SIGNS OF THE TIMES:
Mystic in Shutdown
My first car was a 1949 Ford 2-door sedan which I bought from Santin Chevrolet the summer I turned 16 in 1955. I remember driving it through the “car wash” at the south-east corner of the intersection of Cow Hill Road and Bindloss Road and later on being disappointed by “progress” when the road was improved and it was filled and paved over. - Lou Allyn

“Remembrance of Things Past”

I took my car to the car wash the other day. It needed it, not so much from the usual winter road salt, but it was just plain dirty.

Drivers in this area have quite a choice of car wash establishments. There is a fully automatic one at the intersection of Jerry Browne Road and Route 27 that does a good job. Another drive-through is located behind the Gulf Station on Route 184. One that has been around for several years is near the Groton post office. There the car is taken through and towed off when it exits, much the same way as it is done at the Submarine Car Wash on Route 12. A “do it yourself” wash is located on Poquonnock Road near the Avery Memorial. Being a retired Navy reservist, I took my car to the self-service wash on the base near the gas station.

Many years ago there was another car wash in downtown Mystic on the site of the current S&P Oyster House restaurant. I believe Cities Service owned it. Next to it was Santin Chevrolet, which had a car washing booth in the shop. I washed a lot of cars and even engines during the summer I worked there. One of the things I learned that summer was that engines should be hot when the oil is changed, but cold when washed, so as not to crack the cast iron block.

However, before any of these machine-assisted operations were in town, there was another option for car owners in Mystic. At the intersection of Cow Hill Road and Bindloss Road was a small pond with a gravel bottom, which was generally less than a foot deep. Motorists could drive in, take off their shoes, grab their bucket and sponge and wash the car while it sat in water up to the hubcaps (remember those?). Of course, the soapy water would flow into Bindloss Pond and from there to the river. While this wasn’t especially environmentally friendly, the soap was a lot less harmful than some of the other things being dumped into the river in those days. The “car wash,” which was something of a landmark in Mystic, no longer exists. When the town “improved” Cow Hill Road many years ago, turning a narrow country lane into something that is a cross between a runway and a racetrack, Mystic’s do-it-yourself-for-free car wash disappeared.

Robert F. Welt of Mystic is a retired Groton Public Schools teacher.

Reader Tips:

Looking for an adventure you can have on your phone, or without leaving your car? Connecticut Humanities is proud to offer you the free mobile app, ConnTours. ConnTours serves as a mobile-friendly guide to the unique and interesting places that comprise the Connecticut landscape, offering tours that explore sites connected to notable Connecticut women; Connecticut’s role in the American Revolution; its unique architectural landmarks; its complicated relationship to slavery; its historic places of leisure, and many more. The app provides short introductions to the history of each stop, images, maps, links to social media, and directions.

Virtual Tour of Portersville Academy

The Mystic River Historical Society had planned to participate in CT Open House Day, originally scheduled for June 13. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the state of Connecticut decided to make Open House Day a "virtual" one, encouraging participants to prepare a video of what they would like the public to have seen.

Toward that end, MRHS has prepared a short (8 minute) video of our Portersville Academy. There is a link to the video on the homepage to our website and can be viewed at www.mystichistory.org/images/Portersville%20Academy.

We hope you enjoy.

Downes Building Status

The Downes building has been closed to visitors since March. While we plan to reopen to the public, at this time we have decided to open for visitors by appointment only. Our normal office hours are Tuesday morning from 9am to noon and Wednesday and Thursday afternoons from 1pm to 4pm. Please call us at 860-536-4779 or email us at info@mystichistory.org to make an appointment. Wearing a mask will be required. We thank you for your understanding.
From the Social Pages, By Louisa Watrous

Click the links below, or visit http://www.mystichistory.org/collectionsexhibit/index.htm to view our Virtual Exhibits.

Virtual Exhibit: Main Block Fire, 1915

Genealogists are now often capturing content from these records to share in their family trees, a valuable resource. You can scroll through here, and also through our other Virtual Exhibits of different subjects!

Virtual Exhibit: The Jesse Stinson Collection

The Jesse Stinson Collection has an eclectic and interesting variety of photo subjects taken and compiled by Stinson. We originally started cataloging it in 2006, adding some records to the Virtual Exhibit over time, but are now going back to add all of it for you to scroll through. We always appreciate any comments, clarifications, or additional information, as it’s a collaborative effort with the community to save and share these treasures.

Virtual Exhibit: The Brown Family in Mystic

Here’s a fun card in the collection of Daniel Palmer Brown (1884-1969) postcards, cataloged by Judy Hicks, in 2006, that has just been added to our Brown Family Virtual Exhibit. The relationships between people and places can be researched in such a group of these old communications.

Checking in with the History Book Club

With the uncertainties surrounding the reopening of the Mystic-Noank Library and the restart of inter-library loans, there is currently no way to ensure that multiple copies of the History Book Club’s selected books will be available to our members. Until copies of our books can be made easily accessible, the History Book Club will be taking a summer hiatus. An updated schedule for group discussions will be sent out to members once we have received definitive notice from the library.
What’s “New” in our Collections?

By Dorrie Hanna, Collections Manager

Our newest acquisition is actually something pretty old -- a group of letters dating from the 1800s. They were found in the eaves of the Gurdon S. Allyn house at 28 New London Road and donated to us by the homeowner. The letters came to light during some painting and repair work and we arranged for a “socially distant” drop off at the Downes Building. I really appreciate how well this all worked out.

According to the Summer 2015 issue of the Lower Mystic cemetery newsletter, the Cemetery is the final resting place of many founding families of Mystic, including Lou Allyn’s great-great-grandfather Gurdon Spicer Allyn. Gurdon Spicer Allyn (1816-1876) was born in Ledyard, CT and spent his early years on the farm and at sea with his father Captain Rufus Allyn, Jr. By the 1840s Gurdon was a carpenter, building houses and other structures in the area. In 1853 he built and operated a successful ice house, and soon after set up a fish processing business on Mason’s Island that became known as G.S. Allyn & Co. The company processed Menhaden or “bony fish” to extract the oil and produce fertilizer from the remaining fish pumice. Much of Allyn’s business life was spent in the Menhaden fishery, and he received a number of patents for improvements on various aspects of this operation. For nearly 30 years, G.S. Allyn & Co. was one of Mystic’s major businesses. Gurdon Allyn’s other business ventures included the Mystic River Water Works, and lumbering investments in Juneau County, Wisconsin. He married Hannah Avery Rathbun (1819-1858) in 1838 and Martha Champion in 1859.

The letters are in pretty tough shape (under the eaves of a roof is not considered optimum archival storage) but we’re hopeful we can preserve them. If they cannot be physically saved, perhaps they could be transcribed. We’ll keep you posted!

Historic Replicas

The coronavirus pandemic has delayed the departure of the Mayflower II from Mystic Seaport to Plimouth Plantation in Massachusetts. It is also keeping the New Haven-based Amistad in port this sailing season at Mystic Seaport. This resulted in a momentary intersection of two historic nautical events, as seen in this photo. It is not often that one can see replicas of two ships that sailed the ocean 400 and 200 years ago side by side.
2019 Annual Meeting Minutes  -  -  -

The meeting was called to order by President Lou Allyn. A quorum of members was in attendance.

A motion was made, seconded and passed to dispense with the reading of the 2018 Annual Meeting which had been published in the Newsletter and posted on the Society’s website.

The President introduced members of the Board of Trustees as present: Cindy Allyn – Membership, Margaret Austin – Programs and Vice President, Lois Glazier, Stephen Menno, John Parry, Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild – Social Media & Publicity, and Richard Semeraro – Local History Book Club. He also commended the other Trustees for their support and participation: Marilyn Comrie, Liz Holland – Corresponding Secretary, Jennifer Pryor – Newsletter Publisher and Editor, Barry Thorp - Treasurer, and Stephanie Thorp - Information Technology.

A motion was made, seconded and passed to elect the following Trustees for re-election to three year terms: Cynthia Allyn, Marilyn Comrie, Lois Glazier, and Jennifer Pryor. The following will be nominated for election by the Trustees at their June meeting: Stephen Menno – President and Lou Allyn – Treasurer.

The MRHS President’s report for 2018-2019 was read. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the report as printed and distributed in the May/June 2019 edition of the Portersville Press.

The Treasurer’s report was presented by the President. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the report as presented.

The President then noted that Barry Thorp will be completing his service as Treasurer and expressed his sincere and grateful appreciation for Barry’s dedication and commitment to MRHS. He added that Barry went “the extra mile” when he responded to a request back in 2013 to learn QuickBooks and non-profit accounting and taxes so that Lou could accept another stint as President. In the years since he has done an accurate and professional job. And, he also keeps our computers running and up-to-date.

Our next Annual Meeting will be Wednesday May 20, 2020.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and passed.

April 2020 Meeting Minutes  -  -  -

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society were unable to meet in person due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Instead, the agenda for the meeting was discussed via email.

The minutes for the 16 March 2020 meeting were approved.

President (S. Menno): The annual President’s report has been prepared. It will appear in the upcoming May-June newsletter. • The Downes Building has been closed to the public since March 16. The public and MRHS members can continue getting in touch via phone and email. • Reached out to the point of contact for the June 13 CT Open House Day on April 16 and was informed that it has not been canceled though it may still be possible. Will commence with preparations. Looking for three volunteers to work two-hour shifts that day. • Assuming the August 1 Groton Local History Fair is still on schedule, we are all set with volunteers. • Continuing to look for potential board members and will solicit membership again.

Treasurer/Finance (L. Allyn): MRHS Treasurer’s Report as of April 18, 2020. The year to date P&L and Balance sheets were forwarded to the Board. • In the bank is $9,141.32. • Paid dues of $9,425 are $75 ahead of this date last year and should come in at or above this year’s budget. • Betsy and Louisa are working their usual hours under very safe conditions so their expense will continue as budgeted. Dorrie is working fewer hours. • Prepared and submitted a grant request to the Mystic Woman's Club for us to transfer our PastPerfect collections to an online version of PastPerfect.

Corresponding Secretary (N. Potter): The following four Thank You letters were sent since the last meeting via email: Kate Dinamcescu (book donation - updated copy of ‘Denizens’), Barbara Pearson, Neil Spillane, Barry/Stephanie Thorp (donation in memory of Bill Glazier).

Curatorial (D. Hanna): Responding to queries from home. Louisa and Betsy continue their hours at the Downes Building.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The system administrator performed IT the monthly data backups on 3/16/2020 and on 4/4/2020 on the computers MRHS1, MRHS2 &MRHS3. All data files from PastPerfect, Virtual Exhibit, System Desktop files, working folders and Images were backed up for onsite safe keeping. The computers were each checked for updates to the operating system and the security systems for applications and machine settings. The updates did include updates to the BIOS for each computer. The computers were checked for proper networking and connections to the printer. All equipment appeared to be in good working condition and functioning properly. The MRHS4 (old laptop computer used mainly for support of presentations at the monthly meetings) was not backed up or updated to save time.

Membership (C. Allyn): There have been four deaths in our membership community since the new year: Nancy McKay, Roland Pampel, Jack Lee, and Paul Neuman.

Newsletter (S. Menno): Input for the May-June newsletter is due 24 April.

Programs (M. Austin): April and May speakers will be rescheduled sometime in our 2020-2021 program. Our March speaker, Leslie Evans on women’s suffrage, has been rescheduled for September 23.

New Business: Marilyn Comrie suggested documenting what is going on now in Mystic due to the coronavirus by taking pictures and writing notes. This thought follows Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild’s suggestion about recording history as it happens. The MRHS Board of Trustees encourages others to record history of the current life in Mystic.

Next Meeting— 18 May 2020 will take place via email.

Respectfully submitted,

Cara Lopilato

May 2020 Meeting Minutes  -  -  -

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society were unable to meet in person due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Instead, the agenda for the meeting was discussed via email.

The minutes for the 20 April 2020 meeting were approved.

President (S. Menno): MRHS has received confirmation that this year’s CT Open House Day will be virtual. We can participate by making a short video and uploading it to the CT Open House Day website. Steve will work on the narration and video to submit a tour of MRHS’s Portersville Academy building. • The parking sign at the Downes Building has been repaired and reinstalled. • Due to the cancellation of our annual meeting, there will not be any voting of board members this year. • By this time next year, there will be 4 board member slots available for election. • After 9 years on the board, Richard Semeraro completes his term at MRHS as the head of the History Book Club. A thank you was sent out by Steve via email, but he and the rest of the board hopes to express their thanks in person one day soon. • Thanks to a suggestion made by Lou, the board has agreed to add an extra newsletter (Jul-Aug) this summer to make up for the programs that had been canceled due to COVID-19.
Treasurer/Finance (L. Allyn): Cash in the Bank is $8,674.66. Paid dues of $9,700 are equal to this date last year and should come in at or above this year’s budget. • The stock portion of our portfolio of Vanguard mutual funds has been substantially reallocated to bonds and money market to reduce exposure to a possible significant drop in the stock market this year and into the future.

Corresponding Secretary (N. Potter): No report.

Curatorial (D. Hanna): The Downes Building remains closed to the public, but Betsy and Louisa are still working in the building in separate shifts. Dorrie has been working from home where she has responded to six email queries during the month of April and continued her research.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The system administrator performed the monthly data backups on May 10. The data files from PastPerfect, Virtual Exhibit, System Desktop files, working folders and images were backed up for offsite safe-keeping. The computers were each checked for updates to the operating system and the security systems for applications and machine settings. Updates were installed on all of the computers. The computers were checked for proper networking and connections to the printer. All equipment appeared to be in good working condition and functioning properly. The old laptop computer (used mainly for support of presentations at the monthly meetings) was not backed up or updated to save time.

Membership (C. Allyn): MRHS member Michael Meyer had passed away at the end of April.

Programs (M. Austin): The board agrees to cancel the speaker meetings scheduled for September, October, and December. The September meeting was going to feature Leslie Evans talking about the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage which was previously scheduled for this past March. The October and December meetings were to feature MRHS board member Marilyn Comrie speaking about the 25th anniversary of Mystic River Park and the 1960 Mystic fire, respectively. We have not yet made a scheduling decision for the next Spring 2021 meetings. We hope to make that decision by this September and we plan to reschedule all of our cancelled meetings from the spring and fall of 2020.

Social Media (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): We shared two new virtual exhibitions (‘Construction Work in the Mystic, CT Area’ and ‘Postcards in the Mystic River Historical Society Collection’) put together by Louisa as well as spring photos taken on the MRHS property.

New Business: No new business to report as we continue to make adjustments following the COVID-19 outbreak.

Next Meeting— 15 June 2020 will take place via email.

Respectfully submitted,
Cara Lopilato

Normally, Mystic River Historical Society holds its annual membership meeting during the May speaker program. Since we did not have a speaker meeting in May, our annual meeting is on hold. The three main objectives of the annual meeting are to approve the minutes of the last annual meeting, to have the president report on the past year’s activity, and to elect new board members. The minutes for last year’s annual meeting are in this issue of Portersville Press. The president’s report was published in the May-June issue of Portersville Press.

Election of new board members is on hold. Margaret Austin and Steve Menno reached the end of their current three-year terms and would have been up for reelection at the May annual meeting. They will continue to serve on the board in the interim. Lou Allyn and Lois Glazier are willing to extend their time on the board for another year. Lou has reached the maximum of nine consecutive years of service on the board. Lou will also continue for another year as treasurer. Lois achieved her maximum two years ago and has been extended twice since then. Richard Semeraro has also completed his maximum time of service on the board. MRHS thanks Richard very much for his many years of service. He has been and will continue to be a key player in the History Book Club held at Mystic-Noank Library. As you can see, MRHS is looking for new board members. If you are interested, please contact Steve Menno at stevemenno@yahoo.com.

Guided Tours: History – Food – Walking www.mysticrevealed.com
Hear the stories, see the views, learn the history, feel the sea, taste the food! Experience the magic of Mystic in a small group with a local guide that brings it to life.
Anyone who has eaten at Abbott’s Restaurant in Norank, or who has boated around the mouth of the Mystic River, has gazed at Ram Island, or as it is also known, Mystic Island. In the mid to late 1800s, steamboats served the island and its hotel and other facilities.

By the 1920’s, the hotel had fallen into disrepair and the island became an excursion destination for Camp Mystic’s summer camp for girls, at what is now the Peace Sanctuary on the west side of the Mystic River. In the early 1960s, the island was briefly home for a “boatel.” For more information about Ram Island, readers are encouraged to read Carol Kimball’s accounts of the island’s history in articles she wrote for the Day.

In this photo (below to the left), one can see the pier at which steamboats docked, with the hotel in the background. In this present-day photo (below to the right), the inn and pier are long gone. The island is now home to a private residence.
Events Calendar

History Book Club—MRHS & Mystic-Noank Library Partnership
On Hiatus for the Summer!

Speaker Program Note

As we notified members by email in May, MRHS has decided to cancel our speaker program for this coming fall in view of coronavirus concerns. While no decision has been made yet, we hope to resume our program of speakers in the spring of 2021. We plan to make that decision in September. Our goal is to reschedule all of our cancelled programs based on speaker availability.

Bring a friend! All meetings are free and open to the public! Donations are always welcome. Renew or become a Member of MRHS for updates about our events. Contact us at info@mystichistory.org

Membership Updates

We welcome new members Paul and Debbie Bied, and regret the passing of member Michael Meyers.

-Cindy Allyn, Membership