

---

---

# Stratford Historical Society >> UPDATE

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

---

Volume XVIII Issue 5

May 2014

---



Capt. David Judson House c 1750

## GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Friday, May 23, 2014 - 7:00pm

Christ Episcopal Church  
2000 Main Street, Stratford



**Kathleen Maher : P. T. Barnum  
& The Barnum Museum**



Known to most of the world as the '*Great American Showman*', for more than 150 years, the weight of the Barnum name has forged associations of humbug and merriment, the hyperbolic alongside the austere. Barnum provoked thought and invited controversy, welcomed the cynic, and engaged and challenged the skeptic. With the burgeoning ambitions of a visionary, yet still a man of his times, P.T. Barnum embraced the dream of a truly democratic nation, and in doing so, inspired a new American society to reach beyond the limits of ordinary expectations, to see the world as a place of opportunity and wonder.

P.T. Barnum's story begins long before his circus enterprise was created. Although the Barnum name lives on today as part of the American circus legacy, Mr. Barnum was 61 years old when the circus collaboration was presented to him. It was, in fact, his life-long love of his *American Museum* in New York City that drove his marketing machine and revealed a genius beyond the ideals of 19th century society. P.T. Barnum seized every moment and found promise in every opportunity.

Barnum uncovered a world of curiosity and, in doing so, discovered the curious, offered the superlative and invited the controversial. P.T. Barnum was the answer to the democratic dream to challenge the establishment and alter the authoritative voice. Barnum was a thinker, a creator, and an innovator during the age of industry, fueling the public mind with imagination, and often enlightening the spirit to the marvels the world had to offer. His pioneering spirit of promotion and his acumen for business transformed popular conceptions of the era, in turn molding and defining many ideals of today.

Ms. Maher, Executive Director of The Barnum Museum, has over 26 years experience working for museums that are additionally recognized as nationally significant historic landmarks. Ms. Maher is an active leader in Connecticut and Washington DC, advocating for historic preservation, urban revitalization, arts and cultural heritage.

In 2010, The Barnum Museum was struck by an F1 tornado significantly damaging the National Register building. Ms. Maher has been the champion of the massive recovery effort involving historic architects, engineers, environmental engineers, and an army of object conservators.

Working with the City of Bridgeport, State Historic Preservation Office, and the National Parks Service, Ms. Maher has been a leader in ensuring that 1893 The Barnum Museum's status is elevated to National Historic Landmark by the National Park and Department of the Interior.

\*\*\*\*\*

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

---

### Scholarship Awards

The Scholarship Committee is pleased to announce that this year we will be awarding five \$2,000.00 scholarships to high school seniors residing in Stratford.

Congratulations to:

Bridget Frouge	Bunnell H. S.
Rebecca Simon	Stratford H. S.
Craig Pellegrino	Bunnell H. S.
Carolyn Drenkard	Trumbull H. S.
Rachel Santo	Stratford H. S.

The awards will be given out at our general membership meeting May 23 7:00 pm.

\*\*\*\*\*

### History Camp

Our annual camp registrations are now available. You can download a copy from our website [stratfordhistoricalsociety.org](http://stratfordhistoricalsociety.org), and send it in; or stop by the office and pick one up.

The dates for the camp are:

**Camp 1**—July 7-11 for ages 9, and up to high school.

**Camp 2** - July 21-25 is for a more advanced camp that studies five topics in depth, with related activities. For grades 5 & 6, middle school and high school.

To see pictures of last year's camps, visit our website.

### March Membership Meeting

Richard Elias' presentation of "The Home Front in Stratford During WW II" was both interesting and informative.



\*\*\*\*\*

### Lorrie Laput and Dolores Hctor tending to our courtyard garden.



\*\*\*\*\*

### Judson & Curtis/s Family Visits

Stratford is celebrating the founding of our town in 1639. In that year seventeen families made their way to what is now Mac's Harbor, to begin a new life. Throughout the years the town has grown and now, 375 years later, descendants of the Judson and Curtis families will meet again, at the historical home of Captain David Judson, during the two day Early American Festival event, September 20 and 21st. If you are a descendant of another of the founding families, please give us a call at 203-378-0630.

## George Washington's Visits to Stratford

Washington visited Stratford seven times — as a young officer, commander-in-chief of the army and as the first President of the United States.

On June 20, 1775, Congress appointed George Washington commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. On Wednesday, June 28, 1775 Washington rode through Stratford on his way to Boston to assume command.

Caught without a Liberty Pole to honor Washington's arrival, the townsmen of Stratford had to improvise. They quickly boosted young Ben Fairchild up the tavern pole to bend on halyards and hoist the continental colors to honor the new commander-in-chief, as the citizens and militia accompanied him to the ferry on his way to his next stop.

### Connecticut character

Gen. Washington depended on Connecticut and Stratford during the Revolution for supplies and men. He had also learned to recognize the Connecticut character. Finding himself with a message for the commander-in-chief, Gen. David Wooster selected a young neighbor, Caleb Tomlinson of Ripton (Huntington, then part of Stratford) to deliver it. When Tomlinson asked to see Washington, the guard told him he could not.

"I must! I have a dispatch for him from General Wooster," Tomlinson responded. When Tomlinson was admitted to the Gen. Washington's presence, the general read the message, looked at the waiting soldier, and asked, "Anything more?"

"Nothing" said Tomlinson, "but an answer from you."

The general asked, "Do you presume to tell me what I must do?"

"No, General, but I'll be damned if I leave these quarters without something to show that I have discharged my duty."

Rising from his seat, Washington said, "You are from Connecticut, I perceive."

"I am, sir," was the answer.

The general looked at Tomlinson and remarked, "I wish to the God of battles that I had more such soldiers as you."

### Lafayette and Benjamin's Tavern

On September 19, 1780 the Marquis de Lafayette, crossed on the Stratford ferry to meet with Gen. Washington at Benjamin's Tavern, which was on West Broad Street. When he asked the ferry man the way to the tavern the response was "Yonder is the tavern keeper's daughter."

Young Alice Benjamin was picking berries by the river when the soldiers asked her to direct them to her father's house. She walked beside the horse of Lafayette to the village, where Washington was waiting. Alice's mother was flustered by the important visitors, but Washington assured her that all he wanted was simple food. She served potatoes, which at the time were a rarity, and Alice was allowed to place them on the table. Washington gently turned her face toward him and asked her name. He told her to be a good girl and gave her his blessing.

Eighty-one years later she still remembered.

From Stratford, Washington and Lafayette continued on to meet with Rochambeau to plan the final battle of the American Revolution.

In his diary, Washington refers to Stratford as "a pretty village on or near Stratford River." (*Ed. - Now known as the Housatonic River*)



## William Samuel Johnson, the Editor of the Constitution

In 1787, William Samuel Johnson of Stratford, son of the Rev. Samuel Johnson of Christ Episcopal Church, was appointed to the Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia, Penn. He was one of less than twelve men who created the Constitution that now governs the citizens of the United States.

On May 27, 1787, Dr. Johnson left Stratford for the Convention. He stopped for a few days in New York, where he had just been chosen first president of the new Columbia College. He then took the ferry to Elizabethtown and rode on to Philadelphia to be seated at the Convention on June 2.

Johnson was born in Stratford in 1727 and entered Yale University in 1740, a month before his thirteenth birthday. Theological studies were undertaken in 1745, and in 1747 he entered Harvard University to study law. In 1749, Johnson established a law practice in Stratford.

After three terms in Connecticut's General Assembly, in May of 1766 he became the only Anglican ever to be asked to sit on the twelve-man Governor's Council. His legal acumen led to his appointment by Governor Pitkin to represent Connecticut in a case being heard by the King's Privy Council in London.

Johnson spent four and a half years representing the colony while in the center of the British Empire. It was here that he worked with Benjamin Franklin, who was Pennsylvania's agent in London, and the two men developed great respect for each other.

When William Samuel Johnson sailed for home in August 1771 he recognized that there was little hope for reconciliation between the colonies and England, but dreaded the alternative as a descent into anarchy.

William Samuel Johnson took no part in the Revolution, retiring quietly to Stratford. He was arrested in 1779 by overzealous patriots, then freed by his friend Governor Jonathan Trumbull.

In January 1785 Johnson was elected to a seat in the Congress of the new United States of America. The 1787 convention was called to improve the Articles of Confederation and was conducted in secrecy. The documentation is sparse, but examination of Johnson's contributions were much more important than history relates. The Connecticut Compromise, spoken by Johnson on June 29, 1787, brought about the combination of two ideas — in one branch of the government the people ought to be represented, in the other, the states.

William Samuel Johnson was head of the committee on style. He was, in fact the editor of the Constitution. In 1800 Johnson came home to Stratford to die, but lived another nineteen years.

He is buried in the Christ Church Burying Grounds at the foot of Academy Hill.

\*\*\*\*\*

These articles on Johnson and Washington were prepared for & given to the Stratford Star for publication in recent issues. They are based on material in the book *In Pursuit of Paradise* by Lewis G. Knapp, former town historian. To honor the 375th Anniversary of the town of Stratford, the book is available at the Stratford Historical Society for \$25. Call 203-378-0630 for information.

## Barnum's Mansions

As one of the country's first 19th century self-made millionaires, P.T. Barnum built himself four magnificent homes in the city. "Barnum spared no expense on his homes, especially his first home, dubbed Iranistan [on the corner of Fairfield Avenue and Iranistan Avenue] with a total construction cost of more than \$150,000 of 19th century money," said Alessandra Wood, collections manager for the Barnum Museum. The homes were not only grand -- incorporating cut stone and fancy woodwork -- they also featured the leading technology of their day. "You can imagine the amenities," Wood said. "Iranistan had gas lighting and indoor plumbing in 1847. He spared no expense and his homes were world-renowned. Ironically, while these homes were among the finest in the city, little of them remain today, mostly in the form of gates and fences. Iranistan, completed in 1848, exists only in drawings and artists' models. Stone street markers still stand on State and Yale streets, denoting the location of Lindencroft, Barnum's second, smaller mansion, built in 1860. Parts of *Waldemere* -- a huge, gingerbread home facing Long Island Sound -- still exist but only because they were incorporated into other homes. A house on Rennell Street and Atlantic Avenue in the South End used part of a bedroom wing, and a Victorian home on the beach in Stratford's Lordcenter parlor of *Waldemere*. It was floated out than a century ago. "Being here, you get a life and the things he did," said Katie Bowe, for years. Her parents, the actors Nancy Mar-TV series] fame and Paul Sparer, acquired the wrought iron gates, displaying a large letter standing of Marina, Barnum's fourth and last End. As for the decor, a chandelier is all that is left, and is in the collection of the Barnum Museum. Other bits and pieces are said to surface now and then at antique sales. Barnum could have built his mansions anywhere, including New York City, where his Barnum's American Museum was famous for its curiosities like giants and bearded ladies. But he chose Bridgeport, according to Wood, because he was native to the state (he was born in Bethel in 1810), was once mayor of Bridgeport and because it was on the rail line between New York and Boston. "It was a way to have a lot of land, a grand estate, and still be accessible to New York City," Wood said. The palatial homes Barnum built for his family tell a lot about his personality, said Mary Witkowski, director of historical collections at the Bridgeport Public Library. "Barnum was someone, who early on immediately liked the things of the world, even the architecture he chose for his houses," Witkowski said. "His houses were among the finest." Barnum's Homes Iranistan, at Iranistan and Fairfield avenues. It took 500 carpenters and laborers to build it in 1847 and was completed in 1848. It was famous for its "onion" domes and architectural effects that suggest the Persian world. Barnum lived in it during the years his Barnum's American Museum in New York City was a phenomenon, and during the time he toured the United States with opera star Jenny Lind. Then came a period of fires at home (Iranistan burned down in 1857) and at work, bankruptcy and living in rented homes and apartments for several years, until he restored his solvency. Lindencroft, located 500 yards west of Iranistan, between Fairfield Avenue and State Street. Barnum lived in the stately, but not oversized home, from 1860 to 1869. It was sold to other parties through the years and no longer stands. Barnum lived in this home near State and Yale streets during the period of the Civil War, which brought rioting and fires to New York City. *Waldemere*, on what is now called Marina Circle on the south side of the University of Bridgeport campus, adjacent to Seaside Park. The property originally extended from Atlantic Street. Barnum lived in the huge, ornate gingerbread home by Long Island Sound, from 1869 to 1888. It was in this splendid Victorian home that Barnum served as mayor of Bridgeport and began his years as a circus impresario. Marina, next door to *Waldemere*, on what is now Marina Circle at Iranistan and *Waldemere* avenues. This was Barnum's final home, from 1888 until his death in 1891. He built it to satisfy his new younger wife, Nancy, who wanted no part of *Waldemere* and its memories of Barnum's late wife, Charity. A simpler home than the others, but one that had every modern upgrade at the time, including electricity. Designed by the same Bridgeport architect, Marina resembled the Barnum Museum, although less ornate.



rian home on the beach in Stratford's Lordcenter parlor of *Waldemere*. It was floated out than a century ago. "Being here, you get a life and the things he did," said Katie Bowe, for years. Her parents, the actors Nancy Mar-TV series] fame and Paul Sparer, acquired the wrought iron gates, displaying a large letter standing of Marina, Barnum's fourth and last End. As for the decor, a chandelier is all that is left, and is in the collection of the Barnum Museum. Other bits and pieces are said to surface now and then at antique sales. Barnum could have built his mansions anywhere, including New York City, where his Barnum's American Museum was famous for its curiosities like giants and bearded ladies. But he chose Bridgeport, according to Wood, because he was native to the state (he was born in Bethel in 1810), was once mayor of Bridgeport and because it was on the rail line between New York and Boston. "It was a way to have a lot of land, a grand estate, and still be accessible to New York City," Wood said. The palatial homes Barnum built for his family tell a lot about his personality, said Mary Witkowski, director of historical collections at the Bridgeport Public Library. "Barnum was someone, who early on immediately liked the things of the world, even the architecture he chose for his houses," Witkowski said. "His houses were among the finest." Barnum's Homes Iranistan, at Iranistan and Fairfield avenues. It took 500 carpenters and laborers to build it in 1847 and was completed in 1848. It was famous for its "onion" domes and architectural effects that suggest the Persian world. Barnum lived in it during the years his Barnum's American Museum in New York City was a phenomenon, and during the time he toured the United States with opera star Jenny Lind. Then came a period of fires at home (Iranistan burned down in 1857) and at work, bankruptcy and living in rented homes and apartments for several years, until he restored his solvency. Lindencroft, located 500 yards west of Iranistan, between Fairfield Avenue and State Street. Barnum lived in the stately, but not oversized home, from 1860 to 1869. It was sold to other parties through the years and no longer stands. Barnum lived in this home near State and Yale streets during the period of the Civil War, which brought rioting and fires to New York City. *Waldemere*, on what is now called Marina Circle on the south side of the University of Bridgeport campus, adjacent to Seaside Park. The property originally extended from Atlantic Street. Barnum lived in the huge, ornate gingerbread home by Long Island Sound, from 1869 to 1888. It was in this splendid Victorian home that Barnum served as mayor of Bridgeport and began his years as a circus impresario. Marina, next door to *Waldemere*, on what is now Marina Circle at Iranistan and *Waldemere* avenues. This was Barnum's final home, from 1888 until his death in 1891. He built it to satisfy his new younger wife, Nancy, who wanted no part of *Waldemere* and its memories of Barnum's late wife, Charity. A simpler home than the others, but one that had every modern upgrade at the time, including electricity. Designed by the same Bridgeport architect, Marina resembled the Barnum Museum, although less ornate.

This old Stratford entry sign was recently acquired by the Society, and we are trying to determine what bridge or highway it may have been located on. Possibly Route 1, on the bridge crossing from Bridgeport? Or along the Parkway from Milford? Please give us a call if you can help us with this.



**Stratford Historical Society**  
967 Academy Hill  
P.O.Box 382  
Stratford, CT 06615-0382



E-mail us at: [Judsonhousestfd@aol.com](mailto:Judsonhousestfd@aol.com)

Phone: (203) 378-0630 Fax: 203-378-2562

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

- Upcoming Events: Call for Information**
- June 7 - Main Street Festival
  - June 30 - Governing Board Meeting: 1 PM
  - July 3 - Fireworks at Short Beach
  - July 26 - Blues on the Beach
  - Sept 26 - Gen. Membership Meeting
  - Connecticut Railways - Sue DelBianco