

THE CUPHEAG CORNER

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 3

JANUARY 2020



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

MARK THE DATES:

- January's General Membership Meeting: Sunday, January 26th at 2:00 pm at the Perry House
- Governing Board Meeting, Thursday, February 20th, 6:00 pm, Stratford Town Hall, Room 213
- March's General Membership Meeting: Sunday, March 29th at 2:00 pm at the Perry House

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JANUARY'S GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Sunday, January 26th, 2:00 pm, William Perry House, 1128 West Broad St

Stratford Historical Society Presents:
DNA For Everyone

The AncestryDNA, the 23andMe and MyHeritage marketing campaigns have been great successes and have led millions of people to order test kits. Maybe you've already taken a test and need help understanding your results. Or you have been thinking about it but wanted to know more before you made the commitment. You are encouraged to bring your questions and your relatives who are reluctant to test.

TV Researcher and Genealogy



Janeen Bjork

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

teacher Janeen Bjork will present an introduction to DNA testing for Genealogy that will be accessible to everyone. The discussion will cover the three types of DNA tests (autosomal, mitochondrial and Y-DNA) and the companies that offer them. The costs of the tests, as well as the best ways to save money on testing, will also be discussed. Real PDOPreports will be shown to demonstrate what testing for DNA matches and ethnicity can (and can't) reveal. Attendees will see how different results from five different companies can be. Ms. Bjork has permission from about a dozen relatives to show their test results.

NEW BUSINESS MEMBERS

The Whiskey Barrel

251 East Main Street
Stratford CT 06614

Mellow Monkey

360 Sniffens Lane
Stratford CT 06615

FLORA'S SILHOUETTE IN BIRMINGHAM

During the month of November, we were privileged to be able to attend the **Black Out** exhibit, featuring Flora the slave girl's silhouette, in Birmingham, Alabama at the Birmingham Museum of Art. Flora's



Entrance to the **Black Out** exhibit, and Flora's silhouette, at the Birmingham Museum of Art.

silhouette was transported to Birmingham from Jackson, Mississippi in August of 2019. Her silhouette was in display in Birmingham from September 28th through January 12th. Flora's silhouette will leave Birmingham at the end of January and be returned to the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery for appraisal and final disposition. We will keep you informed as Flora's silhouette's journey continues.

Flora's silhouette has been seen by thousands of people over its 18th month sojourn. Flora's silhouette is a testament to the way slavery sales were discretely carried out in the Northern states, and to the private-terrors experienced by the victims of those sales during the late years of



Entrance to the Birmingham Museum of Art in Birmingham, Alabama.

the 1700s, and the early years of the 1800's. To view a slideshow of the **Black Out** exhibit in Birmingham, please go to florainbhm.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Gail Liscio
SHS President

Happy New Year from Gail Liscio Stratford Historical Society President.

This New Year will be filled with dreams brought to life due to all the hard work of the past few years. I am honored to be a part of our ongoing

commitment to the preservation of all things historic and all things worthy of remembrance.

I am asking each and everyone who holds in their heart the desire to preserve all that is time honored and true to join me in our campaign to

make this year the best that The Stratford Historical society has seen in many years.

Yours Truly,

Gail

DOCENTS WANTED

The Stratford Historical Society
invites you to join

THE DOCENT TEAM

**If you like to work with children
If you want to teach them about local history
If you have a few hours to perform
a real community service**

THE DOCENT CLASS

**Tuesdays in March
9:00 - 11:00 a.m.
Judson House & Museum,
967 Academy Hill**

Please call

Dolores Hctor (203) 378-6842 or Judson House (203) 378-0630



**STRATFORD
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

(203) 378-0630

Friend of Education

Docent Training Classes

8 LESSONS

2 hour sessions
once a week
for 6 weeks
in February and March
plus 2 weeks in September

SUBJECTS

early Stratford history
Stratford in the Revolution
Judson Family
house and museum
artifacts and exhibits

SCHOOL TOURS

May and October

REQUESTED PARTICIPATION

5 mornings in May
5 mornings in October

SUFFRAGE ANNIVERSARY REMEMBRANCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
CONTACT: Karin Doyle
January 9, 2020 203-385-4029

Stratford Honors the 19th Amendments' Centennial Ratification

STRATFORD – The year 2020 marks one-hundred years since the 19th Amendment was signed into law, giving all female U.S. citizens the right to vote. The Town of Stratford will be recognizing this centennial with a series of events throughout the year.

Mayor Laura R. Hoydick, along with the Stratford Historical Society, will host monthly presentations highlighting notable Stratford women. The women being honored range from Suffrage activists to present day civic and community leaders.

“Recognizing this centennial provides an unparalleled opportunity to celebrate a milestone in our republic, both nationally and here in town,” shares Mayor Hoydick. “For more than one-hundred years, Stratford has seen strong, passionate, capable female leaders. The stories being presented are remarkable.”

These monthly presentations will be held at Town Council meetings, beginning January 13th at 8:00pm in Town Hall Council Chambers.

Additionally, the Stratford Library is partnering with the Baldwin Center and Stratford Lifelong Learners to host “Votes for Women”, a presentation showcasing Connecticut women who fought on a local, state and national level for women’s right to vote. This is

being presented by the Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame on February 25th from 1:30 to 2:30pm at the Baldwin Center.

The Library plans to celebrate Women’s History Month throughout March. The conclusion of this program will examine the book “Olive, Again” by Elizabeth Strout, a Pulitzer Prize winning author, on March 25th at 12:00pm in the Library Board Room. The Library Children’s Department is recognizing Women’s History Month as well, including bingo, crafts and a Girl Power celebration.

For more information, including a schedule of Public Forum and Town Council meetings, visit www.TownofStratford.com/19thAmendment. For information regarding Library events, visit www.stratfordlibrary.org.



DATELINE STRATFORD DEC. 1954—JAN. 1955

The Hartford Courant

December 1, 1954

Stratford TB Scare Starts X-Ray Program

STRATFORD, Nov. 30

UPI—Discovery of seven cases of tuberculosis among residents of a housing development here during the past two months prompted the Stratford Visiting Nurses Association to arrange for chest X-rays for other residents of the project. The X-rays will be paid for by the association.

The Stratford News

December 2, 1954

Voters to Decide Liquor Issue

Stratford voters will cast their votes this Saturday in a special referendum election to decide where or not Section 7-G, known as the liquor control section of the Zoning ordinance, should be stricken from the regulations as voted by the Town Council last August.

Town officials, expecting a light turnout, predict the council's action will be supported...

The Stratford News

December 16, 1954

Stratford Population Hits 40,100, Increases Continue

Stratford has an estimated population of 40,100 according to recent statistics released by the Regional Plan Association, Inc., a research and planning agency conducting studies throughout New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut metropolitan areas.

The RPA report shows that the Stratford rate of population increase during the last four years is 20 percent. Bridgeport, on the other hand, showed only a 3% population increase during the last four years...

The Stratford News

January 6, 1955

New Dog Pound Asked By State

In a letter to the Town Council, C. B.

Ganung, Assistant Division Chief of the State Department of Agriculture, has requested that the town give immediate attention to the erection of a new dog pound.

The letter will be discussed at the next meeting of the Town Council scheduled Monday, January 10 at 8 p.m.

Mr. Ganung, in his letter, reported that he had viewed the recent flooding condition at the local pound, which caused the removal of the dogs to the Conn. Humane Society Shelter in Westport.

Urgently Needed

The state official said that a new dog pound is urgently needed and "I believe it should be provided for now and constructed before next winter's cold weather arrive."....

The Stratford News

January 6, 1955

Full-Time Attorneys To 'Save Town Dough,' Dorne

Councilman Edmond A. Dorne of the Sixth District has submitted a resolution to the Town Council asking that funds be appropriated for a full-time Town Attorney and a full-time Assistant Town Attorney...

Councilman Dorne reported that the future growth of Stratford will probably entail an increasing demand for legal services and that at present the town spends considerable sums of money for legal services...

The Hartford Courant

January 11, 1955

Small Business Advisors

Sen. Bush's office announced Monday that two additional Connecticut men have been appointed to the national advisory committee of the Small Business Administration. They are Raymond J. O'Connor, Stratford and Richard F. Moore, Bridgeport.

The Stratford News

January 20, 1955

Fewer 'Bad' Youngsters

Stratford PAL is Helping Prevent Crime Among Youths

The problem of Juvenile Delinquency has been an increasing one during the past 25 years for the country's law officials, but a system put into effect in Stratford, seems to be paying dividends in fewer "bad" youngsters.

Back in 1951, Sergeant Jack Havery of the local Police Department was assigned the task of organizing a Police Athletic League for the town's children.

The town at that time showed a population of 35,000 with some 6,000 children. The statistics were beginning to show that more youngsters between the ages of seven to sixteen were getting into mischief, sometimes pretty serious mischief.

Realizing that this trend was a national one as well as one that would affect the citizens of Stratford in years to come, town officials and parents began a study of the problem to determine the cause of juvenile delinquency and what methods could be worked out to prevent it...

The Hartford Courant

January 28, 1955

Stratford Ban on Auctions Sunday and After 6 P.M. Daily Is Upheld

BRIDGEPORT, Conn., Jan. 27 UPI—Judge Richard S. Swain of Common Pleas Court today sustained the validity of a Stratford ordinance which bans auctions on Sundays and after 6 p.m. on weekdays...

In upholding the ordinance Judge Swain declared the enactment is "designed to protect people from the dangers from public auctions after 6 p.m. where they cannot see clearly what they are buying, and to protect them from possible fraud."



Stratford High couples drift and dream of a White Christmas amid sparkling stars, bells, and silver snowflakes which adorned the school gym for the annual Christmas formal. **Sunday Herald**, December 26, 1954.



Stratfordites L-R: Ed Pliska, Pat Trent, Carole Scott, Chuck Farley, Judy Mainiero, William Felix, Pat Dennis and Bob Nevers. **Sunday Herald**, December 26, 1954.



THE RAYBESTOS REVUE, seated L-R: Madeline Sanders, Marge Kopnick, Sara Milazzo, Mickey Cardone, Millie Elias, Lorraine Johnson and Betty Panda. Standing, Tony Sidoti, George Hayes, Don Beers, Ruth Broman, Ray Paslawski, Virginia DiBiase, Tony Pagliuca,... **The Stratford News**, December 16, 1954.

NOW SHOWING DEC. 1954—JAN. 1955



Stratford Theater c 1946

December 5th	A Woman's Face	Joan Crawford, Melvyn Douglas
December 12th	Drum Beat	Alan Ladd
December 19th	Track of the Cat	Diana Lynn, Tab Hunter
December 26th	Last Time I Saw Paris	Elizabeth Taylor, Van Johnson, Walter Pidgeon, Donna Reed
January 2nd	Carmen Jones	Harry Bellafonte, Dorothy Dandridge, Pearl Bailey
January 9th	3 Ring Circus	Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis
January 16th	White Christmas	Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney
January 23rd	Young at Heart	Frank Sinatra, Doris Day
January 30th	Sign of the Pagan	Jeff Chandler, Jack Palance, Rita Gam

ELIZABETH SAMMIS—SUFFRAGETTE

Elizabeth Sammis looms large in Stratford's history. For nearly 100 years she recorded, and made, Stratford history. Mrs. Sammis was, of course, the founder and first curator of the Stratford Historical Society. Mrs. Sammis' name was, quite literally, synonymous with the Stratford Historical Society from the Society's 1925 founding until Mrs. Sammis' death in 1963 at the age of 101. Mrs. Sammis organized the Society at the age of 64 when most other individuals would be seeking a much deserved rest.

Mrs. Sammis was considered an authority on antiques and was an avid collector. She addressed the Historical Society, periodically, as the featured speaker. Mrs. Sammis resigned from the Governing Board of the Society in 1953.

Most notably, Mrs. Sammis, and her daughter, were some of the founding members of the Stratford Equal Suffrage Association. Mrs. Sammis actively campaigned, in 1920, for signatures on petitions for women's suffrage and carried those petitions to the governor. She also assisted in various fund raising activities for the Association.

Mrs. Sammis was active in the Stratford Method Episcopal Church in her younger years. The Methodist Church was a leader in Suffrage activities in town. It's highly likely Mrs. Sammis' involvement in Suffrage causes predated the formation of the Suffrage Association.

Following the ratification of the 19th amendment, Mrs. Sammis joined the League of Women Voters.

The list of town and state organizations that Mrs. Sammis was involved with, or an officer of, is a long list indeed: Children of the American Revolution; Red Cross (contributing over 800 hours during WWI); Woman's Missionary Society; Surgical Dressing Committee (World War I); Stratford Library Association; Women's Aid Society; Stratford Methodist Episcopal Church; Stratford First Congregational Church;

organizer of the Hollister Heights Sunday School; local whist (card) clubs; and, Republican Women.

Mrs. Sammis was a ticket agent, for a period of time in the 1920's and participated in a track inspection in 1920.

She was active in her beloved town government and can be considered "the mother" of Stratford's Council-Manager form of government adopted in 1921.

Mrs. Sammis lived next to the Historical Society at 949 Academy Hill. In 1911, an overturned kerosene lamp started a small fire in a closet of her home, but, before the fire department arrived to put the fire out, Mrs. Sammis had already extinguished the flames with a rug.

Sunday Herald

December 19, 1954

Historian Says at 93:

Early Stratford Was Really Fun!

By BOB SHOGAN

Mrs. Frank Sammis is a 93-year-old historian who lives in an 11-room house at 949 Academy Hill with a collection of old memories and even older antiques.

She recalls, with ease and enthusiasm, girlhood days when the stage coach still rumbled down West Broad St. and a hoop skirt factory was one of Stratford's leading industries.

Widow of Frank R. Sammis, father of Stratford's council-manager form of Government, Mrs. Sammis was curator of the Stratford Historical Society's Judson House, located next door to her home, for more than 25 years.

The good old days

She retired from her official position last year but still retains an active interest in the society along with a remarkable memory for Stratford's "good old days."

Mrs. Sammis was born on Old Mill Hill, now a part of Bridgeport, in 1861.

The population of Stratford was then 2,500. Transportation to and from Bridgeport was provided by four trains which made the trip in 30 minutes. Fare was 15¢. Mrs. Sammis' earliest and most vivid memory dates back to 1865

when her father, Capt. Wilson French, came home from the Civil War.

Bandages and whiskers

Capt. French, of the 17th Connecticut Volunteers, had been wounded at Gettysburg and taken prisoner by the Confederates.

His daughter recalls his "driving home from the station in a horse drawn hack. His arm was bandaged and he had whiskers all over."

He also had a baby picture of Mrs. Sammis, then Elizabeth Jane French.

The picture went through the war with him. The Confederates had confiscated it when they imprisoned Capt. French, but they returned it to him when he was released.

Mrs. Sammis also reminisced about her first automobile ride in 1902.

"A man from Long Island came up to visit the family and took each of us for a ride in his car. He could only take one at a time, because there was room for just one passenger."

The Sammises got their first automobile in 1911.

"It was a Cadillac," Mrs. Sammis said. "One horsepower. With an extra step-seat in the back that opened up like a door."

Recalls past Christmas

Automobile styling is not the only thing that has changed with the times, Mrs. Sammis reflected.

"In 1900 we paid \$19 tax on this house. Today," she said wryly, "we pay about \$260."

Christmas was different way back then, too, but just as exciting, Mrs. Sammis maintained.

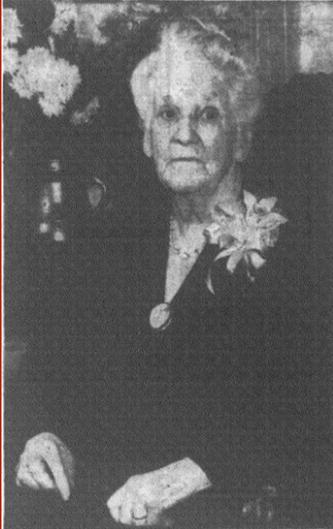
"We always had celery and oranges and cellar full of food," she remembered. "We didn't have Christmas trees, but we hung up our stockings."

The past, Mrs. Sammis believes, was a lot of fun.

Asked about the future she had to stop and think for a moment.

"The future? All I can see for the future," she said, "is that we'll probably all be blown up."

To learn more about Elizabeth French Sammis, please go to es.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info. You will find a recording of Mrs. Sammis recalling Stratford's history from 1955.



ONLY YESTERDAY: Mrs. Frank R. Sammis looks back on 93 years of life and Stratford history. Photo from the *Sunday Herald*, December 19, 1954.

ON THE ROAD TO STRATFORD 400

As we begin a new year, traditionally, we reflect on the events of the year just past. On the Road to (Stratford's) 400th Anniversary we wish to look a bit farther back than the now past 12 months. **On the Road to 400**, let's review a few of the highlights of the 380 years that Stratford has been a town.

1969

50 years ago, long time principal of Lovell Hardware, and former Town Clerk, Harold Lovell, passed away at the age of 83. Mr. Lovell was well-known for his dry sense of humor. Phyl Klesper was the first woman elected to Stratford's Town Council. Sex education being taught in Stratford's schools occupied several issues of Stratford's local newspapers. The "new" Center School was being built on Sutton Avenue.

1944

75 years ago, Vice-president, Henry Wallace, visited Stratford. In a year when most Republican state candidates for office lost their election races, Stratford resident, Governor Raymond Baldwin was re-elected. The Stratford made Corsair fighter plane was winning accolades, and headlines, around the world for its superior performance in battle. A heated battle erupted between the School Board and the Town Council over the Board's hiring of Martha Bond as school business manager. The investigation into the Hartford Circus Fire involved both Governor Ray Baldwin and Stratford war hero General Rex DeLacour.

1919

100 years ago saw the building and launching of several wooden war ships at the Housatonic Shipyard located at the site of today's Dock Shopping Center. The Lovell Building, housing Lovell Hardware and the local A&P, was constructed in Stratford Center. Stratford's Visiting Nurses Association was organized from Red Cross volunteer nurses. Sumner Simpson built the Raybestos factory on Ferry Boulevard. The Port of Bridgeport construction was roundly opposed by Stratford and Bridgeport residents. The opponents eventually prevailed. Florence Lewis, Stratford's beloved nurse and decoy carver, returned from her military nursing service in Europe.

1894

125 years ago the first women registered to vote in local library and school board elections. Railroad tracks along the train line were raised to their current height and bridges were built over Main, King, and Bruce streets. The fourth Washington Bridge was put into service over the Housatonic River. Birdseye Blakeman provided the funding to build the Stratford Library in his boyhood town. The trolley came to Stratford forever altering Stratford's place in Connecticut as a refuge from the hustle-bustle of nearby Bridgeport.

1869

150 years ago, the need to replace the collapsed Washington Bridge was roundly acknowledged. Edward Lamson Henry painted his fanciful version of the Stratford train station, the **9:45 AM Accommodation**. Five trains per day were stopping at the Stratford train station. John Sterling, the man for whom the Sterling House Community Center is named, became Jay Gould's trusted attorney and advisor. A "new" Town Hall, located in Stratford Center where I-95 crosses Main Street and used until 1937, was designed.

1844

175 years ago, the Universalist Church was built in Stratford Center approximately where the Kama Sushi restaurant is located today. Oronoque School was built in Oronoque.

1819

200 years ago, Connecticut's first United States Senator, William Samuel Johnson, died in Stratford. David Plant and Reuben Tweedy represented Stratford in Connecticut's House of Representatives. Stratford's industries included (exclusive of the borough of Bridgeport) a tinware factory, a tannery, two carding machines, three grain mills, and three merchants' mills for flouring wheat and grinding Indian corn and plaster of Paris. The plaster of Paris was made from oyster shells.

1794

225 years ago, John Benjamin sold his 13-ton sloop Peggy to Captain John Selby and traded up to the 22-ton sloop Hunter.

1769

250 years ago, Theophilus Nichols

and Samuel Adams served as Stratford's representatives in Hartford. Later Agur Tomlinson was elected to replace Samuel Adams.

1744

275 years ago, Reverend Richard Miner was dismissed as the Congregational Church minister as his views had become too Episcopalian. His congregation then joined with the Long Hill Congregation. The Connecticut General Assembly authorized the North Stratford (Trumbull) parish. William Samuel Johnson graduated from Yale.

1719

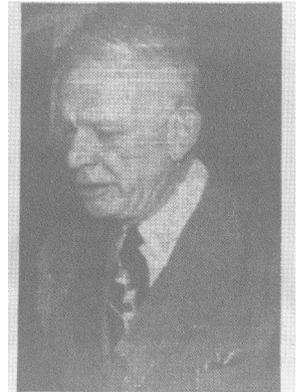
300 years ago, the Rev. Timothy Cutler became minister of the Congregational Church. He, too, later aligned himself with the Episcopalian Church ministers. After increasingly poor ferry service to the residents of Milford, Richard Blackleach, ferry operator since 1712, was counseled by the Milford Council to observe his obligations to the town of Milford, and was awarded the ferry contract for another 21 years.

1694

325 years ago, Jabez Harger came here from Westchester, married Margaret Tomlinson, and settled on a farm in Oronoque. David DeForest rowed a boat sixty miles up the sound to Stratford. DeForest stayed in town and founded a family which remained prominent in the town for generations. Isaac Nichols wrote a will deeding his Indian servant George to his wife for life. The Colonial assembly authorized the residents of Pequonock (which straddled the Fairfield-Stratford border) to form a new ecclesiastical society. The new society, located in two towns, was the first separate church society or village located within an existing township in the Connecticut Colony.

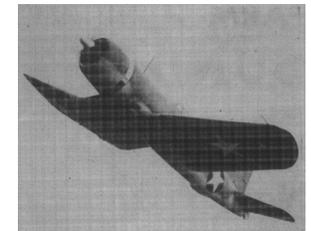
1669

350 year ago, John Pickett was promoted from constable to townsman (selectman). The townsmen ruled that cattle were not to be pastured in "ye fields but such as is sufficiently fenced and passed ye fence viewers judgement to be sufficient to secure ye Creatures pastured thereon," and "whosoever shall leave down the bars in said fence shall be liable to a fine."



Harold C. Lovell, "elder statesman" of Stratford.

Harold C. Lovell. Photo from *The Stratford News*, October 25, 1954.



New Corsair in flight. Photo from the *Sunday Herald*, February 21, 1943.



Lovell Building under construction in 1919. Photo courtesy of Carol Lovell.



Fourth Washington Bridge c 1894.

REMEMBERING THE PHELPS MANSION



Phelps Mansion, 1738 Elm Street. Photo from *In Pursuit Paradise* by Lewis Knapp.



PEEKING AROUND THE CORNER – Touring the Phelps mansion, Alliance Medical Inns staff members, from left, Mrs. Ann Skubas, Miss Carol Chmielewski and Mrs. June Cohen, find that the house still offers many creaking sounds. Photo from the *Sunday Herald*, January 4, 1970.



The interior of the house (Phelps Mansion) shows even greater effects of the ravages of neglect. *The Stratford News*, December 10, 1970.

As we approach the one year anniversary of the destruction by fire of the American Festival Shakespeare Theatre, we are reminded of a neighboring historic home which suffered a similar fate nearly 50 years earlier. After the Phelps Mansion, at 1738 Elm Street, was set ablaze, for the second time, in January 1972, the town deemed the structure unsalvageable and it was demolished in February 1972.

The Phelps Mansion was abandoned in 1968 and sat moldering on Elm Street for the next several years. Attacked by vandals and arsonists, the nursing home owners of the mansion had no choice but to tear the beautiful Georgian-style home down. The loss was deeply regretted by residents and New Englanders alike for the Phelps Mansion had a storied past.

The (Connecticut) *Sunday Herald* and *The Stratford News* both ran articles about the house in 1970 due to the increasing interest of the neighborhood pertaining to the ultimate disposition of the mansion.

Sunday Herald

January 4, 1970
A Stratford Spook: Phelps Mansion; Eeriness Remains 120 Years Later

By TIM HOLLEY

If you believe in or have a fascination with houses which are alleged to have been haunted by spirits, there is one of the most famous examples in New England history situated adjacent to the parking lot of the American Shakespeare Festival theater, Elm street, Stratford.

Recently interest has been revived in the former Phelps mansion due to the many tales and mysterious occurrences which have been intricately inlaid to the 144-year history of the house. The mansion's notoriety is derived from an episode known as the "Stratford Knocking" of 1850 which brought the town into national prominence overnight.

Found Crepe, Body

The "Stratford Knockings" reportedly began on a Sunday morning, March 10, 1850, when the owner, the Rev. Dr. Eliakim Phelps, and his wife and child came home from church services to find their front door hung with crepe and a body lying on the first floor, shrouded for the grave. Upon making this discovery, the

good reverend stated, he heard sundry rappings or knockings from within the frame of the house.

News of these strange and unexplained rappings were carried across the country and stirred much controversy among state newspapers.

As the reports became more unbelievable, tourists began to pour into Stratford to witness the strange phenomena.

Episode Described

... "One is tempted to believe that the spirit of Goody Bassett, hanged in 1651 for divers witch-like arts, was never fairly laid, and now, after an unquiet term of one hundred and ninety-nine years, returned to walk the earth. During the early period of this unearthly possession the entire village was convulsed with excitement and lost is character for sobriety; crowds poured hither by every train; editors, reporters, spiritualists, skeptics explored, watched, investigated and interrogated, and gave an unwelcome publicity to the scandalous details.

To read the complete 1970 newspaper articles on the Phelps mansion, go to phelps.stratfordhistorical.society.info.

STRATFORD GRADED SCHOOL SPEECH CONTEST

The Bridgeport Evening Post
January 19, 1895
STRATFORD.

Delsarte Entertainment.

The long looked for event of the prize speaking contest by pupils of the Graded school occurred in the Town ball last evening. In spite of the storm a very good audience was present and each part of the program was evidently appreciated.

The first of the contestants to appear on the stage after a charming opening piece by the Bridgeport Mandolin club was Miss Clarice M. Dufour who recited "The Sioux Chief's Daughter" and was followed by the following pupils and recitations. Miss Ada Speer, "The First Setter's Story;" Miss Ella Garlick, "The Bell of Atri;" Miss Mabel Coulter, "Beth Gelort or The Grave of the Greyhound;" Master Eddie Dorman, "Daniel Perriton's Ride;" Miss May Herring, "The Witch's Daughter;" music quartette by Mrs. Frank L.

Curtis, Mrs. J. I. Chaffee, Fred Atwood and J. I. Chaffee. Marguerite E. Hubbell, "Bay Billy;" Erma Miller, "The Demon Ship;" Delia W. Park, "Little Sister and I;" This concluded the list of speakers and was followed by a pantomime entitled "Sandalphon" by the class in delsarte which includes all the young lady speakers of the evening Mrs. L. H. Buell, the delsarte teacher, standing behind the scenes read the poem while the class which occupied the stage, made the necessary gestures. This was a remarkably graceful exhibition and was roundly applauded. The program concluded with a telescope march by the same class. "The Mazes in Million" of this march was confusing enough to the audience but the class carried it through without a single misstep. This was the most graceful and entertaining features of the evening and received enthusiastic applause. Meanwhile the judges Mrs. Wm B. Cogswell and Messrs. Arden I. Judd

and Hon. Stiles Judson jr. had retired to the ante room to decide on the awards and at the conclusion of the march Mr. Judson after a few words of well merited commendation to the whole class announced the following decision: first prize to Miss May Herring, second prize to Miss Delia W. Park and honorable mention to Miss Erma Miller and Miss Clarice M. Dufour. The prizes were identical in form, the first being of gold, the second of silver with the following inscription "Prize speaking contest, 1895 S.G.S." They were presented by the Principal J. L. Chaffee with a few appropriate sentiments. Great credit was given Mrs. L. H. Buell the delsarte teacher, who has had the entire training of the class. She is a graduate of one of the Boston school of Oratory and has delighted people in various parts of the state with the result of her work. The music furnished by the Mandolin club was in every respect excellent.

1ST WOMAN ELECTED TO TOWN COUNCIL

Fifty years after the U.S. Congress passed the 19th amendment enabling all U.S. Citizens to vote, Stratford elected its first woman to the Town Council. In 1954, Stratford had elected its first woman to the Connecticut State House of Representatives.

The Stratford News

November 13, 1969

Stfd's first councilwoman recalls election night

By Karen Klebe

"My mind went blank. I heard the figures but I couldn't relate to them."

That is how Stratford's first Councilwoman, Mrs. Phyl Klesper described election night. Phyl, who'll represent the 10th District as a Democrat has broken the sex barrier which has existed ever since Stratford adopted the Council-Manager system.

Phyl was relating her election day experiences—her first as a candidate.

"I spent the entire day at the polls. Right after voting, at 6 a.m. at Second Hill Lane School, I stayed there until 1:15 p.m. After a quick lunch I went to the other precinct at Stony Brook

School and stayed there until the polls closed.

"I wasn't nervous the whole day. At Second Hill Lane, I stood just a few feet from George Dirgo's father and brother-in-law (he was her Republican opponent). We chit-chatted back and forth and kidded each other.

"At Stony Brook I stood near George Dirgo, he even invited me to his victory party. I had the feeling that he felt he couldn't lose, though maybe he was a little worried."

At 7:55 p.m. just five minutes before the polls closed, Phyl and her campaign manager, Ed McMaugh, went inside to hear the results.

Minutes before, State Representative Marilyn Pearson (R-128th) arrived at the polls. Mrs. Pearson, was narrowly defeated by Ed Petro (D-5th) for a Council seat two years ago in the Fifth District.

Phyl recalls: "Marilyn went up to George (Dirgo) and said 'you haven't a thing to worry about' then she came over to me and said, 'I know just how you feel, I've gone through it.'

"Just after that, I went inside to

hear the results and my mind really went blank. When the results were read off the machines, I couldn't understand them. Even when Ed (McMaugh, her campaign manager) said 'you've got him two to one' I didn't really understand.

"George (Dirgo) knew, but I didn't."

After hearing the results from one of the Tenth's two precincts, she went to the Stony Brook Community Center to await the final tally. Considering the possibility of defeat, Phyl said, "I wouldn't have felt bad for me, but I would've for all those who worked along with me. They were so enthusiastic and sure."

But the results from the other precinct were good; Phyl was elected.

"The place went wild," she said. "Everyone shouted and yelled."

"The first thing I did, was to phone my daughter who is a nun in Boston and the one who is a nun in New York and tell them. They thought it was great."

Phyl appears to be remarkably unimpressed by her feat...



Mrs. Phyl Klesper
Phyl Klesper. Photo from The Stratford News, November 13, 1969.

CAPTAIN SELBY'S SALVAGED RUM RUN

It had always seemed, from the recorded historical accounts of Captain John Selby, that his rum smuggling was a well-kept secret, and/or something he rarely engaged in. However, in a recently discovered **Connecticut Courant** article, it appears that Captain Selby's rum smuggling activities were not all that secret (at least not to the residents of Stonington. A cave in Putney, which was (re-)discovered in 1910, may have served Captain Selby long and well for his rum hiding needs.

A History of the Old Town of Stratford Volume I Page 435

John Selby lived near the lower wharf in Stratford. He was a young man who had worked his way to the command of a brig running to the West Indies. In an evil hour he was tempted to smuggle a few hogsheads of rum, the doing of which proved his ruin.

He commanded a brig built all of mahogany in the West Indies, with which he came into and went up the Housatonic river to Friar's Head,

where in the night he unloaded some casks of rum and put them into a building to save the tariff or duties. A young man being near, courting late in the night, discovered the transaction and complained to the authorities that he might get the reward, which was half the vessel and half the cargo. The vessel was seized by the government, condemned and sold. Capt. Selby was fined and imprisoned. After lying in prison a long time, his wife smuggled a saw in to him with which he broke jail and went pirating, and was gone several years.

Finally, becoming tired of the business, and desiring to see his family, which consisted of a wife and three children, he, through agents, made a compromise with the government and was pardoned by paying nine thousand dollars. He came home a dissipated, wretched man.

In Pursuit of Paradise Page 137

The temptation to smuggle was strong. On October 1, 1795. Captain John Selby arrived at the lower dock aboard the schooner St. Joseph from Antigua. His account book shows

sales of oranges, limes and tamarinds to local purchasers, and fifteen hogsheads of rum to Prosper Wetmore - who, incidentally, was part owner of the schooner. On November 23, federal judge Pierrepoint Edwards seized the vessel for not paying duty; it seems that an informer had seen the crew unload fifteen hogsheads of rum upriver at Friar's Head in Oronoque, and informers were given half the value of boat and cargo.

On December 10, collector Samuel Smedley auctioned off the rum and schooner. Captain Selby paid a fine and went to jail, but St. Joseph was soon back in service, recovered by her owners, Prosper, Victory, and Robert Wetmore, the minister's sons.

A cavern found in Putney in 1910 when Adolphus Spearman was building his icehouse could have been the hiding place for Captain Selby's rum.

The Connecticut Courant December 8, 1794

NEW LONDON, December 4
The sloop Nancy, Capt. John Selby, of Stratford, made Montauk-Point, on Thursday the 27th ult. having at the time four feet of water in her

hold. The Captain attempted to get into Stonington-Point for a harbor, but the wind blowing a gale at S. W. the vessel unfortunately was forced a-shore on Watch Hill beech, and wholly lost. The cargo consisting of 50 hogsheads of rum, 50 pipes of brandy, 10 barrels of sugar and 10 do. of beef, (the latter of which could not sell in the W. Indies,) was saved, excepting two bhds. of rum, two pipes of brandy, ten barrels of sugar, and the beef. Capt Selby acknowledges himself under particular obligations for the ready and important assistance rendered him by the inhabitants of Stonington, in his distressing situation.



Captain John Selby's former house at 627 Stratford Ave.

CHRISTMAS IN STRATFORD 1724

Bridgeport Evening Post
December 26, 1894
STRATFORD.

The services at Christ church on Christmas morning were well attended, and the appropriate decorations and excellent music contributed greatly to the enjoyment of all. A new and beautiful altar cloth, and pulpit fontal and book marks, the gifts of Mrs. John Benjamin, were used for the first time. The subject of the rector's discourse was "Christmas in Stratford in 1724." In the course of his ser-mon Rev. Mr. Cornwall spoke as follows:

One hundred and seventy years ago to-day, the first church edifice in this parish was opened tor service. The Rev. Sam-uel Johnson was appointed resident missionary in 1723, and about one year after his settlement, the first church was completed and occupied tor the first time on Christmas day, 1724.

We may picture to ourselves something of the appearance of the church and the town at that time. The new edifice was a small wooden structure 45½ feet long, 30½ feet wide and 22 feet high. It stood just south of the old burying ground, and a few rods from it upon the hill stood the Congregational place of wor-

ship, a building of about the same size. Around the church and upon the hill were various residences, one of which, at least, is still standing. and from it and other very old houses in various parts of the town we can judge of the appearance of the houses of two centuries ago.

As we enter the church we shall find it very plain as compared with the churches of the present day, but there would be much that was familiar in the service. They had the English Prayer book, similar to our own in all important features; the ritual would necessarily be simple, but as the new rector had but recently returned from England, whither he went for his ordination, and where he became familiar with the modes of conducting the service which were prevalent, in the mother country, he would naturally do all that was possible to render the services interesting and impressive.

That Christmas service, of nearly two centuries ago derives its great interest from the fact that it was the first celebration of the festival of the Nativity in a church in Connecticut. There was a time in England when there was great opposition to the observance of this festival, and in

some parts of New England it was made, by law, an offence to celebrate the day. But while we marvel at what seems to have been a great want of sentiment on the part of the Puritans, we must remember that there is even now a great lack of real, true christian feeling in regard to this day, many using it only for social festivities and even abusing it by dissipation and excess. The Puritans objected to the abuse of the day in wild reveling and riot, and it was, perhaps, well that there should be a cessation in the observance of Christmas until the festival had become disentangled from the prodigality and waste with which it had become associated.

While, then, to the founders of this parish was granted the privilege of reviving the celebration of Christmas in Connecticut, let us remember that they revived it as a day of religious character, and it is for us, and for all churchmen to aim to preserve it as a day of sacred associations; and may the method of keeping Christmas in this town be always such as may serve as an example to those about us, and be an honor to its people and reveal a spirit of worship to God and of peace and good will to men.



Christ Church
1743—1857

FOX HUNTERS IN STRATFORD

Bridgeport Evening Post
January 28, 1895
STRATFORD.

That there are fox hunters in town is not debatable and probably few towns in this commonwealth can furnish as many men who are armed and equipped for that pleasure. When the duties of his office will allow First Selectman F. J. Beardsley, takes his gun and his faithful hounds, whose baying has been heard in Great Swamp while he was on the Huntington turnpike with a scoop-net waiting to hear a shot. Capt. Eph. Wakely happened out one day last week and he and his bounds were "in at the death"

and the genial captain carried home the brush. Mr. Beardsley accounts fox this by saying that the melting snow had caused the hounds to loose their scent. Experts hereabouts say that Sam Wells is a good shot especially when the fox stands on a rock, and he is known as the owner of the best hound in town while John Powel has one that is handsomer, yes; the handsomest. Among the retired fox hunters are W. J. Peck and Sheriff Abijah McEwen, the latter of whom it is said has been "foxing" for forty five years and never killed a fox. Mr. Bartlett is not the last to score with the younger blood such as W. B.

Tuttle, D. B. Rhoades, Ed. Plumbad, F. Thompson and it is confidently expected that the rising generation will fill the vacancy caused by the retirement of the elders. Capt. Sam Wakeley says he can kill eight out of seven if they are not checkers. Critics say that his father Capt. Ephram Wakely is probably one of the best shots of either, quail, woodcock or partridge that is known but Capt. Georg Freyer says he has a standing offer of \$5000 that the genial captain can't hit a duck at twenty one rise and eighty boundary.



Walker Lewis home on Tory Hill (Huntington Road at the Trumbull border) c 1900.

BANANA BEER

Harry Chapin was a singer, story teller, and songwriter who died in a car accident on Long Island in July of 1981. Just weeks before Harry's death, he revealed, in concert, that his most requested song was **30,000 Pounds of Bananas** which he had played in concert over 2,000 times. Harry wrote **30,000 Pounds** in 1974. The song commemorated a banana carrying truck accident in Scranton, Pennsylvania in 1965.

Stratford, not to be outdone, had a banana truck crash in 1970 which rivaled Scranton's. Fortunately, no one was killed in Stratford's "mash up."

Harry must not have learned of Stratford's banana truck wreck. A banana carrying truck crashed into a beer carrying truck at Exit 31 of I-95. We always find a way to outdo the "competition" here in Stratford!

Decades after Stratford's banana-beer truck accident, Two Roads Brewers built an experimental brewery just feet from where the banana-beer truck accident occurred.

That got us to thinking, what if, in commemoration of the 1970 banana-beer truck accident, Two Roads created an experimental banana-beer brew? Maybe we should recommend an experimental banana beer brew to the Area Two brewers. Any takers out there?

By the way, if you've not heard Harry Chapin's song, **30,000 Pounds of Bananas**, you may lis-

ten to it at <https://youtu.be/HfM4lt4Rs>. You can create your own ending to the song to fit Stratford's 1970 accident.

The Bridgeport Post

January 16, 1970

Banana Truck Overtakes in Stratford Banana Truck Flips, Hits Beer Vehicle in Stratford

A banana truck overturned, struck a beer truck and caught fire, spilling bananas over the Honeyspot road exit from the Connecticut turnpike in Stratford last night about 11 o'clock closing the exit ramp, State Police said.

The drivers of both trucks escaped injury.

Stratford police detoured traffic around the area for several hours after the mishap.

This was one of six accidents investigated by State Police on the Fairfield county section of the Connecticut turnpike.

State troopers said a truck load of bananas, driven by Russell Mooney, 42, of Malden Mass., headed east along the Connecticut turnpike, was cut off by another truck and had to make a quick exit down the Honeyspot road ramp.

There, it came upon a truckload of beer, which had been stopped waiting for the traffic light at the foot of the ramp by its driver, Raymond Boutin, 46, of South Windsor, Mass.

Unable to stop in time because of defective brakes, the banana truck driver swerved to the left, went up

the embankment and overturned back down onto the beer truck, police reported.

The load of bananas spilled over the exit ramp, observers said.

Two kerosene heaters, used to prevent the load from freezing, overturned and caught fire, police said.

Stratford firemen extinguished the blaze and washed down a large quantity of spilled gasoline.

The load was condemned and transported to the Stratford town dump by the State Highway department.

Trooper Malcolm R. Major charged the banana truck driver, Mr. Mooney, with having defective brakes.

3-Car Carsh [sic] Results

Eastbound traffic slowed in Stratford on the turnpike to watch the truck accident and a three-car crash resulted.

Trooper Barry Morin reported at 11:15 o'clock last night that a car driven by Frank M. Collier, 21, of Seymour, pulled to the right side of the road at the accident scene and another auto operated by Vincent Barone, 44, of Oswego, N.Y., attempted to pull into the center lane but couldn't because of traffic.

The third auto, operated by John Neto, 74, of 76 Dover street, Stratford, struck the Barone auto, forcing it ahead into the rear of the Collier auto, it was reported.

Mr. Neto was charged with following too closely and Mr. Collier was charged with improper parking.



"Yes we have no bananas" is what Russell Mooney, 42, of Malden, Mass., might be saying to his boss when he explains how his truckload of bananas overturned last night at the Honeyspot road exit of the Connecticut turnpike in Stratford.



SCR-013801-3/118/65-SCRANTON, PA.-Gene P. Sesky, Scranton, Pa., the driver of the tractor-trailer was killed and 10 persons hurt at least six cars were demolished and two homes hit as the truck came down Moosic Street, a few blocks from downtown Scranton. UPI TELEPHOTO 1464415

NEW TOWN HALL PROPOSED

Bridgeport Daily Standard

January 21, 1870

STRATFORD

For some time past, efforts have been made looking towards the erection of a building for town purposes. Plans have been drawn and estimates are being made as to the cost of a building built in accordance with them. The plans provide for an edifice of wood, two stories in height. The first floor is divided in apartments for the use of the Selectmen, Judge of Probate

and Town Clerk, and a strong vault is proposed, conveniently placed for use in storing the records of the town. It is proposed to use the second story for a public hall which will accommodate an audience of about six hundred. From what [sic] we have learned of the plans, we should judge that the total expenses of the building would be about twelve thousand dollars. The question whether to accept the plans and order the erection of the building will be brought

before the town at a town meeting, when the plans and estimates will be brought forward and the arguments in favor of the project will be presented. It is to be hoped that ere the coming summer is passed, we shall have the building ready for, occupancy, for we need it sadly.



Stratford Town Hall
1870-1936..

ANNAMAE ANDREWS' SCRAPBOOKS

Annamae Andrews graduated from Stratford High in 1937. From 1932 until 1945, Annamae kept scrapbooks of newspaper photos and articles she found important or interesting. Below, and to the right, are some of Annamae's newspaper photos from 1935.



Irene Comer to Study Russian Ballet in Europe, March 20, 1935.



Miss Muriel Howe
The Edison school Parent-Teacher association of Long Hill benefited from the proceeds of an entertainment presented by the pupils of Miss Muriel Howe at the first annual ...card party Friday night. 1935.



Virginia Comer of Stratford . . . At 18 she is making her debut with the renowned Fokine Ballet at the Brooklyn Armory next Saturday night. February 13, 1935.



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is to keep the memories alive!*

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