

---

---

# Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

---

Volume XII Issue 3

January 2008

---



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

## NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday January 25, 2008 - 7:00pm

Christ Episcopal Church  
2000 Main Street, Stratford

**GORDON M. WILLIAMS**

**“Who is that Fat Man in the White House?”**

**William Howard Taft,  
The Forgotten President**



William Howard Taft  
University

He is the President that few people know today. Sandwiched between the ebullient, charismatic Teddy Roosevelt, and the brilliant, world-embracing Woodrow Wilson, William Howard Taft is the forgotten man. If people remember anything about “Big Bill,” they might remember that his adult weight fluctuated between 300-350 pounds, and that they had to build a special bathtub when he occupied the White House.

It is true that his weight was one of the dominant facts of his adult life. But Taft could always laugh at himself about his abundance of flesh. Once he told the story of how he vacated his seat on a street car and three ladies sat down. His weight became the focal point of many jokes and stories told by the press and by his friends and many of these stories will be retold in this lecture.

What people do not remember is Taft’s excellent public service record. He served with great distinction as the Governor General of the Philippines, setting up public schools and putting the systems in place to move the islands towards independence. He did this while charming the natives by attending local cock fights and by traveling into the interior where headhunters were known to thrive. During Roosevelt’s administration he served as Secretary of War.

People don’t give Taft’s presidency as much credit as they could. Although he had never wanted to be President, he longed for the robes of the Supreme Court. At the end of his life, cheerful, smiling William Howard Taft would have his dreams come true.

Mr. Williams is a retired history teacher from Trumbull High School, ending his formal academic life by earning a sixth year degree in history and literature from Wesleyan University. His numerous awards include Trumbull’s Teacher of the Year, being a Fulbright teacher abroad in England and being a Milken Connecticut Educator.

As a teacher and as president of the Newtown Historical Society, he has presented many lectures filled with material that is informative and interesting, and in the case of William Howard Taft humorous.

The meeting is open to the Public  
Refreshments will be served — Bring a Friend  
Note starting time now 7:00pm

---

**Rudy Mastroianni**  
**President**

The officers and staff hope that you experienced a smooth transition into 2008!

The Society volunteers and staff have sprung into action planning activities for the 2008 season. It is pleased to kick it off on January 25 by delving into the life of our country's past president William Howard Taft with a presentation, by Gordon M. Williams .

At a recent meeting of the Governing Board, the following matters were discussed and actions taken: (1) an increase in the amount of each Scholarship grant from \$500.00 to \$1,000; (2) the appointment of Sandy Rutkowski as the Chairperson solidified the history camp plans, (tentative starting date of July 7); (3) continued to plan for the previously announced tag sale and antiques appraisals taking place on May 31st; (4) also, plans for docent recruitment and training, and arranging school tours.

It is especially exciting to report that the Society is now able to convert audio tapes to digital files. This much sought after capability allows us to convert treasured assets of cassette and reel type tapes of oral interviews of many well known Stratford citizens. An important benefit to the general membership is the ability to reproduce the interviews on compact discs (CD's).

I'll be looking forward to being with you January 25, and to share our thoughts about how to maintain the Stratford Historical Society's history of excellence!

**Volunteers Needed**

The Society is looking for volunteers to help with our annual Children's History Camp, and with school group and public tours of the Captain David Judson House. For the History Camp (week of July 9th), we need anyone who has a special talent and an interest in historical Stratford that they would like to share with youngsters; and for the House tours, we are looking for men and women who are available during school hours to help us show the three levels of our colonial home. Training will be provided. Please let us know with a call by March 1st if you are available to assist. Tel. 378-0630.

**Carol Lovell**  
**Curator & Accessions Chairperson**

Recent acquisitions have included a variety of items. Some have been donated by members, some by non-members and some have been won at auction.

A large collection of 19th century documents dealing with the "fancy goods" store of Selena Brooks on Main St., papers of the Sloop Accordeon, Major A. Brooks' documents about schooling was from an auction in Wallingford. Other items include oyster tongs, scythe and pitchfork, large oil painting of Judson House, a life-size Saucy Walker-type doll, early pair of men's shoes (possibly from England), 19th century soapstone warming stone and a wooden mallet and part of a wood panel which may have come from an early Christ Church structure.

Catherine Lawrence, Historian at Christ Episcopal Church, donated the last items listed. They were found in the basement of her house on Elm Street which has been occupied by members of the family for several generations.

\*\*\*\*\*

Silas Burton, a 19th century weaver who lived on Linden Avenue, created many ledgers, account books and school records in addition to his weaving records and designs. He is the one weaver in Stratford about whom we know the most; thanks to several generations of descendants who saved his papers and then donated them to the Society.

Rebecca Arkenberg, a Society volunteer who is a weaver, has developed a CD containing photos of Burton's weaver's drafts.

It is unusual for so many early designs from one weaver to exist as a collection and the Historical Society is pleased to offer this CD at \$20 plus \$3 shipping/handling. Please send a check in the amount of \$23 to the office at PO Box 382, Stratford, CT 06615.

**The Corsair Restoration Project**

Those wishing to contribute may send checks to the Corsair Restoration Fund, Connecticut Air & Space Center, Sniffens Lane, Stratford, Ct. 06615.



## Hosts and Hostesses

### Dolores Hctor

The 2007 season saw an increase in the number of members who were willing to hostess and greet visitors during tours of Judson House. Members of the Junior society came with a parent during the July and August tours.

Junior Members were Gina and Angela Mariano, Claudia and Victoria Regensburger, Gretchen and Audrey Pancak, Haley Tomscheck, Emily Barksdale, Rebecca Simon and Myra Sampson.

New Hostesses were Gail Liscio, David Schroeder, Maureen Doherty, Vivian Manzione, Lucille DeMarco and Victoria Coulson.

Those who have served before: Dorothy Euerle, Robert Hctor, Marie Blake, Ann Eisinger, Marge Jacaruso, Nancy Goodrich, Mary Evers, Dick and Florence Steele, and Barbara Firisin.

Other Hostesses who have given of their time include Shirley Balascak, Christine Constant, Peggy Doyle, Dolores Hctor, Stephany Kirik, Gail McCarthy, Shirley McCormack, Barbara Reid and Linda Woods.

A few members who had participated in other years were unable to do so this time because of health or family problems but asked to be contacted for the Judson House 2008 season which starts in June.

The following groups arranged for tours with a total of 164 admissions:

Stratford Day - 50

Little Red School House—42

Scholarship Tea—4

Mary Evers Friends—8

Sister Cities—13

Sandy Rutkowski Friends—6

Milford Historical Society—6

35 persons attended the Hostesses

Reception.

Once again visitors to the Captain David Judson House came from beyond neighboring towns. Australia, New Zealand and Ireland from across the seas, and country-wide there was representation from California, Washington, Texas, Michigan, Florida and Virginia to nearby New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island.

## November Membership Meeting

Rebecca Arkenberg's presentation on her Si-las Burton Project was well received by a large audience. With Judy Kurmay providing background on Burton and the world in which he lived, Rebecca covered his life as a weaver extraordinaire based on the records kept in his daybook, account book, customer list, and from other sources.



## Coming Events

### Tag Sale

The 2008 Tag Sale will be held on May 31st from 9am until 3pm in the Catharine B. Mitchell Museum. We are now accepting saleable items of jewelry, books, household items, small furniture, glassware and children's items. If you have items that you would like to donate for the sale please bring them to the society office on any Tuesday or Thursday between 9am and 2:30pm. We can arrange for larger items to be picked up after April 15th. If you would like to volunteer for an hour or two on the day of the sale call the Society off at 378-0630.

### Antique Appraisals

Plans for the Antique Appraisal are being finalized and will be announced in the March Newsletter.

### Society Scholarships

### Curtis/Curtiss Family Reunion

The Curtis/Curtiss Society Family reunion for 2008 is scheduled for the third weekend in October, the 17-19th, in Newtown, Connecticut. For more information contact Jennifer Seney, Membership Secretary, JLD6959@aol.com.

## Sterling Homestead Pond in days prior to I-95



Ice skating on the river and on ponds throughout the town was a nineteenth and early twentieth century pastime.

---

### 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](mailto:Judsonhousestfd@aol.com)

Fax: 378-2562

On the Web: [www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.com)

Stratford Historical Society Board of Directors Meeting

February 25, 2008 7:00pm

Catharine B. Mitchell Museum

All members of the Society are Welcome to Attend

Please call 378-0630 for information