Please join us on Wednesday, February 24th, at 7:30 p.m. at the Mystic Congregational Church’s Meeting Hall for the history of the Mystic Fire Department. Mystic’s Fire Chief, Fritz Hilbert, will provide a talk about the formation of the Mystic Hoxie and Hook Fire Companies. He will also provide, through photographs and artifacts, a glimpse of firehouses, fire apparatus, and some significant fires in Mystic. His talk will also include some old timer photographs of Mystic’s fire fighters and he will note many of the familiar names from Mystic’s past.

Fritz Hilbert has been a member of the Mystic Fire Department for 38 years and Fire Chief since 1989. He serves on state and regional fire organizations in many capacities and holds an Associate Degree in Fire Science and Technology. Hilbert is especially interested in firefighting history and is an avid collector of firefighting historical memorabilia. He is the Foreman of the T. W. Lane, Mystic’s 1883 Button hand engine.

Cabin Fever? Consider packing your bags....
Our presentation at this month’s Member Meeting focuses on Mystic’s fire departments and notable fires in the area. One can’t help but pause and reflect on catastrophes, both past and present.

As I sit here, engulfed by news of the devastating earthquake in far-off Haiti, I’m reminded that such terrible events are not always just news of the far-off. Currently, our main worry here along the shore is always hurricanes. But, we tend to forget, I think, that it wasn’t so long ago that fire was a constant and more serious worry. We forget, of course, because for the most part, our modern fire departments, including both men and equipment, do a remarkable job of controlling, even eliminating, most of the damage that fires of the past were capable of causing.

We’re more inclined to accept the destruction of a single house or building (think of the house on Library Street last year or that still-empty lot in downtown Mystic), then of street after street of destroyed homes and businesses.

Notwithstanding our ability to forget, however, it wasn’t so long ago that a local, modern conflagration threatened to provide us with an example of ancient, memorable fires. In 2003, when that old, Water Street factory burned to the ground (the one being converted to condos), but for the miracle of an unusual easterly breeze instead of the normally prevailing southwesterly, most of Stonington Borough might have burned, too. Just like that, tales of London in 1666, New York in 1837, Chicago in 1871, San Francisco in 1906 (ok, an earthquake might have had something to do with that one, but the fires were real enough), and numerous other massive, historical conflagrations (even Nero fiddling) didn’t seem like so many dusty, distant events. We realized how close a call that 2003 fire was, which gave a singular meaning to those older tales. Calamity winked, but it was frightening wink.

So, the next time you read or think about the past, if you’re having a hard time envisioning the “reality” of it, think of similar modern events of which you’ve had personal experience. Such reflection might help the history come alive. Oh yeah, and think about dropping off some cookies at your local fire station together with a wish that eating them is the only firehouse “reality” for that day, anyway.

**Membership Updates** - Cindy Allyn, Membership Chair

During this period we have had three renewals, including:
- **Contributing** - Mrs. Kathryn Hill
- **Family** - Mr. & Mrs. Leonard Sawyer II
- **Benefactor** - Peter Briggs

**We’ve reached 100 fans on Facebook in January! Look us up and be in the next hundred!**

Search for us on Facebook, become a fan, invite your friends! The MRHS Facebook page is a great spot to connect with other history buffs, find up-to-the-moment commentary, notable events & photos, articles and links to points of historical interest. The page and fanbase continues to develop and grow. Check us out and add your input the next time you’re on FB!
Cereal empire heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post (1887 - 1973) acquired Hillwood Estate in 1955. Prominent landscape architects of the day, such as Umberto Innocenti and Richard Webel, assisted in the creation of a series of formal gardens, including the Japanese-influenced design pictured above. Post’s own concept of a series of ‘outdoor rooms’ throughout 12 acres and engulfed by an additional 13 acres of woodland, contain more than 3,500 varieties of plants and trees. The plants tend to be at their peak display during spring and autumn, when Ms. Post was in residence. April and May, for example, highlight over 4,000 blooming azaleas and complementary rhododendron, spirea, lilacs, and viburnum. Not to be outdone, the ‘indoor rooms’ of the estate feature the most comprehensive collection of Russian imperial art outside of Russia and a world-renowned collection of 18th c. French art and furnishings.

Please join the Mystic River Historical Society’s spring trip to Gettysburg and Virginia and Longwood Gardens. Forget the ice and snow and make plans to enjoy five days of exquisite gardens and houses and meaningful museums!

We will leave Mystic Sunday, April 18, and drive to Gettysburg with suitable stops along the way. The orientation movie at the new Gettysburg Museum will begin our tour. We will have dinner on the square in town, directly by our hotel.

Monday, April 19, we will drive through the battlefields and return to the museum to explore it at leisure. We will continue on to Leesburg, VA for lunch and then to Orange to visit James Madison’s newly restored “Montpelier” and the accompanying gardens. Our home for the next two nights will be in Staunton, VA. We will have dinner next door to the hotel.

Tuesday, April 20, we will spend the day in the Lynchburg area visiting Thomas Jefferson’s “Poplar Forest” and “Sweetbriar House”. Part of “Sweetbriar House” dates to the 1790’s and the remainder was completed in 1852 to form a grand Italianate villa. It is known for some of the finest boxwood gardens in the country as well as many fine specimen trees and shrubs. We will enjoy the Garden Tour lunch and perhaps an additional stop.

Wednesday, April 21, we proceed north to Washington DC and “Hillwood”, the glorious house and gardens of Marjorie Meriwether Post. After lunch we will go to the summer house of President Lincoln in northwest Washington, opened to the public in 2007 after extensive restoration by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We will continue on to our overnight stop and dinner.

Thursday, April 22, we will visit Longwood Gardens followed by lunch and then head home to Mystic.

The price for each person sharing a room, including all transportation, accommodations, all breakfasts and lunches, at least two dinners, all admissions, snacks and extras, and medical cancellation insurance is $850. The cost for a single is $1100. A nonrefundable $200.00 deposit for a shared room, $300.00 for a single, will be due by February 22. Nonrefundable final payment is due by March 15. We must have 25 participants in order to go. We will not cash your deposit checks until we are certain we can proceed. Call Joyce Everett (536-6339) if you have questions about the trip. Most sites are handicapped accessible and we will do our very best to help everyone enjoy every part of the itinerary.
November Meeting Minutes - Cathy Marco

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, November 17, 2009. Members and Committee Chairmen present were David Evans, Joyce Everett, Bill Everett, Tim Evers, Lois Glazier, Alan Greener, Dorrie Hanna, Jim Kimenker, Cathy Marco, Betty O'Donnell, Jane Preston, and Stephanie Thorp.

President's Report (Jim Kimenker): The Board meeting is January 11 and the January membership meeting is the 27th. The November membership meeting is on the 18th. There are no board or membership meetings in December.

Treasurers Report (Bill Everett): Reports had been submitted previously to all board members. A check has been issued to Ashley Halsey.

Corresponding Secretary (Kay Janney): Two thank you notes were sent: One to Dr. Natalie Naylor for her help and presentation on the Long Island Tour and another to Marion Palm for her donation to the education project (in lieu of her receiving the refund on her planned Long Island tour).

STANDING COMMITTEES

Buildings & Grounds (Alan Greener): The Building and Grounds Committee received three bids on the painting and restoration of the Schoolhouse. The Committee agreed on a detailed punch list of repair, preparation & painting projects to be completed to ensure comparable bids, and new requests for quotation have been mailed to Paul Enterprises, Simonds & Co. and the Rainbow Painting Company. The threshold on left-hand side of front door needs to be replaced.

Curatorial (submitted by Dorrie Hanna): The Curatorial committee met November 9th. Kit has agreed to serve as liaison between Committee & Board in the event that Jane or Dorrie are unavailable. We’ve been accepted for Archival Assessment program of CT State Library. • We are researching on an on-line program to create a disaster plan as opposed to re-writing the 10+ year old current one. Off site data back up needs review with Barry. • Louisa has selected some pictures from the Dickinson Collection to begin our first virtual exhibit using the PastPerfect program. • Two other possible appraisers were suggested: Cooley Gallery & Patricia Shippee. Other suggestions are welcome. Board confirmed closing the Downes Building the week before Christmas.

Program (Bettye Noyes): The Program committee (Bettye, John, Jane, Betty) met Nov. 10 to review the schedule of programs. The responsibilities of the person securing the speaker were discussed and that person will provide publicity releases to Stephanie, Jennifer, and Sally. Clarification is required regarding responsibility for writing the thank you note. Aimée Allaire will assist the Hospitality Chair at Member Meetings, where needed. • There have been continued discussions on a joint meeting as early as next fall with the Noank Historical Society, possibly with an Amelia Earhart impersonator, however, more research is needed.

Special Events (Joyce Everett): Appraisal Day is scheduled for Saturday, March 20. Tim Bell has agreed to be the lead appraiser once again. A co-chairman is needed as soon as possible as well as suggestions for appraisers. • Our Spring Trip is April 18 – 22, 2010. The current plan is to begin with the Gettysburg Museum, continue on to Jefferson’s Poplar Forest, enjoy the Virginia Garden Tour, visit Madison’s home, Montpelier, and finish with a visit to Longwood Gardens, at its best in late April with other stops possible.

Walking Tour (David Evans): Outlets for the tour continue to be monitored and replenished. No new developments.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Ashley Halsey Project (Tim Evers): 14 of 19 sketches were submitted by Ashley. The committee was very impressed.

NEW BUSINESS

The Groton Historical Society has requested we and other local societies share our mailing list with them for solicitation of Charter members. After discussion, Board consensus was that we respect the privacy of our membership and not share our list of members without their permission. We instead recommend to the Groton Historical Society that they write an article for our newsletter and/or have an informational table at one of our membership meetings. Discussion of using our newsletter to announce trips of other organizations (i.e. Lyman Allyn Museum) resulted in consensus that this would be better placed in the advertising space and purchased by these organizations.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Marco, Recording Secretary
A new historical society has been established in Groton - this one to collect and house the history of the town not covered by the existing three societies - Mystic River, Noank and Groton Bank. The new Groton Historical Society hopes the members of the other three societies will see the worth of having a historical society specifically for the town and will support it by becoming a member. The group was started by Jim Streeter, who recently became the town’s mayor, and who has a vast collection of Groton memorabilia and historical items. His collection will be the core of the new society’s collection. Others helping the new society to get established are two longtime Mystic River Historical Society members – Carol W. Kimball and Marilyn Comrie. The Groton Historical Society is housing its collection presently at the Avery Copp House in Groton and is hoping to find a permanent location in the future. Right now, the new group hopes to attract members from the existing historical societies in town in order to establish a financial base that will let us begin the work and to invite anyone who wants to help the effort in other ways.

What do you get for your membership? Right now, it’s the knowledge and satisfaction that you are helping a new organization get off the ground. Down the road, however, we hope to do many of the things Mystic River does – have an archive that is accessible to the public and to offer lectures, tours or other events that promote the wonderful history of this area. Please consider joining the new society - membership information below. You will be helping Groton to preserve its history.

Please mail application and check made out to Groton Historical Society, c/o 16 Hillside Avenue, Groton, CT 06340-5806

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**Groton Historical Society Membership Application**

**Type of Membership:**

- ___ Individual - $20.00
- ___ Household - $30.00 (for two adults and any children at same address)
- ___ Student or Senior - $15.00 (for a full time student or those 65 or older)
- ___ Organizational - $40.00 (historical societies; public libraries; educational institutions and other non-profits)
- ___ Charter Members - $100.00 (October 2009 through June 2010 only)
- ___ Tax Deductible Donation

**NOTE:** All membership payments become due January 1st of each year

Name(s):______________________________________________________________________

Street:_____________________________________________________________________

City: __________________________________ State:___________  Zip:________________

Telephone:___________________________   Fax:  _________________________________

Email:______________________________________________________________________

I would be interested in serving on or helping the Groton Historical Society with the following:

- ___ Fundraising Committee  - ___ Education Committee
- ___ Facilities Committee  - ___ Development Committee
- ___ Acquisitions Committee  - ___ Membership Committee
- ___ Survey & Inventory Committee  - ___ Other __________________________________

*Mail application and check made out to Groton Historical Society, c/o 16 Hillside Avenue, Groton, CT 06340-5806*
2009 ANNUAL REPORTS

Collections & Curatorial - Dorrie Hanna

The Curatorial committee met five times during 2009. Members of the committee are Jane Preston, Helen Keith, Kit Werner, Judy Hicks, Louisa Watrous, Lou Allyn and Dorrie Hanna. Chairman Preston had to resign due to relocation to Massachusetts and a new chair is needed.

Requests:
- Image permissions – Several patrons requested copies of images for personal use. There was one request for images for publication: Gloria Fowler for the Indian & Colonial Research Center used two historic photos for her new book of Civil War letters.
- Email queries – About 50, including one from Australia.
- Phone queries – Over 25
- In person queries or drop in visitors – Over 40
- Research done for MRHS programs, newsletter, House Tour, etc. – 10

Acquisitions:
29 items or groups of items were accessioned in 2009. Louisa Watrous reports 210 new catalog records entered, and 1,393 existing records updated in 2009, in work on material previously entered.

Projects:
Goals remain the same - improve access to our collections, conserve space, and improve collection care and storage. Helen Keith sorted, purged and re-boxed the photograph collections. Duplicate or irrelevant items were distributed to Stonington, North Stonington, New London, Westerly, and Groton Historical Societies. We applied for, and were selected to participate in, the Archival Assessment program of the Connecticut State Library. We received a Rotary Club grant for $350 to purchase the Virtual Exhibit software program from Museum Software. Louisa has selected a first group of images from the Dickinson Collection to be reviewed, and is developing the first online exhibit to incorporate the images.

Volunteers:
Over 350 volunteer hours were logged at the Downes Building alone. This does not include those who worked on the school program. Regular weekly volunteers at the Downes Building were Bettye Noyes, Charlotte Smith, Corinne Breed, Jane Preston and new volunteers Marcia Robinson and Lucy Howell. Barry Thorp devoted many hours to updating & trouble shooting the computer system and was graciously on-call for the resolution of problems.

Education Committee - Tim Evers, Helen Keith

2009 was a highly successful year in introducing elementary school students to life in Mystic in the mid-19th Century. Throughout May and early June, MRHS volunteers hosted over 350 first and third grade students at Portersville Academy. Students were involved downstairs in take-home craft projects and hands-on activities, and upstairs in the classroom they learned lessons as they were taught in the 1840’s.

The success of the spring program was due primarily to the reliability of willing volunteers Lou Allyn, Jane Brannegan, Ellie Coffey, Joyce Everett, Tim Evers, Helen Keith, Susan Lund, Nancy McKay, Jane Preston, and Bill Topkin. Additional volunteers who attended a volunteer orientation day in October signed up to help in 2010. This coming spring we anticipate an even larger student contingent from public and private schools in Groton and Stonington, as well as from those in other towns in New London County.

Finance Committee - David Evans

The Finance Committee continued its oversight role in the management of the Society finances. Perhaps its most significant contribution was to maintain the diversified portfolio of the Endowment during the turbulent markets of 2008-09. As a result we ended the year with a balance of $170,276.49, a gain of nearly 20% from year-end 2008, including reinvested interest and dividends. We begin 2010 with an unrealized loss on our books of less than $10,000.

Marketing & Publicity - Sally Halsey

Press releases about the monthly lectures were written and sent to local newspapers and added to electronic calendars and Zip06 (The Day and Shoreline Publishing submission vehicle). The Mystic Times gave us particularly good coverage (via Zip06). Other press releases about volunteer opportunities, our field trips and other events were also written and sent.

We created a Page on Facebook for the Society. To date (Jan. 11), we have 79 Fans, and growing. Many of these are not members, so we will encourage them to become members. Many do not live in Mystic, and are likely keeping in touch with their home town. A group of Facebook users is meeting in January 2010 to discuss the uses and opportunities available through this social networking medium.
Marketing & Publicity, continued

The House and Garden Tour was covered widely, from Cape Cod Magazine to the New York Times electronic calendar. Publicity for the tour appeared in the Hartford Courant numerous times (because of the e-calendar listing), resulting in many visitors from that area. Only two ads were purchased, one in the Garden Club of CT Green Sheet, the other in the Town of Groton Recreation Department magazine.

Membership

The full membership list of over 315 names was printed in the September issue. Since that time, there have been over 25 additional renewed & new memberships through December 2009.

Newsletter - Jennifer Pryor

The newsletter published a total of 56 pages in 2009 in eight six- or eight-page issues with six to nine advertisers per issue. The newsletter is sent out by Team Thorpe to the entire membership list, as well as additional area historical societies and libraries for availability to the broader public. Additionally, the publication is formatted as a pdf and available on line at www.mystichistory.org. The newsletter graphic design department of one also created the Walking Tour brochure and the guide map for the Rooms and Blooms Tour.

Special Events - Joyce Everett

Activities for the past year included our trips to New York City in spring 2009 and to Long Island in October 2009. While not a special events committee project, the June 20, 2009 house tour in conjunction with the Mystic Garden Club was indeed a very special and very successful event - both financially and socially, by involving a large percentage of the membership. The two trips were actually oversold, and financially successful as well. All the participants reported enjoying the content of the tours and said they would come with us again if they were able. They made numerous suggestions of places they would like to go in the future. Appraisal Day was not held in 2009 due to the House Tour.

Walking Tour - David Evans

During 2009 the Mystic Chamber of Commerce continued to partner with MRHS in making the Gravel Street Walking Tour available to the public. Nearly 800 copies of the Tour were distributed bringing the two year total in excess of 1800. Weatherproof plastic holders were placed on the pumping station on Gravel Street and outside the Downes Building to supplement holders at various merchants, inns and the Mystic & Noank Library. The outdoor holders were helpful as the both stores at Main and Gravel turned over and were vacant for part of the year.
CALENDAR NOTABLES

Membership Meeting
Wed., February 24, 7:30p
Mystic Congregational Parish Hall
Firechief Fritz Hilbert presents Mystic Fire Department History.

Appraisal Day
Sat., March 20, 10a - 4p

Membership Meeting
Wed., March 24, 7:30p

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Mystic Congregational Parish Hall

Membership Meeting
Wed., February 24, 7:30p

Remember to bring your attic treasures to Appraisal Day, Saturday, March 20, at the Mystic Congregational parish hall.

Appraisal Day
March 20th
10am - 4pm
74 High Street
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