



## Main Street — Early 20th century

by Stratford Historical Society

At the start of the 20th century, Stratford Center had 20 buildings. Paradise Green had none.

The Center became the place to meet and conduct business. Farmers traded news or used the town's public telephone at L.H. Todd & Company, while businessmen went into Polley's Barbershop down the street for their daily shave, then crossed the bridge at Tanner's Brook to the bakery for cakes, or to the post office for their mail that just arrived on the morning train.

At the north end of the block the undertaker shared a building with a grocery store, and the ice house stood conveniently behind.

Main Street was oiled and moderately dust free. Oil lamps lighted the scene at night. Closed trolley cars ran up the road. Hitching posts were plentiful for teams, and motorcars were starting to appear.

Water mains were newly laid beneath the street and soon electric lighting would be here. Everything was up-to-date in Stratford Center.

Paradise Green was pastoral, literally. Everyday the milkman came. Larry Spamer delivered milk in his wagon. Webb Brothers delivered ice. A cardboard sign placed in the front window of each house told the iceman what size to cut. In midsummer the kids all rushed to eat the chips as the iceman cut the blocks to size.

The ragman made periodic rounds to buy old paper, rags, bottles, tinfoil, and batteries. This was recycling and it paid off. The kerosene man sold lamp oil to householders without electric lights from a wagon with a wooden tank.

The scissors grinder had a small two wheeled pushcart. Mr. Treadwell, the Watkins man, came by car with spices and extracts and so did Mr. Robinson, the insurance man, who showed up every Monday during washing to collect a quarter and to trade news. Eventually the horse-drawn wagons gave way to cars and trucks, and then home delivery ended altogether.

By 1940, Paradise Green was built up. A solid block of stores appeared. With twice the population of 20 years before, the town expanded north, and Paradise Green was a major business center.

Stratford Center wasn't standing still. In 1919, Harold Lovell sponsored the largest building yet, a three story brick structure containing stores, offices, and apartments.

In 1924, Al Pickus opened the Stratford Theater across the street, with wooden seats and pressed-tin ceiling. It offered silent films, with piano accompaniment. In 1930, sound films arrived.

To read more about our town see *In Pursuit of Paradise*, by Lewis Knapp sold by the Stratford Historical Society. In honor of the town's 375 anniversary the book is \$25 with