

# THE CUPHEAG CORNER

VOLUME III, ISSUE 3

DECEMBER 2020



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

## MARK THE DATES:

- January General Membership meeting, Saturday, January 30, 2021, 2:00 pm. Details in the January Cupheag Corner.

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*Happy Holidays from  
The Stratford Historical Society*

## DECEMBER SPECIAL EDITION

I love the photo above. The photo was taken by our former newsletter editor, Dick Steele, in December of 2008. Dick took many wonderful photos which he left to us when he retired as our newsletter editor. I greatly enjoy looking back at these photos remembering happy days gone by, and, most of all, remembering the many great experiences we enjoyed in the company of Dick Steele.

Perhaps, like us, you're feeling that this is a particularly surreal holiday season. Shopping, wrapping, decorating, preparing all seem a bit "over

-the-top" knowing that almost no one will see all the work we've gone to preparing for the holiday season. It caused us to think that during this wretched pandemic it might be helpful if we, here at the Historical Society, could brighten your holidays in some small way.

With that thought in mind, we decided to create this special holiday edition of our newsletter to focus on past holiday seasons. Most notably, we looked at the last time a major pandemic struck our town and our country in 1918. Perhaps the largest town-wide Christmas celebration

ever held was in December of 1917. Nine months later, the "Spanish flu" was ravaging the populations of the earth. How did 1917's Christmas compare to 2019's?

We also thought you may enjoy viewing photos of holiday seasons past and present. We've drawn on photos and newspapers from the past 100 years to find expressions of giving, decorating, and celebrating in Stratford over the years.

Most of all, we just want to say "have a wonderful holiday season!" We look forward to seeing you in person, again, soon!

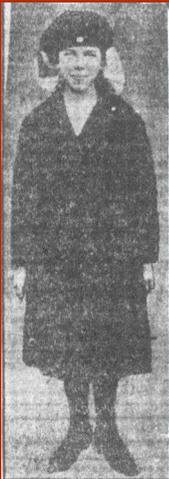
# CELEBRATING BEFORE THE PANDEMIC



Mrs. Richard ("Billy") Howell with Stratford children at Fairfield Beach. *Bridgeport Herald*, August 3, 1919.



Evelyn Pratt. *Bridgeport Herald*, December 9, 1917.



Dorothy Buck. *Bridgeport Herald*, December 9, 1917.

As we face an unusual holiday season, we can't help but wonder what we may have done differently last holiday season had we known this COVID-19 pandemic was "just around the corner."

We then recalled the Christmas season of 1917 in Stratford. The 1917 Christmas celebration in Stratford was the largest and most elaborate up to that time. Would our forbearers have changed anything had they known "the Spanish Flu" of 1918 was to come calling in 9 short months?

In September of 1917, the first recruits had left Stratford for training at military bases around the country. Those same military bases would be the first struck by the 1918 influenza pandemic. There was a great deal of solemnity in town at Christmas time 1917 as residents considered the young men who were about to engage in fierce combat in Europe.

Let's take a look at that 1917 Stratford Christmas celebration. The town-wide celebration was the brain child of one of the town's leading Suffragettes, "Billy" Howell. Like so many of Stratford's suffragettes, women's suffrage was only one of many causes "Billy" championed. She was deeply involved in the betterment of the youth of Stratford, particularly, the materially less fortunate children of Stratford.

**Bridgeport Herald**  
December 9, 1917

## Stratford Boys and Girls Useful Club to Give Town Christmas Tree

EVERYONE JOINING IN

Stratford is all anticipation over its Christmas tree, the first of its kind ever raised in the town. For the past 250 years, there have been Christmas trees, big ones and little ones, but never before has there been one for ALL the children of Stratford, and all the grown-ups too for that matter. Consequently, when the word got around that the little members of the Boys and Girls' Useful club and the Billy Sunshine Useful juniors, were going to have a tree on Academy Hill for EVERYBODY Christmas Eve, Stratford Town sat up and began to take notice.

For a proper understanding of the full significance of the plan something must be known about the little Usefuls whose organizations are referred to in the preceding paragraph. We'll call them "Usefuls" for short because their really, truly names are pretty long, and after all the "useful" is the important part of the title.

The town was always chock-a-block full of Usefuls in short pants and dresses, but nobody seemed to realize this to any great extent until Mrs. Richard Howell got busy and coordinated their usefulness. In other words she fathered a lot of little Usefuls into two organizations where they would all work together toward a common useful purpose.

The older boys and girls were given the name of Boys and Girls' Useful club, and took two mottoes for their guidance for the girls, "Love, Friendship and Sympathy;" for the boys, "By Work and Honor." Miss Dorothy Buck, twelve years old, a Freshman in the Stratford High School, is president.

The two other officers are: Vice-president, Herbert Buck; secretary, Adaline Hammond; treasurer, Walter Goddard; corresponding secretary, Ruth Baldwin.

And now come the juniors. To give the very young boys and girls the same opportunity for usefulness that the B. & G. Usefuls had through their club, the Billy Sunshine Useful Juniors was gotten together. Evelyn Pratt, only eight years old, is president of this group. The vice-president is Elsie Buck; treasurer, Mable Higgins; secretary, Ruth Holcomb.

...Now to get back to the Christmas tree. With Christmas coming on those Usefuls took a peep into their treasury to see how much money they had with which to make Christmas merry for a lot of other children. They found they had \$124. This was enough for a start. What would they do? It was the unanimous opinion that they ought to give the town a Christmas tree, and invite all the children of Stratford to partake in the festivities which went with the tree.

Everybody wanted to help when the idea became known. For once, there were more proffers of assistance than there was need for it. But the selectmen of the town and all the churches begged so hard they were permitted to

do something. The selectmen are going to plant the tree on Academy Hill.

The churches are going to have a "Penny Sunday" one week from today when everybody in Stratford is going to give a penny or more to make the Christmas tree a big success.

The women of Stratford are going to make their fingers fly sewing the cheese-cloth stockings - 2,000 of them - which will be filled with candy and distributed to all the children at the tree, who are twelve years of age or under. The cheese-cloth is already purchased and cut, so the women who want to help in the sewing have only to communicate with Captain Howell and be provided with the unsewed stockings.

The Usefuls have bought the electric lights and wires out of their own money and after the Christmas is through with them for the holidays, the light apparatus will be donated to the town for use at succeeding Christmas-es.

Every child under twelve who attends will be given candy, nuts and an orange.

The time of the affair will be Christmas Eve so that the children can all have a good time, go home and go to bed before Santa Claus arrives. Just when he will arrive nobody knows for sure, but it is known positively that he will not come until every Stratford boy and girl is fast asleep Christmas Eve. If necessary he will stay over in Bridgeport all night waiting for the sandman to close every little peeper in Stratford.

There is a big idea behind this Christmas tree, and the purpose is to give the Usefuls and all other children an impressive example of the Christ-giving spirit for which Christmas really stands, it will be a beautiful symbol of giving, not of getting. Perhaps this thought will be useful to some of the grown-ups, too, who may need it very much more than do the children.

The glorious tree will be a rebuke to selfishness, so long as it stands on Academy Hill. Whether at Christmas Eve or on the Fourth of July it will whisper to all who will listen:

GIVE, GIVE, GIVE.

Read more about this pre-pandemic Christmas of 1917 on our website at [www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.stratfordhistoricalsociety.org).

# JUDSON HOUSE HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

The Historical Society has had several holiday open houses over the years. The Judson House and the Catharine Bunnell Museum have welcomed friends and families to visit during the month of December. Hopefully, you'll enjoy reliving two of those Open Houses from 2008 and 2016.

## 2008



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## 2016



# HOLIDAY DECORATING CONTEST

Since 2014 the Stratford Beautification Committee has hosted a Holiday Decorating Contest for home owners and businesses throughout town. In the spirit of this holiday season, we thought you might enjoy viewing the winners of the contest over the past few years. You may view the winners of this year's contest at [www.townofstratford.com/holidaydecoratingcontest](http://www.townofstratford.com/holidaydecoratingcontest).



"Over the Top" award - 378 North Abrams

## 2014



1st Place award - 91 Lynncrest Drive



2nd Place award - 3910 Main Street



"Over the Top" award - 92 Blamey Circle

## 2015



1st place award - 130 Brinsmayd Ave



2nd place award - 275 Seabreeze Dr.



3rd place award - 114 William Street

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"Over the Top" award - 70 William Street

## 2016



1st Place award - 91 Lynncrest Drive



2nd Place award - 676 Robin Lane



3rd Place award - 38 Lynncrest Drive



"Over the Top" award - 24 Highland Terrace

## 2017



1st place award - 530 Wigwam Lane



3rd place award (tie) - 1649 Nichols Avenue



2nd place award - 50 Morningside Dr



3rd place award (tie) - 310 Flagler Ave

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## 2018



"Over the Top" award - 25 Valley View Road



1st Place award - 20 Sheffield Drive



2nd Place award - 340 Wigwam Lane



3rd Place award - 77 Allyndale Dr



"Over the Top" award - 84 Allyndale Dr

## 2019



1st place award - 1584 Main St



2nd place award - 404 Curtis Ave



3rd place award (tie) - 137 Ryegate Terrace

# NEWSPAPER PHOTOS FROM CHRISTMAS PAST



Christmas services in Stratford churches. Photo from the *The Stratford News*, December 23, 1954.



Raybestos Christmas party. Raybestos VP Robert Davis, Deborah Nield, and Bobby D'Olier with Santa. Photo from the *Sunday Herald*, December 17, 1950.

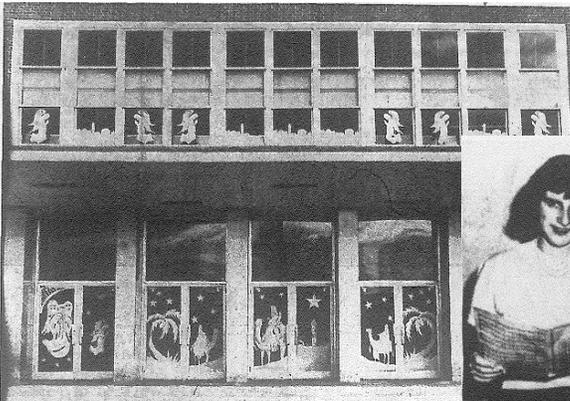


Play at the Christmas Fair of the First Congregational Church. *The Stratford News*, December 1, 1955.

*The Stratford News*, December 23, 1917.



President Hamilton Merrill of Manning, Maxwell & Moore greet Brenda and Albert Kazmierzak with Santa. *Sunday Herald*, December 14, 1952.



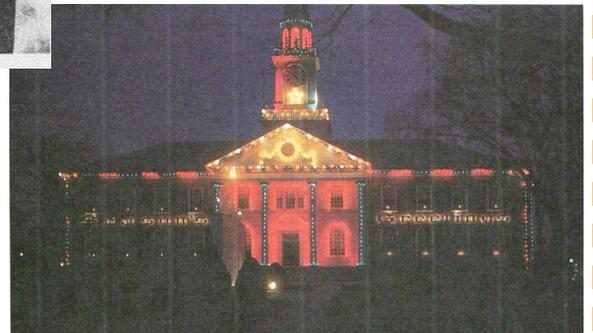
David Wooster Junior High decorated for Christmas. *The Stratford News*, December 17, 1953.



Elizabeth Turro and Gary Weller in Christmas program at Johnson Junior High. *The Stratford News*, December 16, 1954.



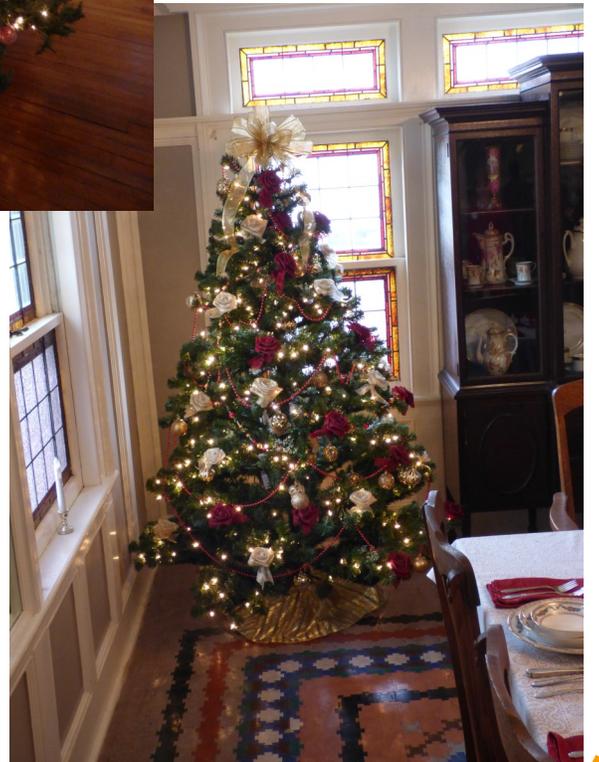
Stratford High Christmas Dance. *Sunday Herald*, December 26, 1954.



Town Hall decorated for Christmas 1989. *In Pursuit of Paradise*, 1989.

# BOOTHE PARK 2018 AND 2019

Stratford has so much beauty, and one of its most beautiful assets is Boothe Memorial Park. During the 2018 and 2019 Christmas seasons, the Friends of Boothe Park beautifully decorated the Boothe homestead. We have a hunch that Steven and David Boothe would have wanted to congratulate the Friends of Boothe Park for a job well done!



# STRATFORD CHRISTMASSES PAST



Holiday Tree at Paradise Green, December 2010.



Stratford Town Hall, December 2010.



Stratford Center, December 2010.



Garbage Museum Holiday Tree on West Broad Green, December 2010.

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!*

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