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Greatest Hits of the Civil War: America's Earliest Professional Songwriters

Join us on May 25th for the annual meeting & potluck with a program from Rick Spencer discussing: "The Greatest Hits of the Civil War: America's Earliest Professional Songwriters."

As of April 2011, our nation commemorates the 150th anniversary of our greatest conflict, the War Between the States. It will be an opportunity for those who are interested in American history to revisit the events of the war and its impact on the American character. This fascinating new music program presents some of the songs that were most popular during that era. The years just prior to the War were times of remarkable cultural development in America and during that period, for the first time in our history, it was possible for musicians to make a living writing popular songs. Writers like Daniel Decatur Emmett ("Dixie"), Stephen Foster ("Oh Susanna"), George F. Root ("The Battle Cry of Freedom") and Henry Clay Work ("Kingdom Coming") composed songs which became the great "pop hits" of the 1860s. This program presents a selection songs from these four marvelous composers. It gives great insight into the American character of the day and includes a discussion of the impact (both positive and negative) of the popular American minstrel shows.

Richard Eugene (Rick) Spencer grew up in Connecticut, where he spent most of his school years looking out the windows, drawing pictures and daydreaming. Nobody knows how he managed to become literate. After his college years, Rick made his living in the fields of construction, factory work, security, education, food preparation, law and health care. In between, he learned to play several musical instruments and to sing a little bit.



Winslow Homer's illustration, "The Songs of War" from the November 23, 1861 edition of Harper's Weekly.

His "big break" came in 1986, when he was hired as a staff musician and historical interpreter at Mystic Seaport. There he met three others of his kind who formed one of the Internationally renowned sea music groups known as "Forebitter."

As a soloist and with others Rick has performed throughout the US, Canada and Europe. He is perhaps best known as a composer and writer of songs that run the range from delicate and sensitive to humorous and irreverent.

Rick is known internationally for his work as a historian, researcher, singer, songwriter, recorder and performer of music in the American folk tradition on a variety of instruments. For over 25 years he has traveled, performed & instructed at venues from concert stages & museums to pubs & tall ships. In the "real" world Rick Spencer works as the Executive Director of the Dr. Ashbel Woodward Museum in Franklin, CT.



Speaker & Musician
Rick Spencer

Join us for the Annual Membership Potluck, Meeting and Program
Wednesday, May 25th at 6pm ~ Mystic Congregational Church



from the PRESIDENT'S DESK

Jim Kimenker

In my last column, I abused our readers by misusing a simple word. To create an indelible mental picture of a bored reader of the dry, dusty past, I placed the word “prone” before the phrase “head back, mouth open, eyes closed”, thinking myself the very picture of descriptive prose. On reading the published version, my wife inquired as to the meaning of “prone” (as did at least one other reader). Her inquiry was not meant (nor taken, for that matter) as a question of innocence, but knowledgeably, namely, “Good gravy! Don’t you know what ‘prone’ means?” (Ok, so maybe she didn’t exactly exclaim “good gravy”). Taking my cue from station manager, Arthur Carlson, in the “Thanksgiving” episode of WKRP in Cincinnati (the infamous turkey drop), who said “as God is my witness, I thought turkeys could fly”, I had to concede the careless use of “prone” to indicate “face up”, when it means precisely the opposite. My apologies to all (the silver lining being, of course, the discovery that two people actually do read this column).

Beyond the simple histrionics of a mea culpa, you’re probably wondering if there is any real point to all this. I think there is. History, by definition, requires the use of words to describe people and events. But, the people in those past events used words themselves and it’s no great leap to consider the importance of what they said when studying the events in which they participated. And it’s a mistake to give short shrift to the meaning of those words, especially when they might help our understanding of those events.

Take Lincoln, for instance. As part of the daily New York Times sesquicentennial series about the Civil War, the March 4, 2011 issue contained four illuminating articles regarding Lincoln’s first inauguration. One of the articles observed that the meaning derived from a speech cannot always be controlled by the speaker—events have a way of coloring meaning in unintended ways. But another article focused on that portion of Lincoln’s inaugural speech not subject to any ambiguity, reminding us that Lincoln, contrary to what many believe, was not focused on ending slavery upon his election. In fact, he made it crystal clear that he had absolutely no intention of even trying to do so. And, to remove any doubt, near the end of his speech, before that memorable closing about the “mystic chords of memory” and the “better angels of our nature”, Lincoln mentioned the newly proposed amendment to the Constitution. The proposed amendment was decidedly NOT the existing 13th Amendment, which ended slavery.

Passed by Congress the day before Lincoln’s inauguration, this earlier “version” of a 13th amendment attempted to assuage southern secessionist sentiment by simply stating that slavery could not be abolished or restricted. Stunning. Did Lincoln mention it in his inaugural address? Indeed he did, saying this about its purpose to prevent any interference with slavery, “I have no objection to its being made express and irrevocable.” How many of you are aware that this amendment was actually ratified by three northern states over the next two years (Ohio, Maryland and Illinois) before it was consigned to the trash heap and replaced by the 13th Amendment with which we are now familiar.

Bottom line? Lincoln, in his single-minded effort to save the Union, and notwithstanding his personal antipathy to the institution, was actually willing to make slavery constitutionally permanent. And he made it as clear as he could in his first inaugural, leaving us with words which cannot be lightly ignored. Anybody want to speculate about the likelihood of a Lincoln Memorial and a venerated memory if his effort had succeeded?

Now, before anybody runs to leap off the nearest cliff in speculative, historical despair, it’s also fair to remind ourselves that subsequent events provided Lincoln the opportunity to do the right thing less than two years later, but only after his words failed to prevent the war and disintegration he sought to avoid. Besides, they were just “words”, right?



“The President’s Inaugural”, 1861 by Thomas Nast portrays the northern reaction to the President’s inaugural speech. Lincoln is shown with the palm branches and garlands of peace. In the second frame, Lincoln assumes a different Roman garb as a helmeted warrior standing on a vanquished foe. “This is the way the South receives it” was Nast’s caption.

Source: www.abrahamlincolnclassroom.org

Mystic River Historical Society Mission Statement

The Society exists to collect, arrange, exhibit and preserve records, papers, photographs, artifacts, relics and related archival materials that document the history of the people who lived in the area around the Mystic River from the first settlement in 1654 to the present.

Officers: President - Jim Kimenker • Vice President - John Porter
Treasurer - Bill Everett • Corresponding Secretary - Lois Glazer • Recording Secretary - Cathy Marco

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
Issues of the newsletter are available for online viewing at www.mystichistory.org



Helen Keith Memorial

- J. Everett

All members of the Mystic River Historical Society and friends of Helen and George Keith are cordially invited to a reception at Portersville Academy on Sunday, June 5th, at 300pm. We will unveil a plaque naming the upstairs Portersville classroom in honor of Helen and George Keith and recognizing their innumerable contributions to the Historical Society during their lifetimes. Please come and do them honor! Sally Halsey will be in charge of the reception. If you would like to bring something please call Sally.



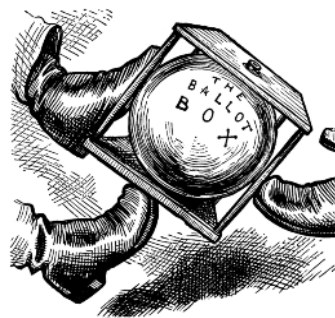
Input Sought for Tour

- J. Everett

The MRHS Special Events Committee is continuing discussions regarding the June 2013 Home and Business Tour. The Committee is reaching out to people in the community and encouraging all ideas of how to honor the MAC on its 100th birthday at the event, the downtown merchants and our town, and celebrate the Historical Society's 40th anniversary as well.

If you have some ideas please pass them along to any member of the committee -- Lou Allyn, Dorrie Hanna, Judy Hicks, Bill Peterson, Willa Schuster, Susan Lund, Joyce Everett, Marilyn Comrie, among others.

Vote: Trustee Nominations



The Nominating Committee consisting of Kit Werner (Chair), Tim Evers, Pres. Jim Kimenker (ex officio), and Cathy Marco proposes the following slate of trustees for 2011- 2012, with each trustee serving a 3-year-term:

- Louis P. Allyn (to replace Kit Werner, now completing her 3rd and final term)
- Judith Hicks (to replace Kay Janney, now completing her 1st term)
- Stephanie Thorp (to continue as a trustee for a 3rd term)
- Aimée Allaire (to continue as a trustee for a 2nd term)

The MRHS general membership will vote upon this slate of trustees at our Annual Meeting in May, 2011.

Spring-Fresh Memberships

- Cindy Allyn, Membership

Spring is the time of our annual membership renewal! By now you should have received a personal letter encouraging you to renew your Mystic River Historical Membership.

Thank you to those who have already renewed their membership. If, for some reason, you did not receive the letter, please use the form below.

Since MRHS is entirely self-funding and relies on dues for help with its annual budget, your support is very important to our ability to continue as an active local historical society. A complete list of all our members will be printed in the September Portersville Press.



~ Mystic River Historical Society Membership Form ~

Name: _____
 Street: _____
 City/State/Zip: _____
 Phone: _____ Email: _____

Annual Membership:

- \$15/Individual \$30/Family \$50/Contributing \$100/Benefactor \$250/Sustaining \$1000/Life Membership

And in Addition:

- \$100/Newsletter Patron \$ _____ Gift in Memory and/or Appreciation of _____

Acknowledgements will be in the above name. Our membership year is May 1 to April 30. Your contribution is tax deductible. Checks may be made payable to MRHS. Send to P.O. Box 245, Mystic, CT 06355

Reflections on the Role of Mystic in the Civil War

- Sally Halsey

As the country commemorates the 150th Anniversary of the start of the Civil War, I wondered what role Mystic's citizens had in the conflict. We drive by the monument on Rte. 1 and have seen graves of various veterans in the Lower Mystic and Elm Grove cemeteries (among others). Surprisingly, little is published on this topic besides a chapter in Charles Stark's Groton, Conn., 1705-1905 and one or two other self-published pieces.

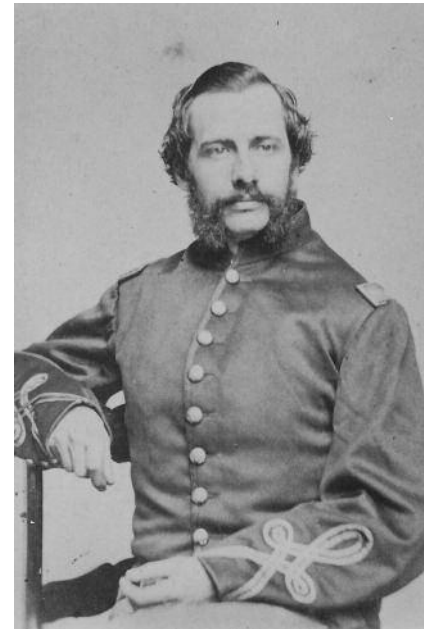
Fortunately, Dorrie Hanna shared with me a paper that Brian Stanley, a young man from Mystic studying at Central Connecticut State University, wrote in December 2010 on this very topic! He used documents from our collection, as well as from other sources, to write a 28-page paper for a graduate-level course. (He got an A!) For anyone interested in reading this well-written and researched paper, you may find it on our website (www.mystichistory.org) or on Facebook (www.facebook.com/mystichistory).

Mystic's shipbuilding industry flourished during the early years of the war. Not only were existing ships fitted for combat, but new ones were built. "Mystic produced more ships than any other New England port except Boston during the war, which was twenty times larger. Overall, over fifty-thousand tons of shipping were constructed in Mystic from 1861-1865, making it one of the most productive shipping centers in the world at the time." (Brian Stanley, 2010).

Mystic men were in many Connecticut regiments, but made up the majority of six companies. They fought in almost every battle of the war. (Brian Stanley, 2010). Familiar last names abound: Fish, Mason, Clift, Rathbun, Packer, Tift, Avery. Hundreds of Mystic men fought, and many died from wounds or disease brought on by war.

The MRHS is lucky enough to have a collection of letters that the young Mystic soldier, Pvt. Horatio N. Fish, Jr., wrote to his family at home while at war. He was wounded twice, and died in August 1864 from infection from his second wound after the Battle of Petersburg. The letters from this young man help us understand the fear and homesickness many must have felt.

The Liberty Pole was erected shortly after the war began to remind residents that "liberty would triumph." (Brian Stanley, 2010) Originally southwest of the bridge, it was moved later to its current location on Route 1 at Holmes Street. In 1889, the Civil War monument was given to the town by the Mallory family to honor those who served. As we whiz by (o.k., slowly creep by) these two Mystic icons, take a moment to think about those many men who



Capt. John K. Bucklyn

left their homes to protect their ideals and the families they left behind. Make a visit to the Lower Mystic Cemetery on Rte. 1 (east of Fishtown Road) and let Horatio and the other vets (Medal of Honor awardee Capt. John K. Bucklyn lies there, too) know that their supreme efforts are remembered.



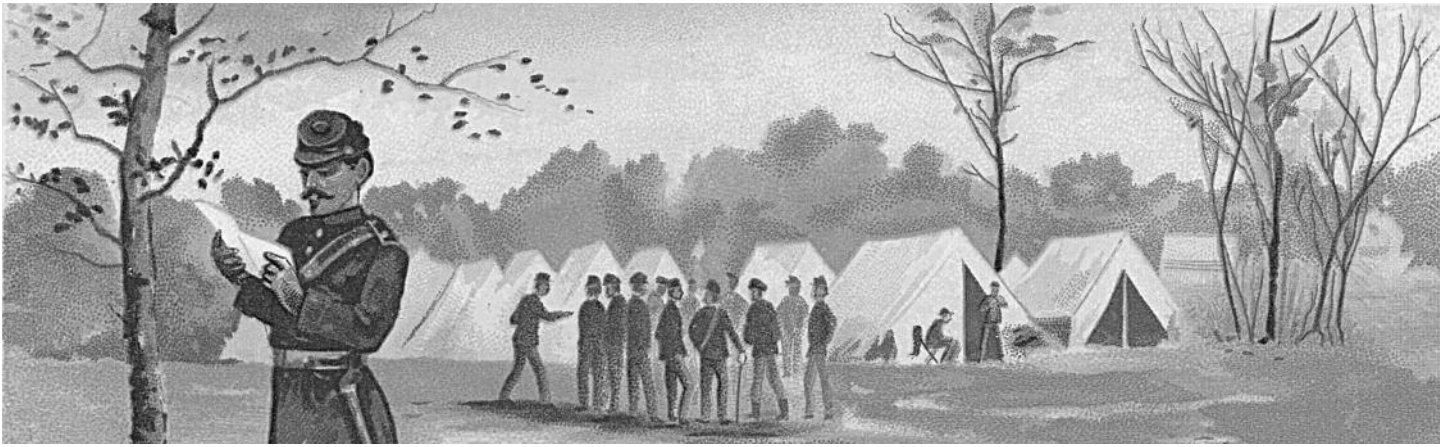
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Insights to the Past through GAR

- Dorrie Hanna

In our collection I found a portion of a little booklet entitled "Bits of Camp Life" containing color illustrations and snippets of Civil War songs. It evidently dates from after the war, around 1888. There is no publishing information in our copy but on line research seems to indicate it was produced in honor of the GAR.

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was a fraternal organization composed of veterans of the Union Army who served in the American Civil War. It was founded in 1866, and dissolved in 1956 when its last member died. Linking men through their experience of the war, the GAR became among the first organized advocacy groups in American politics, supporting voting rights for black veterans, lobbying the US Congress to establish veterans' pensions, and supporting Republican political candidates. The Mystic GAR post was Williams Post #55.

Appropriately enough for our May issue, GAR Commander-in-Chief General John A. Logan established May 30 as Decoration Day in 1867, later known as Memorial Day. In its first celebrations, people used this day to commemorate the dead of the Civil War by decorating their graves with flowers and flags. Helen May Clark wrote about this in her diary from around 1912.

More on CT in the Civil War

If you'd like to know more about Connecticut's Naval Contributions to the Civil War, read the article regarding how Glastonbury's Gideon Welles brings order out of chaos. Written by William N. Peterson, the article can be found in the Connecticut Explored Spring 2011 Special Issue: Connecticut in the Civil War. See & purchase online at: http://connecticutexplored.org/?page_id=6

Submissions: Women's History

- Pat Schaefer

Every year, the Association for the Study of Connecticut History holds a fall conference with a theme dealing with Connecticut history. This year's conference will be on November 12th at Manchester Community College. The theme is Women in Connecticut: Broadly Considered. We are looking for papers on any aspect of women's history in Connecticut, including individuals, groups, movements, and perceptions. For consideration, please submit a paper title, abstract, and a short c.v. by June 15 to Nancy Steenburg, 493 Pequot Ave., Mystic, CT 06355 or nancy.steenburg@uconn.edu. If you have questions, or for further information, please contact Nancy Steenburg or Pat Schaefer (pmschae@99main.com).

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March Meeting Minutes

- Kit Werner, Recording Secretary

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, March 21, 2011. Board Members and Committee Chairmen/members present were Aimée Allaire, Cynthia Allyn, Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Joyce Everett, Lois Glazier, Alan Greener, Sally Halsey, Kay Janney, Jim Kimenker, Cathy Mauritz, Betty O'Donnell, John Porter, Stephanie Thorp, and Kit Werner. The Board members who were not present had been excused

President's Report (*Jim Kimenker*): Jim discussed some of Mystic Seaport Museum's plans for the Charles W. Morgan in 2013. He suggested that we think about volunteering/participating as a Society as a whole or as individuals

Treasurers Report (*Bill Everett*): Financials were sent to the Board prior to this meeting. No questions by the Board.

Finance (*Dave Evans*): No report.

Corresponding Secretary (*Lois Glazier*): Correspondence since February included thank you notes to Fritz Hilberg, our February speaker, and to Tod Johnstone, for his generous donation of the Helen and George Keith memorial plaque for Portersville Academy's upstairs classroom. Lois also sent an acknowledgement of the plaque to Helen Keith's family..

STANDING COMMITTEES

Buildings & Grounds (*Alan Greener*): Alan announced that the annual spring cleanup for the grounds around Portersville and the Downes Building has been scheduled for Saturday, April 30th, from 9am to noon. Regarding our service agreement for the heat pump in the Downes Building, Alan has obtained one competitive bid from a reliable source and is awaiting two other offers from local heating contractors. A motion was made to allow Alan to make decisions regarding Building & Grounds vendors for work with a cost of up to \$1,000. The motion was seconded and approved.

Curatorial (*reported by Acting Chair, Lou Allyn*): Items of interest from the March Curatorial Committee meeting:

1. Donna Keith donated a 'made-in-Mystic' Earth Closet display.
2. Ed Coogan's Civil War letters are being scanned and will then be typed by volunteer, Catherine Deichmann.
3. Dorrie Hanna will attend a two-day workshop on disaster response and recovery, including restoration of damaged papers and photographs. She reported that we had six

visitors doing research in January and two additional phone / email research queries.

4. We chose the first group of titles to be purchased in memory of Helen Keith.

5. Betsy Boucher is entering Haley Collection information into PastPerfect. She is also customizing their detailed step-by-step standard instructions to our specific procedures.

6. Lou has scanned in hundreds of Judy Hicks' 35mm slides and lecture notes, and is in the process of creating PowerPoint presentations from them.

7. Research of downtown property owners and store proprietors is continuing, with Judy Hicks and Joanna Case working on the west side of the river and Betty Tylaska on the east.

Education/Outreach (*Cathy Mauritz*): During the past month, Cathy has sent emails with cover letters to more than 72 elementary schools, informing them of our spring Portersville educational program. Thus far, she confirms that six classes (four 1st grades and two 3rd grades) are participating. Cathy will send out follow-up reminders soon. Discussion followed on how to include families with home-schooled children, as well.

IT Committee (*Stephanie Thorp*): The System Administrator performed routine backups of all files on the system at the end of February. Operating system, security, and other application software have been updated to the most current version, including the Service Pack 1 update to Windows 7. Past Perfect software was verified, and all data files were copied to offsite secure storage. The system and all equipment and software were operational as of February 27, 2011.

A Computer System Incident Report (#0007) had been submitted, regarding non-working printers. The System Administrator investigated the report and determined that the driver for the Brother laser printer was corrupted on the laptop computer. He installed a fresh copy and verified that printer requests operated properly on all computers for all printers.

Marketing (*Sally Halsey*): Sally sent press releases to area papers regarding our upcoming March program, to be given by Bill Peterson. She also updated our page on Facebook.

Membership (*Cynthia Allyn*): We have one new member, Jean Pearson, at the Individual level. We will be sending out the renewal notices around April 1st. Thus far, we have 320 renewals and 12 archived memberships.

Hospitality (*Louisa Watrous*): No report.

Newsletter (*Jennifer Pryor*): No report.

Nominating (*Kit Werner*): No report.

Program (*Aimee Allaire*): February 23rd's presentation by Chief Fritz Hilbert, "The Fires of Mystic, Part II," was a great success, with about 65 people in attendance. We are looking forward to March 23rd's presentation by Bill Peterson on the famed Mystic photographer, Everett Scholfield. We continue to welcome any additional help for May's Potluck Dinner and Annual Membership Meeting.

Special Events (*Joyce Everett*): *Next house tour*: The Special Events Committee met March 15th at Willa Schuster's house to discuss a proposed downtown home and building tour in 2013. We agreed that we want the event: to involve downtown merchants and restaurants; to celebrate the Mystic Arts Center's 100th anniversary as an integral part of Mystic; and to recognize Mystic River Historical Society's 40th anniversary.

We are not proposing a traditional house tour, but rather a 'condo/apartment/church/house/and downtown building and business' tour. A theme of 'Live-Work-Eat-Enjoy' would guide the tour, as we celebrate the village lifestyle that Mystic has enjoyed since its beginnings. Factories, a power-house, and schools have been transformed into downtown living spaces, adding to the historic homes already there. Signage might include enlarged pictures of historic Mystic, erected on corners to help tour-goers contrast Mystic past and present. Lou Allyn will contact the Mystic Chamber of Commerce to get their response to our proposal.

We hope to enlist the help of enthusiastic downtown merchants and restaurants. We need suitable condos and apartments, as well as some houses for the tour. Dorrie Hanna will be working with Judy Hicks to find homes of early downtown merchants. We also hope to identify locations of some of the old 'kettle courts.'

The Committee plans to contact the Mystic Garden Club to share information and to apprise them of the proposed tour dates - Saturday and Sunday, June 22nd and 23rd, 2013. We hope they will be involved with flower arrangements and in helping to find docents.

Our next Committee meeting will be at Willa's house at 4:00pm, April 20th.

Spring Trip: Our Spring Trip to Philadelphia and Delaware (April 25 - 28) is a 'go,' and we are still adding participants.

Walking Tour (*David Evans*): No report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: (none)

NEW BUSINESS: (none)

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kit Werner, Recording Secretary pro tem*



"Captain's Row" on Gravel Street - part of many a Mystic tour, including the one mapped out in the MRHS brochure. This illustration is one of 19 original watercolors in Ashley Halsey's book "Colors of Mystic" presented by the Mystic River Historical Society. Available in paperback for \$14.95 at Bank Square Books, proceeds benefit MRHS.

CALENDAR Notables

Annual Membership Potluck and Meeting

Wed., May 25th 2011

6p/potluck, 7:30p/meeting

Rick Spencer "Greatest Hits of the Civil War" ~ an interactive and entertaining musical program

Helen Keith Memorial Service

Sunday, June 5, 2011, 3:00p

Portersville Academy

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~ Why, Thanks! ~



The Mystic River Historical Society's Portersville Press would like to thank all of the Patrons and Advertisers for their support throughout the 2011-12 publication season. We encourage readers to also offer appreciation and patronage.

MYSTIC RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ANNUAL MEETING & POTLUCK SUPPER
 Wednesday, May 25th
 6^{pm} - Supper & Social and 7:30^{pm} - Presentation featuring Rick Spencer
"Greatest Hits of the Civil War ~ America's Earliest Songwriting Professionals"

Please bring your favorite dish (salad, entree, side or dessert!) to share and BYO plates & flatware. MRHS will provide beverages & cookies.
 This is a fun opportunity for members and guests to socialize - - fun, friendship, tasty treats and a bit of history!
 Mystic Congregational Church Hall at Broadway & East Main St., Mystic

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