

THE CUPHEAG CORNER

VOLUME IV, ISSUE 2

OCTOBER—NOVEMBER 2021



Capt. David Judson House c. 1750

MARK THE DATES:

- November's General Membership Meeting, November 13th, 2pm, Stratford Library
- Holiday Open House, December 11th, 12pm, Judson House

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NOVEMBER'S GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Saturday, November 13th, 2:00 pm, Stratford Library, 2203 Main Street

The year 1921 was jam packed with many history making, destiny changing events. One of those history making events was the opening of the fifth Washington Bridge in November 1921.

On Saturday, November 13th, our newsletter chair and Vice-president, David Wright, will be sharing photos with the history of the Washington Bridge. The history of the crossing of the Housatonic River between Stratford and Milford is fascinating, and includes tales of George Washington, a cannon being fired at the bridge, the disappearance of the title to the bridge, battles with the trolley company seeking trolley tracks on the bridge, and ice flows which destroyed at least one Washington Bridge.

On November 11th, 1921, a great



Fourth Washington Bridge to the left. Current bridge to the right. Photo from *The Bridgeport Times*, November 1, 1921.

celebration of the opening of the fifth Washington Bridge was held. The celebration cost Stratford \$500 which is about \$7,500 today. This was the largest expenditure the town had ever made for such a

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

celebration.

Milford joined in the celebration on the Milford side of the River. A parade proceeded from Stratford to the middle of the new bridge where it was met by a parade proceeding from Devon.

It will be revealed during the presentation who the first person was to cross the bridge in an automobile. You'll be able to view photos that likely haven't been viewed in 100 years.

Following the presentation at the Stratford Library, all those wishing to participate can join David as he retraces the parade route from Broad Street to the center of the Washington Bridge. We hope you'll join us for a lively 100 year commemoration of the fifth Washington bridge's opening.

"Curiosity is, in great and generous minds, the first passion and the last."

William Samuel Johnson

HISTORICAL SOCIETY HAPPENINGS

We will be hosting a Holiday Open House on Saturday, December 11th from noon until 4pm. The event is being chaired by Eileen Ferrigno and Anne Larsen who are new volunteers to our Society, but have long years of leadership in the Barnum Festival celebrations. We'll be providing additional information in the future.

Mary Ann Vlahac hosted Strange Stratford Bus Tours as a fundraiser for us, the Perry House, and the Friends of Boothe Park. The four tours were all sold out, and the proceeds from the tours will be shared with us, the Perry House, and the Friends of Boothe Park.

Our flax garden was not as successful as we would have liked. Our Garden Committee

Chair, Kevin Moore, has some exciting ideas on how to improve our future flax gardens. We are looking forward to next Spring's renewed garden.

We are saddened to report that our Finance Committee Chair, Shirley Clevenger, will be leaving us December 31st. Shirley is pursuing other passions, and we thank her, sincerely, for all her contributions to our Society over the past several years.

We continue to seek a chairperson for our Ways & Means Committee. If you have an interest in fundraising and event planning, or know someone who has such interest and experience, please contact Barbara Firsin or Gail Liscio.

We have just created a new committee, the Collection Management Committee.

Molly Dillon has agreed to chair the committee. Molly has a great deal of experience which she brings to us from Yale University. We look forward to Molly's contributions to our Society.

Our postage meter stopped working several days ago. Fortunately this did not occur during a newsletter distribution period. The meter is working again. Contributions for equipment repair and replacement are always welcome.

2021-22 Meeting Calendar

Saturday	November 13th	2pm
Sunday	January 30th	2pm
Sunday	March 27th	2pm
Sunday	May 22nd	2pm

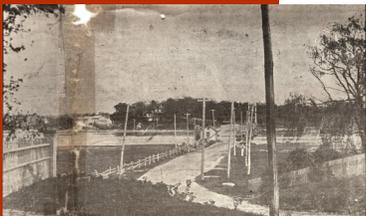
WASHINGTON BRIDGE ANNIVERSARY



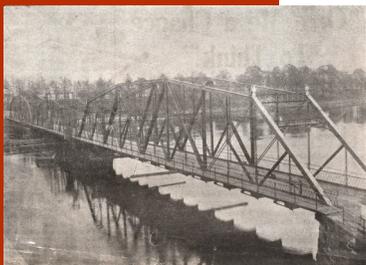
Shang Wheeler's drawing of Moses Wheeler's ferry. Image from *The Stratford Times*, November 11, 1921.



2nd Washington Bridge. Photo from *The Stratford Times*, November 11, 1921.



3rd Washington Bridge. Photo from *The Stratford Times*, November 11, 1921.



4th Washington Bridge. Photo from *The Stratford Times*, November 11, 1921.



Bridge Gate House. Photo from *The Stratford Times*, November 11, 1921.

We are fortunate indeed to possess an original copy of *The Stratford Times* November 11, 1921 edition. That issue of the newspaper contains the story of the opening of the fifth Washington bridge in 1921 as well as the history of each of the other four bridges. Should you desire a copy of that edition for yourself, you may download a copy from the home page of our newsletter website.

The first record of public transportation across the Housatonic River shows that Moses Wheeler was granted the right to keep a ferry by the General Assembly on May 18, 1648.

The ferry served the river crossing public until a bridge was built, paid for by a public lottery, in October 1802. The bridge was short lived and was carried away by an ice flood in the spring of 1806.

The second bridge was also paid for by lottery and opened in 1808. It collapsed on July 15, 1868.

After the enormous inconvenience of having no bridge for several years, the third bridge was opened in 1873. This bridge served until the fourth bridge replaced it in 1892. The fourth bridge served until 1921.

Bridgeport Telegram

November 10, 1921

MILFORD AND STRATFORD JOIN TO CELEBRATE BRIDGE OPENING

STRATFORD. Nov. 11. (Special)—Indians in their gay feathers and gaudy war paint, pioneer mothers in the costumes of a century ago, doughboys in khaki [sic] and sailor lads in blue. Boy

Scouts, Girls Scouts, red shirted firemen, and thousands of singing school children joined today in celebrating the completion of the new Washington bridge across the Housatonic river.

Milford and Stratford did themselves proud in this celebration—the greatest of its kind in the history of either township.

Prominent city officials of Bridgeport and New Haven, members of the police and fire departments of Milford and Stratford, and the town fathers, mothers and children from the neighboring towns on the banks of the Housatonic participated in the celebration.

Event Proves Surprise.

No one but members of the committee in charge of the celebration realized it would assume the proportions it did. Thousands of automobilists came from points miles distant to assist in the other ceremonies. A submarine chaser thundered away with two-pounders in the river below the bridge, drums and fifes played merry times to the tread of marching feet, and the scene was gay with flags and bunting.

The celebration was carried out without a hitch. One big parade, headed by the Milford police force, in spick and span uniforms marched down on the bridge from Devon. The other parade, headed by the Stratford police and American Legion, approached from Stratford Center. The two processions arrived at the bridge shortly after 2:30 o'clock.

Parades Join Across Bridge.

After halting for several minutes on the great concrete and stone structure, the Stratford column moved across the bridge and turned into Rivercliff park. The Milford column moved westerly over the bridge, countermarched

on Ferry boulevard and took up a position behind the Stratford column. The united column then moved over the bridge.

Lieut. Governor Speaks.

At Rivercliff thousands assembled in the grove and listened to stirring speeches by representatives of Stratford and Milford, who had been working for years to bring to a realization the opening of a new and modern span at the spot. Lieutenant Governor Templeton was the guest of honor, and representing the State of Connecticut. In a start talk, he extolled the residents of the sister towns and their sturdy predecessors. He paid a stirring tribute to Highway Commissioner Bennett, the man behind the actual building of the new structure.

The tribute brought tears to the eyes of Mr. Bennett, proof positive that the tasks of the engineer are sometimes more of an emotional battle than it may appear to the layman. Mr. Templeton told of the many obstacles which had confronted, and been overcome by the builders of the structure.

Thanks Helpers.

Mr. Bennett in turn paid tribute to the men who with him had thrown the mass of concrete and steel across the Housatonic.

Neither David E. Fitz Gerald or Clifford B. Wilson, respective mayors of New Haven and Bridgeport were on hand, each sending alternates. Alderman R. A. Brown of the Twelfth district represented the Park City on the speakers' stand. Charles Gaylord of Stratford officiated in introducing the speakers. Representatives of the Bridgeport Chamber of Commerce were Seward B. Price and Fairchild Wheeler.

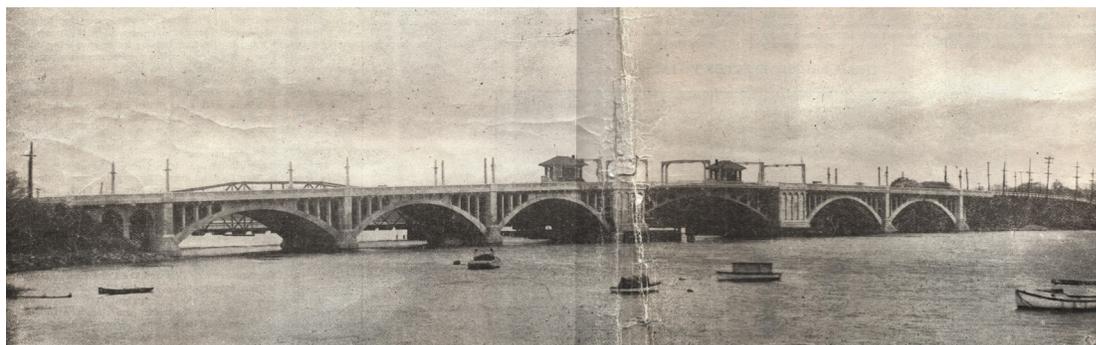


Photo from the front page of *The Stratford Times*, November 11, 1921.

DATELINE STRATFORD OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1956

The Stratford News

October 4, 1956

Teacher's Jobs Go Begging; Low starting Pay Is Blamed

Stratford is one of 62 communities in the state suffering from a shortage of public school teachers.

...The starting pay of \$3,200 per year ranks Stratford in the bottom of 12 of the state's 169 towns,

... "We are fortunate to have an up-to-date school system with modern facilities. That's why many teachers still come to Stratford and accept lower salaries than elsewhere, Supt. Cox added...

The Stratford News

October 11, 1956

200 Scouts on Camping Trip

It's "a camping we will go" for 200 Stratford Boy Scouts tomorrow as part of the annual Oronoque District Camporee.

The youngsters will pack their overnight bags tonight in preparation for the trek into Roosevelt Forest.

The boys will take part in the regular outdoor camp activities during Friday and Saturday.

The Stratford News

October 18, 1956

Town Services to Expand

As the town population shifts and grows, attention will have to be given to the expansion of community services.

In this section on Community Facilities, the development plan recommends the conservation of present open spaces and the maintaining of new areas for flood control and public parks.

Recreational areas should be developed and the town must also plan for additional fire and police protection in sections which are expected to be built up...

Merchants Air Parking Woes

Businessmen and merchants in Stratford center are going to ask for an extension of restricted parking

hours in an effort to get relief from the parking problem in their area.

The request for the extension of restricted parking from 6 to 9 p. m. is expected to be brought up at the Town Council meeting Nov. 12, according to Dr. T. D. Spivack, who was named temporary chairman of the committee.

The Stratford News

October 25, 1956

Stratford Red Cross Takes Lead In Conn. Blood Donor Program

The Stratford Red Cross led all Connecticut towns in its population group in blood donations for the three months ending September 30.

Pulse, the monthly paper of Connecticut Regional Blood Program, reports that the town's average donations for the three-month period was 171.3 pints per month.

Reaction to Master Plan Favorable as Few Attend Hearing; Zoning Rules Nest

Less than 100 of Stratford's 35,000 people went to the Town Hall last night to sit in on a public hearing on a proposed plan of development for the town, but the Planning and Zoning Commission wasn't unhappy about the turnout.

There was no opposition to the overall [sic] plan as presented by the commission after three years of research and study.

Sunday Herald

October 28, 1956

Out on a Limb and Saws it Off

Joseph Chalenfour of 292 Parkway Dr., Stratford, committed the same mistake as many a politician last night when he worked his way out on a limb

You may view a slideshow of our collection of newspaper photos from October and November of 1956 on the home page of our newsletter website: www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.info.

of a tree in his back yard and then sawed the limb off.

Police said the 67-year-old Chalenfour was taken to the Bridgeport Hospital where he was treated for an injured back and a cut over his right eye, suffered when he toppled from the tree.

The Stratford News

November 1, 1956

Sikorsky Plans Expansion

Sikorsky Aircraft division of United Aircraft Corporation has announced plans to add an additional 433,200 square feet to its new Stratford plant.

The addition, construction will begin as soon as final plans are finished and costs determined, will include engineering office space, laboratories, proto-type aircraft manufacturing area, a hangar for experimental aircraft, a cafeteria, plus office space for service, technical publications, and allied personnel.

Council to Give Limited OK for New High School

The need for a new senior high school for Stratford is expected to get qualified approval from the Town Council this month.

Council Chairman Edmond A. Dorne says the proposal for a new high school for the northern end of the town will probably be referred by the Council to its general building needs committee for study.

The Stratford News

November 8, 1956

Bill Wojie Wins Batting Crown

Bill Wojie, possessor of one of softball's hardest swings, has won the batting championship of Raybestos Cardinals for the second straight year, according to figures released this week from the office of Joe Barber, Raybestos Public Relations Director.

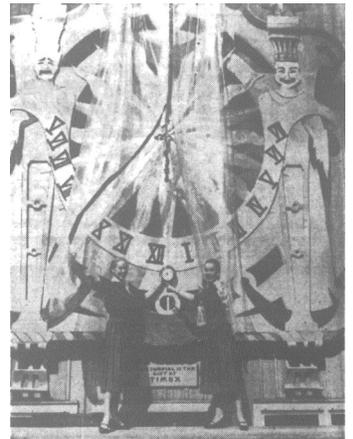
Wojie, a New Havener, in his second season with the Cardinals, after a brilliant career with the Columbus Bears of New Haven, edged out Nick Canto by the slimmest margin...



Second Hill Lane third graders. From **the Stratford News**, October 11, 1956.



Talbot family funeral at Holy Name of Jesus Church. From **Sunday Herald**, October 14, 1956.



Dran and Tani Seitz celebrate return to Standard Time at the Sun Dial at Shakespeare Theatre. From **Sunday Herald**, October 21, 1956.

NOW SHOWING OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1956



Stratford Theater c 1934

October 7th	Bandido	Robert Mitchum, Zachary Scott, Gilbert Roland
October 14th	Ambassador's Daughter	Olivia de Havilland, John Forsythe, Adolphe Menjou
October 21st	Pillars of the Sky	Jeff Chandler, Dorothy Malone
October 28th	The Last Wagon	Richard Widmark
November 4th	Dive Bomber	Errol Flynn, Fred MacMurray
November 11th	Tea and Sympathy	Deborah Kerr, Lief Erickson, John Kerr
November 18th	The Mountain	Spencer Tracy, Robert Wagner
November 25th	The Girl He Left Behind	Tab Hunter, Natalie Wood

BEAUTIFICATION AWARDS 2021



449 Glenridge Road

In our opinion, one of the very best nights of the year in Stratford is the evening the Beautification Committee presents awards to residents who have worked hard to dress the exteriors of their homes in beautiful plants, yard ornaments, and landscaping. The Twenty-third Annual Awards Presentation was held in the Council Chamber at Town Hall on Thursday, September 23rd.

Fifteen awards were presented to home owners, one to an

esplanade, and one to a business.

You may view the video of the evening at <https://youtu.be/0tVWnFP9HIMc>.



493 Sedgewick Avenue



190 Second Avenue

You may view all properties receiving awards at <https://www.stratfordct.gov/beautificationawards>.

RAYBESTOS CARDINALS DISBAND



Photo from https://www.brakettes.com/raybestos_memorial_field.htm



Raybestos Memorial Field in happier days. Photo courtesy of ESPN.



Billy Wojie (Photo from <https://www.teamusa.org>).

Points of inflection can be identified mathematically, but there also seem to be points of social inflection when events begin to turn the nature of a society in an entirely different direction. Examples of points of inflection in Stratford's history seem to be the trolley coming to town in 1891, the change of government form in 1921, I-95 ripping through town in the 1950s, and the slow disintegration of the town's large industrial base after World War II. The disbanding of the Raybestos Cardinals in 1971 at the end of an amazing season certainly helped to define the industrial decline inflection point.

The Bridgeport Post September 28, 1971

Billy Wojie to Retire As Cardinals' Manager

Billy Wojie has announced his retirement as manager of the Raybestos Cardinals. The Redbirds' boss made his decision known to the players during the recent National tournament in Springfield, Mo.

Wojie, an East Haven resident, has been a member of all four Raybestos national championship teams. The Stratford club won its first championship in 1953 when Wojie played third base and he was also the third sacker on the 1958 champions.

After taking over the reins from George Adam in 1968, Wojie piloted the Cards to titles in 1969 and 1970 before his bid for a third consecutive crown was stymied by Cedar Rapids, Ia., this year.

An employee of the Martin

Firearms Co. of East Haven, Wojie has the distinction of being the first Cardinal inducted into the National Softball Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. He is also the record holder for RBI's in a national tournament with 10 in 1956.

In his seven seasons with the local powerhouse, Wojie compiled a .282 lifetime average, including batting titles in 1955 and 1956.

During his playing days, Wojie won tournament all-star honors on three occasions.

The Bridgeport Post October 3, 1971 Sports Whirl

The disbanding of the Raybestos Cardinals certainly came as a surprise to everybody concerned, but I guess it wasn't totally unexpected.

Because of tightened budgets, the club's expenses had been cut almost in half this year and the usual mid-season trip was not scheduled.

To some of the Cardinals, the disbanding holds little bearing, since they had planned to retire anyhow. Manager Bill Wojie had announced his retirement just before the players received their formal notices in the form of a letter from Raybestos president William Simpson.

Southpaw Hurler Pete Carlson reportedly moved to the Midwest and catcher Don Benedict and first baseman George Adam, both of whom earned all-star recognition during the 1971 National ASA Tournament, had been hinting of retirement in past years but didn't want to quit and break up the winning team which had copped successive National titles

in 1969 and 1970.

Teams from Detroit, Chicago and California made overtures to some of the Raybestos players during the 1971 tournament, but that's common among all clubs seeking to either rise to the national picture or remain at the top.

Stunned as they were by the decision, the players met Tuesday to discuss plans for the future and the consensus was to seek a solution whereby they could stick together. A spokesman for the players hopes to meet with Simpson in the rear future, with the result of that meeting dictating any player movement.

As noted in Wednesday's announcement, Raybestos was one of the last large industrial firms to sponsor a major Softball team, but that hasn't prevented the sport from maintaining its lofty position among amateur sports.

Since it would probably be too expensive for a single sponsor to take over the operation of the club, the thought of a community-affiliated team, with several sponsors, might be worth considering.

Many of the teams in National Tournaments, both men's and women's derive their backing from interested local businessmen, who contribute money, help provide jobs when necessary and, above all, generate good will towards the team.

There are many people of that type in the area, particularly in Stratford, and there's little doubt in my mind that they could put the Cardinals back in flight. The team is there, the field is there and I think the interest and support is there.

Now, let's put it together.

BALDWIN CENTER RE-OPENS SEPTEMBER 29TH



Mayor Laura Hoydick addresses attendees.

September 29th was a warm, sunny, and beautiful day for anyone to be outdoors enjoying a Fall day in its Connecticut splendor. For about 100 Stratfordites, the place to be on this beautiful Fall day was the Baldwin Center.

After months and months of being closed to Baldwin Center members, the center opened to fanfare and dignitaries. Several town and State politicians were on hand to celebrate the re-opening.

With over \$1.1 million in renovations, the Baldwin Center is a delight. It's airy and sunny. The new cafeteria is a notable improvement. Officers of the Stratford Historical



Attendees at the Baldwin Center's Re-opening Celebration

Society were on hand to participate in the Center's celebratory re-opening. The Center is enjoying a bit of a name refresh, too, now being referred to as a "Community Center" as opposed to a Senior Center.



Jim Baldwin, former Governor Raymond Baldwin's grandson, addresses attendees.

STRATFORD'S FIRST TOWN MANAGER HIRED

By February 1922, the Council Chair who hired Stratford's first Town Manager, Robert Turney, would be voting to fire him. In the meantime, a fine, qualified man from Ohio, R. H. Hunter, had been hired as required by the recently adopted Town Charter. This marked the beginning of what was to become 84 years of frequent animus between the Town Manager and the Town Council.

Bridgeport Herald
October 20, 1921

Gentleman From Ohio To Be Town Manager of Stratford

Stratford has chosen as its town manager R. H. Hunter of Hudson, Ohio.

Mr. Hunter will take office the first of November. He comes directly from Hudson, where he is in the engineering and contracting business, but previous to February, 1920, he was town manager of Ambridge, Pa.

During the war, Mr. Hunter was

connected with the aircraft board in Pittsburg, Pa. Previous to the war for some eleven or twelve years he was in charge of the physics department of Wooster college, Wooster, Ohio.

Mr. Hunter is forty-four years of age, a man of business-like appearance and conservative dress. He is a firm believer in the town manager system of government.

"Of all the numerous cities and towns that have tried this form of government," he said, "only one has ever gone back to the old method."

He thinks that Stratford's salvation lies in joining all the dissenting political factions in this new form of government, and he says that it seems to him that Stratford is doing just that.

Mrs. Hunter and their five-year-old child are to remain in their present home in Hudson until spring, when Mr. Hunter will bring them on to Stratford to make their home as long as he is the manager of the town. According to the contract that

will be for an "indefinite period."

The Bridgeport Times
October 25, 1921
STRATFORD

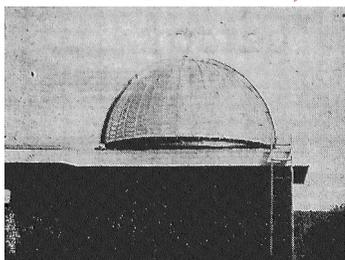
Stratford will be managed by a man from a good state, the state of many presidents, and presidential candidates come from. Hunter, the first manager, is 44 years of age. His record shows experience in both the business and professional class, he having for some time been a professor at Wooster college, Wooster, O.; where he had charge of the physics department. During the war he was attached to the anti-aircraft department. Since that time he has been located at Ambridge, Pa., where he was city manager.

...His term in Ambridge has expired, and he had planned to enter the engineering and contracting business in Hudson before deciding to try the Stratford position, and try living in New England.



Stratford's first Town Manager, R. H. Hunter, **Bridgeport Herald**, October 30, 1921.

OBSERVATORY INSTALLED AT BOOTHE PARK



The new observing dome Photo from **The Stratford News**, November 8, 1956.

The Stratford News
November 8, 1956
Astronomers Put Dome On Boothe Observatory

A 16-inch reflecting telescope is expected to be placed in the astronomical observatory at Boothe Memorial Park, Main Street, early next year.

Members of the Boothe Memorial Astronomical Society, Inc., recently installed the new observing

dome on the observatory, which was built to house the large telescope.

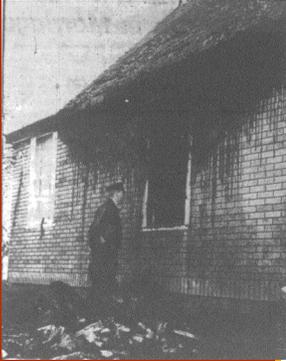
Although the society includes in its membership both amateur and professional astronomers, the observatory will be used for serious work in astronomical observations and calculations, and, probably in co-operation with Yale Observatory's program, according to Benjamin W. Reilly, secretary of the Society.

Society President Albert Farian has

announced that the eighth in a series of lectures on different phases of astronomy will be presented tomorrow at 8 p. m. at Boothe Memorial Park.

This week's speakers, Marion Simmonds and Natalie Wilcoxson, both Society members, will have as their subject *The Fall and Winter Constellations*. The lectures are open to the public.

TRAGEDY BEFALLS STRATFORD



Charred Talbot home at 404 Dahl Avenue. *Sunday Herald*, October 14, 1956.



Florence Talbot. *Sunday Herald*, October 14, 1956.

The Stratford News October 11, 1956 Mother, Four Children Die in 1 A.M. Fire

Stratford's worst fire in 20 years early this morning took the lives of a 58-year-old mother and her four children as they tried vainly to get out of their burning home.

Dead in the blaze that lit up the Huntington Road area about 1 a. m. are:

Mrs. Florence Talbot, 58.

Patty Talbot, 14.

Thomas Talbot, 21.

Robert Talbot, 24.

John Talbot, 28.

Their home, at 404 Dahl Ave., off Huntington Road, was gutted despite the efforts of the three Stratford fire companies to halt the blaze.

Fire Chief Theodore Lockwood said he believes the fire was caused when the kitchen range oil burner overflowed.

He estimated the fire had been burning for about an hour before it was reported to police and the fire department by a neighbor, Mrs. Frank Sakowitz of 386 Dahl Ave., across the street.

As he headed for the scene the chief said the whole Huntington Road area was lit by flames shooting out through the roof of the house.

When firemen arrived, the

flames also were coming out of the North side of the building.

Firemen donned gas masks and entered the burning home to find four bodies piled at the foot of the stairs.

Mrs. Talbot, Patty, Thomas and Robert, apparently had tried to leave by the front door but were overcome by smoke and fumes as they came down the stairs, Lockwood said.

In an upstairs bedroom, John's body was found near the window, where he had evidently tried to escape.

The charred bodies were taken to Bridgeport Hospital.

Meanwhile the dozen firemen brought the blaze under control in half an hour, but remained at the scene until 6 A. M.

The one and a half story frame house with asphalt siding contained six rooms, a bath and an unfinished attic in addition to the basement.

The husband and father of the family, John Henry Talbot, died six months ago of a cerebral hemorrhage at 67. He came to the U. S. from Wales as a young man and had lived in the house with his family for 28 years.

Mrs. Talbot came from Yonkers, N. Y.

Survivors include two brothers, Edward D. and Harry M., and a

sister Miss Marjorie M.

Edward and Harry are partners in the Talbot Fuel Co., Main St., Long Hill, Trumbull. John worked part time for the company and had his own range oil business.

Marjorie is a sportswear buyer in New York City.

Chief Lockwood said this morning the fire was the worst in Stratford since a blaze 20 years ago took the lives of five children on the South side of the town.

He returned to the scene this morning with Assistant Police Chief Geary to wind up their investigation.

Chief Lockwood said he would indicate in his official report that the cause of the fire was an overflow from the kitchen oil burner.

The alarm came into the fire house at 12:55 A. M. and when the fire trucks arrived, firemen found all the windows closed, he said.

"In this way all the heat and smoke stayed right in the house. Just the heat would have been enough to ignite the furniture and the house. Flames wouldn't have had to touch anything," he continued.

What finally broke the windows was the gas and pressure that built up as the fire progressed, he declared.

REMEMBERING THE FIRST POLICE CHIEF

The Bridgeport Post November 26, 1956

W. B. Nichols Dies at 65

...Mr. Nichols, a native of Stratford, was born July 10, 1891, and was educated in the Stratford schools. He was appointed by the Board of Selectmen May 10, 1917, to organize a town police force. Like Fire Chief Allan D. Judson, who retired March 1, 1951, because of ill health, Mr. Nichols was the lone member of the Police department at the time of his appointment.

Gained Fame

...The former Police Chief gained international fame in 1926 when "Big Mike" Riccitelli, a New Haven gunman known by the Police as the "Post Road Phantom" was staging holdups in the area and baffling police in their attempts to apprehend him.

The story of "Big Mike" and his eventual death in Stratford after shooting a Stratford patrolman

has been written in story form in several magazines throughout the country and was considered at one time for a television production.

The later Patrolman Edward Manchester carried five bullets in his body until the time of his death through natural causes several years later as a result of an encounter with the new [sic] Haven gunman during an attempted holdup in Stratford. At the time, Chief Nichols, in a dramatic statement at the bedside of the injured patrolman in Bridgeport hospital, vowed, "I'll get him, Ed, and make him pay for this if it's the last thing I ever do."

Dogged "the Phantom"

Keeping in close touch with all reports on the "Phantom," he received a report a few days later that Riccitelli was in town again, in the area off Stratford avenue near the Baird Machine company at the Bridgeport City line.

Chief Nichols and the present police chief, Patrick A. Flanagan then a sergeant, finally tracked him down behind the railroad ties. When he refused to surrender, they fired at him with riot guns.

He was found dead a few minutes later behind the ties, but it was not until an inquest by the late Coroner John J. Phelan that it was disclosed that the gunman had kept his boast of never being taken by the policed and had committed suicide, shooting himself through the head as the riot guns were fired.

Prior to his appointment to the town police force, Mr. Nichols served many years as a volunteer fireman, and was at one time assistant to Chief Judson.

...During his tenure of office as police chief, he was president of the Connecticut Chiefs of Police association,...



Justice Ray Baldwin left, Chief Bill Nichols right at the Chief's retirement dinner. *The Stratford News*, April 27, 1951.

SHAME OF PECK'S MILL

Bridgeport Herald
November 20, 1921

Failure to Perpetuate Historic Peck's Mill Is Shame To Stratford's Sturdy Civic Pride

"Stratford's shame," the traveler called it as he passed through Oronoque.

There is an old mill pond, drained to the very mud bottom. An ice house stands on the shores to the west, a wooded swap to the north. On the east is a beautiful ravine in which rot some old timers of what may have been a penstock, some carding wheels and old wooden gears.

Stretching far overhead the lofty girders of a railway bridge throw shadows over the ruined

walls of what were once flourishing mills.

"Stratford's shame?" the traveler's companion queried. "What do you mean?"

"Only that the town of Stratford has let go to ruin on land it rightfully owns one of the most historic structures in southern Connecticut.

"On that spot I have shown you, since nearly a century before the Revolutionary War have been locate the most historic edifices of the old town.

Going Center of Industry.

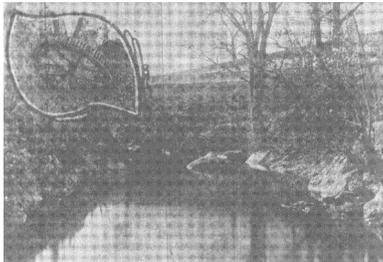
"It has been a center of industry and should be recalled and perpetuated in tradition by every civic minded person to whom the word Stratford, or even Bridge-

port, is dear.

"For it not alone relates to Stratford, but is coincident with Eagle's Nest and Old Mill Green in Bridgeport," the traveler—an old man—continued.

"It was at this forsaken and deserted spot that James Blakeman, shortly after Stratford was settled, came from what now is Bridgeport to found the first grist mill. The grant was such that if ever milling was abandoned the land reverted to the town."

...James Blakeman prior to 1684 had operated mills at Eagle's Nest, in what now is Bridgeport, and also established the mill later known as "Old Mill," near what is termed Mill Hill in Bridgeport...



All That Remains of Famous Blakeman Mill—a Rotted Penstock and Ruins of a Once Prosperous Center. **Sunday Herald**, November 20, 1921.

WHERE TO STRATFORD?

The entire issue of the October 18, 1956 **The Stratford News** was devoted to planning for the future of Stratford. It's revealing reading the headlines of that newspaper issue as they tell the story of choices the town faced and those choices were to determine the future structure of the town.

"Stratford Master Plan Hearing Set For Wednesday"

"Future Land Use Problems Raised by Town Planners"

"Draining Planning Is Needed"

"Town Services to Expand"

"Central District Urged: Business Area Below Par"

"Population May Go to 55,000"

"Caution Is Urged in Judging School Needs"

"Voter Roll Call At All-Time High"

"High School May Have To Go To Double Sessions"

"Too Early For School"

(New) "Sr. High Would Need At Least 22-acre Site"

"Wider Streets Urged In Paradise Green"

"Merchants Air Parking Woes"

"Town May Develop 11 Neighborhood Areas"

"Revisions in Zoning Go with Growth Plan"

"Stratford Located Near Industrial Growth Center"

With the plethora of issues

facing the town in 1956, it was certain that not all the decisions made were going to be the best options for the long term needs of the town. However, nearly any one of the headlines in the foregoing represented choices that would impact the residents of the town in the future.

Consider school building.

"...The Planning Commission warns school planners to proceed cautiously with their estimates for fear they might later find the have built the wrong kinds of buildings.

In discussing school needs, the commission sees an eventual school population of about 11,900 based on a total population of 55,000..."



Thruway construction through Stratford Center. **The Stratford News**, October 18, 1956.



Widening of Main Street through Paradise Green recommended. **The Stratford News**, October 18, 1956.

WHEN MISSILES CAME TO WESTPORT



Officers check missile at Westport Nike installation. **Sunday Herald**, October 28, 1956.

Sunday Herald

October 28, 1956

Nike Site Now Ready

Deadly darts are aimed skyward in Fairfield County today.

The slender but potent missiles are ready for controlled launching against any invader that might attempt an airborne assault on the vital industrial area around Bridgeport.

The Fairfield Nike site is now ready to protect the area with an explosive wall of radar-guided missiles. Capt. Osborne Reaves, commander of the "B" Battery of the 967 AAA Missile Battalion [sic], revealed yesterday.

The Fairfield site is the first in the

Connecticut defense ring to put up its guard, read to ward off the attack of any challenger.

Construction is still going on at the Fairfield installation to provide adequate barracks for the 104 men under Capt. Reaves' command. But the missiles and their radar and electronic controls are ready for the "yellow" alert that means trouble may be coming.

...Actually, the base includes two separate sites about 150 yards apart.

Separate radar units at the "control" site detect and track down what may be enemy aircraft.

...The anti-aircraft missiles themselves are launched from the sepa-

rate site. Experts in cavernous underground launching centers operate the platforms which prepare the batteries for continuous firing...

The most recent Merritt Parkway Conservancy newsletter published a brief history of the Westport Nike site and its subsequent closing in 1963. The movie **Rally Round the Flag**, starring Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, was based on the Nike installation in Westport which most residents of Westport vigorously opposed. The site was located very near the Merritt Parkway. Remnants of the installation remain in place today.

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.

Number 5 is the Cold War visit of a Soviet **Pravda** reporter to the Shakespeare Theatre in 1955. Shakespeare's plays had been popular in Russia/USSR for many years, so it was not too much of a surprise that Russians would have had an interest in the opening of the American Festival Shakespeare Theatre in the summer of 1955.

Visitors had been flocking to the Theatre from all over the world, but none created quite the international political stir that Pravda's Litoshko created. The Soviets had made Litoshko's visit a pretext by which to judge America's willingness to negotiate through the Cold War. Russians were banned from traveling in the U.S. at this time.

The **Sunday Herald** had suggested Litoshko visit the Theatre in a telegram to **Pravda** some days earlier. Litoshko approached the U.S. State Department in July of 1955. Connecticut's Congressman Morano called on the State Department to assist in securing Litoshko's visit to the Theatre.

Litoshko was permitted to travel to Stratford with his wife for opening night at the Theatre. At the Theatre the Litoshko's were seated next to Bishop Walter H. Gray of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, and Mrs. Gray in a box on the balcony, and the "American prelate and the Russian journalist got along

famously. "

The story of Litoshko's visit to Stratford was carried in newspapers around Connecticut, the United States, and, of course, in Russia. It was thought that this gesture of good will between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. helped improve relations between the two countries.



Bishop Grey (left), Mrs. and Mr. Yevgeny Litoshko (right). Photo from the July 17, 1955 **Sunday Herald**.



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.



Stratford Historical Society

967 Academy Hill Rd
P.O. Box 382
Stratford, CT 06615

Phone: (203) 378-0630

Fax: (203) 378-2562

E-mail: Judsonhousestfd@aol.com

newsletters@stratfordhistoricalsociety.info

*Our mission is to preserve,
protect, cherish, and
celebrate the history of the
Town of Stratford.*

www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.org