The Mystic River Historical Society is pleased to announce the release of its newest publication, Colors of Mystic, illustrated and designed by Ashley Halsey. This 26-page paperback features watercolors of some of Mystic’s most important historic and natural settings with brief descriptions of each location. The Society will host a Book Launching and Signing event on Wednesday, October 27 from 6 – 8 p.m. at the Mystic Arts Center in historic downtown Mystic.

Halsey’s beautifully colored and detailed artwork evokes serene and often whimsical images of scenes most tourists and all residents will immediately recognize. “We are thrilled to present this beautiful new book, and hope that every household in Mystic will want one,” said Jim Kimenker, President of the Mystic River Historical Society. “Ashley will be speaking a bit about how she creates her artwork before signing copies of the book on October 27. We are very proud to be working with such a fine young artist.”

A committee of Society members worked with Halsey to choose which locations would be painted, and co-wrote the descriptive text. The committee includes David Evans, Tim Evers, Sally Halsey, and Dorrie Hanna. “I ran into Ashley a year ago, and she showed me a copy of her Saratoga book. I knew this would be perfect for Mystic,” Evers explains. “I’m grateful to the Board of the Mystic River Historical Society for supporting this exciting project!”

Halsey added, “It was such a wonderful opportunity to paint the town of my childhood.” Her parents, Van and Clay Halsey, reside in Stonington.

Colors of Mystic retails for $14.95 and will be available after October 27 at Bank Square Books and at the Mystic River Historical Society. The Book Release event is open to the public and will include refreshments.

Halsey, a native of Stonington, CT, now lives in New York City where she works as a graphic designer for HarperCollins Publishers. A Studio Art Major at Skidmore College, this is Halsey’s second book of illustrations of historic towns. Her first book features Saratoga Springs, NY.
I like to think that people who enjoy history are not typified by those who “judge a book by its cover”. A tale of the past should not require a glitzed-up title; after all, history is history, right? Well, apparently not, as I was initially dismayed about the relatively sparse attendance at our September Members Meeting. The speaker for the evening, Arthur Liverant (of Liverant and Son Antiques, Colchester, CT), was there to discuss “250 Years of Children’s Seating”. Was that title just a tad too dry? Would his subtitle, “Tiny Chairs for Tiny American Buns” have served to persuade more to come? I can’t say. What I can say is that Arthur brought with him about 20 examples of children’s chairs dating from 1700 to 1950 or so, and his descriptions of and stories about the chairs were not only fascinating and humorous, they also served to remind us of connections to events during those years, including the politics of the times.

For instance, Arthur spoke about one connection, one that was almost certainly unintended. Determining the colony in which furniture was made is reasonably uncomplicated, because the colonies were separated not only politically, but stylistically, too. A cabinet maker in Rhode Island quite intentionally made his furniture in a distinctively Rhode Island style, and cabinet makers in other colonies did the same. However, he describes the furniture made in the period following the Constitution’s adoption (in other words, after 1787), as being increasingly more difficult to place as to geographic origin. Is it appropriate to make a connection between the Commerce Clause and this difficulty? Can we view the homogenization of fabrication technique as a direct result of the country being stitched together by the provisions of that document? I think maybe we can.

My mind wandered to other unintended consequences resulting from political action (diligent readers of this column shouldn’t be surprised by the leaps my mind tends to make). I read a report the other day that the Obama administration was increasing the CAFE standards for automobile manufacturers (minimum mileage requirements for cars and trucks—it’s a good idea for cars to get better mileage to reduce the need for oil, isn’t it?). But (always a “but”), consider this: is it reasonable to blame CAFE standards, originally the darling of environmentalists, for the continued suburban sprawl of the country?

Perhaps it is. If not for the better gas mileage our cars get, who would consider living so far from a job? Call me an idiot, maybe, I now commute 60 miles each way to work; heck, even our SUV gets better than 20 mpg!! Talk about an unintended consequence—maybe historians will blame environmentalists for urban sprawl. Wow!

So, there you have it. A fascinating talk on children’s chairs leads to the Commerce Clause and, ultimately, the encouragement of suburban sprawl. Seeing connections in the things and events surrounding us is what history is all about. But, you have to “be there” to see them.

I know I’m looking forward to future Members Meetings. You really don’t want to miss one!
Plan to Catch These Events....

The Program Committee has lined up a fabulous series of events for the 2010-11 Membership Meetings. Come check it out for yourself each month....

November 17, 2010 Matthew Stackpole, Mystic Seaport Museum’s ship historian and advancement officer for the Charles W. Morgan, will present The History of the Morgan, the last wooden American whaling ship.

January 26, 2011 Casey Zahn, teacher and genealogist, will present Hook ‘Em While They're Young: Getting Children Interested in Family and History.

February 23, 2011 Fritz Hilbert, Chief of the Mystic Fire Department, will follow up on last year’s presentation with The Fires of Mystic Part II.

March 23, 2011 Bill Peterson, long-time member of MRHS, and Senior Curator at Mystic Seaport Museum, will discuss Mystic's Famed Photographer: Everett Scholfield.

April 27, 2011 James Baughman, author, will speak on The Mallorys of Mystic.

May 25, 2011 Pot Luck Dinner at 6 p.m. Meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. Rick Spencer, a staff musician for 20 years at Mystic Seaport, will present an interactive and entertaining musical program of Sea Chanteys, following MRHS’ Pot Luck Dinner and Annual Meeting.

Don't Miss the Bus!

“You missed it!” The MRHS intrepid travelers will just have returned from Montreal and New York State by the time you receive this newsletter, but our spring trip is spinning around in Joyce’s head and your suggestions are very welcome. One excellent suggestion has already been received. Our plan for the spring is to head south for 3 or 4 days the third week of April, stop at Washington’s Headquarters in Morristown, NJ, and go on to Philadelphia for two or three special, less well-advertised spots and then to Delaware for houses and gardens. Would you like to return to the Brandywine Museum for lunch along the river and favorite paintings? Have you heard of a really choice garden or small house and garden tour? Please let me know if you would like to be included in the pre-public-announcement list and if you have suggestions.

Hailing a Macon-bound bus on the highway in Georgia, 1943 by Esther Bubley (1921-1998). From the Farm Security Administration and Office of War Information Collection, Library of Congress.

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Payments to: Mystic River Historical Society, attn. Treasurer/Portersville Press Ad, P.O. Box 245, Mystic, CT 06355
Design specifics and/or courtesy ad craft: jenniferspyor@gmail.com

Does the term “Historical Plaque” have a double meaning at your house?
If you have a home heritage sign that needs refurbishment, contact:
Roland Foster at 860.460.5094
Dear Sirs/Madames,

The recent articles in the Portersville Press regarding appraisals of antiques remind me of the oil paintings of my grandfather, Amos Colby. Their themes are of the Mystic locations, sailing ships, harbor scenes from the 1920s-30s.

The family have three of them left – one was sold by my father in the 1940s as a down-payment on a house.

A family story by my mother, Alice Colby Patience, was when we moved from Groton. (My dad, Irwin Patience, worked for the Navy Dept. at the Electric Boat Co.) My mother had to leave behind a small table dated 1680. She said she didn’t have enough room. I said she should have kept the table and left me behind! If you’re interested, I possibly can get copies of these paintings to you.

My mother was the daughter of Edna Burrows Colby – she was the daughter of Benjamin Franklin Burrows. Both grew up in Capt. Benjamin Burrows’ home located at 5 West Mystic Ave and were raised by his sister Elizabeth. See Helene May Clarke’s book.

Also, when I visited William Burrows Allen a few years ago, he took me to the family burial plot on Fort Hill. Besides all the relatives there, I noticed tombstones of Lorenzo and Daniel Burrows. Doing further genealogical research on them, I find they are my great step-uncles of Benj. Burrows. Since they had died so young from their Civil War experience, I felt like they had been forgotten.

In their memories, I scribbled these words enclosed – Song of War. Being active in living history presentations and re-enacting, I also did the enclosed campside illustrations. Your readers may find the items interesting.

Sincerely,
David A. Patience


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Song of War

There by the river comes the long blue line
Ready for battle the soldiers mark time.
McClellan prepared them to look so fine,
But all this effort took too much time.
Lincoln and the Nation could wait no longer.
So Grant takes them south for to fight with honor.
To live, to die, to know grief and pain,
They see their comrades on the battlefield slain.
To preserve a nation and free the oppressed.
Now we remember them as they lay in rest.

Young men of both the Blue and Gray.
On the cold, wet, green fields in the month of May.
The young never grow old in life and spirit.
The old men stay young with their song - do you hear it?
The piper, the drummers, the bugler do play
And loved ones at home must kneel and pray.
As time passes to daughter and sons
Who sings the song? They'll be the ones.
From the heart, the soul and tears of lore.
They'll be the ones to sing the soldier's Song of War.

In Memory of:

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Bits & Pieces

I was born and brought up in Mystic - it was and still is close to my heart. My mother’s family lived for many years in what is now the Mermaid Inn. However, my “claim to fame” - until recent years - lay on the west side of the village.

I feel fortunate that I am able to recall parts of my life and folk that I once knew. This gives me much pleasure.

Several months ago, wanting more meaningful involvement with local history, I visited MRHS, and to my pleasure, I met Helen Keith.

Mrs. Keith introduced me to “Remember When?” - the program designed to bring reminiscences to people confined in convalescent situations.

At first, I was a bit dubious upon presenting the above-mentioned program, but Mrs. Keith’s enthusiasm was somehow contagious, and I ventured to “give it a try.” The results were happily received.

Thank you, Helen, for offering me this opportunity.

~ Lucy T. Howell
After the heyday of ship building in Mystic a number of factories were established here. Among the products they produced were marine engines, fine velvet fabric and—soap. The Packer Soap Company had a long and successful run and, in fact, is still in business today in another location.

During the summer, a patron brought in to the Mystic & Noank Library an assortment of vintage boxes and bottles of Packer products. Together with items from the MRHS collection, they are now on display at the Library. I’m sure we all think first of “Packer’s Pine Tar Soap” in connection with this business. My grandmother in Toledo, Ohio used to wash her hair with it and I well remember that unique smell. But the company made many other products also and some of these are represented in the exhibit.

We’re happy to work together with the Library and have done so on many occasions. Being able to use their display case is a very good thing for MRHS because it vastly increases our audience. The next time you’re at the Library take a minute to view our Packer Soap Company mini-exhibit.

A 1939 Packer Soap tin. Founded in 1869, the company still manufactures tar soap available today in a similar package design of metallic paper.

Packer Soap Company

A news snippet from August 4, 1893 suggests fodder for the rumor mill with a bit of humor.

A construction update from May 26, 1893 outlines a feature still familiar to locals today: pricey downtown utility work...

A 1908 advertisement for Packer’s Tar Soap from Harper’s Magazine touts the soap as the secret to beautiful, lustrous hair and a clean, healthy scalp.

The scene of the crime mentioned at right. Capt. Elihu Spicer of Mystic, CT and Brooklyn, NY built the library to house a book collection and public meeting space for the residents of Mystic January 23, 1894 - despite the theft of tools along the way. Photo - Schofield & Tingleys from www.mysticnoanklibrary.com

A 1908 advertisement for Packer’s Tar Soap from Harper’s Magazine touts the soap as the secret to beautiful, lustrous hair and a clean, healthy scalp.

The Spicer Library (Mystic-Noank Library) at the turn of the last century.
Membership Meeting
Wed., October 27, 6-8p
Mystic Art Center
Ashley Halsey presents her new MRHS co-publication, “Colors of Mystic”

Membership Meeting
Wed., November 17, 7:30p
Mystic Congregational Parish Hall
Matthew Stackpole and “The History of the Charles W. Morgan”

No membership meeting in December.

Recent membership renewals include:
Individual - Ms. Charlotte Acquaviva, Mrs. Harriet Brown, Mrs. Mina Ferguson, Mrs. Ingela Gram, Mr. Lawrence Hall, Mrs. Elizabeth Kennedy, Mrs. Elizabeth Lockyer • Family - Robert & Joan Ness, Mr. & Mrs. David Porter, Mr. & Mrs. Frank Sinnet • Contributing-Mr. & Mrs. Roland Pampel • Benefactor - Mr. & Mrs. John Butler, Mrs. Anthony Halsey, Mr. Peter Stuart