

The War Years

The war effort also include home front song and dance with the children.



THE BRIDGEPORT SUNDAY POST

September 27, 1942

Bustles & Handle-Bar Mustaches Will Be in Style

Gay Nineties Songs, Styles Planned for U.S.O. Affair

Replete with bustles, ruffles, handle-bar mustaches and gay songs, plans are going ahead full swing for a Gay Nineties Party that Sterling House U.S.O. Committee is giving at Red Men's hall, Stratford, on Thursday evening.

This is the first "big affair" the committee has in store following last Thursday's Barn Dance. As the space at Sterling House is somewhat limited for as large a party as the Gay Nineties Party promises to be, it was decided to have it at Red Men's hall.

A program of entertainment has been planned for the evening. Lieutenant Patrick Flanagan of the Stratford Police Department, Leo Fagan, Robert Erie and Vernon Bond have

been drafted as judges to decide which is the outstanding skit.

Hariette Merhill has chosen, as her specialty to sing, "The Bird on Nellie's Hat." She will be assisted by a chorus of Gay Nineties Girls consisting of Mary Stewart, Peg Cummings, Anne Jones, Martha Burns, Helene Hamilton, Mary Hardy, Nora Butterworth, Wilma Coe and Aila Lautala.

Anne Jones will sing saga of "Jennie" made famous by Gertrude Lawrence.

Another specialty act will be a parody on the U.S.O. sung to the tune of "The Band Played On. Seaman Edward Nyborg and Corp. H. Grant Warner will do the vocalization and Wilma Coe and Alla Lautala will be the girls from the U.S.O.

Fred Zisquit and Corp. Warner are going to sing a duet entitled, "Bicycle Built for Two." Fred Zisquit and Edward Nyborg are with the Coast Guard and Corp. Warner is with the Army.

Many service men and defense workers participate in U.S.O. events regularly.

THE BRIDGEPORT POST

OCTOBER 6, 1943

STERLING –USO DANCES FEATURE BAND-A-WEEK

The Sterling-USO Thursday night dances in Legion Hall, Stratford, will feature "a band a week," under a new program inaugurated by the committee in charge, headed by Mrs. Margaret Cummings. Meeting Monday night, the committee selected Al Christie's band for tomorrow night's dance, and the following bands for the coming weeks: Harold Hartley, Oct. 14; Vinnie Wilson, Oct. 21; Jack Still, Oct. 28, and Gene Supple, Nov. 4.

Howard Hoffman, a former Army flier who saw action in the Pacific and who is now employed at the Chance Vought Aircraft plant in Stratford, will also sing at the Sterling House USO dance on Thursday in Stratford.

A Halloween costume party is planned for Oct. 28, with traditional games, novelty numbers and prizes for costumes, in addition to dancing as usual. A harvest dance featuring square dancing is also planned for some time in November. Refreshments at the dance will be coffee and doughnuts.

The committee voted to have a dinner meeting at Sterling House in alternate Thursday evenings. Mrs. Cummings will be in charge of next week's dinner.

A new USO field worker who is to be stationed in California, was a guest and observer at the meetings.

Sterling House Memories ...

'More than just a place to go'

Growing up in Stratford during the late 1930s and 1940s, Sterling House was more than just a place to go for Frederick Downey. Downey, now of New London, New Hampshire, wrote earlier this year, "Sterling House was a second home to me for almost 10 years between 1937 and 1946."

Born in 1928 and getting ready to celebrate his 90th birthday next year, Fred effusively praised the agency's work with youth. "Those were very formative years for me. I learned how to play ping-pong at the House, and baseball and football in the fields" behind Sterling House and nearby.

He recalls playing basketball at the American Legion Hall nearby in the days when Sterling House was closely affiliated with the Legion and the hall was known as the Sterling Memorial Building.

Downey later went on to play semi-pro basketball on the Bridgeport Lenox team in the old Eastern Basketball League in 1946-47. With his Sterling House neighborhood buddies in those days, Downey recalled playing baseball up on nearby Academy Hill. The cemetery was right field, with the trees in left field, he said.

Sterling House was donated to the town of Stratford in

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

The War Years

Memories -

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

1932 at the height of the Great Depression. Downey remembers playing with baseballs “fixed with electrical tape. Sometimes we used just the core itself,” he laughed. “Neighborhood players could be anywhere between the ages of 7 and 14. You don’t see much of that these days.”

Downey also credits his first exposure to golfing and caddying at Sterling House with his future success as an adult. “Golf opened doors for me.” He also credits a past program director, a Mr. Brown, “with recommending the path that I take in business,” including his first job at Warnaco in Bridgeport.

Decades later, Downey went on to become a CPA and retired as a CFO of a large corporation. His family includes four daughters, 12 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

“I attribute much of my adult success to my years at Sterling House.” Then as now, Downey said, “The Sterling House organization did and does many good things and especially for needy people.”

Downey said by cell phone call on July 28, “I have had success in business and sports, but what I most fondly look back upon today is what I did at Sterling House.”

THE CHANCE VOUGHT NEWS

December 23, 1943



Activities are under the direction of the capable Executive Secretary, Mrs. Hulda H. Brown, shown above sewing on an insignia for PFC Earl Fair of the Stratford Air Base. Five people, including a grounds keeper, are the only paid employees at Sterling House. The rest of the work is voluntary.

Sterling House a war-time ‘home away from home’

Sterling House, a community gathering place in every sense of the word, has gone to war. The house, which bears the name of its donor, has served well in peacetime and now has opened its doors to hundreds of out-of-town war workers. Chance Vought people have taken advantage of the many opportunities offered. Almost any time of day or evening, they participate in art classes, study voice or piano, dancing, home economics, languages and pre-flight aviation.

Children of working parents are given adequate supervision and guidance as an important wartime contribution. But most of all, Sterling House is a place where you can have fun. Facilities are provided for almost every indoor and outdoor sport. A home away from home, the house is a place where fireplace parties can be held, dancing and other gatherings.



Mary Sweeney is pictured taking down code during a pre-flight training course. Doors of Sterling House are open for night-shifters early in the morning, and until late at night for those who work days.



Within easy reach of the plant, Sterling House is surrounded by nine acres of beautifully landscaped grounds.



Muriel McKenna and Audrey LaRusso, left to right, of the Engineering Dept. pair teams up for a game of ping pong.



Comfortable rooms, a small library, and a radio are open all. Above, Vought members of a USO committee.



Toasting apples by the first is a group that includes Ray Vogel, Eleanor Hall and Earl Mark, all of Engineering. Kitchen facilities are open to those who wish to have home-like supper parties.

The War Years

Social Aspects in Stratford During WWII 'As Informed to Me by Mrs. Mary Hardy'

An unsigned account describing aspects of the War Years, 1941-45

My friend and Sunday School instructor, Mrs. Mary Hardy, has been a Stratford resident for many years, and worked and still works for almost as many at Sterling House. She had heard and knew of many incidents occurring in town and at Sterling House during the '40s, particularly during World War II. I had the pleasure of hearing some of them (all true) as follows as I now know them:

During the 1940s, Sterling House was used as a community service building. It was brought to the attention of [Sterling House Executive Secretary], Mrs. {Huldah} Brown, a woman who lived in two rooms upstairs, that there was no clubs or places to stay for visiting service men.

So a woman's committee consisting of

workers at Sterling House set up a program where Sterling House would be used as a club for service men, as well as a rooming house for them and other visitors.

To accommodate the service, Mrs. Brown would move out when it was crowded to provide them with more room.

Stratford was busy preparing war planes (the Corsair) so that it was necessary to have three shifts at the plant. Since some defense workers had to work at night, and were complaining that there was no place for them to go after work for entertainment, Sterling House opened the to them 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week. There was dancing and food and many other good things. After work, they would go to bed.

Some service men wanted to get married before returning home. Sterling House staff helped them set up tests and secure marriage licenses, etc. Sterling House also provided a place to stay for them as well as for the P-47 builders, until barracks were set up for them in Lordship. Also, workers at Sterling House helped plan the weddings, making flower bouquets and other wedding preparations, as well as attending the weddings.

Across the street from Sterling House was the David Brooks house that ran a tea room and place to rest. Undercover, but obviously FBI agents would go there and ask a lot of obvious questions such as, "I need a place to stay ... it must be private and quiet so I can work. I'm a secret service man. Do you know where one is?"

Then it was found out that this FBI man was trying to find out about war leaks, since Stratford was making war planes, etc. and defense workers would visit the tea room after work.

There was also a ski club that after trips would meet there. There was a woman who wore exotic clothes in the 30s and 40s who had a slight foreign accent. She was very charming and was the manager of the tea room. When the ski clubbers would meet, they would gossip and talk about anything and everything and socialize and have fun.

The woman would ask seemingly innocent questions, like, "Did you hear word from your son? ... Oh, where is he stationed?"

As far as anyone knows, no one was ever arrested for spying.



The drawings, above and below right, were part of a 1941 dance class recital costume drawing contest. Below, tap dancing class in the early 1940s.



Sterling USO Planning Valentine Hop

The Sterling USO committee is going to sponsor a Valentine dance in Sterling House Thursday night, Dorothea Heppes is chairman.

Ernest Arvia of Fairfield will be soloist, and besides the dancing a community sing will be featured.

Assisting Miss Heppes will be Wila Coe, Gil Monroe, Dee O'Hara, Frank Matthews, Robert Baker, Jack Hammerschmidt, Leah F. Wilson, and Mrs. John Cummings.

This committee under Mrs. Cummings has planned a George Washington dance on Feb. 17, with Clarence Osgood, chairman. The group for friendly service from Sterling House serves refreshments.

