
Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

Volume XIII Issue 4

March 2009



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

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday March 13, 2009 - 7:00pm

Christ Episcopal Church
2000 Main Street, Stratford

A Hard Road to Travel

From Connecticut to Gettysburg 1863

RESEARCHED AND PRESENTED BY CAROLYN IVANOFF



J. Henry Blakeman



Stephen Crofut

With access to letters of cousins Selah and Henry Blakeman and extensive additional research, Carolyn Ivanoff presents the story of four local friends, mess mates and tent mates who would be together almost daily from their enlistment in Company D of the 17th Connecticut Volunteers Infantry in 1862 until their rendezvous with fate on July 1, 1863 on a knoll on the northeast side of Gettysburg.

J. Henry Blakeman and Selah Blakeman were first cousins. Henry, Selah, and Stephen Crofut were from the Oronoque section of Stratford and grew up together. Sylvester Rounds was from Huntington. Of the four friends, only Selah would leave the battlefield at Gettysburg unscathed.

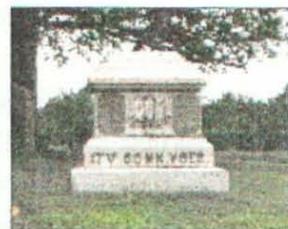


Sylvester Rounds



Selah G. Blakeman

Ms. Ivanoff, a housemaster at a Shelton Intermediate School, brings history and social studies educational programs beyond the classrooms and into the community. In 2003 she was named Civil War Preservation Trust's Teacher of the Year. We welcome her again for another informative evening.



The meeting is open to the Public
Refreshments will be served — Bring a Friend

Rudy Mastroianni, President

Traditionally, the month of February has been the time to remember past Presidents of the United States. Originally honoring the births of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, Presidents Day is now set aside in memory of all past presidents.

Thus it seems fitting at this time to remind our members of the Society's unbroken line of presidents (33) since its inception, beginning with the first, Eliot Peck, 1925-26, followed by Sterling H. Bunnell in 1927. They were succeeded by many others of Stratford's finest civic minded citizens. Space does not permit listing all of them, but to name a few others (at the risk of incurring the wrath of some members) who are recalled for their multi-faceted service to Stratford, there were William Howard Wilcoxson, 1933-34; Frank S. Bunnell, 1937-38; Donald S. Sammis, 1956-through 1960; Donald Fowler, 1961-62; and Lewis Knapp, 1966-67. Our thanks remain eternal for their dedicated service.

Also, occurring annually during February is Engineers Week (Feb. 15-21 in 2009). During this time engineering education institutions and professional societies recall and promote the creative talents of their fellow engineers that have benefited the world's population. In this case, Stratford has good reasons to celebrate Engineers Week. In its history Stratford has recorded the significant engineering feats of several renowned citizens such as: Alfred Ely Beach (1826-1896), who invented an improved typewriter with radial swinging arms, was a patent attorney for Thomas Edison, founded the Scientific American that is still being published, and is most noted for conceiving the idea of the subway system that eventually was applied to construct the system in New York City; and, most recently Igor Sikorsky of helicopter fame. We owe our thanks to these creative men who applied their creativity for the good of society.

January Membership Meeting

A decorated Civil War veteran visited us at the Society's meeting on Friday January 30th. Col. William Burr Wooster appeared in dress uniform - in the person of James Con-



nelly, Jr. He was accompanied by his wife Barbara, dressed for the period as Mrs. Wooster. Also present were Major Philow and Mrs. Buckingham - in reality Charles and Marcia Cornut.

Col. Wooster was a great, great nephew of General David Wooster who was born in Stratford in 1710, and was mortally wounded in the battle of Ridgefield, Ct. in 1777, dying 5 days later - "an unsung hero of the Revolution".

Many thanks to Andy Nelson, a neighbor and very good friend of the Society, who has planted flowers at the Carriage House and seen to their watering during this past summer. Throughout the season, he's given of his truck, his time, and the aid of his helper whenever we've needed extra assistance with dump runs, bunting displays or lawn maintenance.

Victoria Chaffin Woodhull

First woman to be presidential candidate 1872

Jane Addams

First woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize

1931

Ruth Bran Owen

First woman foreign diplomat 1933



Save the Date!

100th Anniversary
Stratford Fire Department
Stratford, CT

April 25, 2009

(Rain Date April 26, 2009)

Parade & Festival

Parade begins at 11:00 am

Main Street Fire House

To

AVCO Parking Lot

Festival Begins at 1:00 pm

AVCO Parking Lot

Sponsored by:

Stratford Professional Firefighters Burn Foundation

&

Stratford Firefighters, Local 998

&

Town of Stratford

Women's History Month

After World War I, a small group of Stratford men was asked by the Republican Town Committee to draft an update to the town charter. A council-manager type town charter was presented to the town committee which adamantly rejected the report! The group went ahead anyway, gathered a charter committee of a hundred prominent citizens, then received approval of the state legislature and charged ahead with a referendum. All the organized politicians in town from both parties opposed the idea, but there was a new element in politics—the ladies.

From its founding, Stratford did not raise bashful women. Mary Silliman, who, when the British fired the town, moved her children from Fairfield to North Stratford and there gave birth to another son; Anna Oliver who became the first woman Methodist minister in spite of male prejudice; the temperance and abolitionist women; the group turned down for membership in the Congregational Church in 1871; all these women fought for their beliefs.

The Women's Suffrage movement followed in their steps. By 1915 Stratford women, led by Mrs. Charles D. Lay, were taking crowded trains to Hartford to speak at hearings on the vote, and Edna Sammis Richardson drove her mother to the same hearings, at a time when not many men dared drive that far. The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified on August 18, 1920, and within eleven months Stratford women exercised their new-found right by voting on the charter.

The referendum was held on July 11, 1921, and the vote was 2 to 1 (1010 to 564) in favor of council-manager government. The people had overridden the politicians, and the charter took effect the following October 3.

From In Pursuit of Paradise, Lewis G. Knapp

A Brief History of the Stratford Fire Dept. as they Celebrate their 100th Anniversary

Stratford's first organized fire protection began in 1875 with the Mutual Hook and Ladder Co. with a group of volunteers under the leadership of Chief Rhoades. Basic fire equipment consisted of a hand-drawn hook and ladder apparatus with several heavy ladders, a pump operated by four men, buckets, helmets and a trumpet. This equipment was kept in a small building behind the Congregational Church. The hook and ladder took a dozen men or, if lucky, a team of horses whose owners competed for the \$5 prize if first on the scene. Often, however, buildings were lost due to the time getting to the fire.

In 1895, funds were acquired to build a central firehouse in the center of town between where the Lovell Building is now situated and the Thruway. The M H & H Co. was under Chief Clarkson, and occupied the building in 1897.

A competing fire company, the Chemical Hose Co., was also on Main St. near the center. **The two companies voted to merge in February 1909, and became the Stratford Fire Department.** Allen Judson, a volunteer since 1895, part-time paid chief in 1909, became the first full-time chief in 1910.

Chief Judson lived near the firehouse and was on duty 24 hours a day. His duties included taking care of the jail and Town Hall, and inspecting all the fire hydrants in town. He did this single handedly for 9 years until William Anthony was hired. The Chief had a full and interesting career, from bucket brigades to gas powered fire engines, retiring in 1951.

In 1930 Stratford had 3 firehouses: Center, Lordship and Nichols Ave. In 1935 fire losses from 223 fires totaled \$15,000. In 1938 the department boasted 4 vehicles and 23 trained men when a second fire HQ was started. In 2008 the SFD has 97 men and women who respond not only to fires but to hazardous-material calls, vehicle extractions, medical calls, water rescue and plane accidents. The SFD does this in a town which today has about 50,000 residents, is bordered by 18 miles of shoreline, and intersected by I-95, the Merritt Parkway, Metro-North Railroad and has an airport within its borders.

Today's fire firefighters are linked through their work back to Chiefs Judson, Clarkson and Rhoades, but the job has expanded and changed dramatically over the years, becoming more complex and dangerous. Though far from the days of a dozen men pulling a hook and ladder up dirt roads, we should not forget those who came before as we advance into the 21st century. Sources: *In Pursuit of Paradise*; SFD scrapbooks et al

See insert re Parade & Festival on Sat. Apr. 25th

When Firemen Ran to a Fire



Chief David Rhoades poses with the members of the Mutual Hook and Ladder Company in the 1890's. They kept the hook and ladder in the lower floor of the town house to the left, behind the Congregational church, before a new firehouse was built in 1897. When church bells rang their summons, the men towed the apparatus. After the fire, the usual comment was, "They saved the cellar and the well." Source:

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The Stratford Historical Society is a not for profit 501 (c) (3) corporation. Contributions are tax deductible. The Society receives no Federal, State or Local dollars.

COMPUTER CORNER

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Stratford Historical Society Governing Board Meeting
 xxxxx 7:00pm
 Please call 203-378-0630 for information