

# Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

Volume X Issue 4

March 2006



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

## NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday March 31, 2006 7:30pm

Christ Episcopal Church  
2000 Main Street, Stratford

**Linda Russell**

*Balladeer*

*From the boisterous ballads of the 18th Century  
to the sentimental melodies of the Victorian age.*



From the boisterous ballads of the 18th Century to the sentimental melodies of the Victorian age, Linda Russell recreates a "lost" National treasure.

Mixing music with history comes naturally to Linda. She grew up in the Wisconsin countryside where she went to a one-room school. Her Mom was a church organist and her Dad the local historian. On family vacations, the Russells followed a trail of history, visiting Civil War battlefields, pioneer villages and waterways of voyeurs. Singing came easily to Linda, and she credits her Mother with instilling in her the pure joy of singing and passion for all types of music.

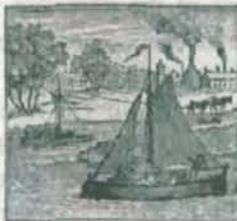
Linda played music all through college at the university of Wisconsin/Eau Claire. It was at college, that she discovered her love of theater and led the shy country girl to New York City where she enrolled in The American Academy of Dramatic Arts.

Linda began her professional career by performing as a balladeer at Federal Hall National Memorial. For 16 years, she brought the 18th century vividly to life for countless visitors to the site of George Washington's inauguration on Wall Street.

Certainly one of the top highlights of Linda's career was her Carnegie Hall debut in June of 1992 with Tom Paxton and Mike Seeger.

She continues to sing and play ballads, broadsides, love songs, marches and dance tunes of early America at national state and local historical sites, as well as schools, community centers, churches, nursing homes, and folk festivals.

Linda resides in New York City and, in between touring the countryside performing, she makes frequent trips to her native Wisconsin.



The meeting is open to the public and refreshments will be served - Bring a Friend  
Weather-related cancellation will be announced on WICC Radio 600.

## Ted Iott, President

I thought it was time to revisit Stratford's Historic Districts. The boundaries of the 17th century village, laid out by our founders, now encompass our Federal Historic District. It covers the area from East Broadway, south on Main Street, south on Elm Street including Judson Place, Broad Street, Academy Hill, Stratford Avenue, South Avenue to Birdseye Street.

In 1977 the U.S. Department of Interior surveyed this area and included hundreds of these homes in the National Register of Historic Places. Homes of the 18th, 19th and 20th century share this distinction.

Stratford also has a Local Historic District. It's distinguished by its organization. All home owners must submit all exterior changes to the Stratford Historic District Commission, who then rules on the appropriateness of the proposed changes. This district is an overlay of the northern portion of the Federal District from Academy Hill north to East Broadway.

Lastly, Stratford has a forgotten historic district; much smaller than the huge Federal District, but where 18th and 19th century homes are the rule. Many of these magnificent homes have original material on their exteriors, and most still have their original colonial lots. My son Eric and I took a tour of this district, and he identified individual houses and the approximate dates. The dates range from 1770 to 1890, making this area as old or older than any in town.

Stratford has reason to be proud!

### Remember This?



Then, please let us know!!

## News Notes of November 1891

(Stratford column of the Bridgeport Post)

Avon Park - It is located in the town of Stratford not far from the Center and directly on Stratford Avenue. It comprises two acres of fine grove surrounded by a high fence. Hammocks, rope and box swings are plentifully provided. There is good well water on the premises and at night the place is lighted by scores of street lamps. The dancing pavilion (140 by 45 ft.) is a fine structure built on a stone wall foundation with a double floor and an elevated stand for the orchestra. This pavilion has no equal in the state. Near the center of the park is a bandstand of good design with a sounding board. Seats are thickly scattered about, sufficient to accommodate a thousand people. Small tables are provided for family groups. Croquet sets are furnished and a tennis court is to be laid out at once.

The credit for all this belongs to the energy and good judgment of Supt. Lines of the East End R.R. Co. The object is to provide a strictly temperance picnic place, convenient of access, where lodges, churches, and private parties can find a suitable spot for recreation. Many people ride daily on the large open cars of the road to Stratford, simply for the enjoyment of the ride, and the establishment of the park will give an added incentive. The East End R.R. Co. will ask no price for the use of the park and all respectable organizations are at liberty to engage it and charge admission. On days when no society is occupying the park it will be free to all. The formal opening of the park will take place next Wednesday, when the full Wheeler and Wilson band will give a concert and admission will be free. In the evening there will be dancing and a small admission fee.

### SBC Participation Program

SBC Community Connections remitted a check for \$76.91 to the Stratford Historical Society, representing 5% of their total SBC All Distance Billing to Society participants during the last two quarters. The total received to date by the Society under this Program is \$271.17. For SBC All Distance customers, a request to SBC can make you a participant with no additional charge on your bill.

## A HOPE CHEST of MEMORIES

from recent letters to the The Historical Society  
by Elizabeth Birdseye Sniffen Gullander

This is a photo of my mother *Alice Winifred Lovell Sniffen's* "Hope Chest" as it presently appears. The chest was given to her by her prospective husband, *Herbert William Sniffen* of Sniffen's Point, Stratford, a year or so before their wedding on March 20, 1910. *Herbert* was 38 and *Alice* 25. *Herbert*, had upheld the duty of a younger brother to assist his older brothers in developing careers. They, one at a time, studied at Yale College, and later at Berkley Divinity School at Middletown, as they became Episcopal ministers. *Herbert* was the sole support of his brothers during the long seasons of running the farm with such tools and horses as were then available mother had purchased after the death of their father, *Charles Birdseye Sniffen*. After *Herbert's* brothers moved away to their ministries, *Herbert* had still to consider caring for his unmarried, elderly Mother. He and *Alice* honeymooned with dinner in New York, then took the ferry up the Hudson to Albany, to take the train to Niagara Falls. *Herbert* died, suddenly, 14 years after his marriage, at the age of 53, leaving behind: his widow of 40 and four children, ages 10 months, 7, 9, and 11 years.



After three seasons of attempting to run the farm by herself (in the Spring of her husband's death), the foreman *Herbert* had hired for several years, came in March to report for duty. *Alice* met him at the farmhouse door. Learning that her husband had died, the man turned on his heel. Announced, "I don't work for women", and departed, leaving *Alice* "to farm" as she had watched *Herbert* do it.

After three years of isolation, except for the four minor children and an elderly mute, whom she had hired to care for the baby, half a mile from a telephone, without running water, except pumps, or electricity, *Alice* taught herself to drive the family sedan, and delivered vegetables from the family car, until the ruts in the unpaved road at 941 East Broadway made travel almost impossible. She then gave up farming and moved into her mother's house, the one pictured largely on the Hope Chest. She had been given a job at the Library, where, earlier she had worked after High School.

The Chest is cedar throughout, the interior being untouched with decoration. I painted the outside several times, always in solid colors which suited the background of where I was then living, and with whom.

After I married "*Gully*", (*Werner Paul Gullander*), and late in our life together, in 1980, we went to Port Ludlow, Washington to live where we could keep our yacht, "*Gazebo Senior*" in sight and handy for use. For the first time in my life I found myself without a household of children, or wifely or civic duties. I had taken art lessons at Oberlin College, '34- '36 and along the way of my married life I had been featured in Art Shows in 3 states, plus the District of Washington. After publishing two books, I began to express myself more independently soundly backed by *Gully* in every project I encountered. At that time *Gully* was President of the National Association of Manufacturers. We lived in the politically famous "Watergate Apartments". I was again teaching painting, as I held classes in Washington, D. C., instructing wives of the ambassadors to the U. S. and their staffs where I was a member of "Welcome to Washington". I encouraged my students sometimes to break away from painting what they saw, to think of painting what they felt. In the process I tried primitive painting and chose as "a canvas" *Alice's* Hope Chest.

I started with a portrayal of the house on East Broadway, where I had lived from 1927 until I left Stratford in 1936 to go to California. The Chest did not go with me until several trips later when my Mother offered it to me, and I had it shipped to California. "Grandmother's house", as our generation called it, was the core of my life, when I badly needed security. It "loomed large", so I painted it big, and

detailed the Gothic trimming around edges of the upper roof, and the porches. I detailed on the left the sleeping porch added on in the late 1880's for my *Aunt Ethelyn's* need for fresh air for sleeping while she fought what she thought was tuberculosis -'nother story on that!

So you have "the house at 941" on the Chest, followed by the horse-pulled trolley, the Post Office with its flags and bunting to establish the holiday. VERY large, Great grandfather *Lewis Todd's* grocery, hardware, and soft goods store. Later a candy shop was added, and run by *Grandpa Todd's* eldest daughter, *Aunt Alice*. (her unmarried status made it necessary for her youngest sister, *Winifred*, never to marry , as rules then ruled.

Also portrayed is Christ Episcopal Church with its weathervane gold rooster, shot at for "target practice" on two occasions during the French and Indian War when the British marched through Stratford. Near the Church with its stained glass windows is the Olde Church Cemetery. The Library, also, had to be on the panel. *Alice* had been a librarian when the Library was new, as she worked and saved her money after her graduation from High School, which had to be at Bridgeport High as the final two years were not available in Stratford. The garage behind Grandmother's house was important as *Alice's* front high-wheeled bicycle was kept there.

Actually, I considered the holiday which brought out all the flags and bunting to be Memorial Day, 1894. (*Alice* was 10). I had to have Academy Hill and its statue and "the boys in blue", several of the veterans still alive, waiting for the parade to arrive. A dedicated top student would recite "The Gettysburg Address.". Horse drawn carriages and wagons loaded with brightly dressed families bringing baskets of tablecloths and place settings and pots and plates of food gathered from every side.

The panel on the right portrays "The Farm" where my sisters, brother, and I were born. My father did not then have the fine gasoline driven Fordson Tractor he would buy in 1923 - the first gasoline-powered tractor in south Stratford. In the picture it shows the Italian women in their bright costumes stooping to gather in the harvest of tomatoes, carrots, spinach, and so forth. *Herbert Sniffen* was best known for his excellent asparagus. Sunday drivers from N. Y. City would drive to Stratford on Sundays, year after year for *Sniffen's* asparagus and rhubarb.

Beyond the tall elm at the edge of the lawn before the farmhouse, the Housatonic rolls on, with its daily rises and falls of tides. Seagulls are landing on pilings. Beyond, one could see seaplanes piloted by the Coast Guard as they attempted to halt the illegal bringing in of alcohol. Also, one can see a stretch of blue Long Island Sound, with distant commercial and cruise vessels arriving or departing for European ports.

The paintings on the Hope Chest do not begin to depict the fun and joy of growing up in Stratford, but the paintings early lack of skill adds a charm further developed skills might well have lost.

On one end of the chest is a portrayal of the "Tumbling Blocks" quilting design. The opposing end has a lattice-work in yellow, with orangey flowers scaling the wooden slats. The back has the legend of the marriage of *Herbert* and *Alice*, with the dates of the entire family, including the first-born, *Herbert Jr.*, who lived only three days. About two months before the baby was to be delivered, *Alice* was in the barnyard while the wagons were being loaded for market, and she was accidentally kicked in the abdomen by one of the horses. The child appeared perfect at birth, but his heart had been affected and he died in four days. The other children "lived happily ever after". Only names and dates are recorded. All are now deceased, except *Elizabeth Birdseye Sniffen Gullander*, who still lives an active life. Two years ago, at 86, she was prize-winning champion of Lady Putters, and Putting Champion in all of Coachella Valley .This slowed down when peripheral neuropathy occurred. Falls and breaks "happened " over the next two years, but *Elizabeth's* pace has again quickened and her putting is showing promise of an interesting 2005-06.

## Winton Bequest Received

Hildreth and Betty Winton, long-time residents of Stratford and long-time members of the Stratford Historical Society, have remembered the Society in their Trust. This generous gift has been entered into our endowment investments and will be of great value in the Society's efforts to complete the carriage house restoration and continue the day-to-day activities. We are thankful for the interest they continued throughout their lives.

Remember Oronoque Orchards?

## January General Meeting



There was a large attendance of members and the public at our January general meeting held at, and co-sponsored by, The Stratford Library in the Lovell Room. This meeting featured the authors discussing their book "Complicity" based on their Hartford Courant series of articles on how the north promoted, prolonged and profited from slavery. Pictured above, standing, is Cheryl Magazine, Images Editor of the Hartford Courant and, at the table from the left, authors Anne Farrow, Jenifer Frank and Joel Lang.

## Presidential Facts



William McKinley (1897-1901) was the first chief executive to appear on a newsreel while president.



Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) established the first White House press room.



Warren G. Harding (1921-1923) had the first radio in the White House.



Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945) was the first chief executive to appear on television as president, at the opening of the New York City World's Fair in 1939.



John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) held the first live televised news conference in 1961.



William J. Clinton (1993-2001) gave the first presidential Internet address to the nation in 2000.

## What is an Estuary?

Long Island Sound and the southern stretch of the Housatonic River, from the Far Mill River at the southern border of Shelton to the mouth of the river at Stratford and Milford are estuaries - bodies of water where fresh and salt water mix. The tides drive the seawater from the Atlantic Ocean into Long Island Sound through the Race, the opening at the eastern end, and push the seawater westward and up into the Housatonic, Connecticut, and Thames rivers, where it mixes with the fresh water flowing downriver into the Sound. Estuaries are crucial breeding grounds for many marine animals, support a great variety of plant and animal life, and produce four times more organic matter than a fertilized cornfield.

(Source: HVA's *A Guide to the Housatonic River Estuary*)



*Alice Winifred Sniffen's "Hope Chest"*  
(See Insert)

**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: 203-378-2562**

**Stratford Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting**

**April 24, 2006**

**Catharine B. Mitchell Museum**

**All members of the Society are Welcome to Attend**

**Please call 378-0630 for information**