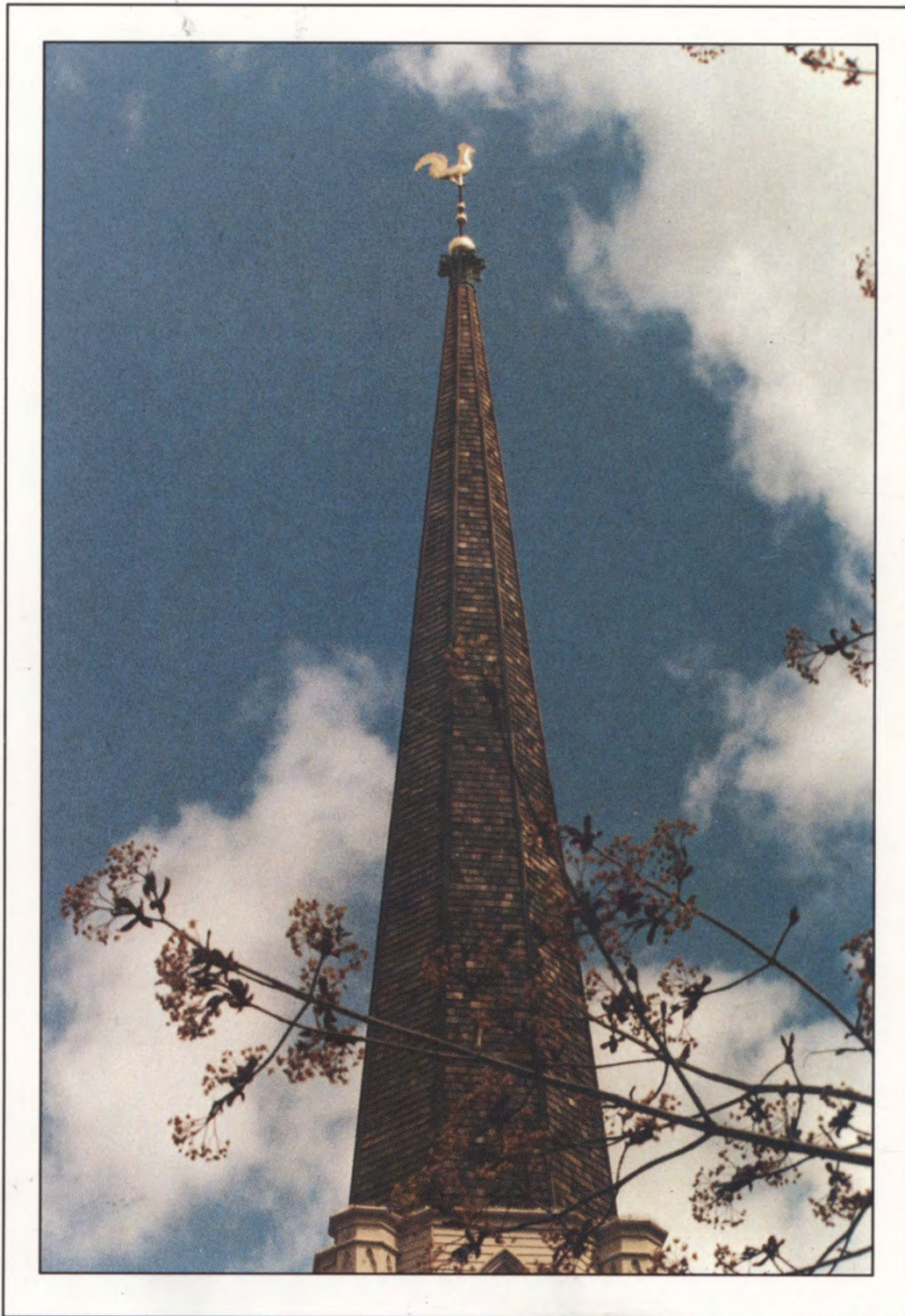


A WALK THROUGH TIME



Walking Tours of Stratford, Connecticut

By Barbara M. Sirois

**A
WALK
THROUGH
TIME**

**Walking
Tours
of
Stratford,
Connecticut
U.S.A.**

AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

*"It seems like only yesterday,
Yet now so painfully far away,
When I would sit beside your knee,
And about our Town you would teach me."*

In loving memory of My Mother,
Helen E. Mazzadra

Who inspired in me a love and pride in
Stratford—the place I will always call home.

Written and developed by Barbara M. Sirois
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Yes, you can have it all.

History, culture, romance, adventure, mystery, nature.

A magical mingling of the old with the new.

Where?

In Stratford, Connecticut, USA.

Come explore and discover.



Let us share with you
the treasures of a
Town For All Seasons

CLASSICConnecticut
The pride of New England.

INTRODUCTION

Located on the Eastern edge of Fairfield County, Stratford is a coastal New England community of 51,000 residents, comprising 18.7 square miles, enjoying a varied climate of vibrant changing seasons with summer temperatures averaging 82 degrees F. and winter averages of 41 degrees F. The town stretches for some 8 miles along the Housatonic River, and for at least 200 years, this waterway was a main highway for trade and transportation.

The community's colonial history is traced to the year 1639, when a courageous group of settlers arrived at Mac's Harbor on the banks of the Housatonic River. This was the Indian Village of Cupheag. According to town records, Cupheag was first called Stratford in April of 1643. Though there is little historical data to allow us to determine the exact origin of the name, it is traditionally assumed that one Thomas Alsop was among the first group of settlers who came to America in 1639. John Alsop, Thomas' father, and William Shakespeare were supposedly both from the same parish of the Town of Stratford-upon-Avon in England, and both were taxed by the Crown according to his individual worth. From the foregoing, it may reasonably be deduced that our Stratford was so named after the great playwright's own town of Stratford-upon-Avon.

Stratford takes great pride in its heritage—from its first settlers to the brave immigrants who followed in later years — from its sparkling seashore to its rolling countryside —it is steeped in history and rich in natural beauty. It is one of the few communities in the entire nation to own its own forest, and it proudly keeps watch over the magnificent "Great Meadows"—the last great salt marsh left in New England. A special town of unique diversity transcended into a homogeneous melding, Stratford *is* quintessential New England.

We invite you to stay awhile—imagine and dream with us.

*Perhaps if we can learn from the past,
it will help to better understand the present,
and illuminate for us the future.*

The Academy Hill Walk

(1 1/2 hours)



1 CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH (2000 Main Street)

This parish is the oldest in the first diocese outside the British Isles. The gothic building you see before you (the third such Episcopal Church constructed in Stratford) was designed by Architect Henry Dudley in 1857. On November 3, the cornerstone was laid. Nearby was also put the cornerstone of its predecessor (which occupied a site just North of the present Church) dated 1743. The cost of the new building was about \$16,000 and on July 29, 1858, the consecration took place.

Although the Church of England was the State Church at home, Connecticut's Colonists established the Puritan Church by law as their State Church. In so doing, every free man (regardless of his faith) had to pay taxes to support that Church. Church of England people objected to that, and Stratford became the first town in the Colony to permit the taxes of Episcopalians to go to their own Church. In 1723, the Rev. Samuel Johnson (father of Stratford's most famous son, William Samuel Johnson) began as a Missionary from the London Diocese. The first church was erected near the present location of the cemetery on the common, with the permission of the Congregationalist townspeople and, on Christmas Day, 1724, the first services were held. Although Town records indicate that the tax was redirected in 1738, the Congregational Church remained the State Church until 1818.

Take special note of the golden rooster weather-vane perched atop the Church. Almost six feet high, it was first mounted on the steeple of the second Church in 1743. It was during the Winter of 1757-58, at the time of the French and Indian War, that Colonel Frasier's Highland Battalion made their camp on the common (in the rear of the Church). As the great rooster looked down upon the encampment, some of the men used it for target practice, piercing it many times. Look carefully at the rooster's tail and you will see where they hit their mark, nearly a quarter of a millennium ago.



The ancient weather-vane atop the Christ Episcopal Church

2 THE STRATFORD TUNNELS

One of the most intriguing mysteries of Stratford's early days involves stories of a network of underground tunnels, secret rooms, hidden spaces and sub-basements. Lifelong residents relate stories of tunnels that they heard back when they were young children exploring and growing up in this Town. Some senior residents even talk about playing in tunnels, being initiated into clubs in "spooky" underground tunnels, and yet always wondering why they were there and how they came about in the first place.

Today, we cannot find the tunnels to explore first-hand—perhaps they were closed off intentionally in the interest of safety—perhaps they collapsed through time—perhaps they merely vanished into the past. We can only speculate on what appears to be a sub-basement in a house or about those strange areas we find in basement foundation walls that look like they might have been doorways (now filled in with stone and concrete)—were they doorways leading to those elusive tunnels? And exactly for what purpose did they exist?

Some say they were created to help villagers escape from unfriendly Indians. Originating in the basements of area homes, the tunnels supposedly led to an area affording protection at Academy Hill which was once surrounded by a stockade fence.

Or, could tunnels have been used for smuggling? Perhaps that would explain the reason for sub-basements, too, particularly in seamen's houses.

Others speak of a connection with the "underground railroad." Though not really meant to imply subterranean, this name was used in the United States before the Civil War to designate the "system" adopted by people in the North to aid fugitive slaves in escaping their masters. The plan designated certain routes and listed houses at convenient intervals, known as stations, where slaves were conducted or conveyed from one point to the next.

History records much bitterness between the abolitionists and the non-abolitionists. Town records tell of an actual attack made with rotten eggs at one meeting of the abolitionists resulting in arrests and a highly emotional and well-attended trial. A letter in the archives of the Stratford Historical Society clearly expresses one attitude. Written prior to the Civil War, a Mrs. Benjamin asks a Southern friend to find her a slave and send her North, so overwhelmed was she with

the burdens of a large household. And yet, we see another side, as we read from an article appearing in the New York Times, dated Sunday, July 29, 1866 (page 8), in which the reporter states that one "Seymour Curtis, who is only one of some 75 persons who bear that honored name in the small population of Stratford, used to be the agent of the underground railroad at this point."

Or, was the true purpose none of the above but one not yet discovered? Is it to remain forever hidden in the mists of time and history? Indeed, we may never know for certain if, when, where or why. The questions remain—for now we can only imagine the answers.

3 THE JUDSON HOUSE (967 Academy Hill)

This house dates to about 1750. It was built by Captain David Judson on what is believed to be part of the original foundation of pioneer settler William Judson's stone house. Some say William may have come to Stratford in 1638, a year before the arrival of the "first settlers" in 1639. This historic house and the adjoining Catharine Bunnell Mitchell Museum are the home of the Stratford Historical Society and are open to the public.

The Stratford Historical Society was founded in 1925 to record and preserve the history of Stratford and to exhibit historical material to townspeople and other interested persons. The Society maintains the Captain David Judson House (listed on the National Register of Historic Places) and the Catharine B. Mitchell Museum.

Restoration of this fine old Colonial homestead to its 18th century condition has been a volunteer project, with expert advice from professional antiquarians and architectural historians. Note the pedimented front door containing bulls-eye glass (*below*).



The Museum houses several permanent exhibits depicting the early history of the Town of Stratford and other temporary exhibits used to display portions of the Society's large collection of artifacts.

Tours are conducted by guides in Colonial costume. You are invited to step back in time into the 18th Century as you enjoy the well-preserved colonial, center chimney, post and beam house with its furniture and household equipment of the period.

The exhibits in the Mitchell Museum introduce you to the early history of Stratford and its relation to the growth of the Connecticut Colony.

The Society offers special events and programs year-round. The House and Museum are open for regular visitation hours from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday from mid-April through October. Special group tours are given by volunteers trained as docents, by appointment. The office is open all year on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m.

**4 CAPTAIN D. PULASKI BENJAMIN HOUSE
(923 Academy Hill)**

Built about 1825, Captain D. Pulaski Benjamin and his wife Susan lived here. Benjamin, a Lieutenant in the Revolution, was a Sea Captain of note. He was the last surviving American prisoner of the infamous Dartmoor Prison in Devonshire, England, having been captured by the British on Christmas Day in 1812. Dartmoor Prison was built in 1809 for the custody of French prisoners of war. The British captured about 2,500 American sailors during the War of 1812, confining them in this prison until peace was concluded. Captain Benjamin returned home in 1815 and he married Susan thereafter. He was a record-breaking Ship's Captain in the China trade and in 1845 broke a transpacific record on the bark Helena.

5 ACADEMY HILL

This "common" land was the center of most of the Town's activities for some 200 years. Encompassing approximately 6 acres, it served as the location of the watchtower, town meetings, training and display of the Colony's soldiers, military encampments, churches, schools, monuments, and was, in essence, the pulse of the community.

It was first called Watch House Hill, during Stratford's infancy, so named for the tower that stood at the North end of the settlement's stockade (about where the Soldier's and Sailor's Monument now stands). It was surrounded by a fort, or palisade, of split logs and posts some eight to ten feet high which had been constructed for protection around this early settlement.

The early settlers' fear of the Indians dissipated in time. However, despite the bounties or premiums offered by both the laws of the Colony, as well as special Town offerings, wolves were a continual problem to the early settlers of Stratford from the time of their arrival in 1639 and for more than a century thereafter. In fact, the intensity of the problem with the wolves was such that by vote of the Town meeting on April 17, 1693, a massive wolf hunt was organized. Although such intense effort undoubtedly alleviated the situation somewhat, if only temporarily, Town records continued to show references to this problem.

The name of the common was later changed to Meeting House Hill when the Town's second meeting house was built here in 1680. And finally, when the Stratford Academy opened, it became known as Academy Hill.

Now atop the hill, in the vicinity of where the Watch House once stood, sits the Soldier's and Sailor's Monument. Originally conceived to commemorate those who fought in the Civil War, it was dedicated on October 3, 1889 at a Town-wide celebration in honor of Stratford's 250th anniversary. The special dedication ceremony was part of an elaborate and beautifully orchestrated day of activities brimming with patriotic speeches, a parade, historical exhibitions, and culminating with a spectacular display of fireworks. Close to ten thousand people attended the festivities.

The statue was designed by the Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport and erected at a total cost of \$3,700. It stands some 35 feet high, is 8 feet square at the base, and is a representation of the "Color Sergeant in Defense of the Stars and Stripes." It is considered unique in that it is made entirely of metal and is believed to be the only such one in the State of Connecticut. It is made of "white bronze" with a zinc compound which gives the statue a distinctive bluish cast.

As the monument approached the century mark, it was given a complete renovation and restoration and fittingly rededicated on Veteran's Day, November 11, 1987. The

statue honors not only 160 Stratford men who served in the Civil War, but also 176 in the War of 1812 and 194 volunteers in the Revolutionary War.

Notice the small Oak tree near the curb in front of the monument. It is a grandchild of the Great Charter Oak. You can also see its aunt (or uncle) standing beside the burial site of Reverend Samuel Johnson and his son, William Samuel Johnson, just down the hill in the Old Episcopal Burying Ground.

Also on the hill is a monument to the Vietnam War, which was erected in 1985. The names of 3 Army soldiers, 3 Marines, and 1 Air Force officer are inscribed on the handsome marble base, along with these familiar words:

"That these dead shall not have died in vain. That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that this government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

— A. Lincoln"

We also find here a flag pole dedicated to the defense of New York against William of Orange in 1673.

And so it is only fitting that here on the hill, at the "common" land, the Town pays tribute to those here noted and to all of its patriots, who bravely pledged themselves to the spirit of freedom. Stratford salutes them and promises to forever remember.



Company K, 8th Regiment, Connecticut National Guard on Academy Hill in 1870.

6 OLD EPISCOPAL BURYING GROUND

The first Episcopal Church in Connecticut was erected here in 1723, surrounded by a burial ground. The Church is gone now—only the weathered stones remain in the old churchyard marking the memory of its parishioners. The memorial gates and bronze tablet at the entrance were the gift of Columbia University in honor of the memories of two of Stratford's most famous native sons who lie buried within—Reverend Samuel Johnson and his son William Samuel Johnson. They lie side by side at the Southeast corner of the yard.

Read the gravestones for historical interest—there are many familiar names. Mrs. Mary Wells Roosevelt, a great-aunt of President Theodore Roosevelt, is buried here. Another is in memory of Captain George Dowdall, of the ship *Ajax*, who died of the plague in Canton in 1829. Only three years before, his father-in-law, Matthias Nicholl had built for him the large mansion on Elm Street that became famous for the "Stratford Knockings" (See page 38). General Matthias Nicholl was the great-grandson of the Honorable Matthias Nicholl, Mayor of New York in 1672.

**7 THE PARSONAGE
(956 Broad Street)**

This Swiss chalet style house was built in 1859. It is one of the very few non-ecclesiastical buildings designed by Church Architect Leopold Eidlitz of New York. He designed it for William A. Booth, also of New York, who leased the building to The Ecclesiastical Society for one dollar per year for use as a parsonage and eventually sold it to the Society below cost. Eidlitz designed this house at the same time he designed the Congregational Church.

**8 THE EDWARD CURTIS HOUSE
(2134 Elm Street)**

For many years, the assumption was that this intriguing house was built in about 1785. However, work done on the interior by the present owners in the past few years has convinced them that it was built much earlier, in approximately 1745. It is believed to have been built by Edward Curtis here at what was then the corner of Front and New Lane (now the corner of Elm and Broad Streets). Edward Curtis died before the house was completed, and his nephew Henry Curtis finished what his uncle had set out to do.

The house remained in the Curtis family until 1981 when it was purchased by the present owners. Its mystifying tilt is believed by its current owners to have been caused by two earthquakes—the first in 1747. Following this quake, they believe the house had already begun shifting to some angle since the paneling and staircases were installed to fit those angles the house had assumed. A second quake which occurred in 1813 (reported to be America's greatest earthquake) is believed responsible for further tilting the house, at which time the present clapboard was installed to replace oak clapboard damaged in the earthquake. It is further believed that the pond behind this house at one time brought the water's edge up to the adjacent yard and that the ground upon which this homestead is built is of a very loose nature, thereby also factors that would make this particular house so vulnerable to earth movement.

The interior of the house shows a progression of improvements culminating in a north front parlor done in an early federal style for the celebration of the marriage of Katharine Curtis to Peter Brooks in the year 1830.

9 **LT. GOV. DAVID PLANT HOUSE**
(2149 Elm Street)

This house, at the corner of Broad and Elm Streets, was built by Lt. Governor David Plant in 1825. It is located on the site of an old salt-box homestead and wheelwright's shop of Solomon Plant (the father of David Plant). The old wheelwright shop now serves as the kitchen on the North side of the present house. It is believed that all the spinning wheels in Fairfield County during a period of fifty years were either made or repaired upon this very site. Some of those very wheels which Solomon made are now in the possession of the Stratford Historical Society and are on view at the Judson House.

Lt. Governor Plant was an outstanding political leader in Connecticut and in 1842 became the first Judge of the Stratford Probate Court on its creation as a separate Probate District. According to his descendant, Mrs. Frank Scott Bunnell, the style of this house was influenced by Plant's friend and Yale classmate John C. Calhoun, that distinguished Southern statesman admired as a great orator who became Vice President.

**10 GENERAL WALKER HOUSE
(2175 Elm Street)**

It is believed that this lean-to (saltbox) may hold the honor of being the oldest house in Town (rivaled only by the Perry Homestead), having been built possibly as early as 1690. Old records provide insufficient information to make a positive determination as to just which homestead predates which. Therefore, we actually have "two oldest houses in town."

The General Walker House originally stood on Main Street just North of the Center and was surrounded by eight acres upon which flourished a fruit orchard, many different varieties of berries, and a garden of beautiful flowers bordered by broad walkways leading to and covering the spot where the railroad is now located. On the Southeast corner of the property stood General Walker's tannery, thus giving its name to Tanner's Brook.

In 1934, when the house was being used as Travis' Feed Store, it was moved to its present location by Sterling H. Bunnell. It became the residence of Raymond Baldwin, the only man since Jonathan Trumbull to hold the offices of Governor, Senator, and Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court.

Notice the overhang between the two main stories of the house and another at the attic floor—a feature found only in the earliest of New England homes, and predating the time the house was converted into a saltbox.

**11 THE SEDGWICK HOUSE
(797 East Broadway)**

This house was built in 1852. It was the home of Professor Frederick A. Sedgwick. The Professor arrived in Stratford in the Fall of 1847, having already established for himself an excellent reputation as an educator. His dedication and leadership at the Stratford Academy soon brought high accolades for this school. In recognition of his outstanding work, Mr. Sedgwick, although not a graduate of any college, was the recipient of an M.A. Degree bestowed upon him, completely unsolicited, by Yale College. So dedicated to his role as teacher was he that for many years after retiring from the Academy, Sedgwick kept a private school right here at his own home.

12 POSTAL SYSTEM/POST ROAD (Elm and East Broadway)

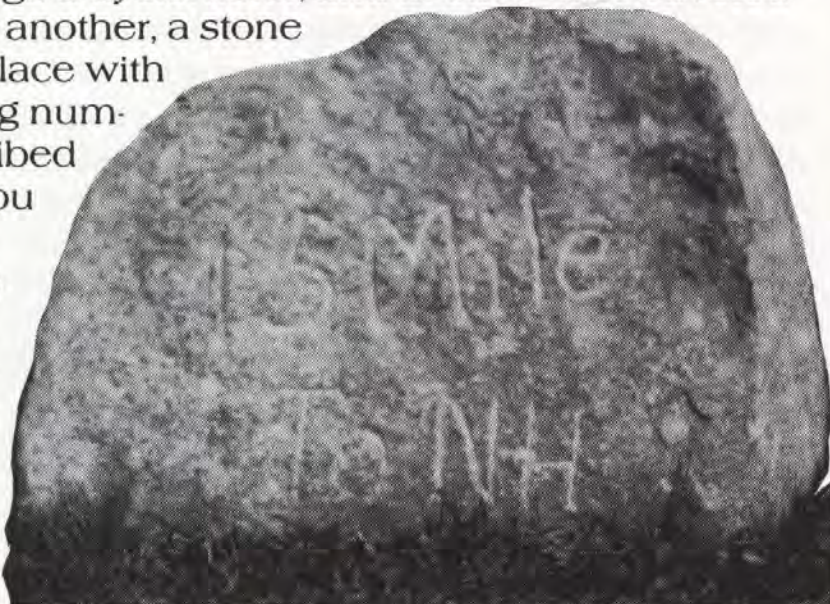
There is no doubt that a variety of systems for the conveyance of communications among individuals have been utilized since antiquity. However, the first systematic institution to have charge of written messages was established by the Roman Empire. Couriers were stationed to bear dispatches at intervals along the roads of Rome. These places were known as "posts"—thus, the term generally applied by nations throughout the world in connection with their particular "postal" system.

Here on the island in the middle of the street where Elm meets East Broadway stands a post with a plaque denoting the Old King's Highway which led to Moses Wheeler's ferry across the Housatonic. It reads thus:

"This tablet marks Ye Olde King's Highway which follows in general Indian trails and is the oldest mail route in America—the first post rider made the trip from New York to Boston in 1673."

It was actually in 1639 that the General Court of Massachusetts established the first post office in America. Then, in 1672, Governor Lovelace established the first post road between New York and Boston. The mail made one round trip each month until 1705 when the round trips were increased to twice a month.

There were many changes and improvements to the system in the years that followed, but Benjamin Franklin was the first Postmaster General to make the system a success. Legend tells us that Franklin measured the post road by affixing to his carriage a cyclometer; and at each mile traveled from one point to another, a stone would be set in place with the corresponding number of miles inscribed upon it. Today, you can still see two of the milestones reportedly set in place by this Colonial Postmaster here in Stratford. Located on the



*"15 Miles To NH"
milestone*

right, mid-way up the hill on West Broad Street (past the traffic light), you will see a stone inscribed "15 miles to N.H.," thus marking the distance to New Haven. Another of these mile-stones can be found on the triangular green where East Broadway meets Ferry Boulevard. It is located in about the middle of the green facing Southwest (across from 576 East Broadway). The inscription, though extremely weathered and worn, reads "14 miles to N.H."

By April 21, 1775, when Stratford's own post rider Ebenezer Hurd rode through town with the news of Lexington and Concord, the King's Highway ran along New Land and up Clapboard Hill (now Broad and West Broad) to Old Mill and Fairfield Town.

In 1789, Levi Pease began a stage line along this very route, which lasted until the railroad arrived in 1849. The early coach was not the Concord coach we think of but rather was a four-seated wagon, accommodating eleven passengers and a driver. The only seat with a back was the rear seat, but the sides were enclosed in the wintertime by leather flaps, and to reach the rear seat, one had to climb all the way from the front.

13 THE STRATFORD GRADED SCHOOL

On Monday morning, September 14, 1885, the Stratford Graded School, also known as the Consolidated School, opened here in the Center of Town replacing most of the one-room school-houses scattered about the community. This was a significant step in the Town's educational system development. Its cost was approximately \$21,000 including "the new building, the lot, out-buildings, fences, grading, furniture and heating apparatus." It housed all grades through high school. It was three stories high and had a tall bell tower used to call the volunteer firemen. On the night of February 19, 1921, the building was completely gutted by a calamitous fire.

Until Stratford High School was completed for the Class of 1925, all classes were held wherever space was available. The old school was rebuilt as the two-story building you now see at 1000 East Broadway (13A) and was used as the Center Grade School until 1970, with the opening of a new modern facility at 55 Sutton Avenue (13B), which was constructed behind it. Built into the front facade of this new building is the bell that originally hung in the bell tower of that first school. The old school was renovated and since the mid 1970's has housed the Board of Education and School Administration.

**14 THE NATIONAL HELICOPTER MUSEUM
(2840 Main Street)**

The National Helicopter Museum came into existence in 1977. It is the only museum in the country devoted exclusively to the history of the helicopter industry, honoring Stratford as the birthplace of the American helicopter industry. Today, Stratford continues the tradition, serving as home to two major contributors to the aircraft industry—the Sikorsky Aircraft Division of United Technologies and Textron Lycoming.

The Museum chronicles the history of helicopter development through a permanent pictorial exhibit. In addition to other special changing exhibits pertaining to helicopter related studies, the Museum also chronicles Stratford's role in such historic events as the development and building of the Corsair, which played such an important role in World War II.

The Museum is open to the public from Memorial Day through October. Visitors are welcome daily (except Monday) from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The building which serves as home for the National Helicopter Museum is itself also of historical interest. This was the Eastbound Railroad Station built by New York and New Haven Railroad about 1848. It was originally located on what is now Linden Avenue, but was moved in 1905 during Charles Mellen's 4 tracking of the railroad. This is the building in Edward Lamson Henry's painting entitled "The 9:45 Accommodation, Stratford, Connecticut" in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (although much modified after a fire in 1882).



The first flight of the VS-300, the world's first practical helicopter, on September 14, 1939. At the controls is its inventor, Igor I. Sikorsky.

**15 THE H.C. LOVELL HARDWARE
& EQUIPMENT CO., INC.
(2419 Main Street)**

This family owned business has been in continuous operation in Stratford Center since 1783, when it was originally known as The L.H. Todd Co. The building it presently occupies was constructed in 1919.

The Center has been a Town focal point since Colonial times. The intersection of Main and East Broadway, once called Ferry Road, then School Street, has been marked by a liberty pole (flagpole), horse watering trough, flower urn, street-light, and since 1986 by a flagpole once again, dedicated to the memory of Harold C. Lovell, Sr., father of the present operators of The H.C. Lovell Hardware & Equipment Co., Inc.

**16 FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
(2301 Main Street)**

This is the fifth such structure of the First Congregational Society. The very first such structure in Stratford was a meetinghouse that was built around 1640 at Sandy Hollow. At the time of its construction, the architecture of this present building was considered quite innovative. It was designed by Leopold Eidlitz, outstanding 19th Century creator of Victorian Gothic churches. In the late 1950's, pseudo colonial trim was substituted on the front door and the steeple, but the original design is still evident in the pitch of the roof, the beautiful rose window above the door and the entrance on the South side.

Dedication services for this building were held on Thursday, October 27, 1859. Imagine if you will the large crowd in attendance that day on which the dedication took place. More than 900 people had gathered. It was probably a typical New England Autumn day with a bit of a chill in the air. They listened attentively and wondered at the future as the pastor read thusly:

"Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number. Lo, he goeth by me and I see him not; he passeth on also and I perceive him not."

—Job, 9th Chapter, 10th and 11th Verses.

17 THE DAVID BROOKS HOMESTEAD
(2288 Main Street)

This house was built in 1715 and became the home of Postmaster David Brooks in 1790. It was at this homestead that the stagecoach would stop on its daily trip from New York to parts East of Stratford. A little store to the South served as the village Post Office. Brooks was Postmaster from 1803 to 1857.

18 STERLING HOUSE
(2283 Main Street)

This house was completed by Sea Captain John Sterling's son in the year 1886. The first John Sterling bought the property many years before and lived in a house which stood in the front of the lot close to the street.

Lawyer/Businessman John W. Sterling, Jr. built the present house for his mother and sisters. This large romanesque mansion of some 30 rooms was designed by Architect Bruce Price, who also designed Osborne Hall and Welch Hall at Yale University. The drawings were made by Sterling's brother-in-law Rufus Bunnell. These drawings are now on view in the dining room of the mansion.

The property initially boasted 8 beautifully landscaped acres, which were originally laid out by Frederick Law Olmstead, Landscape Architect of New York's Central Park. In 1932, the grounds were revised by Landscape Architect Charles Downing Lay.

Notice the Gargoyle on the peak of the side roof. These fanciful yet bizarre stone figures were used to adorn the upper corners of many gothic cathedrals and palaces of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They are unusual half-human/half-animal or birdlike stone figures originally designed to function as water-spouts, projecting from a roof gutter to throw rainwater clear of a building. Nowadays any grotesquely carved figure is considered a Gargoyle. Sterling House's Gargoyle represents a winged dragon (*right*).



John Sterling, Jr. was Yale University's greatest benefactor. In his will in 1918, he left \$25-30 million to the school, the most ever received by any college to that date. Sterling's gift made possible the Graduate School, the Law School building, the Sterling Chemistry Lab, the Sterling Hall of Medicine, the Sterling Library, and eighteen Sterling Professorships. All of this was from earned income acquired through his own efforts; his father Sea Captain John Sterling had bequeathed him only \$17,000.

In 1931, John's surviving sister Cordelia left the property to the Town for use as a Community Center. Renovations were then accomplished and Sterling House has been so utilized since 1932. Today, serving as a focal point for educational and community activities for residents of all ages, Sterling House is a hub of activity and a great asset to Stratford's community life.

Thanks to the efforts of many individuals, outstanding among which has been the leadership and dedication of Mary Hardy, Sterling House's Executive Director for many years, Cordelia Sterling's wish has, indeed, come true—*"to see our home developed to the greatest possible usefulness to Stratford."*

Sterling House is open from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Monday through Friday—on Saturday until 5:00 p.m. It is closed on Sunday. Hours are curtailed during the winter. Visitors are very much welcome.

19 OLD CONGREGATIONAL BURYING GROUND

Before Stratford was 40 years old, the small first graveyard surrounding the Meeting House at Sandy Hollow was full to overflowing, and this cemetery (tucked away toward the back of the Stratford Library), was consecrated at the edge of the village. Town records document the formal action taken in setting aside this hallowed ground and we read in Volume 1, Page 76, this entry: "The Townsmen this present 13 February, 1678 and by Town Order have laid out one acre of land on the West end of John Beers his homelot, for the use of a burying place, bounded East with John Beers his homelot and common land, South, West and North with common land, by verbal information from those that laid it out, and recorded in their presence, this 13 February, 1678. —Joseph Curtis, Recorder."

The old burying ground remained this size until 1802. An addition was made at this time, with another about 1850.

It is an ancient place now filled with memories of life—its trials and tribulations—in those days long ago. Step back in time as you read the words and ponder their meaning. See the fieldstone marker of Moses Wheeler, Stratford's first ferryman, who died a centenarian in 1698 (the first centenarian white man in New England in fact). Read the poignant poems for children dead of the plague, and note the stones placed in remembrance of those who died at sea. Captain William Booth, David Booth, Isaac Booth, all drowned in Boston Bay on October 18, 1810; Captain Abijah Blakeman lost at sea on his passage from Bermuda to New Providence in August 1807; or Captain John Barlow who merits an eight line poem. The sea—so important in those days to their life—so tragic in their death.

**20 THE STRATFORD LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
(2203 Main Street)**

Local chronicles tell us that Stratford's very first library was organized in 1800, having its home in the store and post office of one David Brooks. It functioned well for some years with assistance from several interested townsfolk, but the collection of books was eventually divided among the parties involved.

Next came the formation of the Stratford Library Company which included such leaders as David P. Judson, Captain John Sterling, and Samuel W. Johnson. Having amassed quite a collection of books, the location was shifted from one building to another. Finding the right place was apparently a problem, for eventually the books were sold at public auction.

Finally, in 1864, Company K of the Connecticut National Guard collected a considerably valuable library which was kept in the Armory. Many community leaders were involved in this undertaking and after a few years the collection was entrusted to the care of a committee of women who organized "The Book Club" and set about to expand and ensure the goals of this organization. For 10—12 years, The Book Club was located in the home of Miss Selina Brooks. It was subsequently shifted to a few other locations until the collection was finally put in storage until the winter of 1885 when the organization known as the Stratford Library Association opened in Mr. Watson Smith's store. It was moved once more after that and, then, at last in the early spring of 1894, work began on what would become the permanent home for

the Stratford Library. The building was a gift to the Town from Birdseye Blakeman.

The Library building, which was completed and opened in 1896, is now part of a recently renovated and greatly enlarged Library. The original portion now serves as the Community Room. The original building is of Romanesque Architecture—notice especially its unique tile roof. It was designed by Architect William H. Miller of Ithaca, New York, and built of granite from a quarry in Gouverneur, New York. Judge Robert H. Russell's home had to be moved from the site to Elm Street to make way for the Library. His daughter, Frances B. Russell, was Head Librarian from its opening in 1896 until the 1960's and, coincidentally, her office was located in the new building exactly where her bedroom had been positioned in the house that had to be moved. The Stratford Library, like the New York Public Library, is still a State chartered private corporation, although it is 95% funded by the Town.

In 1924, the Sterling Memorial Building was constructed South of the Library by the Sterling Family children in memory of their father, Captain John Sterling. This building was to be used by the Town, and because it was managed by the American Legion, it also came to be known as Legion Hall. Native Stratford stone from a quarry in this Town's own Roosevelt Forest was used for this Hall.

In the 1970's, Bern Ewert, who was Town Manager at the time, conceived an idea for a civic center which would include a Senior Center, an expanded Library, a Youth Center and a Mall through the center of the block to connect with Sterling House. Due to inadequate funds, the Library was nearly omitted from this development. However, as a result of the dedicated efforts of then President of the Library Association, Vivienne Knapp, a solution was worked out to include the Library. The new structure, completed in 1982, was designed by Architects Galliher & Schoenhardt, with the Director of the Library, Mrs. Edith Landes. Thus was created an award winning library by blending the old (the original Library building



The Shakespeare window in the Library's Community Room.

and Sterling Memorial/Legion Hall) with the new (a modern connecting structure).

Note the stained glass window of William Shakespeare (from the original building—now the Community Room). Also, the rose window which once flooded the original building with afternoon sunlight has been moved by the clever architects to a West stairway in the new part of the building to provide that same brilliant afternoon illumination.

Regular Library hours are Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

21 ST. JAMES ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH (2110 Main Street)

This is the oldest Catholic Church in Stratford. The first church was erected in 1886 on Broadbridge Road, West of King Street. Prior to that, early Catholic settlers had to trudge 3 to 4 miles into Bridgeport to attend Mass. The cornerstone of this Church was laid in May of 1913 and it was formally dedicated on Sunday, May 17, 1914. A school was constructed in 1949.

22 THE PERRY HOMESTEAD (1126/1128 West Broad Street)

This old Saltbox, with its rear roof raised as recently as the mid-1930's, may well be the oldest house in town (rivaled only by the General Walker House). Old records provide insufficient information to make a positive determination as to just which house predates which. Therefore, we actually have "two oldest houses in town." The Perry Homestead was built about 1700 at the latest, and it is believed that it may even date as early as 1690.

Although commonly known as the Perry House, it was actually built more than a century before it was sold to William M. Perry in 1853. William Perry maintained a factory in the center of Stratford where he manufactured shoes for the government during the Civil War, employing both men and women at that time.

The house had been previously occupied by several families, including Deacon and Captain Isaiah Brown, who lived here in the mid-1700's. In August of 1757, an alarm went out, at the time of the capture of Fort William Henry. Among the militia companies to respond was one from Stratford composed of nearly seventy men under the command of Captain

Isaiah Brown. Captain Brown was a blacksmith and his shop was located just West of the house—in the street or common. His son was part of the group who left Stratford in 1770 to settle Stratford, New Hampshire. He attained prominence in that little New Hampshire village and his homestead there is now a historic landmark of the community.

This ancient house still has some of the original shingles on the front and back of the main section. (NOTE: These are very long—more than twice the ordinary shingle—being exposed to view). The extension at the East end was built more than fifty years after the main part of the house. Notice how it sets back somewhat forming an angle. This was a common practice among the early settlers.

23 THE FREDERICK A. BENJAMIN HOMESTEAD (1135 West Broad Street)

Looking directly across the Green from the Perry Homestead, you will see a striking large brick and brownstone which remains today one of the most outstanding houses in Stratford. It was built in 1854 and designed by Architect Frederick Schmidt. Frederick Benjamin's son Bedell was an ardent yet frugal yachtsman. His steam yacht required a crew of three or four. So the story goes, when about to go out for a day's cruise, he would economize in Jewell's Market by ordering lamb chops for his guests but pork chops for the crew. Bedell Benjamin's valuable collection of steamboat slides is now held in storage at the Stratford Library.

On this site, as well, once stood the historic Benjamin's Tavern where General George Washington and the Marquis De Lafayette dined on September 19, 1780. Historical records specifically note that they ate potatoes, which were quite a rare treat in those days.



Bedell Benjamin's yacht "Continental"

24 WITCHCRAFT IN STRATFORD

Before turning to retrace your steps back up to Main Street, stay a moment here by the Perry Homestead while I unfold to you a tale about that which occurred in the general area just to the west.

Witchcraft hysteria swept through New England during the mid-17th Century and, for generations, Stratford's local legends have included this account of the Town's personal turmoil and tragedy.

In a spot somewhere beyond the West Broad Street Turnpike Overpass in the vicinity of the railroad bridge ran "Gallows Brook." Since dried up and diverted by underground drains, "Gallows Brook" and "Gallows Swamp" are noted on early Land Records and, as the legend goes, were so named because it was here that the Goodwife Bassett was supposedly hung for witchcraft in the year 1651. Further "proof" of this event lies in another notation on old Land Records marked "Witch's Rock," which was located in the area under the Turnpike where Linden Avenue crosses West Broad Street. It is said that on this rock ledge could be seen long streaks or impressions of the witch's fingernails as she resisted being dragged to her death.

Although it can probably never be actually proven that this event occurred, it is on record in the General Court of Hartford that in 1651 the Governor and other prominent men were to "goe down to Stratford and keep courte upon the tryal of Goody Bassett for her life ..." If, indeed, Goody Bassett was hanged, it was the second execution in the Colony and the first in Fairfield County.

25 SOUTH PARADE/WEST BROAD GREEN

Now, retracing our steps back up to Main Street, we turn our attention to the West Broad Green.

The Connecticut Colony required each plantation to make provision for a public ground (so called the parade-ground or green) for use in the training and display of the Town's military company (so called the "Train Band"). The earliest such parade-grounds in Stratford seem to be just North of Mac's Harbor (Stratford Harbor) and Meeting-House Hill (Academy Hill). Two other locations were also established before 1680—the North Parade (now Town Hall Green and Main Street as far south as the railroad trestle) and the South Parade (now West Broad Green). Other parade grounds were formed at various sites as new military companies evolved.

Sergeant Francis Nichols was among the first settlers in Stratford and records indicate that on October 10, 1639, the General Court directed that he be appointed to "train the men and exercise them in military discipline," thus garnering for him the distinction of being the first military officer in Stratford.

Training days were required at regular intervals throughout the year; and, in 1654, a general muster of all military companies was ordered for every second year. The training days were special and elaborate Town affairs, beginning with roll-call at 8:00 a.m., and culminating a day filled with military exercises and ceremonies in feasting and merriment.

Imagine, if you will, the impressive sight upon this Green (at South Parade) as the officers of the Stratford Train Band drilled their men—the colorful uniforms, the precision maneuvers, the marching, the sound of fifes and drums, and the energy that filled the air with a spirit of commitment to the land.

Today, upon the West Broad Green (South Parade) rests a monument dedicated by the Town of Stratford "In grateful recognition of all those who served our country in time of war..." The bronze lady seated on a marble pedestal holds in her lap gold stars for the thirteen men of Stratford who died in the First World War. Her shield protects a dove and olive branches. The Statue was unveiled by Governor Wilbur Cross (Uncle Toby) on May 24, 1931.

26 THE JOHNSON HOUSE **(2103 Main Street)**

William Samuel Johnson was born in Stratford on October 7, 1727. He is, indeed, Stratford's most famous son. He was a lawyer, respected friend of George Washington, and first-hand participant in the events preceding the Revolution. He was one of three Connecticut delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787. In 1789, Dr. Johnson was elected the first U.S. Senator from Connecticut, serving in this capacity until 1791.

This home was built by his son in 1799. The father may also have lived here in his last years, although the records show that he did have a house of his own not too far from this one—located on the South side of Broad Street about half way down the block between Main Street and Beardsley Avenue.

It is believed that William Samuel Johnson's leadership and diplomacy may very well have been responsible for the successful completion of the Constitution of the United States. Because the Articles of Confederation were not



William Samuel Johnson (1727-1819)

working—the States would not permit the Congress to levy taxes, nor would they obey its laws—the Congress called for a Convention to improve the Articles. In May of 1787, Governor Trumbull sent Johnson and two other delegates (Roger Sherman, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and Oliver Ellsworth, later Chief Justice of this State) to the Convention in Philadelphia. Seventy six Delegates were

invited in all from the thirteen states. Fifty five attended, and thirty nine actually signed the resulting Constitution; but fewer than twelve assumed leadership roles and thus created the document. Dr. Johnson's presence was constant and his leadership obvious from the time he first arrived at the Convention until its final adjournment on September 17.

The largest obstacle to the New Plan of Government was representation. The idea of a bicameral legislative body was agreed on, but the large states insisted on representation by population and the small states demanded equal numbers of representatives. There was much heated discussion. Sherman stated that he would agree to two houses with "proportional representation in one of them, provided each state have an equal voice in the other." Johnson explained that in one house "the people ought to be represented, in the other, the States."

Johnson convinced Ben Franklin that it was a valid idea in his June 29 speech, and Franklin, in turn, persuaded the

other delegates from the "big" states. (Johnson and Franklin had worked together in London for five years.) And so, the impasse was finally broken as Johnson, well respected as a diplomat, was able to bring the two sides to accept what became known as the "Connecticut Compromise," or the "Great Compromise," providing one representative for 30,000 people and two Senators per state. His tact and diplomacy provided the catalyst necessary to allow the Constitution at long last to be ratified. When the Constitution was finally adopted, Johnson chaired the Committee on Style, in effect, becoming the Editor of the Constitution. His handwriting can be seen in the margins and interlineations on the original copy, now preserved at the Department of State in Washington.

Johnson is attributed with writing the provision in the Constitution which gave the Supreme Court of the United States the power to rule on "all cases, in law and equity, arising under this Constitution," in effect, establishing its absolute power as an arbiter of the Constitution.

Johnson was chosen the first President of Columbia College (which succeeded the old King's College of which his father had been the founder and first President). In fact, he had stopped in New York to assume the Presidency of Columbia while on his way to Philadelphia to attend the Constitutional Convention, arriving in Philadelphia on June 2. He held this position from 1787 until 1800 when he retired to Stratford returning from New York by sailing packet. Dr. Johnson spent his retirement years here in quiet contentment until his death on Sunday, November 14, 1819.

Mrs. Susan Edwards Johnson Hudson was the last of the family to live in the homestead, residing there until her death in 1913.

The house has been totally renovated in recent years and is now home to the Family Health Network, a medical facility. Many of the original construction features are still clearly evident. The magnificent old fireplace in the basement continues to exude the warmth stored up in memories of times long ago. On the second floor, a part of one of the original support posts is exposed to view, proudly displaying the proverbial "square peg in a round hole." And in a small glass display case in the entryway can be found some of the original doorknobs, keys, and nails.

27 CINDERELLA STORY

It was upon this very spot, where the Johnson House now stands, that in an earlier time Stratford's very own "Cinderella" also resided. The site was formerly occupied by the home and blacksmith shop of Samuel Fulsom, father of Glorianna Fulsom—the "Cinderella" in Stratford's fairy tale romance of long ago.

It was a crisp Autumn day in the year 1770 and a stranger had just arrived in town. He registered at Benjamin's Tavern (just a few doors away from the Fulsom home) and gave his name as John Stirling. He was a young man of "attractive manner" with an air of wealth and mystery—the son of a Scottish Baronet. The talk in town was that he had been sent by his father to see the world. And alas, it was here he met Glorianna and she stole his heart. The courtship began and despite opposition of her mother and eldest sister, "Prince Charming" wed his "Cinderella" on March 10, 1771, in Christ Episcopal Church.

The newlyweds remained in Stratford for a time. There was an exchange of letters to Scotland with Sir John supposedly writing home for money. It is not clear whether he wrote also news of his bride or whether his family found this news from another source. It is believed that Sir John's family did not readily accept the fact of an American bride, and funds were not forthcoming. So, Sir John found employment teaching school.

In December, their first daughter, Mary Glorianna was born. With increased expenses to meet, Sir John again wrote home. This time, his father did send money but along with it came the demand that he return home. Sir John did so, leaving his wife and tiny daughter having to contend with the gossip and doubts of the neighborhood that he would ever return. On March 14, 1773, their second daughter, Maria Jane, was born.

And lo and behold—one day, "a big letter with formidable seals" arrived for Glorianna from Scotland. It advised that a special ship was on its way to bring back Mrs. Stirling and her babies and that there would be on the ship her own personal maid and nurses to care for the children. Further, there were bolts of wonderful yard goods from London's finest shops which she was to have made up immediately by the best dressmakers so that she would be suitably attired.

And so off went little Glorianna, the daughter of the village blacksmith. She had won the heart of a nobleman and sailed

for her new estate in Scotland with a retinue of servants in a ship sent especially for her and her children.

John became the 5th Baronet and the father of seventeen children. And, it is believed that, to this day, Glorianna's descendants still occupy her castle in Scotland.

28 HARD'S CORNER

Although no visible evidence remains of historic Hard's Corner, the stories passed down help us to reconstruct the past, if only in our imagination. On the Southeast corner stood John Hard's Store, a two-story building constructed in 1792, with the Local Mason's First Hall on its second floor. On the Southwest corner (toward Keating Ford) was Elijah Marshall's Tavern. It was here in August of 1824 that the Marquis De Lafayette stayed on his triumphal return to the United States. It was his second and last visit to Stratford. A signpost and a pump stood in the middle of the road to Bridgeport until the trolley line arrived in the year 1891. The Bridgeport Traction Company's cars bobbed down Stratford Avenue and rounded the curve to head for the end of the track at the center. In 1894, it was extended to Paradise Green and to the then fourth Washington Bridge. On the Northwest corner was the Leavitt home site, and beyond it on the Bridgeport Road was Jeremiah Quire's blacksmith shop.



Elijah Marshall's Tavern at Hard's Corner. The tavern was destroyed by fire in 1899.

The Shore Walk
(50 minutes)



① THE NICOLL-BENJAMIN HOUSE (1850 Elm Street)

While most houses of times long past provide opportunity for much speculation and stretch of the imagination, this one especially offers intricate ground for fertile imaginings. Some sources date this house from 1785. Others believe it was either built in 1830/1840 or greatly modified at that time into the Greek revival period of architecture with only part of the original construction remaining. We leave the conclusion to be drawn by you.

It is said by some to have been originally built by General Matthias Nicoll (who died in 1830) and, then, inherited by his son, Captain Samuel C. Nicoll, who, in turn, left the house to his wife's nephew, Samuel Nicoll Benjamin. Others feel just about certain it was built by Captain Samuel in 1830 just after Matthias died and his children split up the property. Nevertheless, it eventually became the home of Samuel Nicoll Benjamin.

Samuel married the daughter of Hamilton Fish, who was Secretary of State during President Grant's administration. He served in the regular army and attained the rank of Colonel. Unable to remain in Stratford, he sold the homestead to his cousin, John Benjamin. John Benjamin used the house as his summer home. He was a banker in New York City and, at one time, President of the New York Stock Exchange. He became the first president of The Housatonic Boat Club in 1887. His widow, Mrs. Hannah Lawrence Benjamin (who died in 1906) was the last of the Benjamin name to own the house.

At one time, an old detached building in the rear, which was once used as a kitchen was said by some to be older than the main part of the house and, further, that it was used to accommodate soldiers during the Revolution.

The house has undergone many changes and additions down through the years, with wings added to it on each side, the most recent of which was about 1890; but the essence of its early history permeates throughout.

The building is now part of the Theatre Complex and serves as its Administration Building.

② ELM STREET

Elm Street was originally known as Front Street and was one of the two principal streets of Cupheag Village (the other being known as Main Street then and now).

Front Street was changed to Elm Street in honor of the many towering elms, now gone, which lined this street in days gone by. The elm tree, a native of the Americas, has suffered widespread devastation as the result of a disease that came to the new land from Europe. Conservationists are working hard to try to save this beautiful American native from extinction.

Of the multitude that once stood as sentries along this thoroughfare, only one single specimen remains here at the corner of Elm and Stratford Avenue. This magnificent tree is believed to be 200–300 years old.

3 FERRY BOULEVARD

Ferry Boulevard was so named for the road leading to the Housatonic River crossing before the advent of bridges. Historical records tell us that George Washington crossed this river by ferry on seven different occasions. We recall some of those historic and memorable crossings below.

The present Washington Bridge (the fifth such constructed at this site) now spans the river in the area where the Stratford Ferry formerly crossed. It was officially placed in commission at a joint celebration by the Towns of Stratford and Milford on November 11, 1921. On the morning of November 11, 1789—exactly 132 years to the day earlier—George Washington had crossed the river at this point on the ferry for the last time.

Many of the nation's early leaders traveled through the town of Stratford, since the ferry crossing here was on the King's Highway or Post Road between Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

George Washington's first trip is said to have been when he was still a young man of 24 years of age, a British officer, and Commander-In-Chief of the Virginia Forces (1756).

His next visit occurred 19 years later. Congress had chosen him to be the "Commander-In-Chief of the Continental Army" and astride his white horse he went forth to take command of the Army in Boston. He was surrounded by military escorts, regiments of militia, and friends, and his route was filled with excitement. He crossed the ferry on Wednesday afternoon, June 28, 1775, accompanied by Generals Lee and Schuyler.

In December, Mrs. Washington and children rode through in "her chariot" drawn by four white horses. It was a terribly rough ride. She returned in April of 1776 on her way home to Mount Vernon.

On September 19, 1780, General Lafayette crossed on the ferry meeting Washington in Stratford, where he had just arrived at Benjamin's Tavern coming from the West.

In the fall of 1789, now as President Washington, he returned to Stratford on a tour of the New England states crossing by ferry on October 17. In a rather extensive diary entry, Washington describes this part of his trip including notations about the roads, the churches, his reception, and a visit with Dr. Johnson. Some excerpts from that entry thus:

"A little after sunrise we left Fairfield, and passing through Stratford, wch. is ten miles from Fairfield, and is a pretty village on or near Stratford River. The road between these two places is not on the whole bad (for this country)—in some places very good especially through East Fairfield (now Black Rock) which is on a plain and free from stone... Doctr. Johnson of the Senate, visited me here, being with Mrs. Johnson in this Town (where he formerly resided). The ferry is near half a mile; and sometimes much incommoded by winds and crosstides ..."

And, on Wednesday morning, November 11, 1789, the President crossed the river for the last time on his return from his New England tour.

④ SELBY'S POND

Selby's Pond was named after Old Captain Selby who, it is said, profitted in rum running up the Housatonic. "*The Captain Selby House*" and "*Bond's Dock*" provide further information on the Captain. The pond was originally known as the Great Salt Pond in the days of the Colony. You can see the pond behind the houses as you approach the bend in the road (where the Nehemiah Allen House is located). You will also have a clear view of the pond at the end of the walk (from the road behind the Theatre).

Selby's Pond has existed since before recorded time. It is a rather rare geological feature, a drowned kettle hole bog. At the waning of the last continental glaciation, a block of ice became isolated from the main mass of the melting glacier and became buried by sands and gravel carried off the main glacier by melted water. Over a period of decades, the ice block melted and left a hole which was below the local water table. A small lake formed and, with the incursion of sea water over time, the character of the pond was changed from fresh water to saline.

It is probable that this primeval pond looked much as it does today when Indians hunted, fished, clammed and oystered along the Housatonic River (then known as the Pootatuck River). Stratford Indians included the Pootatuck, Cupheag and Pequonnock (all Paugusset). There is evidence of burial mounds and a variety of Indian relics including soapstone pots and dishes, and spearheads have been excavated near the Housatonic River.

Early each year, a pair of swan arrive at the pond signaling the beginning of Spring and soon the pond boasts an entire swan family as the newly hatched cygnets appear on the water in a tidy line bobbing along between their parents.

**5 THE NEHEMIAH ALLEN HOUSE
(719 Stratford Avenue)**

It was here at the bend in the road that Nehemiah Allen built this house in about 1760. A small house of post and beam construction, it has an immense central chimney. It is uncertain whether it originally had shingle or clapboard siding, but we do know that Captain Selby's house just down the street (believed to have been erected about the same time) used clapboards. The house has clapboards today. The original windows were most likely 12 over 12 like the ones in the attic. Although this little house was renovated in the 1970's and a new overhang was put on the front doorway in 1984, it has remained largely unchanged for over two centuries.

Nehemiah Allen was a shoemaker whose supply of hides came from the slaughterhouse that used to be across the street as well as from the tannery that was located near the present railroad station. His shoes and boots made their way to faraway markets via the schooners that sailed for the West Indies from the nearby wharf.

**6 THE CAPTAIN SELBY HOUSE
(627 Lockwood Avenue)**

As you begin your approach toward the dock, on your right, you will see Old Captain Selby's house. This house is believed to have been erected in 1765 although, through the years, it has been somewhat modified to what we now see, most particularly the roof, which local historians believe to have originally been a gambrel roof.

7 BOND'S DOCK (OR TOWN DOCK)

This was the public dock from the very earliest times. Once a busy wharf with both commercial and passenger service during the sailing and steamboat (side-wheeler) era, many schooners and brigs sailed for the West Indies from this spot. During the early times, colonial shallops docked here. Later, schooners in the West Indies trade and coasters delivered and picked up produce here. Horses, wood and onions went South; sugar, oranges and rum came back.

It is said that, on one of his trips, old Captain Selby made his way up the river to Shelton without going through customs. The story further reveals that he went to jail for this "indiscretion."

By 1800, sailing packets ran in regular service. We know that Dr. William Samuel Johnson traveled to New York on the packets.

Later, the steamboats "General Lafayette," "Naugatuck" and others stopped in. It is reported that on the morning of July 15, 1868, at about 8:00 a.m., the steamer "Monitor" got caught in the Washington Bridge on the way to Derby when the draw collapsed.

In the early part of the Twentieth Century, Captain John Bond converted the warehouse that was out on the dock into a training center for boxing champions.

**8 THE WAREHOUSE
(19 Shore Road)**

This house is believed to have been part of one of the two original warehouses at this busy dock of bygone times. The first story of this building was probably constructed sometime around 1820—1830 with the second and third stories added about 1880. Now a residence, it was used commercially as both a warehouse and a store for many years.

**9 THE KATHARINE HEPBURN COTTAGE
(31 Shore Road)**

This dock was also an affluent oyster center. It served as the unloading point for the oyster fleet. The oysters were sorted in little shacks near the dock, and shipped to New York by boat or train. One of the original oyster shacks still remains. Known as the Katharine Hepburn cottage, it has been part of the Theatre complex. Ms. Hepburn lived in the cottage while performing at the Theatre. She reportedly joined the boat club down the road and learned to sail while here.

10 LAING HOUSE
(50 Shore Road)

This house was originally built about 1800. Extensive additions on the rear of the house and Tudor modifications were made in the late 19th Century. It was once the home of Albert Laing, one of the outstanding decoy carvers of the "Stratford School." The Stratford School of decoy carving is recognized worldwide, and Laing's ducks are among the earliest and most abundant. Laing moved to Stratford in 1860 and began to carve his own decoys, as he was an avid duck hunter.

The Stratford style decoy depicted a high-breasted duck. This particular feature was apparent to Laing as he went duck hunting and observed a characteristic resulting from the tidal rip (flow) as the ducks made their way along the Housatonic River.

Another of the most recognized names associated with the Stratford School of decoy carving was Charles (Shang) Wheeler, whose painting of his decoys was greatly detailed and truly outstanding, since he was quite an artist as well. At the time of Laing's death in 1886, his estate listed 111 decoys. During their lifetimes, it is said that these men generously gave away many of these treasures, yet today Laings sell for \$3,000 to \$25,000 each, and Wheelers run anywhere from \$5,000 each on up. At a recent auction, a black duck decoy by Wheeler sold for \$38,500. The tradition continues in Stratford with present day decoy carvers, who include Jack Tierney and Richard Porter.



An example of a decoy carved by Albert Laing.

11 HOUSATONIC BOAT CLUB (Shore Road)

The Club held its opening ceremony on July 4, 1887. It was begun as a sailing club by a group of seven Stratford men. Its first President was John Benjamin, President of the New York Stock Exchange. It is reputed to be the third oldest yacht club in the State. For a century, it has been a haven for sailboaters.

12 CAPTAIN KIDD

It was from this vantage viewing point perhaps that an early settler gazed out toward Long Island Sound when what to his wonderment should appear on the horizon but the sailing ship of the notorious Captain Kidd.

Many adventure stories have been based on the legend that Kidd buried treasures of vast value on the shores of Long Island Sound or the banks of the Hudson.

The Scottish pirate was born about the middle of the 17th century and went to sea as a young boy, attaining a reputation for stubborn courage against the French. In 1691, he was granted a reward of \$750 from the City of New York. Soon after he was given command of a vessel to suppress piracy in



the Indian Ocean. He reached Madagascar in 1697, where, after some time, he was suspected of engaging in the traffic he was commissioned to destroy and later became one of the most noted of pirates.

He was arrested—so the records say—“on his return” to New England in 1699 and sent to England for trial, where he was found guilty of murdering one of his men and was hanged in London on May 24, 1701, though protesting his innocence to the last. The trial was reportedly unfair and it is quite probable that Kidd was not guilty of the particular crime for which he was executed.

Stratford's own legends say that Captain William Kidd buried pirate treasure atop what were then high sand bluffs at Stratford Point in Lordship. This area was noted for its abundance of wild fowl and it was common practice for hunters to lie on the high bluff just west of the present lighthouse and shoot ducks and wild geese below. It is said that late one night as a slave lay in wait for game atop the bluff, a large boat came ashore. Off marched the men carrying a heavy chest which they buried in the sand. They caught sight of the slave but were unable to catch him. They returned and moved the treasure a little farther to the west. This story has persevered through the years and, at one time (about 1850), a group of people were organized in Bridgeport, who spent a great deal of time and effort digging for this cache at a treasure hunt which has since been referred to as the "Gold Diggings."

Stories of Kidd's presence in the area have also caused the overturning of nearby Milford Island, where Kidd supposedly buried treasure as well. We do find evidence of a visit he made to Milford Village in 1699, in the form of a letter. It was written by a young lady to her cousin and she clearly expressed her disapproval of the Captain. In it, she wrote that he:

"... sat all the night by the fire with Jacobeth and Thomas Welsh carrying himself in an uncivil and bold manner. I told Aunt Prudence that he will come to trouble in the sinful way, wh. he has done—for Zechariah White has told us all about him ..." Later in the letter, she reveals *"I overheard Jacobeth say that Kidd was going on a long cruise, and that he had left some things with him. I am going to tell Aunt Prudence all about it, and find out what they are..."*

The letter was signed "Your Cousin, Patience Tuttle." Could this have been the very "return trip to New England in 1699" at which time, the records say, Kidd was arrested and sent to trial?

The Captain is gone now and so too the slave—eyewitness to the deed at Stratford. Only the treasure remains—somewhere—waiting to be found.

13 SHELL-KEEP-POINT

When the settlers first arrived at Stratford, they found many Indian settlements. The Indians spent the summers at the shore fishing and clamming. Upon this site, known as Shell-Keep-Point, they accumulated heaps of oyster shells—by-products of years of oyster eating.

The shells were first calcined to make mortar and wall plaster. It was here that Mac (see “Mac’s Harbor” below) kept the shells he dredged up from the river to sell. Later, the shells were sold back to the commercial oystermen to spread on the floor of the Sound for oyster beds.

14 MAC’S HARBOR

This was the site of the first settlement in the year 1639. They arrived in the Springtime—when life begins anew. It is believed that somewhere between seventeen and twenty-five families led by Rev. Adam Blakeman made this historic journey. Whether they first arrived here by water or over land, historical records do not verify; but we do know that it was at Mac’s Harbor (then Stratford Harbor), beside Mac’s Creek, that they found shelter and settled, in what was known as Sandy Hollow. “Mac” reportedly ground oyster shells to make wall plaster (See “Shell-Keep-Point”).

This was the Indian village of Cupheag, meaning “protected place.” The River was originally named Pootatuck by the Indians, meaning “Falls River.” Mac’s Harbor inlet was at that time an open harbor, and Captain Gorham is said to have wintered his hundred ton schooner here. The late Donald Sammis told present Stratford residents that in his Grandfather’s time bowsprits extended over Elm Street. By 1900, however, the harbor had silted in. This site, now protected salt marsh, is marked with a commemorative plaque (the first of its kind in the State of Connecticut) erected in 1970 by the Connecticut Historical Commission and the Stratford Historical Society (right).



15 THE INN
(320 Shore Road)

Much modified, this house was originally built as a lean-to (saltbox) in the 1730's. Records tell us that this property, containing a dwelling from the earliest times, has truly endured the tides of change. The land records of Stratford (Volume I, Page 1) show a sale by Robert Rice in 1650. It was once the home of Israel Chauncey, a founder of Yale. In the latter half of the 18th Century, it was changed to a center hall two-story colonial; and, then, in the mid-19th Century, it was altered to a three-story mansard roof Italianate house with cupola. A dike to the East of the house was built by Alfred Ely Beach in 1865 to keep out tidal water.

The property has been used as an inn or lodging house many times. Innkeeper Richard Beach ran the ordinary in the 1660's; the Meachens had weekend paying guests for duck hunting in the 1880's (during the week, they brought out their huge market guns for shooting for market); Al and Alice Beach operated Beach's Manor on the Housatonic here in 1932 and 1933; and the Captain's Walk Inn was open from 1955 to 1966.

16 SANDY HOLLOW

On the left, at the inner end of the Harbor at Sandy Hollow (what is now the intersection of Elm and Shore Road) stood the first meeting house and burial ground. It was used for forty years, until a larger meeting house was erected on Watch House Hill (Academy Hill). Eerie testimony to the little cemetery surrounding the meeting house has manifested itself down through the centuries when digging in this area uncovered human bones. In fact, evidence of the cemetery was found as recently as the 1920's when sewer construction unearthed a complete skeleton, reinterred on the site.

17 OLD SOUTH SCHOOL
(973 South Avenue)

The management of the schools in Stratford from about 1717 until sometime after 1800 was under the immediate supervision of the several ecclesiastical societies of the Town, so one is unable to glean much, if anything, about school matters from the old Town records. Further, the early records of the first ecclesiastical society have been lost. Therefore, our knowledge of school matters during the 18th and early 19th Centuries is rather sparse.

Prior to 1856, there were ten school districts in Stratford, each having its own school-house and governing committee. The "Old South" School (or Sandy Hollow School) was one of these and, throughout most of the 19th Century, it stood in Sandy Hollow located on the triangle or green at the intersection of South Avenue and Elm Street. As with most buildings in those years, when no longer needed, it was not destroyed, merely moved. The school is not easy to find today because it was towed West down the street, moved South onto a houselot, raised twelve feet, and supported by a new first floor below it. The old double door always faced South, and was rediscovered recently when renovation work was being done to the house. Gone now or covered over are the remnants of school children's daydreaming—the scribbles on the walls, the initials carved into the wood. With one exception that is—in a closet window on the second floor (once a classroom window) can still be seen scribed into the glass the initials "CG" put in there in 1835 by young Charlie Gorham.

18 ALFRED ELY BEACH HOUSE
(1670 Elm Street)

This stately Greek revival was built in 1848. It was the summer cottage, then home, of Alfred Ely Beach, founder of Scientific American Magazine, builder of the first subway in New York City, and Thomas Edison's patent attorney.

19 THE STRATFORD KNOCKINGS

Upon this very site, where five ranch homes now stand, once stood the Phelps Mansion. It was here at the Mansion that an unexplained phenomenon occurred.

But first, some history about the Mansion itself. The Phelps Mansion, erected in 1826, was one of the largest and most beautiful homes built in early Stratford. It was built by General Matthias Nicoll for his daughter Elizah and son-in-law, Captain George R. Dowdell. The house was designed by Elizah and (being a most thoughtful and considerate wife) boasted a magnificent entry hall that was 70 feet long (the normal length of a ship's deck during that time) and 12 feet wide so that her seagoing husband would be able to pace the deck, never feeling too far away from the sea. Twin staircases rose from both the front and rear entrances to a combined landing on the second floor. This was done to help simulate the Captain's shipboard trips up to the hurricane

deck on one side and down to the main deck on the other.

On the southern side of the building, a great room opened out of the hall. A school known as the Stratford Institute once occupied this section of the house. It was later transformed into three rooms—a drawing room, library and dining room. It was an impressive mansion, with elaborate furnishings.

In addition to the Phelps family (the Mansion's most famous residents), the house was lived in by Admiral Joshua Sands who helped lay the Atlantic Cable in 1857, then the Benjamins, Frederick Beach (son of Alfred Ely), James Wales, and, finally, the Stratford Convalescent Home. The house was torn down in the 1970's.



The Phelps Mansion

What became known as “The Stratford Knockings”—those unexplained mysteries and strange occurrences which brought so much attention to this quiet and stately mansion—began on a Sunday morning—March 10, 1850. Rev. Eliakim Phelps and his family had returned to the house from church services to find the front door hung with crepe and inside a figure laid out and shrouded for the grave. During the months that followed, there were reports of strange noises, thumpings, apparitions, strange figures, and furniture, ornaments and bricks that would fly through the air. Word spread rapidly and newspapers throughout the State carried stories of Stratford's haunted house. One of the newspaper accounts even speaks of a “scissors grinder” who “stopped in front of the house, and in the view of several persons, he began to ascend into the air. He went up and up, turning his

wheels steadily, all the while until he was lost to human view. The next day he came down in Waterbury. So they say." Another newspaper termed this account a "falsehood," stating that "no such thing happened."

Some believed, while others regarded the happenings as coincidences, childish pranks—even deception. Reporters and spiritualists, as well as the curious, came to see for themselves. No explanation for the happenings could ever be determined. Gradually, however, they subsided and when the Phelps family moved out, no further reports of this kind were heard.

During the time the mansion housed the Stratford Convalescent Hospital, stories circulated of buzzers going off all by themselves to alert nurses of patient problems. Did they really? Or was it the imagination remembering the mysterious happenings of earlier days?

The Phelps Mansion is gone now, "The Stratford Knockings" have ceased to exist, except in the memories, imaginations, and legends of early Stratford.

20 GENERAL MATTHIAS NICOLL HOME (1812 Elm Street)

Though originally thought by some to have been built possibly as early as 1751, it is believed more likely that this house was built in 1785. Local historians point to this residence as one of our purest examples of Pre-revolutionary houses. Take special note of the hand-hewn wood shingle siding, a rare example of the 18th Century shingling which was used in Stratford at a time when most Colonial builders were using clapboards.

This home is generally referred to as the Matthias Nicoll House. However, the homestead was originally owned by William Beach (who was at the time one of the wealthiest men in Stratford) and then passed on to his son Abijah Beach. Abijah and his brother Abel were merchants whose business was struck a drastic blow after the American Revolution when trade to Britain and the British West Indies was cut off. They were forced into debt borrowing extensively from Benjamin Nicoll, a New York merchant. Abijah and Abel forfeited all their property in payment. According to Stratford Land Records dated June 24, 1785, it was divided among Benjamin Nicoll's three sons in settlement of the monies due to their father's estate; and Benjamin's son Matthias became the owner of Abijah's home, which was located here. It is

believed that Matthias then built this house in 1785 or thereabouts. The ornate interior paneling seems to be the work of James Booth, master carpenter of Stratford.

This has also been the home of Stanley Beach, early aviation advocate. Beach financed Gustav Whitehead, saw the Wright Brothers fly at Kitty Hawk, served as aviation editor of Scientific American and built an aeroplane himself (which did not fly) in his barn farther down the street where Harbour Woods Condominiums now stand at 1500 Elm.

Notice the mill stone in the front sidewalk. It is believed to have come from the very first tide mill erected in this early village known as Cupheag. The mill was located nearby at Mac's Harbor and when you stand in front of the commemorative plaque at the harbor, you can look across and still see the stone remnants of this mill.

21 THE SHAKESPEARE GARDEN

The Shakespeare Garden at Stratford came into existence in 1958 through the efforts of the Fairfield County Garden Clubs, Inc. The initial planting plans were conceived by Mr. Will Geer (the actor who was probably most well known for his role as "Grandpa Walton"). He also did the original planting. The garden includes as many of the plants mentioned by Shakespeare as possible. For many years, the garden was cared for by Mr. Geer with the assistance of members of the Stratford Shakespeare Guild, the volunteer arm of the Theatre. The Guild now handles the full care and replacement as necessary of the plantings in the garden.

See the "Shakespeare Garden" brochure for further information, including planting plans, specific quotes from Shakespeare's plays citing the particular flowers and herbs, and other fascinating stories about the herbs and plants mentioned by Shakespeare.

Does this sound familiar?

*"What's in a name?
That which we call a rose
By any other name
Would smell as sweet;"*

Shakespeare gave us this eternal message in his "Romeo and Juliet."

You will be surprised to find many more common sayings of today rooted in his plays. Many such examples are provided in the aforementioned brochure.



22) COSTUME MUSEUM

An important adjunct of the Theatre is the Costume Museum which displays costumes, stage designs and memorabilia from previous productions. Be sure to see the headpiece worn by Katharine Hepburn as Cleopatra in the Theatre's 1960 production of "Antony and Cleopatra" or the model of the Globe Theatre, among the many interesting items on display in the Museum.

See "Museum Brochure" for details.

23) THE AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL THEATRE

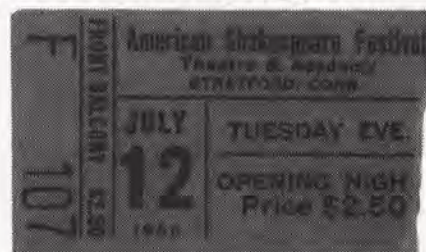
The Theatre property is the site on which some of Stratford's first settlers made their homes in 1639.

In 1951, the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy of Connecticut was chartered as a nonprofit educational institution by Special Act No. 227 of the State Legislature, signed by then Governor John Lodge.

Lawrence Langner, the Theatre's founder, searched for a site for the Theatre and, in 1954, purchased land on the bank of the river from Housatonic Properties, Inc. Ground breaking took place on October 24, 1954, and construction began.

The press reported: "With the setting sun as a spotlight, and the green, russet and gold foliage of autumn as a backdrop, Miss Katharine Cornell used a gilded shovel adorned with green ribbons to turn up a section of the soil on which the original founders of the Town of Stratford disembarked from England in the year 1639."

The American Shakespeare Festival Theatre opened with its first performance of "Julius Caesar" on July 12, 1955, with a company that included Christopher Plummer, Raymond Massey, Roddy McDowell, Earle Hyman, Fritz Weaver and Jack Palance. It was a festive occasion with many dignitaries present. Congratulatory telegrams were received from around the world, including one from Winston Churchill who hailed the newest Stratford



An opening night ticket stub

Festival as "completing the three sides of the triangle" and expressed his hope that the three Stratfords, in England, Canada, and now the United States, might serve to bring the three great English speaking peoples of the world closer together.

The building itself was designed by Architect Edwin Howard. The Theatre seats 1,534 persons, and is designed as an efficient modern theatre, but with Elizabethan overtones and the general configuration of Shakespeare's own Globe Theatre. It is an octagonal weathered teak building. Both the exterior and the interior are made of "Angelique," a teakwood from French Guiana. The outside surface alone contains 30,000 board feet of this Guiana teakwood, which was a gift of the French government. As Theatre legend has it, the hardness of this wood made it impervious to nails, and so, every piece had to be hand drilled! The principal frame is of structural steel and the roof is supported by trusses 96 feet long and 12 feet deep, resting on columns 56 feet high. Because of its size and location, provision was made for unusual wind pressure.

Note the sundial mounted above the doors opening onto the terrace on the second floor in the front of the building. It was a gift of the Timex Corporation and is the only one known that is designed for Daylight Saving Time. Shakespeare's family crest can be seen at the top of the sundial. At its center is a sunburst, symbolizing genius setting fire to all it embraces. Flanking this are the figures of Comedy and Tragedy. They are crowned with stars of inspiration. And yes, it really does work.



The Theatre's sundial is designed for Daylight Savings Time.

The Theatre complex (some 11.2 acres) is a Connecticut State Park. The Theatre has been renamed The American Festival Theatre at Stratford. For additional information and publications on the grounds and buildings, as well as a schedule of performances and activities, contact the Theatre.

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Ever so many thanks to all the People of Stratford for making our Town so special.

And, lastly, but most importantly to me, loving thanks to My Family for providing me with both the childhood memories and the adult dreams that served as the stimulus for me to produce this work.

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SOURCES

History of Stratford, Connecticut by Wm. Howard Wilcoxson

A History of the Old Town of Stratford and the City of Bridgeport, Connecticut by Rev. Samuel Orcutt

The Housatonic Puritan River by Chard Powers Smith

Encyclopedia of the American Constitution - Macmillan Publishing Company

SUGGESTED PARKING

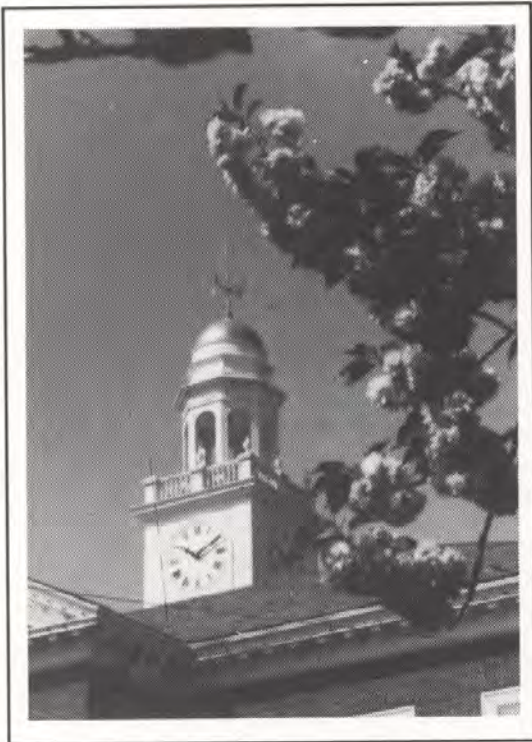
The Academy Hill Walk

A small parking lot is available adjacent to the Christ Episcopal Church, and there is ample on-the-street* parking.

The Shore Walk

Parking is available on the American Festival Theatre grounds (a Connecticut State Park) except during performances and scheduled activities. There is also ample on-the-street* parking in the area.

*Please observe customary on-the-street parking rules and regulations.



(above left) Stratford Town Hall, *(above right)* Soldier's and Sailor's Monument on Academy Hill, *(left)* The American Festival Theatre
(front cover) The steeple and weather-vane of the Christ Episcopal Church

This flap folds out for a map and guide to the Stratford Walking Tours. For parking information, see page 44.

Guide to Points of Interest

Note: On map, number in box □ denotes Academy Hill Walk attraction; number in circle ○ denotes Shore Walk attraction.



The Academy Hill Walk (1 1/2 hours)

- 1 Christ Episcopal Church
- 2 The Stratford Tunnels
- 3 The Judson House
- 4 Captain D. Pulaski Benjamin House
- 5 Academy Hill
- 6 Old Episcopal Burying Ground
- 7 The Parsonage
- 8 The Edward Curtis House
- 9 Lt. Gov. David Plant House
- 10 General Walker House
- 11 The Sedgwick House
- 12 Postal System/Post Road
- 13 The Stratford Graded School
- 14 The National Helicopter Museum
- 15 The H.C. Lovell Hardware & Equipment Co., Inc.
- 16 First Congregational Church
- 17 The David Brooks Homestead
- 18 Sterling House
- 19 Old Congregational Burying Ground
- 20 The Stratford Library Association
- 21 St. James Roman Catholic Church
- 22 The Perry Homestead
- 23 The Frederick A. Benjamin Homestead
- 24 Witchcraft in Stratford
- 25 South Parade/West Broad Green
- 26 The Johnson House
- 27 Cinderella Story
- 28 Hard's Corner

The Shore Walk (50 minutes)

- 1 The Nicoll-Benjamin House
- 2 Elm Street
- 3 Ferry Boulevard
- 4 Selby's Pond
- 5 The Nehemiah Allen House
- 6 The Captain Selby House
- 7 Bond's Dock (or Town Dock)
- 8 The Warehouse
- 9 The Katharine Hepburn Cottage
- 10 Laing House
- 11 Housatonic Boat Club
- 12 Captain Kidd
- 13 Shell-Keep-Point
- 14 Mac's Harbor
- 15 The Inn
- 16 Sandy Hollow
- 17 Old South School
- 18 Alfred Ely Beach House
- 19 The Stratford Knockings
- 20 General Matthias Nicoll Home
- 21 The Shakespeare Garden
- 22 Costume Museum
- 23 The American Shakespeare Festival Theatre