Civil War Sesquicentennial Series - Life on the Homefront: September 1862

by Catherine Deichman

The annual rites of fall begin. Students in the local public schools and "The Select School of Miss Emma S. Pease" are summoned back to their classrooms; advertisements for "fall manure" and winter clothing begin to appear in the local paper. The change of seasons is another indication that the war has lasted much longer than anyone thought it would. In a lengthy editorial in his Mystic Pioneer, Chauncey Rice reminds his fellow citizens that slavery is the reason for the ongoing conflict between the "Southern aristocracy and the entire free north," and its eradication is a righteous goal.

This reassurance comes at a crucial time. Groton and Stonington are struggling to meet their quotas under President Lincoln's summer calls for a total of 600,000 new soldiers. Each town mustered enough men for a company in the new 21st regiment, but not without the lure of local bounties to supplement those offered by the state and federal governments. The burden on the towns to fund these additional bounties is beginning to show. In September the push is on to recruit men for new 9-month regiments authorized by Governor Buckingham. The very real threat of a draft looms for those communities that fail to reach their quota.

Attracted by the short enlistment term, several veterans of the three-month units formed at the outset of the war re-enlist in the new 26th regiment.

In the midst of the bounty meetings, flag presentation ceremonies, last-minute weddings, and farewell rallies at the steamboat wharf comes the sobering news of casualties from a massive battle near the little town of Sharpsburg, Maryland. Twenty local men from the 8th regiment are reported wounded, two are missing. Oscar Hewitt of Stonington and Noank’s Fenimore C. Weeks from the 11th Regiment were among the thousands of soldiers killed in the bloody fighting along Antietam Creek.

As the war enters its second autumn, 600 men from Stonington and Groton are in the service of the United States. Men from other places, many of them recent immigrants, stream into the area to fill the vacancies in the foundries, shipyards, and mills the departing soldiers have left behind. They board with local families, or move into the new worker housing being constructed behind the Maxson & Fish shipyard at Old Fields. Their arrival will permanently change the local landscape.

In anticipation of a second winter of war, the Soldiers Aid Society publishes directions in the newspaper for knitting "soldiers' mittens." Support for the war remains strong, and many women fire up their knitting needles to demonstrate their patriotism.

William Alfred Buckingham, Governor of Connecticut, 1858-1866

After initially being chosen as a "compromise candidate," Buckingham, a Whig, defeated Democrat James T. Pratt in 1858, and won re-election seven years running. The 1860's presidential year election was a close one, with the popular Democrat Thomas H. Seymour sympathizing with the southern states and Buckingham, also a strong Lincoln supporter, met & hosted the president in Connecticut while Lincoln was on the campaign trail. The men maintained a personal friendship as well as a political one: Buckingham worked diligently as the state's major correspondent with the Federal government - speaking at meetings and rallies throughout the state, procuring men & materials for the war, visiting troops in the field & at home and reading & responding to letters. Most concerned for the welfare of Connecticut troops, Buckingham is quoted as saying to an official in Washington: "Don't let any Connecticut man suffer for want of anything that can be done for him. If it costs money, draw on me for it."

from cslib.org/gov/buckingham.htm

from cslib.org/gov/buckingham.htm
Ever notice how the beginning of fall brings a flood of book reviews? Who hasn’t fidgeted through a September sermon that didn’t include revelations, reflections and life lessons gleaned from an impossibly rigorous summer’s reading? Rest easy—no book reviews here, as I must sheepishly confess to not finishing a single book during the past “reading” season.

That failure does not mean I sat around as some kind of intellectual slug, however. Far from it. I spent an idyllic month in the ancient city of Aix-en-Provence attempting to learn French. Sadly, my efforts were inadequate. When I did venture to speak the language, I almost always received a reply in English. Yes, I was that pathetic.

Putting aside my lack of success in materially improving my language skills, our stay did provide much to think about, especially historically. After all, Aix-en-Provence was founded by the Romans over 2,100 years ago and, although little remains from that time, its medieval core survives largely unchanged. “Aix”, in fact, is a French corruption of the Latin, “Aquae”, and was used to name places with a thermal spring (the Romans did love their hot baths). Thus to distinguish among the numerous “Aix’s”, the additional place names were added: Aix-en-Provence, Aix-les-Bains, and so on.

But, let’s leave ancient Rome and medieval France for another column. Thoughts for this column arise from a much more recent event that occurred during World War II. This event is not well known, perhaps because of the embarrassment and humiliation that remembering entails for the French. At a lecture we attended by Yale Professor Jay Winter, he reminded us that the day of the lecture, July 16, was the 70th anniversary of what is simply known as “La Rafle”—the roundup of French Jews for “deportation”. In just two days, over 10,000 Jewish men, women and children were arrested in and around Paris, jailed in the local velodrome without water or toilets, and then sent to their deaths at Auschwitz—only a handful survived and returned. Monstrously (as if comparisons are even appropriate), the children were separated from their parents.

Why should the French be embarrassed, you might ask? After all, this was hardly an unusual occurrence in any country in Europe under the Nazis. Quite true, but unlike most other occupied western European countries, this plan was made and carried out not by Germans, but by the local French police themselves. In fact, German records indicate that it was the French who suggested including and separating the children, surprising even the Germans who did not always target children in western Europe, as it undercut the lie that the roundups were for work parties.

For years, the French covered up the event and made excuses when discussion proved unavoidable. Finally, in 1995, President Jacques Chirac decided the time had come to publicly apologize for this stain on French history, declaring: “France, home of the Enlightenment and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, land of welcome and asylum, France committed that day the irreparable. Breaking its word, it delivered those it protected to their executioners.”

So, reconsider La Rafle. The vast majority of French citizens living before D-Day could not anticipate when liberation might occur—it might never occur in their lifetimes. After all, they were living under the thumb of an oppressor that trumpeted an intention to exist for a 1,000 years and gave every indication of succeeding. How many of us sincerely know how we would have acted under such conditions? And the mere asking of the question underscores the heroism of those who actively resisted, putting themselves and their families in mortal peril, and why we owe them so much.

So, the next time you pick up a book or article on some historical subject, try to put yourself in the story without the benefit of knowing how ends. It’s difficult to do, but doing so should offer a better understanding of the decisions and actions people made and just how harrowing, difficult or perplexing it must have been to live in their time. And, the next time you hear somebody say, “why didn’t they do something?” you’ll have an answer.

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 · Lois Glazer · Recording Secretary · vacant

The Newsletter of the Mystic River Historical Society is published six times annually: September, October, November-December, January-February, March-April and May · Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355
Issues of the newsletter are available for online viewing at www.mystichistory.org
from Robert Irons

In the May 2012 issue of the Portersville Press, Lou Allyn solicited remembrances of the Mystic Sea Scouts, or Troop 34, requesting that they be sent to Lallyn@snet.net.

He received this response from Bob Irons:

...I copied this article from the back page of the 10th anniversary Banquet Program held 10 Feb. 1945 at the Odd Fellows Hall: Hope this helps. I was in Troop 34 for quite some time myself, in fact, I was the Bugler. I can’t imagine how I was given that task.

The Portersville Academy was built by Amos Clift in 1839, and for nearly 50 years housed the Groton, Connecticut’s Fifth District School. In 1887, the building was moved from its original location just north of the Union Baptist Church to its present address where it became the First District Hall. The building fell into disrepair from lack of use from the mid 1950s until 1976, when the Mystic River Historical Society bought and restored the schoolhouse. In 1991, MRHS furnished the second floor classroom with reproduction period desks built by members of the Society.

Today Portersville Academy once again opens its doors to students. Local public and private schools send hundreds of students each year for our fun and educational two-hour programs, specially designed to enrich children’s historical understanding of our area. Lessons include: “Readin’, ’Ritin’, and ’Rithmetic”, and other lessons as they were taught in 1845, as well as school manners and behaviors, and “Families at Sea” and “Home Life and Pastimes” in the 19th Century.

Thanks to Volunteers & Women’s Club

The MRHS Education Outreach Program wishes to thank the Mystic Woman’s Club for their generous donation of $500. The money is designated to help schools offset the cost of bus transportation to and from our programs at Portersville Academy. Last May, nine first grade classes on the average of 24 students each, participated in the programs at Portersville Academy. The number of visiting schools was less than usual mostly due to rising transportation costs and/or cut backs on field trips. Hopefully, this donation will help bolster up attendance next year! A big “thank you!” also goes out to all the volunteers who have made our programs successful: “Teachers” Kay Janney and Tim Evers; Wendy Merckel who headed the “downstairs” activities, Nancy McKay who organized the scheduling, and volunteers Lois Glazier and Linda Files. In addition we wish to recognize and thank the IB History students from Fitch High School who put together journals for the children to use in their class projects.

Anyone interested in helping out with our programs or for more information contact Cathy Mauritz at 860-333-4876 or cemauritz@yahoo.com
Historical Resources & Services Offered by MRHS

Last spring I was talking with Dorrie Hanna, our Collections Manager, about the various services we provide to our members and visitors interested in their family histories, and I asked her to prepare a list of what we offer. I am proud of what we are able to accomplish month after month, and I am also very pleased to share with you a very thoughtful letter from one of our members expressing her appreciation:

In the pursuit of information about local history for some essays about people behind New London County street names, I’ve been greatly helped by Dorrie Hanna. Over the last several years I’ve asked Dorrie many questions, which she always answered promptly and graciously, even when she was on vacation and could have easily postponed responding. One time I had gone down a wrong path on a story I was writing, and she helped me get the forts straight, while still preserving some of the work I had already put into it. You’re lucky to have someone like Dorrie who is such a good representative of MRHS to the public. This small honorarium is in no way commensurate with the value of Dorrie’s assistance, but I hope it’s a meaningful contribution to a cause that’s important to her. Sincerely, (signed) Carol Sommer

MRHS family and historical resources include:

- **Photographs of homes and other Mystic scenes.** If you know where your family members lived or worked or the business that they owned, an image of that site would enrich your written history. Photocopies or scanned images are available for a modest fee.

- **Documents pertaining to Mystic families** such as Allyn, Fish, Gates, Haley & Wilcox. These collections consist of various materials and may include photos, artifacts, papers, letters, journals, etc. Typically you would have obtained basic family information from another source before searching these collections so that you could determine which material was relevant.

- **Published histories & city directories.** We own a number of books on local history and compendiums of local biography. The latter usually focus on so-called “prominent men”. We have about a dozen city directories in a broken run of years over the 20th century.

- **Published genealogies.** We have a small collection of genealogy books dealing with such family names as Avery, Burrows, Denison, Fish, Gallup and Huntley.

- **Genealogy manuscript materials.** The largest group of this type of material came from R. Earl Burrows and is the preliminary work on his published Burrows genealogy. We also have notes and research on a number of other families, including the Fish family.

- **Indices to old Mystic newspapers.** Newspapers are digitized and available at the Mystic & Noank Library, along with others for which there is no index.

**Mystic Flag Committee & Liberty Pole Items**

The Mystic Flag Committee has offered to give the MRHS several items related to the Mystic Liberty Pole. We are hopeful that there will be a small presentation ceremony this fall, followed perhaps by a mini exhibit. Thanks to the Flag Committee for thinking of sharing with us. I’ll keep you posted.

At left: View of East Main Street at Cottrell Street and Holmes Street, looking east, Mystic, CT, ca. 1925. The white pole, far left, is the Liberty Flagpole. The white band on the utility pole indicates a trolley or bus stop. Trolley service was replaced by bus service in 1928. The Hotel Mystic, built in 1860 by Benjamin F. Hoxie, was called the Hoxie House until 1924.

Handwritten text reads: ‘Have been intending to send you a card for a long time. Better late than never.’ May Brady
Maps. We have maps of Mystic from 1868, 1879 and 1911. In addition we have a group of insurance maps showing property locations for various years up to the 1920s.

House history files. For those houses which have been researched, there are files showing the chain of title back to the original owner, so if you know the address of the person you are researching these files may be helpful. House Tour booklet copy and illustrations may also provide a brief source of information. There are also files detailing the history of properties downtown.

We do not have primary records; those are to be found at the appropriate town hall (Groton or Stonington).

Other sites that may be useful include The Mystic & Noank Library, The Stonington Historical Society’s Woolworth Library, the Noank Historical Society and the New London County Historical Society. The Groton Historical Society is newly formed and can be reached via the Avery Copp House.

Ed. Note: The images on these two pages and more are available for viewing in the MRHS online galleries at mystichistory.org

A literal & figurative snapshot of time and culture, this image and MRHS file information offers insight to genealogy, architecture and anthropology. It features the south side of the Miner house, Corz Road Quambaug, Mystic, CT, 1930. The west half was built in 1740 by Thomas Palmer for David Miner; the east half was built by Jesse Miner who married Sally Hilliard, ca. 1806. The man holding the calf is Judge Herbert Rathbun, David Rathbun’s grandfather, the other is unidentified.

Visit downtown today to compare the similarities & differences to the images on this page and to enjoy some of the end results of the bridge & streetscape projects. Wide sidewalks and bench seating will encourage walking from your secret parking spot...!

Many of the downtown businesses have supported the Mystic River Historical Society over the years and we would like to return the favor: Let’s work together to support local economy & business by shopping locally ~ bring a friend, grab a bite to eat, a birthday gift, a holiday gift, a gift certificate or a little something for yourself!

Go to www.mysticchamber.org or www.mystictoday.com for a list of merchants. Autumn days may find more available street parking, and parking is free in the lot behind the 4th District Voting Hall at 10 Broadway just north of Church Street.

~ Thank you. ~
The Mystic River Historical Society Annual Meeting was held on May 23, 2012. President Lou Allyn called the Annual Meeting of the Mystic River Historical Society to order at 7:30pm.

A motion was made, seconded and accepted for the minutes of last year’s annual meeting which were published in the September 2011 edition of the Portersville Press. A motion was made, seconded, and accepted for the 2011 annual reports of the President and the Treasurer which were e-mailed to the membership.

Lou gave special thanks to the following elected members of the Board of Trustees who are retiring: Tim Evers – member of the Nominating Committee and Education Committee (Tim is well known for his role as the Schoolmaster Mr. Avery in our 3rd grade education program at Portersville Academy); John Porter – Vice President and member of the Program & Membership, House & Grounds, and Nominating Committees; and Judy Hicks – Chairman of the Curatorial Committee.

Lou expressed his sincere wish that all three would continue to serve on their committees so that their valuable contributions to MRHS will continue.

In addition to those elected to the Board, there are chairmen of committees who are also members of the Board. One of these is Cindy Allyn who is retiring as chairman of the Membership Committee, which was combined with the Program Committee on which she will continue.

Board of Trustee Bill Everett is retiring as Treasurer and is being nominated for election to Vice President at the next Board meeting. Barry Thorp (if elected as a Trustee) will be nominated to be the new Treasurer at the next Board meeting.

The Nominating Committee presented the following names of those nominated as three year Board of Trustees: Richard Semeraro for first term (replacing Tim Evers) David Scott for first term (replacing John Porter) Barry Thorp for first term (replacing Judy Hicks) Lois Glazier for second term Betty O’Donnell for third term There were no other nominations and all those nominated were elected unanimously by the MRHS members present (constituting a quorum).

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40.

Respectfully submitted, Cathy Marco, Recording Secretary
Program & Membership (Aimee Allaire): The Program and Membership Committee met and reviewed May’s program on Morton Plant by Jim Streeter. 108 people attended and donations for the evening totaled $136. For the first half of 2012, we have averaged 2-3 new memberships from each program.

Aimee thanked everyone who has given ideas, has come to the member meetings, brought cookies, helped with set up, told their friends and, in general, supported the programs that were presented this 2011/2012 season. The entire Program Committee was thrilled that so many people came to the programs, contributed money to MRHS and continuing to show interest in Mystic’s history.

The next program will be October’s presentation Sound Rising CT and The War of 1812 given by Richard Radune. The Program Schedule through May 2013 is complete and is as follows: October: Richard Radune Sound Rising CT and The War of 1812 November: Norman Brouwer Nautical Folk Art January 2013: Kate Dimancescu on the Appelman/Williams families February 2013: Florence Griswold - speaker and topic TBD March 2013: Bill Peterson - topic TBD April 2013: Susan Bailey on Georgia Fulton May 2013: Bettye Noyes on Bluff Point to Latimer Point

On the Membership front, we have decided that a more pro-active approach is needed to create a larger and more involved membership. This will be discussed further at our September meeting, any suggestions from members and the Board are welcome. We are very close to meeting our budgeted revenue from dues of $10,000 but would really like to see our membership growing.

Special Events (Sally Halsey): Bus Trip: The trip on Wednesday, October 3 to The Mount in Lenox, MA (Edith Wharton’s home and garden) and Naumkeag in Stockbridge is being planned. Stay tuned. More information will follow.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Website: Google Analytics (a way to measure performance) is up and running for our website www.mystichistory.org. * We have a new Virtual Exhibit on the trolley in Mystic at: http://mystichistory.org/collectionsexhibit/vex2/index.htm. *

For future projects, Aimee mentioned adding information on MRHS and Mystic history to PINTEREST (an online “content sharing service” where members share images, videos and other things onto a virtual “pinboard”).

No New Business.

The next meeting will be held Monday, Sept. 17 at 7:00 p.m.

Hyperlinks & QR Codes, Oh My!

A couple of handy-dandy definitions in the case that readers are seeking some help in decoding web lingo:

Hyperlink: A web address in a document which, when “clicked”, will take the reader directly to a website. For example, in the downloadable color version of the newsletter document, a written web addresses such as mystichistory.org is a hyperlink which will easily connect readers to the Mystic River Historical Society web page just by clicking the link listing. Try it!

QR Code: A unique black & white square design that can be scanned with a free QR code reader application on a smartphone to give additional information - somewhat like a bar code. The QR code can deliver written information as a text, or connect the interested party directly to a website - in the case of the above sample, the MRHS website home page.

Scan me!

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Contact info@mystichistory.org for more. *

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**Membership Updates**

We will include a complete list of our members in the next Portersville Press. If you have not renewed yet, please do so.

We regret the passing of quite a few members in the past few months. They are: Charlotte Acquaviva, Audrey Beaumont, Mary Fuller, Robert Irons, Donald Jamieson, Horace Lamb, Laurie Lamb, Mrs Everett Law and Bob Rowe.

- Cynthia Allyn, Membership Chair

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**Calendar of Events**

- Membership Meeting -
  Mystic Congregational Church Hall at Broadway and E. Main St., Mystic
  Richard Radune: Sound Rising and the War of 1812

- Membership Meeting -
  Wed., Nov. 28th, 2012, 7:30p
  Mystic Congregational Church Hall at Broadway and E. Main St., Mystic
  Norman Brouwer: Nautical Folk Art

Renew or become a Member of MRHS and receive email updates about all our meetings & events. Contact us at: info@mystichistory.org or 860-536-4779.