n November 11, 1928, hundreds of citizens from Mystic and surrounding towns gathered between the state highway and the Baptist Church to dedicate a new addition to the local landscape, a monument to the veterans of the World War. Designed and built under the leadership of the local American Legion post, and entirely community-funded, the granite and bronze tablet memorializes more than two hundred soldiers and sailors, mariners and nurses, who at some point in their lives had a Mystic connection.

Ninety years have passed. Trees threaten to eclipse the site, and traffic speeds up and down Route 1 without noticing it or remarking its significance. As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Armistice that brought an end to the Great War, we’ll take a closer look at this monument, how it came to be, and the men and women it calls us to remember.

Catherine Deichmann is an independent historian whose current research focuses on the impact of the Great War on many facets of American life and culture, from the New England whaling industry to fashion and personal hygiene. She has spoken at the MRHS on many topics including the maritime Civil War, Civil War commemoration, and Mystic during the Great War. Catherine has just returned from two weeks in France and Belgium, following the movements of the American forces in 1917-1918, visiting local and official sites of memory, and discovering how Mystic’s monument reflects this larger culture of memory of the Great War.

Armistice Day in Connecticut 1918: From parades in the streets of Hartford, to bonfires in the countryside, the celebration of the end of the Great War inspired a large response. Today, in 2018, Mystic’s monument memorializing local community connected to World War I, (inset) continues to be quietly maintained at the intersection of West Main and Library streets. Photos: Connecticut State Library (left), UCONN Library (right), Googlemaps (inset)
Memories of By-Gone Summer Vacations  ~ Dorrie Hanna

In the US, and abroad, visits to the seaside became very popular in late Victorian times. The visitors liked to take a cheap memento home, creating a large market for souvenirs. Thus china trinkets became very popular. The earliest china souvenirs showed transfer printed views. Much of the souvenir china was made in Germany, including this so-called view-ware.

The Mystic River Historical Society owns quite a few pieces of souvenir china which we refer to as "Newbury china" based on the name of the local store that sold it. Thomas H. Newbury sold plumbing (including ship plumbing), sheet metal and hardware goods and services. His store was in operation for many years. The commercial building in which the store was located, on the north-west corner of East Main and Holmes Streets, was known earlier as the Mallory Block, and later came to be known as the Newbury Block. The building burned in the 1960 fire and S&P Oyster House occupies the site today.

Popular Mystic images reproduced on this china include the Mystic & Noank Library, the Civil War monument and the entrance gate to Elm Grove Cemetery. Our volunteer, Carla Lopilato, has been photographing the pieces in our collection so that an image can be added to the catalog record for each item.
Not long ago someone asked me about the Mystic highway bridge, that venerable structure which supports the Rt. 1 traffic across the Mystic River, smack dab in the heart of Mystic’s Main Street.

The present bridge opened for traffic July 19, 1922, and except for a few interruptions caused by storms, heat or accident has been in continuous service since. It replaced a bridge which was built in 1904, well strengthened to carry tracks and trolleys of the Groton and Stonington Street Railway system which began service that year.

As automobiles and trucks replaced horses and buggies, increased traffic over the bridge caused its foundations to settle unevenly. The 1904 span became a source of vexation, developing a bad habit of sticking when opened wide. While attendants toiled over the bulky mechanism travelers sometimes waited as long as two hours to cross. The state highway department installed a new electric motor, but it was of little help.

Thus, the highway bridge became an expensive headache. The bulky span connected two towns, Groton on the west side and Stonington to the east. The Mystic River bisects the village of Mystic, dividing it between the two towns and leaving Mystic with no political government of its own.

In 1920 Groton’s first selectman, Dr. Louis Allyn, summoned the Stonington selectmen, led by John Fribance. The town fathers met on neutral ground and made plans for a new structure.

To carry Main Street traffic while a replacement was built a temporary bridge was necessary. In July 1921 J.E. Fitzgerald of New London began this structure a few rods to the north of the 1904 bridge, crossing from Gravel Street to Holmes Street. For the next 12 months autos, trucks, horses, wagons and pedestrians made an unhappy detour when it was necessary to cross the river.

With the temporary bridge in place, workmen cleared out the old piers and abutments and laid new foundations on solid river bottom. During this lengthy process business was at a standstill on East and West Main Streets. Merchants suffered badly and Mystic residents were frustrated. Heavy auto traffic over Route 19, the East coast’s main artery then known as the Boston Post Road, soon made a shambles of Mystic’s scenic Gravel Street.

The New London Day reported that the Groton side of Mystic village was separated from the Stonington side by a chasm that required a half-mile hike to reach a place only a few steps across the river. In spite of grumbling the work continued. Foundations were in place in March 1922 and a diver laid the heavy iron water mains. The 500-ton iron work for the bridge arrived by rail from the American Bridge Company in Philadelphia and workmen came to set it in place.

The Day described the bascule bridge, calling it the Brown Balance Beam Light Bridge, noting that it was the first of its kind in America. To open the 88-foot lift, large counterweights were finely balanced so that the two 36-horsepower motors could raise the bridge in 35 seconds. The bridge cost $245,000. Groton’s share was $63,000, Stonington paid $54,000, and Connecticut paid the rest.

The first auto crossed the completed bridge July 10 carrying the designer, Mr. Brown (no first name available) accompanied by the site engineer, A. R. Collier. Two days later the lift opened for the first time, and soon afterward the first trolley clanged & rumbled across.

At 6:30 p.m. on July 19th, 2,000 eager citizens assembled for the formal opening. Parades formed at two firehouses, one on each side of the river. Bands played as police escorted the selectmen of Groton and Stonington to the new bridge. As the twin parties approached, the lift, decorated with flags and bunting, was raised to its full height with C. C. Potter at the controls. A member of the State Highway Commission turned the bridge over to the selectmen of the towns. Then the two parades merged and moved to the flagpole where the Rev. Mr. George Farnham delivered a speech. In conclusion the crowd enjoyed a procession of automobiles, still a rarity in 1924. The cars were decorated elaborately with streamers and flowers.

At dusk selectmen threw the switch of a new lighting system, thirty 140-watt nitrogen lamps. Mystic streets from the railroad station to Baptist Hill were illuminated like the great white way as the festivities ended with a concert by the Westerly Band.

To celebrate the return of paying customers, Mystic merchants arranged special bargain sales. Benjamin Bendett advertised gingham dresses from $1.49 up and glove silk stockings with V-point heels at $1.95 a pair. The new bridge was open at last.

*Ed. Note: Approximately $3.5 million in today’s dollars.
Treasurer (B. Thorp): For the period 20 May to 18 June 2018, 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, security, heating/cooling contract and curatorial staff and there were no unusual expenses. • Deposits for this period exceeded expenses and included receipt of 2018 member annual dues, the Akeley Trust annual donation, monthly meeting donations and sale of items. The present balance in the Chelsea Groton checking account is $8,847.43. • A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s Report.

Curatorial (D. Hanna): Dorrie is working on a display for River Day on Sunday, July 8. Volunteers to sit at the MRHS table are needed.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The System Administrator performed computer updates and backups on 1 June 2018. Backup files were moved offsite for secure storage. • Application and security software were updated and are current at this time. All three computers received a security update. All equipment is operating properly at this time as well. • Networked operation of each computer was checked & found to be in good condition. No problem with the printer connection to the Laser multi-function printer with the computers was encountered.

Newsletter (J. Pryor): The next newsletter will be published in the fall.

Programs (M. Austin): Lou Allyn’s talk had more than 120 attendees and was standing room only – our most popular talk of this year’s series. It was extremely well received and we hope that Lou will speak again!

Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): No changes in the membership this month.

Publicity & Social Media (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): All is going well with Instagram and Facebook.

History Book Club (R. Semeraro): The Path Between the Seas by David McCullough will be discussed on June 12. The Man Who Loved China by Simon Winchester will be the next up for discussion this summer.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The System Administrator performed computer updates and backups on 29 April 2018. Backup files were moved offsite for secure storage. • Application and security software were updated and are current at this time. All three computers received a security update. All equipment is operating properly at this time as well. • Networked operation of each computer was checked & found to be in good condition. No problem with the printer connection to the Laser multi-function printer with the computers was encountered.

Newsletter (J. Pryor): The next newsletter will be published in the fall.

Program & Membership (M. Austin): Kate Dimancescu’s talk was well received with 45+ attendees. • The final program is on May 23, 2018: Lou Allyn – History of Enders Island. Father Tom Hoar will be joining him.

Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): Two new member joined MRHS and two members passed away.

Publicity & Social Media (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): Barleyhead Brewery has asked if they could sell some of their prints at their shop.

Finance (L. Allyn): For the period 15 April to 20 May 2018: 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, and curatorial staff. There were no unusual expenses during this period. Deposits for this period totaled less than expenses and included receipt of 2018 member annual dues, member donations, Newsletter patron income, monthly meeting donations and the sale of items. • A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the Treasurer’s Report.

Curatorial (D. Hanna): The Committee did not meet this month; however, Louisa has been working on the Huntley Material, some of which has been sent to other organizations. Additionally, Betsy has entered the Mystic Flag materials into the database and the annual report to the Akeley Trust has been sent. Dorrie is working on a display for River Day on Sunday, July 8. Volunteers to sit at the MRHS table are needed. The next meeting is scheduled for June 11.

History Book Club (R. Semeraro): The Path Between the Seas by David McCullough will be discussed on June 12. The Man Who Loved China by Simon Winchester will be the next up for discussion this summer.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The System Administrator performed computer updates and backups on 29 April 2018. Backup files were moved offsite for secure storage. • Application and security software were updated and are current at this time. All three computers received a security update. All equipment is operating properly at this time as well. • Networked operation of each computer was checked & found to be in good condition. No problem with the printer connection to the Laser multi-function printer with the computers was encountered.

Newsletter (J. Pryor): The next newsletter will be published in the fall.

Program & Membership (M. Austin): Kate Dimancescu’s talk was well received with 45+ attendees. • The final program is on May 23, 2018: Lou Allyn – History of Enders Island. Father Tom Hoar will be joining him.

Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): Two new member joined MRHS and two members passed away.

Publicity & Social Media (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): Barleyhead Brewery has asked if they could sell some of their prints at their shop.

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

Meeting adjourned at 749 pm.

Next meeting is June 18, 2018 7:00 pm at MNL

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Holland, Secretary
Events Calendar

7pm Wednesday, October 24th, 2018
In Commemoration of Local Service: Mystic, Memory & WWI
with Catherine Deichmann
7pm refreshments & socializing, 7:30p program
Mystic Congregational Church Hall, Broadway & E. Main, Mystic
Celebrating the 100th anniversary of armistice honoring local participants.

7pm Wednesday, December 5th, 2018
Journals of the Great War - Pauline Sands Lee
with Joan Warren

~ No meeting in January ~

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

Newsletter/Print Patrons

CYNTHIA AND LOUIS ALLYN
LAURA BEACH AND JOSHUA KALSTEIN
DANIEL & JANE BRANNEGAN
MR. & MRS. FRANKLIN DAVIS
MR. & MRS. FRED DEICHMANN
DENSMORE OIL
KATE DIMANCESCU
DAVID EVANS
MR. WILLIAM EVERETT
ALICE FOLEY
MR. CRAIG HAINES
SALLY HALSEY
MR. & MRS. DOUG HANNA
JUDY HICKS
MURIEL HINKLE
LYNN AND LIZ HOLLAND
NANCY & TOM MCLoughlin
MRS. ROGER PANCIERA
MR. & MRS. JOHN PARRY
JACK & PEGGY SINKS
THE REAL McCoy® RUM

Membership Updates

We have three new memberships this summer. They are Kimberly Hunt and Suzanne Matteson at the Individual level and Paul and Deb Neuman at the Family level.
We also mourn the loss of long standing members Richard Bennett, Theresa Courchaine, Brian Thorp and Norton Wheeler.

-- Cindy Allyn, Membership