2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, giving American women the right to vote. So it is fitting during March, which is women’s history month, that the Mystic River Historical Society should celebrate this milestone.

It took 72 years from the Seneca Falls meeting of 1848 to the passage of the 19th Amendment, with lots of roadblocks along the way. The early suffragettes, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony, didn’t live to see the victory. On Wednesday, March 25, the historical society will sponsor the lecture “Votes for Women – Celebrating 100 years of Women’s Suffrage” by Leslie Evans. The doors open at 7 p.m. for refreshments and conversation. Ms. Evans lecture will start at 7:30 p.m.

The talk will look at how women in Connecticut worked for – or against – the right to vote. This illustrated lecture will show the battle that was fought by American women in the effort to secure the right to cast their opinion at the ballot box. Protests, parades, and pink tea parties were some of the tactics that helped to move this effort forward, but not without setbacks along the way; the opposition engaged in powerful political lobbying and inflammatory propaganda. We will learn about the courageous women – and the men who helped them – as they fought to keep the suffrage struggle alive from generation to generation, culminating in the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

Leslie Evans is the director of the Avery-Copp House Museum in Groton. As a historian, her interest centers on the social history of our region, connecting the stories of immigration, domestic life, technology, and in this case, women’s suffrage, to the country at large and the world around us.
The sinking of the CATH-ERINE M MONAHAN doesn’t carry with it the excitement of a daring rescue during a hurricane or nor’easter. It wasn’t sunk by a torpedo or an underwater mine.

Yet the CATH-ERINE M MONAHAN and its cargo may tell as much about the history of the United States as any ship buried beneath the waters of the Graveyard of the Atlantic.

Leaving New York Harbor in August of 1910, the wooden four-masted schooner was bound for Knight’s Key, Florida with a cargo of Portland Cement. Sometime either on the night of August 23rd or perhaps during the day of the 24th, the MONAHAN dragged her bottom along Diamond Shoal and began to take on water.

Just south of Hatteras Inlet Captain J. Sheppard realized the ship could not be saved and he ordered his crew to abandon ship. Signaling the Durant Lifesaving Station at Hatteras that his crew was taking to lifeboats, there was little call for a heroic rescue.

However, Captain Sheppard was so impressed with the professionalism of the Durant Station personnel that he sent a letter to Sumner Kimball, the Superintendent of the Lifesaving Service calling attention to the skill and courtesy he and his crew received.

“I wish to inform you of the kind treatment I have had from the men of this station. We abandoned our vessel...in a sinking condition. Signaling us where to land, the lifesaving crew were right on hand to catch hold of our boat and run her up on the beach. In fact, we have had every attention from the keeper and crew of this station,” he wrote.

The MONAHAN was one of the last of a dying breed of ships. Launched just six years earlier in 1904 from Mystic, Connecticut, she was designed to sail the coastal waters of the Atlantic seaboard and had a number of voyages on her log. Although not as large or as fast as the steamships that were already dominating ocean commerce by the beginning of the 20th century, using wind power and only needing a crew of 10-12 sailors, she was very efficient.

It is, perhaps, ironic that its cargo of cement was probably destined for one of the most remarkable and innovative engineering feats of its day.

Today there isn’t much at Knight’s Key, Florida. A small Key, really more a part of Marathon Key than a separate island. But in 1910 it was the southern terminus of the Overseas Railroad Extension of the Florida East Coast Railway.

The Overseas Railroad was an ambitious undertaking of Henry Flagler, one of the founders of Standard Oil. Wholly funded by Flagler, his idea was that with the impending opening of the Panama Canal (1914) the deep water port of Key West would become a commercial and transportation hub for the Caribbean basin.

Flagler had already linked Miami with the rest of the country and had extended his Florida East Coast Railway to Homestead at the northern end of the Keys by 1904. One year later construction of the extension officially began and by 1908 his the rail line had reached Marathon.

Flagler’s Folly, as many called it, now faced its largest hurdle—50 plus miles of almost open sea to reach Key West.
Seeking Photos, Memorabilia on the 1960 Mystic Fire

By Marilyn Comrie

The Mystic River Historical Society will present a program in December to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the worst fire in Mystic’s history. The Dec. 12, 1960, fire destroyed two business blocks on both sides of East Main Street from the drawbridge to the flagpole, including nine stores, six businesses and the Strand movie theater, which was built on pilings in the Mystic River.

The fire was discovered just past midnight during a raging snowstorm and was very difficult to battle. The stores were all packed full of merchandise because it was the height of the Christmas shopping season, so the financial loss was significant.

The society is seeking any photos or memorabilia that members or residents may have from the fire and would be willing to share. The society would welcome donations of these items, but for people who don’t want to part with photos, the society can make copies at the archives building and return the originals.

Anyone with photos, film, or memorabilia who is willing to share with the society for this milestone anniversary of an event that changed the landscape of downtown Mystic may contact the historical society at info@mystichistory.org or call Dorrie Hanna at the archives building at (860) 536-4779. Thank you to everyone who has already contributed!

Deadline for submissions is April 1.

Because Flagler financed the entire project himself, the exact amount that was spent is unknown. Most estimates put the figure at $50 million, about $1.3 billion in modern dollars.

The extension lasted until the Great Labor Day Hurricane of 1935 which wiped out a number of bridges. Already struggling because it was the height of the Great Depression, the rail line was never rebuilt. However, many of the bridges later became the first roads to Key West before the modern Overseas Highway was finished in the 1980s.

In 1912, the last stretch of the rail line was completed and Key West was connected by rail with the rest of the country. Many considered the Overseas Extension one of the Eight Wonders of the World of its time.

Although there is no record saying specifically that the cargo the MONAHAN was carrying was destined for the project, it’s hard to imagine any other possible use for a shipload of cement at the southern tip of the railroad network at that time.

Resting in 100’ of water, the MONAHAN can be reached by experienced divers. According to reports, there is nothing left of the oak frame of the ship, but the hardened bags of Portland Cement give the shape of the ship and mark its final resting place.

MRHS2005.054.0058
Gift of James Burbank

MRHS2020.005, Gift of Marianne Holly

Editor’s Note:
The Editor apologizes for an inaccuracy in the caption of the photograph of sledders on Baptist Hill in the previous issue. While the photograph is a part of the Jesse Stinson Collection, the photograph was taken by Everett A. Scholfield.
November 2019 Meeting Minutes - - -

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, November 18, 2019. Attendees were: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, Marilyn Comrie, Cara Lopilato, Stephen Menno, John Parry, Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild, and Richard Semeraro.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by President Menno.

President (S. Menno): Cara Lopilato was welcomed as a new Board member. Steve attended a publicity seminar at the New London Public Library to help get your news in the paper, specifically the Mystic River Historical Society. Steve will also add the names of the board and officers to the About Us page. Steve sent a thank you letter to the Mystic and Stonington Historical Society.

Recording Secretary (L. Allyn): A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s report.

Treasurer (L. Allyn): As of October 31 cash in the bank was $4,280.31. This includes $5,000 transferred October 22 from Vanguard Money Market which will be subtracted from Other Income when the annual Vanguard income is booked at the end of the year. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s report.

Corresponding Secretary (L. Holland): No report.

Curatorial (L. Allyn): No report. Steve reported that he is getting different results with Virtual Exhibit depending upon which button is selected.

Finance (L. Allyn): With the addition of $500 for plaques on historical buildings on Cottrell Street a motion to accept the proposed 2020 Budget was made, seconded and passed.

Information Technology (S. Menno for S. Thorp): No report.

Membership (C. Allyn): Cara Lopilato is a new member. Lou reported that he is working with Arts-People, a non-profit organization, to use their on-line software to replace the current method of using outdated Microsoft Access and Excel for handling membership records and dues. The software also provides on-line registration and payments for our events.

Mystic Noank Library (R. Semeraro): The next History Book Club meeting December 10 will discuss The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain.

Newsletter (S. Menno): The second issue has been published. Copy for the next issue is due December 20.

Programs (M. Austin): Our upcoming meetings and the associated speakers are as follows: December 4, 2019: Damien Cregeau, "Great 18th Century Houses and Towns of Connecticut" • February 26, 2020: Lou Allyn, "The Phoenix of Mystic - The Central Hall Block" • March 25, 2020: Leslie Evans, "Votes for Women - Celebrating 100 Years of Women's Suffrage" • April 29, 2020: Gail MacDonald, "Hidden History of Mystic and Stonington" This may be a joint meeting with the Stonington Historical Society. • May 27, 2020: Steve Slosberg, "Stonington Cemetery's Poet's Corner: A Stroll Along This Storied Lane"

Social Media (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): Facebook and Instagram postings have been made for the next membership meeting.

Lower Mystic Cemetery (L. Allyn): A broken lower bar on the cemetery gate was repaired by Jack Garbarino at his house. Rufus Allyn and Roy Bohlander helped with removal and reinstallation of the gate.

Helen Clarke Walking Tour (M. Comrie): The October 5th tour was quite successful; three groups were led by Marilyn Comrie, John Parry and Margaret Austin.

Mystic River Park (M. Comrie): The Park Commissioners have established a committee to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Park in 2020.

Next Meeting – January 13, 2020 7:00 pm Mystic Noank Library
The Meeting was adjourned at 8:14 pm
Respectfully submitted, Lou Allyn

January 2020 Meeting Minutes - - -

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, January 13, 2020. Attendees were: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, Marilyn Comrie, Lois Glazier, Cara Lopilato, Stephen Menno, John Parry, Richard Semeraro, and Stephanie Thorp.

Mystic: Then and Now
Baptist Hill, 1923—2020

Baptist Hill under construction, 1923. MRHS1990.001.0890, Stinson Collection

Read more on the 1923-1924 expansion of Route 1 at Baptist Hill here: http://www.mystichistory.org/Newsletter/MRHSPPMarch2012.pdf

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Respectfully submitted, Lou Allyn
January Minutes (continued) - - -
The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm by President Menno.

President (S. Menno): A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the minutes of the November 18, 2019 meeting. • Steve plans to start soliciting for speakers for the Virgil Huntley lecture this spring and have the lecture program begin sometime during our 2020-2021 season. • There will be an open house at Portersville Academy June 13. The event will be similar to last year, but different exhibit. • Late August, the president of the Mystic Chamber of Commerce contacted Dorrie Hanna for information on the bascule bridge for the upcoming anniversary. Stephen mentioned to them that MRHS would be interested in participating in a discussion about the bascule bridge. No plan has officially been put into place. Stephen also expressed interest in writing an article for the newsletter on the topic.

Treasurer (L. Allyn)
Lou continues to look into the use of a new software system through a non-profit organization called ‘Arts-People.’ This would be to replace the current Microsoft Access and Excel currently used to track membership records and dues. The software also has the ability to make event ticket purchases easier.

Finance (L. Allyn)
Reviewed Profit & Loss / Budget & Actuals outline of the year 2019. Increase in sales of the book ‘The Diary of Helen May Clarke’ due to the success of the walking tours. A motion was made, second, and passed to accept the Treasurer’s report.

Corresponding Secretary (C. Allyn for Liz Holland): No report.

Curatorial (L. Allyn for Dorrie Hanna): No Report.

Information Technology (S. Thorp)
The system Administrator performed data backups to offsite storage on November 22 and December 27 on the two desktop computers (MRHS 1 and MRHS2), as well as security and system updates on all four of the Society computers. All computers were tested for proper network connection and access to the printers. The Past Perfect application was updated on all computers to version V5.0F4 in November backup. • In addition to the usual backups, the System Administrator removed the hard drives from the old desktop computers and disposed of the balance of that equipment at the Groton electronics recycling facility in December. (Note: The old laptop computer, re-named MRHS4, is kept up to date and planned for use to host presentation at the monthly meetings.) • All equipment is operating properly and in good condition at this time.

Membership (C. Allyn)
270 renewal letters were sent out January 5. Within one week, we received about 70 membership renewals.

Mystic Noank Library History Book Club (R. Semeraro): The next History Book Club meeting January 14 to discuss the first half of 'The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism’ by Edward E. Baptist.

Newsletter (S. Menno): Betsy came out with latest issue of Portersville Press. Deadline for the next issue will be February 21.

Programs (M. Austin): The attendance of the last program was about 50 people. The next program will be February 26 “The Phoenix of Mystic - The Central Hall Block” by Lou Allyn. It is noted by Marilyn Comrie that Stonington Historical Society has agreed to sponsor and advertise Gail MacDonald’s talk April 29.

Lower Mystic Cemetery (L. Allyn): No report.

Mystic River Park 25th Anniversary (M. Comrie). No report. There will be a meeting next month regarding the 25th anniversary that is in October. We will be partnering with the Mystic Park Association to place plaques in the park.


New Business: The annual meeting is coming up in May. A few board members are coming to the end of their terms. New board members will be needed, although extending the terms of current ones is also an option.

Next Meeting - February 10, 2020 7:00 pm Mystic-Noank Library
The Meeting was adjourned at 7:57 pm
Respectfully submitted, Cara Lopilato

February 2020 Meeting - - -

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.

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 - Stephen Menno • Vice President - Margaret Austin • Treasurer - Lou Allyn • Corresponding Secretary - Nancy Potter • Recording Secretary - Cara Lopilato

The Newsletter of the Mystic River Historical Society is published five times annually: September-October, November-December, January-February, March-April and May-June

Past issues of the newsletter are available for viewing at www.mystichistory.org

P.O. Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355
Events Calendar

7pm Tuesday, March 10th
History Book Club—MRHS & MNL Partnership
Always Open to New Readers!

7pm Wednesday, March 25th, 2020
"Votes for Women—Celebrating 100 Years of Women’s Suffrage,” Presented by Leslie Evans
7:00 refreshments & socializing, 7:30 program
Mystic Congregational Church Hall,
Broadway & E. Main, Mystic

7pm Wednesday, April 29, 2020
"Hidden History of Mystic and Stonington,” Presented by Gail MacDonald
7:00 refreshments & socializing, 7:30 program
Mystic Congregational Church Hall,
Broadway & E. Main, Mystic

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 regret the passing of three members—William Glazier, Charles Glaza and Jean Rowley.
We welcome new member, Lavina Kepple, and extend a special thank you to all of the Newsletter Patrons.
-Cindy Allyn  Membership

Newsletter/Print Patrons

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