

KAYAKER'S GUIDE TO MYSTIC RIVER & HISTORY MAKES DEBUT



The Mystic River Historical Society is proud to announce the publication of *A Kayaker's Guide to the Mystic River and Its History*. If you are one who enjoys exploring a small river and learning a bit about its history, whether in a kayak, a canoe, a rowing shell, or any other small boat, this is for you! If you have ever wondered about "those who have traveled (the river before you) and worked and lived along its banks.

Imagine the passages of American Indians in their canoes, colonial settlers and traders in their small boats, ferrymen, fishermen, shipbuilders, and sailors and captains on their ships. Although the river is only six miles long, between 1784 and 1919 shipbuilders launched more than 1,400 vessels into its waters – from fishing boats and barges to coasting schooners, 24 clipper ships, and 57 steamships – a remarkable output for a small New England region."*

The brochure is an 11"x14" two-sided, waterproof, tri-fold piece with maps of the Upper and Lower Mystic River identifying both historical sites and locations of public access to the water. Explanatory text gives the reader some information about each of the identified sites. (See sites marked on sample at left.)

Just in time for summer paddling, the Guide is now available at the Society's offices at 74 High Street as well as local outlets. The price for the Guide is \$7.00 each; MRHS member's price is \$5.00 each. Over 70 pieces have been sold already.

Left: A reduced-size sample of the map portion of the brochure shows the many points of historical and natural interest marked and described within. ~ *Reproduced & reprinted with permission from L. Allyn.

ANNUAL MEETING & POTLUCK features CAROL KIMBALL - MAY 18th

As part of our Annual Meeting & Potluck Dinner Program, the featured speaker will be revered historian, Carol Kimball. She will tell us just how it was that she came to be named the Municipal Historian for the Town of Groton in 1985.

It all goes back to 1939 when she and her husband, Burton settled in Mystic and she became a teacher in the Groton School System. (She jokingly says that she's been here long enough that some of the natives actually speak to her now.) At any rate, she was assigned the task of teaching local history, only to find out that there were no books on the subject, so she ended up writing one titled, "The Groton Story", which was first published in 1965 by the Pequot Press for the Groton Board of Education, and later re-published by the Groton Library.



Carol has become widely recognized for her interest and enthusiasm regarding the History of Groton in General and Mystic in particular. Other publications that she has either published solely or with others, include: "The Poquonnock Story"; "The Union Baptist Church of Mystic, Ct.- Its Story", co-authored with Marilyn Comrie; "Historic Glimpses - Recollections of Days Past in the Mystic River Valley"; a weekly column in the New London Day entitled, "Neighbors" and she is currently working on a new Arcadia Publishing booklet, "Groton Revisited" with Jim Streeter & Marilyn Comrie.

Please come to our Annual Meeting and Potluck Dinner Program on Friday, May 18th at 6pm in the Parish Hall. Share Carol's enthusiasm for our wonderful corner of this country along with your heritage potluck dish contributions.



from the
PRESIDENT'S DESK

Lou Allyn

Last fall my first “from the President’s desk” spoke to four major areas of importance to MRHS and listed my priorities for the next 12 months. Now, at the end of our Membership Year I thought it would be a good time to give you a status report.

Physical Assets: We continue to invest in maintaining our facilities. The Downes Building roof was re-shingled; painting the exterior and replacing shutters is in progress. Flashing on the Portersville chimney was repaired, the interior was painted, and a vapor barrier was installed under the first floor. Measurements of relative humidity in the archives room showed winter readings below the desired minimum 40%. A room humidifier was purchased and humidity is now up where we want it to be. Storage space in our archives room is limited. The Curatorial Committee hired an Archives Manager who has been working diligently (with our Curatorial Assistant) to identify, process and organize a substantial quantity of items that have accumulated over the years. This is freeing up shelf space and making more information readily available to our staff and visiting researchers.

Money: The Finance Committee withdrew monies from a scattering of various investments and consolidated them into a basket of Vanguard mutual funds. We anticipate that normal dividends from these funds will be used to supplement our annual operating income so that we will continue to leave the principal part of our endowment untouched. Membership dues and contributions continue to be our largest source of operating income.

Organization: Our website continues to grow as new pages are added. Ownership of the content of each page has been transferred to the relevant committees. Some possible uses of the website that were under consideration have been transferred to our new Constant Contact email utility. With over 150 current users, Constant Contact

has proven to be another way to easily and quickly communicate with the membership. A recent mailing on some history of Ram Island was greeted with enthusiasm and fond memories.

People: We have appointed new Trustees and Committee Chairman during the year and welcomed new volunteers. The slate of Trustees proposed for election at the Annual Meeting shows that MRHS continues to attract people from a variety of backgrounds & interests in local history. A new brochure to publicize the Society was printed and is being used to attract & inform potential new members.

Goals for 2007:

Physical Assets: Continue to monitor the condition of our buildings & equipment. Plan for eventual replacement of the heating and air conditioning system in the Downes Building. Continue to free up archive storage space.

Money: Continue to monitor our mutual fund investments. Provide trips and special programs for the enjoyment of our members, while making a small profit. Market our DVD’s and publications, including the new Kayaker’s Guide to the Mystic River and Its History.

Organization: Encourage the growth of our fledgling internet-based MRHS “community” by implementing new ways to use Constant Contact and our website.

Continue to develop and implement Curatorial procedures so that new donations are quickly processed and added to the PastPerfect system. Upgrade the software to the latest version..

People: The revised by-laws enacted in 2005 specify that no one may serve more than 9 consecutive years as a Trustee or more than 5 years as the Chairman of any particular committee. Thus we need to continue to focus on enrolling and developing Trustees to replace some of our stalwarts who will be retiring in the next several years.

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

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by the Mystic River Historical Society
Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355*



The author and pedaling tourguide with VIP MRHS pedicab guests.

PEDICAB NEWS

-T. Evers

The first outing of the MRHS pedicab which has been resting on blocks all winter will be at New London's Main Street Food Stroll on Wednesday, May 16. Free rides will be offered from 5 to 9 PM to anyone who prefers not to walk to the many restaurants in the State Street vicinity that will be catering to visitors that day.

One-hour tours of Historic Downtown Mystic by pedicab will again be available this summer. On Friday and Saturday afternoons, from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend, you'll find Tim Evers at Liberty Pole Square ready to take you and your friends (two at a time, please!) on a relaxed tour, explaining the historic highlights of the downtown area. How many of you know the background of the Powerhouse and adjacent Trolley Car Barn or the historical significance of the historic homes on Willow Street? Come on down to learn—and bring any guests! Tours cost only \$15 per passenger and, although not necessary, reservations are possible (860.572.1102).

Grounds Cleanup A Great Success

-J. Porter

The annual grounds cleanup was successfully completed on Saturday, April 14th. Perfect weather, coupled with an enthusiastic group of volunteers, made short work of it. Debris was raked up and bagged, shrubs were trimmed, parking lot gravel was re-distributed, several large stones were returned to the parking lot retaining wall, and 25 bags of cedar mulch were spread in the beds. A trip by the property on Monday after the Nor'easter showed that everything had survived the storm. Participants included Tim Evers, John Porter, Alan Greener, Joyce Everett, Dorrie Hannah, Lou Allyn, Jim and Jen Kimenker, Betty O'Donnell, and Dave Evans. A grateful MRHS thank you is extended to each of them.

Report from the ARCHIVES

-D. Hanna

This month I'd like to share some numbers with you that show, I think, that we are indeed supporting our mission to preserve and promote the history of the Mystic River valley.

In 2006 we added over 250 accession records to our computer database. These records may identify either a single item, or many items in a group. So far in 2007 we have added about 50 items and/or groups of items. Some of this material is newly acquired and some we already had but had not entered the information into the computer. Additionally we have been enriching previously existing records in the database to better describe the material.

Also in 2006 we received over 50 email inquiries regarding various questions about Mystic, its history and its families. Obviously our web site is attracting some attention! Several researchers have visited the Downes Building and used our collections to learn more about such topics as the fishing industry in Southeastern Connecticut or Mystic soldiers in the Civil War. We received additional inquiries by mail and phone as well. So far in 2007 I've responded to nearly 20 queries by email and several by phone, including three just today!

We still have a lot of work to do, but it's great to see that progress is being made and that people are learning to consider the MRHS to be a valuable resource for information.

MRHS & Library Co-Sponsors in Grant Microfilm Conversion Project

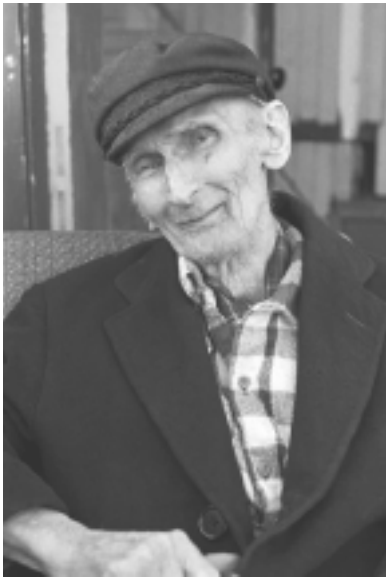
-L. Allyn

The Mystic & Noank Library has received a grant in the amount of \$4,250 from the Connecticut Humanities Council. This grant will be used to partially underwrite the cost of converting 31 rolls of microfilmed historic newspapers to a digital format. These valuable newspapers cover the years 1859-1948 and are a virtual treasure trove of information for scholars, historians and genealogy researchers. When the project is complete the public will be notified and all will be welcome to come to the Library to use this improved digitized system. The Mystic & Noank Library will have the Mystic River Historical Society as a co-sponsor on this project, which will make the information more available to the public.

MRHS enjoys a good working relationship with the Library and is pleased to provide financial support to this project. We look forward to having this unique source of local historical information more readily available to our members and the public.

FINER FOODS & THE EARLY DAYS OF CROCKER HOUSE

...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 his later years putting stories from his life on paper. The Mystic River Historical Society newsletter will publish 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.

After my 11th birthday in 1910, living on Granite Street, Groton, near the old shipyard cove, our lantern-lighted cellar became Pop's lobster-pot building workshop, with me holding the cocked-up lantern until I thought my arms would drop off.

Seldom did Pop knock off for a coffee break. But with a bushel of oysters handy by – shipped up to him from Fulton Fish Market by N.S. Gates, a former Mystic resident – he would halt work twice during the evening to open a dozen oysters on the half shell.

Pop was a worker and a sport. There were times when he would take time off to treat me to a ball game as far away as the Polo Grounds in New York. He worshipped the New York Giants, Christy Mathewson and John McGraw.

Throughout the winter and early spring, Pop had been building up heavy oak-framed lobster pots and other lobster gear. I often had the job of painting them – white with two red bands at their butt, the tip that breaks water first as racing tide slackens.

In April, we set the gear inshore to "soak up," before venturing offshore into the Race.

The G. M. Long Company at New London had a tremendous outlet for live lobsters in New York City, often shipping out barreled orders on the Boston to New York express trains.

Lobsters hauled out of Race waters after sunrise might be cooked and eaten at the Waldorf Astoria or Delmonico's before another sunrise. Arthur Greenleaf, a former state of Mainer, had taken over management of the Long Company from Mr. Coty. He welcomed lobstermen from anywhere to sell their "bugs" to him. But Pop liked to sell direct to local hotels and restaurants for one of two cents a pound more.

Occasionally Pop sold his lobsters and fillet of flounder direct to the Crocker House on State Street, a fine eating institution known throughout the state and into Rhode Island. The steward or head chef wanted only the best. He paid my father 10 cents a pound for legal nine-inch lobsters, and 12 cents a pound for 10-inchers or 2-pounders.

When you ate at the Crocker House, you weren't served a shedder or chicken lobster. You got a man or woman's meal. Whenever I helped Pop deliver, the head man usually rewarded me with delicacies from the cookie jar.

The kitchen was spacious and impressive with its many shining stoves and copper-bottomed utensils. Each dinner was inspected by the chief chef before leaving the kitchen. Sometimes a brush dipped in melted buttered was brushed on before the plate left the kitchen.

Perhaps this early exposure to a fine eating place was to have some bearing on influencing my life in the Roaring '20s, when, as a successful fisherman in my own right, I patronized many fine hotels and restaurants from The Adams House in Boston to the Treymore in Atlantic City, with my all-time favorite, Lorbers near Times Square in New York – waiters in tails, and a complete seven-course roast duck dinner for a dollar.

Even as a boy below teen years, I vowed that when I grew up and got a girlfriend, I would treat her to supper at the Crocker House – a vow I was to keep, and how.



The Crocker House and the Post Office on State Street from a vintage New London postcard.

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April 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, April 16, 2007. Those present were Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Joyce Everett, Tim Evers, Margo Greener, Paul Ingle, Helen Keith, Jim Kimenker, Cathy Marco, Betty O'Donnell, John Porter, Betty Anne Reiter and Stephanie Thorp. Board members who were not present had been excused. Allyn called the meeting to order at 7:30. Minutes of the March meeting were accepted.



Keith noted for Werner that eight thank you notes were sent for Appraisal Day.

Treasurer Everett sent a balance sheet to Board members via email prior to the meeting. A final accounting for the spring trip will be available soon. Two of the appraisers donated their honorariums to MRHS.

President Allyn remarked that the Kayakers' Guide to the Mystic River was distributed. It is available for sale at the Downes Building and Bank Square Books. \$314.00 has been collected to date. Quantity discounts are available. Allyn distributed a graphical representation of board members' terms. New board members will be needed to replace members who have served the maximum number of terms and to replace those who have resigned. Bill Everett, Dave Evans, Jim Kimenker and Cathy Marco were named by the Nominating Committee to be presented as the slate of trustees at the Annual meeting.

Standing Committees

Porter reported for *Building and Grounds* that Simonds & Co. power washed the Downes Building and removed the old shutters. Further progress is weather dependent. The Spring Yard Cleanup was held on April 14th at 9:00 a.m. Response from Board Members and their families was excellent and the project was finished by 10:30 a.m. The stone retaining wall in the parking lot needs re-grouting. After Mark Mitsko inspected the wall, recommended repairs were more extensive than expected. The Finance Committee has decided to postpone repair to a later date. A humidifier for the Downes Building was purchased from Home Depot. It is up and running with the expected increase in building air quality. Some interior paint has lifted in PVA. Analysis of a paint chip at Mystic Paint indicated that the cause is a breakdown of the underlying plaster coat, probably due to moisture. At present, the problem is very localized.

In *Curatorial*, Allyn spoke for Hanna saying a meeting was held with the Akeley Trust on April 5 to discuss the history of the Akeley collection held by MRHS. All parties are acting to determine more accurately how MRHS came to hold this material. Also, consultant Donna Baron met with members on April 9 to discuss how to handle framed items in the collection. This was in preparation for a framing workshop to be held in June. Weather has not been conducive to working in PVA but when warmer weather arrives, it will be cleaned. Louisa has finished adding ten manuscript boxes of material donated by Carol Kimball. Detail on contents is now available in the database. Archival supplies were inventoried, placed in labeled containers, and relocated to shelves closer to the processing area. Needed supplies will be ordered by the end of the month.

For *Education & Outreach*, Keith reported that because of the lack of response for participants, the anticipated amount of work, number of volunteers needed and the expectation of a poor audience, the Committee recommended that the Arts & Crafts Fair, scheduled for June 23rd, be cancelled. She added that MRHS will sponsor a Framing Workshop at Portersville Academy from 10 to 12 on Saturday, June 16th. The Workshop is limited to 15 at a cost of \$10.00. Registration by May 31 is required; call (860) 536-4779.

The Committee's PVA Family Activity Centers are well on their way to completion. (Please see article, p.7) An understudy for Miss Williams and a few additional volunteers to help with the programs are still needed. Emily Perkins will take care of orders for the 19th century reproduction toys and Nancy McKay will be the contact/registration person who will set up the schedule for school groups this fall.

Brochures have been printed for the *Pedicab* tours. The tours will run from Memorial Day to Labor Day. MRHS has been asked to participate in the May Day Parade on Saturday, May 5. Evers is not available but Keith will investigate finding a volunteer to ride the pedicab. Organizers of the New London Main Street Food Stroll on May 16 have asked Evers to participate and he agreed.

For *Finance*, Keith noted that monies from the Vanguard Short Term Investment Fund were used to purchase Vanguard Total International Index Fund. An additional amount from the Vanguard Short Term Investment

Meeting Minutes, continued.

Fund was used to purchase Vanguard Mid Cap Index Fund.

In *Hospitality*, Greener noted that plans are in place for the April meeting. Allyn reported that we received a bill for use of additional tables and chairs at the church. He will investigate. The Potluck Supper meeting with speaker Carol Kimball is May 18th and volunteers are needed for set-up.

For *IT* Thorp noted that archives backups were made over the weekend. The newsletter schedule has been coordinated with Pryor.

For *Membership*, Allyn stated that renewal letters have been mailed out. New members receive a thank you letter, but in order to save postage, renewing members do not. This policy was discussed and Allyn will consider email or postcard options.

For the *Newsletter*, Allyn announced for Pryor the newsletter copy deadline. Members were polled about their preference for receiving the newsletter via email or hardcopy and it was about evenly divided. Allyn will send out the next newsletter via email & collect more feedback.

Ingle assured that *Program* plans for April meeting are in place. Allyn will introduce the speaker if Ingle is absent.

In *Special Projects*, Everett noted that 19 people have signed up for the spring tour. Appraisal Day broke even but attendance was down from last year.

Unfinished Business

Evans met with Tricia Cunningham who was supportive of the walking tour publications. She suggested making them available on the website.

Keith contacted Joan Cohn from the Indian and Colonial Research Center and will have more to report after the ICRC Board meets on April 26th.

New Business

Board members Greener and Reiter were thanked for their service.

The next meeting will be May 21 at 7:30.

Committee Announces Board Nominees

The Nominating Committee named Bill Everett, Dave Evans, Jim Kimenker and Cathy Marco to be presented as the slate of trustees at the Annual meeting.



* WISH LIST *

In order to create the Family Activity Centers, MRHS is soliciting a little help from our friends. Donation of a full-length mirror and Erector, Construx, Kenner or K'nex or similar building toys would be deeply appreciated.

PVA Family Activity Centers

The PVA Family Activity Centers are well on their way to completion. Betty Tylaska is creating a Knot Board Center where visitors can learn how to tie a variety of knots used by sailors in the 19th Century. Using small wooden hulls (made by Bob Floyd for our school program), Tim Evers has made two or three samples of different kinds of boat. Families can create a boat to take home using the supplies provided. With an Erector set, K'nex or similar building materials the challenge will be to create a new bridge across the Mystic River. Pictures of bridges from the past will serve as the inspiration for this activity. Behind the railing families will be able to visit "Grandma's Attic" where household items from years past can be found. Thanks to Ann Hallum dress-up clothes will be available to be tried on and admired in a full length mirror*. The farewell party for the '49ers at Portersville Academy and a Journal telling of one Mystic man's adventures will be the inspiration to make a diary to take home and keep a written record of daily events. With an artist's rendition of Fort Rachel on the wall and a box full of wet sand on the floor (courtesy of Joyce Everett), visitors can make their own replica of the Fort as it might have looked during the war of 1812. Last, but not least, Karen Havrilla and Lynn Leech have paper quilts and "cross-stitch" samplers to be completed and taken home. We expect to have everything ready to be installed in June and plan to have a Grand Opening on Sunday, July 1st from 1 to 3.

CALENDAR NOTABLES

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 ~ see below

Member Arts & Crafts Show - June 19th and 20th, 10 - 4
 Portersville Academy & Lake Umbagog Camp Grounds

CANCELLED

Family Activity Centers Grand Opening, July 1st, 1-3
at Portersville Academy ~ see page 7 for details.

Framing/Reframing WORKSHOP - H. Keith

Saturday, June 16th from 10 - 12 at PVA, 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

MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

You should have received your 2007 membership renewal request in the mail by now. Please take a moment to consider how much your membership and contributions mean to the elected and appointed Trustees and volunteers who put their time and energy into keeping MRHS flourishing and then send in your check. These letters were mailed to 494 active members and include 50 Life members who are being asked to consider a contribution to the Society in lieu of dues.

Renewals for Newsletter Patrons and Advertisers will be mailed in the fall before the start of the next round of publications.

NEWSLETTER PATRONS

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