
Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

Volume IV Issue 5

May
~~March~~ 2000



Capt. David Judson House c 1750
Catharine B. Mitchell Museum

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday May 19, 2000 - 7:30pm

Christ Episcopal Church
2000 Main Street, Stratford

THE JACKSON PIKE SKIFFLERS

“Traditional music upon which no moss shall gather”

BUT JUST WHAT IS A SKIFFLER?

Sometime in the early twentieth century, this stonecutters' term came to be applied to groups of musicians who improvised on popular tunes of the day, or made up their own, using an array of makeshift instruments.



The Jackson Pike Skifflers' name is derived from the Jackson Pike, the old name for Sport Hill Road in Easton where band founders Will and Katie Tressler lived at the time.

For more than 25 years, the Skifflers have performed on radio and television and in concerts all over the country, including at Lincoln Center in New York City. Their instruments range from guitar, cello, bass and fiddle to seldom heard and unusual like gut bucket, penny whistle, squeeze box, autoharp, dulcimer and cane.

The Group perform songs and tunes from bygone days, country and other vernacular (generally classified as “folk”) music from 1800-1950; minstrel show, vaudeville, jazz, jug band, blues and popular tunes. Tonight's performance will include New England and southern country dance music based on English, Irish, Scottish and French Canadian tunes from about 1750-on, resulting in an abundance of traditional ballads, pub songs, jigs, reels, hornpipes and the like.

Everyone can enjoy the somehow-familiar spirit of the old-time music.

**The meeting is open to the public and refreshments will be served
Bring a Friend**

Melody is a form of remembrance. . . It must have a quality of inevitability in our ears.

Gian Carlo
Menotti

Remember:
Giant Tag Sale
June 3, 2000

Vice-President Todd Lovell

Major improvements have taken place since the Society's last Newsletter. A new, badly needed, burglar and fire alarm system has been installed in the Judson House and Museum. Our old system was 26 years old and on several occasions, when activated, received no response from the former alarm company.

Security screens have been installed on the museum windows making forced entry much more difficult.

Don't forget - Volunteers are badly needed for all aspects of the Stratford Historical Society's operation. A few hours or more per week, especially during the summer season would help greatly. Help is needed with the Children's History camp. We are hoping to have a Bake Sale on the day of the Tag Sale and volunteers will be needed to coordinate this effort. If you are interested in working on this sale please call the office. This would be a great time to get acquainted with other members of the Society and learn more about us.

Have a good Summer - our next Newsletter will be in September.

Spring Tag Sale

We are looking forward to fine weather again on **Stratford Day, June 3rd** when the grounds of Judson House will be ready to welcome many guests. The Junior Historical Society will be participating, in costume, demonstrating weaving and guiding visitors, among other duties. There will be re-enactors demonstrating skills of the 1700's, a potter, spinner and musicians to entertain. Our **GIANT TAG SALE** will have items of interest to everyone. This is where you may find that collectible you have been searching for, or where you may donate a collection that is no longer of interest to you.

If you have items that you would care to add to the sale please leave them at the office any Tuesday or Thursday from 9 to 2 or call for pickup at 378-0630

We are not accepting books but all salable items are welcome: glassware, brass, jewelry, pictures and picture frames, brick-brac, baskets and china, etc. Admission is free. This is an activity for the entire family.



New Exhibits

Members and Visitors who pass through Judson House and the Catharine B. Mitchell Museum this season will be pleased to see several new exhibits.

Thanks to Todd Lovell, the Historical Society has a new acquisition in the Duck Decoy exhibit. A Black Duck by the famous Stratford Carver, Benjamin Holmes (1843-1912). A rare and valuable addition to our collection.

Marie Kubic has created a fascinating display of hats from the Society's collection dating from 1900 through the end of the Century. Along with the very colorful display of hats are handbags and gloves.

Diane Matthews and Sandy Rutkowski are transforming the museum alcove into a Victorian lady's boudoir. Our "lady" is dressing for the evening. Her many "unmentionables" are arrayed for her selection.

The Society is very pleased to be able to show these items from our extensive collection of artifacts, but would not be able to do this without the help of the above members who have contributed so many hours to complete these projects.

Every year the Society is pleased to welcome visitors from many parts of the United States as well as foreign countries. Consider bringing your summer guests to view Judson House and enjoy the new exhibits along with them.

Book of Remembrance

The following contributions have been made in memory of:

Thomas Bradbury

By: Carol & Todd Lovell, Gloria Duggan
Margaret Jacaruso, Connie & Hiram Tindall
Henry W. Bradbury, B.J. Calkins
Catherine Moore, Carolyn & Robert Marairz
Harold C. Lovell, Sr.

By: Mr. & Mrs. Harold C. Lovell, Jr.

Gift of Clothing

The Stratford Historical Society has received a gift of 19th Century clothing from the Estate of Elsie Kaeser. The donation was made by members of her Stratford family.

The items will be evaluated and properly cataloged.

*Thieves respect property.
They merely wish to
become their
property that they may
more perfectly respect it.*

G.K. Chesterton



Stratford Center
2414 Main Street
The David L. Len Laundry
C. 1913-1915



Around 1932 the Len Laundry became the
SNOW WHITE LAUNDRY
Richard Lutters is the driver



In 1990 former Superintendent of Schools Walter Dunbar greeted the Len sisters, their brother and families when they attended a reunion in Stratford. They are standing in front of the old Center School, now the Board of Education, where all five Len children attended.
Standing are: Ruth, Lucy, June, Thuey Fong and Edwin.

Life in the 1500's

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and were still smelling pretty good by June. However, they were starting to be fragrant, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers.

Baths equaled a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Houses had thatched roofs. Thick straw, piled high, with no wood underneath, it was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the pets...dogs, cats and other small animals, mice, rats, bugs lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying, "It's raining cats and dogs."

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could really mess up your nice clean bed. So, they found if they made beds with big posts and hung a sheet over the top, it addressed that problem. Hence "those beautiful big four poster beds with canopies."

The floor was dirt, only the wealthy had something other than dirt, hence the saying "dirt poor." The wealthy had slate floors which got slippery in the winter when wet. So they spread thresh on the floor to help keep their footing, as the winter wore on they kept adding more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside, a piece of wood was placed at the entry way, hence a "thresh hold."

They cooked in the kitchen in a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They mostly ate vegetables and didn't get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes the stew had food in it that had been in there for a month. Hence the rhyme: peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old."

Sometimes they could obtain pork and would feel special when that happened. When company came over, they would bring out some bacon and hang it to show off. It was a sign of wealth and that a man "could really bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with a high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food. This happened most often with tomatoes, so they stopped eating tomatoes...for 400 years.

Most people didn't have pewter plates, but had trenchers - a piece of wood with the middle scooped out like a bowl. Trenchers were never washed and a lot of times worms got into the wood. After eating off wormy trenchers, they would get "trench mouth."

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or the "upper crust."

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around to eat, drink and wait to see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a "wake."

England is old and small, and they started running out of places to bury people. So, they would dig up the coffins and take the bones to a house and reuse the grave. In reopening these coffins, one out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they thought they would tie a string on the wrist of the dead person and lead it through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night to listen for the bell. Hence on the "Graveyard shift" they would know that someone was "saved by the bell" or he was a "dead ringer."



The Naming of the Towns

The geographical nomenclature of a newly settled country reflects truthfully the spirit and tastes of the people, or of their governors, who have the naming of the new "concentrations" and land divisions. It is very interesting to compare the names of Connecticut towns and counties with those, for example, of Massachusetts. On the map of the Bay State we have a panorama of the political history of England. One finds not only the names of English royalty, good and bad, wise and foolish, but also of royalty's favorites, mistresses, places of residence, gentile connections and precedents. From the names of Massachusetts towns, one could write as in an illuminated commentary the story of British kings for a century and a half.

On the contrary, in Connecticut, the most democratic of all the thirteen colonies, one will find on the map no name suggesting king, queen or royal favorite, unless perchance it be one like that of Windsor. This, indeed, recalls the seat of a palace; but then it was given by emigrants from Massachusetts. The Connecticut names were born on the soil, transferred from redmen, borrowed from the Bible, Anglicized or, as in the case of Housatonic, *Indianized* from the Dutch, who were the first white explorers, or they are reminiscences of ancestral seats, of historic incidents, or indexes of first impressions.

The New England Magazine
September, 1897

To have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have done great things together; to wish to do greater; these are the essential conditions which make up a people.

The Revolt of the Masses

Stratford Historical Society

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Stratford Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting

June 26, 2000 - 7:30 pm

Catharine B. Mitchell Museum

All members of the Society are Welcome to Attend

Please call 378-0630 for information