



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

# Stratford Historical Society UPDATE

VOLUME XXII, ISSUE 6

JULY 2018

## MARK THE DATES:

- Governing Board Meeting, Monday, August 27th at 1pm.
- September's General Membership Meeting: Saturday, September 29th at 2:00 pm at the Stratford Library
- November's General Membership Meeting: Saturday, November 17th at 2:00 pm at the Stratford Library

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## Upcoming General Membership Meetings

Stratford Library Lovell Room, 2203 Main Street

We're very excited about our upcoming meeting schedule. We have some very informative meetings planned for you in September and in November.

On Saturday, September 29th at 2pm, Eric Chandler, an American Revolutionary War Living History specialist, will be presenting his **"Women In The Revolution"** program.

Then, on Saturday, November 17th, at 2 pm, Beth Caruso will be discussing the first witches put to death in Connecticut. Beth worked hard, with other Windsor residents, to clear the names of the wrongly executed Windsor witches. Windsor's work on



Plaque honoring the Lovell family's contributions to the Stratford Library Association in the Stratford Library Lovell Room.

clearing the names of these good women may well be a model for us in Stratford to clear the name of Goody Bassett.

### 2019 Meeting Calendar

Sunday	January 27th	2PM
Saturday	March 23rd	2PM
Sunday	May 19th	2PM
Sunday	September 29th	2PM
Sunday	November 24th	2PM

All meetings are free and open to the general public. Please bring a friend! Donations are gratefully accepted.

*"Every child in America should be acquainted with his own country. He should read books that furnish him with ideas that will be useful to him in life and practice. As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his own country."*

Noah Webster

## Connecticut Open House Day

### A MEMORABLE OCCASION

By Dolores Hoctor

MANY THANKS to Nancy Sirois (West Room), Shirley Clevenger (West Chamber), Dennis Brunelle (East Chamber), Joe Dimenno (Slave Quarters), Christine Lesko (Kitchen), and Georgene Fasanella (East Room) for manning the House and sharing the history of Stratford with our visitors.

To Judy Kurmay (Applesauce Cake), Georgene Fasanella (Cinnamon Cookies), Pam Hutchinson's helper, Karen Constantini (Scripture Cake), Eileen Salamon (Abner Judson's Pork Cake), Dennis (Haymaker's Switchel), and Jeanette Caron (Syllabub) for the delicious and popular re-

freshments; to Eileen for serving them and Sandy Rutkowski for showing off the Museum exhibits we express our gratitude for your efforts.

To Jeanette Caron for greeting our guests and increasing membership, "thank you."

To Sandy's camper, Melanie, and her mother, Melinda Acosta, for attending to the gift shop; know we appreciate all you contributed.

Thanks to all FOR MAKING CONNECTICUT OPEN HOUSE DAY 2018 AT THE STRATFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY SUCH A MEMORABLE OCCASION.

We couldn't do it without you! P.S. Thanks to everyone for help with the cleanup.

We welcomed sixty adults and children to explore and enjoy the 18th century Judson House with its Stratford based period furnishings and a Museum of interesting exhibits where visitors could partake of refreshments from recipes contained in **"Paradise Enow... Treasures from Yesterday's Kitchens"**, the Society's cookbook.



# Visitor Praise for Open House Day



## Stratford Historical Society,

Roberta and I wanted to thank the men and women of the Stratford Historical Society, for their job, "Well Done", on Saturday's open house of the Capt. David Judson House.

Roberta, is Capt. David Judson's, 7th GG daughter. She is a member of her local DAR

Chapter in Ohio, through her 5th GGF, Josiah Curtis, (1752-1818), born Newtown, Fairfield County, Conn.

We were in the area traveling, doing genealogy, enjoying life with our RV, and celebrating our 50th anniversary.

God, just happened to place Stratford, your Open House and us, on the same page, at

the same time.

Thank you, for your time and effort, in planning and conducting such an event. It seemed well received by the public.

Blessings and Best Wishes,

Roberta and Dale Maidens  
Syracuse, Ohio

# House Tag Sale - Special Thanks

Throughout Mary Hardy's long life, she was always deeply involved in her community. Mary moved to Stratford as a child with her family from Newark, New Jersey. She attended school in Stratford, and, at the young age of 17, she began volunteering at the Sterling House. She married her husband of 74 years, Vincent, on the grounds of the Sterling House in 1942.

In 1953 Mary was appointed Executive Director of the Sterling House which was a position she held for 34 years. Mary was a long-time member of the Stratford United Methodist Church where she served as a Sunday School teacher and as the Church School Superintendent.

At Mary's passing, she left her home on Academy Hill Road to the Sterling House and the home's contents to the Stratford Historical Society.

After making a thorough examination of Mary's home, the Society determined there was nothing of historical significance among Mary's possessions. Many volunteers worked hard to sort through the contents of Mary's home to prepare them for sale.

On June 22nd through the 24th several volunteers from the Society descended on Mary's home to sell its contents to the public. The days were long for the volunteers, and the work was challenging.

We wish to thank all the volunteers for their time and efforts. Most especially, we wish to thank **Sandy Rutkowski** and **Mary Pirelli** for their tireless work in preparing for the sale, and in reading all the home's contents for sale. The Society was able to procure a generous sum from the sale which will be used to further the work of the Society.



MRS. MARY HARDY

Mary at the Sterling House from *The Stratford News* 06/25/1943



Mary in her later years from the *Connecticut Post* 01/10/2018



Mary Hardy/Captain Pulaski Benjamin home built about 1825

## Proposed Slate of Officers for 2017 - 2018

PRESIDENT: Dennis Brunelle  
VICE PRESIDENT: Tam Vio  
RECORDING SECRETARY: Tina Venette  
CORRESPONDING SECRETARY: Barbara Firin  
TREASURER: Shirley Clevenger

### STANDING COMMITTEES

Accessions: Carol Lovell	Library: Gloria Duggan/Virginia Hilligton
Building: Joseph Bonitabus	Membership: Jeanette Caron
Education: Dolores Hector	Newsletter: David Wright
Finance: Shirley McCormack	Nominations: David Wright
Garden: Patsy Casabier	Programs: Gail Licio
Grounds: Joseph Bonitabus	Publicity: David Wright
Hospitality: Pam Huchinson	Scholarships: Shirley McCormack
Home & Homeless: Barbara Firin	Ways/Means: Shirley McCormack

### ELECTION OF OFFICERS

To cast your vote, please use the mail-in ballot printed below and return it to the Society Office before October 16, 2017. If you wish to nominate a candidate, or work on a committee, please attend the September 23rd General Membership meeting at the Stratford Library.

STRATFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2017 - 2018 ELECTION BALLOT

FOR ALL CANDIDATES, OR

FOR ALL CANDIDATES EXCEPT:

NOMINATIONS FOR:

POSITION: NAME

POSITION: NAME

MEMBER'S NAME:

# Society Officers for 2018-2019

It's that time of year when we select our officers for the 2018-2019 fiscal year. The Nominating Committee has presented its proposed slate to the Society Board, and the Board has accepted the slate as presented. The ballot will be presented to the general membership in the September newsletter. (The ballot to the

left represents last year's ballot as presented to the membership by the Nominating Committee).

If you would like to nominate someone for one of the available board positions, please contact one of our Society's existing board members.

While we are nominating chairs for our various and sev-

eral committees, we also welcome those of you who may have an interest in participating in one, or more, of these committees. If you believe you would enjoy being a member of one of our Society's committees, please contact any of our Society's board members.

# Dateline Stratford June - July 1953

**The Stratford News**  
June 4, 1953

**Stratford Garden Club Holds Annual Flower Show in Putney**  
A spring flower show entitled "Everything is a Source of Fun," was held Wednesday afternoon and evening by the Stratford Garden club in Boothe Memorial park, Putney.

**The Stratford News**  
June 4, 1953

**Summer and Smoke**  
Boats watch in silence as smoke pours from the New Haven Railroad bridge on Tuesday evening. The fire loss was estimated at \$16,000. Arson is suspected. Some 10,000 passengers were delayed for several hours because of the blaze.

**Sunday Herald**  
June 7, 1953

**Freeman Av. Paving In Probe Spotlight**  
While the Lincoln Av. Probe is still under way, a new roadbed controversy seems to be looming. The new outcries against contractors in Stratford came as a result of the grading of Lincoln Av.'s sister street, Freeman Av.

A section of Freeman Av., where it is intersected by Lincoln, is in the process of being paved. Supposedly the street had a gravel bed. But when a scraper went to work, the men found that either the gravel sowed several years ago had grown to boulder proportions or there never was any gravel in there to begin with.

**The Stratford News**  
June 11, 1953

**Elected Board of Education will Be Tuesday Panel Topic**  
The Citizens Steering committee of the public schools is sponsoring

an information panel on the pending legislation calling for the election of a board of education in the auditorium of Stratford High school on Tuesday evening, June 16, beginning at 8...

A referendum on the question of whether or not voters of Stratford want an elected school board, on the terms of the proposed bill, or whether they wish to retain the present appointed board, will be held on June 22nd, along with several State-sponsored referendum items.

**Sunday Herald**  
June 14, 1953

**Sumner Simpson No. 1 Citizen, Dies**

Beloved through the city and godfather of many of its charities, Sumner Simpson, multi-millionaire, aged 79, died last night at 7:45 in Bridgeport Hospital.

Long chairman of the board of Raybestos-Manhattan, he was also a modest citizen of genuine soul who gave away many tens of thousands of dollars. For some 20 years he held the unrivaled position of Bridgeport's No. 1 philanthropist.

**Sunday Herald**  
July 5, 1953

**Copter Plant Hard On Two Towns**

Fairfield and Milford town officials, agreeing that the impact of the relocation of Sikorsky Aircraft in Stratford will be terrific throughout the Greater Bridgeport area, pointed out yesterday that the taxpayers of their communities must be ready to take the bitter with the sweet.

Milford Town Mgr. John J. Desmond (whose town missed the boat) said: "Stratford gets the plant and the taxes. We will get the workers' families and the cost of educating their children..."

Fairfield First Selectman Dimill Kinnie said:

While the \$10,000,000 new Sikorsky plant will mean additional \$500,000 in tax revenues to Stratford, neighboring town officials fear that it will mean additional tax increases for their residents.

**The Stratford News**  
July 16, 1953

**Tilo And The Tornado**

Within minutes after the recent tornado had devastated sections of Worcester, Mass., emergency repair crews of Stratford's Tilo Roofing Company were called to the scene along with police, National Guardsmen, and civil defense officials.

**Sunday Herald**  
July 19, 1953

**Outcome of Peck Appeal May Stop Sikorsky Cold**

Whether Sikorsky sets up its proposed new plant in the Oronoque section of Stratford depends entirely on the outcome of the appeal to be filed tomorrow by Bernard Peck, attorney for the 62 opponents of the proposed zone change.

Although the Planning and Zoning Board has welcomed Sikorsky with open arms, with an eight to two vote favoring a zone change, the final decision is in the hands of judges who will hear the appeal.

**The Stratford News**  
July 16, 1953

**Stratford Historians to Picnic**

The annual picnic of the Stratford Historical society will take place Friday, July 24, at 6 p.m., in the Boothe Memorial Park, Putney. The program chairman, Robert P. Shelton, has announced that Mrs. Stuart Narramore will be the speaker for the evening...



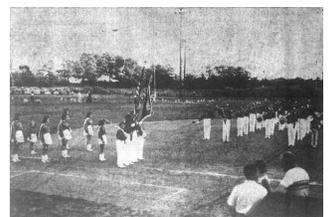
This Linden Avenue house was the first moved to make way for I-95. **The Stratford News** June 4, 1953.



Stratford High School graduates. **The Stratford News** June 11, 1953.



CYO Lawn Party at St. James Church. **The Stratford News** June 25, 1953.



Stratford PAL Drum Corps at Raybestos Field. **The Stratford News** July 9, 1953.



Stratford Theater from the 1944 Stratford High School Log

## Now Showing June - July 1953

June 7th	<b>Man On A Tightrope</b>	Fredric March, Terry Moore
June 14th	<b>Desert Song</b>	Gordon MacRae, Kathryn Grayson
June 21st	<b>The Girl Next Door</b>	Jane Haver, Dan Dailey
June 28th	<b>Angel Face</b>	Robert Mitchum, Jean Simmons
July 5th	<b>Pick Up On South Street</b>	Richard Widmark, Jean Peters
July 12th	<b>South Sea Woman</b>	Burt Lancaster, Virginia Mayo
July 19th	<b>The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms</b>	Paul Hubschmid, Kenneth Tobey
July 26th	<b>Scared Stiff</b>	Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis

# Flora: Stratford to the Smithsonian



Flora's silhouette and Bill of Sale as they're displayed at the National Portrait Gallery



Entrance graphic to Flora's silhouette at the National Portrait Gallery.

If this page appears a bit "busy", it's because the world of Flora has been a busy one indeed. Much has occurred surrounding Flora's silhouette over the past several weeks, and it's really quite incredible.

As has already been reported in this newsletter, late last year the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. "discovered" Flora's silhouette. Asma Naem, curator at the National Portrait Gallery, approached our Society and asked if the Gallery could borrow Flora's silhouette for their new exhibit in Washington. The Society agreed, and, as part of that agreement, the Gallery committed to the restoration of Flora's silhouette and her accompanying bill of sale.

On Thursday, May 10th, the National Portrait Gallery opened their exhibit, **Black Out: Silhouettes Then and Now**, in which Flora's restored silhouette was the centerpiece. In addition to the exhibit, the Gallery created a book (of the same name as the exhibit) featuring Flora's silhouette. The **"Black Out: Silhouettes Then and Now"** book is available to be checked out at the Stratford Library should you desire to read it.

Attendees from Stratford were at the opening reception for **"Black Out"** on May 10th, and you may view photos from the opening reception at [npg.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://npg.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info).

On Monday, June 11th, at the Stratford Town Council meeting, Mayor Laura Hoydick issued a proclamation declaring June 12th, 2018 **"Flora Day"** in the Town of Stratford. You may

view the Mayor's proclamation, and the video of the proclamation's presentation to the Historical Society, at [fdp.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://fdp.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info).

Perhaps most surprising of all, we learned from curator Asma Naem in mid-June that BBC News had broadcast a news segment on the **"Black Out"** exhibit. In that broadcast, the BBC referred to Flora's silhouette as a "national treasure." You may view the entire BBC news segment at [bbc.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://bbc.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info).

Lastly, on June 28th, the **Stratford Star's** front page featured a news story on Flora's silhouette, and its centerpiece roll at the **"Black Out"** exhibit in Washington. You may view the **Stratford Star's** article at [star.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://star.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info).



BBC News features the Smithsonian's **"Black Out"** calling Flora's silhouette a "national treasure".



See the Flora Day Proclamation at [fdp.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://fdp.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info).



This book is available at the Stratford Library



## Stratford Map from 1921

Recently, the Planning & Zoning office was sorting through some of their older files. They came across a huge map from 1921. The map was printed on a specially treated paper which had not faded at all over the years. The map measured about 18" x 33". The map is shown in miniature

to the left.

Planning & Zoning asked if we would like a copy. We answered in the affirmative. The P&Z office was kind enough to scan the map, digitally, and send us a digital copy. Since the resulting file is very large, there's no easy way to display the map in its entirety

in our newsletter. Therefore, if you utilize your computer's web browser and go to [map21.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://map21.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info), you'll be able to download, and view, the map for yourself. It's quite illuminating to view Stratford's street and subdivision layouts, or lack thereof, from 100 years ago.

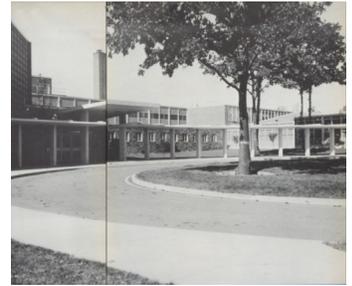
# Housatonic Community College Graduates first class

In January of 1968, Housatonic Community College had grown to the point in its 18 months of operation where if became necessary to look for additional classroom space. The college began holding classes at Wooster Junior High in February of that year. Eventually, the College would expand to the point where it would seek its own dedicated campus.

In June of 1968, the College graduated its first class of 23 students with Associates Degrees. Of the 23 graduating students, 11 were Stratford residents. The other 12 students came from Bridgeport, Milford, Orange, Seymour, Shelton, Trumbull, and West Haven.

Stratford's graduating students were W. Robert Bull, Jr., Bruce H.

Dobson, James W. Dombrasukas, Joseph P. Dubee, Jr., Irene Katharine Guman, Robert Hargus, John Michael Jezierny, Barry Johansson, William Joseph Malone, Jr., Thomas James Nelson, and Thomas J. Roche, Jr. We have included photos for all the graduating Stratford students for whom we could locate photos.



Bunnell High School from the



**W. ROBERT BULL**

50 Chanhook Road

Forewarned, forearmed; to be prepared is half the victory. — Cervantes

Art Club 3; A.A. Delegate 4; Boys' Sports Club 1, 2, 3, 4; French Club 3, 4; Spanish Club 1, 2; Traffic Squad 4.



**BRUCE H. DOBSON**

Bruce

157 Glenfield Avenue

One part wit, the other brotherhood . . . recall those reckless active days of youth.

Chess Club 4; Spanish Club 4; Varsity Baseball 2, 3, 4; Varsity Football 1, 2, 3, 4.



**ROBERT J. HARGUS**

"Bob"

35 Newport Avenue

Stratford's own poet . . . airplanes, airplanes, airplanes . . . a smile for all . . . "I've got the beat, man."

Film Service 2, 3, 4.



**BARRY R. JOHANSSON**

4235 Main Street

No task's too steep for human wit. — Horace

Boys' Sports Club 2, 3, 4.



**WILLIAM J. MALONE**

"Billy"

295 Franklin Avenue

Takes his time and enjoys the relaxation . . . a "typical Irishman" . . . always in there — hiding.

Swim Team 2; Freshman Forum 1.



**THOMAS J. NELSON**

75 Elizabeth Terrace

When man to man shall be a friend and brother. — George Massey

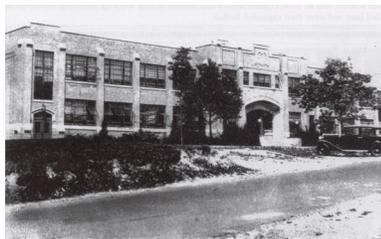
A.A. Alternate 1; Boys' Sports Club 1, 2, 3, 4; Class Council 2; J.V. Football Team 2; Varsity Football Team 3, 4.

## Big Changes for Stratford High School

On June 8th, the bridge, which will connect the two halves of the new Stratford High School, was set in place over King Street. King Street was shut down for several days as the bridge was securely attached to the anchor ways on either side of King Street. You may watch a video of the bridge being set into place at [https://youtu.be/4kajG\\_CIL4](https://youtu.be/4kajG_CIL4).

The eventual plan for the new high school calls for tearing down all of the old high school and only leaving the existing front entrance way in place as part of the new high school's façade.

We thought it would be memorable to include some photos of Stratford High School as it appeared in past issues of *The Log*.



Stratford High School 1925



New walkway bridge being set in place over King Street.



Stratford High School 1939

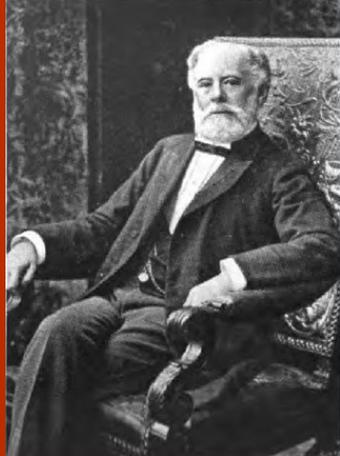


Back of Stratford High School 1952



Stratford High School 1953

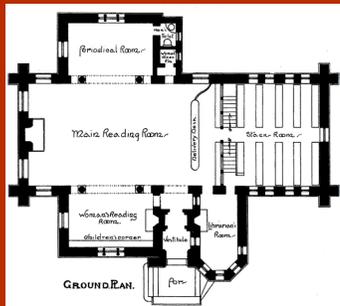
# Birdseye Blakeman's Gift 1893



Birdseye Blakeman from *History of Stratford Connecticut 1639—1939*



Stratford Library being constructed in 1894



Original floor plan of the Stratford Library from *Scientific American*, June 1896.



Interior of the reading room and northern alcove of the Stratford Library from *Scientific American*, June 1896.

Most likely anyone who has visited the Stratford Library has walked away with an awareness that Birdseye Blakeman played a primary role in the Library building's construction. What is much less apparent is the enormity of the role Mr. Blakeman played in the Library's past, and the motivations Mr. Blakeman harbored for the role of the Library in the Stratford community. Mr. Blakeman not only donated the \$25,000 (about \$650,000 today) to build the library building, he also purchased the property on which the library was built (Probate Judge Robert H. Russell's home and lot) in 1893, and donated \$5,000 to purchase books for the library once it opened. Unfortunately, Mr. Blakeman never lived to see his library completed.

## *Scientific American* June 1896 Vol XXI No. 6

We illustrate on page 94 the Stratford Library building, at Stratford, Connecticut. This institution was founded, some eleven years ago, as a private library, and was supported largely by subscriptions and the proceeds of entertainments given from time to time, until the year 1893, when substantial legacies, together with the munificent gift of a former resident of Stratford, Mr. Birdseye Blakeman, allowed the materializing of one of the most unique, attractive and picturesque library buildings in the State. The building (Figure 3) was erected in memory of Mr. Blakeman's ancestors, who were among the first settlers, and had lived in the old town of Stratford for two and one-half centuries. Mr. Blakeman purchased a very desirable site on Main Street, and in 1894 constructed thereon the building which we illustrate, at an estimated cost of \$25,000 (about \$648,000 today), presenting it to his native town to be used as a public library, and also donated the sum of \$5,000 for the purchase of additional books. Unfortunately, Mr. Blakeman did not

live to see the building fully completed, but passed away at his country residence, at Stockbridge, Mass., September 30, 1894. His will provided for the completion of the building, and although it was practically finished before January, 1895, it was not dedicated or opened until January 16, 1896, owing to the delay incident to the settlement of his estate. The dedication exercises may be noted as one of Stratford's rare historical events, and was regarded as a step in its educational progress. Among the distinguished persons attending was Dr. Timothy Dwight, President of Yale University.

## *The School Journal - New York and Chicago* July 7, 1894

Birdseye Blakeman was born in Stratford, Conn., on the 25th of January, 1824, and died at Stockbridge, Mass., September 30, 1894. In his ancestry Mr. Blakeman represented the entire history of the town of Stratford. For six generations from the very first settlement of the place, commencing with the Rev. Adam Blakeman on his father's side and Deacon John Birdseye on his mother's, his ancestors in direct, continuous line lived in Stratford, and his own early life was passed there.

While yet in his teens Mr. Blakeman went to Bridgeport, Conn., and in 1843 he engaged in business, in that town, on his own account. From his earliest business life Mr. Blakeman was connected more of [sic] less directly with the book trade, the retail book business being an important part of his first commercial venture.

In 1844 he removed to New York and connected himself with one of the leading book publishing houses of that day, and his excellent judgment and sound sense marked him thus early as one of the rising men in the publishing interest.

Some years later Mr. Blakeman became associated in business with the late Smith Sheldon, and

entered into partnership with him under the firm name of Sheldon, Blakeman & Co. He remained in this firm until the year 1863, when he entered the firm of Ivison, Phinney & Co., which soon afterwards changed to Ivison, Phinney, Blakeman & Co., then to Ivison, Blakeman, Taylor & Co., and finally to Ivison, Blakeman & Co.

In the spring of 1890 the school book interests of his firm were purchased by the American Book Company, and the firm of Ivison, Blakeman & Co. was dissolved on January 1 following. Upon the organization of the American Book Company Mr. Blakeman was chosen its president, and remained at the head of the company, in most active association with its management until the spring of 1893, when he declined a re-election unanimously tendered to him by the board of directors. Upon retiring from the presidency of the company Mr. Blakeman terminated fifty years of continuous and active connection with the school book interests of the country; and his life probably covered more completely than that of any other man then living the history of the growth and development of school text-book literature in the United States...

...Mr. Blakeman always showed a warm attachment for the home of his New England ancestors, and a few years ago purchased a fine site in Stratford and erected thereon a building for a public library to cost above \$25,000. Speaking of this gift Mr. Blakeman once said that as his own family residence was in New York the continuity of the family residence in Stratford was broken off and his gift was made with the hope that through the silent power of a public library an influence for good might be infused into the future life of the town that should be in accord with whatever had been of good report in the honored ancestry whose names he bore.

# Both Sides of Avon Park

Avon Park's history is replete with human interest stories. Stratford voted to go "dry" in 1917, well ahead of much of the rest of Connecticut. Yet, Connecticut and Rhode Island never voted in support of the eighteenth amendment (Prohibition). Meanwhile, in Avon Park, Stavola's tavern was often the locale where temperance was observed in the breach.

Mrs. Angelo Stavola, however, was the driving force behind many of the community events in Avon Park including the Feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel festival. We'll first take a look at the festival, then we'll turn to a "festival" of a different sort that was enacted at Stavola's tavern.

## Bridgeport Herald

Sunday, July 21, 1918

Stratford Italians Observe Feast of Mt. Carmel As in Their Native Land

(By "Bob" Vickery)

"What a magnificent banner, and what peculiar green fringe!" I exclaimed.

"That's not fringe, that's money — real bills, ones and twos and maybe tens," said Mrs. Stavola. "You see, the faithful, pin money on the banner as a sign of devotion."

We were watching the Mount Carmel parade in Stratford on Tuesday — a sight well worth looking at. Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the especial patron saint of the Italians, and every year they have a celebration in her honor. The parade started at Avon Park, marched along Honeyspot road and Sedgewood [sic] avenue to Main street and so to St. James' church where High Mass was celebrated.

This parade was a strange mixture of the "old Country" and the modern American spirit. First came two small boys dressed as an American sailor and soldier, then a girl carrying the American flag and one with the Italian flag. Then followed the Mount Carmel banner, hand painted and decorated with bills. Eight flower girls accompanied the banner, and the motive power of the parade — the band — followed them.

"The kiddies have marched for hours," said Mrs. Stavola, "but they won't know they are tired as long as the band plays."

There were about forty men to carry the banner as an act of devotion or penance; and there was a long line of girls in white dresses and veils with tiaras of green vine.

"I had a time with the girls," said Mrs. Stavola. "I told them to wear veils and vines and a lot of them came in their Sunday hats. I had to about ruin my pot [sic] plants to get them fixed up."

At the beautiful church of Saint James there was a sermon in Italian by Father John Sullivan — "Sulivano" the Italians call him. He preached in Italian and to look at him and hear him talk, you would never guess he is Irish.

The parade started again at 4 o'clock in the afternoon at Avon Park and marched through Hollister Heights. Then in the evening amid beautiful colored illuminations, an excellent program was carried out. There was American and Italian patriotic music, and some dances by the Red Cross girls and others from the Boys' and Girls' Useful Club of Stratford. And little Eleanor Willey deserves special mention for her natural ease and the beauty of her dancing. In fact, all of them, children and grown-ups, did what you would expect from a people who come from the land of song, story and art.

The leading spirit of the whole celebration was Mrs. Angelo Stavola. She is a leader of thought among her own people; a worker in Red Cross, church work, and any other worthy cause that presents itself to her. She finances the celebration each year, and deserves much credit for the success and interest of the Tuesday celebration.

Thoroughly Americanized herself, she can laugh at the foibles of her people and at the same time be patient and loving with them.

"They wouldn't go to church in their own town because they wanted statues all over the place like a wholesale house," she laughed. "So to keep them to-

gether, I bought the Mount Carmel group for Saint James — and now they go to church there."

The statue is certainly a wonderful piece of artistic workmanship. It is worth going to church to see if you had no other motive. Mrs. Stavola has lately presented the Saint James' Church with a beautiful service flag, flying more than 100 stars.

Humorous and generous, she is also very tender hearted, especially with children. Rosa was not in the parade.

"Why don't you march, Rosa?" she asked her.

"We only have one pair of white shoes and my sister go because she is older," said Rosa, quite cheerfully.

And, Maria why do wear black?" Mrs. Stavola questioned another girl.

The tears came quickly into the girl's eyes. "It's my sister," she answered, "she die two months ago. In one month she graduat [sic] — then she die." Then wiping the tears from her eyes and smiling, she added:

"They bury her in her graduat [sic] dress — and her funeral is Oh, so nice!"

The Italians' defiant attitude at a hint of ridicule and the wonderfully quick softening of their great black eyes at the least kindness ought to be a standing rebuke to us, the native Americans, in our treatment of them. It has taken the great war to teach us their real worth.



Mrs. Angelo Stavola—The Lady Bountiful of the Stratford Italians all photos from the **Bridgeport Herald** July 21, 1918



Forward! March! - The Parade Forms at Avon Inn

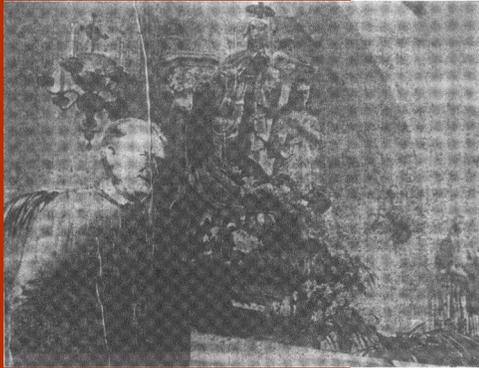


The Mt. Carmel banner attended by flower girls



The rear rank of the Mt. Carmel parade

# Avon Park - The Rest of the Story



Rev. M. J. O'Connor, Pastor of St. James R. C. Church, The Mt. Carmel Group of St. James all photos from the **Bridgeport Herald** July 21, 1918



The Evening Entertainment at Avon Park

(Continued from page 7)

"You no laugh? You like?" one little woman asked me.

"Of course I don't laugh, I answered. "It is a very beautiful ceremony."

"We like it in Old Country and we like it here," said she. "People laugh - we no care." But she clung to my hand in a frenzy of friendship because I "no laugh."

"Well," said Mrs. Stavola, "I went to bed last night at 3 o'clock this morning" (and she's not Irish), "and I can't walk another step in this parade."

So the last I saw of her she was taking a short cut to home and the joy of "old house shoes."

And now for the less community oriented Avon Park news.

**The Bridgeport Evening Farmer**  
June 10, 1918

**STRATFORD**

A. Stavola of Avon Park was again arrested for selling beer without a license. Stavola was fined fifty dollars and costs and will appeal to the Common Pleas Court in September.

**The Bridgeport Telegram**  
June 7, 1918

**Shot Down in Fight, DiNicola Can't Live Assailants Flee After Row in Stavola Saloon at Avon Park - Patsy and Joseph Santone Sought by Police - Argument Apparently Over Pool Game.**

Another Bridgeport man was shot and probably fatally wounded in a shooting affair which was the culmination of a pool game in Stavola's temperance saloon in Stratford last night.

Albert Di Nicola of 39 Hallett street lies near death's door in the Bridgeport hospital with three 38 caliber bullets in his body. His assailants Patsy and Joseph Santone who live at Honeyspot road near Avon Park made good their escape and up until a late hour this

morning had not been apprehended.

**Operation on Victim**

Late last evening an operation was performed at the Bridgeport hospital to remove the bullets which had lodged in Di Nicola's hips and near the ribs. Dr. Phillip W. Bill performed the operation and succeeded in extracting one of the bullets. At the hospital it was reported the Di Nicola was in a weak condition and he is not expected to recover.

According to the Stratford Police Di Nicola and the Santone brothers had had a heated argument in the temperance saloon and pool parlor continuing it on the outside they crossed the street where the argument became hotter. Chief Nichols said that it was his information that one of the men picked up a stone and threw it and Di Nicola started to run to safety. His assailants pursuing him and as he was near the corner of the Stavola Saloon in the rear one of the brothers opened fire.

**Bridgeport Daily Standard**  
June 30, 1893  
**STRATFORD**

A young man named Burdick, who is digging ditches through the salt meadows near H. F. Meachen's house, unearthed a few days ago, the skull of a large animal, which is believed to be the remains of a mammoth. It was much decayed, but was still larger than any known animal of the present time. The young man sent it to the Bridgeport Scientific society.

## Keep Your Livestock in Pastures!

**Bridgeport Evening Farmer**  
June 8, 1868  
**"Ephraim's" Stratford News**

AT THE present time, this old, "God and morality" town, is clothed in her green garbs, which for superiority of style and richness of color was, perhaps, never surpassed. The God of nature has once more blessed us with his beauteous smile, and the fields and trees are putting forth their color, and there is every prospect of a rich harvest.

TO THOSE parties who own cattle or horses, we would say a word in reference there to. On Saturday afternoon, as the

New Haven and Naugatuck trains were leaving the station at this place, quite a drove of cattle were pasturing on and beside the track, and hearing the locomotives approaching ran directly in front of them, barely escaping. Had one or several of them been killed by the cars, the owners, of course, would be the losers, and would undoubtedly attempt to gain some pecuniary assistance from the railroad companies and, our citizens for the unexpected slaughter of their beeves. But this won't do; the cattle should be kept in their pastures, whether it be on a Sunday or a week day.

Our streets, having assumed a brilliant hue of green, should not be permitted to be trampled by animals belonging to men of any rank. The presence of them on the grass-plots in front of our house is obnoxious; and even little children, playing in the street, under the shade of the overhanging trees, are intimidated by their approach causing them to abandon their frolic. Any and every one of these animals should be impounded, and thus put a stop to making our neatly laid-out walks a pasture lot to somebody's cow or horse.

## Stratford Characters - Stiles Whiting

Stiles Whiting's life appears to have been fraught with one "lightning strike" after another.

### **The Hartford Courant**

July 14, 1876

*...Mr. Stiles Whiting and a boy twelve years old, named Warren Jewell, were driving a number of steers from Bridgeport to Stratford, and when about half way there, on the Air Line road, were prostrated by lightning. Mr. Whiting says when consciousness had been somewhat restored he found himself standing beside the wagon, the horse, boy and three steers all lying around on the ground. They soon recovered, however, one after the other, from the shock...*

Stiles was born in 1854 to Ezra and Mary Whiting. Ezra was well known in Stratford, accomplished much in his life, and ultimately assisted in the formation of the first oystering company in America.

George Jewell's parents both died in 1866 leaving George an orphan at age two. George was the younger brother of the aforementioned Warren. George came to live with the Whiting family and was raised in their home. George appears to have learned the meat market business from Stiles.

Stiles' father, Ezra, purchased the Universalist Church sometime between 1857 and 1867. The Church was located on

the east side of Main Street, where route I-95 now bisects the Center. Stiles and his brother opened a meat market in the former church and the market continued until 1893.

Stiles married Adelaide Depew. In February of 1885 Stiles was selected as a commissioner of the state Washington Bridge Commission. Stratford, Milford, and Bridgeport were all striving with the state, during this time, to wrest control of the bridge. All three towns sought to eliminate the bridge toll believing business between Milford, Stratford, and Bridgeport would be greatly improved.

Lightning struck again when Stratford, in August of 1889, voted to transfer ownership of Washington Bridge to Fairfield and Washington County and asked Stiles to make the transfer happen. Stiles wasn't sure this stroke of lightning was legal.

Stiles became secretary of the Mutual Hook & Ladder Company in October 1889. During the late 1800's and early 1900's many residents experiencing fires in their homes or places of business felt it was better to leave the extinguishing of the fire to chance rather than call in the firemen. Consequently, Stiles likely experienced lightning strikes from town residents

when, as a fireman, he arrived on the scene.

In January of 1891, Stiles' brother wanted out of the meat market business. Whiting Brothers meat company was dissolved, and Stiles was left to manage the meat market by himself.

In March of 1891, Stiles' mother-in-law, died unexpectedly, and suddenly, of a "shock." The "lightning" kept striking in Stiles' life.

In May of 1891, Stiles learned he had diabetes. This diagnosis was, of course, a death sentence in the late 1800's. Stiles no doubt felt this lightning strike as acutely, if not more so, than the literal strike in 1876.

In May of 1893, Stiles' horse dropped dead in its harness. No other explanation is given. This sudden death was no doubt an electric shock to Stiles.

On July 14th, 1893, Stiles passed away after having experienced too many shocks. The story does not end there, however. On the day Stiles passed, there was a strange fire at the house and barn of Joseph Leitz. No explanation could be found. On July 26th, a tornado ravaged Stratford bringing thunder, lightning, rain and hail. The storm did a great deal of damage in the town and destroyed Oronoque School.



Stiles Whiting



Whiting's Meat Market in Stratford Center is the white building on the right.

## John Sterling's bequest

The man for whom the Sterling House and Community Center is named, John William Sterling, passed away, suddenly, at the fishing lodge of Lord Mount Stephen in Canada on July 5th, 1893. He was 74 years old at the time of his passing. Mr. Sterling left \$15,000,000 (about \$390,000,000 today), to his alma mater, Yale University. Mr. Sterling's entire estate was valued at about \$20,000,000.

Mr. Sterling left his Stratford estate to his two sisters, Mrs. Rufus W. Bunnell, and Miss Cordelia Sterling. He also left his sis-

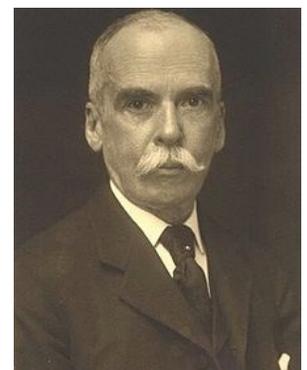
ters trust funds in the amount of \$250,000 (about \$4.5 million today).

Additionally, he left his sisters \$50,000 to be expended on "any public object" in Stratford. Mr. Sterling left an additional separate trust fund of \$50,000 to his sister Cordelia, and another separate trust fund of \$150,000 for Mrs. Bunnell's children.

Mr. Sterling left his business to his partner John A. Garver, and a bequest of \$10,000 as "a slight token of friendship." The employees of his company received a bequest of six months wages with the

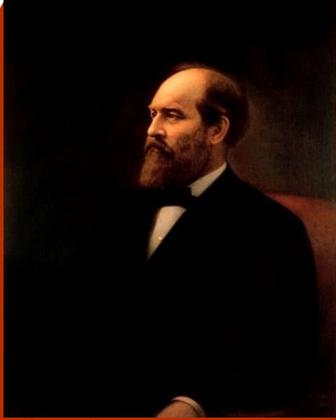
exception of his personal secretary, Helen C. Adams, to whom he bequeathed a trust fund of \$50,000.

Mr. Sterling was not a collector, per se, but he had many works of art and paintings by well-known artists including Schreyer, Gerome, Vibert, Richter, Bouguereau, Kaemmer, and Madrazo. He had a large collection of rare edition books, and a remarkable Cremona violin. These collections were left to the "residue" of the estate which would have been turned over to Yale University upon the settling of Mr. Sterling's estate.



John William Sterling image from Wikipedia Commons

# Calvin Curtis - Painter of Distinction



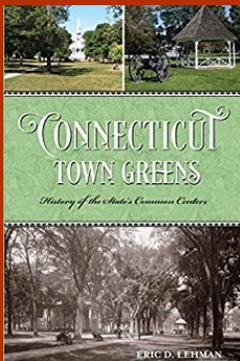
Calvin Curtis' portrait of President James A. Garfield from <https://americangallery19th.wordpress.com>



Calvin Curtis' sketch of Seaside Park 1885



Neva Conger by Calvin Curtis July 1884



Quite coincidentally, the Society received, during the month of June, a donation of Calvin Curtis' sketchbook from the late 1800's exactly 125 years after Calvin's passing.

## **Morning Journal and Courier** July 12, 1893 **DEATH OF CALVIN CURTIS, THE ARTIST.**

Stratford, July 12.— Calvin Curtis, who was one of the most widely known American artists of the old school, died this morning at his home here, aged seventy-one years. He was born July 5, 1822, in Stratford, and has resided here entirely, with the exception of a few trips abroad and to various parts of the United States, taken in the interests of art. In early life he showed much talent for art, and when comparatively young painted landscapes and portraits, which received favorable notice from capable critics.

Before reaching his majority he became a pupil of Daniel Huntington, a famous artist of years ago, and later was an associate of all the American artists of the old school. His fame spread throughout the United States, and his works were to some extent known abroad. In early life he devoted his talents almost entirely to landscape painting, and was beyond middle age when he began to paint portraits, which also added to his reputa-

tion. When he was fifty-five years of age he was stricken with paralysis in the lower limbs. For a year he was compelled to give up work, and when he again took up his brush began to paint portraits.

He painted portraits for most of the leading families in this section of the state and the portraits of the judges which hang in the county court house at Bridgeport are his productions. Among the works produced during this period which decide his position as a painter and will live as a lasting memorial of his ability is the portrait of Chief Justice Butler, now in the Fairfield county court house.

This work would have won him recognition as an artist of great power had he never done any other equally excellent work, but his portraits of Judge S. B. Beardsley, Amos S. Treat, esq., Lieutenant Governor Averill, the Hon. James C. Loomis, I. M. Sturges, esq., and Colonel S. B. Sumner, hanging in the same building, are of similar character and amply vindicate his artistic ability.

Among other important portraits which he painted are those of General W. H. Noble, William K. Seeley, esq., Gideon Hollister, esq., Rev. Nathaniel Hewitt, D. D., and John Young of Utah.

But although he was primarily a portrait painter and his bread was earned painfully and with immense difficulty in that most important branch of art work, his

taste was for landscape painting, and this he resumed after removing from Bridgeport to Stratford, which he did about a dozen years ago, to the home in which he died and where up to a very short time before his death he continued to work.

Despite the stroke of paralysis which made him a cripple until the time of his death he was a very energetic man in his later years and some of his best works were produced after he was sixty years of age. A widow, his second wife, a son, S. F. Curtis of Brookfield, two daughters, Mrs. Webster and Mrs. Angel of Cleveland, and a brother, R. G. Curtis of Stratford, survive him.

Despite our best efforts, and after hours of research, our famous portrait painter, Calvin Curtis, does not appear to have a portrait, or photo, extant, anywhere. In addition to painting many local people of distinction, and many beautiful landscapes, Calvin also painted a portrait of President James Garfield. This portrait was considered too dark, however, and was not used as the official portrait of President Garfield.

You may view many more of Calvin Curtis' paintings, and view a slideshow of Calvin's sketchbook, at [cc.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://cc.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info).

## Books of Note

Recently published by Eric Lehman is **Connecticut Town Greens: History of the State's Common Centers**. Mr. Lehman's book covers the town greens found throughout the State, featuring many useful photos, and highlighting various festivals should you decide, after reading his book, you'd like to visit the several dozen greens Mr. Lehman describes.

Mr. Lehman notes three

town greens in Stratford: Paradise Green, Town Hall, and Academy Hill. You may notice, as did we, Mr. Lehman overlooked West Broad Street green which, in earlier times, was known as "South Parade". We were somewhat surprised by this oversight in that residing on West Broad green is Stratford's World War I monument, and the Stiles Judson monument.

The book does a thorough job of describing Stratford's three other greens, noting the North Parade green has its origins in "1680 when it was used as a parade ground for the proud Stratford militia company. It kept that function through the War of 1812, when Captain Elijah Booth drilled his men here before defending nearby Black Rock Fort from the British Navy."

# Washington Bridge Rammed by Steamer

**Bridgeport Evening Farmer**  
July 16, 1868

The traffic by road to Milford is for the present suspended, in consequence of the draw on Washington Bridge having collapsed through being run against by the steamer "Monitor" of Derby.

**The Hartford Courant**  
July 20, 1868

A part of the old Washington bridge at the mouth of the Housatonic, fell in on Tuesday night. The only carriage route from Stratford to New Haven is now direct through Birmingham (Derby).

From **In Pursuit of Paradise**  
Lewis G. Knapp

With a few patches, the bridge built in 1808 lasted for sixty years. At about eight in the morning on July 15, 1868, the open draw collapsed onto the steamer Monitor as it entered the draw on its passage downriver. Ironically, when the draw was opened for the Monitor, a crew was standing by waiting to repair and strengthen the draw.

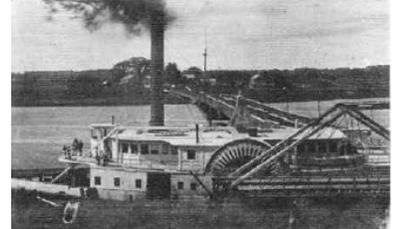
The Monitor was delayed for several days, but road traffic had to detour twenty miles through Derby for the next five years, while the bridge company searched for funds to build a replacement. In 1870 the state legislature allowed the

towns of Stratford, Milford, Bridgeport, and New Haven to take over from the bridge company, provided they build a new bridge for under \$530,000, with an eighty-foot-wide draw. New Haven backed out and the other three towns estimated the cost of piers alone would exceed \$100,000.

A second look at the problem showed that the piers of the old bridge were perfectly usable. The new Consolidated Railroad (New York, New Haven & Hartford) offered its own sixty-foot span draw...This brought the cost of a bridge down to \$17,000.



Second Washington Bridge 1808-1868.



Monitor Steamer stuck in Washington Bridge from **In Pursuit of Paradise**

# Decoration Day in Stratford

**Bridgeport Daily Standard**  
June 2, 1868

**Decoration Day in Stratford**

Appropriate and impressive ceremonies were held at this place, on Saturday last, under the auspices of Post No. 20, Grand Army of the Republic and in accordance with general order No. 11, issued by the Commander-in-Chief of that organization. At 3 o'clock, the members of the Post, each bearing the wreaths

and flowers to be used in decorating the graves of their fallen comrades, formed in line, and escorted by Co. K., 8th Regt. Conn. N. G., marched through a portion of the village, and finally halted at the entrance of the burial ground. Here the military escort reversed arms, and the procession moved again, marching with solemn step to the sound of the funeral dirge. Marching in double file, the

members of the Post halted on each side of a monument bearing the names of those heroes who fell at duty's post. A solemn and impressive prayer was offered by the Rev. Mr. Weston, rector of the Episcopal church. The monument was then decorated with flowers, and while a detail from the members of the Post visited and strewed with flowers each soldier's grave, the national hymn, "America," was

effectively sung by volunteers from the gathered assemblage. The Rev. Mr. Hall, pastor of the Congregational church, delivered a brief, touching and eloquent address and the exercises closed with a prayer and benediction pronounced by the Rev. Mr. Smith, of the Methodist church. A solemn earnestness marked these appropriate services. The fallen sleep, but in death they are not forgotten.

# A bit of a crime wave following the Civil War

Following the Civil War, many people were suffering. Several of the returning soldiers were finding it difficult to return to their former lives. Stratford, like many American towns, saw an uptick in crime. Unfortunately, a full-time police force was 50 years in the future for Stratford residents.

**Bridgeport Evening Standard**  
June 9, 1868

- The Dry-Goods store of Messrs. Allen & Co., in Stratford, was entered last night, and robbed. Entrance was effected through the front door. An auger was freely used.

We understand that \$10 in

cash and about \$300 worth of goods were taken. The tools used were stolen from Burritt's carpenter shop.

**Bridgeport Evening Standard**  
June 25, 1868

HIGHWAY ROBBERY IN STRATFORD. - Last night, James Quinn, a young man about twenty years of age, who works at the W. & W. factory, was robbed of his watch in the street, near Academy Hill, by some person unknown, who succeeded in making good his escape.

**Bridgeport Evening Standard**  
June 25, 1868

MORE THIEVING IN STRAT-

FORD. - On Wednesday night, some thieves entered the door-yard of Mr. George Fryer, and stole a lot of clothes which had been washed and left out and which were valued at about \$40. No arrests.

**Bridgeport Evening Farmer**  
July 21, 1868

Mr. John Coe, of Stratford, lost a pocketbook in this city, containing over one hundred dollars. The finder has not yet seen fit to restore it to the owner or give him information where it may be obtained. Should he decide to appropriate it to his own use, he will find it to be the dearest money he ever obtained. Mr. Coe

was robbed of five hundred dollars, some two or three years ago, by burglars who entered his house in Stratford, on a Sunday, if we remember right, while he and his family were at church.

**Bridgeport Evening Standard**  
July 21, 1868

- Last night the depot in Stratford was broken into and robbed of a small amount of money in pennies, a few postage stamps, &c., hardly enough to pay the rogues for their trouble. Entrance was effected through a window. They visited other places in turn, but the barking of dogs probably frustrated their designs.

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Goody Bassett's Ice Cream

2404 Main St. | 203.612.8075

JM Home Improvement Group

203.556.8652

The Mellow Monkey

203.379.1860 | Howard@mellowmonkey.com

Milford Bank

3651 Main St. | 203.783.7000

The National Helicopter Museum

203.375.8857 | nationalhelicoptermuseum.com

Open Door Tea

3552 Main St. | 203.345.9659

Joel F. Pleban, CPA, LLC

joel@joelplebancpa.com | 203.375.1040

Pickle Barrel Deli & Catering

203.380.0338

Rotary Drug

1030 Barnum Ave. | 203.378.9394

Scott Insurance

bscott@scottinsurance.com | 203.375.5847



Volunteers Needed: The Society can use your talent and energy. If you have some time to share, please contact the Stratford Historical Society at 203-378-0630.

# The Big One Almost Got Away!

Sikorsky Aircraft is, and has been for many years, Stratford's largest taxpayer. It's difficult to imagine, today, a company the size of Sikorsky Aircraft exploring relocation from Bridgeport to Stratford and receiving an unqualified "NO" from many Stratfordites. Yet, that is precisely what occurred sixty-five years ago.

When the Corsair manufacturing was moved to the Sikorsky plant by United Aircraft, Igor Sikorsky found fighter planes and helicopters did not mix well under the same manufacturing roof. Mr. Sikorsky decided, in 1943, to move Sikorsky's manufacturing to South Avenue in Bridgeport.

Ten years later, Mr. Sikorsky

was ready to leave Bridgeport and return to Stratford. In the intervening 10 years, many Stratfordites had forgotten about Sikorsky's tenure in town. When Mr. Sikorsky proposed his plant to the Town Council **The Stratford News** found the need to explain to Stratford residents who Igor Sikorsky was and what his company manufactured.

Earlier in 1953, Sikorsky had submitted a proposal to locate its new plant in Milford. Delays and stalling of the Sikorsky request changed Sikorsky's leaders' minds. Many people in the state were stunned by the Milford refusal.

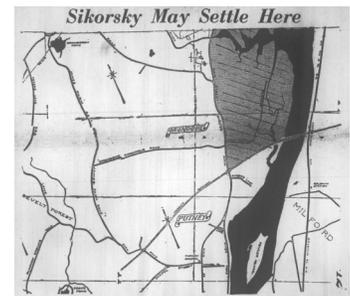
Sikorsky went before Stratford's Planning & Zoning and

received approval for a zoning change in Oronoque which would allow the plant to be built.

Putney and Oronoque neighbors fought the zoning change and, once again, many State residents were in disbelief. Rumors circulated that Sikorsky was considering moving to Shelton.

Sikorsky threatened legal action, and took out a full page ad in **The Stratford News** pleading their case: 1) Sikorsky would be a substantial taxpayer demanding little in return; 2) many new jobs would be created; 3) new revenue would be generated for local businesses; and, 4) property values would increase.

The rest, as they say, is history.



From **The Stratford News** July 2, 1953



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

