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Spring Trip to Salem & Gloucester, MA on June 11-12



The Yin Yu Tang house is a merchant's house built during the Qing Dynasty - approximately 200 years ago. The house was relocated from southeastern China & re-constructed at the Peabody Museum in Massachusetts.

Please join us on Wednesday & Thursday June 11-12 2008 for the Mystic River Historical Society spring trip to Salem and Gloucester, Massachusetts. We shall tour the Judge Jonathon Corwin House (aka the Witch House) built 1675 and then go on to the Peabody Essex Museum for a tour of the newly reconstructed Yin Yu Tang house from China. You will have plenty of time to tour on your own at the museum and enjoy lunch. After the group visit to the museum you may stay on your own, go down to the waterfront, do a little shopping, or relax at the hotel. Our hotel will be the Hawthorne Hotel, two blocks from the museum. Dinner will follow at the Village Restaurant in Essex, Massachusetts.

After a full and early breakfast we go to Gloucester for a morning whale watching expedition. We will have lunch on the waterfront and then visit the Judith Sargent House and Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center, both within a very short walk or bus ride of the docks. We will head for Mystic shortly after 4pm and should be home in time for dinner.

Our first departure will be at the Red Caboose, Olde Mistick Village, at 7:30am and the second at Stoneridge at 745am. The bus does have a bathroom.

Included in the cost of \$375 sharing or \$460 single are transportation, hotel and full buffet breakfast, dinner, all admissions, the whale watch trip, snacks, and cancellation insurance. A nonrefundable deposit of \$150 per person is due

at the time of sign up to secure your space. We require a minimum of 25 participants to go and we will refund your deposit should we not meet this number. Final payment is due by April 10, 2008. Checks should be made out to MRHS and mailed to PO Box 245, Mystic, CT 06355. You are welcome to call Joyce Everett at 536-6339 and let me know if a check is coming in and you would like to be on the list. We are greatly anticipating another Mystic River Historical Society adventure and we hope that you'll be a part of it!

Students Can Travel Back in Time

Students in elementary schools in the Mystic area will soon be traveling back to the 1850's. Local grades 1 and 3 teachers and students have been invited to take a field trip to Portersville Academy to learn how and what students learned over 150 years ago. From May 8 to June 10, they will learn about home life in the mid-19th Century by experiencing a variety of activities, including modeling clothes of the period. They will also have the opportunity of participating upstairs in the classroom, practicing arithmetic and reading exercises (such as those in the McGuffey Reader)—and, perhaps, being disciplined in the appropriate historical manner.

Historical Society members volunteering on Thursdays with first grade students are activity leaders Helen Keith and Ann Hallum; Betty Ann Tylaska and Jane Brannegan will alternate as the teacher "Miss Williams." Bill Topkins, Lou Allyn, and Jane Preston will help out with the activities sessions for third grade students on Tuesdays; Tim Evers will take over as "Mr. Anery," as Russ Leonard has decided to retire after over 15 years as "Mr. Potter" our Portersville teacher.

Mystic River Historical Society's Renowned & Spectacular

APPRAISAL DAY

Bring your treasures & tchotchkes, heirlooms & housewares for assessment & advice from local, Yale & NYC professionals - à la "Vintage Items Roadshow"

SAT, MARCH 29th 10-3
MYSTIC CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH HALL

See inside - page 3 for details!



from the PRESIDENT'S DESK

Lou Allyn

Seven plus years ago Frank Durrschmidt wrote a letter to the Board of Directors in response to the question "Should the MRHS be preservation oriented, education oriented or research oriented and in what combination?" He stated that "The record of the Mystic area, important as it is, will only be of interest to the dedicated researcher. The story of Mystic can be made more vibrant and interesting to more people if a broader collection is presented to the public."

I believe that the question and Frank's response is as relevant today as it was in 2000. In the years since then MRHS has devoted resources of time and money to growing and improving the record of Mystic in our collections and to programs and events that use the record to tell the story of Mystic. Now, because the world keeps changing the Board has decided that it is time once again to survey our membership to find out what is important to them. We are preparing a detailed two page questionnaire which will be distributed in a future Newsletter and by email and posted on our website. A test version will be handed out at the February membership meeting. Please take the time to complete the survey when you receive it and return to:

MRHS, P.O. Box 245 , Mystic, CT, 06355.

Because the world of local historical museums and societies such as ours is currently engaged in figuring out how to evaluate and implement the new computer technologies at hand and coming "down the pike" I thought I would share with you a paragraph from a grant application by the Sharon Connecticut Historical Association:

Embracing technology, and meshing it with the needs of the museum user is not a new concept. With the advent of the personal computer, the Ethernet, and the Internet, museums have experimented with computers in exhibit halls, software developed specifically to augment interpretive functions and a web "presence" —whether that be a basic website, or one featuring interactive components or merchandizing capabilities. However, we are at a turning point within the field, a time when ignoring the impact of new technology is no

longer an option. It is time, as so much recent scholarship suggests, to go where the public has already gone to fulfill its information and communication needs. It is time to turn museum interpretation around 180°. Our old ways of building relationships are not enough. History museums are learning facilitators. If we at the Sharon Historical Society are committed to providing access to history, we must commit fully to the revolutionary power of the Internet.

This view of the world of the local historical society is certainly thought provoking for us. **Basically, the question for the Board, and the membership, is, "How and when do we combine technology with our traditional activities to continue to tell the story of Mystic?"**

If you currently enjoy working with computers and would like to participate in our upcoming projects, please contact me at lallyn@snet.net



The ever "attended" widow's walk - a local landmark at 2 Clift Street

Ideas for a Historic House Tour

The MRHS would like to once again host one of our benchmark House Tours in fall 2008 or spring 2009.

The committee is currently developing a list of possible houses and researching preliminary date options. Additional ideas, input and volunteers are very welcome to this always grand and intriguing community-wide event. Please contact the MRHS office at (860) 536 - 4779 if you wish to be involved.

Volunteers Needed for Grounds Cleanup

- J. Porter

The annual Grounds Cleanup Day will be held on Saturday, April 26th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Help is needed to clean-up and re-mulch the beds, rake out the driveway gravel and generally clean-up up the property around Portersville Academy and the Downes Building. Please call John Porter at 536-2312 to volunteer to assist.

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Back issues of the newsletter are available for online viewing at www.mystichistory.org*



Appraisal Preview & Appraisal Day



Photo by Hayk Oltaci

*Caucasian rug depicting the walls of Jerusalem
from the Nemati Collection, New York*

The March meeting of MRHS will take place on Wednesday, March 26th, at 730pm at the Mystic Congregational Church meeting hall. Tim Bell, long-experienced antique dealer from Stonington, will be the “master of ceremonies” at a discussion on collecting and present a locally owned multi-generational collection of wonderful pewter. He will also answer your questions and offer a fascinating evening. Be sure to join us!

Appraisal Day will take place on Saturday, March 30th, from 10am to 3pm at the Mystic Congregational Church meeting hall. In addition to our always helpful Tim Bell, the appraisers will include Jennifer Lacker of Stonington, Tom Gray of North Stonington, Darius Nemati of the Nemati Collection of New York City, oriental rugs and wall hangings, and Susan Holbrook of the Yale University Art Gallery with a private practice in appraising and repair of all types of objects – decorative arts, folk art, furniture, frames, sculpture, ceramics.

We will be charging \$5.00 per item so that more of you will be able to bring more items for the expert advice of our appraisers. Unless you have a small rug, Mr. Nemati has advised that you bring a good photographs and dimensions. Refreshments will be served while you wait. Come, join us & find out about all your special treasures!

Oral History Workshop Notes

- J. Porter

I attended an Oral History Workshop led by Mary Marshall Clark, the Director of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University, and assisted by Jerald Albarelli, Oral Historian and Adjunct Professor at Sarah Lawrence College. The workshop was sponsored by the Stonington Historical Society. An extensive bibliography was provided containing both published & web resources.

The key to a successful oral history project is to properly plan it ahead of time. Without this key step the results

will become completely overwhelming. The first thing to determine is what you don't know and thus what you want to find out. Address the following questions or issues: Who is the audience? Who are the subjects? What are the expected outputs? What are the available resources? Research potential similar efforts on the Web. Also consider why you are doing the project and establish a time line for it. Starting with a pilot project, with more in depth efforts later, might be a good plan.

An order of magnitude effort might be answer to 3-4 questions through 30-40 interviewees. Each interviewee should be interviewed 2-4 times for 1 1/2 hours at each session using digital recorders as tapes are too hard to transcribe and will be unusable in the future. Video interviews should also be considered. Think of an oral history as a possible multi-media product.

Interview/interviewer suggestions include:

- The interviewer researching the period in question in order to be well versed on responses and able to identify follow-up questions. Part of the planning effort must be to identify the reference material.
- Not worrying about exact dates during the interview as dates can be researched from other sources.
- Sincerity and interest on the part of the interviewer.
- Requesting impressions of historical events.
- Requiring answers from questions - don't get abstract.
- The phrase “Tell me more” is always useful.
- Ascertaining an event's effect on both the community and the individual.
- Identifying the general area of interest/purpose of the project in a letter to the interviewee. Clarify the individual's rights to the interview output. It is also a good idea for the interviewee to fill out a questionnaire before the interview to establish a background for the interviewer.
- Each recording including who, what, where, when.
- If an interview isn't going well, turn off recorder and discuss issues. If it doesn't progress, don't hesitate to cut & run.
- Never do just one interview. The first interview is a bit of an ice breaker and subsequent interviews leave the door open for future clarification on what has been said.
- Interview at a site comfortable for the interviewee.
- Interviewees need to always get something back, usually a copy of the interview.

Transcription can be outsourced - Columbia outsources all their interviews at a cost of \$90-\$120 per recorded hour. You should verify completed transcriptions against the recorded interview and compose abstracts and indexes for recordings, particularly if no transcript was made.

The bottom line is that oral history projects must not be treated lightly. They are complex, require significant preparation requiring a lot of commitment and resources.

January 2008 Meeting Minutes



- Cathy Marco

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met at Mystic Chamber of Commerce on Monday, February 11, 2008. Those present were Lou Allyn, Bill Everett, Joyce Everett, Tim Evers, Sally Halsey, Dorrie Hanna, Paul Ingle, Helen Keith, Jim Kimenker, Cathy Marco, Betty O'Donnell, John Porter, Stephanie Thorp and Kit Werner.

President (Lou Allyn): Lou announced that Tim Evers has agreed to head the nominating committee.

Treasurers Report (Bill Everett): No changes. Lou has filed our federal taxes through e-filing (an online process).

Corresponding Secretary (Kit Werner): Four notes of thanks were sent this month - one thanking our January monthly meeting speaker and three to generous donors.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Buildings & Grounds (John Porter): The Downes Building plaque has been located and re-installed. John attended the Oral History Workshop sponsored by the Stonington Historical Society on January 19th. It was worthwhile, well attended, and demonstrated that the key to a successful project rests with planning. John's notes are in this newsletter. One important message from the workshop: "Don't think tape, think digital multimedia." Also, volunteers are needed on Saturday, April 26th, from 9:00 until noon for our Grounds Cleanup Morning. Mark your calendars!

Curatorial (Dorrie Hanna Collection Manager): The Committee will meet after Bettye returns from Florida. Work continues on adding material to our database, correcting records, etc. We recently received a donation of the Archives of the Mystic Depot Committee and will be helping them with their 30th Anniversary observance on May 31. We will be represented at the anniversary and offer photos for their exhibit. Brian Rogers will write an article about the event in an upcoming newsletter.

Education & Outreach (vacant): Tim Evers has graciously volunteered to work on educational sessions for youngsters at Portersville Academy. Helen Keith will work with first graders on Thursdays. Bill Tonkin will do 2-3 sessions this spring for 3rd graders and Lou Allyn volunteered to do 2 sessions but we urgently need to have more volunteers in place by the end of March or we'll be unable to offer our program. Tim will contact Kim Carlson, activity director at Stoneridge, to see if she has any residents who might be interested.

Helen reports that the Family Activity Center will continue this year on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons. However, we need a Coordinator to be responsible for getting people to run the Family Activity Center on 14 Sundays from mid-June until mid-September. Anyone who is interested should contact Helen.

Helen shared a draft of the 1930's "Remember When" program booklet which will be published with enough copies to be shared with the participants at a locale as a stimulus for discussion of the period. The participants' reminiscences will be videotaped for our archives. Helen will be working on booklets for the 1940s and 1950s.

Finance (Helen Keith): Nothing new to report.

Hospitality (vacant): Dorrie and Louisa will provide cookies. Lou has made new nametags for attendees.

Information/Technology (Stephanie Thorp): Stephanie continues to update our website routinely as news is provided. Lou discussed his recent PastPerfect training, also attended by Louisa Watrous. A half day was devoted to Virtual Museum software which creates web pages from the PastPerfect database. The pros & cons of implementing the \$336 Virtual Museum, will be pursued. Lou also mentioned for MRHS consideration an online backup service (www.mozyhome.com) and Symantec's pcAnywhere remote accessing software.

Marketing (Sally Halsey): News articles on MRHS events have been attracting new people to monthly meetings.

Membership (Cynthia Allyn): Nothing new to report.

Program (Paul Ingle): Programs so far have been well received. This month's speaker is Tony Donovan speaking about Amos Congdon. In April, Jim Streeter will talk about "Groton Landmarks", and in May, Judith DuPont will discuss her book "The Stonington Tragedy".

Special Events (Joyce Everett): Appraisal Day will be Saturday, March 29th from 10:00 - 3:00 at the Mystic Congregational Church. Dorrie will be sending around a signup sheet at the next Members meeting for cookies and other refreshments for Appraisal Day.

Plans are in place for the Trip to Salem and Gloucester on June 11 and 12. The \$365 cost includes tickets to museums, accommodations at the Hawthorne Hotel, dinner in Essex, and a Whale Watch. It should be a terrific trip!

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Walking Tour (David Evans): David emailed his report that the Project is on track and will be available for spring. Trish Cunningham of the Chamber was contacted to confirm the plan of utilizing their quality copier, including a digital file which should additionally improve output. Jennifer is finishing work on architectural features and final layout. Copy is set; however, there is still some research being done on the Masonic Temple land. Following a tip from Lou, David submitted a grant application to the Women's Club for purchasing upgraded paper stock and plastic holders for the brochures.

Continued, page 5

Pedicab (Tim Evers): Tim spoke with Karin Soderberg to see if the Seaport as any interest in acquiring our Pedicab and they do not. Tim also spoke with Tricia Cunningham who is asking the Mystic Chamber board to see if they have any interest.

The Patrons and Benefactors Party is scheduled for Sunday, April 13th from 4-6pm at Judy Hicks home. Lou will be sending out/sent invitations to patrons, benefactors, life members, sustaining members, and others. Food and drink will be provided by board members.

Hurricane of '38 - The 70th Anniversary (Lou Allyn): Possible places to display an exhibit were discussed: Ames Room at Mystic Noank Library, Portersville Academy, and Mystic Train Depot. Work continues on this project.

NEW BUSINESS

Member Interest Survey - Lou shared with the board a draft of a survey for members to rate MRHS events and facilities. The board endorsed the survey, agreeing that member feedback is important, and provided suggestions.

House Tours - The Past President's Committee suggested to the Board a House Tour in fall 2008 or spring 2009. Joyce Everett stated that it is "important for recognition of our organization and helps us." The committee has developed a list of possible houses. The consensus of the board was to endorse this project. The committee will check other groups in our area to make sure that there is not a conflict with a similar event or date.


The next Board meeting will be March 10th at 7:30pm.



Patronage Rates: \$100/Line Listing
Directly offset newsletter costs to allow more funds directed toward MRHS programs.


Advertising Rates: \$75/Small Single-size Ad, \$150/Large Double-size

- Advertise or become a Patron to support your local heritage!
 - Connecting membership in the Mystic community & beyond in print and online.
- For design details & reservation, contact jenniferpryor@sbcglobal.net



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CALENDAR Notables

Transcription Club Monday, March 3, 12:30p
at the Denison Homestead
Bring your lunch & treasured documents for a fun afternoon!
Call Jane Preston at (860) 536-9248 for more information.

Member Meeting Wednesday, March 26, 7:30p
at the Mystic Congregational Church
Appraiser Tim Bell will discuss pewter collecting.

Appraisal Day Saturday, March 29, 1 - 3p
at the Mystic Congregational Church
Bring your heirlooms for professional review & appraisal.

Transcription Club Monday, April 7, 12:30p
at the Avery-Copp House
Bring your lunch & treasured documents for a fun afternoon!
Call Leslie Evans at (860) 445-1637 for more information

Member Meeting Wednesday, April 23, 7:30p
at the Mystic Congregational Church
Jim Streeter will highlight Groton Landmarks.

Transcription Club Monday, May 5, 12:30p
at the Denison Homestead
Bring your lunch & treasured documents for a fun afternoon!
Call Jane Preston at (860) 536-9248 for more information.

Annual Meeting & Potluck Wednesday, May 28
at the Mystic Congregational Church
Author Judith du Pont will speak about her intriguing book
"The Langworthy Family of Darling Hill in Stonington -
and the Murder of Their Youngest Son."

Newsletter Patrons

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Membership Updates

The MRHS will miss member Molly Budding and extends sympathy to her family. Renewed Memberships include Family Lois McDonald and Benefactor Michael Hennessy.



PVA Volunteers?

We urgently need volunteers to host educational sessions for local school groups this spring and a coordinator for the Family Activity Centers on summer Sundays. Please contact Helen Keith at hkhgram@sbcglobal.net

Tuesdays 9 A.M. - 12 NOON
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