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# Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

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Capt. David Judson House c 1750

## GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday, January 27, 2012 - 7:00pm

Christ Episcopal Church

2000 Main Street, Stratford

**Presentation by Robert Berthelson**

**Mr. Robert Berthelson will give a presentation:**

**'Connecticut in the War of the Rebellion'.**



Between April 12, 1861 and April 9, 1865, the United States was involved in a life and death struggle that would determine if the 34 United States would remain a unified nation or if they would be divided between Union and Confederacy. The war cost the lives of over 620,000 Americans, more than in all the other wars in our nation's history.

Connecticut men fought in virtually every major battle of the Civil War. One regiment, the First Infantry, fired the first shots at Bull Run and then had the honor of escorting Grant to take Lee's surrender at Appomattox. The War called forth many able-bodied Connecticut men. The most celebrated of the state's war heroes was General Alfred Terry, who participated in a number of engagements, including the capture of Fort Fisher in North Carolina.



Bob Berthelson is a photographer with a life-long interest in American History. He is a member and past President of the Civil War Round Table of South Central Connecticut as well as several other historical organizations. Since 1965, he has presented programs to over 1,900 Connecticut audiences including libraries, schools, historical societies, and social groups. Mr. Berthelson's last program at SHS was Jan. 2010.

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

### Rudy Mastroianni, President

It is my wish that all Society members enjoyed smooth sailing into Year 2012, and that it continues throughout the year. At the Historical Society offices, Committees of the Board are now making plans to offer Docent Training, School Tours in the Spring and Fall, Summer History Camp, and Public Tours of the Judson House and Catherine Bunnell Mitchell Museum. Also in progress is the review of the Society's Constitution/By-Laws.

Also planned for 2012 are new museum displays of literature and artifacts to commemorate the Bicentennial of the War of 1812 on June 12. "The War of 1812 is often called the 'forgotten war'. To some historians, it is the end of the American Revolution. It established the American right to trade and commerce ..." as explained in a letter to The Society from the Connecticut Society, U.S. Daughters of 1812, Spring 2011. Recalled is that President Madison's declaration of the War was the result of the blockade put in force by the British of shipping ports important to the existence of the newly established United States of America.

Samuel Nicoll, a Stratford native, landowner and resident at the time, played a key role in the conflict. He made history as a privateer during the War. He and his ship, the Scourge, were one of many employed by the United States to capture British ships and confiscate their cargo. Nicoll's quick action meant the Scourge escaped the British blockade of Long Island Sound early in the war and profitably captured many British ships in the Atlantic throughout the war.

A remaining legacy of Samuel is the Nicoll-Benjamin House. It was built by Samuel's father General Mathias Nicoll in 1785. The General willed it to Samuel, and who in turn willed it to his wife's nephew Samuel Nicoll Benjamin. Thus the origin of the name, though it is now commonly known as "the White House". It still stands at 1850 Elm Street on the grounds of the Shakespeare Festival Theatre. At that location it gained fame during the illustrious era of the Theatre as headquarters of its Administrative Offices. Samuel Nicoll's legacy in Stratford to be continued in the March newsletter.

### November Membership Meeting

Jackson Kuhl spoke to an engaged crowd the Friday before Thanksgiving. Mr. Kuhl spoke to the Society regarding 'privateering' and its role in in the Revolutionary War. Privateers menaced the British Navy and merchant ships during the Revolution and the War of 1812, assisting a nascent American Navy. Mr. Kuhl also answered many questions regarding Fairfield, Stratford and Bridgeport history, based on his research in local Historical Societies.

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### 150 Year Ago—Civil War Headlines

Jan. 10, 1862, The Battle of Middle Creek, Eastern Kentucky.

Jan. 27, 1862, frustrated by the reluctance (bordering on outright refusal) of McClellan, Halleck and Buell to take any offensive military action, Lincoln issued his famous General War Order No. 1, demanding that each military department begin moving toward battle with the enemy within a month.

*Feb 7, 1862:* Rebel reinforcements ordered to Tennessee's Fort Donelson.

*Feb 8, 1862:* Yankees capture Roanoke Island

*Feb.21, 1862:* Confederate troops attack Union troops near Fort Craig in New Mexico Territory. The first major engagement of the Civil War in the far West. The battle produced heavy casualties but no decisive result.

Feb 25, 1862: U.S. Congress passes the Legal Tender Act, authorizing the use of paper notes to pay the government's bills. This ended the long-standing policy of using only gold or silver in transactions, and it allowed the government to finance the enormously costly Civil War long after its gold and silver reserves were depleted.

## Docents

The docents are the heart of the Historical Society's educational and public interactions. The Stratford Historical Society organized a Docents program in 1973 to provide educated volunteer guides for groups of adults and schoolchildren, as well as the general public. The Docents enjoy sharing the depth of their knowledge of the Judson House and Family, as well as the history of Stratford during the Colonial and Revolutionary periods. The Docents dress in period attire to better portray early Stratford environment.

The Docents host all of Stratford's third and fifth grades in the spring and fall. Please join the 39th class of Docents to learn and then share Stratford's early history! Docent classes will meet once a week in February and into March. No prior knowledge is necessary!



## Educational Outreach

Please spread the word about the Historical Society's College Scholarship Program. Any high school senior, residing in Stratford and planning for college may apply. Applicants must have a favorable academic record and a strong interest in historical, political and civic affairs. Applications are available from the Guidance Offices at area high schools and by calling the Society's Office.

## By-Laws Committee

The Historical Society's Governing Board has undertaken a major project under the skillful guidance of President Rudy Mastroianni. A new committee formed to review the Society's Constitution and By-Laws for revision has met weekly to update to current practice and/or to establish new guidelines. The suggested amendments will be presented to the Board of Directors for approval early in the spring.

The Stratford Historic Society, formed in 1925, has faithfully carried out its original commitment to "preserve, cherish and care for" historical materials related to the history of the Town of Stratford. During the ensuing 86 years the Society maintained the Judson House and its unique collection of furnishings. The Society built the Catherine B. Mitchell Museum housing an outstanding collection. The archive preserve and protect many artifacts from Stratford throughout existence. In 2004, the Society reconstructed a 19th century Carriage House on its property, and last year, a generous neighbor donated an additional parcel of property. In addition the Genealogy section of our library has been a valuable resource for inquirers from all over the country. The Society's resources have been consistently open to the public for their enjoyment and education. Stratford school children visit the House and Museum under the guidance of a core of volunteer docents.

The Board is committed to maintaining access to this remarkable resource for the citizens of Stratford and beyond. Its preservation is our primary concern. The By-laws are being streamlined, simplified and clarified. The committee will suggest revisions to reflect current practices. The structure of the Board of Directors will be revised to reflect fewer available volunteers. The wording will also change to reflect modern financial terms and requirements.

**Stratford Winter Scenes from the Past**



In the winter Beach's carriage was stored in the barn, and his one-horse sleigh took its place. Far from having snow removed by plows, the streets were packed hard by heavy town-owned, horse-drawn rollers.



Winter weather was a challenge for the trolley line. Here men dig out as a car waits on Main Street at West Broad. Work cars with plows or large rotating brushes cleared the line of snow.

Electric heaters were provided for the passengers.

Taken from: *Images of America - Stratford*

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- Upcoming Events: Call for Information
- Feb. 27, 2012 - Docent Training Begins This Week
  - Feb. 27, 2012 - Governing Board Meeting: 1 PM
  - Mar. 30, 2012 - Gen.. Membership Meeting: 7 PM
  - Subj. War of 1812 - Speaker is Richard Spencer

**History is Made Every Day--Don't Miss a Single One!!!**  
**2012 SHS Membership renewals now due.**  
**Please send your check and let us be a part of your future.**

The best we can do about the past is to keep the memories alive!