



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

Stratford Historical Society Update

VOLUME XX, ISSUE 4

MARCH 2016

MARK THE DATES:

- March's General Membership Meeting: March 18th at 7:00 pm at Christ Church
- Historical Society Governing Board Meeting: Monday, March 28th at 1:00pm
- "Treasures from the Attic", May 14th from 10am-4pm on the Society grounds
- May's General Membership Meeting: May 27th at 7:00 pm

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March's General Membership Meeting

March 18th, 7:00 pm, Christ Church

Ken Svengalis will be discussing his latest work "**Conspiracy on the Housatonic**". The premise is a World War II mystery set in 1942 Stratford, Ct. This is a first in the series of Ellen Anderson mysteries from the author.

Author/publisher Kendall F. Svengalis was born in Gary, Indiana in 1947 to Frank Anthony and Alvida Linnea (Matheus) Svengalis. He received his B.A. in English literature (1970) and M.A. in American history (1973) from Purdue University. In 1975, he received an M.L.S. from the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Library and Information Studies. He has done additional work in American history at Brown University. In 1976, he joined the staff of the Rhode Island State Law Library as Assistant Law Librarian. In 1982, he was appointed State Law Librarian. During his twenty-year tenure, he ushered in an unprecedented era of growth and expansion in state law library collections and services. The innovative techniques he pioneered in bringing law library costs under control have served as a model for law libraries across the country.

Ken's very successful non-fiction history book about his hometown: **Gary, Indiana: A Centennial Celebration** was a labor of love. This nostalgic, 455-page, over-sized coffee table book contains twenty chapters,



Kendall Svengalis

each detailing an aspect of Gary's rich history and its neighborhoods. Printed in full-color, this lavish pictorial history uses over 650 rare archival photographic and postcard images, maps, aerial photographs, and illustrations, many never before appearing in print. The book concludes with a fascinating case study of the Ken's Lithuanian pioneer family, whose saga led them from the



Suvalkai province of western Lithuania to Gary in 1908.

In 1996, the first edition of his **Legal Information Buyer's Guide & Reference Manual** was published by Rhode Island LawPress (now New England LawPress), the company he founded in 1995. In 1998, the **Legal Information Buyer's Guide and Reference Manual** received the Joseph L. Andrews Bibliographical Award, the highest honor bestowed by the American Association of Law Libraries on works of legal bibliography.

Kendall's wife, Ellen, is a Stratford native and resided there for 47 years. She is of Swedish descent, while Ken is of Swedish and Lithuanian descent. They live in the rolling hills of Connecticut and spend their leisure time as a vocal and instrumental duo performing Swedish folk music at Swedish and Scandinavian folk festivals in the Northeast. In 2005, they were featured soloists on a 17-day American Union of Swedish Singers' chorus tour of Sweden. Ken is also President of the Rhode Island Swedish Heritage Association, an organization dedicated to preserving the history of Swedes in Rhode Island and southern New England. He is also Vice-President of the Jussi Björling Society-USA, which honors the career and legacy of the 20th century's greatest operatic tenor. Ken has two children: Hillary and Andrew.

Florence M. Lewis - Decoy Carver



Florence Lewis (from the February 26, 1951 *New York Herald Tribune*)

"Miss Lewis is one of the best known professional nurses of this section."
Bridgeport Telegram 1918

The following was excerpted from the February 26, 1951 *New York Herald Tribune*.

"Miss Florence Lewis, who took a first prize' in the North American Decoy Makers Contest at the National Sportsmen's Show in Grand Central Palace, New York, with a pair of blue-wing teal, explained her unusual talent today with the modest apology, 'I can't sew.'

Miss Lewis' talent—she won the 1948 contest with a pair of green-wing teal—makes parlor conversation in the homes of all the amateur decoy makers in the land. She is the first woman to break into the business, they say, and they wonder why and how she does it.

Miss Lewis, sixty-four, lives here in a canary-colored house 150 years old, where she was born. The house is shielded from the road by a row of blue spruce, with a wide view of the Housatonic River across a half mile of flatland where her pointers, Fly Gal and Hannah, skitter after rabbits, mice and pheasants.

...I don't make mantel mod-

els,' Miss Lewis said, accounting for the absence of meticulous coloration on her decoys. 'With decoys, the silhouette is the main thing.' Nevertheless, she prefers to carve teal, one of the most handsome ducks, to the relatively drab black duck, which her brother carves.

...Stephen Lewis, her great-great-grandfather, a settler of Stratford, 'grew rocks and raised sheep—the only, things that could get between the rocks,' she said. The field had been cleared, but the riverfront is hemmed with sedge and cattail. Miss Lewis used to hide in this natural blind on days when an east storm pressed black ducks upriver from Long Island Sound, three miles away.

She shot many ducks and dressed them for the dinner table. She held many in hand, and with an innate skill and some prodding and a set of knives from the late Charles E. Wheeler, the sportsman, took to carving ducks the way they take to water.

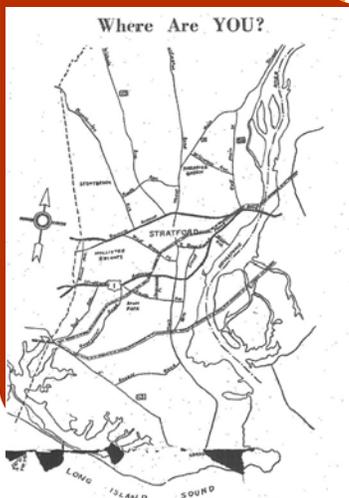
That was four years ago. In 1948, Miss Lewis scored her success, with her green-wing teal and hen, and in the contest that

ended today, with the blue-wing."

Miss Lewis was a force of nature in her own right. Todd Lovell had described Florence as an accomplished carver. Long before Florence was known for her Shang Wheeler mentored carving skills, Florence was recognized by Harold Lovell, Todd's father, for her service to Stratford's Red Cross Chapter in 1959.

Florence was employed by Warner Brothers, of Bridgeport, as head nurse, for 38 years. As the United States was pulled into World War I, Miss Lewis attempted to enlist as a nurse. When that proved impossible, she signed up with the Red Cross and left for training in Oswego, NY in August of 1918. She rapidly rose to the position of head nurse at her station in Oswego.

At Warner Brothers, Miss Lewis organized the first women's bowling team and served as a governor of the Warner "20 Year Club". She passed away at the age of 91 in 1977.



Map from the March 16, 1951 *The Stratford News*.

Proposed I-95 Route

From the March 16, 1951 *The Stratford News*:

"The state highway department will put its engineers immediately on a study of the expressway route proposed by the Engineering department of the Town of Stratford.

...Stratford outlined an alternate route, which would connect with Bridgeport, but for which no provision has been made in Milford.

The Stratford route enters near

Surf Avenue, intersects Surf Avenue and Great Meadows road and proceeds northeast between Surf avenue and Honeyspot road. It would pass just west of Honeyspot school.

The route then crosses Honeyspot road near Shore street, crosses South avenue at Silver street and Stratford avenue at Lewis street, be-

tween Linden avenue and the railroad.

It continues across West Broad street and parallels the railroad along Linden avenue. It crosses Main street adjacent to the railroad in Stratford center and proceeds northeast across the marsh and south of the Tilo Manufacturing company to the intersection of Barnum avenue and Ferry boulevard..."

Vernon Morehouse Dies



Vernon Morehouse from a 1939 photo taken with the Town Council.

Brigadier General Vernon S. Morehouse, a native of Stratford and a descendant of William Beardsley, was State Director of Selective Service at the time of his death on March 18th, 1951. He was a well-known figure in the Town of Stratford having served for

14 years as the Town Council Chairman.

General Morehouse was very involved in Stratford's 300th anniversary, dearly loved his native hometown, and refused several lucrative offers so that he could remain residing in Stratford.

In November 1950, General Morehouse wrote his views of Stratford in **"The Stratford News:"** *"Stratford has, I believe' everything that a town steeped in the traditions of 300 years and now confronted with modern problems of growth and development, has to extend to potential citizens seeking a*

better place to live or establish new industrial and commercial enterprises.

Located on the historic, scenic Housatonic River, with nearly 15 miles of waterfront extending along the river and Long Island Sound on the southern boundary of the town, offering boating, fishing and swimming, in both fresh and salt water, with acres of park and wooded areas for recreation, situated close to the New York City metropolis and readily accessible by the scenic Merritt Parkway to other smaller cities and communities for either business or pleasure motor jour-

Final Services For Vernon Morehouse



The Rev. Dr. Loyal Y. Graham, III, pastor of the Christ Episcopal church, leads the way on the final earthly journey of one of Stratford's most noted and civic-minded citizens, Vernon Morehouse, following services at the church on Wednesday afternoon.

Rev. Dr. Loyal Y. Graham III leads funeral procession at Christ Church. Photo from the February 23, 1951 **Bridgeport Telegram**

Chief Allen Judson Retires

From the **IAFF Local 998** website.

"Stratford's first organized fire protection began in 1875, was called the Mutual Hook and Ladder Company and was under the leadership of Chief Rhoades.

...In 1895, funds were acquired to build a central firehouse in the center of town, between where the Lovell Building is situated today and the Thruway. The Mutual Hook and Hose Co. at this point was under the direction of Chief Clarkson, and

occupied the building in 1897.

A competing fire company was the Chemical Hose Co, also on Main St near the Center.

February 17, 1909, the Mutual Hook and Ladder Co and the Chemical Hose Co voted to merge and became the Stratford Fire Department. Allen Judson was hired part-time in 1909 and in 1910 became the full-time Chief.

Chief Judson was on duty 24

hours a day living near the firehouse. His duties included taking care of the jail, Town Hall and inspecting all the fire hydrants in Town. He did this single handedly for 9 years until the second man, William Anthony, was hired.

The Chief had a full and interesting career, from bucket brigades to gas powered fire engines, and retired in 1951..."

Fireside Chaps



Present assistant Fire Chief Theodore Lockwood, who will succeed Fire Chief Allen Judson in his post on March 1st, shakes hands with the retiring chief at a party in Chief Judson's honor on Wednesday evening. The retiring chief has held his post for the past 42 years. For eight years prior to that, he was with the Town's volunteer department.

Assistant Theodore Lockwood (left) Chief Allen Judson (right). Photo from the February 16, 1951 **The Stratford News**.

Chief William Nichols Retires

From the March 6, 1951 **Bridgeport Telegram**.

"Born July 10, 1891, Chief Nichols, a native of Stratford, was appointed by the Board of Selectmen to organize the police force on May 10, 1917. Like Fire Chief Allen D. Judson, who retired March 1 because of ill health, Chief Nichols was the entire department at the time of his appointment.

Chief Nichols gained international fame in 1928 when "Big Mike" Riccitelli, a New Haven gunman known as the "Post Road Phantom," was staging holdups in the area, baffling police attempting to apprehend him.

...Chief Nichols and Captain Flanagan...learned that Riccitelli was reported to be hiding behind railroad ties off Stratford Avenue near

the Baird Machine Company. They tried to get him to surrender and when he refused, fired at him with riot guns.

He was found dead behind the ties...Riccitelli had shot himself through the head...

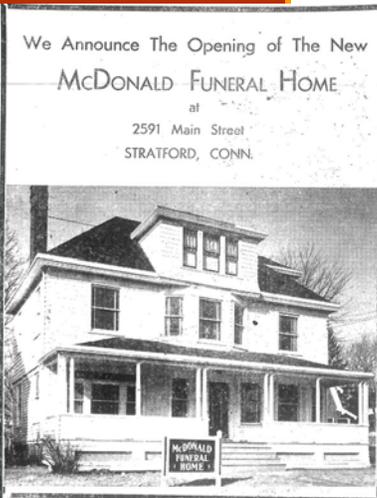
He (Chief Nichols) has received several commendations from the State Police Department..."



CHIEF WILLIAM B. NICHOLS

Chief William Nichols. Photo from the March 6, 1951 **Bridgeport Telegram**.

Dateline February - March 1951



From *The Stratford Times* March 2, 1951.



Job applicants waiting in line for an interview at the newly opened AVCO plant. From *The Stratford Times* March 9, 1951.



Spring comes to Longbrook Park. From *The Stratford Times* March 30, 1951.

Sunday Herald 2/11/1951 **Wolf: Slash \$225,000 From Stratford Budget**

Approximately \$225,000 should be sliced off the Stratford town budget before it is adopted, according to Herman Wolf, Democratic town chairman.

"This will enable the mill rate to be held at 37 rather than the 41 mills now proposed by town officials.

"An increase from the present tax rate of 34 to 37 mills is reasonable..." Wolf said.

He claimed anything above 37 mills is unnecessary at this time and an unfair burden on Stratford taxpayers.

Sunday Herald 2/11/1951 **Stratford Seeks Upset Victory Over Central**

A sizzling Stratford quintet, winner in nine of its last 10 starts, will attempt to add strong Central, current County "A" and district leader to its fast-growing list of victims when the two squads collide Tuesday night on the State Armory court.

Coach Ray Needham's

North Paraders have been licked but once (by Harding, 67-59) since Jan. 9 when Coach Ed Reilly's Hilltoppers upended them by a 64-55 margin in the Paraders' own gym.

Sunday Herald 2/18/1951 **Roosevelt Forest Affects**

A special committee of town councilmen has been appointed to check the natural gas pipe proposal because it portends to affect the Roosevelt Forest section of town. Arthur Hart, Ed Carpenter and George Doe are checking with state officials to find out what gives, and will make a further study of the effects of the route.

Sunday Herald 3/04/1951 **Biggest Area Aged Hospital in Stratford**

The largest hospital for the aged in this area is being planned in Stratford, The Herald learned yesterday.

The Stratford Geriatric Hospital, to cost \$135,000 with at least 70 beds, has been given a go-ahead by the local building inspector, A. Bruce Schow.

...Joseph Lupe, pharmacist, Stratford Planning Board member from the Eighth District, and Carl I. Caserta, superintendent of the Restmore Hospital on Elm St., Stratford, are the men behind this project.

... Construction will begin soon and will be a two-story brick structure of Colonial design.

Sunday Herald 3/18/1951 **Everybody Wants To Get into Avco**

More than 5,000 applications for jobs have already been received by the Bridgeport-Lycoming division of Avco Manufacturing Co...

Early this week, as the company began taking applications for jobs, long lines of men and women formed....

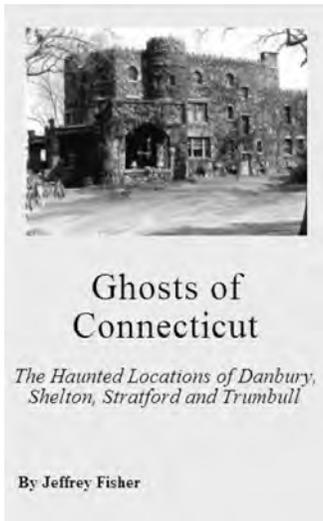
Some are former Chance Vought workers who either refused to go to Grand Prairie, Tex. when the plant moved or who tried it for a while and came back to Connecticut.

The Connecticut Employment Service figures this week there are only 1,450 unemployed men in the area.

Stratford Theater February-March 1951

February 4th	Copper Canyon	Ray Milland, Hedy Lamarr, McDonald Carey
February 11th	Mr. Music	Bing Crosby, Nancy Olsen, Charles Coburn
February 18th	Storm Warning	Ginger Rogers, Ronald Reagan, Doris Day
February 25th	Sugarfoot	Randolph Scott, Adele Jergens, Raymond Massey
March 4th	At War With the Army	Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis
March 11th	The Enforcer	Humphrey Bogart
March 18th	Branded	Alan Ladd, Mona Freeman, Charles Bickford
March 25th	Lightning Strikes Twice	Ruth Roman, Richard Todd, Mercedes McCambridge

Ghosts of Connecticut



“*Ghosts of Connecticut: The Haunted Locations of Danbury, Shelton, Stratford, and Trumbull*” was recently published on Amazon books by Jeffrey Fisher. Unsurprisingly, the Phelps Mansion, formerly located on Elm Street, was featured in Mr. Fisher’s book. It was much more surprising to learn the homestead at Boothe Memorial Park and St. Michael’s Cemetery have also experienced their own “hauntings.”

According to Mr. Fisher, a male apparition is known to show him-

self in the windows of the home- stead. The apparition disappears when he is approached. His pres- ence, allegedly, has been recorded in photographs taken at the home- stead.

At St. Michael’s Cemetery, a shadowy figure appears late at night. The figure has been reported to chase after people visiting the cemetery late at night. The apparition has been known to growl at visitors in a low, male voice.

The book presents a fun, quick read of the local ghost stories.

Gustave Whitehead presentation

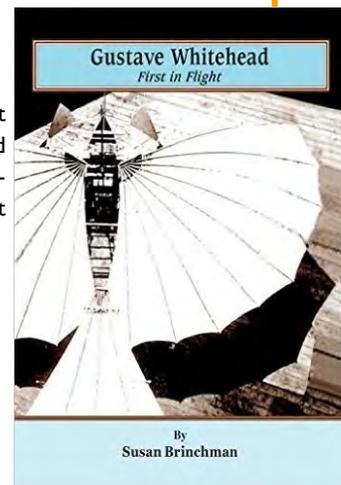
On Sunday, February 7th, Susan Brinchman video-conferenced into the Stratford Library from her home in California to discuss her new book “**Gustave Whitehead: First in Flight**”. Ms. Brinchman has spent decades documenting Whitehead flights in Bridgeport, Fairfield and Stratford years before the Wright first flight at Kitty Hawk. She follows up on the work of her father who spent decades docu- menting Whitehead’s flights while Ms. Brinchman was still a child.

Some of the most compelling

evidence Ms. Brinchman presents is that 2 airplanes have been con- structed from the Whitehead plans. Both of those planes have success- fully flown. Airplanes built on the Wright brothers’ plans have never successfully flown.

Mr. Whitehead’s flights were well -documented by *The Bridgeport Herald* and by Stanley Yale Beach, editor of the *Scientific American* magazine, in 1901. That documen- tation has been disputed, over the years, because no photographic evidence supports these 1901

claims. The Wright brothers also lacked photographic evi- dence of their first flight.



Connecticut Open House Day June 13th

Connecticut residents are invited to discover – and rediscover – the state’s exciting arts, history and tourism offerings with a variety of special incentives, such as discount- ed or free admission, free gifts or special exhibits and activities during the 11th Annual Open House Day on June 13, 2015.



Connecticut Open House Day specials and hours of operation vary by property. Check out all the his- toric property open houses at [http:// www.ctvisit.com/dontmiss/ details/2322](http://www.ctvisit.com/dontmiss/details/2322).

Treasures from the Attic

Treasures from the Attic Tag Sale will be held Saturday, May 14th on the grounds of the Historical Society from 10am until 4pm. The cost will be \$35 per space and everyone will be expected to bring their own table. No tent setup is allowed, but large umbrellas are fine. Spaces open to the public. If

you would like to participate, please call the Society at 203-378-0630 to hold a spot. Additionally, a food truck and an ice cream truck will be onsite. The rain date is May 21st. Please join us for what promises to be a day filled with fun and “treasure”!



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

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