In March: Lies We Learned at the Open Hearth with Michelle Moon

For nearly a century, Americans have learned about their food history from the nation's museums. Watching a cook at the open hearth or cookstove, or a farmer on a living history site, museum visitors have formed ideas about how people in the past ate. But food studies scholarship, expanding rapidly over the past few decades, has begun to reveal gaps between the historical image museums often present and the reality of American foodways past. In this lively talk, we'll explore five myths of food history called into question by newly circulating evidence, and present some of the freshest ideas in presenting a fuller food history, one that links food issues and ideas from the past to the present-day culinary scene.

Join us at 7pm on Wednesday, March 23rd at the Mystic Congregational Church Hall for Michelle Moon’s intriguing presentation which will be paired with tasty “Indian” (cornmeal) pound cake and insights & recipes from her book, “Interpreting Food at Museums and Historical Sites.”

Michelle Moon creates meaningful learning experiences through inspiring collaborations that unite the arts, food and history in deeper explorations of places and ideas. A career museum professional, she developed adult experiences and worked on major exhibitions at the Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, MA), supported staff in telling stories about one New Hampshire community’s history at Strawbery Banke Museum, and introduced audiences to New England’s maritime history at Mystic Seaport. Now completing a Master’s degree in Museum Studies at the Harvard Extension School, she also serves as Massachusetts State Governor for Slow Food New England. Her research interests focus on the intersection of sea and shore in the cultural development of the coastal Northeast; exploring food as an entry point to big ideas in social history, and building a sense of place and community well-being through storytelling and the arts.

In April: Henny & Her Boat - The Rescue of Danish Jews with Howard Veisz

In October 1943, after occupying Denmark for three years, the Nazis put a plan into operation to capture the country’s 8,200 Jews in a single night and send them on the path to annihilation. A member of the occupation disclosed the plan to the leader of Denmark’s ruling party with 72 hours notice, triggering a nationwide rescue effort that was unique in all of occupied Europe. Within hours, the Danish people mobilized to warn and hide their Jewish countrymen. When Gestapo agents fanned out on their overnight raids, they came up almost empty handed. The chase, however, had just begun....

Continued inside on p. 3
January 2016 Meeting Minutes


President (L. Allyn): A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the November meeting as published. • PayPal was added to the MRHS website as an option for donations & dues payments and thus far, it has been well received. The fee for service has been reduced to 5%. • The insurance on schoolhouse may be modified to exclude rebuilding coverage in an attempt to lower the annual premium.

Corr. Secretary (E. Holland): Seven thank you letters were sent.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): For 11/15 - 1/16/16, all deposits have been made, all bills paid current and account books reconciled. Expenses for months are mostly non-discretionary. Deposits included a Money Market transfer and generous donations from individual members families. Present balance is positive. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s Report.

Curatorial (L. Allyn/D. Hanna): The committee didn’t meet in December and is set to meet 1/25/16. Lou Allyn and Richard Semeraro are to meet with the new Director of the Mystic and Noank Library to discuss potential joint activities between MRHS & MNL, possible uses for Portersville Academy, collaborative programming, and ways to engage younger individuals.


Information Technology (S. Thorp): Administrator performed updates & backups 1/10/16. All equipment appeared in good condition & functioning as designed. Microsoft virus protection and software, including substantial updates to Windows 10, are current & operating properly. All is upgraded to Windows 10.

Newsletter (J. Pryor): Copy is due Friday after board meeting.

Program & Membership (M. Austin): Kate Dimianescu’s talk 12/2/2015 was well received with 45 attendees (on a very rainy night) and $21 donated. She will return to speak on her forthcoming book in October. • Upcoming speakers are Norman Brouwer, Howard Veisz, Michelle Moon, then Richard Spencer in May, also the MRHS anniversary. • R. Semeraro is forming a History Book Club starting March 1, 7pm at the Mystic Noank Library.

P&M Subcommittee of Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): We have mailed out 308 annual dues renewal letters.

Publicity/PR (S. Thorp): Press releases of the membership meeting will be sent out. Dorrie is posting photographs on Mystic River Historical Society’s Facebook every Thursday.

Publicity/PR (S. Thorp): David Evans approached B. F. Clyde’s Cider Mill and the Mystic Seaport buyer to sell “Colors of Mystic” in their respective gift shops. They agreed, and the book is now available in both locations. There was discussion of using the illustrations from the book to create a calendar, poster, etc.

Next meeting February 22, 2016, 7:00 pm

Respectfully submitted, Elizabeth Holland, Recording Secretary

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November 2015 Meeting Minutes

The Mystic River Historical Society Board of Trustees met Monday, November 16, 2015. Attendees included: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, Bill Everett, Lois Glazier, John Parry, Richard Semeraro, Barry Thorp and Stephanie Thorp.

President (L. Allyn): Liz Holland was introduced. • A motion was made, second & passed to accept with regret the resignation of Trustee Jim Kimenker. Jim had served as Trustee since 2007 and a term as President. His column in the Newsletter ‘from the “President/Contributor’s Desk” received many compliments over the years. • A motion was made, seconded & passed to approve Liz Holland to fill the Board vacancy until the 2016 Annual Meeting. A motion to elect Liz as Recording Secretary and Corresponding Secretary was then made, seconded & passed.

Corr. Secretary (C. Allyn): Five thank you letters were sent.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): For 10/17 - 11/16/2015, all deposits have been made, bills paid current and account books reconciled with bank statements. Expenses are mostly non-discretionary, deposits exceeded expenses, and balance is positive. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s Report.

Curatorial (L. Allyn/D. Hanna): The committee met 11/16/15, with no December meeting & office will be closed last two weeks. The old dehumidifier has been removed; maintaining appropriate humidity should be fine over the winter while replacement dehumidifier research is under way. Richard Semeraro contacted the new Director of the Mystic & Noank Library and mentioned joint activities the MRHS may undertake with MNL.

Finance (D. Evans): The annual review of MRHS books was successfully conducted by the Finance Committee. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the 2016 Budget.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): Updates & backups performed 10/30/15, including Past Perfect database with offsite removal for security. All equipment & software appears to be in good condition and functioning as designed. Administrator expects to upgrade remaining units to Windows 10 next month.


P&M Subcommittee of Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): Responses to the dues renewal reminder letters sent to 50 members have been coming in.

Publicity/PR (S. Thorp): December membership meeting press releases will be sent out. Dorrie is posting photographs on Mystic River Historical Society’s Facebook every Thursday.

Library Cooperation, New Business: Richard and Lou will meet with Directory Chris Johnson and President Rhona Heyl on Monday 11/23. • R. Semeraro is forming a History Book Club at the Mystic Noank Library.

Next meeting January 11, 2016, 7:00 pm

Respectfully submitted, Cindy Allyn, Recording Secretary

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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 1654 to the present.

Officers: President - Lou Allyn • Vice President - Bill Everett • Treasurer - Barry Thorp • Corresponding Secretary - Stephanie Thorp • Recording Secretary - Elizabeth Holland

The Newsletter of the Mystic River Historical Society is published six times annually: September, October, November-December, January-February, March-April and May-June • Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355

Issues of the newsletter are available for online viewing at www.mystichistory.org

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...The only place within 450 miles that the Gestapo could not reach was unoccupied Sweden, and the only way to get there was by boat. Almost overnight, groups sprang up along the Danish coast to organize escape routes on fishing boats and other craft. Nearly 300 boats participated, none more successfully than Gerda III, a 40 foot workboat owned by the Danish Lighthouse and Buoy Service.

Henny Sinding, the 22 year old daughter of the Service’s commander, teamed up with a fledgling resistance group, evacuating Nazi sentries and leading Jews to the safety of Gerda III’s hold to save at least 300 Jews -- just 10 to 15 at a time. When the rescue operation was completed a month later, Henny’s team remained united, becoming one of Denmark’s leading sabotage groups, and going on to locating & blowing up Nazi targets at the cost of life or capture. The Gerda III remained behind, rescuing an additional 700 resistance fighters and Allied airmen.

Today, Gerda III is owned by New York’s Museum of Jewish Heritage and is docked at Mystic Seaport, where the stories of the extraordinary people associated with her can continue to come to life & be celebrated. Please join us on Wednesday, April 27th to hear more of the story.

In 2009 Howard Veisz left a litigation career, and the New York firm he co-founded, and went to sea. After a two year sailing voyage, Howard and his wife settled on the Mystic River, and Howard began work as a volunteer in the Seaport’s rigging department. While pouring hours into the restoration of the Charles W. Morgan, Gerda III – docked in front of the Sabino at the Seaport entrance – caught his eye. Born into a Jewish family that barely escaped from Berlin in the days before World War II, and with the memory of other Jewish relatives who escaped to Sweden, the story of Gerda III drew him in. Over the next two years, Howard travelled to Denmark to locate and meet with descendents of Henny Sinding and Gerda III’s crew members; scoured Danish archives for information about the boat; visited the docks from which Gerda III and other rescue boats set out; gathered writings by Henny and her associates that had never appeared in English; and assembled a team of volunteer translators to uncover information that had been buried in those writings for the last seventy years. He is putting the finishing touches on a history of the boat, its crew, and the group – Henny’s group – that epitomized Denmark’s transition from a defeated nation, to a nation that rose up to battle the Nazis and hand the Gestapo its most glaring defeat.

Meet Liz Holland....

Liz Holland recently relocated to Mystic from Baltimore, Maryland. She holds a B.A. from Boston College and a Master of Health Science (M.H.S.) from the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. Liz’s professional background is in maternal and child health, and she has worked at both nonprofit organizations and academic research institutions. Liz grew up in Simsbury, Connecticut, and as a child spent many summers on Mason’s Island, so when the opportunity presented itself to move back to New England, she knew that Mystic was high on her list. Liz and her wife, Lynn, spent several years renovating their 19th-century home in Baltimore before moving to Connecticut, and they feel very fortunate to have purchased a house built in 1729 in historic Mystic. Liz currently stays home with the couple’s two preschool-aged children, Charlotte and Pete. Liz looks forward to contributing to the important work that MRHS does in protecting and showcasing the heritage of Mystic.

Traditionally a symbol of hospitality in the tropics, the pineapple as a symbol of welcome grew in favor in the early American colonies when sea captains reportedly placed the exotic fruit outside their homes to signal a safe return and invitation to visitors.

Welcome, Liz!
Dear Diary... Insights to Daily Life Past & Present

When I say the word “diary” do you think of a little book, perhaps pink, with a lock and key? That’s sort of the common concept, but of course there are many others. In general terms a diary is a record of daily life with entries made on a regular basis. Now I myself don’t keep a diary, and you probably don’t either. So—when we want to recall an event what do we do? Go back through emails or Facebook posts? Look at our smart phone? Those things might work, but we sure aren’t leaving any back story for posterity!

Many times a diary entry is short and strictly factual. “It rained today” or “Planted potatoes”. Not a lot of information or interest there. But sometimes, for example the Helen Clarke Grimes diaries, the entries are full of anecdotes of daily life that enrich our understanding of a by-gone era. MRHS is fortunate to have many such volumes, but I’d like to focus on those in the Coogan Collection. I’m hoping to establish an on-going feature in the Portersville Press to share excerpts from them.

My first selection is the diary of Bertha Coogan for the year 1927. Bertha was the wife of Stillman Morse Coogan, known as “Morse”, and she was 43 years old in 1927. It’s true that this diary include comments and observations that should be kept private, as I’m sure she intended. Mentions of illness, family squabbles, etc. don’t need to be shared. But she did document their purchase of land and the construction of her “dream house” at what was then 110 High Street.

Besides her daily notes she pasted in newspaper clippings covering local and national events. Here’s a few highlights: Jan. 1 - skating on the river; Feb. 2 - unusually low tide, Morse dug some clams; Feb 3 – made “dandy chowder”; March 26 – news clipping of ad for Morse’s business selling blinds and screens; April 5 – news clipping about the parking problem in Mystic; May 11 – news clipping on the need for clean up along the river because of accumulated garbage and discarded items; May 12 – news clipping about Lindbergh’s transatlantic flight. Well, you say, interesting but nothing extraordinary. To me, the less than extraordinary information is the best part because it illustrates life in our town 90 years ago.

The Downes Archives Building was open the customary nine hours per week with the following exceptions: Closed January 1; Closed January 27 & March 5 due to snow; Closed July 7,8 & 9; closed the week of Thanksgiving; closed the week of Christmas and December 29, 30 & 31.

The Curatorial Committee met eight times during 2015. The Committee consisted of Judy Hicks, Dorrie Hanna, Louisa Watrous, Dave Scott, Richard Semeraro and Kit Werner. MRHS President Lou Allyn serves as acting chairman.

Paid staff at the Downes Building are Dorrie Hanna (9 hours/week), Betsy Boucher (6 hours/week) and Louisa Watrous (5 hours/week). Staff compensation did not exceed budgeted amount.

In 2015 we added 22 new collections. We responded to more than 225 requests for information and assistance, about 100 more than last year. Fees collected for research and for images were nearly double the projected amounts in the 2015 budget.

We had 13 requests for images:

- 7 were for single images or small numbers.
- 6 for larger numbers of images.
- 3 for publications
- 3 for commercial use

Pat Pia - Reprint of history of Union Baptist Church
Lisa Saunders and Kent & Meredith Fuller - Book for Arcadia
Sherman Butler - History of Grover Insurance

We also participated in Groton History Fair at Groton Public Library and we made a donation to the Mystic & Noank Library's Silent Auction.

There were two major changes to our collection during the year.

Extensive documentation for each action is on file.

1. We transferred ownership of the majority of our book collection housed at the MNL to the Library.
2. We requested and received removal of an existing listing of our alleged newspaper holdings previously shown on the Library of Congress website. This listing was demonstrated to be out of date and inaccurate.
A dozen history book buffs gathered on March first at the inaugural meeting for the History Book Club co-sponsored by the Mystic & Noank Library and the Mystic River Historical Society. The club will meet monthly at 7pm on the 2nd Tuesday at the Mystic and Noank Library.

- The next meeting will be April 12 in the Activities Room through the children’s library
- The book will be: *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community and War*, paperback by Nathaniel Philbrick
- Everyone should propose books, and whoever proposes the book should lead the discussion.
- It would be preferable for the discussion leader to pass around questions, relevant information about the author and other news about the book prior to the meeting
- Possible suggestions for the future:
  - Isabel Wilkerson: *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*

Thanks to: Manju Soni for the meeting notes above, and to librarian Marilyn Barr for co-hosting the session with Richard Semeraro, who is coordinating on behalf of MRHS. He can be reached at rasemeraro04@gmail.com

**Now & Then on Mason’s Island... -- John Parry**

*Top: Photo from John Parry, submitted with the note: “In the last issue of the Porterville Press, page 4 had an article from Ed Pryor talking about the summer of 1949, including the photo (above.) The photo was taken from the end of Money Point, and I’ve attached a photo taken about an hour ago from about the same spot where I think the photo in the article was taken.” February 17, 2016*

*Bottom: The vintage image from Mystic Seaport on Connecticut History Illustrated was described as follows: “View of a small rocky island just off Mason’s Island. What appears to be a wooden walkway spans the water between Mason’s Island and the small island. Another small structure is visible just off the small island to the left. Rocks, trees and brush can be seen along the Mason’s Island shore in the foreground. Fisher’s Island (New York) and Noank are visible in the left and right background.” 1920 - 1940.*
Membership Updates

We are getting a good and earlier response from our 2016 membership renewal letter. More than half have sent in their 2016 dues. Thank you for that and we hope others will renew as well. ~ Cindy Allyn, Membership

Renew, become a member or find out more about MRHS ~ contact us at: info@mystichistory.org or 860-536-4779.