

# THE CUPHEAG CORNER

VOLUME III, ISSUE 5

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2021



Capt. David Judson House c. 1750

## MARK THE DATES:

- March General Membership meeting, Sunday, March 28th, 2021, 2:00 pm.
- TBA Stratford Lighthouse History Tour, April 24th, 12pm, Stratford Lighthouse. Registration details coming soon.

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## MARCH'S GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Sunday, March 28th, 2:00 pm, "Virtual" Meeting via [gotomeeting.com](https://gotomeeting.com)

Barbara and Ethan Stewart, Stratford residents, created a book on the restoration of the Christ Church Burying Grounds. They generously offered the Society a copy of their new book. Then, they graciously consented to present a "virtual" program for our March meeting on the process of restoring the Burying Grounds.

Ethan and Barbara Stewart are members of the Sons & Daughters of the American Revolution (SAR) & (DAR). Ethan is a member of General David Humphreys Branch #1 which is in New Haven County, CT. Ethan is the past President of the CT Society of the SAR and President of the David Humphreys Branch. Barbara is a member of Freelove Baldwin Stow Chapter in Milford, CT. Barbara is past Regent and Vice Regent of the Freelove Baldwin Stow Chapter. Barbara is also chairperson for the Wreaths Across America Ceremony that is held at Kings Highway Cemetery in Milford, CT every December.



President Gail Liscio (center) receiving a copy of Barbara and Ethan Stewart's book *The Restoration of Christ Episcopal Church Cemetery*

*This project has been a great privilege and enormous achievement by all those who worked in the cemetery. It was very inspiring to find old lost information and gravestones. Let's not forget the lost*

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

inscription that had sunk into the ground over the centuries. With all the work we all put into this cemetery it was also fun and exciting and most of all rewarding.

The Stewarts have graciously allowed us to view their book, *Stratford Christ Episcopal Church Cemetery Book*, at no cost, online at <https://www.connecticutssar.org/PatriotGraves/Stratford%20Episcopal%20Church%20Cem%20Book.pdf>

To join our March meeting with no long distance telephone charges, please join our meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone at <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/703801029>

You may also dial in using your phone at (571) 317-3122. Access Code: 703-801-029

**Long distance charges may apply.**

We hope to SEE you, virtually, on March 28th!

“To be ignorant of what happened before you were born is to remain a child always.”  
Marcus Tullius Cicero, 107 BC - 44 BC

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY HAPPENINGS

The good news is we hope to open our offices, again, beginning in April. We're looking to be open on Tuesdays and Fridays. We'll post our new office hours on our website, and on our Facebook page, once our hours have been firmly set.

Our Gardens Committee, headed up by Kevin Moore, has a number of projects underway. The committee is working on an herb/kitchen garden and a flax patch. The flax patch will be used to augment the Society's educational efforts. If you're interested in volunteering to assist the Gardens Committee, please contact Kevin at [funkywyt-boy@gmail.com](mailto:funkywyt-boy@gmail.com).

The Education Committee has completed work on a virtual video presentation for the schools. The video will be rolled out to the schools, soon, to replace the former

in person school tours of the Judson House and Museum. The Committee's next video project is to prepare a virtual Revolutionary War video.

Ways and Means Committee has an historic dollhouse display they're working on. Once the museum can be safely reopened, the committee is hoping to have the display available to the public.

Historical Society Volunteer Mary Ann Vlahac arranged for a special program, entitled "Love Connections", which was held at the Shell Station Restaurant at the train station on February 14th. The presentation covered the history of Valentine's Day and love stories from Stratford's past

As you peruse this edition of the newsletter, please notice that three books are specifically mentioned which you may read for free. Two

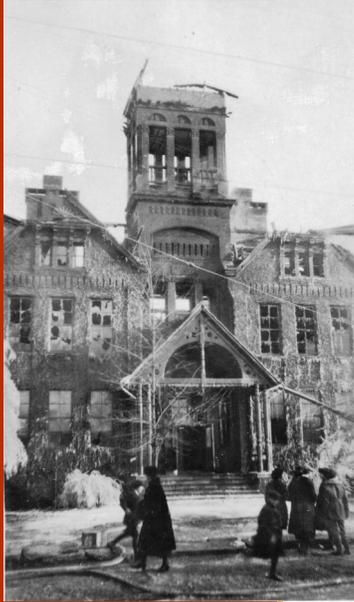
of the books pertain to the Shakespeare Theatre, and one to the Christ Church Burying Grounds. Your SHS dues at work!

We hope to restart our Stratford Lighthouse History Tours in April. We'll post updates on the availability of the tours on our Facebook page and on our website.

Mayor Hoydick proclaimed March as Women's History Month in the Town of Stratford. At March's Town Council meeting, Councilor Shake and Councilor Dancho gave presentations on important women from Stratford's past. A recording of the video of these presentations is available on our website.

We're working on a yearbook scanning project for Stratford and Bunnell High Schools. We hope to have several yearbooks digitized soon and available online.

## STRATFORD HIGH SCHOOL BURNS



Stratford High School, aka Center/Consolidated School, after the fire of February 19, 1921.



Likely the biggest news story of 1921 was the burning of the Stratford High School, today termed the "Center School Fire." Both high school and grammar school students met in the building at the time of the blaze.

The initial cause of the blaze was said to be arson, but, to the best of our knowledge, the perpetrator of the blaze was never identified, and the official cause of the fire was never conclusively identified. Both William Howard Wilcoxson and Lew Knapp were silent on the cause of this blaze.

The damages from the fire were said to be \$200,000. The town had only \$33,000 in insurance coverage for the building.

In attempting to identify a scapegoat for the fire and the lack of adequate insurance on the building, Assistant Fire Chief Frederick Palmer was said to be negligent in his response to the fire since he would not climb the tower of the burning school to help extinguish the fire. The Assistant Chief remained on the job.

Harry Flood (town manager 1945 to 1963) was one of the firefighters who responded to the fire. He was injured on the scene and told by his physician he could no longer play on the American Legion basketball

team. Harry was one of the team's star players.

Following the blaze a terrible blizzard struck Stratford crippling traffic through the town. High School boys were asked to assist in removing supplies from the school for relocation to other buildings in town.

Students at the school were "distributed" to various churches and buildings nearby. Classes restarted on February 23rd. The high school students were without a school building to meet in until the "new" high school opened in 1925. Basketball games were played at the Town Hall.

### **The Bridgeport Times**

February 19, 1921

### **SEEK FIREBUGS AFTER STRATFORD HIGH SCHOOL BURNS; LOSS \$200,000**

### **5 FIREMEN INJURED IN HARD FIGHT**

Fire which may have been of incendiary origin broke out at 3 o'clock this morning in the Stratford High school, and despite the efforts of Stratford and Bridgeport firemen laid the building in ruins. The exact amount of damage, which is only partially covered by insurance has not been determined as yet, but it is estimated at approximately \$200,000. A hasty meeting of the Stratford Board of Education

was called this noon, and it was decided to house as many students as possible in the churches and other available buildings, until the school is repaired.

Cold weather handicapped the fire fighters considerably, the water freezing solidly on the walls and fire escapes of the building. Five Stratford firemen were injured while fighting the blaze, and were given medical attention by Dr. E. H. J. Hennessey and Dr. DeRuyter Howland. While the fire was at its height, about 4 o'clock, a large number of women appeared on the scene with hot coffee and sandwiches which they parsed out to the cold and hungry men.

...An investigation started this morning showed that the blaze started in the basement in either the boiler room or lunchroom. In the hallway on the second floor was found a quantity of matches strewn over the floor, and in an adjoining room lay a box of matches. Chief A. D. Judson would not say that the fire was incendiary, but admitted that the matches looked suspicious.

...The high school as it stands today is a complete wreck.

You may read this news story in its entirety on our newsletter website at [www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info).

## BOOTHE PARK ODDITIES

### **Sunday Herald**

February 26, 1956

### **Oddities at Boothe Memorial Park Designed to Arouse Curiosities of Passers-by**

By DICK ZANDER

There is method in the madness of the Boothe Memorial Park.

With the return of warm weather, the park—32 acres of well-kept land overlooking the Housatonic River in Putney Gardens—has again attracted curiosity seekers, historians, and people who want to find out the who-what-when questions behind the strange estate.

David and Stephen Boothe are described by most persons who knew them as eccentric.

They built a garden-full of "white elephants" to shock people into remembrance. According to Joseph Melnick caretaker of the park, David Boothe—the "brains" of the brothers — explained his reason this way.

"In the old days people used to travel anywhere to find something that was beautiful. Then it got so any man could go out and buy something beautiful . . . and people wouldn't go out of their way to see beautiful things.

"So, the Boothes decided the way to attract people was to build oddities. These strange objects draw a person's curiosity and bring them to the memorial," Melnick said.

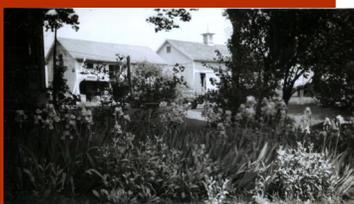
...The Redwood Building or monument to the depression was

built in 1935. Also termed the "technocratic cathedral" by David, all the materials in the building lie flat. The Redwood was used to remind people that the country was in the red.

...When the Boothes died in 1948 and 1949, Connecticut lost two of its most colorful figures.

If they were crazy, they succeeded in their aim. Certainly anyone who drives by the park will pause to look at the strange looking buildings. Probably the Boothes were right; the odd things in life are remembered while the beautiful ones are forgotten.

You may read this news story in its entirety on our newsletter website at [www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info).



Boothe Homestead c 1944.

# DATELINE STRATFORD FEB.-MARCH 1956

**The Stratford News**

February 2, 1956

**Grand List Total Reaches New High During Past Year**

Stratford's grand list climbed to a new high, \$137,310,580 an increase of \$10,916,255 during the past year, according to figures filed on Wednesday by Peter Junkin assessor.

The present rate of 31 mills is expected to be maintained if Town Manager Harry Flood's recommended budget totaling \$5,396,188 is adopted by the Town Council.

**The Stratford News**

February 2, 1956

**New Store Opens**

Rappaport's French Cleaners, according to proprietor Harry L. Coleman, is now in its new location on Boston Ave., at the corner of East Main St. Virginia Kosman, of Carol St., Stratford, is assistant to Mr. Coleman. The 40 year old cleaning establishment has two trucks on the road servicing areas between Milford and Westport. The store hours are from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**The Stratford News**

February 9, 1956

**SHS Seniors Present Play; Musical Version of 'Shrew'**

The senior class of Stratford High School will present Can't Kiss Kate, a modern musical version of Taming of the Shrew on February 16, 17, and 18 in the school auditorium.

In the starring roles will be Rose Maries Misinonile, as Kate; Julie Hudak, Bianca, sister to Kate; Harvey Cbul, Petruchio; and Ronald Smith, Lucentio.

**The Stratford News**

February 16, 1956

**Foes Flunk In Flood Ouster Fight**

With the court ruling his term of office as "indefinite," Town Manager Harry B. Flood has been busy since

Wednesday signing papers and checks that were held in abeyance since Jan. 10 when the Town Legal Department had declared his post vacant. Flood has also been jostling around his office receiving hundreds of congratulatory messages.

Superior Court Judge Samuel Mellitz ruled on Wednesday that Flood remains legally in office "without term" and can be removed only by the filing of charges and a public hearing.

Town Attorney Raymond Ganim said that any Town Council action requesting an appeal to the Supreme Court is not anticipated.

**The Hartford Courant**

February 17, 1956

**Charles Downing Lay**

STRATFORD. Feb. 16 (AP) - Landscape architect Charles Downing Lay, 78, who designed parks, military installations and housing developments, died of a heart ailment at his home yesterday.

...He designed Fort Jay on Governor's Island, N.Y. in 1941 and during the war worked almost exclusively for the Navy designing Naval installations.



**The Stratford News**

March 1, 1956

**Shakespeare Gets More Time**

The American Shakespeare Festival Theatre was granted permission to present concerts, opera and Shakespearean plays on Sundays between 2, and 11 p.m. from June 3 through Sept. 16.

**The Stratford News**

March 1, 1956

**Ragan Joins Brakettes**

Bertha Ragan, the world's best woman softball pitcher has come east to join the Raybestos Brakettes as the

perennial New England champions lay aim on copping the 1956 Women's Work softball championship. Mrs. Ragan, a member of the Orange, (Calif.) Linettes, 1955 world champs, has been pitching for the California team since 1939. She hurled Orange to their fourth world title in six years at Portland, Ore., last year.

**Sunday Herald**

March 11, 1956

**Mill Riverites Plan Surprise for Dance**

Mill River Club's members are working up a surprise program to feature the entertainment at Saturday night's annual St. Patrick's dance.

Festivities will begin at 7 P.M. with a cocktail hour. Charles Ferron's band will provide the music.

**Sunday Herald**

March 11, 1956

**Sons of Erin Organize Club In Stratford**

The newly organized Stratford Irish-American Club will meet Tuesday at the Knights of Columbus Club Rooms, Main St., Stratford, at 8 P.M.

More than 100 enrolled at the first meeting and it was agreed to keep the charter open for another month, due to the demand for membership in the new Stratford organization.

**Sunday Herald**

March 18, 1956

**Future's Unlimited At Avco**

A future of "unlimited promise" was foreseen by S. B. Withington, president of Lycoming, yesterday, in a statement marking the fifth anniversary of the Avco division plant in Stratford.

Pointing to a five-year growth in the working force from 44 to 4,800, Withington said that the company has been seeking to further increase its working force.



Stratford High Band officers. From *Sunday Herald*, February 19, 1956.



L-R: Lillian Katzman, Faye Linett, Beatrice Smolen, Gertrude Grudberg, Mary Tellis, and Frances Rood in Gay 90's production. From *Sunday Herald*, March 11, 1956.



Snow bunny build after March blizzard. L-R: Bud Russell, Phyllis Lakatos, Barbara Shiroky, Paula Lakatos. From *Sunday Herald*, March 25, 1956.

## NOW SHOWING FEBRUARY-MARCH 1956

February 5th	<b>Trouble With Harry</b>	Edmund Brent, Shirley MacLane
February 12th	<b>All That Heaven Allows</b>	Jane Wyman, Rock Hudson
February 19th	<b>There's Always Tomorrow</b>	Barbara Stanwyck, Fred MacMurray, Joan Bennett
February 26th	<b>Lone Ranger</b>	Clayton Moore, Jay Silverheels
March 4th	<b>The Court Jester</b>	Danny Kaye, Angela Lansbury, Glynis Johns
March 11th	<b>The Rose Tattoo</b>	Burt Lancaster, Anna Magnani
March 18th	<b>Helen of Troy</b>	Rossana Podesta, Jack Fernas
March 25th	<b>Our Miss Brooks</b>	Eve Arden



Stratford Theater c 1934

## SHAKESPEARE THEATRE NEWS



Archive.org



Hal Holbrook in 1967.  
Photo courtesy of Getty Images.



Christopher Plummer and James Earl Jones on stage at the Shakespeare Theatre 1981.



Stratford's new Police Court Building is scheduled for dedication on November 15, one month behind schedule. Photo from *The Stratford News*, November 5, 1970.

Former Town Historian, Lewis Knapp, wrote in November of 1995, "What's past is prologue." Forty years of Shakespeare Theatre history sends a strong message. When theater, town, state and drama school work together, with a year-round playbill including popular productions—musicals, road shows, pre-Broadway plays—to help support the classics and experimental theater; with a revolving repertory company in training; with well known stars as leads; with professional business managers; with support by income-producing tourist businesses and willing donors, then Camelot will return.

Astrid Zydower's sculpture on the theater lawn, *The Poet*, is smiling.

Twenty-five years after Lew recorded the foregoing observations, the Theatre is no more. On the two year anniversary of the burning of the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre, an outdoor marketplace is developing. On the first and third Sundays of each month, vendors will be marketing their wares on the Theatre grounds.

Two years on from the blaze that destroyed the Theatre, two of the Theatre's acting icons have passed on: Christopher Plummer and Hal Holbrook.

Chris Plummer appeared in the first Shakespearean play staged at the Theatre in 1955 as well as one of the Theatre's final season Shakespearean productions in September 1981. His acting career was legendary including the "second season" incarnation of his acting career which lasted

until near the end of his long life.

Chris Plummer was a gentleman in every sense of the word. Visiting his home in Weston always found Chris engaged and interested in his visitors regardless of how little he may have known the visitor or how lowly the visitor's station may have been in life. You always felt welcome in his presence.

Being fortunate enough to witness Hal Holbrook's reprise of Mark Twain on Hal's 90th birthday was an unforgettable treasure and pleasure. Hal seemed to grow in his role as Twain with the passing years. It was easy to be swept away by Hal's performance and you felt as if Mark Twain was addressing you personally.

Hal Holbrook performed Mark Twain on the ASFT stage in 1960, and performed in other ASFT productions in 1962 and 1963.

As much as we'll miss the Theatre on the Housatonic, in many ways we'll miss the lions who performed on its stage even more as they pass on and out of our lives.

Recently we discovered two books written about the Theatre which you may read online: *The American Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford 1955-1985* by Roberta Krensky Cooper, and *The American Shakespeare Festival; the birth of a theatre* by John Houseman. Both books are out-of-print, but you may check them out of the online library at archive.org at no cost. Here are the respective links to these very interesting

books: *The American Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford 1955-1985* <https://archive.org/details/americanshakespe00coop> and *The American Shakespeare Festival; the birth of a theatre* <https://archive.org/details/americanshakespe0000housemode/2up>. Either book is quite costly if you can find a used copy of the book for sale.

Also at archive.org you'll find the script for *Morning Becomes Electra* by Eugene O'Neill as it was performed on the ASFT stage.

*The Sunday Herald*

March 11, 1956

### A Journey to Our Corner of New England

By Robert Martin Hodesh  
*THE AMERICAN Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Conn., will be in only its second season this Summer, but the likelihood is that in spite of its newness it will stand out as the biggest thing in New England Summer theater.*

To call these presentations "Summer theater," is to invite comparison with the many groups who spend their Summers entertaining the public in barns from which the livestock was removed just before the actors came on.

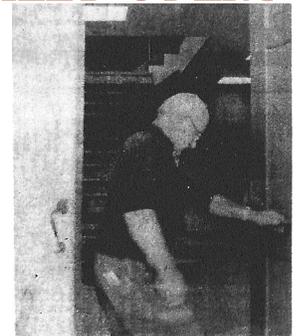
The comparison would be unjust. For one thing, the theater at Stratford is one of the most imposing buildings of its kind in the country. For another, the standards being set by the group are uncompromisingly lofty. Finally, the names of the people involved in sponsoring and presenting the plays read like a "Who's Who" of the American theater....

## POLICE COURT BUILDING FINALLY OPENS

After months of delays, the new Police Court Building opened on Longbrook Avenue February 15, 1971. The building was originally scheduled to open October 15, 1970. Delays ensued pushing the opening date back a month and the dedicatory services were scheduled for November 15, 1970.

Additional delays pushed the dedication back an additional two months.

When the building was finally opened to the public, it was considered a state-of-the-art public safety facility and the town was rightly proud of the new police building. Several open house tours were held at the new facility for nearby police departments and town organizations.



News photographer Greg McAvoy met with a rude greeting when he showed up at the New Police Court Building to take a picture of the problem areas which are causing a delay in the opening ceremony until early in 1971. Photo from *The Stratford News*, December 10, 1970.

# WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Former Town Historian, Lewis Knapp wrote in 1989, "From its founding, Stratford did not raise bashful women. The feisty Blakeman widows in 1665; Mary Silliman, who moved her children from Fairfield to North Stratford when the British fired the town and there gave birth to another son; Anna Oliver who became the first woman Methodist minister in spite of male prejudice; the abolitionist and temperance women; the group turned down for membership in the Congregational Church in 1871; all these women fought for their beliefs."

We have featured a number of the town's Suffragettes in this newsletter over the past two years. The Town Council, on Monday, March 8th, honored another Suffragette, Billy Howell, and Susan Freeman who is featured in greater detail in this newsletter. You may view the video of the Council's presentation at <https://fb.watch/47oV2dtLMg/>.

Stratford's history is replete with amazing women. We'd like to highlight the lives of a few more women who had a significant impact on the town. Sadly, we lack pictures of many of these remarkable ladies.

### Nettie Filmer

Nettie Filmer has the distinction of being one of the first two female Registrars of Voters in the State of Connecticut. She was appointed in 1921 along with Christine Wells who also lived in Stratford. Mrs. Filmer and Miss Wells would have been the first two female Registrars in the United States had New York State not appointed their first female Registrar just days before. Mrs. Filmer served the Stratford Equal Suffrage Association as President, on the Executive Committee,

and as Delegate to the state convention. She served on Stratford's Board of Education. Nettie's home was on East Broadway. Nettie was born in 1871 and passed away in 1936.

### Maude Hull

Edith Hastings was Stratford's best known Suffragette on a local, state, and national level. She is memorialized on Academy Hill. However, her nearly constant companion in all things "suffrage" was Miss Maude Hull. Miss Hull lived near Miss Hastings on Elm Street. She served in the Stratford Equal Suffrage Association as Treasurer, Delegate to the National Suffrage Convention, and on the Executive Committee. She traveled with Miss Hastings to all the State and National Suffrage Conventions. She was born in 1879 and died in 1954.

### Augusta Wheeler

Augusta Wheeler (1836-1919) was the daughter of Captain Isaac Wheeler (1800-1867) and his wife Catherine (1803-1882). Isaac was the son of Samuel Wheeler Jr (1777-1858) and Annie Cirtiss (1772-1831). This Wheeler line is descended from Moses Wheeler (1598-1698) of England, New Haven, and Stratford. Augusta served as Second Vice-president, Treasurer, and on the Executive Committee of the Stratford Equal Suffrage Association. She was very active in the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the local Orphan Asylum. Augusta was described by George Waldo Junior in 1917, "Miss Augusta Wheeler ..... is also an ardent supporter of the cause of woman suffrage and

was among the founders of the Woman's Suffrage Association in Stratford, of which she has been treasurer..."

### Mary Hardy

Any discussion of remarkable Stratford women would be incomplete without an acknowledgement of Mary Hardy's contributions to our town. Mary Hardy's name is nearly inseparable from the Sterling House Community Center of which she was Executive Director for many years.

Mary was born November 26, 1916 and passed away January 9, 2018 at the age of 101. By the time she graduated from Stratford High School in 1935 she had already become a familiar face at Sterling House Community Center, where she began work as a part time unpaid volunteer in 1933, just one year after the agency was founded.

She was always eager to tackle any job, including office work, painting, program assistance, child care, plays, dances, musicals, art exhibits, socials, senior citizen open house programs, as well as flower growing and arrangements.

In 1953, after 20 years in various positions of service at Sterling House, Mary was appointed Executive Director, and her dedication, caring, influence and leadership for the next 34 years positively affected thousands of people in many ways until her retirement in 1987.

### Helen King Reynolds

The building that houses the present Helen King Reynolds Private



Mary Hardy 1973



Helen King Reynolds (center). Photo from *The Bridgeport Post*, May 24, 1959.



Gladys Jubb from the 1937 Stratford High *The Log*.

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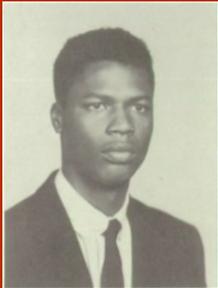


From *The Bridgeport Times*, March 21, 1921.

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH



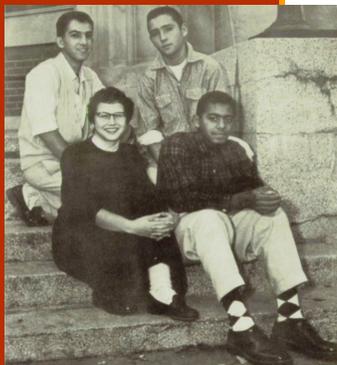
Susan Freeman c 1945.  
Photo from Miss Freeman's collection.



Stan Geter, SHS Log



Ella L. Anderson, *The Bridgeport Post*, February 10, 1962.



Joyce Goodwin, Louis Horner, Dan Del Vecchio, Robert Brezozky, Stratford High Log, 1955.

Of course we realize February is **Black History Month**. However, this edition of **The Cupheag Crier** is the February-March edition. We hope you'll forgive us for being a bit late in bringing this article to you. However, according to our newsletter publishing schedule, we're right on time!

Former Town Historian, Lewis Knapp, wrote in the Spring of 1992: "Traditional historians have consistently neglected or distorted the role of black Americans in developing our nation...There is a hidden history of black residents of Stratford. Records are sparse, but show a centuries-long evolution of the black community toward liberty, well-being, and human dignity."

Our history of the black residents of Stratford likely begins with **Jack Arabas** who volunteered to serve in the Revolutionary War in place of his master, Captain Ivers. When Jack returned from the war, six years later, Jack's master reneged on granting Jack his freedom. Jack sued in State Court for his freedom and won. Jack's successful court case led to the freeing of other black soldiers in Connecticut who'd been promised their freedom in exchange for fighting in the Revolutionary War.

Three other Revolutionary War soldiers from North Stratford (today's Trumbull), **Tony Turney**, **Caesar Edwards**, and **Nero Hawley** were in Washington's army at Valley Forge and were freed when they came home.

After 1784 offspring of slaves became free by law at age twenty-five, and after 1797 they were freed at twenty-one.

In 1797 Samuel William Johnson emancipated a woman, **Chloe**, and in 1799 he freed a man, **Juba**. His brother Robert freed one **Edwin** in 1801 and **James** in 1803.

Of course, many of us know of **Flora** the slave girl who was sold to Asa Benjamin of Stratford by Margaret Dwight of Milford in 1796. Her haunting silhouette has been viewed by people all over the world as a visual reminder of the horrors of living as an enslaved person. Flora's silhouette came into the possession of the Stratford

Historical Society in 1925 and hangs in the National Portrait Gallery at present.

The autobiography of Aunt **Hagar Merriman** was written in 1861 when she was an old lady. The autobiography is available for purchase from the Stratford Historical Society. The autobiography describes a slave's childhood in Stratford:

"When I was a child three years and a half old, I was living in Stratford at Mrs. Lovejoy's with my mother. The way I came there was, my mother being sold as a slave to him. She was born in New Milford, and when a little girl, was sold to Mrs. Brown, of New Haven."

**Mack** was a well-known oysterman who stored his oyster shells, awaiting crushing to create plaster, at "shell-keep point", today's Mac's Harbor on Shore Road, in the early 1800s.

Stratford was, from at least the early 1800s, home to many abolitionists. The Asa Seymour Curtis (1813-1895) home was one such home at 2016 Elm Street. Mr. Curtis' home is on the state's Freedom Trail. You may view the Freedom Trail website at <http://ctfreedomtrail.org/trail/underground-railroad/sites/#!/asa-seymour-curtis-house>. Asa Curtis was such a well-known conductor on the Underground Railroad that *The New York Times* talked about his home in a July 29th, 1866 newspaper article.

The oldest Baptist church in Fairfield County began in 1877 "when a resident of this town, Mrs. Talbot ... opened the doors of her home [corner of Main and West Broad, now Pistey's Funeral Home] to the small group of Negro settlers to meet and organize a Sunday School class". The new congregation met in the old abandoned (Sedgewick) academy building on Academy Hill, then, after they moved it in 1880, on Lundy's Lane until 1912. In 1910 four families from the church constructed a new building with their own hands, on Stratford Avenue. It was this building that the current structure replaced in 1977.

**Bill Freeman** (1867-1954) was a skilled chauffeur, mechanic and dairyman. To-date, we've been unable to locate a

photo of Mr. Freeman.

Frederick Beach (1848-1918), was secretary (owner) of the magazine **Scientific American**. His ...photography shop still stands behind the house at 1670 Elm Street. Each day his driver, Bill Freeman, drove the phaeton (horse drawn carriage) to the (train) depot, where Beach took the cars to his office in New York...The first electric lights in Stratford appeared on Elm Street, when (Mr.) Beach installed a dynamo and put it in his barn on Little Neck. He had wires strung through the lots to the four houses he owned, and wired them for electric lights. Every morning Bill Freeman went down to the barn and spun the heavy flywheel to start the engine;...

**Susan Freeman** was Bill Freeman's daughter. Susan was a lifelong resident of the town. Descended from a long line of well-respected Freemans, she served her country as many of her black forebears had also done. Susan was attending Stratford High School when it burned in February of 1921. Susan headed up the very first Army unit of black nurses. She received many commendations for her service to our country. She was active in her Stratford Baptist Church and in her town. Susan's life was profiled in the book **Profiles of Negro Womanhood** (1966) as well as **African American Connecticut EXPLORED** (2013). *The Bridge-*

Continued on page 7



Rev. and Mrs. Homer Tucker look forward to 75th anniversary of the Baptist Church. *Sunday Herald*, October 12, 1952.

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH (CONTINUED)

Continued from page 6

**port Post** profiled Susan's life for Black History Month. (You may read this entire article on our website). Susan lived in her parent's home on Stratford Avenue until her death in 1979. Susan was born in Stratford in 1904.

### Ella L. Anderson

In 1952, she moved to Stratford, where she lived for 42 years before moving to Huntington in 1994. Mrs. Anderson's contributions to the community were significant. She was a member of many community and political action, social service and civic organizations, and served on various gubernatorial teams and councils. She is listed in *Who's Who Among Black Americans, 1975 and 1976*. Her greatest passion and vision was fighting for racial equality and social justice. A life member of the NAACP, she served as president of the Greater Bridgeport Chapter of the NAACP from 1960-1966 before becoming the first president of the Connecticut State Conference of branches. Mrs. Anderson was invited by the President of the United States to participate in the White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights." (From Mrs. Ander-

son's obituary).

In 1984 Mrs. Anderson was interviewed for "**A Study of Bridgeport Neighborhoods: A Black Perspective, 1900 – Present.**" During that interview Mrs. Anderson said of Stratford, "Well, my son never had a problem. He never had a problem. I never had a problem with him in school. Everything was just grand. I never had a problem with my neighbors. I never had a problem with my son not getting along with the other children. He always made friends. In fact he is the one, my son is the one, who made it possible for my neighbors and myself to become closer, because he went in every home and learned every name and said, 'I want my mother to meet you; I like you.' This is what my son would say, and he was only two years old.

...When I first moved to Stratford, there were not too many Black people. They just started moving in. In fact I remember when I first came to Bridgeport, even to Bridgeport, I would go downtown and I would be downtown sometimes all day long, and I didn't see two Black people. I would go to town every day just to be going because I was lonesome.

My husband was working, and I'd just go downtown to look around. Sometimes I didn't see a Black person all day long."

### Stan Geter

Stan Geter was an All-Star basketball player at Stratford High in the mid-1950s. His basketball skills were regularly praised in local newspapers. Sadly, Stan recently passed away.

### Lou Horner

Lou Horner, like Stan, was an All-Star basketball player. Lou Horner scored 33 of Stratford High's 71 points in the CIAC championship basketball tournament in February 1956. Lou was elected President of the Stratford High Sophomore Class of 1956. Of that event, The Sunday Herald posted the following.

### Sunday Herald

November 7, 1954

### Negro Boy Hear Stratford Sops

If the leaders of anti-Negro attacks in Milford, Del., wanted to see democracy in action, should have dropped into Stratford High School this week. They would have seen a 15-year-old colored boy, Louis Horner, 53 Hull Ct., win the presidency of

the sophomore class, and he won it by 300 votes with only 400 pupils balloting.

For his campaign manager, Horner had a Jewish girl, Sue Koskoff, 93 Mt. Pleasant Av., daughter of Bridgeport Attorney Theodore Koskoff.

Their spirited campaign won the hearts and the votes of their classmates.

Horner, a graduate of David Wooster Jr. High, campaigned on the pledge to promote better understanding between students of both junior high schools.

"When the 10th graders get here, they tend to stick to their old schoolmates. We should all join forces to make our class the best in Stratford High history," the new president declared.

...The boy hopes to become a professional baseball player some day. He has won many awards both in baseball and basketball.

"I'd like to go to Holy Cross when I graduate from high school," Lou says, "because it has one of the best baseball coaches."

## WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH (CONTINUED)

Continued from page 5

School was built in the 1890's as a private residence. It is also now listed on the National Register Of Historic Places. In 1911, Sheriff Charles E. Stagg lived here. In 1940, Bridgeport Post newspaper manager T.A.D. Weaver lived here with his family. In fact, the shed in the back yard was his daughter's playhouse. Helen King Reynolds, who had established a private school on Main Street in 1931, purchased the property in 1943 and operated her private school here for grades K-8. (Foregoing from the HKR school website). Mrs. Reynolds was head of the school for 28 years. She had a great influence on the lives of many Stratford youngsters including former Historical Society President, Todd Lovell.

### Gladys Jubb

Any time we've published any item of interest on our Stratford 400 Facebook page pertaining to Miss Jubb, one, or more, of Miss Jubb's former pupils has commented on what an amazing woman Miss Jubb was, and what an influence

she'd been on their young life. Miss Jubb was born in 1904 and passed away in 2000.

### The Bridgeport Post

June 11, 1972

### PTA to Honor Principal Retiring in Stratford

Miss Gladys Jubb, principal of Wilcoxson school, who is retiring this year after 47 years in the teaching profession, will be honored by the school's PTA and faculty on Friday at a tea.

...Coming to Stratford in 1926, Miss Jubb taught fifth and sixth grades at Eli Whitney school, later moving to the junior high school level and for many years taught U. S. history and problems of democracy at Stratford high school.

She then served as principal of both Franklin and Center schools, combined, and later of Center and Wilcoxson schools.

...She served for many years as superintendent of the Sunday School of St. Luke's Episcopal church in Bridgeport and as president of the church Ladies' guild.

### Ruby E. Wheeler

Like Miss Jubb, Miss Wheeler

was a beloved educator in the Stratford School system. She was a direct, lineal descendant of Stratford's first ferry man, Moses Wheeler. She was an accomplished photographer and left behind a treasure trove of photos of Stratford events, places, and people. Miss Wheeler was born in 1903 and passed away in 1970.

### The Bridgeport Post

March 22, 1970

### Wheeler Fund Set Up In Memory of Teacher

"In her 43 year teaching career in Stratford, she touched the lives of countless students. Her activities in church and civic work touched countless others. It is hoped that her many friends will donate to this fund as an expression of their commitment to the high principles which governed her life," Mr. (Louis) Coulombe said.

Miss Wheeler was in her 49th year of teaching at the time of her death. Born in Stratford and a 1920 graduate of Stratford high school when it was located at what is now Center school, she began her teaching career in September 1920,



Ruby E. Wheeler from the SHS **The Log** 1950.

in a one room school in Cheshire, after a summer course to prepare high school graduates for teaching.

...In 1941, she became teacher of general science in Stratford high. Since 1950, she taught biology at Stratford high through June, 1960, and then in Bunnell high school from when it first opened to the time of her death a period of almost 10 years. She was active in professional science organizations and was twice named Science Teacher of the Year.

# THE STRATFORD TOP 10

Those of you night owls who were able to stay awake for **The Late Show**, or you insomniacs, no doubt recall David Letterman's **Top 10** lists. Letterman's top tens were regularly reported on by other media sources as well. Letterman has sauntered off into retirement, but it occurred to us that it might be educational to create some **Stratford Top 10** lists.

For instance, what are the Top 10 Stratford political events? "President (Timothy) Dwight (of Yale and William Samuel Johnson colleague), in 1789, writes: *Stratford is better built than either Fairfield or Norwalk...The inhabitants have long been agitated by religious and political controversies.*"

**Number 7** is the defeat of the Charles Peck Republican faction in 1916.

Charles Peck served for over 20 years as a Probate and Trial judge in Stratford. Up until 1914, Charles was so popular in Stratford that in 1912 the Democrats united with the Republicans to re-elect Charles as Judge of Probate. In 1914, Stiles Judson, acting as States Attorney, brought charges against Charles for de-

frauding a client and breaching the client's trust. Charles had charged this client \$700 to act as her attorney in a probate case in which he was acting as Judge of Probate. Charles was found guilty and, subsequently, disbarred.

Apparently, Charles never reconciled with Stiles Judson as Stiles died later in the year 1914. Smarting from his "rough handling" at the hands of his relative, Stiles, Charles formed his own subgroup within the town's Republican Party. In 1916, Charles ran his own slate of candidates for local office running himself for three different offices on this slate. All Charles' nominees were soundly defeated in the general election of 1916. When the town learned of Charles' defeat, a large celebration and parade erupted. The following appeared in the November 8th, 1916 **Bridgeport Evening Farmer**.

"The result was announced shortly after 8 o'clock, and immediately a great shout of victory went up. The Good Government club of Stratford, which was largely instrumental in eliminating Peck, had worked hard and when victory was assured, a celebration ensued. ...The Stratford Drum corps preceded



*the parade that formed and torchlights were procured. The parade proceeded to Peck's house where three cheers were given for Welles. Thence it went to the Judson Memorial fountain, where honor was done the memory of Stiles Judson. Welles' home was the next stop and a cheer was given there."*

Charles was so enraged by the outcome of the election that he purged his office of all books, paintings, and furnishings leaving nothing but an empty office for his successor. He vowed never to run again

To view past editions of our **UPDATE** newsletter, and/or to view current as well as historical photo slide shows and videos, visit

[www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info](http://www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info).



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

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