Join us on Wednesday, February 28th for a presentation about Capt. Nathaniel Palmer and his intriguing life, including his family, Masonic affiliation, ship building in Stonington, sealing adventures and other notable events such as his Antarctic discovery voyage.

Roger Read has a Bachelors Degree in Electrical Engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute and an Executive Masters of Business Administration from the University of Rhode Island and was employed at the United States Naval Undersea Warfare Center for 31 years before retiring as Division Head in 1989. Roger and his wife, Barbara, settled in Stonington in 1964, and raised their family there. Historically, the Read family has a Masonic connection that spans four generations starting with Roger’s Great Grandfather. Roger began his own Masonic membership in Asylum Lodge, now Coastal Lodge, in Stonington Village in 1969. He served as the 153rd Grand Master of Masons in Connecticut and was coroneted a 33rd Degree Mason, as well as serving on the Board of Directors of Masonicare, as Secretary of the Stonington Grange, and volunteering at the Mystic Seaport Museum. As an outgrowth of his interest in Masonry, Roger published a Masonic Short Talk Bulletin delineating the life of Brother and Captain Nathaniel Palmer, the American discoverer of Antarctica.

“I could not credit my ears. I thought I was dreaming, save for the screeching of the penguins, the albatrosses, the pigeons and the Mother Cary chickens [Wilson’s petrels], I was sure no living object was within leagues of the sloop.”

From the log of 21 year-old Captain Nathaniel Palmer, having heard a distant ship’s bell tolling a reply to a query ring from Palmer’s 47’ sloop, “Hero” on the morning of February 6, 1821 in the uncharted waters off Antarctica. Within earshot that foggy, frigid morning were the answering Russian warships “Vostok” and “Myzy” – sent by the Czar on an exploratory voyage. The captain of the “Vostok”, Fabian von Bellingshausen, (credited with having discovered Antarctica a year earlier), was equally surprised, upon summoning, to find someone so young captaining the U.S. vessel Palmer offered to pilot the Vostok to Deception Island, a very safe harbor he had discovered on a journey just three months prior. Palmer also told von Bellingshausen of an immense peninsula of land to the south which von Bellingshausen offered to name “Palmer Land” after the young captain on Russian charts. From newenglandhistoricalsociety.com


Ad from the late 1800s touting Antarctic baleen, or “whalebone,” which was used in corsets. From representantarctic.com


October 2017 Meeting Minutes - - -

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, October 16, 2017. Attendees were: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, John Parry, Richard Semeraro, Lois Glazier, Stephanie Thorp, Barry Thorp, and Steve Menno. The meeting was called to order at 7pm by President L. Allyn.

President (L. Allyn): Bill Taylor used his drone with camera to inspect the Portersville Academy Gutter. They were clean except for a small amount of leaves near the south end of the east gutter. This is much easier than using a long ladder or a cherry picker. • Bids were opened to repaint the exterior of the Downes Building with Forever paint. A motion was made, seconded and passed to appropriate $5,000 and contract with Jeremy Shimian for the work.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): This report covers details of the treasurer’s activities during 18 September through 16 October 2017. At this time all deposits have been made in the bank and all bills are paid current. The Treasurer’s account books are reconciled with the Chelsea Groton Bank statements. Expenses for this period are mostly non-discretionary commitments that include payments for utilities, meeting speaker fee, and to our curatorial staff. No unusual expenses for the period. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s Report.

Chamber of Commerce (S. Menno): The Mystic Chamber of Commerce is printing more of the walking tour flyers.

Curatorial (D. Hanna): The Committee will next meet on October 23. The Committee suggests that the Downes Building be closed the week of Thanksgiving and the last two weeks of December, as has been customary in recent years. Louisa and Dorrie have been working with Herb Holmsted from the Fire District and with Arleen Andersen at Mystic Seaport on creating a replacement for the History of Mystic sign at Mystic River Park.

Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): We received 12 membership renewals since sending reminder letters. MRHS members Billie Palmer & Alan Greener have died recently.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The System Administrator performed computer updates and backups on 30 September 2017. Backup files were moved offsite for secure storage. Application and security software, including a security update to Windows 10 V1703 KB4040724, were updated and are current at this time. All equipment is operating properly at this time as well.

MNL History Book Club (R. Semeraro): The History Book Club has recently read “And Then All Hell Broke Loose: Two Decades in the Middle East by Richard Engle. The November book will be The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl by Timothy Egan.

Newsletter: (L. Allyn for J. Pryor) Copy is generally due the Friday after the board meeting. For the January/February issue, the deadline is December 20th.


Finance, Social Media: No report. New Business: None.

Meeting adjourned at 740pm. Next meeting is November 20, 7p. Respectfully submitted, Lou Allyn for Elizabeth Holland

Wintery image of downtown Mystic c 1908 recently featured on the MRHS Instagram. Pop by & follow our social feeds for other photos from the archives & commentary at: facebook.com/mystichistory or instagram.com/mystic_history. Online readers, click any blue link or image with a pointing hand!
Hot Off the Press: Noyes’ Bettye’s Blue Sea Chest

Hot off the press! “Bettye’s Blue Sea Chest” is a special new book of cherished personal stories saved by Bettye Noyes, our much-loved colleague and kindred spirit in historic preservation. She shares traditions and love inspired by 200 years of family letters.

Reader Kathy Getchell offered this review:

“This author is doing her part for her family! Taking generations of letters found in an old trunk, along with vintage photographs, she has created a precious little book of memories for her family to cherish. This book also serves as a model for those of you who have so many stories and pictures to pass on to children who are overwhelmed by it all and really don’t want them. Sort through your stuff! Condense it, write about the best, and publish it for them. The information you pass on in book form won’t get lost in the cloud or lost when the next computer dies. Plus, by doing this, you can pass on the values that you cherish... things you want subsequent generations to know about you and your generation. The themes of faith, family and helping others are so important to be shared with each new generation! The author has done us all a favor by essentially creating a template for how this is done!”

It was published through CreateSpace.com, an on demand publishing system anyone can easily and affordably use, a division of Amazon.com, where the book is offered for sale. I used my iPhone camera for capturing images of Bettye’s family photos, and re-sized them for publication in PhotoShop. The cover was created with the CreateSpace template from two photo scans, and text inserted, and the interior of the book was generated from a Word document. With this capability, we can envision sharing many of the old diaries and manuscripts in our collection. If you are interested in knowing about how it works, let me know, and I’ll be happy to lead you through the steps!

Bettye Noyes, 99, holds samples of her new self-published work, “Bettye’s Blue Sea Chest” - - available for $12.95. Online readers can click here to purchase on Amazon.

MRHS Publications Local, Online & by Mail

Please stop by to review current MRHS publications online at www.mystichistory.org/publications or in person at the Downes Building or Bank Square books. Some titles include:

- Colors of Mystic by Mystic River Historical Society, 2010
  Designed & illustrated by Ashley Halsey, $14.95/MRHS, $21/mail

- Images of America: Mystic by Mystic River Historical Society

- An Account of My Life: The Childhood Journals of Helen May Clarke of Mystic, Connecticut, 1913-1926 by Helen Clarke Grimes
  Edited by Mystic River Historical Society; 1997
  $15.95 non-members, $14.35 members

An intriguing selection of digital publications are also available for online reading at www.mystichistory.org/digital_publications, including Back When - The Story of A Youth Who Lived Through A Very Exciting Time in America by Karl H. Inderfurth or A Haley Farm Souvenir by Walter Hill, October 1898.

Cozy Up & Read with History Book Club

The History Book Club recently voted on upcoming selections and had a tie among the top winners, so have elected to move ahead with all four titles in the next four months, pending availability.

February: Defenders of the Faith by James Reston, Jr.
March: Catherine the Great by Robert K. Massie
April: The Path Between the Seas by David McCullough
May - The Man Who Loved China by Simon Winchester

The History Book Club is a partner project of the Mystic-Noank Library and MRHS. New reader members welcome at any time! Please join us on second Tuesdays at the Mystic-Noank Library at 7pm in the Activities Room. For more, please contact Richard Semeraro at rasemeraro04@gmail.com

HOT OFF THE PRESS: Betsye’s Blue Sea Chest

Bettye Noyes, 99, holds samples of her new self-published work, “Betsye’s Blue Sea Chest” - - available for $12.95. Online readers can click here to purchase on Amazon. Additional photo on MRHS Instagram, Nov 20, 2017
Spanish Flu: The Last Pandemic?

By Stephanie Thorp

Image believed to be the Kansas Building at Camp Funston during the height of the epidemic. From Otis Historical Archives of the National Museum of Health & Medicine.

One hundred years ago, cases of severe flu were being reported across an area of the southwestern United States...Kansas and Oklahoma primarily. It was much later that the world realized that this had been the epicenter of what would become one of the 20th century’s most dreadful experiences...the Spanish Flu pandemic.

On March 4, 1918, the first soldier at Camp Funston in central Kansas to fall ill reported to the infirmary. Several men from the area of Kansas where the illness first arose had reported to Camp Funston only days before. Camp Funston was a huge Army base being used to train soldiers for WWI combat. Within two weeks, 1100 soldiers had been admitted to hospital, and thousands more of their fellows were ill in their barracks. Thirty-eight soldiers died. One of those recruits who had reported to Camp Funston was likely to be Patient Zero...the first case of Spanish Flu.

Spanish Flu obviously then wasn’t actually Spanish. It earned the title because the Spanish government was the only government world-wide that didn’t censor the story. Remember that the world was embroiled in World War I at the time; government policy world-wide was to protect their positions and to maintain morale among their citizens.

At any rate, infected soldiers very likely carried influenza from Camp Funston to other Army camps in the States (24 of 36 large camps had outbreaks). Tens of thousands sickened. Then the infection was carried overseas on troop carriers. Meanwhile, the disease spread into US civilian communities.

We know today that flu viruses mutate at an alarming rate. That’s why the flu shots that we get every year are different from previous years, and why scientists spend a good deal of effort deciding which flu strains should be vaccinated against each year. And it is now understood that influenza strains can transfer from avians (birds, such as chickens) to humans, and from pigs to humans...and incredibly (to me) from humans to pigs...indeed, between humans and any animal with which humans maintain close contact. It appears possible that back in 1918, Haskell County, Kansas, center of hog production and situated along a major migratory flyway for many different bird species, may have had the misfortune to be in the wrong place at the wrong time...when a mutation (an accidental change to a flu virus’ DNA) occurred there.

What made this flu virus different from preceding ones were the severity (extremely high fatality rate) and also the fact that the sufferers most likely to die were not the very young and the elderly, as was common with most illnesses, but younger, healthier people...young adults between the ages of 20 and 40. Add to this the horrific nature of the disease: someone could be fine at breakfast and dead by dinner. If you want the details, please see some of the books and articles in the bibliography.

The mortality rate was extremely high; more people died in 1918-1919 from influenza in a single year than in four years of the Black Death (bubonic plague) in the years 1347-13, between 20 and 40 million, or 50 and 100 million, depending on which estimate you’re reading. More people died from influenza at this time than died from war-inflicted injuries. The mortality rate was calculated at 2.5%, versus only 0.1% for previous epidemics.

According to an article in Connecticut Explored magazine just last year, the 1918 epidemic was a public health disaster in our state. It appears that the disease entered the state in southeastern Connecticut, the US Naval Submarine Base in Groton to be specific, and spread north and west from there. (And it probably spread north and east, into Rhode Island, as well, but the article focused on Connecticut).

The first flu case in Connecticut was a Navy member in New London on 9/11/1918. By 10/25/18 there were 180,000 cases in Connecticut. At the end, the death toll in Connecticut was about 8500. About 5000 of these deaths were younger persons, mostly men, aged 20 to 39. As in the rest of the world, the disease appeared most frequently in environments where people were in very close quarters: military barracks, tents, factories, mills, tenements, troop ships, as examples. The significance of the US Naval Submarine Base as an entry point to the East Coast is that this was the transit point for military personnel returning from Europe, and not surprisingly, some of them returned already infected with the flu. As in the rest of the world, about 60% of deaths were men, and the remainder women and children. It is thought that men contracted flu much more because they were much more in public spaces, while women were more likely to be at home, but there’s no way of verifying this.

(See bibliography at the end of this article.)
Most of New England suffered proportionately. Most of the world, in fact, suffered proportionately, with a few exceptions. Some places suffered much more and some much less. Countries where conditions were “wrong” incurred extremely high mortality rates; India and China, for instance, and rural Alaska, where entire villages disappeared. Countries where conditions were “right” suffered much less; for example, countries that applied quarantines immediately, such as Japan, where the government quarantined ships entering their ports; American Samoa, where the American governor quarantined the territory; and a small, unnamed village in Alaska that placed armed guards around the village perimeter with orders to shoot to kill anyone who tried to enter the village from outside.

By February of 1919, the epidemic had subsided. The death toll in the United States was about 500,000. In the rest of the world, as mentioned previously, the death toll was possibly, by modern estimates, between 50 million and 100 million persons.

The Spanish Flu pandemic represented a “perfect storm” of coincidences. Medicine had barely discovered that bacteria existed. They had no idea that viruses existed, and even after they developed the concept, they had no way to prove that viruses existed, and if so, what they were. Methods of treating illnesses like this were primitive to say the least, and no one, even in the public health sphere, had no way to prove that viruses existed, and if so, what they were. Methods of treating illnesses like this were primitive to say the least, and no one, even in the public health sphere, had no way to prove that viruses existed, and if so, what they were. Methods of treating illnesses like this were primitive to say the least, and no one, even in the public health sphere, had no way to prove that viruses existed, and if so, what they were. Methods of treating illnesses like this were primitive to say the least, and no one, even in the public health sphere, had no way to prove that viruses existed, and if so, what they were. Methods of treating illnesses like this were primitive to say the least, and no one, even in the public health sphere, had no way to prove that viruses existed, and if so, what they were.

Laura Spinney, in her book Pale Rider, deduced from her research that epidemics of various diseases, probably including any number of influenza viruses, occurred through history over many thousands of years. We are probably all familiar with The Black Death, or bubonic plague, caused by bacteria that are carried by rats, and by fleas on rats, that occurred several times over hundreds of years. Within our own memories, we have survived a number of pandemics:

1. 1957-58, 2 million died world-wide (70,000 in the US)
2. 1968-69, 1 million (34,000 in the US)
3. 2009-10, 575,000 (17,000 in the US) as a result of H1N1 swine flu

Note that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimate that approximately 500,000 people world-wide die as a result of the annual seasonal flu that we’re familiar with.

Are scientists today doing anything to prevent and/or treat future pandemics? The chief or viral pathogenesis and evolution at the National Institutes of Health’s Laboratory of Infectious Diseases, Jeffrey K. Taubenberger, has set this as his goal. Researchers are analyzing lung tissue from exhumed flu victims in an effort to understand the viruses. Taubenberger has traced about 14 discrete pandemics, with maladies describing identical respiratory symptoms, since the 1500’s, up to the 2009 outbreak of swine flu. He says he dreams of the day when scientists are able to spot a newly developing pandemic and possibly even develop a universal vaccine for all future mutations of the flu virus. This is a challenge because flu viruses mutate extremely quickly, but it’s also a worthy goal.

When we ask the question, was the Spanish Flu the last pandemic, the answer is obviously “no”. There have been more since 1918 and there will doubtless be more to come. When we ask the question, have we expanded our knowledge about public health to allow us to manage such a pandemic better than we have in the past, the answer is probably, “time will tell”. In the meantime, American remains dependent on our National Institutes of Health for keep our virus defenses up to date and effective.
Events Calendar
7pm Tuesday, February 13th, 2017
History Book Club - MRHS & MNL Partnership
The Activities Room, Mystic-Noank Library
Defenders of the Faith by James Reston, Jr.

7pm Wednesday, February 28th, 2018
Captain Nathaniel Palmer - Roger Reed
7pm refreshments & socializing, 7:30p program
Mystic Congregational Church Hall, Broadway & E. Main, Mystic
The life and adventures of the Stonington mariner explorer.

7pm Tuesday, March 13th, 2017
History Book Club - Catherine the Great, Robert K. Massie

7pm Wednesday, March 28th, 2018
History of Mystic Fires + Vintage Firetruck - Richard Froh

7pm Tuesday, April 9th, 2017
History Book Club - The Path Between the Seas, David McCullough

7pm Wednesday, April 25th, 2018
Denizens: A Narrative of Cpt. George Denison & His New England Contemporaries with Kate Dimanescu

Membership Updates

Our membership lost the company of Roger Panciera last fall.

Friendly Reminder: In late January we will be sending out letters of renewal for 2018.

-- Cindy Allyn, Membership