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In Search of the BONHOMME RICHARD - April 27th



Serapis vs. Bon Homme Richard. ~ Naval action from the events of September 1779 as envisioned by engraver J. Rogers.

Benjamin Franklin must have been proud of the ship that bore his nom de plume; few ships of the Revolutionary War hold such a high degree of historic significance as the *Bonhomme Richard*. It was captained by John Paul Jones, who is often considered the father of the U.S. Navy. The *Bonhomme Richard* had been lent to the U.S. by France and was named in honor of Jones's friend Benjamin Franklin, author of *Poor Richard's Almanack*, who at that time represented America in France and was instrumental in acquiring the ship. Fighting for America's independence from British rule, Jones engaged the British ship H.M.S. *Serapis* on September 23, 1779, in one of the fiercest, most memorable battles in U.S. naval history. It was during this three-and-a-half-hour fight, most of it taking place at point blank range, that Jones was asked to surrender. In response, he shouted his legendary words, "I have not yet begun to fight!"*

The celebrated phrase that captured patriotic hearts over 200 years ago captures still the imagination of the history buff and marks the opening paragraph of an article written by our April speaker, Melissa Ryan.

Ryan is the Project Manager and Director of Education for the Ocean Technology Foundation (OTF), a non-profit marine research & exploration organization based at UConn Avery Point. She is part of the OTF's Bonhomme

Richard Project - one that partners American and British research resources & educators with the U.S. Navy Historical Center and the U.K.'s Osiris Projects - a surveying company. The Bonhomme Richard team has worked to cross-reference their extensive historical research with contemporary marine & computer technology to determine the final resting place of the Bonhomme Richard.

After much research, the OTF team was able to focus on a 50 square mile area in the North Sea as the most likely region for any remains of the fallen vessel. Summer 2006 found OTF in a survey boat off the coast of England for four weeks spending long hours combing the underwater terrain for evidence. They returned with four promising leads: sonar images of wreck sites that could potentially be the Bonhomme Richard.

The 2006 data is now being reviewed at the Naval Historical Center to be able to better map the sites for a follow-up expedition this summer. What are the historical ramifications of such a significant discovery? What technologies will they employ? How will they identify the ship? What other exciting discoveries might happen along the way? Find out more by joining us for Melissa Ryan's program on April 27th and by visiting online at www.oceantechnology.org/BHR.

**From an article written by M. Ryan for *Wrack Lines Magazine* Vol. 6, No. 2*

Please don't forget to grab a rake and join us at Portersville Academy on Saturday, April 14th from 9am - noon to help tidy the grounds for spring! RSVP to John Porter (860) 433-7342 or jporter@gdeb.com



from the PRESIDENT'S DESK

Lou Allyn

Volunteer Month

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month. In addition to our Committee Chairmen, Trustees and Officers, MRHS benefits greatly from the work of our other volunteers. I would like to recognize the following people and express my, and the Board's sincere appreciation for their continuing support over the past year (plus anyone I may have inadvertently missed):

Building & Grounds Committee - Alan Greener, Larry Hall

Curatorial - Corinne Breed, Bettye Noyes Recent adds - Jake Hanley, Robert O'Conner

Education & Outreach - Marilyn Comrie, Karen Havrilla, Martha Lane, Russ Leonard, Bill Topkin, Betty Ann Tylaska

Finance - David Evans

Hospitality - Alan Greener

Information/Technology - Doug Hanna, Barry Thorp

Special Events - Corinne Breed, Carol Craig, Amy Swan

Not to single out anyone in particular but I wish there were more space to tell you how much Barry Thorp does to keep our computers up-to-snuff. His list of activities for February alone is nine items including reorganization of file structures, total reloading one of the PCs and various software updates and installations.

Membership Renewal

Our membership year begins in May so April is the month when the Membership Committee mails out the annual membership renewal envelopes. If you have enjoyed this year's meetings, newsletters, website, emails, trips, fairs, open house, walking tours, classroom re-enactment, etc., etc., please remember that your contributions help to make them possible.

Annual Meeting

The approaching end of the membership year also means that it will soon be time for our Annual Meeting and Potluck Supper - May 18th. This year, to make the supper a little more interesting, and "historical", we will be asking people to bring food for an old-fashioned Church supper. If you're not sure what to bring, we will provide a menu harking back to the mid 1800's.

Electronic Communication

Emails to Constant Contact subscribers were sent out regarding:

- Arts & Crafts Fair
- April Trip to PA and VA
- Denison Herbal Workshop
- Denison Genealogy Workshop
- Framing/Reframing Workshop

You can now read back issues of our newsletter, *The Portersville Press*, on our website at www.mystichistory.org



CALLING ALL CRAFTERS!

The MRHS Arts & Crafts Fair and Portersville Open House will be held at Portersville Academy from 9 - 4 on Saturday June 23rd. Any and all members are welcome to exhibit, assist, or display an intriguing and/or historical artifact in the event. Refreshments & wine will be served and 20% of all sales will benefit MRHS.

Contact Lou Allyn at 536-9363 or email lallyn@snet.net if interested.

The Newsletter of the Mystic River Historical Society
is published monthly, September through May, with a combined issue for November and December,
by the Mystic River Historical Society
Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355

Birdseye View of Mystic ca. 1934

In March and April of 1934, the state of Connecticut took the 1933 recommendation of Governor Wilbur L. Cross and conducted the first government sponsored aerial survey of an entire state.

Sherman M. Fairchild and his Fairchild Aerial Survey company, which had unsuccessfully lobbied Gov. John Trumbull for a survey in the 1920s, owned three of the four planes that did the spring survey. The Connecticut National Guard contributed the fourth plane and the only one with an open cockpit biplane configuration. They flew at 11,400 feet at 100 miles per hour taking photos in mapped flight lines of 16 - 20 miles at a rate meant to have a 50 % image overlap. It took a total of 153 flight hours for the planes to cover Connecticut's 5,004 square miles.

The data collected would be assembled in a mosaic photomap at a scale of 1";1,200' - resulting in an image 31' x 42'! It would prove useful in civil & public works planning as well as for mapping and tax purposes.

The photos & history are now available as a searchable resource online from the Connecticut State Library at www.cslib.org.



*The Vintage View from Above 74 High Street
The intersection of West Main and High Streets - note the church
and Factory Square - and a little more elbow room in town!*

The APPRAISAL DAY REPORT

-J. Everett

The Third Annual Antiques Appraisal Day was a success not in the numbers of people coming through the door but in the quality of items people brought to the appraisers, the helpfulness of all the volunteers, and the extraordinary expertise of the appraisers. We actually made a small profit in spite of relatively low attendance figures and we had a great afternoon and evening.

We thank our appraisers - Tim Bell, Allison Goodsell, Patricia Hval, Jennifer Lacker, Trina McCandless, and Bonnie and Paul Russ. We want to especially thank Tim, Allison, and Jennifer who came back for the evening and treated us to a wonderfully informative & relaxed discussion of some special items and of the antique world in general. We are grateful to the generous owners who allowed us to retain their treasures to be featured in the evening program.

A whole crowd of volunteers arrived to collect money, hand out tickets and direct people to the proper appraiser, and to deliver trays of delectable goodies. We even had two very welcome junior helpers to keep our appraisers properly supplied with cider and cookies - Maddie and Finn Pryor. A special round of thanks goes to our well-organized and unflappable co-chairs Amy Swan and Carol Craig Barnes.

Framing/Reframing WORKSHOP

-H. Keith

On Saturday, June 16th from 10 until 12 at Portersville Academy Donna Keith Baron will lead a hands-on workshop on how to frame/reframe old photographs, pictures and documents. She will demonstrate how to safely remove them from their frames and, using archivally correct materials, mount them for framing. Framed pictures from the MRHS collection will be used and all supplies will be provided. Each participant will reframe at least one item and will receive written guide lines to take home. The class will be limited to 15 participants at a cost of \$10.00 per person. Please call the MRHS office at 536-4779 by 4 p.m. Thursday, May 31st to register. For questions or more information please call Helen Keith at 536-8284

Donna Baron is the daughter of MRHS Vice President, Helen Keith and is currently the Director of the Middlesex County Historical Society. Previously she was the Curator at the Webb, Deane, Stevens Museum in Wethersfield and on the Curatorial Staff at Old Sturbridge Village. She is a graduate of Robert E. Fitch High School and Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. She, her husband, John, and two sons, Nate and Ben, live in an 18th century farm house, which they moved from Preston to Hebron and rebuilt board by board and stone by stone.

LOBSTERING OFF EASTERN POINT *circa 1909*

From the Pages of History with Ellery Thompson



Ellery Thompson (1899-1986) was born in Mystic and spent his adult life fishing the waters off southern New England. He was an author, a painter and an all-around character. In addition to writing such books as "Draggerman's Haul," Ellery spent much of his later years putting stories from his life down on paper. The Mystic River Historical Society newsletter will pub-

lish excerpts from some of Ellery's reminiscences, most written in the 1970s. Marion Krepcio of Stonington was entrusted with Ellery's manuscripts and she is generously sharing them with the historical society and allowing society member Marilyn Comrie to edit them for publication here.

Ellery was descended from the Thompsons, Denisons, and Wilcoxes on his father's side and from the Chapmans, Rathbuns and Packers on his mother's side.

Wind, wave and fog can scare the oil pants off most any man or boy, even girl mariner of today. I got my first scare at age 10 in 1909, when my father took time off from being a captain on the Thames River ferryboat Governor Winthrop to set lobster pots in Fishers Island Sound.

Off Eastern Point, a couple of miles south of Shennecossett Beach, the mouths of Long Island Sound and Fishers Island Sound face each other in tide-rip fashion, with their ebb tides flowing seaward through the 50-fathom depths of the Race, where the best lobsters along the coast were caught - mainly by seasoned lobstermen from the old smack port of Noank at the mouth of the Mystic River.

It was my father's ultimate goal to have veteran Noank boatbuilder Jerry Davis build him a 30-foot lobster boat for Race lobstering. Meanwhile, Pop would only dare to set pots with his 26-footer, a flat-bottom dory type, out on Middle Ground west of Seaflower Reef.

It was a beautiful summer day when we left our Groton Cove and steamed down the Thames, with our five-horse Lathrop engine popping away in loud fashion. Around

noontime we were hauling pots on Middle Ground, just a mile or so north of Silver Eel Pond on Fishers Island, when the sky darkened in the nor'west over Ocean Beach. Gulls began winging out of sight.

But Pop paid little attention to the threatening weather signs. He was too busy grabbing lively lobsters out of dripping pots, then rebaiting his pots with strung-up bunches of Wilcox-caught bony fish. But the overcast had me worried. I can still see those dark clouds racing our way.

"Look, Pa," I howled, pointing to the sky over New London. "It don't look good, Ellery," Pop cried. "We're heading in."

As we squared away for home, spiteful white caps raced toward us with billowing black clouds passing overhead. When the full fury of the squall hit us, we nearly stopped dead in the water, with driving spray sweeping over us. Pop crouched down aft at the tiller. I was hunched over up forward in the lee of our windbreaker sort of cabin.

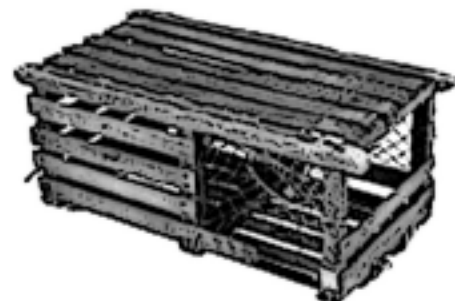
Luckily our single cylinder five-horse Lathrop engine was one-foot above the swashing bilge water. Each time I peered out at the foaming and snarling water, I ducked back to shut out the scary sight.

"Bail, Ellery, bail," my father's cry rang out, muffled a bit by the wind and water. I grabbed the coffee can and bailed until I could bail no more and flopped back in exhaustion.

It seemed like hours as we struggled to keep head to the wind and remain afloat. But Pop remained steady at his post. "It's moderating," Pop finally cried. I peered out, heartened by the clearing sky.

It had been rain, wind, flying spray, slopping bilge water, a cuss word or two, silent prayers and then out of the edges of hell we steamed.

When we entered the mouth of the Thames, it was a wonderful sunny afternoon again. If you want a change of weather "just wait awhile."



Oral History Project Still Seeks Talent for Transcription

The MRHS would like to create a team of transcription artists and other interested volunteers for our Oral History Project. Help us to forever capture moments in time through the tales & memories of resident historians and "voices of experience" like Ellery Thompson. Interested? Contact Kit Werner at royalwerner@sbcglobal.net



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March 2007 Meeting Minutes

Betty Anne Reiter

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met at the Mystic Chamber of Commerce on Monday, March 19, 2007. Those present were Lou Allyn, David Evans, Tim Evers, Margo Greener, Dorrie Hanna, Helen Keith, Jim Kimenker, Cathy Marco, Bettye Noyes, Betty O'Donnell, John Porter, Betty Anne Reiter and Kit Werner. Board members who were not present had been excused. Allyn called the meeting to order at 7:30. Minutes of the February meeting were accepted.



For Correspondence, Werner noted that one thank you note was sent to February's program speaker.

In financial aspects, Treasurer Everett had sent a balance sheet to Board members via email prior to the meeting. Keith moved that MRHS apply for year three of our Heritage Advancement Program Grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council in the amount of \$1667. MRHS affirms that it has budgeted for our share of the funding for the paid positions. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The grant pays for curatorial assistants Watrous and Hanna. In the third year, the amount we are eligible for declined to encourage MRHS to begin funding the project on our own.

Collections Manager Hanna reported that the map cabinet has been sorted through and storage areas have been reallocated to make better use of available space. Hanna has identified projects for the volunteers. When the weather improves, items in Portersville will be inventoried so that they can be accessioned and added to PastPerfect. Two new volunteers have offered their services.

President Allyn introduced Jim Kimenker and Cathy Marco who have been invited to attend Board meetings this spring. They will be nominated as Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society at the Annual Meeting on May 18th. He reported that MRHS tax returns have been filed. MRHS has decided not to participate in the Five Rivers Consortium Crystal Mall event to be held on April 28th. The Annual Meeting will take place on May 18th.

In Standing Committees, Porter noted for Building & Grounds that roofing & flashing repairs have been completed. Simonds & Co. has ordered replacement shutters and hopes to power wash the Downes Building late this week with paint preparation beginning next week. Progress is weather dependent. Keith & Hanna recommended removing the sign from the building prior to washing.

Volunteers are still needed for the Spring Yard Cleanup on April 14th from 9:00 a.m. to noon.

The stone retaining wall in the parking lot needs re-grouting. Porter moved that the Board approve an expenditure of up to \$200 to have Mark Mitsko make the necessary repairs. Approved unanimously.

Relative humidity is staying at about 30% in the Downes Building. A small humidifier should be sufficient to maintain proper humidity levels. A suitable humidifier has been identified and will be purchased at Home Depot.

For Curatorial, Noyes' committee met in February but had no business to bring to the Board. Plans were made to schedule a meeting to discuss new business.

Keith's Education & Outreach committee will meet on April 3rd at the Mystic & Noank Library. They will finalize plans for the members Arts & Crafts Day. Allyn distributed copies of the agreement exhibitors will be asked to sign. Plans for the six family activity centers to be created in the lower floor of Portersville will also be on the agenda. The Committee will discuss how to incorporate the centers into the fall class visits.

For Finance, Keith reported that the brokerage fee for Merrill Lynch was adjusted thanks to Bill Canning. It was agreed that when stock certificates are received as a donation, the stock will be sold immediately (day of receipt if possible) and the proceeds added to the Money Market Account.

Contracts for the flashing work on PVA and the painting, shutters and roof for the Downes Building have been signed and total \$16,125.00. This amount has been transferred from the Money Market to the checking account. Deposits for this work have been paid and the funds to make final payments when the work is satisfactorily completed are available. This work will be covered by the Downes Fund.

There are funds remaining in the Money Market account and the Committee voted to retain them in liquid form to meet any contingencies which may arise. We presently have a positive some in short term investments. The Committee agreed to look into the best possible funds in which to invest some, or all, of this amount. David Evans will be asked to do a careful, annual review of all investments and, with Bill Everett and Lou Allyn, to make recommendations for consideration at the next meeting. The committee decided to retain MRHS special accounts

Meeting Minutes, continued.

for projects as follows: The Downes (buildings' maintenance) Fund, the ARC (acquisition, restoration, conservation) Fund, and the 25th Anniversary Fund (renewable educational projects.) Lou will adjust the percentages accordingly and all surpluses will be added to our General Endowment Fund. The next meeting is April 9th at the Downes Building.

For Hospitality, Greener assured that plans were in place for the March meeting.

Allyn reported for Thorp's IT that Barry has worked to clear up computer issues and in Halsey's Marketing & PR that ads were purchased for Appraisal Day.

Allyn also spoke on behalf of Membership, saying that two new members have joined, and for Programming that the Annual Meeting pot luck will be an old fashioned church supper with members encouraged to use traditional recipes.

In Special Projects, Allyn remarked that finger foods will be served at the Arts & Crafts Fair. We will borrow a tent from the Mystic & Noank Library for the event. Money for the April trip is due. The kayakers guide is at the printers; ways to promote the guide were discussed.

In Unfinished Business, Keith described the activities of the Five Rivers Consortium for the benefit of new board members. The group provides networking for organizations in the region and sponsors speakers, e.g., a workshop on strategic planning to be held on April 2nd. It currently has 34 members.

Evans continues to refine plans for walking tour brochures. Keith suggested asking the Chamber for input.

Allyn is working on a graphic representation of a timeline of Mystic's history.

In New Business, Evers suggested that the discussions of the pedicab be included as part of the Education & Outreach report.

The next meeting will be on April 16th at 7:30.

SPRING ACTIVITIES in PVA & DOWNES

-D. Hanna

It's Spring (theoretically at least) and time for sprucing things up. The Downes Building has a new roof and will soon have new shutters and a fresh paint as well. The Building & Grounds committee will hold a clean up day for the lawn, driveway and plantings. But what's happening INSIDE Portersville Academy and the Downes Building?

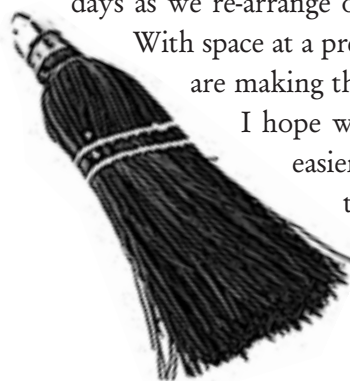
Once the weather is more temperate we plan to spend time in PVA taking inventory of the items there and also taking pictures. Then we can add information on the items, such as school desks, tools, etc, to our database. Digital pictures will be added to the computer records to give us an easy way to identify those things in our collection which are not in the Downes Building. Also we will be preparing PVA for summer happenings. Both a framing workshop and our members Arts & Crafts show will take place in June and then we will set up new family activities for summer visitors.

Things are a bit messy in the Downes Building these days as we re-arrange our collections and our supplies.

With space at a premium we need to make sure we are making the best use of the space available.

I hope when the "dust settles" it will be easier to see what we have and easier to access it as well. We are also making plans to work with a consultant to get some tips on how we could better handle some of our material.

Speaking of our collections, we have completed our application to the Connecticut Humanities Council for the third year of the grant that helps us pay our curatorial assistant, Louisa Watrous. Louisa has made great headway in identifying items never before accessioned and adding information about them to the database. This is a kind of "spring cleaning" too, although it goes on all year round.



CALENDAR NOTABLES

Spring Cleaning Day - Saturday, April 14th, 9am
 Portersville Academy & Downes Building Grounds
Bring your friends & good spirits for a spring tidying!

In Pursuit of Gen'l Washington Trip - April 22 - 27

General Meeting & Program - Friday, April 27th, 7:30p
 Parish Hall of the Congregational Church, Broadway
Join us for a meeting and then a presentation from Melissa Ryan on Searching for the Bonhomme Richard.

Annual Meeting & Potluck - May 18th, 6pm, Parish Hall
Our annual potluck event will have some added historical flavor as members have the option of contributing dishes from heritage recipes. The notable Carol Kimball will speak.

Framing Workshop Saturday, June 16th, 10 - 12
 at Portersville Academy
Donna Keith Baron will lead a hands-on workshop on how to frame/reframe old pictures and documents.

Member Arts & Crafts Show - June 23rd 2007, 9 - 4
 Portersville Academy & Downes Building Grounds
Come as a contributor or a guest to enjoy refreshments and the artistic talents of the MRHS membership.

**A little madness in the Spring
 Is wholesome even for the King.**
Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)



Mad New Fashions for April 1829

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Thanks to the patrons below for springing forth with their support:

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For \$100, you can add your name or that of an honoree. Please send to MRHS, Attn. Newsletter Patron

MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

We welcome new Individual members Rosemary Dayton and Lois Jennings.

IN MEMORIAM

We will miss Mrs. Robert (Ellen Bird) Scott who was a Life Member and Newsletter Patron. Our deepest sympathies to her family and friends.

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