
Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

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January 2014



Capt. David Judson House c 1750

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday, January 31, 2014 - 7:00pm

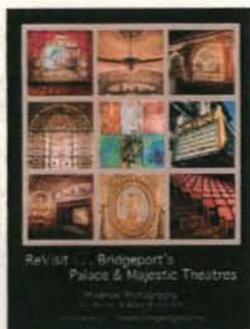
Christ Episcopal Church

2000 Main Street, Stratford

Bridgeport's Poli/Palace and Majestic Theatres

Jay Misencik and Geralene Valentine will present a short video of pictures taken of these theatres in 1991 and 2011, comparing the theaters 20 years later, then and now. Also on display will be framed photographs they have taken.

In their presentation they will explain who they are, how they began and the reason for the photos. They encourage the audience to share their memories of the theaters for use in a documentary they are producing. They are also interested in any artifacts/memorabilia from the theatres.



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

Poli/Palace Theatre

The Loew's Poli Theater was built by theater impresario Sylvester Poli as a vaudeville house, and opened for business on Sept. 4, 1922. Designed by Thomas W. Lamb in the Beaux Arts style, it featured vaulted ceilings, gilded hand-carved moldings, seating for over 3,600 and a giant Hall theater organ. When it was erected, it was the largest theater in the state of Connecticut and hosted a string of renowned entertainers, including Mae West in 1927. Eventually renamed the Loew's Palace Theater, it hosted live shows, concerts and events for decades before it officially closed in 1975 (after a brief stint as an adult movie house), and has been shuttered for almost 40 years. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, along with the Majestic Theater.

Majestic Theatre

The Majestic Theater, which has seating for 2,200, was also designed by Lamb, although it's slightly smaller and bit less ornate. Still, it's an impressive structure, very much in the style of the 1920s — lots of gold and red, crystal chandeliers, gilded moldings, high arching ceilings and detailed craftsmanship. It also opened in 1922 and served as a movie theater for years. It was closed in 1971.



Book of Remembrance

Donations have been made in
Memory of **John Hutchinson**

Given by:

Judy Kurmay

Elizabeth Rivera

Ann Stockman

Commemorative Calendar

The Stratford Historical Society has worked with the Town to produce a calendar to commemorate Stratford's 375th anniversary. The calendars are free and can be picked up at the town hall, the Society does have a few but call to be sure of supply.

The photos of old Stratford and the captions used in the calendar are from the files of the Society..

Holiday Open House

Our Junior Society with the help of volunteer docents greeted many visitors to the Stratford Historical Society's Holiday Open House. The Junior Society did an excellent job of greeting guests and giving tours in each of the festive rooms. The house was decorated in the spirit of present and past traditions, even though in Connecticut in the time period of the time, Christmas was not observed. Posted are many explanations of how these traditions came about. In the Museum our guests were treated to punch and cookies while being entertained by The Hearthside Waits. Who filled the Museum with holiday music.

Many of our guests found holiday gifts in our gift shop from hand made tin items to children's colonial toys.

Many thanks to the wonderful volunteers who gave their time to make this holiday celebration possible.



Stratford: 375 years old, 1639 - 2014

The Beginning of Stratford

Rev. Adam Blakeman (born in 1598), a graduate of Christ Church College at Oxford (where some of his teachers had labored to produce a new Bible for King James I) and a Church of England (Episcopal) clergyman, emigrated to New England because he could not, in conscience, live with the orders of King Charles I and Archbishop Laud. Blakeman became a convert to the Puritan principles of Thomas Hooker.

When he and some of his parishioners arrived at Massachusetts Bay, much of the land was already taken up. Blakeman and his followers followed Thomas Hooker to Connecticut where, at Wethersfield it was found that the best farmlands had been taken by the first arrivals. They settled there but decided to move farther on to new and better lands at the first opportunity.

Early in 1639, Blakeman's group moved on southward toward the shoreline of Long Island Sound. As soon as the weather allowed, the main group set out overland with cattle, sheep and hogs while boats were left at Wethersfield laden with heavy household goods and stores, and with the old and infirm.

Fording the Housatonic River near Oronoque, where the Paugussett Indians had a fort where their trail crossed the river, and where the depth at low tide was only a few feet, they came south along the river's edge until they found their vessels moored snugly in the little inlet later called Mac's Harbor (now on/at Elm St.). Here they erected the meetinghouse and built English-style wigwams and temporary sod homes. Tradition says that on a spring day in 1639 Rev. Adam Blakeman and his small group of Englishmen knelt to pray on the banks of a little cove near the mouth of the Housatonic River, and agreed that this was the place they sought. They had traveled over five thousand miles to reach this spot. The shores of this sheltered inlet .. Cupheag, as the Indian named Okenuck called it .. would be their home. After years of searching for the freedom to worship their God in their own way, this was to be their Paradise.

In the beginning, in 1639, Reverend Adam Blakeman prayed to God that this new plantation would be a Paradise on earth.

When Roger Ludlowe arrived, and began settlement of the Town of Fairfield, in late August of 1639, the crops in Stratford, were already sown, and Pequonnock/Cupheag/Stratford was a functioning plantation. Almost a year later, in June of 1640, a court order was sent to determine the bounds between Cupheag of Stratford and Uncoway of Fairfield.

The earliest settlers who had died were buried in the Mac's Harbor area to face the rising sun. We do not know their names, how many there were, or where within the graveyard they were put to rest, but when they died, each grave was oriented so that on Judgment Day its occupant would rise to face the rising sun.

Today, the first burying ground is gone. In 1678 the present Congregational Burying Ground took its place .. now behind the library. The dead who could be located in the original burying ground were exhumed and taken to the new location.

The men who settled Stratford were workingmen weavers, masons, joiners, smiths, and husbandmen, servants and apprentices. They may have originated anywhere in the British Isles. Regular seasonal migration of farm workers was common. The harvest workers came from all sorts of occupations: ship's carpenter, silk weaver, butcher, collier, chain-maker, even an owner of a boys' school. Rising population, depressed wages, and a series of crises in the woolen cloth industry drove workers to the lowland farms and drove many overseas, some to end up in Stratford.

The original settlers came for their religious beliefs, and also for economic reasons; to feed their children and to have a better life.

The most important building in the new Stratford was, as usual, the meetinghouse ... which served as church, town house, and fort, and probably as a school. New England meetinghouses assumed a standard form: a square building with a steep hip roof surmounted by an open turret. To house a hundred people, and serve as a watch house, it had to be about 30 feet square. In Stratford, at an early date the church procured a bell, the first in Connecticut, it is said, to call the people to church.

On the Sabbath every person came to church. Non-attendance meant a fine. Husbands and wives sat together, ancient bachelors and maids in another place, and children in a third. Muskets and pistols were in evidence.

In 1647, the General Court ordered the towns to supplement the armed householders by a guard from the train band. In Stratford, eight men were designated to come to church in armor and sit together at the rear of the church, ready for action.

The Church was the colony and the Church was the town. Becoming a member of the Church was not a decision made by the applicant; it was in the hands of the Church members, who were rather particular about whom they invited in. It sometimes took years for servants or menials to be allowed to join, and change their social status.

The Colonial Records for May 15, 1651 state that the Governor and 2 others were to go to Stratford to keep court on the trial of Goody Bassett for her life. Goody Bassett was accused of being a witch. She was declared guilty and hanged at the base of Clapboard Hill, where a little stream thereafter bore the name Gallows Brook. That brook once drained Gallows Swamp and fed into Tanner's Brook which ran through Stratford Center (very near/south of the Lovell Building, formerly the home of Lovell Hardware) to the Housatonic River. Today all evidence of the Stratford witchcraft trial has disappeared in the name of transportation progress.

Cotton Mather paid tribute to Reverend Adam Blakeman describing him as a very holy man, loved by all his people. Mather wrote "He was a useful preacher of the Gospel." Thomas Hooker said of Adam Blakeman, "for the sake of the sacred and solemn simplicity of the discourse of this worthy man, if I might have my choice, I would choose to live and die under Mr. Blakeman's ministry."

Rev. Adam Blakeman's memorial sign on the northwest wall of the Congregational Church was created in 1912 and donated by his descendants, including Miss Harriet Blakeman, a long-time member of this church.

On Nov. 18, 1678, the freedmen of the town voted to build a new meetinghouse. All of the five sites suggested were north of the old meetinghouse and the site selected "upon the hill called the Watch-house Hill", was the northernmost of these, showing that the town was growing northward. Watch-House Hill is now known as Academy Hill.

By 1699 Stratford, the fifth town founded in Connecticut Colony, was flourishing. The beginning years of settlement were over; the transition from Cupheag plantation to Stratford town was complete. Civilization had arrived; the colonists had become colonials.

The third meeting house, was built in 1743 and burned in 1785 after it was struck by lightning. It was the last building of the Congregational Society to stand upon Academy Hill.

The fourth meeting house was completed just 25 weeks after it was erected on Main St.. On the next day, Sunday Nov. 12, 1786, the congregation met in it in the forenoon for the purpose of public worship. This fourth meeting house stood for seventy-five years.

The present church is the fifth building of the Congregational Church. The movement for its erection began at a meeting of the First Ecclesiastical Society on June 20, 1857, when it appeared that several families could not be accommodated with sittings on account of limited space and that the building was inconvenient and uncomfortable. The proposition to build a new church was a serious one and it was determined not to proceed until the sum of fifteen thousand dollars had been subscribed. This was soon accomplished! But, a much larger sum was needed before the building was finally complete. The old house of worship was moved into the highway a few rods to the south and west (no longer there) and was used up to the Sunday preceding the dedication of the new church. The dedication services of the new church were held on Thursday, Oct. 27, 1859 and were attended by more than 900 people. (I wonder whether everyone fit inside!)

The architect of this current church (Leopold Eidlitz of New York) stood high in profession. The Stratford Congregational church is a fine example of the Gothic style and the original spire (no longer in existence) was admired as one of the most beautiful in the state. Mr. William A. Booth was a leader in both the proposal to build the church and working out the plans for the structure, both by his counsel and his large gifts. Mr. Booth *also* built the former parsonage on Broad St. and later sold it to the Ecclesiastical Society for two-thirds of its actual cost.

There have been many ministers and many members of the First Congregational Church of Stratford in the 375 years since the beginning of the town. The current membership continues this very long tradition.

To honor the 350th Anniversary of the Town of Stratford in 1989, Lewis G. Knapp, Town Historian, wrote the human story of Stratford "In Pursuit of Paradise." from its settlement to the 1989 present.

I have chosen to use this book and one by Howard Wilcoxson, published in 1939, entitled "History of Stratford, Connecticut" to give a very limited history of the beginning of the Town of Stratford and the Congregational Church.

This year marks the 375th year since Reverend Adam Blakeman and the early settlers began what became the Stratford known today.

Carol W. Lovell

January, 2014



Message from Our Docent Team

The Stratford Historical Society has made great strides in recent years by providing our school children with tours of the Judson House and Museum. Third graders come to learn about early Stratford history and colonial Life. Fifth graders learn about Stratford's role in the Revolutionary War.

The Society has a wealth of resources from stories to displays in addition to the wonderfully restored and furnished Judson House. We have the information and we have the facilities and, best of all, we have a group of well prepared and amazingly dedicated docents who present this information to the students.

In order to keep this program going as the great service it is to the schools and community, we need to constantly renew our pool of docents. So, we are asking any of you who are interested to step forward and join us. It is such a rewarding experience you will never regret it.

The next Docent training class is scheduled for March. Call Dolores Hoctor (203-378-6842) or the Judson House (203-378-0630) for more information.

The best way to pay for a lovely moment is
to enjoy it. *Richard Bach*

November's Meeting

We thank State Historian Walter Woodward for his informative lecture on Connecticut's early dealings with persons accused of witchcraft; and how Governor John Winthrop, Jr. and his friend Rev. Gershom Bulkeley transformed our State from New England's most aggressive witch hunter to a Colony that completely ended executions for witchcraft 30 years before they even began in Salem.

140 Years Ago

After explaining evolution in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Charles Darwin examines its role in human lineage in February 1871 in *The Descent of Man*. His big ideas—people belong to a single species descended from an ancestor shared with other mammals, and sexual selection, or competition for the opposite sex, can account for variations—are now mainstays of biology.

Archival Project: WWII & Stratford

The Society is gathering Memories, memorabilia and other information regarding the impact of WWII on Stratford's people and their community. If you would like to participate provide us with the information shown on the form shown below, and return to: SHS., P. O. Box 382, Stratford, Ct. 06615, or drop it off at 967 Academy Hill.

INDIVIDUAL MEMORIES: Here are some possibilities: Pearl Harbor, patriotism, war bonds, rationing, doing without, propaganda, victory gardens, civil defense jobs, volunteering, daily life/schedule, media-radio, film, news, selective service, friends and family in service, D-Day, VE Day, VJ Day, Atomic Bomb

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____ TEL. _____

AGE BETWEEN 1941 & 1945 _____

WHERE YOU LIVED: & SITUATION: _____ BRANCH OF SERVICE _____

YOUR MEMORIES: (please relate, in your own words memories and accounts of this era)



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On the Web: www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.org

Upcoming Events: Call for Information

Feb. 24 - Governing Board Meeting: 1 PM

Mar. 28 - Gen.. Membership Meeting: 7 PM

Richard Elias - The Home Front

In Stratford WW II