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# Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

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Volume IX Issue 2

November 2004

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

## NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday November 12, 2004 - 7:30pm

Christ Episcopal Church  
2000 Main Street, Stratford

### GORDAN M. WILLIAMS "The Character and Personality of Teddy Roosevelt

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Americanism is a question of principle, of purpose, of idealism, or character, it is not a matter of birthplace or creed or line of descent

Theodore Roosevelt speech at Washington D.C. (1909)

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Theodore Roosevelt was a descendant of Claes Martenssen van Roosevelt, who migrated to New Amsterdam (now New York City) from Zeeland, Holland (now in the Netherlands), in 1649. Roosevelt's father, Theodore Roosevelt, Sr., was a New York businessman who married Martha Bulloch, a Southern belle from a prominent Georgia family. The American Civil War (1861-1865) caused the Roosevelts much distress, because Mrs. Roosevelt's brothers fought for the Confederacy. To spare his wife's feelings, the elder Roosevelt did not enlist in the armed forces, although he was a staunch supporter of the Union. During the war he distinguished himself as an adviser to Union troops on missions that took him to the front lines.



Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt served as President of the United States from 1901-1909. His administration fought for the rights of workers and small businesses and the conservation of natural resources. In 1912 he ran again as a candidate of the Progressive Party (Bull Moose Party). In a speech during the 1912 campaign he advocates limiting working hours of women and abolishing child labor.

Mr. Williams is a retired Trumbull High School social studies teacher. In addition to his several degrees in history and literature he also studied education in Japan and is the recipient of a number of awards: Trumbull's Teacher of the Year, Fullbright teacher in England and the national Milken Educator award.

As President of the Newtown Historical Society, he has presented many lectures and evenings of information. They are filled with material that is educational, informative, and historical.

The meeting is open to the public and refreshments will be served.  
In case of inclement weather please listen to WICC at 5:00 p.m.

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**IN MEMORIAM  
Stanley Ochman**

**February 14, 1919 - September 16, 2004**

For many years, until illness made it impossible, Life Member Stanley Ochman was always a bright and cheerful presence at the Society. Always willing to do what ever had to be done, from sweeping the floors to taking care of the trash to telling one of his many stories, Stan made us all have a happier day - and always with a big smile on his face.

Surrounded by his wife and their six children, Stan's long life was a celebration filled with all the activities he enjoyed, his favorite was antiquing.

"A wonderful, kind, gentle man,  
Stan never spoke ill of anyone."

He was our friend and he will be missed.

**David Guion  
President**

Because of scheduling and injuries, we have had to make substitutions in our personnel who conduct tours of the Judson House and Museum. Diane Matthews started the year doing the Wednesday tours but personal commitments meant she would be temporarily unavailable. During the season Renee Basso and Dolores Hocht have generously given additional hours to make sure the house was staffed and open on Wednesdays. I would like to personally thank these two dedicated people for their efforts

"above and beyond."

**Todd Lovell  
1st Vice President**

With cold weather rapidly approaching, your Society is preparing for winter; water lines drained, furnaces checked and thermostats set. Carriage House reconstruction continues with the completion of the cedar shingle roof now a priority. We hope to have the building "closed in" soon so that some work can continue throughout the winter. Many of the windows and frames have been repaired and replaced and the classic old building is beginning to really take shape. Next year, when it is completed and painted, it will be a premier addition to your Society.

The cost of this worthwhile project is really stressing our finances. Remember, if you make a contribution to the Society or, specifically, to the Carriage House Fund, all donations are deductible. All contributions will be acknowledged by letter.

We are hoping for a return of the Early American Festival in the summer of 2005. No festival was held this year because eleven sections of the Carriage House took up much of the Society's open space. As it turned out, on the probable date for this year's event, September 18th, this area of the country experienced the very rainy aftermath of one of the many hurricanes to strike Florida. We lucked out!!! Stop by and see your 1895 Carriage House under reconstruction. It's great!!

A friend may  
well be reckoned  
the masterpiece  
of nature.  
Ralph Waldo  
Emerson  
"Friendship"

**BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE**

The following contributions have been  
made in memory of

**MRS. ROSAMOND DUSTIN**

Given by:

Hiram and Connie Tindall  
Carol and Todd Lovell

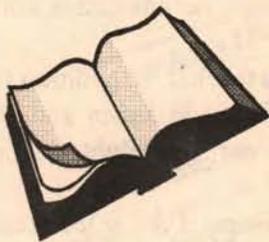
**STANLEY OCHMAN**

Given by:

Hiram Tindall  
Carol and Todd Lovell

**THE BEARDSLEY FUND**

Mrs. Ruth Beardsley Parker has sent a  
gift in memory of her father T. R. Beardsley  
and brother H. R. Beardsley.



## An Airport of Many Names

The history of the airfield now known as *Sikorsky Memorial Airport* goes back to the early 1900's. The location in the south end of Stratford was developed out of the marshes that separated the town from the beach areas on the Sound. As fields began to replace the marshes, the area was a part of a section of town known as Avon Park, and here crowds came to watch car and motor cycle races, and to see pioneer aviators in stunt flying over the *Lake Aerodrome* at Avon Park. Called the *Bridgeport Aerodrome* in 1911, it was a center for spectator sports and was home to the country's first air show.

So, in the summer of 1933, to this airfield, a British couple was destined unintentionally to add yet another moniker to the still unpaved airfield. Two renowned British pilots of the Earhart/Lindbergh era, Jim Mollison and his wife Amy Johnson Mollison had planned to break the world long distance flight record. They had left South Wales, England for New York in a little black one-engine plane on July 22, 1933 on the first leg of an attempted round-the-world flight. Our Betty Parmelee Applegate's recollections of the eventful conclusion of this flight, when she was about 13, follow:

"Our family was following the radio news dispatches on this exciting event, and I recall hearing of their passing over New Haven and seeing the plane fly over Cook's Pond at Hickory Hill. Then, a news dispatch indicated that contact with the plane had been lost, followed by word that the plane had crashed in the marsh area by Stratford Airport. It was at about 9 p. m. that Sunday night that my father, Dr. Parmelee, the hospital's x-ray physician, got called to Bridgeport Hospital to check the pilots out for any broken bones. The four of us children then climbed in the car and accompanied our father and stood by the emergency room window watching the two fliers being bandaged. Fortunately they were not badly hurt. As I watched, I particularly remember the huge diamond "rock" on Amy Johnson's finger, and the expensive watch, comparable to a Rolex, worn by her husband. Subsequently, a picture of my father and the pilots was taken on the hospital porch, and it appeared in the rotogravure section of the *Herald Tribune*."

Soon thereafter, the airport was named *Mollison Airport*.



The Crash Scene



A Week Later - with the Roosevelts & Amelia Earhart

Then in 1937, when the City of Bridgeport purchased the airport, the name was further changed to *Bridgeport Municipal Airport*. During the 1930's, many now famous aviators visited the field. Names such as Amelia Earhart, Charles Lindbergh, Howard Hughes and Juan Trippe can be found in the airport logbooks documenting their arrivals.

Finally, in 1972, a final rededication took place, and it was named *Igor I. Sikorsky Memorial Airport*, in honor of the airport's most famous tenant (and namesake), who in 1929 had picked the Stratford site for his expanding Sikorsky Aviation Company.

(Sources: *In Pursuit of Paradise* by Knapp; Bridgeport; Sikorsky Airport Web Page by J. Ricci; Stratford Postcard Series by Calhoun and Knapp; & other internet web pages)

## MOLLISON HEADLINES



Enroute to Wales before Atlantic Crossing

### MOLLISON'S WING WAY OVER OCEAN

7-23-33  
M  
Leave Wales on Long Delayed Flight to New York City.

PENDINE, Wales, July 22.—(AP)

Flight Ends at Airport in Stratford

### FAILED 5 TIMES IN ATTEMPT TO MAKE LANDING

### JIMMY MOLLISON BLAMES FATIGUE

Flier Says He Was Worn Out  
in Accounting for  
Crack-Up.

### AIRPORT IS CLOSED

The Stratford airport was closed to the public today and only persons with proper credentials will be admitted to the field.

Six members of the Stratford police department and five from the state police have been stationed about the field and will not permit anyone to enter. However, planes of New York newspaper men and other ships from various parts of the state have been swamping the field all day.

### VISITING PLANES SALUTE INJURED

Fliers Dip and Circle Over  
Hospital in Tribute to  
Mollisons.

Gallant friends and admirers of Jimmy and Amy Mollison today "visited" the injured victims of the climactic tragedy of their transatlan-

### FINDS BRIEF CASE AMONG WRECKAGE

Letters and Mollison Passport  
Watersoaked in  
Crash.

### PLAN TO LEAVE HOSPITAL HERE AT FIVE O'CLOCK

British Flying Couple In-  
jured in Crash At  
Local Airport.

### PLANE IS WRECKED

Wiley Post Pays Secret  
Visit to Amy and  
Captain Jimmy.

### FINDS BRIEF CASE AMONG WRECKAGE

Letters and Mollison Passport  
Watersoaked in  
Crash.

### MRS. MOLLISON'S PARENTS INFORMED

Learn At Dawn Injuries to  
Fliers Here Only  
Superficial.

## What They Did Before Exit Polls

Before TV and radio, voters would gather on the streets in front of Newspaper offices to hear the returns shouted out. In 1920 someone at Connecticut's *Hartford Times* had a brainstorm: A wire from the *Times* bulletin desk would carry the latest returns to the searchlight station 400 feet above street level in the Travelers Insurance building. Every ten minutes, results from a

different race would be beamed out. If a Republican had won the governor's race, for example, at exactly 8:10 the beam would shine to the north. If the Democratic candidate was victorious, the beam would shine south.

The *Times* rhapsodized that the light would be "a great Milky Way against the darkness."

Every detail had been worked out. Except the weather. By early evening of election day, rain was sailing sideways, propelled by 45-mile-an-hour winds. The operators found it difficult to move the 1,800 pound light in the wind. The rain limited visibility to a few miles.

It was "no place for a Sunday school picnic," the *Times* reported the next day, along with the election results that only a few hardy voters had been able to see the night before.

Donald B. Coney - Yankee Magazine 1996



## Do Not Miss This!!

At the November 12th Membership Meeting we are pleased that Mr. Alan Stein will bring a special display of his own creation. Alan has crafted a very authentic colonial kitchen in miniature that we are sure all who attend will find very interesting.

### BOOKS FOR HOLIDAY GIFTS

Words and pictures about remembrances of the past are always welcome gifts to friends and family members. If you have not seen or browsed through the Society's latest collection of pictures and postcards of early Stratford you must see the new Postcard History Series assembled by Past President John Calhoun with descriptions by Town Historian Lew Knapp. The following books will be available at the November 12th meeting as well as every Tuesday and Thursday at the Society office from 9am to 2pm.

- In Pursuit of Paradise - \$30.00
  - Stratford and the Sea - \$27.00
  - Images of America-Stratford - \$19.00
  - Postcard History Series-Stratford - \$20.00
- There is no added tax if purchased from the Society.

## Curtis/Curtiss Society Reunion

Among the many highlights of the recent reunion of Curtis family descendants were the Perry House Foundation tour and dinner, the Judson House and Museum tour, and the afternoon spent with Catherine Lawrence who described the history of Christ Episcopal Church.

Mrs. Lawrence arranged for the group to walk through the nearby Christ Church burying grounds located behind the church; this was followed by a play she had written of the church's early leaders that was very well acted by young people from Christ Church.

Those attending the 65th Reunion and Meeting of the Curtis/Curtiss family greatly appreciated the above proceedings and the hospitality of Stratford.

Theodore Roosevelt:  
Quotes  
All the resources we need are in the mind

Don't hit at all if it is honorably possible to avoid hitting: but never hit soft.

Every reform movement has a lunatic fringe.

I am only an average man but, by George, I work harder at it than the average man.

I think there is only one quality worse than hardness of heart and that is softness of head.

I have always been fond of the West African proverb: "Speak softly and carry a big stick, you will go far."

NOTE: 1915-1921  
Marcus H. Holcomb, Republican, was re-elected Governor in 1920

## THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving commonly regarded as being from its earliest beginning a distinctive New England festival, and an equally characteristic Puritan holiday was originally neither.

Days set apart for thanksgiving were known in Europe before the Reformation and were in frequent use and a fixed custom by Protestants afterward, long before they were in New England. One wonders that the Puritans, hating so fiercely the customs and set days and holy days of the Established Church should so quickly have appointed a Thanksgiving Day. But the first New England Thanksgiving was not a day of religious observance, it was a day of recreation. Those who fancy all Puritans, and especially all Pilgrims, to have been sour, morose, and gloomy men should read this account of the first Thanksgiving week (not day) in Plymouth. It was written on December 11, 1621 by Edward Winslow to a friend in England.

*Our harvest being gotten in our governor sent four men to fowling that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruits of our labor. They four killed as much fowl as with a little help beside served the company about a week. At which times among other recreations we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest king Massasoit with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer which they brought and bestow'd on our governor, and upon the captains and others.*

Though there were but fifty-five English to eat the Pilgrim Thanksgiving feast, there were "partakers in plenty," and the ninety sociable Indian visitors did not come empty-handed, but joined fraternally in provision for the feast, and probably also in the games.

*The Treasury of New England Folklore - B. A. Botkin*

Not what we say  
about our blessings,  
but how we  
use them, is the true  
measure of our  
thanksgiving.

WT Purkiser



## 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 for the  
2004-2005 year.

#### COMPUTER CORNER

e-mail us at:

Judsonhousestfd@aol.com

Fax: 378-2562

Stratford Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting  
December 27, 2004

Catharine B. Mitchell Museum

All members of the Society are Welcome to Attend

Please call 378-0630 for information