International Ice Patrol: A Legacy of RMS Titanic - in January

From the earliest journeys into the North Atlantic, icebergs have threatened vessels. A review of the history of navigation prior to the turn of the 20th century shows an impressive number of casualties occurred in the vicinity of the Grand Banks. Between 1882 and 1890, 14 vessels were lost and 40 were damaged due to ice. Finally the disastrous sinking of RMS Titanic on April 15, 1912 provided the impetus for the establishment of the International Ice Patrol. The primary mission of the Ice Patrol is to alert any ship traveling the great circle shipping lanes between Europe and the major ports of the United States and Canada of the presence of any icebergs. The headquarters of the Ice Patrol is located at the Coast Guard Research and Development Center in New London.

Join the Commanding Officer of the Ice Patrol, CDR Gabrielle McGrath, as she shares the history of the Patrol with us at 7:30 p.m. on January 22, 2014 at the Fellowship Hall of the Mystic Congregational Church. CDR McGrath is a 1996 USCG graduate and is now serving her second tour with the Ice Patrol.

Captain George & Anne Borodell Denison - in February

Mystic River Historical Society member and author Katherine Dimancescu's upcoming February 2014 presentation will focus on her Denison forebears who settled in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s and later in the Connecticut Colony in the 1650s. Her presentation will shed light on her immigrant Denison ancestors and the lives they created for themselves far from their former homes in England. She will also share stories of early ministers in Boston and religious controversies, ancient burial grounds in Massachusetts and Connecticut which serve as outdoor classrooms for scholars of all ages interested in early colonial New England, war veterans, 17th century American poets, and the Great Migration. Her presentation will also share highlights of her research in both New England and England. Please join us on Wednesday February 26th to hear the full story.

Left: Potentially an honorary member of the "Cemetery Ladies" (see p. 5), Author Katherine Dimancescu poses at the cemetery site of Denison ancestors.
The approaching new year brings with it an almost reflexive need for reflection on the year just past. We typically participate in the usual bromides about mistakes made and promises to be kept. But, as we consider them, most of us also feel an uncomfortable suspicion that twelve months hence, we will be reflecting on the same mistakes and promises. In other words, we’d all like to do better, but we recognize something about the human condition—changing behaviors is a difficult task.

What about congenital or biological conditions? Oh, for pity’s sake, you’re probably saying: if it is part of our very nature, behaviors derived from such conditions cannot be changed. If that is true, then blaming events or situations on biology might be an effective way to advance a political cause, would it not? In fact, such an argument was used precisely that way in the years before and during the Civil War to advance the idea that disunion was inevitable due to the racial divide present in the country. For many, the thought of a superior race having to deal with an inferior one, incapable of governing itself was, indeed, compelling. But, as Christopher Hanlon, professor at Eastern Illinois University, wrote in the New York Times, the racial division being referred to had nothing to do with slavery or the racial differences between whites and blacks—it was the perceived difference between Northern and Southern whites!

For many, the differences between North and South were rooted in the racial backgrounds of the original colonists north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line. The northern colonists (read New England, for the most part) were “Puritans”, believed to be descended from the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of England. The southern colonists (read Virginia, for the most part) were “Cavaliers”, believed to be descended from the Norman conquerors of those same Anglo-Saxons. Surprisingly, this does not appear to have been a matter for much debate as it was widely accepted by both sides. The difference, as Hanlon points out, was how that history was interpreted. Southerners claimed racial superiority through their supposed Norman, aristocratic roots — a class of people born to rule over the barbarous and uncivilized Saxons, whose descendants were a bunch of fanatics, burning witches until deciding to dump tea instead. Northerners, on the other hand, who viewed their character as the more ideal, interpreted that same history as showing that the Normans and their bastard Southern descendants were an imperious, aggressive and ruthless race that imposed serfdom on the Saxons and continued the tradition by imposing slavery on the United States.

So, for many our Civil War was just a continuation of a divisive, racial war that had endured for centuries in England. More than one historian has speculated that at least in part, the American Civil War was a continuation of the English Civil War between the Roundheads (Puritans) and the Royalists (Cavaliers). But step back for a moment. The English Civil War occurred in the 1640s, over 200 years before the American Civil War, and the English were long over that divide. Is it possible that the descendants of that earlier civil war who had emigrated to the New World, had somehow kept the embers of past hostility burning for so many years?

Before you sweep the idea aside as silly or impossible, think about some of the more recent conflicts in the world which seem to be a continuation of ancient enmities. One example should suffice: within the last 25 years we were treated to a war in the Balkans in which Serbs still rallied to a cry of “Remember the Battle of Kosovo”, a battle lost to the Ottomans in 1389! How many of us just shook our heads at such historical stubbornness? But, if Serbs of the 1990s could be motivated by an event over 600 years in the past, then we probably should not be too quick to dismiss Americans on both sides of the geographical and political divide of the 1860s in drawing “inspiration” from a history going back a similar period.

But the real point here is not to wonder at motivations or criticize them as foolish, but to seek to understand them, and by such understanding gain a better insight into why historical events occurred and the people who made them happen. And, regular readers of this column will not be surprised by this last thought — if we remember to remain open to such insights, we will in turn gain a greater understanding of the present and ourselves.

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 1634 to the present.

Officers: President - Lou Allyn • Vice President - Bill Everett
Treasurer - Barry Thorp • Corresponding Secretary - Lois Glazer • Recording Secretary - Cindy Allyn

The Newsletter of the Mystic River Historical Society is published six times annually: September, October, November-December, January-February, March-April and May • Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355
Issues of the newsletter are available for online viewing at www.mystichistory.org
**Website Updates by Lou Allyn**

Things are afoot at our website:

- Our new booklet *The Mystic River Historical Society: Our First 40 Years* by Pat Schaeffer is now available online at http://www.mystichistory.org/digital_publications.htm
  Her PowerPoint presentation at the December 4th members meeting, and her script, will be posted there also. The same page additionally has digital versions of several interesting historical publications for free download & perusal.

- The MRHS Digital Publications page includes ongoing fresh material, including the article *Preserving History One Document at a Time* by Deborah Straszheim featuring MRHS and our own Dorrie Hanna in the December 12, 2013 issue of The Mystic Times and online.

- One of the benefits of having some of our books and booklets online is that they are in pdf format and may be searched using Adobe Reader. To do so, just click on the title and wait for the pdf file to open. Then, click the download button in the toolbar or right click and “Save As” the file to your computer. If you then open it with Adobe you can search for names, words and phrases using the "find" feature.
  Alternately, if you prefer not to download the pdf, you can search the opened document while online by pressing “Control” and “F” (PC) or “Command” and “F” (Mac). This will bring up a search window and magnifying glass symbol in either the upper right or lower left corner.

- It is now also possible to search our website. Look for the search box at the top of the right hand column. Enter a word or phrase and click on search.

- Each issue of the color version of our newsletter is emailed to all email subscribers and is posted to our website. The alternative black and white version is printed and postal mailed a week or so later. All MRHS members are welcome to choose either method of delivery, or both. If you would like to change from what you have today, please email me at lallyn@snet.net

**The Mystic Connection by Dorrie Hanna**

In October the MRHS received an email from Stephan Rossie who lives near Cologne, Germany. He wrote:

* I am a grandnephew to both John (Johannes) and Ernst (not Ernest) Rossié, founders of The Rossié Velvet Mill in Mystic. I’m active in the genealogy of the Rossié family, which for its larger part is based in Germany and still is growing vividly. Today’s generations of our family don’t know very much of the ongoing family history of John and Ernst. We have some rough data of birth and death of some family members, but nothing is very precise or complete...

We exchanged emails during the fall and Mr. Rossie was able to verify some of the information he was seeking. It was so great to hear from him in December:

You have helped me very much with introducing me to the New England world of ancestry, and I can say that I’m doing quite successfully within. I have contacted all the people and families that will help me to complete my Rossié Family Tree. Lots of photographs are crossing the Atlantic both ways already, and I must say that it’s a great pleasure to me. And - not to be forgotten - two family branches have found together again after almost 25 years of silence. And you are in the focus of it. Thank you so much...

It would be wonderful if every request that we receive for help and information had such a happy outcome. Of course that’s not the case. But as the MRHS embarks on its 41st year we should all be proud of the resources we have accumulated, of our efforts to share what we have with others and of our willingness to help folks make that “Mystic Connection.”

See pages 4 - 5 for more Mystic genealogical notes of interest...!

**GeoHistorian on Facebook by Cathy Marco**

There is now a new Facebook page for the GeoHistorian Project for Downtown Mystic. Visit our page as another way to be able to see and share all of the history videos about downtown buildings from the warmth of your own home!
The week before Thanksgiving, Bettye Noyes found an envelope on her desk at the Mystic Seaport addressed to her "for Mystic River Historical Society." In it were two laminated photographs of students and teachers at the Mystic Academy 1915 4th grade and 1917 6th grade along with lists of the names written on the back of the photos. On each was a notation "Return to Gladys E. Lamb." We thank the anonymous donor and present these images as an interesting bit of local history and an example of the various ways that objects join our collection. If anyone see the name of a relative, or has any additional information, please let us know.

4th Grade Mystic Academy 1915  Transcribed from handwritten note with photo, with all listings left to right:
Front Row: Gurdon Chapman, Palmer Bogue, Royce Wolfe, Louis Oliver, Robert Woodbury, Reginald Geer, George Wilson, (?)
2nd Row: Len Bogue, Warren Sebastian, Earle Cutler, Archie Battistini, Raymond Brown, John Crandall, Ernest Dobson, Clinton Shelburne
3rd Row: Irma Johnson, Georgiana Beauchamp, Viola Lamphere, Mary Perry, Elizabeth O’Grady, Jeanette Callenjik, Gladys Sheehan
5th Row: Hazel Barlow, Florence Kinney, Gladys Lamb, Helen Tabor (Teacher) Stellan, Mabel Taylor

6th Grade Mystic Academy 1917  Transcribed from handwritten note, all listings left to right:
Front: Bernard Donahue, Gurdon Chapman, Clinton Shelburn, Georgiana Beauchamp, Margaret Ward, Minnie Duerr, Gladys Lamb, Leo Amero
3rd Row: Robert Woodbury, Lawrence Collins, Royce Wolfe, Archie Battistini (Ed), Louis Oliver
4th Row: __?__ (sic), John Crandall, Raymond Perry, Earle Cutler, Robert Tabor
5th Row: Alice Eccleston, Thelma Bus, Anna Inderelst, Elizabeth O’Grady, Ella Bourroughs
Joanna Case and I refer to ourselves as The Cemetery Ladies. For the past 1 ½ years you could find us most every Wednesday morning in the Mystic Cemeteries reading headstones, taking their pictures, and figuring where they were placed within the cemetery.

Joanna suggested we do this as a project to be able to give the local Towns, Libraries, and Historical Societies CDs with the information of who, when and where for genealogy-interested people. We started with 11 small family-named cemeteries in Mystic on the Groton side of the river and now have moved onto Elm Grove across the river on the Stonington side.

Both Joanna, past Director, and I have been involved in the Mystic & Noank Library and have used for research the Library’s Hale Collection. Collections such as this are in every Connecticut town. They are the result of efforts of Charles Hale and his workers who in the 1930’s, as part of the WPA work program, inventoried all the cemeteries in Connecticut. Joanna suggested that we bring these local records up to date to supplement this Hale Collection.

We obtained a list of Mystic cemeteries from the Groton Town Hall and started with the Fish Cemetery on Pequot Ave. There were 11 in all with grave counts ranging from about 20 to 150 or more. Every Wednesday morning around 9 we would meet, weather and bodies allowing, and spend the morning recording and photographing. Joanna with her camera and remarkable ability to read those old stones, and I with notebook, pen and beach chair. We were quite the sight! The next step was entering all the data and photos into a data base, Joanna, and then proof reading the data base, Judy. Joanna also entered the info and pictures onto findagrave.com, a popular site for genealogists.

We will continue at Elm Grove until the snow flies and pick up in the Spring. Elm Grove has over 14,000 residents and we have only recorded about 4,000... this project has a long future!!

The records for Crary, Daniel Burrows, Fish, Lower Mystic, Niles, North Burrows, Packer, Packer Burrows, Silas Burrows, South Burrows, and Wells cemeteries are all on a CD and available for use at the local Libraries, Historical Societies, and Town Halls. The main feature of this project is that all residents, as of 2012, of the 11 cemeteries are listed in one alphabet with location notes for each.

Examples of the “Cemetery Ladies” work from FindaGrave.com:

*Photos by Joanna Case

A deteriorated and largely illegible stone (top) was able to be identified as that of Hannah Fish (March 10, 1792 - September 8, 1815), by utilizing the Hale collection. Joanna Case notes that they did verify the date, as the Collection cites Miss Fish’s age as 23, while the stone reads 24. Hannah’s siblings would have included Bridget Fish Clift (____ - 1845)*, Levina Fish Denison (1794 - 1890)*, Sands Fish (1799 - 1829)* and Nathan Gallup Fish (1804 - 1870)*. With the Hale and subsequent information, Hannah could be identified as the daughter of Sands Fish (1762 - 1838) and Bridget Gallup Fish (1768 - 1842), (headstone pictured bottom), daughter of Benadam Gallup and Bridget Palmer.

*Calculated relationships per findagrave website
Perhaps the most fortunate families are those of the 100 or so men, mostly from Mystic Bridge and Stonington, who volunteered for another tour of duty with the 8th CVI, and arrive home at the beginning of January to enjoy their Veterans’ Furloughs.

Some of the local “boys” remain in danger. The forty men from Groton and Stonington riding with the 1st CT Cavalry in the Shenandoah Valley face daily harassment from Confederate cavalry and guerilla attacks along the line. The thirty men with the 5th CVI are under constant threat as they guard the Nashville – Chattanooga railroad in the rugged hills and valleys of southeast Tennessee. The fifty local men in the 14th CVI are encamped in a contested area of north-central Virginia near the Rapidan River, far in advance of the Union army line. After a difficult summer attacking the fortifications around Charleston, SC, the 10th CVI was sent to St. Augustine Florida for the winter to regroup and refill its depleted ranks. The fourteen men from Groton who serve in the 10th hope for a peaceful winter, only to find Confederate cavalry lurking in the swamps and forests that surrounded the town, capturing several soldiers detailed to cut firewood, and any other Union man who strays from the protection of the fort.

The war will start up again soon enough, more desperate and savage than before. Looking back, the people of Mystic will remember this winter as a brief pause before the long final push to victory.
November Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, November 18th, 2013. Attendees included: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Sally Halsey, Cathy Marco, Richard Semeraro, and David Scott, Barrie Thorp, Stephanie Thorp.

A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the October meeting as published.

Corresponding Secretary: A thank you note was sent to Walter Watrous for repairing the stone wall as well as five other pieces of correspondence in October: four membership renewals and one thank you for a donation.

Treasurer’s Report: During the period 4 October to 17 November income included withdrawals in excess of deposits with expenses essentially being non-discretionary payments for services and operations. A single out-of-ordinary expense was paid to scrape, prime and paint the areas of peeling exterior paint on the Portersville. The Chelsea Groton checking account balance is positive.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Buildings & Grounds: During Work Day, Dave Scott power-washed Portersville’s exterior first floor; Barry Thorp removed two rotten risers on the outside stairs; they were later replaced with Azek. Lou scraped and painted the outside steps and door sills.

Curatorial: Reminder - The Downes Building will be closed the following weeks during the 2013 holiday season: For Thanksgiving ~ Week of November 25; For Christmas ~ Week of December 23; For New Years ~ Week of December 30, reopening on Tuesday, January 7, 2014. • The Mystic Art Center has donated to us 37 mounted enlargements of images from our collection that were used in their photography exhibit. They will be displayed next in the Ames Room of the Mystic Noank Library. • The pictorial book being published by The Day should be available about December 15. • The MRHS 40th History booklet is in the final stages of editing. • There will be a meeting with Maggie Jones, Lou, and the curatorial staff on December 5 regarding the Coogan Family materials. A family member from out of state spent two research sessions working on the papers and was able to help identify pictures. • Currently we are still waiting for paperwork on the letters that were found in the attic at Hummingbird Hollow Farm

Education/Outreach: - Lou and David Scott will meet with two Stonington middle school principals on 11/21 to see how we might provide local history resources that would be of use to them. Due to a lack of volunteers and lack of budgets in some school districts the Portersville Academy school program has been discontinued. Cathy Mauritz will be stepping down as Chairman of the committee; we thank her for her work in running this activity the last few years.

Finance: The proposed 2014 budget was discussed & approved.

GeoHistorian Project: There is now a Geo poster on the sign board by Bank Square Books.

Information Technology: All backups and updates were performed on schedule.

Marketing & Special Events: Press releases continue to be sent out for the Membership Meetings. Deb Straszheim from The Day will visit the Downes Building for a story on MRHS’ 40th Anniversary. An afternoon party for Patrons & volunteers is being planned for 3-5 pm April 13th.

Newsletter: Copy is due 12/27/2013 for the next issue. Lou has learned how to use the USPS Intelligent Mail small business online tool to produce barcode labels for our bulk mailing. This will mean a lower rate in 2014 than would have been the case. He is offering to help other area non-profits to get set up.

Program & Membership: The Committee has most programs and topics set through May 2014. There will be a 40th birthday cake at the December 4th meeting.

No New Business.

Next meeting is January 27th, 2014 7:00 pm at the Mystic Noank Library

Respectfully submitted,
Cindy Allyn

Trolleys share the unpaved road with horses & carriages on West Main Street ca. 1906. Photo from the MRHS Collection was included in the Mystic Art Center Exhibit and an enlargement will now be available to be seen at the Mystic Noank Library.
We have four new members. They are Margaret Austin at the Contributing level and William Butler, Chris Donohue and Clifford Neal at the Individual level. We regret the passing of a long time charter member, Virginia Niebling. Renewal membership letters will go out the end of January.

- Cynthia Allyn, Membership