The Diary of Joshua Hempstead 1711-1758 is a 700 page record of life in colonial New London, Connecticut. Scholars and Connecticut historians have been using it as a major resource for information about 18th century New London ever since the first edition was published in 1901 by the New London County Historical Society. Enterprising researchers such as Frances M. Caulkins were using the manuscript of the diary, with entries for almost every day of its 47 years. However, besides notes about hours worked, type of work done and by whom, Hempstead recorded baptisms, publishments, who preached, what the weather was like, family news, his travels, ship movements, deaths, court cases, and many other details of life in a busy seaport. He touches on many events that affected the wider community or colony as a whole, including the Great Awakening, wars, and the Spanish ship affair.

I began working with the diary in the mid 1990s, using it as a springboard for researching life in New London and Connecticut. In 1999, the Society issued a new edition of the diary, making it easier to read and updating the index of names to include blacks, married women, and others who did not rate entries in 1901. While I did write a new introduction and add genealogical charts (there were a lot of Hempsteads), there was neither time nor room in that volume to add a subject index.

Ever since then I have been working on a companion volume to the diary, which is almost completed. The purpose of the volume is to make the diary more accessible to the general reader as well as to scholars. It will include a subject index of the diary, articles explaining various aspects of life in that time, maps and explanations of places referred to by Hempstead, and a glossary.

Indexing the diary proved to be both more interesting and more complicated than anyone had anticipated. Many questions were raised about what was found and not found: What patterns are revealed in Hempstead’s life? In life in New London? What is omitted? How does the diary itself change over time? And how does reality, as indicated by references in the index, sometimes conflict with the perception of reality that comes from just reading the diary?

Find out the answers to these questions and more at our program with Patricia Schaefer on Wednesday October 24th.
This month’s newsletter was published in Africa! Our Editor, Jennifer Pryor, is there with her family (see www.pryorpostcards.blogspot.com for their online journal) and was able to find the time to compose the publication from emails sent to her, and then email the file back to Mystic for printing. Just another example of how advances in communications technology are affecting even local historical societies.

September 21, the 69th anniversary of the Great New England Hurricane of 1938 was remembered at the Mystic River Homes with a presentation by yours truly. After a series of 35mm slides covering the storm track and local impact of the hurricane, residents enjoyed swapping personal stories about where they were and what they were doing on that fateful afternoon. It was a particularly enjoyable event for me because it was the first time I (MRHS actually) was paid for talking about one of my special interests.

You may wish to attend the History & Cultural Fair 2007 at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center on Saturday, October 20th from 10am to 3pm. The second annual History & Culture Fair brings together local history authors, research centers, museums, re-enactors, students, historical societies and interested individuals to network, share ideas and resources, and to promote the study of New England history and culture. MRHS will be there and admission is free.

Our membership year runs from May 1st to April 20th which is why renewal letters are sent out in the spring. Response to this year’s letter has been very good, but for those of you who have not yet been heard from, a follow-up was recently sent out. Please be sure to reply in order to maintain your membership and to continue receiving this marvelous newsletter.

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

Boats washed onto the railroad bridge at Mystic after the Hurricane of ’38.
Reading Between the Lines: A Real Civil War Mystery, Part I

Reading Between the Lines is the second in a series of vignettes relating to Mystic and the Civil War by Catherine Deichmann, a resident of Mason's Island and member of the Historical Society. Over the last year Catherine has been researching the archives in the Downes Building for information to use in her thesis for a Masters degree in History from the University of Connecticut. We will also have the opportunity to learn more about her work when she will be the featured speaker at our General Meeting this November.

It is exciting to see our archives being used for this level of serious study and know that the time & money invested in our database will be of use to more scholars in the future.

“Dear Sister, I take my seat to write a few lines to you...”

So begins a fascinating letter from the Fish Collection in the MRHS archives. This single sheet, laboriously penned by Catharine A. Mobberly to Rebecca Seals on the ninth of November, 1864, is a puzzling orphan in a collection mainly dedicated to Fish family memorabilia. The surnames are not locally familiar; there is no envelope or postmark, or indeed many clues that could help us identify or locate Catharine and her “dear sister,” Rebecca. After 143 years, what can these two unknown women possibly have to say to us?

According to her own words, Catharine Mobberly’s troubles are many, and her comforts few. Her husband, James, a soldier, was severely wounded in battle near Staunton, Virginia, and has not been heard from in five months. Some of the men from James’ unit who have recently returned home think he is dead, but no one is sure; their conflicting reports only add to her distress. Catharine is afraid she will have to travel to Virginia to get confirmation of his death from the doctor who treated him. James’ fate is “a great trouble on my mind all the time,” she confesses to Rebecca.

Unable to manage their farm on her own, Catherine has moved in with James’ family. Although she lives under her father-in-law’s roof, she maintains her independence. She boasts to her sister that she has a “right smart” amount of dried apples, “two big fat hogs for meat,” and “wheat enough for bread for a year.” But despite her self-sufficiency, she longs for the comfort and support of her own family. “I would like to see you all and I wish that you were here for company for me,” she pleads.

Catharine Mobberly’s poignant letter provides a glimpse of the uncertainties and fears faced by thousands of women on the home front during the Civil War. A soldier’s pay was stopped if he failed to report for the call of the roll; without a witness to his death or capture, he was presumed to have deserted. Unless she can prove that James is dead, Catharine will be unable to collect his outstanding bounty or qualify for widow’s benefits. Her temporary living arrangements in her father-in-law’s home demonstrate another common effect of the war on soldiers’ families. Army pay was unreliable; often the wives and children of soldiers depended on the beneficence of their churches or their home communities for survival. As the war dragged on, these mounting obligations became increasingly difficult to for private charities to honor. The absence of the breadwinner threatened to destroy the traditional structure of the family. Children were sent to live with relatives who could make a place for one more at their table; women left alone were forced to hire strangers or combine their households with those of other relatives to keep the family farm or business running. Although Catharine is unable to live independently, she is fortunate to feel welcomed by her husband’s family. “I do expect that I will stay here a good while, for I can stay as long as I want to stay,” she assures Rebecca.

The concerns and frustrations that Catharine voices in her letter illustrate the larger story of women’s lives on the home front, as they struggled to keep their homes and families intact throughout a costly and uncertain war. Yet the tone of letter and its many unanswered questions sparks our curiosity about the personal stories of the people whose lives we have glimpsed in these lines. Following the letter’s faint clues to finding Catharine, James and Rebecca will have to wait until next month. Stay tuned!

*For the sake of clarity I have corrected Catharine’s wonderfully creative spelling when quoting from her letter.

A snippet of Civil War penmanship.
The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met at the Mystic Chamber of Commerce on Monday, September 17, 2007. Those present were Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Joyce Everett, Tim Evers, Sally Halsey, Paul Ingle, Helen Keith, Bettye Noyes, John Porter and Cathy Marco. Board members who were not present had been excused. President Allyn called the meeting to order at 7:32 pm. June minutes were accepted.

**Presidents Comments** - Allyn commended Jennifer Pryor for her work on Portersville Press and recently winning 3rd place for publications design of our newsletter in a contest held by the New England Museum Association.

MRHS will have a display table at Mashantucket Pequot Museum’s second annual History & Culture Fair 2007 on Saturday, October 20, 2007 from 10am to 3pm. This event is open to all and free. Lou and Catherine Deichmann have volunteered to hand out MRHS membership information, and sell DVDs and Kayaker’s Guides.

**Treasurers Report** - Bill Everett reported the checking account tally as of September 16, 2007 and gave a history of minimum monthly balances as requested by the Finance Committee.

**Standing Committees**

**Building & Grounds** - John Porter cited that gutters were installed on the Downes Building by Yost Home Improvement and carpenter ant treatment is still required, although less urgently as the painters treated the infested areas. A Request for Proposal was given to three local exterminators, Acorn, Guardian, and Bliss. After review of terms, Acorn was recommended. The Board discussed whether PVA should be treated simultaneously, but it was pointed out that PVA treated during recent restorations. The hiring of Acorn was unanimously approved.

Bob Van Houten, a HVAC engineer recommended by Bill Hermann, evaluated our heat pump installation on 9/15 and recommended replacement of components on an as-fail basis, or a similarly-rated system if the entire unit should fail. The Board concurred that it would be best to leave our 21 year old compressor alone since it works, or better said, “if it’s not broke, don’t fix it.”

Tim mentioned that the crawl space under the buildings was open and wanted to know if this should be blocked off. The Board discussed the lack of success in doing this in the past with wire grates which were continuously knocked down. John will look into this and advise the Board at the next meeting.

**Curatorial** - Bettye Noyes reported that the Curatorial Committee met on September 5th. Present were Committee chair Bettye Noyes, Helen Keith, Judy Hicks, Dorrie Hanna, and Lou Allyn. Kit Werner and Louisa Watrous were unable to attend.

Dorrie discussed her on-going work in pursuit of a formal agreement between the Mary Jobe Akely Trust and the MRHS. Regarding collections, Lou will draft a “loan agreement” for consideration. Dorrie also explained book collection efforts and handed out a task goal list that should ultimately result in improved access. Suggestions were solicited regarding “antique medical books” placement.

In response to a discussion of image reproduction fees v. newer digital technology, Louisa will discuss watermarking images at a future meeting and Lou suggested potential digital print sales include preservation information.

Bettye asked the Board and received unanimous approval for the newly revised Collections Management Policy (reprinted in full on page six) which replaces the Acquisition Policy and includes changes to Criteria for Acquisition of Materials with a new Procedure section.

**Education & Outreach** - Temporary Chairperson, Helen Keith sent letters to 1st & 3rd grade teachers in the Groton, Stonington & N. Stonington systems and Pine Point, Fishers Island, St. Michaels and Sacred Heart Schools. To date no reservations have been made. It is the committee’s recommendation that we offer the program again in the spring.

Attendance at our Family Activity Centers increased weekly through the summer with most participants making donations. The first Wednesday in September we had a record of 10 children and 4 adults. Boat building has been the most popular activity and we are in need of more material for building. Helen mentioned extending invitations to scout troops and making it available for birthday parties as a way to further benefit the center.
Membership - Lou reported for Cynthia Allyn that there are currently 317 paid memberships for the 2007-08 membership year, including 52 Life memberships. Renewal reminders are being sent to 58 members.

Newsletter - Jennifer Pryor has sent letters to all advertisers requesting renewal & payment for the current year.

Program - Paul Ingle is filling up the program schedule for the 2007-08 season, including: Patricia Schaefer in October, Catherine Deichmann in November, Fred Burdick in January, Appraisals in March, and Jim Streeter in April. Upcoming speaking engagements by MRHS board members include: Lou Allyn speaking about the Hurricane of ’38 at the Mystic River Homes and Helen Keith speaking at the Rotary Club about our new Family Activity Centers.

Special Events - Joyce Everett’s Hudson River Valley Trip is full (48 people) and there is a waiting list. Joyce has recruited two volunteers to assist her with administrative work during the trip. A lot of people made reservations after seeing the press releases and didn’t want to miss out. Joyce is now planning a trip to Key West for next spring (sometime in March). This will be with a smaller group and it will be costlier because of the airline reservations.

We are planning to have Appraisal Day on Saturday, March 29th from 10:00 – 3:00 at the Mystic Congregational Church. Appraisals this year will be devoted to small oriental rugs and hangings.

Unfinished Business

Walking Tour (David Evans): Jennifer Pryor provided a mockup which David showed the Board. David reported that all is shaping up and it will be ready for Spring 2008. He welcomed all who would like to review it before publication to let him know.

The next Board meeting will be October 15 at 7:30pm.
MRHS Collections Management Policy

Introduction The Mystic River Historical Society, Inc. (henceforth MRHS) is a not-for-profit organization, established in 1973. It has no connection to any other institution, public or private. The Board of Trustees (henceforth the Board), as empowered by the by-laws, directs the activities of MRHS and is responsible for the development of the properties owned by MRHS. The Collections Manager, together with the Curatorial Committee, is responsible for the acquisition and preservation of appropriate materials as defined within the framework of MRHS “Statement of Purpose”.

Statement of Purpose MRHS exists to collect, index, catalog, exhibit and preserve records, papers, photographs, artifacts, relics and related materials that document the history of the people who lived in the Mystic area from the first settlement in 1654 to the present.

Mission MRHS seeks to facilitate research and promote awareness of the history of the Mystic area, its people and its institutions.

Goals The MRHS shall build collections that support the Society’s Mission and purpose. These collections shall be available to the public under the conditions established by the Curatorial Committee for each of the facilities owned and operated by MRHS.

Objectives In order to achieve its goals, MRHS establishes the following:
• Provide proper storage & display our historical collections.
• Provide access to our collections during regular hours of operation.
• Build the local history collection.
• Build the genealogy collection.
• Support research requests received by mail, phone, email or in person.
• Support Portersville Academy and the public programs we conduct there through the collection of educational materials dating from the period 1839 to 1890, especially items related to Portersville Academy’s history and the history of other Mystic area schools.

Acquisition of Materials Historic material selection is an interpretive process that involves a strong knowledge of history, an awareness of preservation requirements and recognition of the current and future needs of the members and the public users of the collections. Therefore, the Board delegates, to the Curatorial Committee, the authority and responsibility for the management of appropriate historic materials as set forth in our “Statement of Purpose”. The Collections Manager is responsible for the management of all collections and the day-to-day functioning of the Downes Building and any other facilities that house our collections. A current Collections Management Policy shall be kept on file in the MRHS office. Copies are available to members and to the public.

Criteria: During the selection process, the material under consideration will be evaluated using the following criteria:
• Relevance to the history of the Mystic area
• Significant enhancement of the current collections of MRHS
• Verifiable authenticity and provenance
• Physical condition of item
• Availability and cost of appropriate storage
• Duplication of other materials in MRHS collections
• Donor’s imposed conditions

Procedure: The Collections Manager evaluates all gifts using the stated criteria under the terms of the “Temporary Custody Agreement”. Gifts accepted by the MRHS become the permanent property of the MRHS, which retains the right to dispose of any donated item(s) as it deems advisable. A Certificate of Gift is provided to the donor for tax purposes. The MRHS does not provide monetary valuations of gifts. The valuation of gifts is the responsibility of the donor.

Deaccessioning of Materials The Curatorial Committee shall, at least once every five years, review the collections based on the mission, goals, and objectives of MRHS. The preservation of the collections, as a whole, is of paramount importance. However, items outside the interest of the MRHS; those not related to the history of the Mystic area; those which cannot be stored properly; those which duplicate materials in the collections or fail to meet other stated selection criteria may be withdrawn. Such items shall be disposed of at the discretion of the Curatorial Committee acting in good faith according to professional museum standards.
CALENDAR NOTABLES

Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center’s History & Culture Fair, Sat. October 20, 10a - 3p at the Museum Gathering Space. Free. Historians, authors, researchers & geneologists share ideas about what shaped modern day southeastern Connecticut and western Rhode Island. See www.pequotmuseum.org for more info.

Member Meeting Wednesday, October 24, 7:30p at the Mystic Congregational Church
With speaker Patricia Schaefer.

Member Meeting Wednesday, November 28th, 7:30p Catherine Deichmann presents “Mystic and the Draft during the Civil War.”

NEWSLETTER PATRONS

Newsletter Patrons for 2007-08 are listed below. We deeply appreciate their support in covering the printing and postage costs of the Newsletter. Also, please look over our advertisements and patronize these businesses when possible.

Louis & Cynthia Allyn  Sally Halsey
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Butler  Mr. & Mrs. William F. Hermann
Webb & Patty Copp  Ms. Judith Hicks
Densmore Oil  Mr. & Mrs. David Hinkle
Ms. Sandra Dolan  Stuart Lamson & Leah Prescott
Mr. & Mrs. David Evans  Frank & Cathy Marco
Mr. & Mrs. William Everett  Nancy & Tom McLoughlin
Franklin’s General Store  Captain & Mrs. John Porter
Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Fuller  Mr. & Mrs. Peter Stuart

Membership Updates

We will miss MRHS member Lucette Liebig who has died recently. The Mystic River Historical Society extends sympathy to her family.

Membership changes this month include new Family members Edwin & Blanche Burke, and Contributing member John Purcell. Renewed memberships include: Individuals Herma Kluck, Laszlo Pozsonyi and Family membership for Mr. & Mrs. Roland Pampel and Stephen & Ann King. Matching Grants were received from the following corporations: AIG, Pfizer and Stanley Works.