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In “For Neighbor or for Nation: Mystic, Connecticut and the Civil War Draft,” I look at one aspect of the Civil War from a local point of view. From the summer of 1862 through the spring of 1865, the Federal government battled public apathy, confusion, and local values to meet the manpower requirements of the Union army. The story of how communities across the North grappled with preserving their local authority while accommodating the nation’s needs is one of the under-researched areas of both Civil War scholarship and nineteenth-century social history.

The Civil War draft placed an almost unbearable burden on communities across the North. Every time the President issued another call for men, the state assigned each town a quota to be filled, hopefully by volunteers enticed by ever-increasing bounties. If volunteers could not be found among their own sons, the community then had a difficult choice: to find substitutes to fight in place of its sons, and find the money to pay them, or to draft some of their own, and force them to go to war against their will.

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Sate your thirst for answers at our November program featuring Ms. Deichmann on Wednesday November 28th.
Once again it is Fall and the Finance Committee is in the process of preparing our Annual Budget for approval by the Board of Directors at their November meeting.

Over the last few years we have received a total of $10,000 in grants from the Connecticut Humanities Council (CHC) for partial funding of a Curatorial Assistant. Each year the percentage of the salary paid by the grant decreases and the portion paid by MRHS increases. For 2008, the grant money is gone and MRHS is expected to fund the entire amount. This means that there will be an increase in our Operating Expenses.

Since income from membership dues, contributions, newsletter patrons and advertising, and Ways and Means activities is relatively fixed, we will probably cover this cost increase with dividends and capital gains in our basket of funds at Vanguard.

We have made good use of the grant and our matching funds. After the grant was approved in 2005 Judy Hicks was hired as the Curatorial Assistant. Then in 2006 we hired Louisa Watrous to share the workload as another Curatorial Assistant. In 2007 Judy retired and we hired Collections Manager Dorrie Hanna. The scope of their work was spelled out in the original application said “The general responsibilities of the Curatorial Assistant are to process collections, assist with reference questions, develop finding aids, train volunteers, and develop procedures to facilitate accurate and effective use of PastPerfect, our primary database, all in an effort to better promote and interpret Mystic’s history.”

Later in an Interim Report to CHC we said “A crucial development came when Judy and Louisa had been hired. We desperately needed an easily searchable finding aid. For some time, the MRHS had been operating with two databases – our original Data Ease, which had become overgrown and cumbersome, and our modern PastPerfect database, designed specifically for small museums and archives such as ours. After a lengthy planning and study process this past year, Doug Hanna, with help and support from Dorrie Hanna, our President, completed the merge of the two databases. This enabled Louisa to begin scanning one of our more valuable, and most-used photographic collections, the Stinson Collection, into the new PastPerfect, some 840 photos. Her next task will be to develop a basic finding aid for our archives using PastPerfect. She will determine which collections have been entered into the newly merged database, and from there begin entering search terms for collections that have no references.”

I think the money is well spent and look forward to making all the images and information now on our Past Perfect database available to our members and the public.

The early days of data entry at the Typewriting Department for National Cash Register Co., Dayton, Ohio, c. 1902
The National Cash Register Co., which was founded in 1884, manufactured the first mechanical cash registers.
It introduced electric cash registers in 1906
Travels with Joyce & Friends - the Hudson River Valley and Upcoming Key West

The MRHS Hudson River group returned in the lightning and thunder from two days of sightseeing - a celebratory end to a great trip! For the first time ever our perfect weather prayers went unanswered, but we had a wonderful group of enthusiastic sightseers who brushed away the fog and drizzle with great good cheer. We began with a visit to “Boscobel” near Garrison NY. Instead of a picnic on the lawn we had a picnic on the bus as we journeyed on to ValKill, Eleanor Roosevelt’s getaway during the Roosevelt presidency and later her home. People had a chance to walk and explore the grounds before we headed on to the FDR museum. Some opted for the FDR mansion and some energetic souls managed both the museum and the mansion. From the FDR complex we went on to the Culinary Institute of America where we enjoyed a tour of the facilities and a chance to see many students at their work before our delicious dinner. The following morning the group headed off to “Clermont”, the home of the Livingston family for many generations. At noon we returned to Kingston’s Rondout district to enjoy lunch at a waterfront restaurant before a two-hour cruise on the Hudson River. The leaves and homes along the river were beautiful in the slightly grey weather and many people enjoyed the hot chocolate onboard. John, our valiant bus driver, was waiting to load everyone on board and brought us safely home through torrential rain in Waterbury, thunder and lightning. We are most grateful to Helen Keith and Bettye Noyes who were always on hand to help Joyce and keep us traveling smoothly. We thank all of you for coming and making the trip such a grand experience!

......and now....on to March 2008 and our trip to Key West! After considerable thought Helen and Joyce have decided to do the March trip totally by coach under the care, we expect, of our favorite and careful bus driver, John. We would leave March 9, spend three nights on the road, stop once each day at lunchtime for an adventure to get us out and walking, spend three nights in the Keys (two in Key West), and another three nights on the way home. Among other spots we plan stops in Fredericksburg, Charleston, St. Augustine, and Savannah. It should be a grand adventure that will not be too tiring, avoids the worry over putting the group on planes in March, and provides a driver and bus we know in Key West. For a minimum of 30 people, we expect the cost to be between $1800 and $1900, door-to-door, all breakfasts, some lunch and dinners, admissions, and baggage handling where appropriate. You will receive more information soon.

Your thoughts and suggestions would be greatly appreciated, so call Helen or Joyce (536-6339) and let us hear them!

A vintage travel poster highlights the glories of Key West - beaches, boating and palm trees abound with even more history today.
New Book about Groton Just Published

- Dorrie Hanna

The other day in the mail we received a complimentary copy of a great new book published by Arcadia accompanied by a letter asking me if I would help spread the word and share the information with MRHS members. So here goes....... Carol W. Kimball, James L. Streeter and Marilyn J. Comrie are the authors of the newly published Groton Revisited. This photographic history is the follow up to Images of America: Groton, published in 2004 by the same authors. During signings for their first book, many people offered to share family treasures of Groton photographs with the authors, and, as a result, this new volume, Groton Revisited, contains many previously unpublished images of the town and its people. The book should interest Groton’s present residents as well as any who once lived in the town. The authors say their new book "celebrates in photographs the people, places and events that have made Groton a vital part of Connecticut’s history and economy for more than 300 years." Chapters of Groton Revisited include: Shoreline Activities, Bridges, The 1938 Hurricane & Here and There.

Carol, Jim, and Marilyn, all Groton residents, have long been interested in Groton history. In 2004, as members of the Groton Tercentennial Committee, they co-authored their first volume for the event. All three have been involved in the formation of the new Groton Historical Society, to which royalties from this book will be directed.

Groton Revisited is available at area bookstores, independent retailers, and online retailers, or through Arcadia Publishing at www.arcadiapublishing.com or (888)-313-2665. Arcadia is the leading publisher of local and regional history in the United States. Their mission is to make history accessible and meaningful through the publication of books on the heritage of America’s people and places.

MRHS GENERAL STORE - Books, Gifts & Sundries - Open for the Holidays!

Stop by the MRHS offices to purchase periodicals, films, stationery, reproduction toys and more for timeless gifts this holiday season and throughout the year. All financial proceeds benefit the Historical Society and the entertainment benefits are, of course, priceless!

“A Kayaker's Guide to the Mystic River and its History”
Written and produced by MRHS, 2007
$5 members, $7 non-members
$4 quantity of 20 - 99, $3 for 100+

"The Battle of Groton Heights"
Written by William Harris, 1870; Published by Charles Allyn, 1881; Republished by Dr. Norman Boas 1999, with Foreword and Copies of Original Documents Added $30.

"Longer Than Expected"
by George Kelsey Drebber; Biography of Samuel Huntington, President of the Continental Congress 1779-1781, considered by some to be the first U.S. President
$12.95

"Mystic - An American Journey"
DVD
Written and produced by Bailey Pryor, 2004
$15
+ $5 S&H if mailed

"Images of America: Mystic"
by Mystic River Historical Society Published by Arcadia Publishing Company, 2004
$19.99

"An Account of My Life: The Childhood Journals of Helen May Clarke of Mystic, Connecticut, 1915-1926"
by Helen Clarke Grimes
Edited by MRHS; 1997
$14.35 members
$15.95 non-members

"My Hurricane & Here and There."

Stop by the Downes Building to pick up the classics of local yore, handy stationery and MRHS logo carrying totes~ They make great gifts!
The Search for Catharine Mobberly

As the final winter of the Civil War began, Catharine A. Mobberly wrote a letter to her sister, Rebecca Seals. The letter revealed that Catharine’s husband James had been wounded at Staunton, and that even four months later she remained unsure of his fate. Catharine faced an uncertain future at her father-in-law’s house; from her descriptions of her apple crop and fat hogs it was clear that the family lived a rural life. Catharine’s longing for her family implied that they were living at a distance from the Mobberly farm.

From reading her letter, we know so much about Catharine...and so little! The letter provides few clues as to who she was, where she lived, or what became of her. Although I didn’t originally view this as a genealogical mini-project, as I worked with the letter my curiosity about Catharine grew. So how do we go about the task of finding a nearly anonymous woman who lived almost a century and a half ago? Without a local starting point for our investigation, I turned to the internet. Nineteenth century women seldom left a paper trail; men are usually easier to track down. So even though I was primarily interested in Catharine, I decided to start with James.

Although I was missing the usual facts such as state of service, regiment or rank, I did have a name and one very important clue: Catharine’s James fought at the battle of Staunton, Virginia. My search of the National Park Service’s Soldiers and Sailors database was almost too successful – using variant spellings, the NPS lists several James Mobberlys who served in the Union army. How could I tell which of these was Catharine’s James? Some quick research in the regimental histories revealed that only one of the James Mobberlys on the list served in unit that fought in the Shenandoah Valley in the spring of 1864 – James B. Mobberly, a private in Company C of the 116th Ohio.

Now I could identify James with a state, but Ohio is a really big place! How could I find out more about him? The database didn’t give a town or place of birth, and also didn’t say if he survived the wounds he received at Staunton. The 1860 Federal Census did not list a James and Catharine Mobberly anywhere in Ohio, and the only history of the 116th I could find online did not list casualties by name. A search of the Civil War pension records revealed that Catharine A. Mobberly applied for widow’s benefits in February of 1865, eight weeks before Appomattox, so it was clear that James never did return to his home in Ohio. The Civil War graves registration records show he was buried in the Union cemetery in Staunton, Virginia, on July 12, 1864. Although she did not know it at the time, when Catharine wrote to Rebecca, her James had been dead for almost four months.

So I had found James, but what happened to Catharine? Once again I turned to the internet. I posted a brief question on the Mobberly message board at ancestry.com, asking if anyone out there in cyberspace had information about a James who was married to Catharine and who served in the 116th Ohio. Within hours I had a reply from a lovely woman named Brenda in Pennsylvania, who is descended from James’ brother, Amos; she generously offered to share her family research with me.

From Brenda I learned that Catharine A. Seals was born in Monroe County, Ohio, the same place where the Mobberlys lived. Rebecca was her younger sister by two years. Sometime between 1850 and 1860 the Seals family moved to Iowa, which is where Rebecca was living when Catharine’s letter was sent. Catharine and James were married in Appanoose County, Iowa in 1860. Although Catharine does not mention a child in her letter, she and James had a daughter, born in 1863, who they named Huldah, after James’ mother. At some point after 1864 Catharine and Huldah moved back to Iowa. Catharine never remarried; she lived the rest of her life with her daughter and eventually, her daughter’s family.

So the mystery is solved. Or is it? We have been able to fill in the picture of a young soldier and his bride; a farmer of “small family and small means,” who marched off to war and didn’t return, and the hardworking wife and young child he left behind. Through Catharine’s letter we have come to know her family across time. But one question still remains: How did this wonderful document come to be a part of our archive? Neither Brenda nor the internet could solve that part of the mystery. Do you have the answer?
October 2007 Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met at the Mystic Chamber of Commerce on Monday, October 15, 2007. Those present were Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Joyce Everett, Paul Ingle, Helen Keith, Jim Kimenker, Cathy Marco, Betty O’Donnell, John Porter, and Kit Werner.

President - Allyn had nothing to report.
Treasurer - Bill Everett distributed copies of the Balance Sheet, and Profit & Loss Budget versus Actual.
Correspondence - Kit Werner’s work was light this past month. Three letters of thanks were sent; one to our wonderful September speaker, Robert Welt; one to our air conditioning consultant; and another to our Board member Joyce Everett for her fantastic work on the Hudson River tour.

Standing Committees

Building & Grounds - John Porter reported that Acorn Exterminating Co. completed treatment of the Downes Building for carpenter ants. After the last meetings discussion regarding crawl space closure, an expanded metal grate was installed over the entryway. It will be monitored periodically to ensure that it effectively isolates the crawl space.

Curatorial - Dorrie Hanna, Collection Manager noted that several small donations and one large one have been received in recent weeks. The large group of items came from Mary Ann Read and consists of a number of photographs, journals and papers that were the property of her late aunt, Helen Clarke Grimes. Bettye Noyes is inventoring this material at present.

Dorrie spent some time assisting Judy Hicks in the preparation of a short program about Elihu Spicer for presentation at the Mystic & Noank Library. There were also about a dozen queries answered since September 1.

Helen and Dorrie have continued work on the map cabinet inventory. Items not accessioned to date will be set aside for Louisa to enter. Louisa also continues to add a large amount of Fish family material to Past Perfect.

Looking ahead, focus will be on adding entries for accessioned book collection materials to the database.

Education & Outreach - (vacant) The first grades from Pleasant Valley School are the only ones to avail themselves of our new fall field trip this year with two classes each coming on October 4th and 18th. The “old” classroom program with Miss Williams (a.k.a. Betty Tylaska) was a great hit as always; the “new” activity centers program downstairs was a success also with thanks to the multi-talented Ann Hallum who has volunteered to be a spokesperson for the Society. She plans to tell the Rotary Club about the family activity centers at the Oct 15th meeting.

Finance - Helen Keith and the committee met to begin Budget deliberations and will have the proposed 2008 budget ready for discussion and vote at our November Board Meeting.

Hospitality - (vacant) Cider and donuts with decorations are planned for the October 24th members meeting.

Information & Technology - Stephanie Thorp announced that changes to the website are due by October 17th. The site has recently been revised.

Membership - Cynthia Allyn noted that renewal reminders were sent out and people are responding.

Newsletter - Jennifer Pryor forwarded the newsletter deadline - October 19th for the November-December issue, always the Friday after the Board meeting.

Program - Paul Ingle reported positive response to our September speaker, Robert Welt. It was great to see the coverage about him and his work in the Mystic Times on October 11th. At the October members meeting we will hear Patricia Schaefer.

Special Events - Joyce Everett’s Hudson River Valley Trip was a success with 48 people. Joyce expressed gratitude for the assistance of Helen Keith and Bettye Noyes and she continues to plan a trip to Key West for next spring (sometime in March).

Appraisal Day will be Saturday, March 29th from 10:00 – 3:00 at the Mystic Congregational Church. Jim Kimenker has arranged with Joyce for Mr. Darius Nemati, the owner of the prestigious New York City Nemati Collection to participate. Nemati’s website (http://www.nematicollection.net) states “For almost forty years, the Nemati name has been recognized for distinguished expertise and the most enticing assemblage of fine antique oriental rugs and tapestries in the world.” There will be additional appraisers participating as well.

Unfinished Business

Walking Tour - David Evans stated that reviewers comments are coming in and work is progressing.

The next Board meeting is Monday, November 19th at 7:30pm.
We will miss the following member who has died recently: The Mystic River Historical Society extends sympathy to the family of Mrs. Rita Conant.

Membership changes this month include new Family members Stephen & Anna King, and Contributing member John Purcell and Benefactor Joyce & Tony Pippo

Renewed memberships include: Individuals Ms. Carol Bacon, Harriet Brown, Mrs. Atwood Ely, Ms. Rose Gordon, Mr. Harold Stevens, Ms. Kathryn Van Leeuwen

Family Mr.& Mrs. Walter Chappel, Mr.& Mrs. Toby Halsey, Mr.& Mrs. Donald Jamieson, Bill & Fran Oat, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Purinton, Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Reid

Contributing Mr.& Mrs. James Burbank, Mr.& Mrs. William Glazier, Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Halsey, Capt. & Mrs. William Yates Benefactor Essex Financial Services, Inc. A Gift was received from Harriet Brown

In seed time learn,
in harvest teach,
in winter enjoy.
~
William Blake
1757 – 1827