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# Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

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Volume VI Issue 4

March 2002

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

**NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING**  
**Friday March 22, 2002 - 7:30pm**  
**Christ Episcopal Church**  
**2000 Main Street, Stratford**

**Peter C. Brockett**  
**Performing on the Glass Harmonica**

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*If a man does not  
keep pace with his  
c o m p a n i o n s ,  
perhaps it is because  
he hears a different  
drummer. Let him  
step to the music  
which he hears,  
however measured  
or far away.*

*Henry D. Thoreau*

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Glasses filled with more or less water so as to alter the pitch of the sounds obtained by striking them with sticks were very early used by the Persians, the Chinese, the Japanese and the Arabs. But the technique took a decisive turn in 1732 when an Irishman, Richard Puckeridge, had the bright idea of rubbing with wet fingers the glasses standing on the table.

Benjamin Franklin saw for the first time that instrument at a concert by the English virtuoso Delaval. It was called angelic organ, then musical glasses or seraphim. Franklin fascinated by the "soft and pure sound of the musical glasses," modified them so as to increase their possibilities. He called the new instrument glassharmonica because of its harmonious sounds. He had glasses of different diameters blown, each corresponding to a note, instead of filling glasses with water. The glass harmonica was very popular from the start. Four hundred works were composed for it, some unfortunately now lost, and probably about 4000 instruments were built in seventy years. This instrument was fashionable in the late 1700's and early 1800's, but is almost never heard today.

Our Guest this evening, Mr. Peter Brockett, was born in North Haven, CT, he went to grammar school there and graduated from Lyman Hall High School in Wallingford CT. At about the age of 10 years he attended a local talent show and states "I heard the most beautiful music I had ever heard played on a set of goblets and I vowed that someday I would play that same kind of music." It was 45 years before that dream was realized.

Mr. Brockett worked at radio station WOV in New York and when WWII came along signed up with the Army Signal Corps and taught radar theory and maintenance as a civilian. He then enlisted in the Coast Guard and spent the rest of the war as a radar instructor.

After discharge from military service he worked for over twenty years at various companies including: Southern New England Telephone Co., Norden Instrument Co. and at Automatic Signal Co. designed traffic light control equipment. After retirement from Automatic Signal Mr. Brockett ran an antique shop in Dublin, New Hampshire and while there was able to obtain the set of goblets that started him on his hobby. He has played in churches, weddings, schools, convalescent homes, country fairs and "most anywhere they ask me to, I enjoy it."

Peter Brockett's program will be a new experience for our members to enjoy and we hope everyone will bring a friend and join us on Friday, March 22nd.

**The meeting is open to the public and refreshments will be served**  
**Bring a Friend**  
**In case of inclement weather - listen to WICC 5pm**

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## President John Calhoun

I will be concluding my term of office in a few months, and I would like to highlight some of our society's most interesting activities in recent years.

Using a small space in Judson House we built a gift shop and stocked it with interesting and unusual items not found in local stores. Now all visitors stop and shop. We took over management of the Historical Society trust fund and increased the income by 30%. Our publication of "Images of America-Stratford" has introduced hundreds of citizens to the Historical Society, shown the town an important part of its past, and earned over \$7000 profit.

Perhaps our most important accomplishment is the expansion of children's activities. Participation in History Camp has introduced young people and their parents to colonial history. History Camp provided the nucleus for our Junior Society whose young members are so important in making a success of Stratford Day, the early American Festival, and Holiday Open House.

History Camp will take place from July 8 through July 12. This activity would be a great gift for your children or grandchildren. Reservations must be made by June 1st.

## Carol Lovell Appointed Curator

It was a unanimous vote by the Board of Directors at their February 5th meeting to appoint Mrs. Todd Lovell as Curator of the Stratford Historical Society.

Carol has been assistant to recently retired Hiram Tindall for many years and during 26 years as an active member has become extremely knowledgeable in all phases of the work of the Society including genealogy, research, records and acquisitions. Carol will work to attract more public attention to the Society in the future with promotion of Judson House and its programs.

## Spring Tag Sale June 1, 2002

For over thirty-five years the Stratford Historical Society sponsored very successful Antique and Collectable Shows. Members of the Society, town residents and friends donated countless articles year after year. Since 1999 the Society has had a Tag Sale each year as our principle fund-raiser when very few articles that could be considered "antique" became available for sale.

We are asking your help again this year with good quality articles for this very important event. Springtime is the perfect time to browse your attic and basement for items that you think worthless but could be treasure to your neighbor. All items are of value to someone.

Everything from A to Z (in reasonable condition) will be accepted: apple peelers, books, baskets, china, cutlery, dolls, furniture, glassware, pictures, toys, sleds, moose heads, umbrellas and xylophones.

Jewelry items are very popular and sell extremely well: pins, bracelets, necklaces, etc. are a big attraction. Society member Mrs. Frances Sloane has spent many hours sorting, cleaning and repairing pieces that have already been donated. If you do not wear it or you think it is out of style, bring it in and let Frances make it look like new and ready for sale.

Our "Tag Sale" will be held on Stratford Day, June 1st in the Catharine B. Mitchell Museum under the Co-Chairmanship of Diane Matthews and Sandy Rutkowski. You may bring items to the Society during office hours, Tuesday or Thursday from 9 to 2 or call 378-0630 if you need pick-up service.

Donate your articles and then come to the sale and we are sure you will go home with at least one new treasure.



## A Wee Bit of Irish

### OF POLITICS.....

Edmund Burke in parliament just after the Treaty of Paris was signed giving the Colonies their Independence said, "There is America, which at this day serves for little more than to amuse you with stories of savage men and uncouth manners, yet shall, before you taste of death, show itself equal to the whole of that commerce which now attracts the envy of the world."

### OF THE COURTS.....

Mr. Justice Fitzgibbon dismissed John Curran's argument by saying, "If that be the law, Mr. Curran, I may burn my law books." To which Mr. Curran replied, "You had better read them first, my lord."

Another man when asked if he pleaded guilty or not guilty said that he could not make a plea until he'd heard the evidence.

### OF BEING AT WAR.....

Before 1916 the epitaph for Irish Soldiers was: "We fought every nation's battles and the only ones that we lost were our own."

### OF THE CLERGY.....

A woman confesses the sin of vanity to Father Healy of Bray. He asked for more information and she said, "every morning, Father, I stand in front of the glass and I admire what I see." Father Healy replied, "Oh don't worry, that's not a sin, that's just a mistake."

On death, Father Healy said, "I would prefer Heaven for climate, but Hell for society: all my best friends are Protestants."

### OF LOVE & MARRIAGE.....

No Irishman ever fell in love at first sight in broad daylight.

A proud Irishman proposed by asking, "How would you like to be buried with my people?"

The best test of a man is his choice of a wife.

### OF DRINK.....

Whiskey bottles have narrow necks to stop Irishmen from knocking off the contents in one go.

"Are you telling this court that you only had one glass of whiskey?" asked the magistrate. "Yes Sir", replied the accused. "And where did you have it?" "Oh, in many different places, your honor."

### OF DEATH.....

If the rich could pay people to die for them, the poor would make a marvelous living.

### OF REPARTEE.....

Two drunken English lords taunted Richard Sheridan with "Tell us, sir. Which are you - a fool or a rogue?" Sheridan took both in arm to stroll across the room and replied, "Well gentlemen, at the moment I am between the two."

### OF THE COUNTRYSIDE.....

There's many a farm that grew bigger through the lace of a daughters petticoat.

### OF PROVERBS.....

The Tongue ties knots that the teeth cannot loosen.

Even castles were built one stone at a time.

The smaller the cabin the wider the door.

The best looking glass is the eyes of a friend.

There's many a good tune played on an old fiddle.



## From Indian Trails to Turnpikes



We are always desirous to study the history of our local community and its founders, but let us think of our town as it was connected with the rest of the State. In the early years before we were concerned, as now, of the constant danger and congestion of our modern highways to when the roads followed the Indian trails and people traveled on foot. Later, when the trails were improved, pack horses were able to pass and carry the mail and small express from place to place. The pack-horse business became very profitable, so much so that its owners opposed the coming of freight wagons and stagecoaches.

In 1638, the General Court ordered Highways to be built, but little progress was made until 1795 when the towns were empowered to build, repair and collect taxes on the roads. Evidently the State or the towns failed as these early highways were not well built or kept in good repair. It was then left to the companies operating the stage lines who obtained charters from the State, allowing them to take over and improve the existing roads and also to build their own roads and bridges.

The stage coach became common by the year 1800 and continued in some parts of the State until 1900. After 1900, the auto began to take its place, but during that 100 years stage coaches made regular trips between Providence and Hartford, and also between Hartford and Albany. It took about twenty-four hours to make the over one hundred mile round trip from Hartford to Albany. Trips were made regularly between Boston, Hartford, New Haven and New York. Branch lines to all principal villages and cities in the State carried passengers, mail and freight. From time to time turnpike companies were chartered until the State was well covered by post coach lines. Post coaches left Hartford at three A.M. and reached Boston at eight P.M. The fare for this trip was six dollars and fifty cents and the time on the journey was seventeen hours. Even as late as 1842 twenty-two stagecoach lines had their headquarters in Hartford in much the same way that bus lines do today.

The turnpike companies erected milestones along the turnpikes or post roads. One of the old milestones on the Hartford and Albany turnpike stands on Main Street in Winsted and reads "Hartford 26½ miles, Albany 67 miles." In 1753 Deputy Postmaster General Ben Franklin had milestones placed along the King's Highway. In Stratford 15 to New Haven could be seen on West Broad Street at Colonial Park and 14 to New Haven located where Ferry Boulevard meets East Broadway."

These same companies owned and operated ferryboats which crossed the larger streams as tollgates and keepers of the gates were installed at frequent intervals along the lines. Twenty-five cents was collected for a four-wheeled pleasure carriage down to four cents if on horse back. People going to and from church on Sunday or to a funeral were passed free. In *"In Pursuit of Paradise"* we are told - as early as 1648 the General Court instructed the County Court in Fairfield to act on Moses Wheeler's request to operate a ferryboat across the Stratford River. The Stratford Ferry operated from 1648 or earlier to 1804. In 1670, the ferryman was required to keep two boats, "one to be called ye horse boat, ye other to be called ye sciffer." Later, the larger boat was described as similar to a gundalow and was capable of carrying carriages and carts.

Source: *The Story of Connecticut*

**This Tablet Marks  
Ye Olde Kings Highway  
Which Followed In General  
Indian Trails  
And The Oldest Mail Route  
In America  
The First Post Rider  
Made the Time From  
New York To Boston  
In January 1679  
Placed By Mary Silliman  
Chapter DAR  
1915**

The original markers at West Broad Street and East Broadway were replaced in 1915 by brass plaques commemorating the Post Highway.

## In Remembrance Louis J. Petriel 1918-2002

Louis J. Petriel, Jr. was a true volunteer at a time when volunteerism is almost a thing of the past. He was a devoted friend of the Stratford Historical Society having served as President, Nominating Committee chairman, Finance Committee member and Docent and was a steady influence to whom we could confidently turn for guidance. His knowledge and remembrances of his youth in Stratford were of great help in the work of the other volunteers at the Historical Society. His interest in the genealogy of his own family, as well as other Stratford families led him to travel throughout Connecticut seeking pieces of the puzzle.

While we knew him best as a member of the Historical Society, his involvement's were widespread: Red Cross, Coast Guard Auxiliary, Rotary Club, Congregational Burying Ground, St. James Church, Veterans of Foreign Wars to name only a few. Lou was a pilot with a commercial rating who had owned his own plane and a boater who spent much time on the waters of Long Island Sound.

While our national leadership has called for more volunteerism, Lou Petriel had been answering that call for most of his almost eighty-four years. We will miss his sincere smile, firm handshake and gentle leadership. We are proud to call him Friend.

Todd B. Lovell  
1st Vice President

## Book of Remembrance

The following contributions have been received in memory of:

ELLA E. McCULLOUGH

Given by: Sabra & Roger Burritt

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Barlow

Mr. & Mrs. Paul Lee

## From the Past GREAT ELM TREE IN STRATFORD IS VICTIM OF AXE

Known as One of Largest  
In Country

STRATFORD-NOV. 18

After having braved the storms and sunshine for more than 150 years the largest Elm tree in the New England states succumbed to the terrific onslaught of the trusty axes of Alfred Stacey, Harry Wilcoxson and Charles Nichols on Thursday. The tree which was located on the Huntington Road near the residence of I. Lobdell has a record of being one of the oldest and the largest trees of its kind in the country but modestly speaking it is known to be the largest in the New England states. The three workmen who have just completed cutting it down have been six days in doing the work. The butt of the tree it is estimated has at least 2,000 feet of lumber in it and at the base it measured exactly seven feet in diameter and weighed over seven tons, while in its uppermost branches a 100 foot measure would not reach across. The tree was an old landmark and for a number of years past, the local tree warden has been compelled each year to cut out the dead limbs and not until it became dangerous to passersby did they think of taking it down.

EDITORS NOTE: Unfortunately the above article was brought to our attention without a year to establish when this cutting took place. We can put it only somewhere between 1900 and 1940. If anyone can advise us of a date or, by chance, have a photo of this unfortunate tree, please contact us.

In March all thoughts turn to sugaring. The doughnut kettle is in readiness, for who can imagine sugaring without doughnuts and fritters to eat with the new syrup? Raised doughnuts are especially good: Nuns, technically jelly doughnuts, and Henriettes, richly spiced cinnamon doughnuts are very old versions of the familiar cruller.



Alas, the drug store soda fountain is long gone



In 1903 when Coca Cola contained cocaine, it was a popular drink at drug store soda fountains. Wilson and St. John sold medicine, cigars, and notions in their pharmacy in the center business section of town. Shortly after, the two gentlemen split up, Bill St. John (5th from left) remained in the center for many years, and George Wilson (far right) moved down Main St. to a store which later became the Bon Ton Fish Market and the Republican Headquarters. Kealer Wilson (center) became an expert druggist.

## Stratford Historical Society

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**Stratford Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting**  
 April 29, 2002 - 7:30 pm  
 Catharine B Mitchell Museum  
 All members of the Society are Welcome to Attend  
 Please call 378-0630 for information