVENING! BRING YOUR FRIENDS, FAMILY AND ESPECIALLY CHILDREN!!**

Albert Pope had seen European-made bicycles at the U.S. Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, and started importing them the next year. In 1878 he became the first manufacturer of bicycles in the United States. Connecticut, with advanced factory facilities and skilled workers, offered the perfect environment for manufacturing bicycles, which for their era were "high-tech" items.

The first bicycles to be produced in America were "high-wheelers", with front wheels as tall as 60 inches and much shorter rear wheels. The late 1880s saw the introduction of the "safety" bicycle, with two wheels of equal size.

The bicycle made a significant change in the lifestyles of millions of Americans. It increased personal freedom by providing a new method of individual mobility, thereby affording many people a degree of self-reliance that today is taken for granted. It became a popular form of physical recreation for men, women, and children. The formation of bicycle clubs became a new form of social activity.

The heyday of the bicycle in Connecticut ended during the first decade of the twentieth century. The increasingly available automobile offered a superior mode of personal transportation that soon replaced the bicycle in popularity.

Refreshments will be served following the program.

NEW EXHIBITS have been created for the 1995 season at the Museum of the Stratford Historical Society.

"SCENES OF STRATFORD" hang in the gallery of the Dickgiesser/Viner wing. These include oil paintings, water colors, drawings, prints and needlework. The earliest is a needlework picture showing Gloriana Folsom, (the local blacksmith's daughter who married a Scottish nobleman) with her family gazing across a symbolic Atlantic Ocean toward Stratford. Christ Episcopal Church and the Congregational Church are shown. The piece was worked in silks by Mary Gorham in 1814.

There is also a wonderful Calvin Curtis painting looking up the Housatonic River from Putney. The exhibit contains seventeen pieces, all of which are of particular interest.

"TOYS IN THE ATTIC" includes a bicycle, sled, rocking horse, doll house, and many games, toys and items which had been cherished by local children from the early nineteenth century through the early twentieth.

"BEFORE THE BATHROOM" shows utility items from our collection, including an elegant commode, a tin tub, bowls and pitchers, soap dishes etc. In the background is a photographic mural of a still standing local outdoor facility designed in 1859 by the architect of the present Congregational Church.

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EARLIEST MAP OF STRATFORD--The eighteenth century map of Stratford given by Carl Wischan is now hanging in the museum. It is drawn in brown ink on six joined sheets of handmade paper and shows period roads and distances in miles, rods and feet. Most place names are no longer in use. Mr. Wischan had the map professionally conserved, cleaned, deacidified and framed before presenting it to the Society.

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#### RECENT GIFTS:

From Arthur Hale of Hendersonville, North Carolina, we have received a fine early Staffordshire tea pot which descended in the family of his grandmother who was Madeline Wells Holmes. Mr. Hale's father's brother was Ben Holmes, the famous decoy carver. The Holmes family had a farm at the corner of Main Street and South Avenue. The Holmes family were the first proprietors of the store at that address which became known as "Steve's Market."

From Robert Duguay, who was the last president of the Cupheag Club, we received two very large period framed pictures, one with fourteen and the other with twenty-one individual portraits of the club members in 1888. The list includes many descendants of the early families plus comparative newcomers who had lived in Stratford for less than one hundred years.

From member Ruth Barrows came a number of early games which were donated to be sold in the Society Booth but which were of such rarity and quality that they have been made part of our permanent toy collection. Some of these toys are featured in "TOYS IN THE ATTIC".

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The Sunflower Quilt which was donated to the Society by the Curtis/s Society is now part of a loan exhibit at the National Quilt Museum in Paducah, Kentucky.

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FLORA'S FAME keeps spreading. In the Sammis store display case in our museum which is located directly below the 1796 silhouette of Flora, the slave, are shown four books in which Flora has been featured. This extremely rare portrait and its accompanying bill of sale are widely known. "Flora" has been prominent in exhibitions in Washington, D.C. and Brooklyn. Recently she has been requested for a traveling exhibition that would take her to Hartford, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey and New York State. The Executive Board must act on this request.

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As you can tell, we are very pleased to continue the tradition of stewardship in collecting the history of Stratford which was begun in 1925. We feel that it is our duty to share this history and some of the artifacts which represent it. Many volunteers have preceded us in this work and have been responsible for the foundation of our efforts.

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THE CAPT. DAVID JUDSON HOUSE is open for the 1995 season: Wed., Sat., Sun. from 11:00am to 4:00pm. The Museum exhibits are also available during these hours. Remember that your Society membership entitles you to visit for free.

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You will be receiving an invitation to an Open House in June to celebrate the New Exhibits. This will be a Sunday afternoon event tentatively scheduled for June 11. Please plan to attend.

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Remember THE WHEELMEN on Friday, May 26. Bring your friends!!

Judith Kurmay, President