

THE CUPHEAG CORNER

VOLUME IV, ISSUE 5

APRIL - MAY 2022



Capt. David Judson House
c. 1750

MARK THE DATES:

- Pollinator Garden Planting May 21st, 9:30am
- May's General Membership Meeting, Sunday, May 22nd, 2pm, Stratford Library
- Stratford Museum Day, June 11th, 11am
- Membership & Volunteer Fair, June 25th, 1pm

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MAY'S GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Sunday, May 22nd, 2:00 pm, Stratford Library, 2203 Main Street

Recently, interest was generated in the history of Roosevelt Forest by the members of the Facebook group www.facebook.com/pages/Roosevelt-Forest. The questions about the Forest's history arose due to the rock and mortar structure that stands on an outcropping at the start of the Red Trail from the base of Peter's Lane. What was this structure and why was it there?

The answer to that question is deeply rooted in Stratford's Depression Era politics. Of course, one question led to another, and it reminded us of a presentation we made at the Oronoque Country Club, some years ago, entitled **Naming a Town Forest**.

The presentation grew and expanded as an increasing amount of information came to light in answering the question of the Forest's naming as well as in researching the



Ever wonder why Roosevelt Forest exists as a town park? What about the age of the trees in the Forest? Ever wonder for whom the Forest was named? Melonheads ever kept you awake at night? We'll explore these questions and several others.

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

several "mysteries" to be found on the Forest trails.

The trees of the Forest, in some cases, are unusual and appear to have been introduced. The trails have been alternatively well-marked at times, and appear abandoned at others. The one time girl scout camp at the Forest has all but disappeared. The shooting range in the Forest seems very incongruous with a town park. Join us as we explore the answers to these and other "Forest mysteries."



Stratford just naturally has to battle over something. Harmony, team work, giving a point to the opposition occasionally, and anything recembling [sic] even so remotely a fifty-fifty way of meeting arguments, is also unknown to Stratford as Eskimopies are to the Eskimos.

The Bridgeport Times and Evening Farmer, May 11, 1922, page 3.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY HAPPENINGS

Much activity has been occurring, and more is planned, at your friendly, neighborhood Stratford Historical Society. First off, our **Museum renovations** are well underway. Read more about them on page 7.

We are very pleased to announce that Mary Ann Vlahac has accepted our invitation to Chair our **Education Committee**. Mary Ann comes to us with many years of educational experience, and an in depth knowledge of Stratford.

On Earth Day, April 22nd, Society volunteers teamed up with **Aquarion Water volunteers**. The volunteers prepped new landscape beds and installed rain barrels. Many thanks to our amazing volunteers for all their hard work!

Pollinator Garden Planting

Day is Saturday, May 21st from 9:30am until 12pm. Help the Garden Committee plant 200 pollinator plants and bushes in our new Pollinator Garden!

Stratford Museum Day is Saturday, June 11th from 11am until 2pm. Join us for tours of the colonial period Captain David Judson House, family-friendly activities in our newly-renovated museum galleries, and light snacks on the porch.

June 25th from 1pm to 3pm is **Membership & Volunteer Fair**. Find out how you can get involved! Stratford Historical Society would be nothing without its members. Learn about our member benefits and how you can share your talents with our community through volunteering. Also join us for tours of the Captain David Judson House, a



Our dedicated Earth Day cleanup/landscaping volunteers.

special Pollinator Garden presentation, and light snacks.

Our **Summer Program** is back! The Stratford Historical Society and the Ruby and Calvin Fletcher African American History Museum are teaming up for a week-long summer drop-off program! Monday, August 15 – Friday, August 19,

Continued on page 8.

TRAGEDY STRIKES STRATFORD AGAIN



...at the rear of the flaming dwelling at 217 Harding avenue, Stratford, a fireman carries two-week-old Sandra Martin accompanied by Stratford Police Sgt. Harold Smith and Mrs. Anna Franklin the woman who caught the baby.

For the second time in 1957 fire claimed the lives of several Stratford children. Both sets of fatalities were attributed to faulty oil burners. These tragedies led the town leaders to call on the State for stricter regulations governing oil burners.

The Hartford Courant May 13, 1957 **Defective Burner Blamed** **For 7 Stratford Deaths**

STRATFORD, May 12 (AP)—A defective oil burner, which reportedly had flared up two weeks before, was described today as the cause of the blazing fire that burned seven small children to death yesterday.

Fire Chief Theodore S. Lockwood said the burner was part of the kitchen range in the second-floor apartment of Mr. and Mrs.

Martin Davis. Their five children perished alone in the flat, while the mother was out shopping.

Two children of Mr. and Mrs. Claude Martin were also burned fatally in a bedroom on the floor above.

Davis, who arrived on the scene to find his children dead, told police the oil burner had a tendency to leak. Two weeks ago it flared up and had to be extinguished with water, he said.

He notified the owner, Davis said, and asked for a new range.

Mrs. Davis told police she left one burner lighted on the stove when she left the house for a quick trip to a nearby store.

Lockwood, after an inspection of the structure's charred shell, said the burned area around the kitchen range indicated the fire had originated there.

He said he was unable to de-

termine how the fire spread so rapidly through the building.

Although it was old and a "tinder box," he said, "the mystery is how it could burn, as it must have, for 10 minutes or more without attracting the attention of some of the neighbors."

...The two Martin children who perished in the blaze were Russell, 5, and Doreen, 3. They were removed from the building with serious burns and died in a hospital.

Their mother, grandmother, two-week-old sister and 17-month-old brother, John, escaped. The baby, Sandra, was tossed to a neighbor from a third floor porch by the mother, Cecelia, 32.

The Davis children were all dead when firemen reached them. They were Benjamin, 5, Jeanette, 3, George, 2, Evelenia, 1 1/2, and Patricia, 8 months...



Abijah McEwen home c 1934. Photo from the Library of Congress Archives: <https://www.loc.gov/item/ct0275/>

ABIJAH MCEWEN'S WELL POISONED

We wish we had the backstory for this newspaper article. This type of crime was highly unusual for "olde Stratford". There obviously was some bad blood between Mr. McEwen and Mr. Lally.

Abijah McEwen (1815-1898) was a painter in 1860. Frank Lally (1839-?) was born in Ireland and was a farmer in 1880. Frank Lally was living with his mother in 1880.

We can find no other infor-

mation about Frank Lally, but we speculate he may have been a relative of Stratford's last First Selectman, James Lally. James' father would have been close to the same age as Frank Lally.

Hartford Courant May 10, 1872 **Alleged Poisoning of a** **Well in Stratford, Conn.** **From Our Own Correspondent.**

FRANK LALLY, of Stratford, was arrested yesterday, on the charge of poisoning the well of Mr. ABIJAH MCEWEN, a neighbor, by throwing in arsenic. The evidence showing that he had threatened to take the life of MCEWEN, and had purchased arsenic at a drug-store in this city, he was committed for further examination by Justice SUTTON, in default of \$5,000 bonds.

PURITAN NO'EASTER

It seems counterintuitive to our general understanding of the strictures of Puritanism that any opportunity for religious expression would go unobserved. However, the Puritans were averse to any holidays. They considered holidays, generally, as holdovers from paganism and popish traditions. The Bible didn't mention any holidays, so none were observed. "They for whom all days are holy can have no holiday," they reasoned.

Under Cromwell in England, Easter, Christmas, and other holy day observances were banned in 1647. By 1659, Christmas was banned in Puritan colonies. Easter and other

holidays were ignored.

Ignoring Easter was tricky for Puritan ministers as Easter always fell on Sunday. What's a minister to preach about on Easter if not Easter? As it turned out, the Puritan ministers chose any other non-Easter topic for their sermons.

Ignoring Easter was also complicated by the fact that Election Day was reckoned by the Easter calendar. Election day was actually one of four important holidays that the Puritans celebrated. The other three were Commencement Day, Thanksgiving, and Training day.

The Puritans also had problems with the names of the days of the week and the names of months. The days

and months were named for heathen deities. The Puritans referred to months by numbers. March was month 1 and February was month 12. Sunday was simply considered the first day of the week. Monday was the second, and so forth.

So, it appears, if you happened upon a chicken egg as you were walking to Puritan services on an Easter Sunday, it was, in fact, just a chicken egg. No egg bearing bunnies had placed the egg for your Easter merry making.

You may read all about the Puritans, and their holiday non-traditions, on the New England Historical Society's website: newenglandhistoricalsociety.com.



DATELINE STRATFORD APRIL—MAY 1957

The Stratford News

April 4, 1957

Stratford Retailing is Typical of State Trends

The latest statistics gathered throughout the State of Connecticut show that the increase of retail business in Stratford is typical of the mercantile growth of similar communities.

...Towns like Stratford reported large increases in sales from department stores, motor vehicle agencies, garages, office furniture and jewelry stores, as well as establishments selling building materials and electrical and plumbing supplies.

All types of chain stores had substantial increases in sales volume in the larger suburbs.

...Stratford and other suburban and rural towns showed five per cent increase in percentage of sales. In 1955 suburban areas did 25 per cent of all business tallied for the Bridgeport Metropolitan area.

Sunday Herald

April 14, 1957

State Title Skeet Shoot at Lordship

The Connecticut 410 and 20 Gauge Skeet Championships will be run off today at the Lordship range, starting at 10 A.M., with contestants competing for \$100 added money.

The event is open to any registered shooter regardless of residence, is sponsored by the Connecticut Skeet Shooting Assn. and will be conducted by the Housatonic Gun Club, Inc., whose skeet chairman is Cy Marnik.

The Bridgeport Post

April 23, 1957

What's News About Town and Townspeople

Girl Scout leaders are busy as the proverbial bee getting Girl Scout land in Roosevelt forest ready for the summer season. The Lions club crew will journey to the forest on Sunday to install sanitary facilities for the girls.

The Stratford News

April 25, 1957

Church Returns After 113 Years

The First Universalist Church which left Stratford 113 years ago will return here late this Fall, according to Rev. Albert F. Ciarcia, representative of the Universal Church of America, who is presently serving the congregation.

The church was established in Stratford in 1820 and then moved to its present location at 262 Fairfield Ave., Bridgeport, in 1844. Plans call for the sale of the Bridgeport property and for a new church and parsonage to be built on a site at 96 Chapel St.

Sunday Herald

April 28, 1957

Exodus to Suburbia Now Stampede

The exodus of Bridgeporters to the suburbs is becoming a stampede.

Latest figures on Greater Bridgeport, supplied by the Post Office and the State Department of Health, show a population for the city during the past year while Stratford, Fairfield and Trumbull are growing at a lightening [sic] pace.

...Stratford now boasts a population of 42,000, compared to 33,428 in 1950 when the last U.S. census was taken.

The Bridgeport Post

May 1, 1957

Stratford Dwelling Values Despite Losses to Turnpike

Although Stratford has lost more than 200 dwellings in the path of the Connecticut Turnpike during the past year, new building throughout the town brought dwelling values to a new high of \$85,001,900. Town Assessor Peter

Junkin shows in a breakdown of the 1958 grand list filed this week with the state tax commissioner.

A comparison of the 1955 and 1956 grand lists shows 10,226 dwellings valued at \$80,113,235 in 1955 and 10,006 dwellings valued at \$85,001,983 on the current grand list. Mr. Junkin said a survey by his office indicated that the majority of the dwellings removed from this list were houses in the turnpike path

The Bridgeport Post

May 9, 1957

Tax Board Is Preparing Reply to Town Council

Edmund J. Seaman, chairman of the Board of Tax Review says his board will submit a reply to the Council Monday night stating why they agree "to the fairness" of the current assessment of the Stonybrook Gardens development. Councilman George F. Wright has asked for the report pointing out that the assessment is much lower than when the property was owned by the Federal government. Mr. Seaman, pointing out that the Tax Review board, stated in its report to the Council in March that the assessment "is fair and equitable" declined to comment on what the new report will say. He declared that the board will get together over the weekend to sign the report.

The Bridgeport Post

May 24, 1957

1,300 Girl Scouts In Juliet Low Program

More than 1,300 members of the Girl Scout troops of Stratford are expected to participate in the annual Juliet Low ceremony Saturday in the Girl Scout area of Roosevelt forest.

A special program has been arranged for the girls from 3 to 5 p.m., and in the event of rain it will be shifted to Sunday afternoon.

...One of the features of the ceremony will be an authentic primitive camp.



Shakespeare Guild. Mrs. Donald Sammis seated second from the right. Photo from the **Sunday Herald**, April 14, 1957.



Annual Easter egg hunt at Sterling House. Photo from **The Stratford News**, April 25, 1957.



Visting Nurse Association met at Sterling House. Photo from **The Stratford News**, April 25, 1957.



American Cancer Society fundraisers. Photo from the **Sunday Herald**, April 14, 1957.

If you're interested in viewing additional newspaper photos from this time period, please consult our Stratford 400 Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/stratford400>.

NOW SHOWING APRIL—MAY 1957



Stratford Theater c 1934

- | | | |
|------------|----------------------------------|---|
| April 7th | Fear Strikes Out | Anthony Perkins, Karl Malden |
| April 14th | Giant | Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson, James Dean |
| April 21st | Men of War | Robert Ryan, Aldo Ray |
| April 28th | The Tattered Dress | Jeanne Crain, Jeff Chandler |
| May 5th | Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison | Deborah Kerr, Robert Mitchum |
| May 12th | Boy on a Dolphin | Alan Ladd, Sophia Loren, Clifton Webb |
| May 19th | The Spirit of St. Louis | James Stewart, Sheila Bond |
| May 26th | The Buster Keaton Story | Donald O'Connor, Ann Blyth |

IGOR SIKORSKY RETIRES



Igor I. Sikorsky. Photo from *The Bridgeport Post*, May 7, 1957.

Although Mr. Sikorsky "retired" from active participation at the Stratford Sikorsky plant in 1957, he continued to consult for the company through October of 1972. Much may be said of Mr. Sikorsky's life and career, but the Sikorsky Archives tell his story in detail the best:

www.sikorskyarchives.com.

Bridgeport Post
May 7, 1957

Sikorsky to Retire, Will Be Consultant

Igor I. Sikorsky, engineering manager and founder of the Sikorsky Aircraft division of United Aircraft corporation, and world-renowned as the aircraft designer best known for his development of the helicopter, will retire

this month after a half-century of active participation in the aviation industry.

...Although officially retired, Mr. Sikorsky will remain with Sikorsky Aircraft in a consulting capacity. He has disclosed that he has no immediate plans for the future other than to continue his work in the field of rotary-winged aircraft.

Mr Sikorsky will be 68 on May 25.

...Since pre-World War I days, the name of Sikorsky and aviation have been synonymous.

First Multi-Engine Plane

In 1913 he built and flew in combat the first multi-engine airplane, and in 1939 in Stratford he brought forth the first workable helicopter. Today's gigantic helicopter industry and potential is evidence of the worth of this

type of craft.

Although the helicopter was long in the back of Mr. Sikorsky's mind, he gained world-wide fame in the early 1930's when his huge Flying clipper ships pioneered transoceanic commercial routes.

...Leaving his native land during the Russian revolution in 1918, Mr. Sikorsky came in the United States in March, 1919. Practically penniless, he struggled to bring together a group of aviation engineers and mechanics and formed the Sikorsky Aviation corporation in 1925.

This plant was located on Long Island.

In 1929 he built the Sikorsky plant in Stratford, which later was occupied by Chance Vought and now by Lycoming division Avco...

SOLOMON PLANT SPINNING WHEEL MAKER

Solomon Plant, Stratford's renowned spinning wheel maker, was born, and died, in the month of May. His shop was located near the northwest corner of Judson Place and Elm Street..

Solomon Plant, Wheel Maker of Stratford, CT

By Florence Feldman Wood
Double-flyer spinning wheels were an early effort to increase the productivity of hand spinners at the end of the preindustrial era. Many examples have been found in a variety of styles, indicating many builders. In a few cases the wheels are signed. Double-flyer wheels with the initials S. P. were made by Solomon Plant of Stratford, CT. He kept a record of his accounts

from April 1810 to June 1821, from age 69 to 80. This account book is in the collection of the Stratford Historical Society. Although it only covers the last decade of his life, it provides insights into how he worked, to whom he sold his wheels, and other work that he was doing, such as mending.

...The examples of Solomon Plant's double-flyer wheels have a structure typical of a double-flyer wheel with the drive wheel below the flyers. The lower table rests on four legs. Four upright posts are set into the table with the front pair angled toward the spinner. A split upper table fits onto these posts. Two short posts in the center of the lower table hold the drive-wheel axle. On the

back part of the upper table are two threaded screws. The mushroom caps come off and a turned rod rests between them. The maidens are set into the front top table. The spindle shaft rests between the maiden in the front and leather bearings attached to the turned rod in the back. The variations in this style of wheel are seen in the turnings on the posts, drive wheel spokes, and maidens.

...Besides wheels Solomon also made and sold "reals," quill wheels [bobbin-winder wheels], "whirls" and "pare of flyers." The latter were probably replacement parts for double-flyer wheels, his own or perhaps those made by others.



Solomon Plant Spinning Wheels

SHOOTOUT ENDS IN STRATFORD

Not since the Honey Bud-long shootout at the trolley barn on Stratford Avenue in Avon Park in 1915 had there been such gun play in Stratford.

The Hartford Courant
May 25, 1922

Kill One Bandit, Catch Comrades and Recover Loot

Bridgeport, May 24.—A daring daylight robbery by four youths from New York was frustrated here today when one of the holdup men was killed and the

other three arrested after a brief chase through Stratford. The loot was \$19,000, the local payroll of the Connecticut company which was being carried across Middle street in a wooden box when the bandit auto came up. The money was recovered in Stratford where it was left on the porch of a house by two of the robbers.

The body of one of the robbers was found in the auto which was abandoned. It was identified as that of Louis Stone of Brooklyn, alleged leader. The men under arrest are Herman Kraut, 91 Willett street, New York; Max

Becker, 320 Clinton street, New York; Edward Kiviatt, No. 22 Pike street, New York.

...The car entered Stratford and on Barnum terrace stopped in front of a residence.

Two of the robbers set the money box on a porch. The automobile then started up and the two men on the porch turned and ran into a woods.

Kraut, driving the automobile, was in the meantime been speeding through the streets of Stratford with the body of Stone in the tonneau [sic] of the machine...



Two of the robbers arrested in Stratford: Edward Kiviatt and Max Becker. *The Hartford Courant*, May 25, 1922

THE ROARING '90'S IN STRATFORD



Party like it's 1897 may have been the catch phrase for May and June of that year. Something was definitely in the air and/or water in Stratford. We include the following **Bridgeport Herald** "snap shots" for your consideration. Perhaps you can determine what force (s) were afoot in town in mid-1897. You may find all of the following articles, in their entirety, on our newsletter's homepage.

Bridgeport Herald

April 4, 1897

STRATFORD OF DATE IS

growing more enterprising and daily new arrivals come to town. Some stay to seek their fortunes there and others find it too quiet and leave for other places. The competition in the bicycle and laundry business has attracted much attention of late, but perhaps the laundry business has claimed the most attention. Seldom in a town the size of Stratford is there a laundry of any kind, but Stratford has for the last three-years been up-to-date in this line and until recently John Wing, a son of the Flowery Kingdom, presided over the only laundry...Every one admits that there are a great many persons in the aristocratic [sic] town who have wheels and don't know it, but there are now six local bicycle agents willing to furnish them with more. All kinds, colors and grades are carried by these enterprising agents and bicycles were quoted last week in the "stove Club Weekly Review" anywhere from ten cents to \$100. Stratford is booming.

April 4, 1897

OVER IN STRATFORD

there is a widow who seems to be creating considerable comment by her conduct lately. She was at one time a resident of another town in New Haven county, and if all that is said of her is true, she was somewhat of a trouble maker, even in those days. Several domestic rows and lover's quarrels have been laid at her door and yet she seems to be gayer than the gaiest [sic] of her kind. Since she took up her residence in the old town some very queer stories have been circulated about her and more than a few of those who know her wonder where she comes in to be the rich widow she profess-

es to be. She seems to have plenty for herself and family and observant ones whom she has tried to make trouble for declare they can plainly see that her Charlie is not the only pebble on the beach, and unless there is a reformation soon they are going to take steps towards bringing matters more prominently before the public than they have been.

April 11, 1897

HAD LEONARD TWO WIVES

THE ARREST OF William Leonard, traveling salesman for the large hat concern of Walheiser & Dwyer of 14 Waverly place, N. Y., which took place in the little town of Stratford last Friday morning on the charge of trying to defraud Mrs. Mary Garry out of a board bill amounting in all to about \$200, brings to light a peculiar state of affairs.

In the early part of last June Leonard and a woman who he represented to be his wife came to Stratford and engaged board with Mrs. Garry who conducts a boarding house on Stratford avenue near the lower dock. He claimed at the time he did not know how long he and his wife would remain but if they liked the place they would remain through the summer at least.

...William came last Thursday night and Friday morning when he told Mrs. Garry he would be obliged to go to Bridgeport and get a check cashed before he could pay her. Mrs. Garry beckoned to Sheriff Stagg who had learned of his arrival and he was placed under arrest. He claimed when taken to the lockup that he had no money, but upon searching him it was found he had \$75 in his pocket.

In quicker time than it takes to tell it Mrs. Garry had secured judgment through her Attorney Mr. Hall and \$50 of the \$75 was turned over to her and with the remainder Mr. and Mrs. Leonard left town shortly after. Leonard when asked in regard to his wife in New Jersey refused to say anything about her.

Where Mr. and Mrs. Leonard went is unknown, but it is probable that if they return to Stratford to board again they will have to pay in advance and prove that they are man and wife.

April 11, 1897

LOCKED IN THE TOWN

HALL MRS. MINOR SMITH WANTS TO RUN THE SHORE RESORT AS SHE PLEASURES.

THERE WAS A real warm time at Minor Smith's shore resort, Stratford, Friday morning and according to all accounts for a few moments the well known place was the scene of a free-for-all-fight. The disturbance was the outcome of Mr. and Mrs. Smith's matrimonial troubles which have now been existing for over a year.

A year ago Mrs. Smith on account of the cruel treatment she received at the hands of Minor deserted him and went to live with relatives in Newtown.

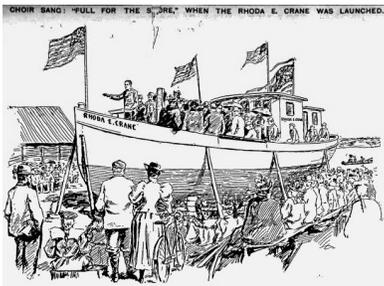
Minor was not at home when his family arrived and Mrs. Smith started in to run the establishment as she saw fit. Her first action to show that she was to be the master in the future was to discharge all of the help and when Minor returned from Bridgeport where he had been shopping he found the place in great confusion.

Minor was not pleased to see his wife and children and as soon as he found that they were there he approached them and told Mrs. Smith to take the children and get out. But Mrs. Smith evidently had no intention of going and as soon as Minor tried to put her out by force she resorted too [sic] woman's weapon, the broom stick, and for a short time Minor was kept busy dodging the vigorous thrusts his dear little wife made at him.

Seeing that Minor was too quick to allow her to strike him with the broom Mrs. Smith turned her attention to the numerous household utensils laying about and then their troubles began in earnest. Minor took a hand in throwing dishes himself and it was not long afterwards before the dining room presented the appearance of a crockery store after having been struck by a cyclone.

...Mrs. Smith was placed in the Town hall about noon Friday and when Judge Peck went to call upon her about an hour later she had disappeared and no one appeared to be able to tell where she had gone.

It is understood, however, that Mrs. Smith returned to Newtown, but will come back to Stratford in the near future and again try and compel her husband to support her.



Sketch of the Rhoda Crane being launched. Sketch from *The Bridgeport Herald*, April 25, 1897.



Minor Smith's Shore Dinners and Hotel c 1900.

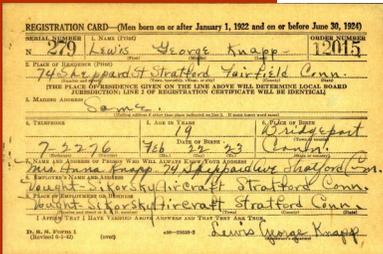


Bedell Benjamin on his bicycle in Stratford 1887.

REMEMBERING LEW KNAPP



Stratford Town Historian, Lewis Knapp, takes in some sun at the Dock recently. **The Stratford Star**, April 10, 1997.



Lew Knapp's draft registration card when he was 19.

Our former Town Historian, Lewis Knapp, would have celebrated his 98th birthday in February of this year.

We lost Lew, too soon, during the town's 375th year celebrations in May 2014.

We remember Lew for his many contributions to our Society and to our Town. Lew was the author of several books about Stratford history. Lew and his wife Viv played a very active role in the town's 350th anniversary celebrations in 1989.

The Stratford Star
April 10, 1997

Lewis Knapp earned his know-it-all status

By Dana Keeton

If you ever have a question about Stratford's history, the person to ask is Lewis G. Knapp.

Town historian since 1987, Knapp possesses a wealth of knowledge about Stratford's history and its people.

In addition to his role as town historian, Knapp is a Historic District commissioner and Greenway Steering Committee mem-

ber. He is also working on a book about Stratford's maritime history.

The Shore Road resident said he spends about 40 hours a week researching, documenting, writing and answering queries.

He retired in 1985 from his job as chief of new product engineering at Sikorsky Aircraft to devote his time to documenting local history. Knapp said he volunteers his time because he is fascinated with the subject and believes it is important to remember history.

"Those who don't remember their history are doomed to repeat it," he said.

The opportunity to learn has kept him focused on the town's history for the past 10 years, Knapp said.

"History isn't useful unless you have learned something from it. That is what has intrigued me, there is a lot to be learned," he said.

While Knapp is writing a new book on Stratford's maritime history, which is scheduled to be published in 1998, he also wrote "In Pursuit of Paradise," a 350-page local history published in

1989 for Stratford's 350th anniversary.

Although there is no formal method to working as a local historian, Knapp taps into a variety of sources to find out about the town's history.

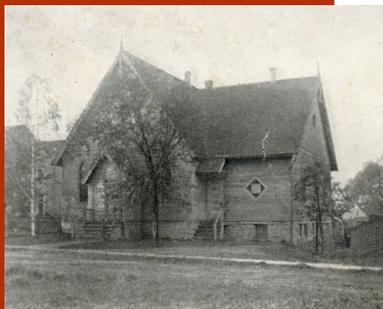
Knapp said he pieces things together through information he finds in account books, ledgers, diaries, land records, probate records, minutes of state and city meetings and taped conversations with people who have lived in town their whole lives.

"The diaries and ledgers stay in attics sometimes until someone hands them over to the historical society," he said.

Having grown up in Stratford, Knapp, 74, knows a lot of people who have stories to tell about their experiences and families.

"There are a lot of tapes of oral history," said Knapp. "I piece them all together and you have something."

As opposed to him utilizing the town library as a resource, Knapp said, librarians sometimes call him with a question.



Neighborhood Church of Christ on Church Street in 1911. Sold to International Order of Red Men in 1913. Became Polka Dot Playhouse in 1954. To the left of the Red Men's Hall in the above photo is the corner of the old Town House which served as Town Hall from 1844 to 1872. The old Town House was demolished in 1915 and was replaced by the Congregational Church Packard Hall.

A POLKA DOT MYSTERY SOLVED

The provenance of the Polka Dot Playhouse has always been a bit unclear. We knew that the former International Order of Red Men's (IORM) Hall had been converted into the Polka Dot Playhouse in 1954. However, the building always appeared very "church like". Why would the Red Men build a church-like building for their meeting hall?

As it turns out, they didn't. The IORM "repurposed" a church building. The Neighborhood Church of Christ was founded by Charles Seymour Bullock shortly after the end of the Spanish American War (1898).

How Rev. Bullock came to Stratford is unknown, but he quickly rose to prominence. Some of Stratford's most distinguished citizens were members of Rev. Bullock's church. The church came to its end when Rev. Bullock accepted a pastoral assignment in Mystic, Connecticut in 1912.



Gail Glynn, Pauline Beach, David Reed, Kay Calmer, and Harry Flood working to transform Red Men's Hall into the Polka Dot Playhouse. Photo from **The Stratford News**, July 1, 1954.



Neighborhood Church of Christ after being converted to Red Men's Hall in 1913.

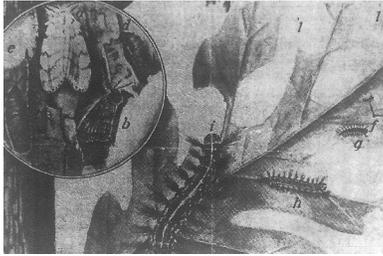


Neighborhood Church of Christ on Church Street prior to its becoming Red Men's Hall.



Red Men's Hall after being converted to the Polka Dot Playhouse in 1954.

GYPSY MOTH CONTROL IN ROOSEVELT FOREST



Heavy gypsy moth infestation in Stratford in 1954. Drawing of moth and larvae from *The Stratford News*, March 11, 1954.

Gypsy moths were first discovered in Connecticut in 1905. By 1922, the insect was recognized as a permanent Connecticut pest. Infestations have occurred in Stratford on several different occasions.

The infestations of 1971 and 1972, however, were particularly severe. Young people were enlisted to gather gypsy moth eggs to help stem the severity of the damage wrought by the moths.

The Bridgeport Post
May 5, 1972
Gypsy Moth Egg Campaign Tomorrow

Members of the Stratford Junior Youth Conservation club and

Roosevelt forest ranger Robert Blakley will again be in charge of the gypsy moth egg collection day scheduled tomorrow beginning at 1 p.m. in the forest.

Fred C. Wirth, conservation club executive director, said that all persons who wish to participate in the collection of moth eggs should meet in the forest lower parking lot at 1 p.m. All persons and organizations taking part in the event should register with Mr. Wirth.

Last year, 32 pounds of the eggs were collected by participating organizations.

"We hope to again get as many egg pods as possible out of the forest area so that we'll have as much green left on the trees

and shrubs as there was a few years ago," Mr. Wirth said.

The director also commented that "the forest was stripped very badly last year and had to be closed. Through the help of other organizations, we hope to keep the forest open all summer so residents may enjoy the forest."

All Boy and Girl Scouts, Brownies and Cubs have been asked to participate in the program.

All participants should bring a plastic knife and a coffee can for scraping. At the end of the collection, Ranger Blakely will collect the eggs and take them to the incinerator where they will be burned.

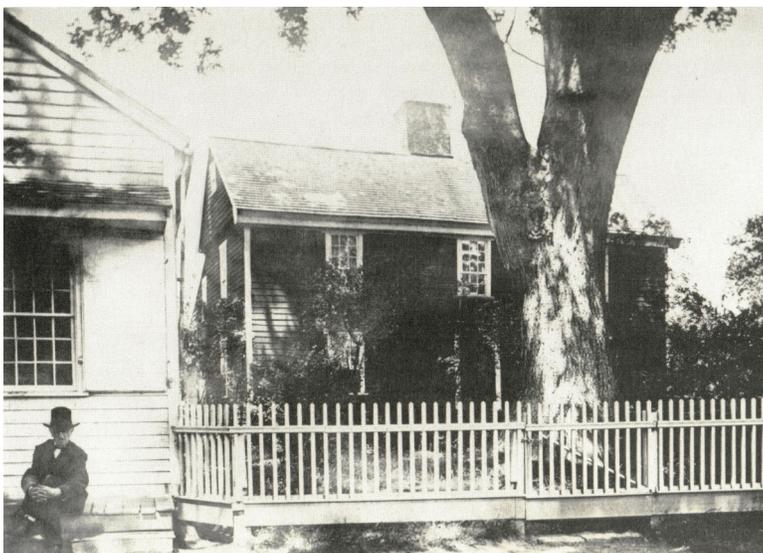
MUSEUM RENOVATIONS CONTINUE A PACE

The Catharine Bunnell Mitchell Museum has been undergoing extensive renovations; the first since 1976. Floors, ceiling, painting, trim, and exhibition cases are all being replaced, repaired, and/or repositioned. The photos at the right, courtesy of Roger Salls, provide some idea of the work underway.

Roger Salls, chairman of our Building Committee, has been directing the construction efforts. Roger, Stephanie Kadam, and Gail Liscio, President, have been spending many long hours at the museum coordinating the removal and storage of the museum's displays, and coordinating the trades people. The hope is to reopen the Museum by Memorial Day.

The Bridgeport Post
September 26, 1976
Stratford Historical Society Reopens Catharine Bunnell Mitchell Museum

MUSEUM REOPENS — In ceremonies on Sept. 12 the Catharine Bunnell Mitchell museum, adjacent to the Capt. David Judson house on Academy hill in Stratford was reopened. It was originally, dedicated on Nov 8, 1959 as the result of a bequest of \$25,000 in the will of Mrs. Catharine Bunnell Mitchell for its construction. However during the 1960s the decision was made to bring the basic interior layout, exhibits and lighting up to date, a task which took six years of painstaking work while the museum remained closed.



The Bridgeport Times and Evening Farmer
April 19, 1922.

...The meeting they say was quite a lively affair. 'Tis said that some of the ladies lost their temper, panned one another, and exchanged pet names, which shoots to pieces the theory of some of the old timers that the women don't know how to behave in politics.

While all this was going on the Seventh district "Civic" association also had a meeting at which several, among them Seymour Wells, are said to have had a lovely panning. "I don't care as long as they keep on coming here to buy their ice cream," says Seymour. "They're all excited now and so I don't get sore. They've got to have somebody to romp on, and it's worth something to know they think of me first." That'ta boy!

Further signs of spring. The screen doors on Seymour Wells' Emporium. Lent being over, political talk is again permitted, with certain restrictions and variations.

Photo to the left is Seymour Wells' home (ice cream proprietor) at 3590 Main Street. Well's store is to the left in the photo.

STRATFORD WOMAN SOLOS SIKORSKY HELICOPTER

First woman pilot to solo a Sikorsky helicopter, Priscilla Handy, 23 of Stratford, stands beside the four-place commercial Sikorsky S-51 after her record-making experience. Miss Handy established another "first" when she became the first helicopter flight test observer of her sex, checking performance of military production models during the war. She is now engaged in special work at the Sikorsky plant.

The Hartford Courant
May 30, 1947

Miss Handy was the daughter of John and Helen Handy of 125 Holmes Street. She was born in 1924 and passed away in 2018. Priscilla graduated from Stratford High School in 1941. She served three tours of duty in the American Embassy in Moscow. She married Sydney Swenson, and refurbished an 18th century home on Sport Hill Road in West Redding, Connecticut. She was the mother of six children.



Happenings continued from page 1.

2022, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm for
students entering Grades 4 –

8. Contact us for more information.

We will be participating in the **Stratford Bird Festival** on Saturday, September 24th with walking tours and presen-

tations.

The **National Helicopter Museum** at the train station is looking for volunteers. If you have time and can lend the museum a hand, please call

(203) 218-4087 or email raymond.jankowich@gmail.com. Former Town Historian, Lewis Knapp, was instrumental in assisting in the start up of the Museum many years ago.



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

www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.org