
Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

A Hand on the PAST >> An Eye to the FUTURE

Volume II Issue 5

May 1998



*I want a house that
has got over all its
troubles; I don't
want to spend the
rest of my life
bringing up a
young
and inexperienced
house.*

*J. K. Jerome
1859-1927)*

*Coming Event...
Early American
Festival...
Saturday,
September 26,
1998*

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday, May 22, 1998-8:00 pm

Christ Episcopal Church

2000 Main Street Stratford

“An Armchair Tour of Connecticut History”

Karin Peterson

Associate Director-Curator

Antiquarian and Landmarks Society

A native of Washington, D.C., Karin Peterson came to Connecticut in 1986 to work for the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society where she presently fills the combined position of Associate Director and Curator. As such she oversees the organization's thirteen historic properties, nine of which are open as museum sites, and is directly responsible for the Society's artifact collections.

Karin has an undergraduate degree in archaeology from Beloit College in Wisconsin and worked for the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. She has a master degree in American Studies from the University of Pennsylvania and after completing a year's internship at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware, worked for Historic Annapolis, Inc., and the Historical Society of Delaware.

Karin has continued to expand her background by attending the Museum Management Program at the University of Colorado in Boulder and several European programs sponsored by the Attingham Summer School.

Ms Peterson will present an illustrated talk tracing the history of Connecticut through the historic properties of her organization. These nine museum houses represent four centuries of domestic life from the late 17th century to the more recent 1950s. The Joshua Homestead House in New London is considered the oldest firmly documented house in the state. Its 1678 construction is authenticated by an early 18th-century diary entry. The 18th-century is interpreted by the Hale Homestead in Coventry, birthplace of Connecticut's State Hero, and the Hatheway House in Suffield with its unique assemblage of original wallpapers still in situ. Hartford was the preeminent city in the state at the end of the 19th-century and its story is told through the Butler-McCook Homestead and the Isham-Terry House. The Ferriday family were among the affluent New Yorkers who discovered the summer charms of Litchfield County in this century and their home with its lovely formal garden opened to the public four years ago.

The meeting is open to the public and refreshments will be served.

Letter from the President

With the arrival of Spring the school buses began to arrive at the Judson House. The herb garden started to get its annual care. Plans for the Summer Camp are under way. The Annual Antique Show demonstrated a wonderful cohesiveness among the many members who contributed their time and energy.

It is now time for the people of Stratford and visitors to our town to visit the Judson House. Please talk it up among your friends. About the middle of summer a new exhibit of flags will be ready in the museum, it will show the many changes in our nation's flag since 1812.

Finally, in September we will have our annual Early American Festival with fun for the entire family.

Louis J. Petriell,
President

Book of Remembrance

The following contributions have been made to the Book of Remembrance:

In memory of Mrs Eleanor Jacaruso by Ms Eleanor Anton.

In memory of Mr Irving Dobkin by Mr & Mrs Peter Dahl.

In memory of Mrs Helen Jacopian by Mr & Mrs Peter Dahl.

The longest chapter in the Bible is Numbers chapter 7—nearly two thousand words, all about giving.

Stratford Junior Historical Society

The Youth Committee of the Stratford Youth and Family Advisory Board presented the 4th Annual Youth as Resources Awards, Thursday, February 26th in the Stratford Town Hall Council Chambers.

The awards recognize Stratford youth groups, businesses, organizations and adult volunteers for their contributions to the community.

The Stratford Junior Historical Society was nominated along with Boy Scout Troop 72, Boy Scout Troop 202, Bunnell High School Environmental Club, Bunnell High School Interact Club, Bunnell High School Telecommunications Association, First Congregational Church Senior Pilgrim Fellowship, Stratford EMS Explorers Post 4911, Trash Clean Up Club and Ujima Team.

Nominations for the business/organization award were: Stratford Historical Society, Fleet Bank, SHARE-New York, Stratford Citizens Advisory Council, Eli Whitney Ecology Committee

The groups received certificates of recognition for working to make Stratford a better place for young people. The awards commended them for sharing the vision that youth are a resource to each other, their schools and their community.

Coming Events

JUDSON HOUSE & MUSEUM
Open-Saturday, May 23rd thru October
RED, WHITE & BLUE-display of the Society's extensive flag collection
July 4th thru October 31st (approx.)

EARLY AMERICAN FESTIVAL
Saturday, September 26th

Whatever we possess becomes of double value when we share it with others.

"The Wench Flora"

By the well-to-do, buying slaves was thought of as an extension of the indenture system. In 1795, Asa Benjamin bought the slave Flora from Margaret Dwight for twenty-five pounds. Flora's silhouette, which draws much interest from Judson House visitors, hangs in the museum. Silhouettes were used as identification, much as fingerprints might be used today.

Flora's fame keeps spreading and her silhouette, already featured in six books, has just appeared in *Underground Railroad*, a U.S. Parks Department publication. The silhouette has also been requested for use in a book by Harcourt, Brace & Company.

In Appreciation

A rare 18th century mahogany embroidery frame has been donated by Ruth Beers Ruskin. The frame is in beautiful condition and will be added to the Society's collection. Our thanks to Mrs. Ruskin for this gift.

We appreciate Charles A. Carroll & Sons donating their services to reinstall the stair railing in the museum. The railing was dangerously loose and a hazard to all using the stairs.

MANY, MANY THANKS! To all who helped at the Antique Show. We have never had such cooperation, people donated, people baked, people helped. We wish to thank all who participated in so many ways.

REMEMBER-We will accept books and items that are saleable throughout the year. Bring your treasures in to the office any Tuesday or Thursday and they will be stored for our next event.

A Special Contribution

In the past some people have made important contributions to the Society. David Wiggin played a very important part when, as advisor to Edna Viner, he suggested she include the Society in her will. She generously left the Society \$50,000. The late Robert Dickgiesser, sensing it was a good time to build because construction was almost at a standstill, offered to match the bequest if we built immediately, hence the museum's Dickgiesser-Viner Wing.

New Docents

We would like to thank the following Docents who have given of their time to guide school children and other community groups through the Judson House and Catharine B. Mitchell Museum: Cindy Kleynowsky, Joan Barlow, Leslie Light, Jean Miles, Mary Perille, Elaine Gavoli, Marie Kubic and Sandy Rutkowski.

In March a training course of lectures and field trips took place for new volunteers wishing to become docents. We are happy to welcome the following who participated: Irene Kalman, Judy Ostrow, Pat Comer, Iretta Moore, Dave Guion, Sue Dimenno, Heidi Stranko, Elaine Watson, Diane Matthews and Shirley Kappel.

"Pressers"

We are often given fine linens to sell. Fortunately, we have someone one is willing to wash and bleach these items, but occasionally some are in need of pressing. At the moment there are two or three white Christening dresses waiting to be pressed. Any volunteers? Call the office at 378-0630.

Flora's Profile

Interesting Facts About Our Town of Stratford

According to the official census returns of 1890, Stratford's population was 2,608. The town was rural, no automobiles, telephones, electric lights or street cars.

In 1890 agriculture was Stratford's main industry. Now John Pirhala runs the last farm in town located on Connors Lane.

The first train passed through town December 29, 1848 on its trip from New Haven to New York.

The Bridgeport Horse Car Company extended its line to Stratford Center in 1891, three years later the line was electrified and in 1895 was extended on Main Street to Paradise Green east along East Broadway and Ferry Boulevard to Washington Bridge.

Being situated on the banks of the Housatonic River made boating very popular with Stratford residents. The Housatonic Boat Club was the earliest, organized in 1887. The Pootatuck Yacht Club was organized in 1898.

In May, 1882, the first telephone made its appearance in Stratford, four years after the first telephone exchange in the world was established at New Haven. The first telephone directory lists but three subscribers in Stratford. These were Bishop & Cullinan, undertakers, Franklin R. Sammis and H. P. Stagg's Hardware Store. By 1920, there were more than 1,000 in service and today the number is over 45,000.

Electricity for household lighting was introduced into Stratford in 1908 and in 1910 was first used for street lighting. Today there are approximately 10,000 lights on Stratford street.

In March of 1897, the town voted to instruct its representative in the General Assembly to seek an amendment to

charters of the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company and the Citizens Gas Company of Bridgeport, which would permit them to extend their pipes to Stratford, that the town might be supplied with water and gas. However, these improvements were not actually available for use until 1905.

Organized fire protection was established in 1875 with volunteers. The first piece of apparatus consisted of a hand drawn hose reel, succeeded by a horse-drawn apparatus. The fire company never owned a horse of their own, so the first pair of horse to get to the firehouse when the alarm sounded would get the job. The first piece of motorized equipment was purchased in 1910.

Before Sikorsky Airport was built on much of Great Meadows Salt Marsh in the 1930's, the Lordship section of Stratford was an island, connected only by a bridge spanning a small creek at the end of Ferry Boulevard.

The Stratford Town Hall, a handsome colonial structure, which has become a local landmark, was built in 1936 with a Public Works Administration grant for an approximate cost of \$194,000. It stands on the historic "North Parade" used in colonial times for drilling of the local militia.

In 1925, The Stratford Historical Society was one of the earliest established. In 1936, the Conference of Historical Societies in their publication *Historical Societies in the United States and Canada* had 583 listed. A second handbook was published in 1944 listing 904 societies. By contrast, the latest edition of 1986 has 9,375 agencies. The historical agency field has had a far and wide growth rate.



The United States Capitol

The great dome of the U.S. Capitol rises above the trees at the end of converging avenues. It is an awe inspiring, breathtaking sight. No other building is so intimately linked with the lives of its citizens. Not everyone was happy with the move to the Potomac site.

In June of 1791 President Washington made a horseback tour of the swampy new Federal District. To obtain a suitable design a contest with a prize of \$500 + a lot would be given to the winner. William Thornton (physician, portrait painter, amateur architect) sub-

nicknamed "the oven" erected temporarily on the South Wing site. (It was razed in 1804).

Benjamin Henry Latrobe was appointed as Architect-in-Charge by President Jefferson in 1803. Jefferson took a personal interest and went as far as dictating much of its detail.

Besides stopping leaks and patching cracks that threatened the North Wing, was the threat of premature decay. Latrobe raised the floor part way up, thus creating a second story to the building in which the Senate would meet.

*The two original
Capitol buildings
were linked with a
wooden walkway.
The overlay is the
present Capitol.*

mitted the winning design plan. Washington upon sight of it commented "Grandeur, Simplicity and Convenience appear to be so well combined in this plan."

Washington, in a Masonic Apron with a silver trowel, laid the cornerstone on the 18th of Sept. 1789. The exact site of the cornerstone is today uncertain.

November 22, 1800, President John Adams addressed the 1st joint session in the columned Senate Chamber. He wore a formal coat, knee breeches and powdered hair, to reflect the importance of the occasion. Not until Woodrow Wilson in 1913 did another president appear in person to Congress.

A wooden walkway connected House & Senate wings before British soldiers fired the Capitol in 1814.

The Representatives moved first (1801) into a one story oval hall quickly

In January 1810 the Senate took over the top part of the West Chamber, and the Supreme Court (7 members) took over the ground floor. Also, Congress established a Library of Congress and provided one room in the the new Capitol for it.

In 1812, on June 18th Congress declared war on Great Britain. In the summer of 1814 a British Squadron under Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn landed troops on Maryland's Patuxent shore. On August 24th British troops were ordered to "destroy and lay waste" to the new Capitol, thus most of Washington's public buildings were set afire. This act incensed Americans and shamed many Britons, in their paper appeared "The Cossacks spared Paris, but we spared not the Capitol of America."

Latrobe replaced the gutted wood with marble, brick and metal.

Letter From the Editors

We would like to thank those who share our enthusiasm for the new form we introduced to the newsletter. Now titled Stratford Historical Society>>UPDATE, we have tried to make it more informative and enjoyable. The following quote is from a letter received from Elizabeth Gullander, a life member of the Historical Society, now living in Palm Desert, California.

“If I sound a bit homesick for Stratford, I suppose I always will be. I was born in Stratford in 1917 and have a head filled with scenes and happenings of my years there. I was born at Sniffen’s Point where my father had 36 acres of prime farm land which reached half way from the river, along Sniffen’s Lane, towards Main Street - long before Igor Sikorsky built his aircraft factory at the west end of the lane. My ancestors were also Birdseyes (of the street and school) and on my mother’s side, Todds and Lovells.” She also states that her mother was a librarian at the Stratford Library for many decades until her death in 1955.

The newsletter is published five times a year and mailed to about 380 members and associates, of which 50 are posted to members out of state and Canada. We welcome all comments and suggestions and appreciate your continued support of the Society.

Editors: Marie Blake
Diane Wright

Don't mind criticism. If it is untrue...disregard it: if it is unfair...don't let it irritate you; if it is ignorant.... smile; if it is justified... learn from it.

Stratford Historical Society

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