

STRATFORD'S 350th Trolley Tour

Introduction

As you follow the tour you will be traveling through the Stratford of 350 years ago as it was planned and laid out by the first settlers. At some points you will see locations virtually unchanged from the earliest days.

Along the route various houses will illustrate changing times and fashions and others will show the desire of townspeople to preserve their historical past.

If you are a Stratfordite, we hope you will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of your town. If you are a visitor, welcome. The 350-year heritage is ours, but it is yours too, and we invite you to join us in our motto to "Continue the Spirit."

The Settlers

Stratford's first settlers arrived here in 1639, led by the Rev. Adam Blakeman. Coming from England, they nostalgically named their new home Stratford. Tradition says they landed at Mac's Harbor, but Town Historian Lewis Knapp's research leads him to believe they came overland. What is certain is that our ancestors came into the wilderness and carved out a place where they could worship and live in freedom and hope for the future. We are the beneficiaries of their courage and determination.

The location of the first settlement offered an abundant food supply and natural protection. On the exposed western side and to the north, the settlers built an 8-to-10-foot-high wooden palisade and a watch house a little distance off.

The settlers built homes, laid out one-to-two acre homelots, and established common fields for farming and grazing. Soon they began building boats and established a thriving port for import and export that served the town for more than three centuries.

The boundaries of the first settlement are close to those of the recently established National Register Historic District which this tour covers. Main and Elm Streets were the north and south thoroughfares and Broad Street, Stratford Avenue and South Avenue were the original cross-streets.

Trolley Tour

The trolley leaves from the American Festival Theatre parking area on Elm Street.

(FROM THE THEATER, TURN RIGHT, HEADING NORTH, ONTO ELM STREET.)

1) #1850, on your right as we turn out of the driveway, is the **Nicoll-Benjamin House**, now the American Festival Theatre administration building. It was built c. 1835 as a Greek Revival home, probably by Capt. Samuel Nicoll, who had made his fortune as captain of the privateer "Scourge" in the War of 1812. Below the ground floor is a four-foot-high sub-basement which may have been used by escaped slaves on the Underground Railroad or, with the Captain's reputation, to hold smuggled rum. A later resident, John Benjamin, was president of the New York Stock Exchange and the first president of the Housatonic Boat Club.

(TURN RIGHT ONTO STRATFORD AVENUE)

Stratford Avenue, one of the original streets, becomes a narrow lane as it leads to the Lower Dock, now called Bond's Dock. On the left are World War I era two-family homes that became popular when housing materials were expensive and money was tight.

2) #841 is the **Fairchild house**, built c. 1791. The simplistically styled early one-half Federal style home with center chimney and gable roof was popular in this area.

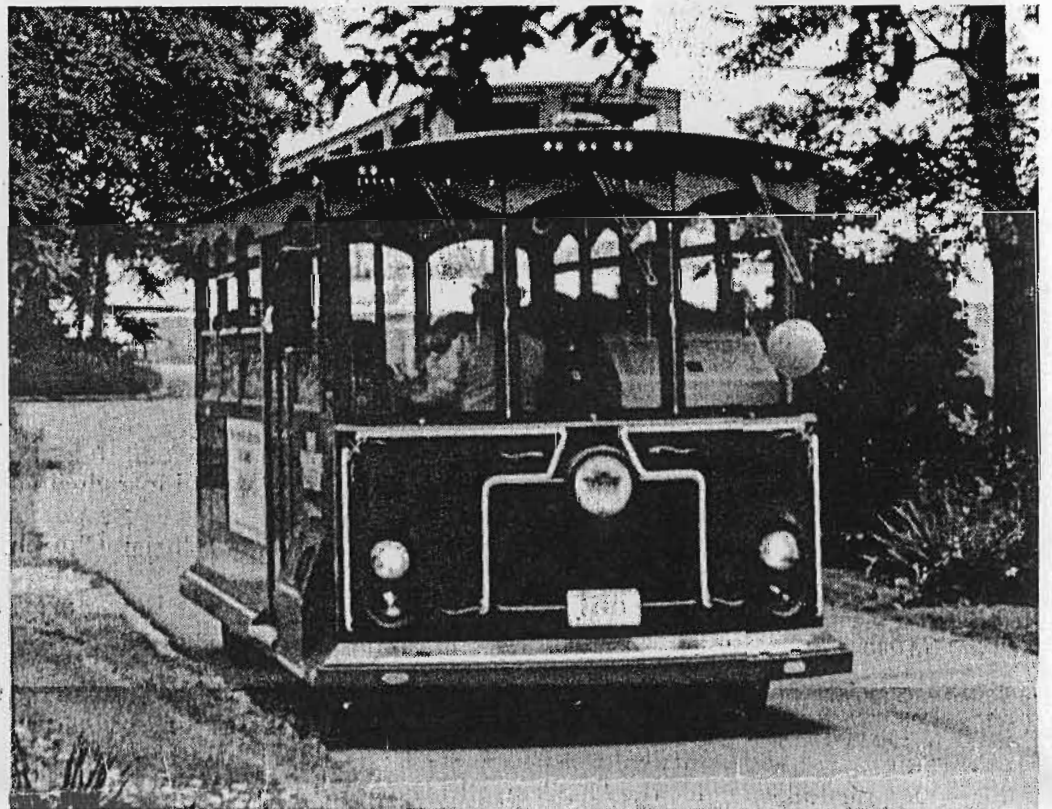
(PROCEED SLOWLY)

3) **Selby's Pond**, the tiny body of water you can see behind the houses on the right, was called the Great Salt Pond in Colonial times and because of its highly saline water, people used it to soak flax to make thread for linen cloth. Legend said the pond was bottomless.

4) #719 on the right was built c. 1760 and has changed very little over the years. Large panes of glass were very expensive in the 18th century and its windows probably were like the 12-over-12 sash you can see in the attic. **Nehemiah Allen**, who lived here, used hides from the slaughter house across the street to make shoes. Leather pants and saddles were also made from the abundance of hides and also exported from the Lower Dock to the West Indies and other far ports. In Colonial Stratford, work clothes were usually made of leather, rather than cloth.

5) #627 on the right is the **Capt. John Selby house**, for whom the pond is named. It dates to c. 1765. Sea captains who sailed from the Lower Dock built their homes near the water so they commanded a view of the port. It was believed that a sea captain lost a minute off his life for every minute he could not view the sea or a waterway. According to Orcutt's *History of Stratford*, Capt. Selby once returned from a voyage with six hogsheads of rum in the cargo on which he neglected to pay duty. The customs agent seized his boat and auctioned it off and Selby was thrown in jail. The owners, who were the minister's sons, quietly bought back the boat and resumed the business and Selby later opened a saloon.

6) #640, at the end of the row of houses once occupied by dock workers, is the **Lewis Burritt house**. This c. 1796 Federal home retains a good deal of its original character. The Burritts were noted cabinet and coffin makers and rumor has it that extra coffins were kept in the basement for those who did not survive their sea voyages.



7) On the left is **Brown's Boatyard**. Small shops such as these have serviced the port and its sailors for more than three centuries.

8) Next on the left is **Bond's Dock**, known over the years as Prince's, Thompson's and the Lower Dock. It was the town's main dock from the mid-17th century. Cargo vessels and sailing packets landed here. Sugar, molasses, rum and salt were imported from the West Indies and horses and barrel staves were exported to the Carribean where both commodities were scarce. Corn and leather goods were also exported. In 1880 **Capt. John Bond** converted the old shipping warehouse into a training center for boxers. Dempsey, Firpo and Jack Johnson are said to have trained here and John L. Sullivan was a frequent visitor.

(BEAR RIGHT ON SHORE ROAD)

9) #19 On the right is the remaining part of an old warehouse constructed in 1830. The upper story served as a residence while the tall basement was a storehouse for export goods.

10) #31 on the left is the only remaining oyster house where Stratford oysters were packed for shipment by boat or train. It was later used to house actors performing at the Theater. Katharine Hepburn lived in it for two summers and enjoyed the fact that water came up through the floorboards at high tide.

11) #50 on the right was once the home of **Albert Laing**, who inspired the Stratford School of decoy carvers. According to *The Art of the Decoy*, Laing's birds "were fashioned so expertly they are as tight and good now as on the day they were finished." In 1886, in failing health and no longer able to carve with the perfection he demanded of himself, Laing made the final entry in his diary "Today the martins left..." and shot himself. His estate listed 111 stool ducks, valued at \$45. Today, his decoys bring \$3,000 to \$25,000 each.

12) Once oystering was an important industry in Stratford. In the 17th century foot-long oysters could be picked up from the river bottom and, even before the American Revolution, laws were passed to limit oyster harvesting to winter and fall. In the 19th century as many as 250 oyster sloops worked the offshore beds in the Sound.

13) On the right is the **American Festival Theatre**, originally and still referred to as the Shakespeare Theatre. It is designed in the octagonal shape of the Globe Theatre in England and sheathed in teak supposedly so hard each nail hole had to be drilled. The Republic of France donated the teak, which was originally intended for a 1939 World's Fair pavilion that was never built. In 1954 Katharine Cornell broke the ground with a gold shovel and the theater opened with **Julius Caesar** the following year. Actor/director John Houseman and actor Morris Carnovsky were instrumental in bringing the AST to the fore and such actors as Christopher Plummer, Raymond Massey, Roddy McDowell and Jack Palance have performed there. Dark for several years, the complex has been acquired by the state, which will run it through the University of Connecticut's Stratford Institute and a board of directors. A limited summer season was produced in 1989 to coincide with Strat-

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ford's 350th Celebration.

(PAUSE AT CORNER BEFORE TURNING RIGHT)

14) Stratford is one of the communities in the area fighting to preserve its coastline. This area appears much as it did at the turn of the century. The salt marsh on your left and in front of you was an open harbor when the first settlers arrived in Stratford.

(PAUSE NEAR MARKER)

15) On your left is **Mac's Harbor**, named for Little Mack (or Mac), who was a shellerman and kept his oyster piles at the south end of the Theatre grounds, known as Shellkeep Point. The plaque, commemorating this historic site, was erected in 1970 by the Connecticut Historical Commission and the town. Across the inlet, at the base of the trees, you can see a crumbled pile of stones marking the site of the **first grist mill**. By 1660 Stratford had three mills, two powered by the tide and the other by a fast flowing inland stream.

Tidal mills were superseded by mills powered by streams, and it was largely due to its superior water power and more protected harbor that Bridgeport became a separate entity from Stratford in 1821. At one time Stratford encompassed all or large parts of what is now Bridgeport, Trumbull, Easton, Monroe, Huntington and Shelton. For years Stratford even had an ongoing dispute with Newtown over its northern border.

16) The early settlers had a surprising variety of food. In addition to their domestic sheep, cows, swine and chickens, they ate water fowl, wild turkey, partridge, quail, pigeon and venison. They grew Indian corn and picked strawberries, blackberries and wild grapes. From the streams and sea came fish, oysters, eels and clams.

17) #320, the large house on the right was probably built c. 1732 by **Joseph Gorham**. This homelot has been occupied since the founding of the town and is listed in Vol. 1, page 1 of the town's land records. Originally a saltbox, it has been radically modified. One owner, the **Rev. Israel Chauncey**, was a founder of Yale University. Later **Capt. Nathan Gorham** wintered his 100-ton schooner across the street where now there is only marsh. The house has sometimes served as an inn even into modern times, but is now privately owned.

(PAUSE AT CORNER OF ELM STREET)

18) This intersection was known as **Sandy Hollow** and the SE corner is the site of the first meeting house which was surrounded by a small burial ground. The green in the middle of South Avenue is the approximate location of the **Old Sandy Hollow School House** that served until the districts were consolidated. The marker is the **Beardsley family monument**, which was dedicated during the 300th celebration in 1939 when the descendants of the original settler William Beardsley had a family reunion.

(PROCEED DOWN SOUTH AVENUE)

19) #973, the blue-grey house with black shutters on your left, is the upper half of the **old Sandy Hollow (or Old South) School**. Shortly after the Consolidated School was built, the old school building was pulled by team and greased skids to this site where it was jacked up 10-12 feet and a framed first story built below. A window pane on the second floor still bears the initials "CG" scratched there by a schoolboy in 1835.

(TURN RIGHT ONTO MAIN STREET)

Main Street, one of the original thoroughfares, dates back to the mid-1600s. The palisade paralleled the street behind the homelots on the west side to protect the settlers from Indians and wolves. At the turn of the century quite a hullabaloo was raised by those who felt the aesthetics of the street would be ruined when telephone and electric poles were added. Nearly half the houses on this street date to before the Civil War and a variety of architectural styles is represented.

20) #1630 on the right is a large, high style Italianate home c. 1870. The flat roof, rounded window hoods, brackets and large windows are all characteristic of Italianate houses.

21) #1656, also on your right, is a Greek Revival, dating to c. 1850. Note the use of classical columns and pediments like those found on a Greek temple.

22) #1770, the house on the right was built in 1920 with hipped roof and stucco exterior, styled after English Tudor homes.

CROSS STREET — WELLS PLACE

(CONTINUE TRAVELING TO STRATFORD AVENUE)

23) Around the turn of the century Stratford experienced a population growth and several streets were built, filling in the Academy Hill area, to provide new home sites. **Wells Place** is such a street, comprised of modest homes representative of the building styles popular from 1900 through 1935. Stained glass was often used — a luxury and status symbol — and some is still evident today.

24) None of the historic character remains at this once important intersection called **Hard's Corner**. **John Hard's store**, built in 1792, stood on the southeast corner with the **Mason's First Hall** on the second floor. Across from it was **Elijah Marshall's Tavern** where Lafayette had breakfast in 1824, and nearby was **Jeremiah Quire's blacksmith shop**. This area is slated for streetscaping and commercial rehabilitation as part of the 350th celebration.

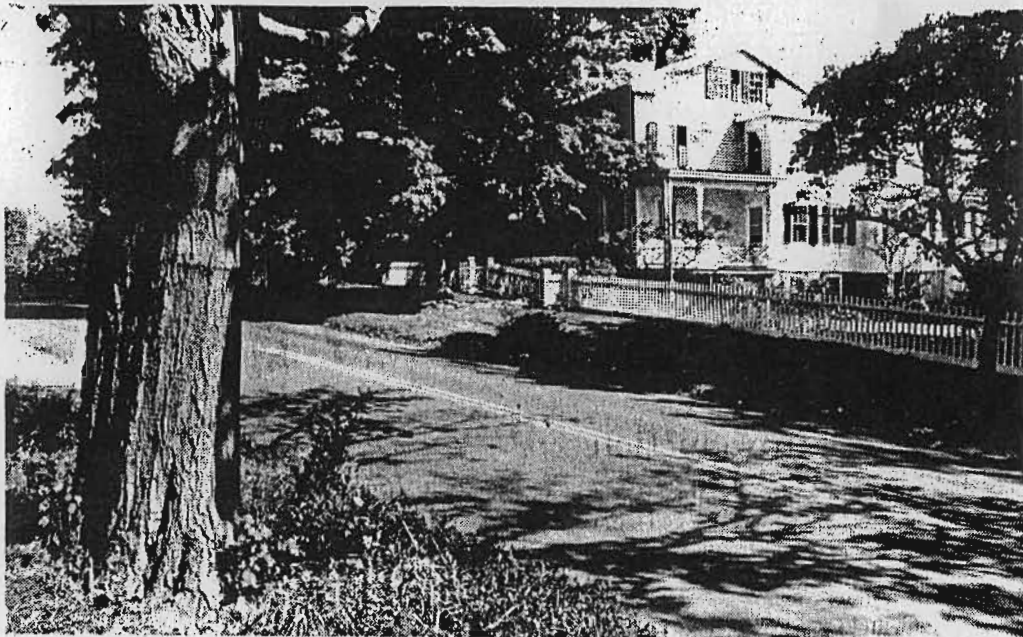
(TURN RIGHT ONTO STRATFORD AVENUE)

In a moment we will be turning onto **Elm Street**, originally known as **Front Street**. Elm and Main were the two roads of the original settlement. The giant native trees for which it was re-named lined each side of the street but have since all fallen to Dutch Elm disease except for one majestic survivor at the SE corner (Stratford and Elm). As part of Stratford's 350th anniversary celebration new disease resistant trees are being planted to replace the elms.

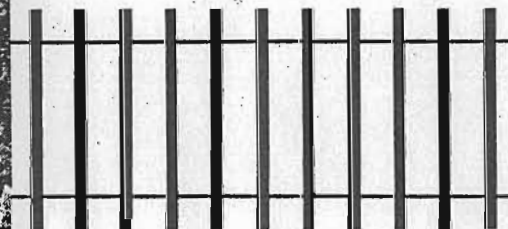
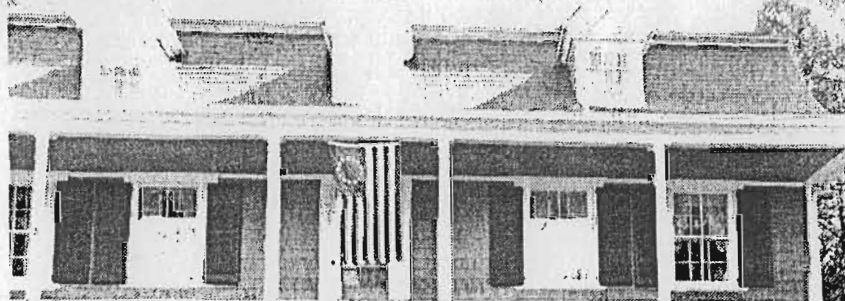
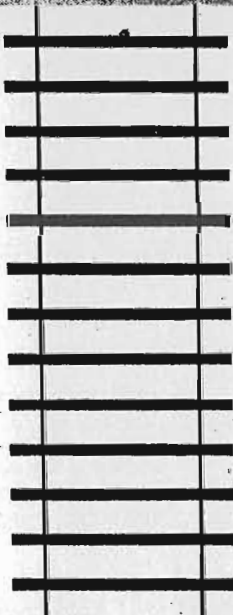
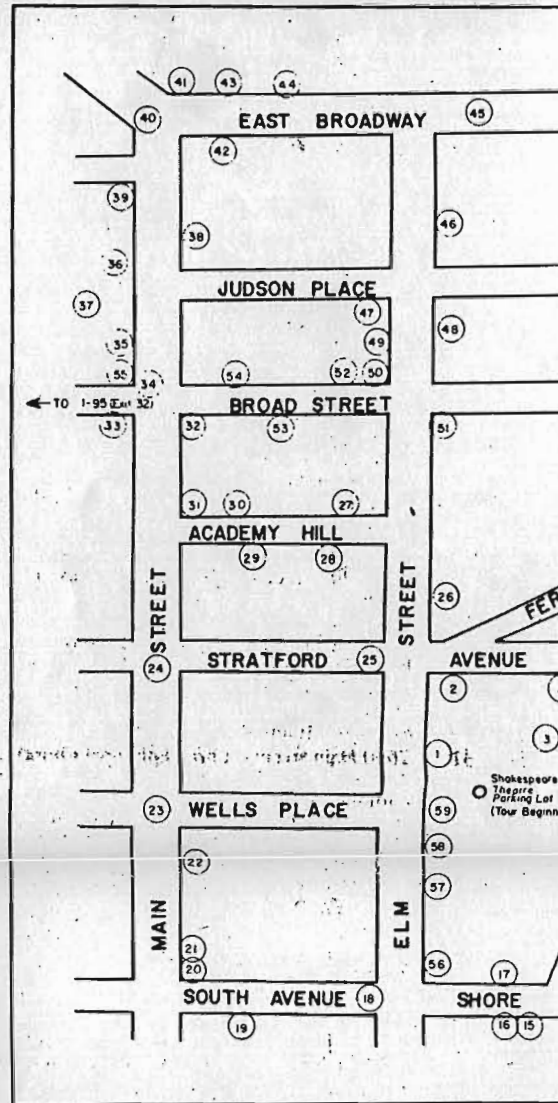
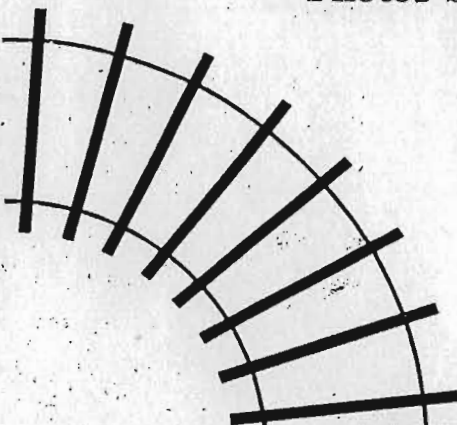
As we continue on Stratford Avenue and cross Main Street, you will notice on your left the esplanade improvement project being completed as part of the town's 350th Celebration.

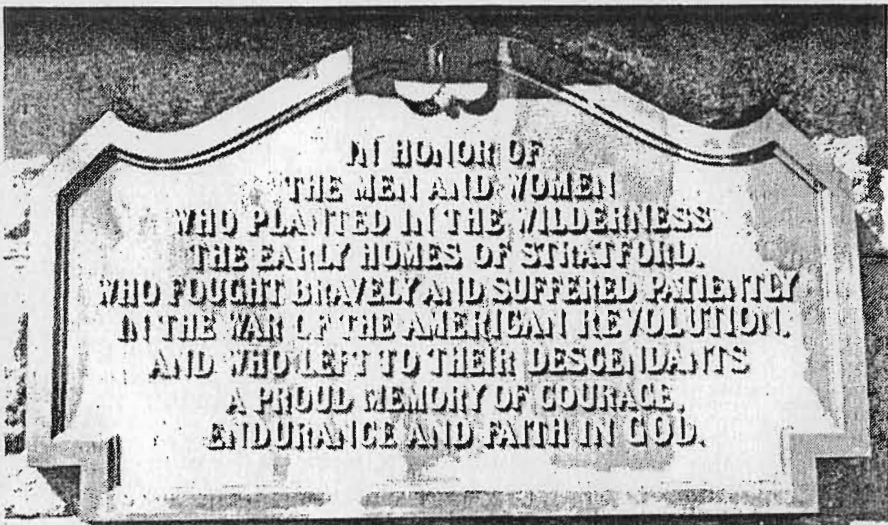
We are now entering the **Academy Hill** area. The homes here are grandiose and stately and of varying ages dating back to the Revolution. The waterfront, which we just left, first served as the town's center but eventually became associated with dock activities, raucous sailors and even boxers and it became more fashionable to live closer to the center of town.

One's home denoted their position in society and houses were constantly being remodeled in the popular style of the day. Georgians and Federals were re-done with Italianate and Greek Revival features to keep up with the times. Only at the turn of the century did it become stylish to own a historic house. This trend, thankfully, accounts for the moving and preservation of many of Stratford's historic houses. Today this attitude is even more prevalent as seen in the establishment of Historic Districts such as this.



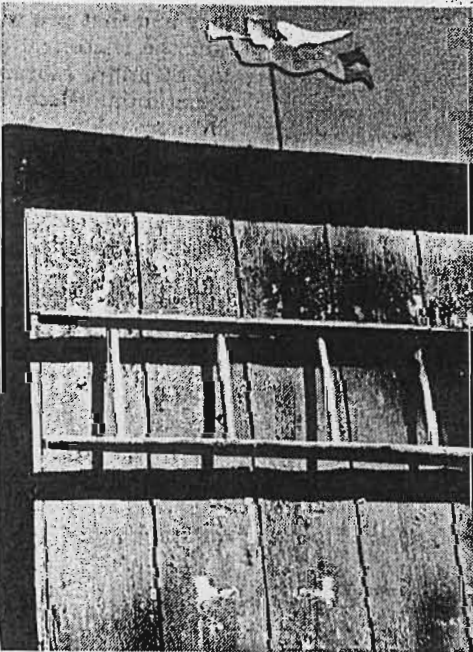
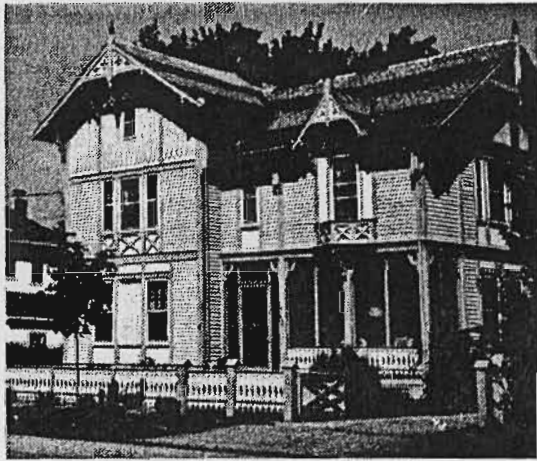
Photos by Michael Kolster & Dorothy Euerle





Tour Key:

- 1 1850 Elm Street — Nicoll-Benjamin House
- 2 841 Stratford Avenue — Fairchild House
- 3 Selby's Pond
- 4 719 Stratford Avenue — Nehemia Allen House
- 5 627 Stratford Avenue — Captain John Selby House
- 6 640 Stratford Avenue — Lewis Burritt House
- 7 Brown's Boatyard
- 8 Bond's Dock
- 9 19 Shore Road — Warehouse
- 10 31 Shore Road — Oyster House
- 11 50 Shore Road — Albert Laing House
- 12 Housatonic River Oystering
- 13 American Festival — (Shakespeare) Theatre
- 14 Salt Marsh
- 15 Mac's Harbor
- 16 Diet of early settlers
- 17 320 Shore Road — Joseph Gorham House
- 18 Sandy Hollow
- 19 973 South Avenue — Sandy Hollow School
- 20 1630 Main Street — Italianate Home
- 21 1656 Main Street — Greek Revival Home
- 22 1770 Main Street — Tudoresque Home
- 23 Wells Place
- 24 Hard's Corner
- 25 Great Wolf Hunt
- 26 1962 Elm Street — Captain Thomas Austin Home
- 27 Academy Hill Common
- 28 923 Academy Hill — Captain D. Polaski Benjamin House
- 29 967 Academy Hill — Captain David Judson House
- 30 Stratford "Tunnels"
- 31 2000 Main Street — Christ Episcopal Church
- 32 2110 Main Street — St. James Roman Catholic Church
- 33 2103 Main Street — Samuel William Johnson House
- 34 World War I Monument
- 35 2203 Main Street — Stratford Library
- 36 2283 Main Street — Sterling House
- 37 Congregational Church Burying Ground
- 38 2288 Main Street — David Brooks House
- 39 2301 Main Street — First Congregational Church
- 40 Town Flaggpole
- 41 1000 East Broadway — Old Center School
- 42 953 East Broadway — Italianate Home
- 43 952 East Broadway — Federal 1/2 House
- 44 922 East Broadway — Shingle Style Home "Olde King's Highway"
- 45 2272 Elm Street — Dr. Agur Tomlinson House
- 46 2211 Elm Street — Queen Anne Style House
- 47 2190 Elm Street — Thomas Wells House
- 48 2175 Elm Street — General Joseph Walker House
- 49 2149 Elm Street — Lt. Governor David Plant House
- 50 2134 Elm Street — Curtis House
- 51 908, 890 Broad Street — Italianate Homes
- 52 Episcopal Burying Ground
- 53 965 Broad Street — Congregational Church Parsonage
- 54 2155 Main Street — Italianate House
- 55 1670 Elm Street — Alfred Ely Beach House
- 56 Site of Phelps Mansion
- 57 1812 Elm Street — Nicoll/Beach Home
- 58 Shakespeare Gardens



(PAUSE)

26) #1962, the Italianate style house on the right, is the first example of the grander architecture of the Academy Hill area. Built in 1852 by Capt. Thomas Austin, it stands almost exactly as when constructed. Austin commanded some of the last and largest of the pre-clipper trans-Atlantic windjammers and continued to sail long after most Stratford shipmasters had retired.

(START UP AND TURN LEFT ONTO ACADEMY HILL)

27) On the right is Academy Hill common. The road we are on is one of four that boxes in this six-acre parcel of land. Called Watch Hill until 1680, it was changed to Meeting House Hill when the second meeting house was built here. In 1743 a third meeting house replaced the old one and was located east of the Civil War monument. It was struck by lightning and burned in 1785 and in 1805 the Stratford Academy was built on the site and stood there until 1872. After the school's construction the hill was re-named Academy Hill and continues to bear that name.

28) #923 on your left was built in 1835 by Asa Curtis for his daughter, who became the wife of Capt. D. Polaski Benjamin. Benjamin began his naval career at 16 as a deck hand during the War of 1812. Captured on Christmas day and imprisoned for two years, he escaped the infamous Dartmoor prison massacre and by 1827 was captain of his own ship, crossing the Atlantic every 106 days. Arriving home from a voyage in 1836, Capt. Benjamin was told by his pastor that his wife Susan had died "loving the Lord." "Like hell she did," Benjamin exclaimed, "She never loved anyone but me!"

In later years Anna Oliver, the first woman preacher in the American Methodist Church, lived here and at one time it was a school for girls.

29) #967 is the Capt. David Judson House, home of The Stratford Historical Society. The curved pediments above the doorway are an outstanding example of such design throughout the Connecticut Valley. The house design is a mid-18th century transition between saltbox and Georgian. In 1988 Judson House was re-painted in its original colors in preparation for the 350th celebration.

The Catherine Bunnell Mitchell Museum, located to the rear, houses exhibits depicting Stratford's history. Tours are conducted by guides in Colonial costume on Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday from mid-April through October.

(PROCEED SLOWLY TO CORNER)

30) Many Stratfordites believe there were tunnels in this area. However, Town Historian Lewis Knapp says that "The 'tunnels' played in were the basements of the Episcopal and Congregational Churches which were built (1858 and 1859) on stone foundations with interior piers and arches to support the columns above. The low height, dirt-floored crawlspaces that formed ad hoc crypts, might have looked to some people to be 'tunnels.' Twentieth century additions of basements were made to both churches.

(TURN RIGHT ONTO MAIN STREET)

31) #2000 on the right is the Christ Episcopal Church. The original parish was established in 1707, making it the oldest parish in the oldest Episcopal diocese in the United States. During the French and Indian Wars a Highland Battalion encamped on Academy Hill took pot-shots at the six-foot tall golden rooster weathervane — the marks of the pellet holes have been filled in. This Gothic-style church was designed in 1857 by Henry Dudley and in 1988 restored to its original colors.

(STOP AT THE CORNER OF MAIN AND BROAD)

32) #2110 on your right is St. James Roman Catholic Church the first Catholic church in Stratford, established in 1886. The building was dedicated in 1914 and the school added in 1949.

33) #2103, across the street with the blue shutters, is the home of Samuel Johnson, son of one of the signers of the U.S. Constitution, William Samuel Johnson, whose home stood on the south side of West Broad Green.

William Samuel Johnson was a member of Congress under the Articles of Confederation, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention and the first Senator from Connecticut. He is credited as one of the authors of the "Connecticut Compromise" which provided for one Representative for each 30,000 people and two Senators per state. As chairman of the Committee on Style, he can be said to have been the "editor" of the Constitution and an original copy of the document bears his marginal notes. Johnson was the first president of Columbia College succeeding his father Dr. Samuel Johnson, who was founder and first president of the then King's College.

34) The statue you see at the end of the green across the street is a World War I monument. Seated on a marble pedestal, the bronzelady holds a dove and olive branches. In her lap are 13 gold stars, one for each stratford man who lost his life.

Running on either side of the green is West Broad Street, once a part of the Boston Post Road. The strip of land in the center of the street is the South Parade Grounds where the train band or militia paraded and trained.

35) #2203 on the left is the Stratford Library. The town's first library was in David Brooks' store and post office across the street and it was long years before Stratford had a true library. The Stratford Library Association, formed in 1885, finally found a permanent home in this Romanesque building, a gift to the town from Birdseye Blakeman. Designed by William Miller, it is made of New York State granite. In the 1970s the building was renovated and expanded to include the Sterling Memorial Building/American Legion Hall, which was built with granite quarried from Roosevelt Forest in the north end of town. The tile roof is unique. The Shakespeare and rose window from the original building are incorporated in the new.

36) #2283 On the left is Sterling House, Stratford's community center. The 30-room mansion originally sat on eight acres laid out by the firm of Frederick Law Olmstead, landscape architect of New York City's Central Park. The house was designed for John W. Sterling by Bruce Price, who designed Osborne and Welch Halls at Yale University. Sterling was a Yale graduate and its largest benefactor. His maiden sister Cordelia lived in the house until 1931 and left it to the town to be used as a community center. Note the eyebrow window in the roof and the gargoyle over the side entrance.

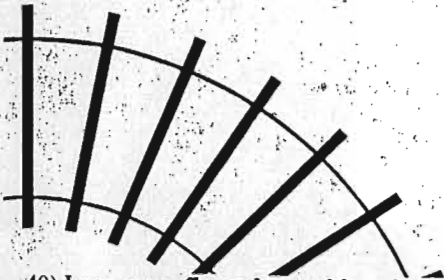
37) Behind the Stratford Library and Sterling House is the Old Congregational Church Burying Ground, set aside by the town fathers in 1678. The memorial gates were erected by the Mary Silliman Chapter, National Society Daughters of the

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American Revolution, in 1906 and are dedicated to "the men and women who planted in the wilderness the early homes of Stratford, who fought bravely and suffered patiently in the war of the American Revolution and who left to their descendants a proud memory of courage, endurance and faith in God."

38) #2288, the yellow building on the right, is the David Brooks house. This saltbox, built in c. 1715, served as a post office, general store and as the stagecoach stop from New York to Boston.

39) #2301 On the left is the **First Congregational Church**, built between 1857-9. It was designed in the Swiss Gothic style by famed ecclesiastic architect Leopold Eidlitz. When the church was repaired c. 1960, the architecture of the steeple was changed to neo-Colonial to the dismay of many, including a Yale professor of architectural history, who had previously brought students here to study Eidlitz's Carpenter Gothic edifice.



40) Long ago a **flagpole** stood here but over the years it was replaced by other things. In recent years locals continued to direct people to Stratford Center, saying, "Go to the flagpole" when, in fact, the circle in the rotary had a lamp post. After a hurricane toppled it in 1986, the **Lovell family** put up the **flagpole** you see today and at last made the directions fact again.

(TURN RIGHT ONTO EAST BROADWAY AND PAUSE ACROSS FROM CENTER SCHOOL.)

This road, previously called Ferry Road and Schoolhouse Road, marks the northern boundary of the National Register Historic District. It leads to the fifth **Washington Bridge**. Before there was a bridge people crossed the Housatonic River via ferry. In 1670 the fare was a half-penny for people and two pence for "horse or beast." Moses Wheeler, who died at age 100 and was quite likely New England's first centenarian, was the ferryman for many years. When he retired his son Samuel followed the tradition.

41) #1000 across the street is the **Board of Education** which is housed in the **Old Center School**. In 1885 the three-story Stratford Graded, or Consolidated School was built here to replace the one-room schools spread throughout town. In 1921 the building burned and classes were held in different locations throughout town until the new Stratford High School was completed in 1925. The Old Center School was re-built and used as a grammar school until 1970.

42) #953 On the right is a high style Italianate home c. 1855. Note the unusual Ionic portico on the front.

43) #952 On your left is what is known as a Federal one-half house. Homes such as this one built c. 1820 were popular dur-

49) #2175 On the right is the **General Joseph Walker** house, believed to be one of the oldest in the area with a suspected construction date of c. 1690. Its style is derived from Post-medieval English buildings. In 1934 it was moved piece-by-piece from Main Street north of the Railroad Station to its present site. The Raymond Baldwin family lived here at one time. He had the distinction of serving as Governor of Connecticut, Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court and United States Congressman.

(STOP AT INTERSECTION OF BROAD)

50) #2149 On the righthand corner is the **Lt. Gov. David Plant** house, which he designed and built in 1825 to replace the home his father set up after serving in the French and Indian War. David probably got his ideas for such features as the arched doorways and curved balustrade (which he may have turned himself in his father's wheelwright shop) from his visits to Yale classmate John Calhoun in the South.

In 1889 it was known as "where the children of the County Home live." The kitchen in the north of the house is thought to have been the original wheelwright shop.

Plant served as a State Senator, Lt. Governor on the Whig ticket and went on to become a Congressman. He was Stratford's first Judge of Probate.

51) #2134 Kitty-corner across the intersection is the **Curtis house**. It stands on the corner of Elm and Broad Streets facing Academy Hill, but in 1750 it stood on the corner of Front Street and New Lane and faced Meeting House Hill. Can you figure out why? (Those were the previous names.)

The Georgian style house has a sad history. It was built in the latter half of the 1700s by **Edward Curtis** for his bride-to-be, but Curtis died before he could marry and the house was completed and lived in by his nephew, Henry. The house's bizarre slant is the result of years of settling, but Stratford legend says it began to tilt the day Edward died.

(TURN RIGHT ONTO BROAD STREET)

52) #908 and #890 On the right are two more stylized Italianate homes built around c. 1850 by two brothers, each trying to surpass the other in grandeur.

53) On the left is the **Episcopal burying grounds**. It has existed since 1723 when the first Episcopal church was built. In 1931 Columbia University dedicated the gates to Dr. Samuel Johnson and William Samuel Johnson, both of whom are buried here. The large oak next to their graves was grown from an acorn from the Charter Oak, presented by the Captain David Hawley Chapter, Children of the American Revolution, during the Tercentenary celebration.

(PAUSE IN FRONT OF)

54) #965 on the right was the **Congregational Church Parsonage**. Leopold Eidlitz, who designed the church, was noted for creating such buildings as the American Exchange National and Dry Dock Savings banks and collaborating on the New York State capitol. He did not build residences. But somehow William Bothe prevailed upon him to design the parsonage also and it was built in the Swiss style of the church. Today it is privately owned.

55) #2155 Main Street, across the intersection, is an example of a high style Italianate house c. 1850. Over the years it became impossible for such a large house to function as a private

home and for some time it was the Red Cross building. It had fallen into disrepair until purchased and restored by the **Pist family**.

(TURN LEFT ONTO MAIN STREET AND PROCEED TO SOUTH AVENUE, TURN LEFT ON SOUTH AND PROCEED TO AND TURN LEFT ONTO ELM STREET)

56) #1670 on your right is a fine example of the transitional architecture between Greek revival and Italianate. **Alfred El Beach**, who lived here, invented the first practical typewriter the first with raised type for the blind; published the *New York Sun*; and began the *Scientific American*. In 1868 he secretly dug a block-and-a-half long tunnel and built a magnificent waiting room under a Manhattan street to demonstrate his pneumatically-powered subway car. Sadly, his plan was sabotaged by Tammany Boss Tweed and today only a plaque marks the spot of Beach's walled-up dream.

Although he never made money from his own inventions, Beach became rich acting as consultant to such men as Samuel Morse and Elias Howe and, as Thomas Edison's patent attorney, he was among the first to see the incandescent lamp, phonograph and moving picture machine.

57) Where you see the recent housing development, once stood Stratford's most notorious building. The **Phelps Mansion** was built in 1826 by the wife of **Capt. George R. Dowell** who her seafaring husband was on his final voyage. The 70-by-12 foot main hallway, built to the exact dimensions of a clipper ship's deck, and the twin stairways on either end were meant to allow the Captain to feel he was aboard his ship. Sadly, he died of the plague and never got to enjoy it. The next owner died within two years and in 1840 it became a school for boys.

In 1849 the mansion was sold to the **Rev. Eliakin Phelps** and soon it became the scene of all kinds of supposed supernatural occurrences. Believers and sceptics crowded into town on every train and a special vehicle carried sightseers to the house night and day. Mrs. Phelps and her children left the house and the weird happenings stopped.

For the next 100 years all was quiet. In the 1940s the mansion became a convalescent home and strange events were said to occur again, including the report that the "spirits" twice saved the life of the owners' little son.

Eventually the pillared mansion fell prey to neglect, vandals, vagrants and fire. In 1972, amidst new reports of mysterious happenings and despite the pleas and protests of townspeople, the once stately home fell to the wrecker's ball.

58) #1812 Also on the right, is the Colonial/Georgian style **Nicol/Beach** home, heralded as one of the finest examples of pre-Revolutionary architecture in the area. Its original hand-hewn shingles date from a time when most houses in Connecticut were clapboard sided. In the War of 1812 Capt. Samuel Nicol commanded the 15-gun schooner privateer "Scourge" and played havoc with British shipping, capturing prizes and making his fortune. This house was also the home of **Stanley Beach**, an early aviation enthusiast who built his own plane in a nearby barn and saw the Wright brothers fly, knew Glenn Curtiss and Bleriot, and worked with Gustave Whitehead. Imbedded in the sidewalk at the curb is a **millstone** thought to be one of the originals from Colonial times.

(TURN RIGHT INTO AMERICAN FESTIVAL THEATRE GROUNDS)

59) The **Shakespeare Garden** was conceived and originally planted by actor Will Geer (Grandpa Walton), who had a degree in landscaping. The garden contains many of the plants mentioned in Shakespeare's works. The Shakespeare Guild, a group of longtime AST and now AFT volunteers, maintains the garden today.

Conclusion

This trolley/driving tour was written by Dee Watt for the 350th Celebration, based on the Architectural Tour created by Yankee Intern Mary Allyn Schwartz in 1988. Included is information garnered from William Howard Wilcoxson's *History of Stratford, Connecticut*; the valuable input and writings of Town Historian Lewis Knapp's *A Walk Through Time: Walking Tours of Stratford, Connecticut*, by Barbara M. Sirois; and numerous other sources.

The other members of the 350th Trolley Tour Committee — Town Planner David Killeen, 350th Executive Director Gioia Marinaccio, Susan Verrell and Patricia Naylor — offered continued encouragement, patience, guidance and time.

We hope the tour will when your desire to learn more about Stratford history and that you will consult the Historical Society, the Stratford Library Association and local school for more information.

ing that period as they were approximately half the size of a standard Federal style house yet looked as elegant.

44) #922 On the left is a shingle style home built c. 1895. This style became very popular in the midwest and west around the turn of the century.

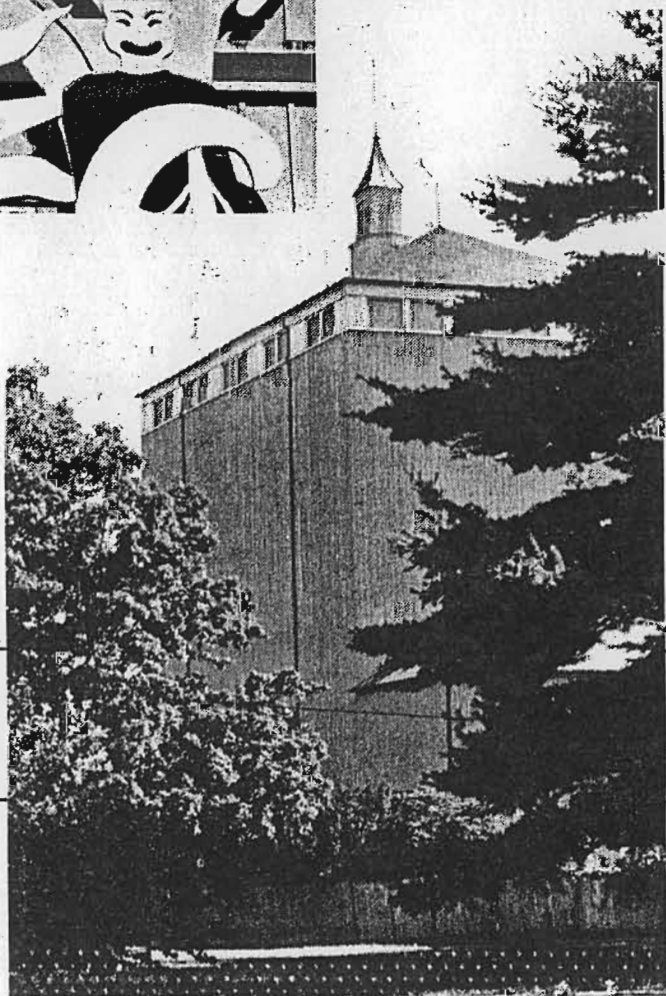
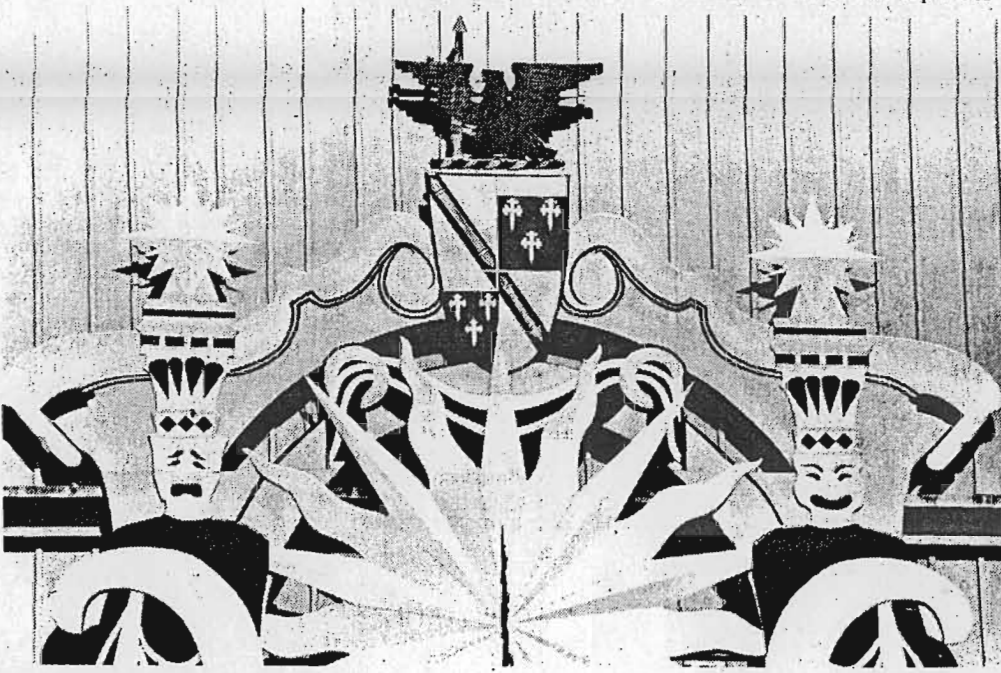
45) The stone marker at the intersection explains that you are now on the "**Olde King's Highway**," better known as the **Boston Post Road**. Established in 1672-3, it is the **oldest mail route** in the United States and followed Indian trails from New York to Boston. Over this very ground Stratford's post rider **Ebenezer Hurd** carried the news of Lexington and Concord.

(TURN RIGHT ONTO ELM STREET)

46) #2272 On your left is the **Dr. Agur Tomlinson** house. The c. 1772 Georgian-style home was one of the first in Stratford to be restored and was moved from Main Street by Judge Russell to make way for the library. Russell's daughter Frances (Fanny) ran the Library for more than 60 years and her office in the new building was on the very spot where her bedroom had been.

47) #2211 On the righthand corner, as we cross the intersection, is a very ornate Queen Anne style. Notice the multicolor treatment highlighting the different elements of the house. Built in 1892, it is one of the highest style houses of this type in Stratford.

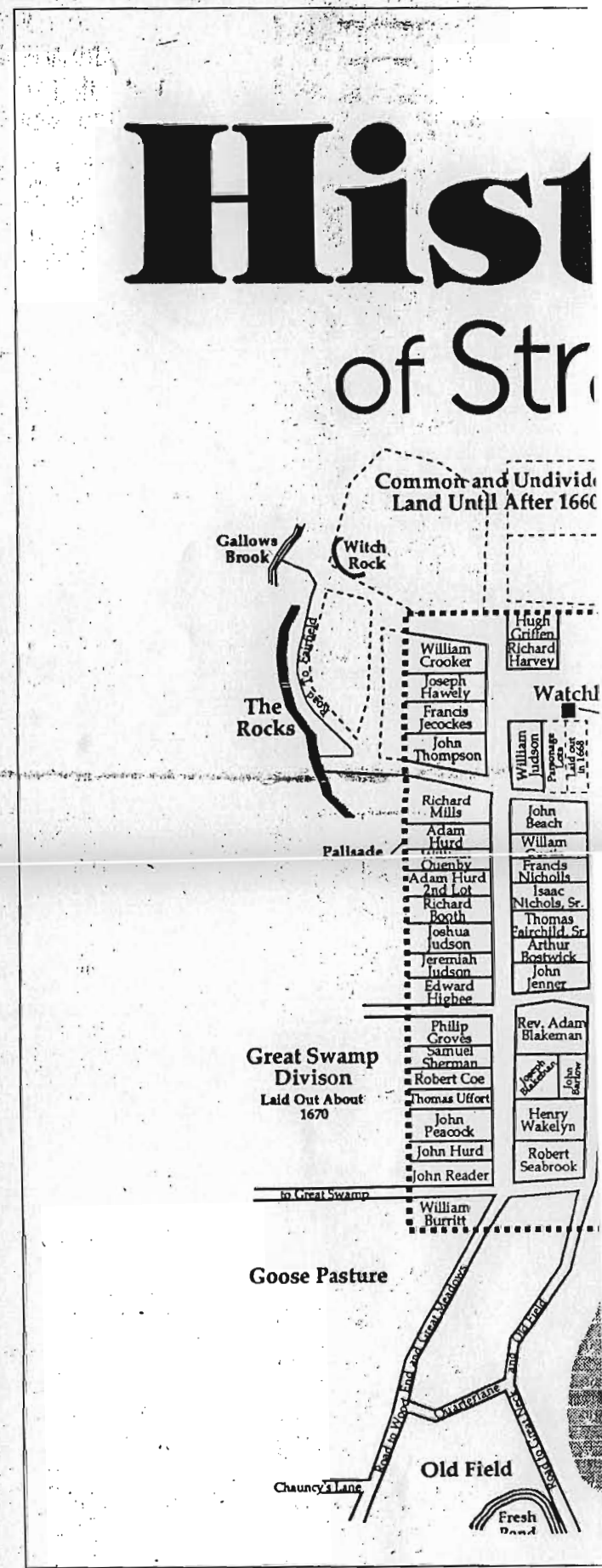
48) #2190 On the left is the **Thomas Wells** house, another example of a c. 1750 saltbox. The **Shelton** family, who lived here from 1842-1917, is said to have unearthed a chest of Spanish coins in the cellar, giving rise to the rumor that it was part of Captain Kid's treasure. For years people have searched for Kidd's treasure on Lordship beaches and off-shore islands.



1637 — Flight of Pequots, through Cupheag, to last stand at Southport.
 1638 — This territory granted by Indians to Connecticut Colony for security. Connecticut's first constitution drawn up by Roger Ludlow of Fairfield.
 1639 — First 17 settler-farmers settled at Cupheag, led by the Reverend Adam Blakeman. First (now Congregational) church organized.
 1640 — Settlement called "Cupheag." Boundaries ordered, settled by General Court.
 1641 — About this time the first meeting house was erected at Sandy Hollow.
 1642 — First representative (Philip Groves) sent to the General Government.
 1643 — (Settlement first called "Stratford." Palisade built across Watch-house hill. Indians troublesome.
 1644 — (watch kept nights and Sundays, militia called out several times - House built on the hill for these soldiers 1645 — (gave the name "Watch-house" to hill now called "Academy Hill."
 1646 — Stratford gave six pounds, fourteen shillings "to maintain poor scholars at Cambridge."
 1647 — General Court ordered taxes of Stratford and Fairfield, formerly collected together as one plantation, to be collected separately.
 1648 — Town plot laid out. Roger Ludlow asked General Court to permit Moses Wheeler to operate a ferry across what is now the Housatonic River.
 1650 — Town records begin. Town voted to pay half the salary of a schoolmaster, the parents of pupils sent, to pay the rest.
 1651 — Goody Bassett tried, and hanged, for witchcraft.
 1652 — Voted that "the present meetinghouse be fortified as a place of safety for women and children in times of danger."
 1653 — Establishment of ferry at what is now Washington Bridge.
 1654 — Mill built at Old Mill Green by John Hurd Sr. and Thomas Sherwood Sr.
 1655 — Trouble with Dutch and with Chief Ninigret of the Narraganset nation.
 1656 — First Indian deed made. General Court confirmed right of soil to inhabitants.
 1658 — General Court ordered planting land laid out for Indians, that peace should prevail.
 1659 — Court assigned Golden Hill to Indians and settled titles of plantations. First purchase of land made in Stratford, for the town, by Moses Wheeler.
 1660 — Mention made that the first meetinghouse had been using a bell to summon worshippers to services (other towns used a drum).
 1661 — Joseph Judson made the Mohagan Hills land purchase for the town.
 1662 — Long Hill purchase, which included most of Trumbull, Monroe and Easton. Connecticut and New Haven Colonies united under one charter.
 1663 — James Blakeman sold mill at Old Mill Green and, the next year, built mill at what is now known as "Peck's Mill."
 1664 — Dutch "New Amsterdam" became English "New York," causing peace of mind to Stratford and other nearby English settlements.
 1665 — The Reverend Israel Chauncey called to assist the aged Rev. Adam Blakeman, who died this same year.
 1666 — Difficulties arising in first church, a second ecclesiastical society was formed. Fairfield County, and three other counties, organized.
 1667 — Permission granted to establish plantation at Newtown, soon abandoned.
 1668 — Regulation, or "advice," of Governor accepted concerning voting privileges.
 1669 — Liberty granted for both Congregational societies to use the same building for services at different times.
 1670 — A "Select school" authorized.
 1671 — White Hills purchase, for forty pounds.
 1672 — Stratford people made settlement at Woodbury.
 1673 — Militia companies of towns placed in county organizations.
 1674 — Defenses strengthened against any emergency.
 1675 — King Philip's War, — Men drafted, — provisions collected.
 1676 — War ended.
 1677 — Congregational burying ground laid out. Attempts to distribute lots on Golden Hill stopped.
 1678 — Town voted twenty pounds to maintain a schoolmaster. General Court reaffirms grant to Indians at Golden Hill.
 1679 — Boundary line settled between Fairfield and Stratford. General Court ordered that "present roads from plantation to plantation shall be reputed the country roads, or 'King's Highway.'"
 1680 — Second Congregational church building

erected, placed on Watch House Hill. Tract at Coram Hill given to Indians.
 1681 — Ceremony, under an oak near western boundary, at which final Indian deed was signed as authorized by General Court.
 1683 — First Meetinghouse, at Sandy Hollow, torn down.
 1684 — Settlement with Moses Wheeler about the land he had purchased in 1659.
 1685 — Highway to Fairfield established by town act.
 1686 — First ladder company — every householder in Stratford must provide a ladder to reach the top of his house. Wharfs provided and warehouses built.
 1687 — First provision made by town for the support of public school instruction.
 1688 — Patent, or charter, of town of Stratford, granted in 1686 by Governor and General Court, was recorded in the town records by Joseph Curtis.
 1689 — Town ordered meetinghouse fortified as a place of security.
 1690 — Samuel Wheeler leased the Stratford ferry for twenty-one years.
 1692 — Last trial for witchcraft in Connecticut (Mercy Disborough's) was held in Fairfield.
 1693 — The wolf hunt.
 1695 — Ecclesiastical Society of Stratford was organized.
 1696 — "James Bennitt, a shipwright, built a vessel at Stratford."
 1697 — Birth of Elnathan Beach, who first, in Connecticut, began a fund for relief of the poor.
 1698 — Death of Moses Wheeler, aged 100 years, the first ferryman.
 1702 — Death of the Reverend Israel Chauncey.
 1704 — Birth of the Hon. Robert Walker, noted lawyer with few equals in his day.
 1705 — Indian capitol, or "Council-fire place," at New Milford, sold.
 1706 — The Rev. George Muirson, Episcopal missionary at Rye, held services at Stratford and baptized twenty-four persons, "which was the first step toward introducing the church worship into the colony" (for Episcopalians).
 1707 — Christ Church, first Episcopal parish in Connecticut, was founded.
 1708 — The Rev. Muirson died. Episcopal church left to occasional visit of missionaries.
 1709 — The Rev. Timothy Cutler settled as minister of Congregational church.
 1710 — Birth of General David Wooster, Revolutionary War officer.
 1712 — The Rev. Francis Phillips, an Episcopal missionary, labored here about five months.
 1714 — Episcopal churchmen began the work of building a house of worship.
 1715 — Voted that "our neighbors north of Tanner's Brook may set up a schoolhouse at the north end of the town at their own expense."
 1716 — Oronoque allowed a separate school.
 1717 — Separate school established at Old Mill green.
 1719 — The Rev. Timothy Cutler became president of Yale College.
 1722 — The Rev. George Pigot, msionary from New York, visited Episcopal parish. The building of a church edifice considered. The Rev. Hezekiah Gold called to be minister of Congregational church. A congregational parsonage begun.
 1723 — Judson House built. Episcopal burying ground established. The Rev. Samuel Johnson reached Stratford after his ordination in England. The Rev. Timothy Cutler resigned presidency of Yale College, went to England and was ordained an Episcopal clergyman.
 1724 — First service held in the First Episcopal Church building.
 1727 — Episcopalians were excused from paying taxes for support of the Congregational church. Birth of William Samuel Johnson, delegate to the Constitutional Convention, president of Columbia College and United States Senator from Connecticut.
 1730 — Robert Wheeler granted liberty to set up grist mill on east bank of Far Mill River.
 1732 — Division of common lands ordered, which was not made until 1783.
 1733 — The Rev. Samuel Johnson and others requested liberty of erecting and setting up a school house on the Common.
 1735 — Supporters of the Episcopal church petition for town to grant a portion of common lands for their minister. It was granted.
 1736 — Birth, in Stratford, of Andrew Adams whose name appears signed to the Articles of Confederation.
 1737 — All taxed, but tax money of Episcopalians

turned back to their use.
 1739 — Another request for part of common land for Episcopal church use, again granted.
 1740 — Visit of the Rev. George Whitefield, who stood upon the steps of the Congregational Church on Academy Hill and preached to a great multitude.
 1743 — Third Congregational church building erected, by taxation. Second Episcopal church building erected on Main Street, by stock ownership. Upon its spire is placed the weather-cock which tops the spire of the present edifice.
 1744 — New Episcopal building, unplastered and without pews, opened with a sermon by Dr. Johnson.
 1745 — Public greens came into town's possession as gifts of private individuals.
 1750 — Voted to build a town hall.



1751 — Agreement for a clock to be built for Episcopal tower by John Davis, "a stranger."
 1752 — The Rev. Hezekiah Gold, Congregational minister, having married an Episcopalian, who insisted upon attending her own church services, thereby making him escort her to and from the door of her church, before and after conducting his own service. The Rev. Gold was pastor for twenty years.
 1753 — Birth of Captain Nehemiah Gorham, a Revolutionary War officer.
 1754 — Dr. Samuel Johnson accepted presidency of King's College. The Rev. Iraiah Wetmore is pastor of First Congregational Church.
 1756 — Washington, as a British officer, first passed through Stratford. Birth of General Joseph Walker,

a Revolutionary War officer.

1757 — "Colonel Frazier's Highland Battalion was encamped on the common and amused themselves by shooting at the weather-cock on the Episcopal church spire, piercing it many times." Birth of Colonel Aaron Benjamin, who was in the attack on Stony Point.

1758 — First town meeting held in first town hall. Organ placed in Episcopal Church. Stratford and sister towns recompensed by General Assembly for quartering Colonel Frazier's Highland Battalion.

1760 — Town voted to build a "pest house."

1762 — Severe drought, but spring which answered the prayers of the Rev. Nathan Birdseye, in Oranoke never has dried. Episcopal bell cast in Fairfield.

baronet, at Benjamin Tavern.

1771 — Marriage, in Christ Church, of Glorianna Folsom and John Stirling.

1772 — Death of Dr. Samuel Johnson.

1773 — Glorianna Folsom Stirling sailed from New York to rejoin her husband at Gloriat, the family seat at Stirlingshire, in Scotland.

1774 — Town meeting authorized collections to be taken to assist the oppressed people of Boston.

1775 — Washington met Lafayette at the Benjamin Tavern.

1776 — Captain David Hawley sailed from Stratford, was captured by the British but later escaped to New York in a small boat.

1777 — Town meeting, held at North Parish, voted unanimously the sum of ten pounds to each who enlisted in Continental service for three years or during the war. Voted a tax of eight pence on the pound on list of 1776 to pay same. Later, committee appointed to receive donations of provisions for support of soldier's families. Additional tax of six pence on pound. During spring and winter about six hundred persons had smallpox.

1778 — Articles of Confederation carefully considered and approved.

1779 — Tyrone's raids on shore towns, Stratford people, terrified, circulated petition requesting William Samuel Johnson and other prominent people to use their influence with British admiral and General to save Stratford. Johnson arrested, by orders of General Oliver Wolcott and ordered sent to Farmington, under guard, to prevent him holding correspondence with enemy. Johnson given parole, journeyed to place the case before Governor Trumbull and soon was exonerated by Council of Safety. Town makes effort to clear itself of charge of carrying on a traitorous correspondence with the enemy.

1780 — Town voted to provide one hundred of each of the following: shirts, mittens, stockings and shoes for soldiers from Stratford who were in active service. Birth of Gideon Tomlinson, Governor of Connecticut from 1827 to 1831 and U.S. Senator. Division of town into two townships considered.

1781 — Protest to General Assembly against division of town. Matter dropped.

1782 — Town authorized to "borrow money on the credit of the Town," for the first time, to pay bounties to fill the quota for the army. Berkshire mill established.

1783 — May 26th set apart as a day of "Public Rejoicing" for peace. Prayers, an address, singing, refreshments and toasts, and discharging of cannon made up the celebration. Birth of Hon. David Plant, four years Lieut. Governor of Connecticut and member of Congress.

1784 — Ordination of Stephen William Stebbins of Congregational Church, who "stopped the vandalism which cut away so much from Academy Hill and spoiled its symmetry."

1785 — Third Congregational Church struck by lightning and destroyed by fire.

1786 — Fourth Congregational Church built on location of present edifice and dedicated. Benjamin's Bridge built and Stratford Road (Avenue) opened.

1787 — Federal convention, William Samuel Johnson a delegate. Town meeting excitement over Connecticut's adopting the Constitution.

1789 — Washington breakfasted at Stratford on presidential tour of New England. Town of Huntington set off from Stratford.

1790 — Post office established with Robert Walker as first postmaster. Methodist Church organized in Stratford by Jesse Lee.

1791 — Methodist Bishop Asbury preached in the town house.

1792 — General Joseph Walker granted the privilege to build a grist mill at Benjamin's Bridge. This became the old "Yellow Mill."

1795 — Petition, for a bridge at the Ferry, before the General Assembly.

1796 — Birth of Capt. D. Pulaski Benjamin, last survivor of Dartmoor prisoners.

1797 — Town of Trumbull set off from Stratford.

1798 — Birthdate of Jesse Olney, A.M., author of geography and history text books, whose home was what is now the St. James rectory.

1799 — Epidemic of dysentery and typhus fever believed to be due to dyke built across Little Neck Creek.

1800 — William Samuel Johnson resigned presidency of Columbia, held since 1787.

1801 — "Turnpike era" under way.

1802 — Permission granted to build a toll bridge at the Ferry. Golden Hill Indian find established and still endures.

1803 — Name "Washington Bridge" first used.

1804 — Stratford Academy established.

1805 — Town voted to remove dyke at Little Neck Academy completed.

1806 — Proprietors of Stratford Academy made corporate body. First bridge, over Housatonic washed away by ice-flood.

1807 — Lottery, granted by Legislature, to raise funds for another bridge.

1808 — Second bridge begun.

1810 — First Methodist Church building erected.

1812 — War with Great Britain — The "Scourge" Captain Samuel Nicoll, captured many prizes. Historic crystal chandelier, once owned by Christ Church, obtained from this source.

1813 — Second bridge at Ferry completed.

1814 — The Rev. Matthew R. Dutton, pastor at First Congregational Church. Stratford militia twice summoned to help defend Bridgeport when British vessels anchored off the harbor. No attacks made.

1815 — Captain Samuel Nicoll built dyke at Lordship farm.

1817 — Death of the Rev. Nathan Birdseye, aged 103 years.

1818 — Dwelling and barns at Lordship farm built. Red cedar pump taken from a Spanish vessel being repaired at New York, brought and installed at Lordship farm by Capt. Nicoll for watering cattle. Forty-three years later it was taken up and, afterwards used by Spiritualists to pump water from the hole at the diggings about a mile east of the farm, near the shore. Wood later made into canes.

1821 — Borough of Bridgeport set off from Stratford.

1822 — Lighthouse keeper lost a cow by mosquito.

1823 — Monroe set off from Huntington.

1824 — Marquis de Lafayette passed through Stratford and stopped at Marshall's Tavern. Spent one half hour greeting the citizens.

1825 — The Rev. Joshua Leavitt, D.D. pastor of First Congregational Church.

1826 — Congregational Church Sunday School organized by Dr. Leavitt.

1830 — The Rev. Thomas Robbins pastor at First Congregational Church.

1831 — The Rev. James Harvey Linsley ordained minister of Baptist Church. He had already opened a mission at the lower wharf wholly at his own expense.

1832 — The Rev. Frederick W. Chapman pastor of First Congregational Church.

1834 — Methodist Church ceased to be on a circuit and became a station with a resident minister.

1836 — Bridgeport made a city. Housatonic railroad built.

1837 — Universalist Church building dedicated.

1839 — Second Methodist Church erected. The Rev. William Bouton Weed pastor at First Congregational Church.

1840 — Probate records of Stratford, formerly kept in Fairfield or Bridgeport, henceforth kept in Stratford.

1842 — "General Lafayette," first steamboat up the Housatonic to Derby.

1843 — Death of Mr. Linsley.

1844 — Putney Chapel built. New York and New Haven Railroad chartered.

1845 — Congregational lecture room built. Naugatuck railroad chartered.

1846 — About time of movement to settle middle west. Stratford people went.

1847 — Frederick A. Segewick became head of Stratford Academy.

1848 — Drawbridge widened. First snowplow in town, built by Mr. Sedgewick.

1849 — First railroad trains passed Stratford.

1850 — Stratford's "Spirit Knockings."

1851 — Death of Hon. David Plant, Lt. Gov. 1824-1827. Tide Mill at Eagle's Nest, built by the Johnsons, burned.

1857 — The Rev. Joseph R. Page pastor at First Congregational Church.

1858 — The Rev. Benjamin L. Swan pastor at First Congregational Church. Third and present (1939) Episcopal edifice consecrated.

1859 — Fifth and present Congregational Church built.

1860 — Dyke rebuilt at Little Neck Creek.

1861 — Civil War. Stratford men in Union ranks. Women provided comforts for them and for wounded in hospitals.

1862 — The Rev. B.L. Swan, early town historian resigned as pastor of Congregational Church.

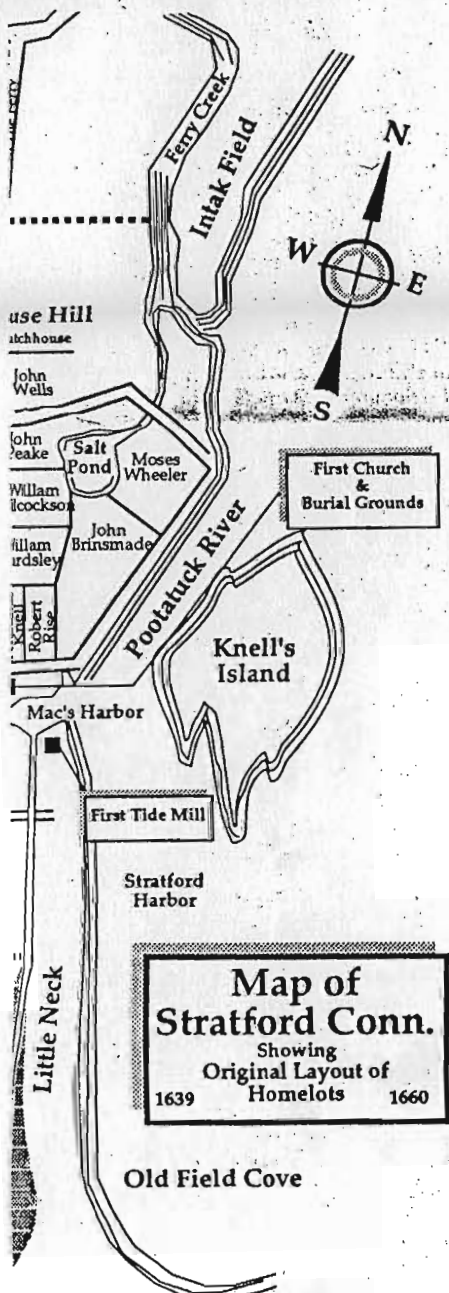
1863 — Company K, 8th Regt., Connecticut National Guard, organized.

1864 — The Rev. Louis R. Charpiot pastor at First Congregational Church. Christ Church chapel erected.

1865 — End of War.

Continued on page 2

The Story of Stratford



1764 — First time-restriction for taking oysters — ten shillings fine for taking them between April 20 and September 10.

1765 — Golden Hill reservation sold by Indians.

1766 — Honorable William Samuel Johnson appointed by General Assembly to go to England and defend the Colony of Connecticut concerning its title to certain lands. Loss of suit meant threat to Connecticut's charter.

1767 — Johnson successful. Became acquainted with many in high places at court.

1768 — The Rev. Ebenezer Kneeland called to assist Dr. Johnson at Episcopal Church.

1770 — Arrival of John Stirling, son of Scottish