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# Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

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Volume V Issue 2

November 2000

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

## NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday December 1, 2000 - 7:30pm

Christ Episcopal Church  
2000 Main Street, Stratford

**“When Did It Begin To Look A Lot Like  
Christmas?”**

**Lisa Broberg Quintana**

**The Stratford Historical Society will host a slide  
lecture on The History of Christmas Observances in  
New England**

*Yes, Virginia,  
There is a Santa  
Claus. He Exists as  
certainly as love and  
generosity and devo-  
tion exist.*

*Francis Church  
New York Times*

*Heap on more  
wood-  
the wind is chill;  
But let it whistle  
as it will,  
We'll keep our  
Christmas merry  
still.  
Sir Walter Scott*

In the “good old days” of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Christmas, at least Christmas as we know it today, was not observed in New England. Only in the last half of the nineteenth century did many of our familiar Christmas icons appear. The Society is pleased to offer a slide lecture by Lisa Broberg Quintana on the History of Christmas Observances in New England. The lecture traces the development of Christmas observances from the seventeenth century to the 1960’s.

Ms. Quintana developed this slide lecture after completing research for the Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich. The Historical Society wished to decorate each of their rooms to a different period from the eighteenth century to the 1950’s. Ms. Quintana searched historical societies, looking at diaries, letters and photographs, as well as secondary sources, to document the changing attitudes toward Christmas.

Ms. Quintana holds a master’s degree in Colonial American History from the College of William and Mary, with a certificate in Museum Interpretation and Administration—a program co-sponsored by Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. She came to Connecticut in 1981 as the director of the Middlesex County Historical Society in Middletown and the Historical Society of Glastonbury. She was the curator of the Wethersfield Historical Society from 1987-1990, and the Curator of the New Haven Colony Historical Society from 1990-1993. Presently, she is a free-lance lecturer and museum consultant, mother of Margaret, age 6, and co-authoring a book on quilting with Susan Varanka.

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

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## Vice President Todd Lovell

Since the last newsletter your SHS has had a wonderful series of successes. The Early American Festival was outstanding with high attendance, great weather, and excellent crafters and re-enactors. The food was great too!

Our Stratford Decoy Exhibit has been enhanced with the addition of a Black Duck Decoy by William Bentley of Stratford. Bentley carved during the period of Roswell Bliss, Shang Wheeler, Willard Baldwin, and C. Ralph Wells. If any members have decoys the SHS would be pleased to see them. A tax donation would be available should they be donated.

Two beautiful Coin Silver Spoons by Stratford Silversmith John Benjamin working 1725-1773 and monogrammed "BM" were added to our collection. Come and see these very rare additions.

A set of "A History of Stratford and Bridgeport" by The Rev. Samuel Orcutt, First Edition, signed by both the author and original owner Richard C Ambler, who purchased them on April 7, 1887 for \$3.50 per volume, has also been added to the collection.

Memberships both new and renewal are coming in. Please ask a friend to join.

Dave Guion is writing a regular column in the Stratford Star with his focus on the Judson House and the Historical Society. Don't miss it - its Great

Our on-going "Tag Sale" has been an outstanding success. We are in need of more donations of things you no longer need but feel would be of value to others. We need fresh stock when we resume the sale in the Spring. You may drop items off at the office on Tuesday or Thursday 9-2, or if you call the office at 378-0630 we will be glad to pickup your items.

## Christmas Gathering at Judson House

In 1750 when Captain David Judson and his family resided at Judson House, Christmas was not a day for celebration, religious custom forbid it. December 25th was considered as any other day. It was not until the mid 1800's that indoor decorations began to appear. Candles, toys and sweets along with strings of popcorn and berries were used. It is in this spirit that Judson House will be decorated for the Christmas Season this year. Our lovely colonial will be adorned in a festive manner when guests are welcomed on Sunday, December 9th from noon to 4 P.M.

Visitors can mingle with Docents, Jr. Historical Society Members and Re-enactors who will be portraying seasonal activities. For our Guests enjoyment, "The Hearthside Waits" will be performing 18th Century music and holiday selections. Free cider will be available to all as well.

We know you will want to visit our Gift Shop where many unusual and unique items have been added just in time for your holiday shopping.

Co-Chairmen Diane Matthews and Sandy Rutkowski would welcome the assistance of anyone who might help in the decorating on December 8th. Also, the donation of greens or holiday decorations will be appreciated. For any information concerning the Gathering please call the office at 378-0630.

**NOTE: The Gift Shop will be open for extended hours during Dec as follows: Fri.-Dec 8th 10-1: Sat-Dec 9th 12-4: Sun-Dec 10th 12-3: Mon-Dec 11th 10-1: Sat-Dec 16th 12-3: Sun-Dec 17th 12-3.**



**ATTENTION:** Jr. Society Members and parents, have you signed up to help at the Festival on December 9th? We will need all of you to make this a successful event again this year.

## Political Campaigns From Mudslinging to Acceptance Speeches

The Campaign is over, the election past, leaving some hurtful things in the midst that will take a long time to heal among all the candidates. Mudslinging is not new in our political scene, in fact it goes back to the time of our first president. I know that is hard for us now to believe, but unfortunately it is true. In fact, George Washington may have refused to run for a fourth term because of it. He was accused of stealing from the Treasury, of legal corruption, treachery, and being the "dishcloth of dirty speculation." These were very strong, harsh things to say back in the 1700's. Franklin even said, "If a nation was debauched by a man, the American nation was debauched by a man, the American nation was debauched by Washington."

Rivals claimed that James Buchanan bore the scar of an unsuccessful hanging. Actually the angle and twist of his neck was due to a birth injury, but a good many people latched on to and ran with the hanging story.

Andy Jackson tried to smear the straight-laced John Q. Adams by contending that the pool table he purchased from his own funds was simply for the "Royal" extravagance of gambling.

Theodore Roosevelt was anxious to go to war with Spain. So when President McKinley noticeably hedged on the issue, Teddy chided him with having the "backbone of a chocolate éclair."

When a story circulated that President Adams had sent Gen. Pinckney to England to get four pretty mistresses for them, 2 each, John Adams "declared upon his honor that Pinckney had kept them all to himself and cheated me out of my two."

And, the "buck stops here" Harry Truman said of Nixon, "I would never call Nixon a son of a bitch because he claims to be a self made man."

As for "Killer Speeches" how about the acceptance speech of William Henry Harrison's inaugural address, it was so long and wordy at 8578 words (this was after Daniel Webster had shortened it) that cold January day that it led directly to a cold that turned to pneumonia from which he never recovered. He had refused to wear a coat or a hat that day, and then attended 3 balls in his honor until the wee hours of the morning. He died one month after taking office. Yes, it was a killer of a speech.

Another noteworthy acceptance speech was that of Millard Fillmore. He picked up president elect Franklin Pierce in a blizzard in an open touring car. Pierce took the oath of office before a large crowd during a slight lull in the blizzard. Pierce then proceeded to begin his lengthy acceptance speech, as the Northeast wind began to blow and the snow came driving back in. The speech was more than 3000 words long of which he had memorized every word. It is the only time a president gave an inaugural speech without notes. By the time he finished that blizzard was again raging in full force causing the parade to be canceled.

Then another of the great inaugural speeches was by Warren Harding, who in the midst of his speech professed, "I don't believe what I just read." As he stumbled over one passage after another, pausing, then finally admitting to the audience "I never saw this before, I didn't write this speech." How's that for a president-elect being on top of things?

*President Roosevelt is no crusader. He is no tribune of the people. He is no enemy of entrenched privilege. He is a pleasant man who, without any important qualifications for the office, would very much like to be President.*

*Walter Lippman*

## The Story of the Charter Oak

The people of Connecticut have always regarded the charter secured under Governor Winthrop from Charles II of England in 1662 as one of their most precious inheritances. Charles II died in 1685 and his brother James became King. During the first year of his reign James took away the charter from Massachusetts and Rhode Island and demanded the Connecticut charter. The King planned to organize New England under one general government. In this way, several colonies would be better able to defend themselves against the Dutch, French and Indians. Connecticut was alarmed. Governor Treat and the general assembly hoped to find some way to continue under the precious charter.

On December 19, 1686, Sir Edmund Andros arrived in Boston. He was well known in Connecticut having often visited as Governor of New York. He came as Governor-in-Chief of all New England. Connecticut was ordered in the name of James II to resign her charter at once, if she failed to do this, all western Connecticut was to be annexed to New York and the rest of the State joined to Massachusetts. A reply was forwarded begging to retain the charter if the King were willing, but if not, they must submit to his will. The charter, however, was not sent to Andros.

On October 26, 1687 Governor Andros attended by 70 soldiers left Boston and traveled to Hartford to obtain the charter and assume authority over Connecticut. Upon arrival he ordered the King's commission to be read, this appointed him Governor of all New England including Connecticut. He then demanded the charter. After a long and earnest debate the charter was produced and laid on the clerk's table. Governor Treat gave a long and eloquent speech for the liberties of the people of Connecticut, evening came and townspeople gathered outside the building. Two large candles were lighted and the windows were opened to let in cool air and allow those outside to see and hear the proceedings. Sir Edmund replied "even though you yield reluctantly, still you must yield to the will of the King." At that moment Assemblyman Andrew Leete, a man in poor health, arose pointed to the charter and spoke. "That charter is in force at this hour. No Judgement has been rendered against it. Remember the last words of King Charles I," that measures obtained by force do not endure." He fell unconscious on the table, upsetting both lights, not to recover for more than half an hour. The charter, however, had disappeared. In the darkness Nathaniel Stanley handed the charter through the open window to Captain Joseph Wadsworth who carried it to the Great Oak, wrapped it in his tunic and hid it in the hollow of the famous tree now known as the Charter Oak. Andros saw that he had been tricked, expressed sorrow at the unfortunate incident, then announced that the government of Connecticut, under the royal charter, was at an end. The government under Andros was arbitrary and tyrannical. He put an end to the liberty of the press; he made young couples give him a heavy bond for the privilege of being married and would not permit clergymen to perform the marriage ceremony; made widows and children go to Boston to settle the estates of their deceased; he taxed the people heavily at his own pleasure and without their consent.

In 1688 William, Prince of Orange, ascended the throne of England and James II fled to France. In April, 1689, the glad news of the coming of William reached Boston and people gathered to express their hatred of Andros and his followers. In Connecticut the joy was not less great. Andros was arrested and put in prison, now New England and Connecticut were free once more.

The great oak, now called the Charter Oak, has become famous in story and song. The Indian sachem, Sequassen, said an ancient tradition reported the tree to have been planted as an emblem of peace by a great sachem who long ago led his people from the land of the setting sun to the Connecticut valley. For many generations the Indians had planted their corn when the leaves on the old oak boughs were the size of a mouse's ear. It was a very old tree when the royal charter was hidden in its hollow trunk by Joseph Wadsworth. The tree fell on August 21, 1856, eight hundred years old, they say. A guard was placed about it, the American flag was placed on it and Colt's band of Hartford played a dirge. Just at sunset the bells of Hartford tolled as when a great man dies.

The wood from the tree was very carefully saved. Three chairs have been made from the wood. One is in the capitol at Hartford and is called the Governor's chair. The second chair is in the Colt Memorial in Hartford, and the third chair is in the library of the Connecticut Historical Society. The story of the Charter Oak is perpetuated in granite on the east front of the capitol building in Hartford, and has been told the world over.

Source: *The Story of Connecticut*  
Lewis S. Mills - 1932



Chair made from the Charter Oak now in the Library of the Connecticut Historical Society

## South Main Street Widening Now Fully Assured - Will be 60 Feet

The Stratford News  
September 12, 1913

Property Owners have all agreed to  
give necessary land.

The plan to widen South Main Street which has been so long under consideration will be an assured fact. This announcement will be good news to the whole town and it reflects great credit on the promoters and to the property owners who have donated land along the entire road to accomplish this result. The improvement will be worth \$10,000 to the town at the lowest estimate.

Commodore E. H. Beers, of Stratford Avenue has long been interested in the project and through his persistent efforts the matter has been brought to a successful conclusion. Several meetings have been held in the last two weeks and at the last one held all the property owners agreed to a plan by which the road will be at least 60 feet between fences the whole distance from the junction of Elm Street and Lordship Manor. The property owners will give a deed to the town necessary to accomplish this result and the strips will vary from 5 to 12 feet in width.

At a previous Town Meeting the sum of \$2500 was appropriated to be used to widen the road to 70 feet, however, a survey of the proposed lines developed the fact that a uniform width of 70 feet would necessitate the moving of three houses. The owners naturally objected. Another line was surveyed which satisfied everyone interested and the agreement was reached.

The Connecticut Co. has a charter to traverse South Main St. to Lordship Manor and is confident that cars will be running on the line next summer..

## Officers Elected for Year 2000-2001

The Nominating Committee of the Stratford Historical Society presented the slate of officers for the year 2000-2001. The list of those to be considered was published along with the September Newsletter. An election ballot was also sent to all of our members at that time and we wish to thank you for promptly returning your ballots. This procedure was a new experience and we are very pleased with the results. The slate as presented was accepted by all.

We would like more of our members to be active in the society and invite you to join us at any time. Stratford has a very interesting history.

## Book of Remembrance

The following contributions have been made in memory of:

### **JAMES B. SPAMER**

Bill & Karen Phipps  
Marianne Cooley  
Elizabeth P. Applegate  
Meredith Rogers Cherland  
Mr. & Mrs. Hiram Tindall  
Atty: John L. Dodd  
Mr. & Mrs. M. Boyd Brown  
B.J. Calkins

### **MRS. SELMA DOBKIN**

Mr. & Mrs. Hiram Tindall  
Mrs. Elizabeth Applegate

### **RICHARD E. BLAKE**

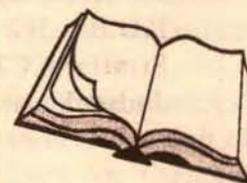
Mr. & Mrs. Hiram Tindall  
Mrs. Elizabeth Applegate

### **FRANK KALAFUS**

Ms. Margaret Jacaruso

### **MRS. LILLIAN LARSON**

Mrs. Elizabeth Applegate  
Mrs. Zaida T. June



### Unusual -Sounding Names of Old Stratford and Ripton

The name of a man is a numbing blow from which he never recovers.

Marshall McHulan

Conclusion!  
You can pick your friends, but you can't pick your relatives.

Zalmon Lyon  
Asenath Prout  
Azariah Odell  
Experience Sherwood  
Peninnah Seeley  
Tryphena Strong  
Tertullus Stevenson  
Onesimus Hubbell  
Spidon Fairchild  
Freegrace Adams  
Selah Shelton  
Balmerine Judd  
Ranson Porter  
Zelman Smith  
Blagg Clark

Granderson Hubbell  
Prosper Shelton  
Durelia Wheeler  
Amaizah Downs  
Menzes Freeman

#### From other New England Records:

Comfort Vine            Sally Box  
Zenas Graves            Tilly Minching  
Zabiel Ropes            Zerushaddi Key  
Hannah Teatta        Titherming Layton  
Jolley Allen            Engrossed Bump  
Bathsheba Spalding  
Noca Emmons  
Elam Noyes

W.S. Lawson - 1964

## Stratford Historical Society

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**Stratford Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting**  
**December 18, - 7:30 pm**  
**Catharine B. Mitchell Museum**  
**All members of the Society are Welcome to Attend**  
**Please call 378-0630 for information**