
Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

Volume V Issue 3

January 2001



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

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday January 26, 2001 - 7:30pm

Christ Episcopal Church
2000 Main Street, Stratford

NOSTALGIA THROUGH THE MAIL

The Story of the Picture Post Card

Robert L. Berthelson

*Get what you can,
and what you get
hold;*

*Tis the Stone that
will turn all your
Lead into Gold.*

*Poor Richard's
Almanack*

The first commercially produced picture post cards in the United States went on sale May 1, 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. By 1906, the post card industry had grown so rapidly that in the United States over 770 million cards were mailed and by 1913 the volume had grown to almost one billion.

Between 1905 and 1910, the album of favorite post cards was a popular item on the drawing room table of many homes. The hobby of collecting these cards is now enjoying new popularity thanks to those who saved these treasures with their other prized possessions.

Mr. Berthelson's program will provide a cross section view of the history and variety of the picture post card in the United States. His topics will include pioneer post cards, advertising, local views, expositions, special events, comics, collector's sets, educational cards, publishers, holiday greetings, signed artists and novelties. The program combines two projectors with a unique image blending technique to provide special effects and to illustrate the unusual novelty and mechanical post cards of the period.

Robert Berthelson of Trumbull, a professional photographer with a life long interest in American History and nostalgia, has been a post card collector since 1945. In 1954 he helped organize the Connecticut Post Card Club and served as its president and editor. His article "Cards With A Flip, Wiggle and a Twist" describing mechanical post cards appeared in Yankee Magazine. Mr. Berthelson has presented programs to over 900 audiences in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York including libraries, schools, historical societies, social groups, retirement communities, and other organizations.



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

President John Calhoun

The Junior Historical Society sponsored our Holiday Open House in December. Junior members made beautiful decorations for the Judson House and again demonstrated their skills as docents. They showed visitors how Stratford families lived in the 18th and 19th centuries. Weaving demonstrations, musical entertainment, and a big bake sale rounded out the day. Visitors were enthusiastic about our new Gift Shop items. The shop enjoyed one of its best days ever.

We are planning a sprucing up of Judson House. It has been many years since the house was painted inside or out. Todd Lovell has contracted for repair and painting of several interior areas. The work will be completed during the winter. We are hoping to have some outside work done in the Spring.

The Society has been working with the Perry House committee to develop support and suitable uses for the Perry House and property. Recommendations are being sought from many Stratford groups. Sterling House directors have shown particular interest. Perry House may provide needed space for Sterling House classroom activities.

Memorial Gift

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Hoctor have donated an intercom system to be used between Judson House and the Catharine B. Mitchell Museum. The gift is in memory of Mrs. Jean Wilcoxson who served as a docent at Judson House for many years.

Judson House Visitors

A total of 149 visitors came to Judson House during the past season. They were graciously shown the many historical artifacts and special features of the house as well as guided through the museum by Dolores Hoctor, David Guion, Selma Clark and Louis Petriel as well as Betty Johnson and Jean Miles until their recent retirement.

Sixty Volunteers spent a total of 185 hours greeting the visitors to Judson House and Mrs. Betty Applegate, Chairman of Hosts and Hostesses, contributed over 48 hours.

Connecticut 91

Stratford 55	Meriden 2
Shelton 6	Monroe 2
Bridgeport 4	Ansonia 1
Fairfield 4	Naugatuck 1
Milford 3	No. Branford 1
No. Haven 1	Norwalk 3
Wallingford 1	Orange 3
Madison 2	W. Hartford 1
Westport 1	

Other States 58

Alaska 1	California 5
Florida 3	Georgia 1
Illinois 2	Indiana 3
Louisiana 2	Maine 3
Maryland 1	Massachusetts 5
Minnesota 4	Montana 1
New Jersey 7	New York 7
Ohio 2	Pennsylvania 3
Texas 4	Virginia 2
Washington 2	

*It is not the weight of
jewel or plate
Or the fondle of silk
or fur,
Tis the spirit in which
the gift is rich
As gifts of the wise
men were,
And we are not told
whose gift was gold,
Or whose was the gift
of myrrh.
Edmund Vance Cook-
The Spirit of the Gift*

The Stratford News-June 3, 1938
For the first time Stratford women have been selected as possible jurors. Of 133 electors submitted to the Superior Court for duty thirty-six are women.

SUSAN ELIZABETH FREEMAN

ARMY NURSE

The S.S. James E. Parker, a former luxury liner now converted into a transport ship, was heading toward Africa through rough waters as part of a Convoy. Carrying mail, food and ammunition there was also aboard doctors, soldiers and the first black unit of military nurses to be sent overseas during World War II. Susan Freeman of Connecticut, was the Chief Nurse of the unit. To have been appointed head of this groundbreaking group of women was a great honor, but a fitting climax to her years of service in the profession.

Born in Stratford, Connecticut to Susie and William Freeman she grew up at 1433 Stratford Avenue. Susan attended Stratford High School graduating in 1921. She was active in sports during her school years but in her senior year was stricken with diphtheria which nearly proved fatal, but she recovered in time to graduate with her class.

Her determination since childhood to become a nurse never wavered and in 1923, she entered Freedmen's Hospital Training School for Nurses in Washington, D.C. completing the required three-year course. She did post-graduate work at Columbia University in New York City, and at Howard and Catholic Universities in Washington, D.C. Her patients found her sensitive and understanding as well as professional and her nursing career proved very rewarding.

On April 23, 1941, Susan began her army career as a second lieutenant. Assigned to Camp Livingston, Louisiana she encountered segregation when traveling by rail. Negroes could not ride Pullman in the South. When the Conductor showed her to her berth at "Lower 13" she discovered to her amazement that it was a private room. This was one instance where the separate but equal doctrine had its advantages. Negro nurses were new to Camp Livingston. Susan was the second to arrive, and others appeared daily creating much excitement in the camp. At first, all nurses were assigned to a single area, but it was not long before they were segregated. New quarters were built and they, along with Negro doctors, were assigned to wards where there were Negro patients only. Upon receiving her commission as a first lieutenant, she became the first nurse, Negro or white, to receive a promotion at Camp Livingston.

She was then assigned to Fort Huachuca as chief nurse and was given only 10 days to train for this position. Her orders, as well as those of the other Negro nurses again called for Pullman accommodations and again were ignored, they were told to take seats in the day coach. When Lieutenant Freeman said she would not travel this way her colonel sent for her. She asked him one question: "have you ever ridden in a day coach that Negroes ride in down South?" The nurses were given Pullman accommodations and to make certain there would be no trouble, two federal agents rode in the same car.

At Fort Huachuca, 11 nurses including Lieutenant Freeman were to care for 700 patients in the completely disorganized hospital. It was her job to see that wards were established and that a full quota of nurses was assigned to the camp. She soon had a staff of 110 nurses, and the number of beds for patients had increased to 1000. The hospital was running smoothly when she received her "sealed orders for overseas." Arriving in Casablanca, the nurses were immediately sent to the hospital in Liberia. Accommodations were wooden buildings with no screens, 19 of the 30 nurses in the unit contracted malaria and two had to be sent back to the United States. Nursing was not confined to the hospital alone, a call from an outpost would send one or two nurses to administer first-aid or to bring back any men in need of hospitalization. Susan Freeman remained in Liberia for almost a year. While there, she and eight other nurses received a unit commendation, dated November 8, 1943, from the office of the Commanding General and stated in part "these nurses have clearly demonstrated fidelity to duty, a sense of responsibility, and understanding of their positions as officers that is well above the average." A copy was sent to the Surgeon-General of the U.S. Army in Washington.

In December, 1943 Susan returned to the United States and was reassigned to Camp Livingston, with the rank of captain. Upon arrival she was elated to find that the camp was now completely integrated. In 1944, she received a citation as Knight Official of the Order of African Redemption from the Liberian Government. The following year, she received the Mary Mahoney Award for service to the American Red Cross during the Ohio-Mississippi Flood of 1937 and for commanding the first unit of Negro nurses overseas.

On July 31, 1945 shortly before the end of the war, she was retired from the army with an honorable discharge. Upon returning to her home in Stratford, she engaged in a wide variety of civic and religious activities.

Susan Elizabeth Freeman died on September 22, 1979 in the West Haven Veterans Hospital. She was a dedicated humanist and Christian whose motto was "to maintain and perpetuate Christian ideals and beliefs to the best of my ability."



Nurse Susan Freeman pioneered the way for black women officers in the Army Nursing Corps, when she became the first to make captain.

Merely Three-fifths of a Person

*Is life so dear, or
peace so sweet, as to
be purchased at the
price of chains and
slavery? Forbid it.
Almighty God! — I
know not what course
others may take, but
as for me, give me
liberty, or give me
death!*

Patrick Henry



Slavery: Without it there would be no America, no nation dedicated to liberty and equality. This was the paradox faced by delegates to the Constitutional Convention. The southern states had made it clear that they would not join the Union if slavery was not accepted. And although abolitionist sentiment was strong in the North, pragmatism and politics dictated brutal compromise. As a result, it would take civil war and 175 years to correct the injustices incorporated into the new Constitution.

The very language of the Constitution reflects the convention's spirit of compromise. Nowhere in the document is the word slavery found. But the continuation of the system was provided for in three separate passages.

ARTICLE I, SECTION 2 - Spelled out the formula for determining each state's popular representation in the lower house of Congress: Count all free persons, exclude Indians not taxed, then add "three fifths of all other persons." Thus a compromise was struck between the South, which wanted slaves counted for the sake of representation, and the North, which wanted them excluded.

ARTICLE I, SECTION 9 - Stated that the importation "of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit" would be permitted until 1808. Thus the South conceded in return that the slave trade would end after 20 years-as it did.

ARTICLE IV, SECTION 2 - Prevented a "Person held to Service or Labour in one State" from escaping his bondage by moving to another state. Known as the fugitive slave clause, this was the Constitution's most effective protection of the institution of slavery.

In the first half of the 19th century what rights the black slave had, if any, were at the discretion of local authority. As to the small population of free blacks, who lived mostly in the North, the situation varied from state to state. In New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and most of New England some even had the right to vote before 1820, but gradually the status of free blacks degenerated to that of noncitizen. The Supreme Court made this official with the Dred Scott decision in 1857.

Scott was a slave whose suit to gain freedom went to the nation's highest court. In delivering the majority opinion, Chief Justice Roger Taney not only rejected Scott's plea but stated that the Constitution was written only for whites and that blacks, even free blacks, could never be citizens.

The decision was met with cries of protest from the North and of approval from the South. The foundation of compromise upon which the Constitution had been built began to crumble and civil war ensued. The emancipation Proclamation of 1863 freed slaves in the seceding states only; until the war was over, it had no practical effect. In 1865 the 13th Amendment ended slavery once and for all in the United States.

In 1868 Justice Taney's interpretation of the Constitution was nullified by the 14th Amendment, which endured full rights of citizenship to "All persons born or naturalized in the United States." The right of citizens to vote regardless of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude" was guaranteed in 1870 by the 15th Amendment.

Finally, in 1964, the 24th Amendment abolished the poll tax, making it clear that "WE THE PEOPLE" means ALL the people.

Taken from "Strange Stories, Amazing Facts of America's Past."

*"My definition
of a free society is a
society where it is
safe to be unpopu-
lar."*

Adlai Stevenson

The Autobiography of Aunt Hagar Merriman

"My Grandparents were brought from Africa, and sold as Slaves in New Milford, they were brought from Madagascar, caught while running on the sand banks, searching for gold. When taken, they had bands of gold on their wrists and ankles, of rough manufacture."

According to Town Historian, Lewis Knapp, Aunt Hagar's memoir is special, providing a vivid description of town life in the 1790's. It was from her story that preservationists were able to determine that red was the original color of Judson House.

Aunt Hagar Merriman was probably born about 1805. She was sold, along with her mother to a Mrs. Lovejoy of Stratford by a woman named Mrs. Brown of New Haven. "Mrs. Brown was not willing to sell me too," Aunt Hagar wrote, "but my mother said she would spill her last drop of blood but that I should go with her." Although treated better than field slaves in the South, her early years were not ideal but she got proper care and a better education that enabled her to write her story in 1861.

Mrs. Lovejoy was the wife of Ezekiel Lovejoy, who owned a tavern in Stratford, an important stop on the stagecoach line. Mrs. Lovejoy lived across from William Samuel Johnson, one of Stratford's leading figures, a friend of George Washington and a signer of the U.S. Constitution. Aunt Hagar probably saw a lot of important people when she was growing up.

Scholars consider Aunt Hagar's book a very valuable writing as there are few autobiographies of black women written before the Civil War. It is also valuable because it is about the North. Most accounts were written by escaped slaves from the South.

Assistant Curator, Carol Lovell, has meticulously copied Aunt Hagar's complete autobiography and copies are being printed. The finished book will be available for sale in the near future.

Historical Society Weavers

Mr. Philip Allen, an experienced weaver, joined the Society's weaving group last summer. Along with volunteering his time Mr. Allen has offered valuable advice concerning projects the group may undertake. He has also helped in warping the floor looms. The antique loom has been prepared for the weaving of a stair carpet which, when complete, will replace a worn runner in Judson House. The group needs woolen remnants for the weft and would appreciate the donation of wool clothing or yardage suitable for this project.

Ms Joanne DiMenno, also a new member, worked on a huck piece during the summer which is now almost complete.

A modern table loom was warped and participants at the summer History Camp, who were interested, were given instructions and allowed to weave samples. The loom is also available for use by the Junior Society members. Towels were woven on a modern floor loom and are on sale in the Society's Gift Shop.

There is a wide variety of looms available for many projects and we welcome anyone interested, whether or not you have weaving experience.

If you have fabric to donate or would like to become involved in a weavers' group at the Society, please call the office at 378-0630. The office hours are: Tuesday and Thursday from 9am to 2pm.

Judson House will again be open for visitors in the Spring.

Weaver William Wilcoxson and tailor Richard Harvie, two of the earliest settlers, were skilled workers of cloth. At first these craftsmen had to wield hoes and axes with other settlers, and taught their skills with fabrics to others in their spare time. With population growth, the planters grew both hemp and flax, and raised sheep for wool. The women spent long hours at their spinning wheels to create strands of yarn, and often itinerant weavers or resident craftsmen wove the cloth. From earliest times, cotton was brought home from the Caribbean islands to be woven into cloth.

In Pursuit of Paradise

"When I was a child, three years old, I was living in Stratford at Mrs. Lovejoy's with my mother. The way I came there was, my mother being sold as a slave."

*Aunt
Hagar
Merriman
1861*

Obesity Is Not A Modern Problem

The following historical facts are from the memorandum of an officer of the Massachusetts line: -

Weighed at the scales of West Point - August 19, 1783

General Washington	209 Pounds
General Knox	280 "
General Lincoln	224 "
General Huntington	132 "
General Greaton	166 "
Colonel Swift	219 "
Colonel Michael Jackson	252 "
Colonel Henry Jackson	238 "
Lt. Colonel Ebenezer Huntington	232 "
Lt. Colonel D. Cobb	186 "
Lt. Colonel D. Humphreys	221 "

All but Washington were New Englanders. Leaving him out, leaves a balance of 2170 lbs for the ten robust New England military brass, an average of 217 pounds.

W. S. Lawson - October 1967

*An army marches
on its stomach.
attributed to
Napoleon first*

Stratford Historical Society

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UNPAID DUES

If you find an "X" above your name on the address label your dues are not paid and this will be your last news letter.

Stratford Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting

February 26, - 7:30 pm

Catharine B. Mitchell Museum

All members of the Society are Welcome to Attend

Please call 378-0630 for information