
Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

Volume VI Issue 3

January 2002



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

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday January 25, 2002 - 7:30pm

Christ Episcopal Church
2000 Main Street, Stratford

BOB BERTHELSON

The Legacy of P. T. Barnum Greatest Showman on Earth

Phineas Taylor Barnum dedicated his long career to alleviating the "severe and drudging practices" he considered the chief defect of American Civilization. He provided the world with a prodigious swarm of divas, minstrels, circuses, museums of curiosities, beauty pageants, sideshows, baby contests - whatever it took to entertain his fellow citizens while making himself one of his country's first millionaires.

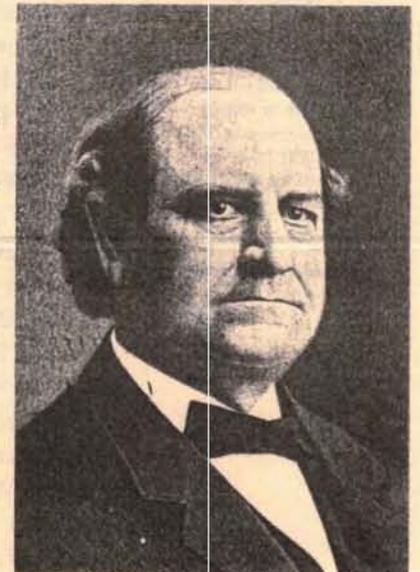
Born in Bethel, CT, in 1810, Barnum began his financial empire at the age of 12 selling lottery tickets. He learned early on that people were actually entertained by having the "wool pulled over their eyes" if they were amused. He soon gained a reputation as the "prince of humbug."

Bridgeport became his home in 1848 and there are many reminders there of his generosity, and industriousness. His life was filled with an amazing number of discoveries, and innovations. Our language is sprinkled with countless "Barnumisms" from "Siamese Twins" to "Jumbo." He invented

billboards, beauty contests, indoor aquariums, and the live natural history museum. Barnum often referred to his American Museum on New York City's Broadway as "The storehouse of the earth's novelties for the study and enlightenment of all." He became world famous for his promotion of Tom Thumb, Jenny Lind, Jumbo and countless other unusual and talented performers. His fame is carried on in the world renowned Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus.

He had an eternal optimism that enabled him to recover after several disastrous fires, train wrecks, life threatening illness, alcoholism, bankruptcy, and the death of his spouse.

Bob Berthelson, a photographer with a lifelong interest in American history and nostalgia, has prepared over 30 color slide programs that he has presented to over 1000 audiences in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York. Bob has received the Award of Merit of the Connecticut League of Historical Societies and a Certificate of Commendation of the American Association of State and Local History.



*A person with
enthusiasm lives
abundantly in spite
of and not because of
his situation.*

anonymous

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

Bring a Friend

In case of inclement weather - listen to WICC 5pm

Vice-President Todd Lovell

With the beginning of the new year, our volunteers have begun to work on new exhibits using items from our large collection. The new displays are in the planning stage while previous exhibits are being dismantled. Help is always appreciated. If you are interested, please call the office.

Outdoor preparation for winter went well. We hope that the watering of the shrubs on the south boundary was enough to bring them through the fall drought. One of our accomplishments in the fall was the restoration of the stone driveway to the lower back door of the museum. Now our volunteers and visitors can drive right to the building in order to enter and, perhaps, bring items for the Tag Sale; no more carrying boxes across the lawn.

The Tag Sale will take place again this year on Stratford Day in June. The date is not yet available. We will be accepting donations every Tuesday or Thursday between 9:00am and 2:00pm at the office. It is always a good idea to call before coming in order to give us time to make room. Remember, anything sells! If you have something you would like to have picked up, please call.

While Judson House is closed to visitors until June, the Gift Shop items are still available. Some new additions include copies of the hard-to-find Wilcoxson's History of Stratford and several rare framed Robert Treat pen and ink drawings of 1950's Stratford.

Book of Remembrance

Contributions have been received in
Memory of

ELLA McCULLOUGH

Given by: Bertha Banks, Mr & Mrs Albert C. Graham, Mr & Mrs Edwin S. Botsford, Mr & Mrs Robert J. Ready, Ms Marilyn C. Perry

MARGARET M. ROSS

Given by: Henry S. & Carol A. Ross

JEAN WILCOXSON

Given by: Catherine Lawrence

Thank You From Hy And Connie

On Saturday, December 1st, Curator Hiram Tindall and his wife Connie were honored by the Board of the Historical Society at a reception in the Museum. Hy and Connie will be greatly missed when, in January, they retire to their new home in Canandaigua, New York.

The Tindall's wish to thank everyone who stopped by for their kind words and good wishes. They extend a sincere:

**THANK YOU TO ALL WHO
MADE IT A PERFECT DAY!**

Memorial Plaque

A donation has been received from Catherine Clinton Lawrence with the wish that a plaque be placed on a case in the Catharine B. Mitchell Museum in Memory of her Grandmother, Adelaide Curtis Gunther, a founder of the Stratford Historical Society.

Address Change

We have received a note from Mrs. Barbara Chapman Jameson of a change of address for her mother, Mrs. Vincent Chapman.

It has been over twenty-five years since her mother lived in Stratford and spent many hours working at Judson House, but she always enjoys talking about the good times she remembers.

For any member who may recall working with Freda Chapman at Judson House we are sure she would be very pleased to receive a card or note from you.

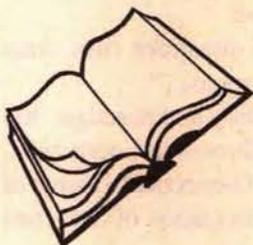
New Address:

Freda M. Chapman

Manor on the Square

550 Barrington Drive, Rm. 44

Roswell, GA 30075



Harvesting the Salt Hay

Mr. Hildreth Winton, a past President of the Stratford Historical Society, wrote the following article and it appeared in a Newsletter in 1965. Hildreth and Betty Winton were active members of the society for many years and were the founders of Oronoque Orchard Pies, a very successful enterprise. The Winton's now reside in a retirement community in Branford, CT.

There was an admirable self-sufficiency about the early settlers of Stratford. Many families owned a wood lot in Putney or Oronoque, and a few acres in the great salt meadow where they harvested salt hay for their cattle.

While the salt hay was used mostly for bedding, or packing against the north side of the house foundation in the winter it was, never-the-less, highly valued. I date myself a little when I recall the scows the Boothe brothers, David and Stephen, kept at the point where Peck's Mill Pond empties into the river. The scows, if memory serves me, were at least forty foot long - of shallow draft - heavy wood planked bottoms caulked with oakum - square at both ends. They had to be big boats to float two horses, a mowing machine, hay rake, a few ton of hay and a crew of men. Just think of all the vagaries of nature these early farmers coped with in harvesting salt hay. Harvest time was in the summer - the hay had to be cut often by scythe for the ground would be marshy. It had to be dried in the sun, tossed or turned over, raked, stacked, loaded aboard the boats, transferred to wagons and stored in the barn. Thunderstorms originating in the North West seemed to follow the river valley down and into the Sound. Rain on cured hay was tragic for even bedding had to be kept dry lest it become moldy and a hazard to livestock.

The hay scows had no mechanical means of propulsion. Diesel or gasoline motors were not available. It took an uncanny knowledge of tide and wind to scull, row or tow by rowboat a heavily laden scow from one bank of the river to the other. Stand still high tide afforded but a short, precise interval at which a crossing could be made. A strong headwind could make crossing impossible.

From this distant point of time the harvesting of salt hay seems to have been an overwhelming task - yet in a horse, cow and farming era it must have been the economical thing to do. Our forbears worked hard. They took full advantage of the resources Stratford offered and they prospered.

I once heard a lecturer say that if he knew the ratio of cows to humans in a country he could quite readily tell you of the well being of the country's population. This ratio was good in Stratford in those days. They lived a sometimes stern but wholesome good life.





Saturday, June 5, 1915, was a day to celebrate. The last trolley line was built, the three-mile stretch from Stratford Avenue in Bridgeport across the meadows to the new pavilion at Lordship Manor was complete. Shortly after one o'clock the first car set out down Hollister Avenue, then out onto the salt marsh to Lordship, weaving and bobbing along the new rails. Leaving the marsh, the little car bounced down newly graded Gorham Avenue (Washington Parkway) to the beach, and stopped in front of the new Lordship Pavilion. When the guests debarked, the officers of the Wilkenda Land Company, who owned the Lordship Railway Company, the pavilion, the casino, and the nearby property they called Lordship Manor, conducted tours of new homes being built and spoke at length of their plans for this new resort.



In the 20's Lordship Beach was the place for public bathing in Stratford. Short Beach was leased to cottage owners and Long Beach was not developed.

From The Past

THE BRIDGEPORT POST - 1891
NOVEMBER

Several of our town ladies complain of the annoyance they have to put up with going to and from the Post Office evenings and would like to know if something can't be done about the matter. On several occasions they have had to return to their homes without making some of the purchases they intended rather than go through the crowds which stand in the way of several stores.

DECEMBER

The Stratford correspondent of the Post complains of loafers hanging about the stores and insulting people. Stratford is getting to be real citified and all that is needed now is a brass-buttoned police force and a lock-up. A reputable citizen today sends a communication on the subject. There should be an effective remedy for the trouble and the authorities should have the gumption to apply it. What our town sadly needs at the present time is a cage or a lock-up of some description. "Where is the double cage that the town voted some time ago to buy?"

Sikorsky Bridge

The Sikorsky Bridge, which spans the Housatonic River from Stratford to Milford, opened in 1940 and was, at that time, the longest steel-decked bridge in the country. According to officials, "it was functionally obsolete but a historically significant structure."

The bridge is now being replaced with a new structure in approximately the same location. The new bridge will have two through lanes and an operational lane with shoulders in both directions and a walk/bikeway along the north side of the westbound bridge.

In 1997 the National Park Service requested photographs and historical information from the Society which were reproduced and are stored in the archives of the National Park Service in Washington.

Docent Training Program



March 5 to April 2
Tuesdays
10:00 - 12:00

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!!

Our school group tours will begin in April and we are in need of a few new volunteers to join our docents in this very rewarding activity. If you enjoy history, story telling, working with children, and volunteering, you are the perfect candidate for our training sessions. The sessions will be held at the Judson House located at 967 Academy Hill, Stratford.

Membership in the Historical Society and a willingness to give tours to school-aged children required. No prior knowledge is necessary, only an enthusiasm for sharing history with children.

If interested please call:
378-0630

(Leave a message: Attention
Diane Matthews)

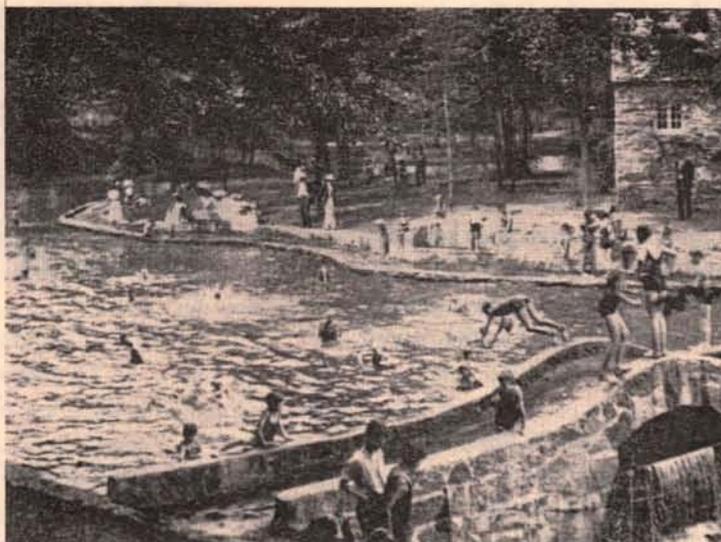
Connecticut Courier January 17, 1821

The Camden New Jersey Gazette has the following singular story: A cow was lately killed by Benjamin Sampson in Evesham, Burlington County, in which were found, *two hundred and fifty-two nails*, besides a quantity of shot, some pins, and four buttons. Some of the nails were 3 inches long. The cow had been fed with sweepings of a feed-store.

Longbrook Park A Town Asset

*Summer afternoon-
Summer afternoon;
to me those have
always been the two
most beautiful words
in the English
language*

Henry James



Picture from
Town Report
c. 1936

In the northern part of Stratford, surrounded by picturesque landscaping, rests Longbrook Park. The ground was donated by Mr. Elliot Peck, a leading town citizen at that time. In 1935, Stonemason Tony Santoro and crew had just completed the fieldhouse from stone quarried at Roosevelt Forest, which also supplied material for a pool, walks and walls.

The local high school and various athletic organizations make use of the playing fields. It is a place for all Stratford people to enjoy. Longbrook Park is a credit to our Town.

Stratford Historical Society

(203) 378-0630

967 Academy Hill

P.O.Box 382

Stratford, CT 06615-0382

COMPUTER CORNER

e-mail us at:

Judsonhousestfd@aol.com

Fax: 378-2562

Stratford Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting

February 25, 2002 - 7:30 pm

Catharine B. Mitchell Museum

All members of the Society are Welcome to Attend

Please call 378-0630 for information