The culmination of the industrial age and of all the technological wonders that had been invented in the years leading up to and during the turn of the twentieth century were fully unleashed on the battlefield during the First World War. This program will present the contribution of one of these, the submarine, to the Great War. Focusing primarily on the activities of United States submarines, while referencing some of the more significant feats performed by the German U-boats in order to create a larger context. Because of the lateness of America’s involvement in the war the program will focus more on the types of submarines in use, the technical advancements that can be demonstrated by these types, their operational uses during the war, as well as what life aboard submarines was like at that time.

Please join us at the Mystic Congregational Church Hall, 7pm on May 24th for Eury Cantillo’s WWI submarine presentation.
Exploring the MRHS Website

mystichistory.org - the website for the Mystic River Historical Society (MRHS) - is fairly extensive, with many areas to explore. Currently, there are twenty broad categories of information from which to choose.

There are two ways to browse the website. The first is to select from those twenty categories noted above. They appear on the left side of the screen. The second is to use the search button which is on the right side of the home page. Using the search feature will result in a listing of any MRHS website pages related to a particular search, which you can then click on to view. You may not find exactly what you were looking for, but odds are that your search will take you to related areas that you’ll find informative and fascinating. For example, when I searched my address, while nothing specific was found, I was treated to a page of numerous old photographs of nearby homes.

Every month MRHS president Lou Allyn receives data on the website from Google Analytics. The information includes the day, date, time, and specific query made by users of the search feature of the website. We’ve analyzed the information from January 1, 2014 through March 31, 2017 and thought we’d share some of the results.

During that time period, there were almost a thousand queries (980, to be exact). The number of queries per year have been about the same over the years, around 300. While too soon to tell, the number of queries so far in 2017 indicate potentially 400 queries for this year.

Based on the queries seen, four groups were created: people, places, addresses, and events. (There was, of course, a fifth group of miscellaneous items that challenged categorization.) Most of the queries fell into the people category, being 422 of the 980, or 43%. Queries included the names of specific individuals or family names. It would be a stretch to say who the most popular names were, since most inquiries of a particular name appear to be from the same user (based on many of the same inquiries being on the same day and within minutes of each other).

The second most popular category was places, with 230 of the 980 total queries, or 23%. There were queries for both specific places (such as Elm Grove Cemetery, Mystic Academy, Rossie Velvet Mill, and the Emporium) and more general places (such as Greenmanville, Mason’s Island, the Mystic River & West Mystic).

Coming in third was addresses. This category included both specific street addresses or simply street names. Of the 114 queries (12% of the total queries), there were 43 searches for a particular address and 70 for street names.

The final category was that of events, and those queries included such items as the 1894 peace convention, the 1938 hurricane, 1960 mystic fires, and the Pequot War. There were 28 event queries, about 3% of the total.

Those four categories still leave almost 20% of the remaining queries as a variety of miscellaneous items. Clearly, though, most users who search the MRHS website seem to be looking primarily for people, whether historical figures or relatives.

Take a look - - We’d be curious to know your interests and where we should perhaps try to provide more information.
2016 was another busy year at the Downes Building. I’m still gathering information for a more complete Annual Report, but the most impressive number so far is -- Number of Queries Received? Over 120! They came via on-site visit, phone, snail mail, email, the Mystic & Noank Library, and even Facebook. I’d say the word is out that MRHS is a great source of information about our local history. Sadly we could not find answers to every one of those questions, but we did pretty well. Our webpage states, “call and ask for Dorrie”, but I wouldn’t be able to help people if Betsy and Louisa weren’t on the job working to make our information increasingly accessible. Thanks to them! We’re a great team!


Local History Books Available at MNL

The local history books are now more available for you to browse and take out. A major move has been made with the local history CIRCULATING and the local history REFERENCE books. Now all the CIRCULATING collection is shelved in the first wood and glass cabinets, (those facing the Fireplace) and the doors are open for your perusal. The REFERENCE books are in the rear area and those cabinets will still be locked and you will need to ask a staff member to help you. Take a “browse”...there are many interesting titles related to local and Connecticut history.
At April's meeting, we had a good & lively discussion on "The Guns of August." (General agreement: why do we keep repeating history and making these horrendous wars?!) We're also pleased to announce two new members: David Francis and Bill Metzger. Welcome aboard!

We will be doing the first half of "The Great Bridge," by David McCullough, Chapters 1 - 12, for the May 9th meeting, and will finish the book at the June 13 meeting, ou, and we hope you can come to the May 9th meeting. "The Great Bridge" is a fascinating read on the building of the Brooklyn Bridge, an amazing achievement and a look at the colorful slice of history at that time in NYC. There are several copies available right now at the Reception Desk; please pick up your copy soon.

We'll be completing the voting for the summer & fall reading selections by the end of April, so Marilyn can make sure the books are available at the library. We hope everyone makes their interests count by voting! Also, we welcome suggestions of other books to put on the list when we start another vote in the fall.

The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914 - David McCullough (1977) Amazon 4.5 out of 5 stars, 1,764 reviews

The Path Between the Seas tells the story of the men and women who fought against all odds to fulfill the 400-year-old dream of constructing an aquatic passage between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It is a compelling story of the social climate of the time and of the heroes & rascals who had a hand in either constructing or exploiting the surpassing enterprise.

No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II - Doris Kearns Goodwin (1994) Amazon 4.7 out of 5 stars, 973 reviews

A compelling chronological account of the country’s transformation was the partnership of Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt. Using diaries, interviews, and White House records of the president’s and first lady’s comings and goings, Goodwin paints a detailed, intimate portrait not only of the Oval Office but of the extraordinary family dynamics but of the Roosevelts themselves and their extraordinary constellation of friends, advisers, and family, many of whom lived with them in the White House. Bringing to bear history and biography as well as her great talent for capturing larger-than-life characters, Goodwin relates the unique story of how Franklin and Eleanor, in their small circle of intimates, led the nation to military victory abroad against seemingly insurmountable odds and, with Eleanor’s essential help, forever changed the fabric of American society.

Catherine the Great - by Robert K. Massie (2011) Amazon 4.5 out of 5 stars, 1,237 reviews

Once upon a time, there was an intelligent German princess named Sophia. In 1744, at the age of 14, she was taken by her ambitious mother--removed from her family--and sent to a foreign land with a single goal: marry a prince and bear him an heir. Once in Russia, she changed her name, learned the language, and went on to become the world’s richest woman. Catherine the Great, as well as her great talent for capturing larger-than-life characters, Goodwin relates the unique story of how Franklin and Eleanor, in their small circle of intimates, led the nation to military victory abroad against seemingly insurmountable odds and, with Eleanor’s essential help, forever changed the fabric of American society.

Blood at the Root: A Racial Cleansing in America - by Patrick Phillips (2016) Amazon 3.7 out of 5 stars, 75 customer reviews

A gripping tale of racial cleansing in Forsyth County, Georgia and referring to the deep roots of racial violence in America, Forsyth County at the turn of the twentieth century was home to a large African American community that included ministers, teachers, farmers, field hands, tradesmen, servants, and craftsmen. Many black residents were poor sharecroppers, but others, like the Johnson family, were well-to-do, owning land and with a single goal: marry a prince and bear him an heir. In this gripping tale of racial cleansing in Forsyth County, Georgia and referring to the deep roots of racial violence in America, Forsyth County at the turn of the twentieth century was home to a large African American community that included ministers, teachers, farmers, field hands, tradesmen, servants, and craftsmen. Many black residents were poor sharecroppers, but others, like the Johnson family, were well-to-do, owning land and with a single goal: marry a prince and bear him an heir.

For Readers Based in the Middle East and Western Europe, the Middle East has changed since he arrived in the region as a young reporter back in 1996. The result is a fast-paced overview, this book is a great explainer. Mr. Engel, 42, gives us sharp, unnerving snapshots of events he witnessed and a visceral sense of the daily rhythms of life in Baghdad as the war turned increasingly bloody chaotic. What makes Mr. Engel’s tactical eyewitness accounts particularly valuable is that they are fuel-injected with his knowledge of the history and politics of the Middle East, the result is a fast-paced overview, this book is a great explainer.}

The Man Who Loved China: The Fantastic Story of the Eccentric Scientist Who Unlocked the Mysteries of the Middle Kingdom - by Simon Winchester (2008) Amazon 4.3 out of 5 stars, 201 reviews

In sumptuous detail, Simon Winchester, bestselling author of The Professor and
the Madman, brings to life the extraordinary story of Joseph Needham—the brilliant Cambridge scientist, freethinking intellectual, and practicing medicine who unlocked the most closely held secrets of China, once the world’s most technologically advanced country.

Custer’s Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America by T.J. Stiles (2013)
Amazon 4.4 out of 5 stars, 5,126 reviews
Paints a portrait of Custer both deeply personal and sweeping in scope, proving how much of Custer’s legacy has been ignored. He demolishes Custer’s historical caricature, reviving a man yet intact with both intellectual and physical daring, and showing up on Benjamin Franklin’s doorstep in the middle of the American Revolution—hence his name. Stiles reveals a capable yet insecure man, intellectual and military (court-martialed twice in six years) and the frontier, he also played a central role as both a wide-ranging participant and polarizing public figure in his own time. His leadership of the army during the 1860s, as the European powers were carving out their empires, had been uncovered at the last hour. The foiled leadership. The aborted plot renewed anti-Catholic sentiment. A tragedy that turned on the murder of a Scottish king, Macbeth. He ended this astonishing year with a third masterpiece not steeped in current events and concerns: Antony and Cleopatra.

Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920’s by Otto Friedrich (1972)
Amazon 4.4 out of 5 stars, 4,125 reviews
The time from Germany’s defeat in World War I to just before Hitler’s accession is recaptured in an eerie but terrifyingly relatable panorama. A time that beguiled and undeniably exciting story of the sickness which overcame Germany in the ’20s. No place in the world was so creative & defunct as Berlin’s. Friedrich has captured here, “—Harrison Salisbury “A fascinating portrait of a city where art and riot flourished side by side and incredibility was the normal state of things.”

City of Dreams: The 400-Year Epic History of Immigrant New York by Tyler Anbinder (2016)
Amazon 4.6 out of 5 stars, 51 customer reviews
Inspirational and defining account of New York’s both famous and forgotten immigrants: the young man from the Caribbean who relocated to New York and became a Founding Father; an Italian immigrant who toiled for years at railroad track maintenance before realizing his dream of becoming a nationally renowned poet; Russian-born Emma Goldman, who condemned the murder of American industrialists as a moral necessity; and others united by their hatred of slavery—came together in a London printing shop and began the world’s first grass-roots movement, battling for the rights of people on another continent.

Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire’s Slaves by Adam Hochschild (2006)
Amazon 4.4 out of 5 stars, 71 customer reviews
The taut, gripping account of one of the most brilliantly organized social justice campaigns in history—the fight to free the slaves of the British Empire. In this action-packed, fast-paced tale of the law, a clergyman, and others united by their hatred of slavery—came together in a London printing shop and began the world’s first grass-roots movement, battling for the rights of people on another continent.

Thunderstruck by Eric Larson (2006)
Amazon 4.4 out of 5 stars, 1,025 customer reviews
The interwoven stories of two men—Haward Crippen, a very unlikely murderer, and Guglielmo Marconi, the obsessive creator of a seemingly supernatural means of communication, each with their stories of miscalculation, tricksters, environmental arrogance and hubris, political chicanery, and the ambiguous ways. Crippen tells a story of endurance and heroism against the backdrop of the Great Depression.

Nothin’ Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War by Viet Thanh Nguyen
Amazon 3.7 out of 5 stars, 30 customer reviews
All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in the memory. The study of why the war against her rebellious colonial subjects, placing America’s survival in the hands of George Washington.

Amazon 4.4 out of 5 stars, 42 customer reviews
A fast-paced account of the War of 1812. Ostensibly a fight over the impressment of American sailors by the British, the war was really about who controlled the middle of North America. As the subtitle suggests, Langguth argues that only with America’s second victory over England did the nation finally full-firm its sovereignty over the vast western territories.
March 2017 Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, March 20, 2017. Attendees included: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, John Parry, Liz Holland, Richard Semeraro, Lois Glazier, Stephanie Thorp, Barry Thorp, Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild, and Steve Menno. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by President L. Allyn. A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the February meeting.

President (L. Allyn): The Day is to publish an article on March 21 about the special activities MRHS is featuring this year to commemorate the 100th anniversary of WWI.

Corresponding Secretary (E. Holland): Two thank you letters were sent since the last meeting.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): For 26 February through 20 March 2017, all deposits have been made in the bank and all bills 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, bulk mail account deposit, building security contractor and to our curatorial staff. No unusual expenses for the period. Deposits for this period exceeded expenses. Deposits included payments of member 2016 dues, unrestricted donations and Patron donations resulting from the January mailing. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s Report.

Curatorial (D. Hanna): The committee will meet on March 27. The Downes Building was closed on March 14 due to weather.

History Book Club (R. Semeraro): There were no participants in the book club’s last meeting because the club was snowed out. Guns of August will be reviewed in its entirety in April. The Great Bridge by David McCullough will be discussed in May and June. Richard is exploring the possibility of having a shelf at MNL that is dedicated solely to local CT history and he will speak to the library about that.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): On Friday 3 March 2017, computer updates and backups were performed. All equipment appears to be in good condition and functioning as designed. Past Perfect application was updated to version 5.0 E4 on all computers and the data files updated to operate with the updated version.

Newsletter: (L. Allyn for J. Pryor) May-June copy is due April 21.

Program & Membership (M. Austin): George King’s ambulance will be displayed at one of Rob Valenti’s car dealerships. The WWI theme will run from February-May, including: March 22: Catherine Deichmann – Over Here: Mystic in the Great War.


May 24: Eury Cantillo – US Submarines in WWI.

Hospitality & Membership, P&M Subcommittee (C. Allyn): No new members joined since the last meeting.

Publicity/PR (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): The MRHS Facebook page continues to gain followers. We will pay to promote Catherine Deichmann’s talk on Facebook and see if that results in a bump in attendance on March 22.

Finance No report. New Business: None.

Next meetings April 17, 2017 7:00 pm Mystic Noank Library
Respectfully submitted, Elizabeth Holland, Recording Secretary

February 2017 Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, February 27, 2017. Attendees included: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, John Parry, Liz Holland, Richard Semeraro, Lois Glazier, Stephanie Thorp, Barry Thorp, Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild, and Steve Menno. The meeting was called to order at 7pm by President L. Allyn. A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept January meeting minutes.

President (L. Allyn): MRHS welcomes new Board member Steve Menno. The WWI edition of the MRHS newsletter will be entered into the 2018 New England Museum Association (NEMA) competition. The newspaper was very well received and MRHS received several rave emails.

Corresponding Secretary (E. Holland): Forty-one thank you letters were sent since the last meeting.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): For the period 22 January through 26 February 2017, 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, snow plowing and to our curatorial staff. No unusual expenses for the period. Deposits included payments of member 2016 dues, unrestricted donations and Patron donations resulting from the January mailing. • Barry also completed the taxes for 2016. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s Report.

Curatorial (D. Hanna): The committee met on February 27. Various on-going topics were discussed including the six enlarged photo prints that have been ordered for the WWI exhibit. In addition to the display in the Ames Room at the Mystic & Noank Library, this exhibit will include smaller items in the Library’s display case. The Groton Public Library has issued an invitation to MRHS members to attend the ribbon cutting of their new history room on March 22 at 5 pm.

History Book Club (R. Semeraro): There were 7 participants in the book club’s last meeting, where the second half of Undaunted Courage was discussed. Guns of August will be reviewed in March and April. Richard is exploring the possibility of having a shelf at MNL that is dedicated solely to CT history and he will speak to the library about that.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The System Administrator performed computer updates and backups on Friday, February 3, 2017. All equipment appears to be in good condition and functioning as designed. The backups for the Past Perfect database files and working files were done and removed offsite for security.

Newsletter: (L. Allyn for J. Pryor) The Newsletter will return to standard size & content this month as the last was a special edition.

Program & Membership (M. Austin): Rick Spencer was very well received – about 40 were in attendance, including many first time attendees. The WWI theme will run from February-May, including: March 22: Catherine Deichmann – Over Here: Mystic in the Great War.


May 24: Eury Cantillo – US Submarines in WWI.

P&M Subcommittee of Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): Three new members joined since the last meeting. Renewals are coming in quickly for 2017 and we have collected $1650 in donations from Newsletter Patrons.
Publicity/PR (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): The Newsletter was posted on Facebook and was well received. Lyndsey is going to begin analyzing Facebook data with the goal of maximizing the reach of MRHS posts to current and potential members.

Finance (TBD) No report this month. • New Business: No new business.

Next meeting March 20, 2017 at 7:00 pm Mystic Noank Library • Respectfully submitted, Elizabeth Holland, Recording Secretary
Events Calendar

7pm Wednesday, May 24, 2017
*Mystic in WWI Commemoration Series*
US Submarines in WWI - Eury Cantillo
Industrial age technology unleashed underwater in WWI.
7pm refreshments & socializing, 7:30p program
Mystic Congregational Church Hall, Broadway & E. Main, Mystic

7pm Tuesday, March 9th, 2017
History Book Club - MRHS & MNL Partnership
The Activities Room, Mystic-Noank Library
“The Great Bridge” by David McCullough (Chapters 1-12)

7pm Tuesday, June 13th, 2017
History Book Club - MRHS & MNL Partnership
The Activities Room, Mystic-Noank Library
“The Great Bridge” by David McCullough (Final chapters)

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 had three new memberships during the past month. They are Bill Martley at the Individual level and Ann & Russ Burgess and Louise & Clark Phippen at the Family level.

~ Cindy Allyn Membership