Above: The Craftsman style mansion built by Dr. Thomas Burnham and Alys Van Gilder Enders who also designed the home which features extensive stone & imported Italian tile work. The estate was expanded to eventually include a cow barn, horse barn, hen house, tea house, and art studio. Now known as Enders, the island has also been referred to as Barker’s, Dodge and Keeland’s Island. Interestingly, the island itself was not mentioned in surveys made as late as 1847, while other surveys appear to show that Enders Island was once part of adjoining Mason’s Island – to which it is connected by a causeway today.

Right: A sample of tile from the mansion, a portrait of Alys Van Gilder Enders, and a January 20, 1954 front page article from the Biddeford Daily Journal (Maine) indicates the reach and interest of Ms. Enders’ gift of the property as a novitiate for the Society of St. Edmund & priests.

Please join us on Wednesday, May 23rd for a Virtual Historical Tour of Enders Island presented by Lou Allyn with special guest Father Thomas F.X. Hoar, S.S.E. The topics will include:
- Various owners of the island through the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent DePaul
- The Enders era when Dr. Thomas Burnham and Alys Van Gilder Enders built a Gentleman’s Farm and House of Tiles, with magnificent gardens, in the 1920’s.
- The Society of St. Edmund and their Novitiate & the transition to St. Edmund’s Retreat after Vatican II

Lou Allyn was named after his great grandfather Louis Packer Allyn of Mystic, where the younger Lou also grew up attending Mystic Academy & local schools before going on to graduate with a BChE from Yale and an MBA from Harvard.

After a work life in Massachusetts, Allyn retired back to Masons Island in 1999. He soon joined the Mystic River Historical Society & Board of Directors, becoming a Life Member, Treasurer & President. He is currently serving a second term as MRHS President, as well as Treasurer for the Mason’s Island Yacht Club, Lower Mystic Cemetery Association, and M/N/S Auxiliary of the Child & Family Agency of SE Connecticut, as well as Vice Chair of the Mystic Harbor Management Commission.

Lou Allyn lives on Masons Island with his wife, Cynthia Abell. They have a son, a daughter, and two granddaughters. His favorite topic of local history is the Great New England Hurricane of 1938.

Father Thomas F. X. Hoar, S.S.E has a BA from St. Michael’s College, Seminary Master of Divinity from Univ. of St. Michaels College at University of Toronto, MA from Fordham, and Ph.D. from Michigan State as well as an MBA and Ph.D from Salve Regina where he explored the advent of religious broadcasting in radio and television as a tool of evangelization and social communication.

He served as Vice President of Student Affairs at Christian Brothers University and was Director of Campus Ministry at St. Michael’s College. Rev. Hoar has been a Roman Catholic Priest with the Society of St. Edmund since 1971, and President of the St. Edmund’s Retreat since 1993. He also serves as Catholic Contract Chaplain for the US Naval Submarine Base New London.

Organized by the Downtown Mystic Merchants Association
--- See Inside for More ---
Mystic River Day will be a celebration of the local river community including children’s activities and games on the Mystic River Park green, learning about Mystic River history, local non-profits, animal encounters, discovering volunteer opportunities and more. There will be a Sharkfest Swim, Kayak and SUP races down the Mystic River, as well as the chance to meet the Mystic mermaid in the park (photo op!) Participating Downtown shops, restaurants, and bars will offer specials, discounts and extended happy hours.

The MRHS has been asked to participate and we will have a table in the Park with information and a picture display, weather permitting. If we could please request a few volunteers to spend a couple of hours sitting in the park and promoting MRHS that would be wonderful! Please email info@mystichistory.org if you would like to help.

Interestingly enough, this will not be the first time Mystic has seen such an event. “Mystic Day” was held on August 26, 1949 as part of a month long celebration of the Stonington Tri-centennial. The Mystic River Day will be July 8th, 2018 from 9 - 230p.

History of Mason’s Island Book Available Online ~ Lou Allyn

A rare copy of James H. Allyn’s History of Masons Island written in 1940 has come to light and is now available on the Mystic River Historical Society’s website mystichistory.org in the Digital Publications section.

This booklet include new information that is not in Major John Mason’s GREAT ISLAND as well as a map of Masons Island with houses and their owners identified by number. One of the sources listed is Miss Elizabeth Colegrove who cared for her uncles John and Andrew Mason before they died. She is buried with them just in the field on the right at the bottom of Cormorant Road.

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 - Margaret Austin • Treasurer - Barry Thorp • Corresponding & Recording Secretary - Elizabeth Holland

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

Copy deadline is the 3rd Friday of the month prior to issue publication. Please submit to jenniferspryor@gmail.com

Online? Handy Tip! Click blue text to link directly to more information online.

Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355
In my youth, we rode the Norwich trolley frequently to New London, a rollicking trip as we swung around the corners, metal wheels squeaking and grating. During most of the year we sat comfortably in double seats that were upholstered in a straw-like fabric, located on either side of the middle aisle. Everyone rushed to get a window seat.

In the summer, when it was warm enough, we rode in open trolleys on hard wooden benches which stretched all the way across the cars. These were not as comfortable, but it was great fun in the open air. If it chanced to rain, the conductor rolled down long canvas curtains to keep us from getting drenched.

We lived across from Smith Cove on Old Norwich Road, so to take the trolley we walked past Mr. Nelson’s store on up the hill to the waiting room at the end of Best View Road, which doubled as Mr. Nelson’s store. The trolley swayed around the corner from Uncasville, stopping to pick us up. We dropped tokens in the little box beside the motorman and heard them clink. You got three tokens for a quarter and it cost one token to go from Quaker Hill to New London. To go all the way from New London to Norwich, it cost four.

We found seats hurriedly, before the trolley lurched around the next bend. It was well to be seated when that happened. We smelled the smell of hot metal. It seemed that the trolley pantied as it waited. Soon we were passing the Best View waiting room, a small wooden structure that stood right in front of Aunt May Gracey’s house. Next we crossed the precarious trolley trestle bridge which spanned the cove at Richards Grove where the big kids liked to swim.

We zoomed up the hill to Thames View, like Best View a real estate sub-division that appeared when the trolley line opened land for development. New houses stood on the heights. The trolley stopped along the way to pick up passengers wherever poles had white stripes painted on them, but soon we came to the switch in front of Caleb Champion’s house. There we had to wait to pass the trolley going in the opposite direction. Sometimes it would be waiting for us, but usually we pulled onto the double track and waited till the track was clear. On the way again we passed Benham Avenue and the old farmhouse where Aunt Mandy Benham lived with her brothers Lloyd and Tryon. It was not much farther to Connecticut College and the beginning of the concrete road to New London. In those days there was no vehicle road along the trolley line, which went straight across open country from Mr. Nelson’s store to Benham Avenue.

We whisked past wooden college buildings and the president’s house and past the stately granite buildings on the (hill.)

Soon we were passing the Coast Guard Academy and the Lyman Allyn Museum on Mohegan Avenue. Then we rounded a sharp corner onto Williams Street hill. We went down that hill at top speed, breezing past the power station at the bottom on the right and the horse trough at Hodges Square on the left (until) we came to Bullard’s Corner.

On school days students from Chapman Tech and WMI got off the trolley there and walked up the hill to their schools, but we stayed on the trolley and continued down Main Street to go downtown. Soon we passed the Olde Towne Mill at the left, cozy and shady in its little grotto. Just a bit farther was the small brown house where Rosie lived, with a sign in front reading “Home Hand Laundry.” Rosie did Aunt May’s washing. She returned the clothes every Sunday, freshly ironed and sweet-smelling in a large wooden basket with L.E. Gracey printed on the handle.

Soon on the right was the Ford agency and the steep hill where the Bulkeley boys got off the trolley to walk up to their school. All this part of the city was decimated by the first wave of urban renewal, but in those days we passed some of the oldest buildings in New London. On the right were statuesque mansions that had belonged to leading citizens like Sebastian Lawrence. One of them was now the B.P. Learned Mission where Mr. Richard Mansfield did so much good work. On the left were railroad tracks and what remained of the old cove where whaling vessels once landed, now all silted in. And I remember a large multi-storied tenement building where my mother told me immigrants lived.

Then we were in the business part of town — passing the impressive Savings Bank of New London and the no-nonsense granite front of The Day. One more sharp corner brought us onto the Parade at State Street, where the trolley stopped to discharge passengers in front of the Crown Theater. Across the street we could see our objectives — Woolworth’s Five and Ten and Starr Brothers Pharmacy which served great ice cream sundaes. Our trolley trip was over. We were in the big city and ready for fun.
March 2018 Meeting Minutes ---


President (L. Allyn): The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm. A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the February meeting.

Secretary (E. Holland): 16 thank you letters were sent.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): This report covers details of the treasurer’s 25 February to 19 March 2018 activities. At this time all deposits have been made in the Chelsea account and all bills are paid current. The treasurer’s account books are reconciled with the Chelsea Groton Bank statements. Expenses for this period are non-discretionary commitments that include payments for utilities, snow removal and our curatorial staff. There were no unusual expenses during this period. • Deposits exceeded expenses and included receipt of 2018 member annual dues, member donations, Newsletter Patron income, monthly meeting donations and sales of items. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s Report

Curatorial (D. Hanna): The March meeting was cancelled and the next meeting will be April 9.

History Book Club (R. Semeraro) The meeting was snowed out last month but Catherine the Great: Portrait of a Woman by Robert K. Massie will be discussed at the next meeting

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The System Administrator performed computer updates and backups on 2 March 2018. Backup files were moved offsite for secure storage and the software was updated from Past Perfect5 to V5.0E9. • Application and security software were updated and are current at this time. All equipment is operating properly at this time as well. • Networked operation of each computer was checked and found to be in good condition. No problem with the printer connection to the Laser multi-function printer with the computers was encountered.

Programs (M. Austin): Roger Reed’s talk in February was very well received.
March 28, 2018: Richard Froh – Lost and Found: The Fire Truck that Came Back. The 1917 American LaFrance fire engine. The church gave permission to display the fire truck in their parking lot at 6:30 prior to the talk.
April 25, 2018: Kate Dianescu · Denizens: A Narrative of Captain George Denison and His New England Contemporaries
May 23, 2018: Lou Allyn – History of Enders Island

Looking forward to 2018-2019, we have October and December programs booked already with several other potential speakers on the horizon.

As we look into 2020, we may consider themes of Plymouth Rock, The Mayflower, etc to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Plymouth Colony.

Publicity & Social Media (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): An analysis of our Facebook “membership” was performed and most people following us on Facebook are local, with a second cluster in NYC. The majority of those who follow us on Facebook is also female. The MRHS Facebook and Instagram accounts both continue to grow in popularity.

Finance, Membership: No report.

New Business: None.

Meeting adjourned at 754pm. Next meeting is April 16, 7pm, MNL.

Respectfully submitted,
Lou Allyn for Elizabeth Holland, Secretary

February 2018 Meeting Minutes ---

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met February 26, 2018. Attendees were: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, Liz Holland, Lois Glazier, Stephanie Thorp, Barry Thorp, Richard Semeraro, Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild, John Parry, Jennifer Pryor & Steve Menno.

President (L. Allyn): The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm. A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the January meeting. • Virgil Huntley left MRHS $10,000 and we will be deciding how to best put it to use. • The Mystic Chamber of Commerce has selected 5 prints that we will loan them to display in their office.

Secretary (E. Holland): 29 thank you notes sent since last meeting.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): This report covers details of the treasurer’s activities 21 January - 25 February 2018. All deposits have been made & all bills are paid current. The Treasurer’s account books are reconciled with the bank statements. Expenses for this period are mostly non-discretionary commitments including payments for utilities, snow removal, curatorial staff, postage, a new building sign and a dues payment. No unusual expenses for the period. • Deposits included receipt of 2018 member annual and member donations. The present balance in the Chelsea Groton checking account is positive. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s Report

Curatorial (D. Hanna): The Curatorial Committee met on February 12th. • MRHS is signed up for the display case at MNL for an exhibit in April in celebration of the 125th anniversary of the library. We have a new volunteer - she’s working on a Fish Family project. We have loaned the Chamber of Commerce five mounted prints for one year. We approved both sample permission forms for those using MRHS publications as well as loan agreement forms for those borrowing our materials. The committee will no longer meet monthly, so the March meeting was cancelled and the next meeting will be April 9.


Information Technology (S. Thorp): The System Administrator performed computer updates and backups on 2 February 2018. Backup files were moved offsite for secure storage. • Application and security software were updated and are current at this time. All equipment is operating properly at this time as well. • Networked operation of each computer was checked and found to be in good condition. No problem with the printer connection to the laser multi-function printer with the computers was encountered.

Program & Membership (M. Austin): The program committee had a meeting and is pleased with how the speakers have been going thus far this year.
February 28, 2018: Roger Reed · Captain Nathaniel Palmer
March 28, 2018: Richard Froh · Lost and Found: The fire truck that wouldn’t go away. The 1917 American LaFrance fire engine
April 25, 2018: Kate Dianescu · Denizens: A Narrative of Captain George Denison and His New England Contemporaries
May 23, 2018: Lou Allyn – History of Enders Island

Looking forward to 2018-2019, we have October & December programs booked already with several other potential speakers on the horizon.

Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): There were no new members in the last month and 2 members died. Members have been very generous with annual dues/donations.

Publicity & Social Media (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): We now have over 1600 Facebook followers and 581 followers on Instagram.

Finance (TBD): No report this month. New Business: None.

Meeting adjourned at 745pm. Next meeting is March 19, 7pm.
Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Holland, Secretary
Did you know that Mystic has two Historic Districts on the National Register of Historic Places?

In the March/April issue I wrote an article on the question “What is a “Truly Historic” Building? Jane Lassen Bobruff telephoned to share her thoughts on the topic. She reminded me that our Portersville Academy is on the National Register of Historic Places. This prompted me to find out more about what this means.

I found the NRHP website at www.nps.gov/nr/ It says that “The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation’s historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service’s National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America’s historic and archeological resources.” You can read the fundamentals of the program at nps.gov/nr/national_register_fundamentals.htm, one of which is “Encouraging preservation of historic resources by documenting a property’s historic significance.”

A search on their database at npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/ for Connecticut resulted in 1,682 hits; you can spend an enjoyable time there browsing through the old photographs and descriptions. When you narrow the search to Mystic there are two historic districts. The Mystic River Historic District on the west side of the river, which was entered on August 24, 1979 and the Mystic Bridge Historic District, entered on August 31, 1979. You will find Portersville Academy at 74 High Street in the Mystic River District described as “1839. Portersville Academy. 2 1/2 story, Greek Revival, clapboard building. Twin front doors have simple pilasters and entablature. There is a large oval window in the flush boarding pediment. Moved from its location near the Baptist Church to this site in 1880. Used as Fifth District Schoolhouse until World War I; then as voting place and community hall.”

Just to make things a little more confusing there is also a Mystic River Historic District Commission - see lh dct.org/district/mystic-historic-district “The boundaries of the Mystic River National Register district have been drawn so as to be less jagged than the local Historic District’s and so as to include certain contemporary buildings that were omitted from the local district. [NR] The list of the properties enlisted on the district has been obtained from the National Register Nomination and needs to be verified by the district authorities.” An additional Disclaimer essentially says the same thing “The list of the designated properties has been adopted from the National Register Nomination. Since the boundaries of the local historic district and the National Register historic district are not coterminal, the list of the property needs to be verified by the Groton Town Clerk’s Office or the Historic District Commission.” Portersville Academy can be found among the complete listing of nominated addresses entered in August of 1979 at https://np gallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/437e41db-1a08-4be2-87ff-b8bbfbbd8390.

Please note that the Mystic River Historical Society is entirely separate from, and has nothing to do with the Town of Groton Historic Commission Zoning rules and regulations.

There is also a Connecticut State Register of Historic Places according to cultureandtourism.org. “All State Register files are currently held at the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in Hartford. The SHPO staff is in the process of compiling a database of all State Register properties, but currently there is no database or list available.”
Events Calendar

7pm Tuesday, May 8th, 2018
History Book Club - MRHS & MNL Partnership
Path Between the Seas, by David McCullough Chapters 1 - 10

7pm Wednesday, May 23rd, 2018
History of Enders Island with Lou Allyn
7pm refreshments & socializing, 7:30p program
Mystic Congregational Church Hall, Broadway & E. Main, Mystic
Local fire history & the truck that keeps coming back.

12pm Sunday, August 12th, 2018
Local History Round Table
at the Groton Public Library Streeter History Room

Renew or become a Member of MRHS for updates about our events.
Contact us at: info@mystichistory.org or 860-536-4779.

Membership Updates

We regret the passing of two of our members--Ed Sproul and Ingela Gram.
And we welcome one new member, Fred Allard.

-- Cindy Allyn, Membership

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