In October: Turning to Tourism - How the Seaside Saved New England

As whaling, cargo carrying, and shipbuilding faded in importance in the twilight of the nineteenth century, New England’s coastal towns needed a new source of growth. The answer, for many, was coastal tourism. Join Michelle Moon on Wednesday, October 26th for a look into her newest research project on the early steps toward coastal tourism, from the camp-meeting movement to resorts and rusticators, and a chance to consider how this history of coastal change can help us look toward the future of the region’s waterfront.

Michelle Moon creates meaningful learning experiences through inspiring collaborations that unite the arts, food and history in deeper explorations of places & ideas. A career museum professional, she has developed & worked on major exhibitions at the Peabody Essex Museum (MA), New Hampshire’s Strawerry Banke Museum, and Mystic Seaport. Now completing a Master’s degree in Museum Studies at the Harvard Extension School, she also serves as Massachusetts State Governor for Slow Food New England. Her research interests focus on the intersection of sea and shore in the cultural development of the coastal Northeast; exploring food as an entry point to big ideas in social history, and building a sense of place and community well-being through storytelling and the arts.

From September - In History’s Wake: The Last Trap Fishermen of Rhode Island

“For as long as people have lived along Rhode Island’s meandering coast, the ocean at their doorstep has provided them with a ready supply of food. Whether Native American or European transplants, fishermen sought to move beyond capturing individual fish to ensnaring entire schools. Searching for increasingly efficient ways to capture their prey, the trapping technologies they invented evolved over time, and primitive stake traps gave way to fykes and weirs, much as they had along the entire New England coastline. Faced with assaults from the broad Atlantic Ocean, fishermen from the state experimented with new designs, capable of withstanding the punishment delivered by wind and waves, eventually creating the unique floating trap system still in use today. While dozens of companies deploying hundreds of traps once fished the state’s waters, only four continue using this ancient but effective technique.

Using images & quips from the author’s book, this presentation will document a tradition now hundreds of years old, capturing the spirit and work ethic that drives Rhode Island’s fishermen to continue providing food for their neighbors.

Markham Starr is a documentary photographer committed to preserving something of the working cultures of New England, including commercial fishermen, family owned dairy farms, the sardine industry and traditional agricultural fairs. His major projects have been selected for inclusion in the permanent collections of the Library of Congress. His current book, “In History’s Wake” is available in soft cover from Wesleyan University Press.

Our thanks to Markham Starr who presented at the MRHS meeting on September 28th.
Archive Additions  ~ Dorrie Hanna

Some items recently received for the MRHS archives include:
• Copies of Lisa Saunders’ two new books  
• A group of items via the Mystic and Noank Library  
• Pictures of Roger Quesnel’s retirement party  
• A picture of Lizzie Burrows from David Patience  
• Material from the Charles B. Allyn Foundation via Joanna Case  
• Two aerial photos of Mystic. *(Shown below)*  
• Material about MRHS trips from the files of Joyce Everett  
• A photo of 8 West Mystic Avenue (the Octagon House)  
• Photos from Bill Lewis re: Archie’s Soda Shop/Virgil Huntley  
• Two envelopes addressed to Jennie Wolf  
• Digital family history files for MRHS shared by Debbie Barnes  
• A Fenner folding doll cradle with bedding donated by Marian Voss

Repairs to Lower Mystic Cemetery Wall  ~ Lou Allyn

Stones were falling off the walls around the Cemetery and needed to be put back into position to prevent further deterioration and improve the general appearance.
Thanks to a grant from The Charles B Allyn Foundation, Inc. repairs have been made; the contractor was Jerry Swanson of Charlestown, RI. As you can see from these before and after photographs he did a very good job.

**BEFORE**

![Before photo](image1)

**AFTER**

![After photo](image2)

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**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 & Recording Secretary - Elizabeth Holland

The Newsletter of the Mystic River Historical Society is published six times annually: September, October, November-December, January-February, March-April and May-June  
Box 243 Mystic, CT 06355

Issues of the newsletter are available for online viewing at [www.mystichistory.org](http://www.mystichistory.org)
The Federal Railroad Commission has been in the newspapers lately. They are proposing plans for new routes within our State. One of which will go through Old Lyme and Olde Mistick Village in Stonington. Many citizens and town governments are vigorously protesting and who knows what will happen in the years to come.

I was going through Kathleen Greenhaugh’s book The History of West Mystic and she wrote that back in 1857, Mystic residents, led by Charles Mallory, petitioned the State Legislature to repeal legislation that allowed the newly consolidated New Haven/New London Railway and the Stonington Railway to lay tracks across Mason’s Island. These townspeople asked for a route to cross the Mystic River not below the traffic bridge over the Mystic River. This bridge was the southern connection of the Mystic River and Portersville villages. They had to fight hard and persistently, but in time a compromise was worked out. In 1858 tracks were laid as we see them today. Trains from Boston to New York had to be ferried across the Thames River but by 1882, the Connecticut Legislature gave permission for a bridge to span the Thames River.

Kathleen wrote that train cars had always been painted a dull black, but by 1891 they were changed to bright and gleaming cream and gold tints. The "The New England Limited" was considered the best and fastest way from 27th West in New York City to the Station at the bottom of the Boston Common. In 1891 the distance was 232 miles and the ride was 6 hours and 25 minutes. Today it only takes 3 1/2 hours.

The seasons and sights of Mystic are captured in Colors of Mystic - designed & illustrated by Ashley Halsey and sponsored by MRHS. The book makes a great gift for Mystic fans - locals & visitors alike - and is available at the Downes Building as well as Bank Square Books, the Seaport Store, and, this fall, at Clyde’s Cider Mill.

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Mystic From The Air: A New Addition to MRHS Resources

These aerial photographs of Mystic were donated to the Mystic River Historical Society by Ruth Gallup Bowers of New Hampshire through her son Roger G. Bowers of Richmond, VA. There are no dates on them so we are asking our readers to point out any features that might help.

On the Groton side (below) the Central Hall is to the north of West Main Street and the cove has yet to be filled in for parking and Steamboat Warf. Portersville Academy is quite visible on High Street south of route 1 and the Union Baptist Church but the Downes Building is not yet there. Dorrie noticed that it was before 1959 because the old buildings on the corner of Water St and West Main have yet to be torn down for Chelsea Groton Bank. The pumping station site on Gravel Street is still just a parking lot. What was the little building on the river bank south of the Main Block? [Dorrie thinks it was a fish shack and/or ice house.]

Noticeable on the Stonington side of the river (right) are: the Strand Theatre (by the highway bridge) [Who remembers sitting in the balcony throwing candy boxes on the seats below and listening for rats?], Cottrell Lumber Company (now the Mystic River Park), and Franklin G. Post & Son boatyard (the marine railway is now graveled over). Does anyone know the name of the old sunken ship? [Virgil Huntley believes she was the “Black Rock.”]

Please do feel free to share your research, stories & observations to Lou Allyn at allynlouis6@gmail.com!
Digital Detective Sproul

Online reader and MRHS member Jonathan Sproul took the date challenge seriously and wowed us with his findings! Rolling up his sleeves, Sproul set an excellent example of how contemporary resources can ingeniously be utilized to fill in the gaps left by historical clues. It’s always a great pleasure when readers add to a story in our newsletter - thank you!

Q: “When were these photographs taken?”

Conclusion: Sproul estimates the photos were taken in 1947 +/-1 year based on the following evidence:

Clue #1 - Abandoned/sunken barge south of Main Block was visible in 1934 but not in 1951.

From UConn’s online Connecticut Aerial Photography Index.
http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/mash_up/1934_aerial_index.html
http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/mash_up/1951_aerial_index.html

Clue #2 - Property records for the Cottrell St./Haley St./E. Main St. blocks from 1946 - 1950. The telephone building (now Frontier Communications) on E. Main St. across from the church wasn’t built until 1950. The old firehouse on Cottrell St. wasn’t constructed until 1948. The house directly behind the soon-to-be built firehouse was constructed in 1946. Therefore, I conclude this photo was taken sometime between late-1946 and early-1948.

From Town of Stonington Property Listing Report online
Year Built details: 30 E. Main Street - Built 1950; 21 Cottrell St. - Built 1948; 2 Haley St. - Built 1946
The Planning Committee would very much like to thank everyone who answered our online survey. 300 invitations were sent out and there were 105 responses — an exceptionally high rate for a survey. The chart below shows that many people were quite interested in the topic of Immigration and Family and slightly less interested in the other two: Transportation and War. A number of these people have pictures, artifacts, letters, etc. relating to Mystic and they and others said they would like to participate in some way. There were also quite a few comments & suggestions in the responses.

At present the Planning Committee is analyzing the detailed data and will issue a report soon. Our intent is to contact these people individually to learn more about their interests and how they might participate in developing programs around the subtopics.

Sincerely yours, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, Liz Holland and John Parry

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**IMMIGRATION & FAMILY HISTORIES**
How & why did individuals and groups of people move to Mystic and what was life like for them?

- Quite Interested: 24%
- Somewhat Interested: 49%
- Slightly Interested: 39%
- Not Very Interested: 31%

**TRANSPORTATION**
How have various kinds of land and water transportation come to Mystic and what has been their impact & significance then and now?

- Quite Interested: 46%
- Somewhat Interested: 39%
- Slightly Interested: 14%
- Not Very Interested: 11%

**WAR**
Mystic’s contribution to war efforts and how wars have affected Mystic - both collectively and as individuals at home & abroad.

- Quite Interested: 73%
- Somewhat Interested: 49%
- Slightly Interested: 39%
- Not Very Interested: 31%

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**Why Do Old Places Matter?**

*In the Summer issue of the Historical News of the American Association for State and Local History there is an article “Why Do Old Places Matter?” Since our Portersville Academy schoolhouse is an “old place,” I wanted to remind us all why it matters. Which of the following strike a chord with you? ~ Lou Allyn*

**Continuity:** Old places create a sense of continuity that helps people feel more balanced, stable and healthy.
**Memory:** Old places help us remember.
**Individual Identity:** Old places embody our identity.
**Civic, State, National & Universal Identity:** Old places embody our civic, state, national and universal identity.
**Beauty:** Old places are beautiful, and beauty is profoundly beneficial.
**History:** Old places give us an understanding of history no other evidence possibly can.
**Architecture:** Old buildings are part of the history of civilization and they place us on the continuum of time.
**Sacredness:** Sacred old places provide deep spiritual and psychological benefits of peace, serenity & inspiration.
**Creativity:** Old places inspire creativity and entrepreneurship.
**Learning:** Old places teach us about the past and give us perspective on the present in a way that nothing else can do.
**Sustainability:** Old places – through their embedded energy, the avoided impacts of demolition and new construction, use of traditional design features compatible with local climates, and locations close to existing infrastructure – are inherently “green.”
**Ancestry:** Old places connect us to our ancestors, giving us a sense of identity & belonging.
**Community:** Old places give people a sense of shared community.
**Economics:** Old places foster a sustainable and equitable economy.
June 2016 Meeting Minutes  


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 May meeting as published.

President (L. Allyn): There was considerable discussion about the composition of the Board and its members and committees. Board members can be on the Board for 9 years while officers and committee chairs can retain their positions for 5 years. Board members must take 2 years off from the Board before joining again, but committee members are permitted to maintain their positions for 9 years in a row (2 terms).

The eleven Board members were confirmed as the following: Lois Glazier, Cindy Allyn, Barry Thorp, Jennifer Pryor, Liz Holland, Stephanie Thorp, Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild, John Parry, Lou Allyn, Richard Semeraro, and Margaret Austin. MRHS requires seven elected Board members to achieve a quorum. • The Board is elected by the Membership while the officers and committee chairs are elected by the Board. The following positions were confirmed by the Board: Cindy Allyn on the Membership Committee, Barry Thorp as Treasurer, Liz Holland as Secretary, Stephanie Thorp on the Information Technology Committee, Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild on the Publicity/Social Media Committee, Lou Allyn as President, Margaret Austin as both Vice President and on the Program Committee. Dave Evans, a Board member who recently ended his tenure, has agreed to remain on the finance committee while MRHS looks for another finance person. Motion to accept officers was made, seconded, and passed.

A new committee was created called Publicity/Social Media, which will send out press releases for all programing, and post on Facebook and Instagram. Lyndsey will do the press releases and Instagram posts, Dorrie will continue to maintain the Facebook page, and Lou will send out email blasts to the Membership.

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

Treasurer (B. Thorp): This report covers the treasurer’s activities during the period 19 April through 15 May 2016. At this time 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-discernable commitments that include payments for utilities, annual heating/cooling system maintenance, a toilet tank repair and payments to our curatorial staff. No unusual expenses for the period. Deposits included payments of member 2016 dues and an interest payment in our checking account. 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 (L. Allyn/D. Hanna): The Curatorial Committee met June 20. Smoke detectors were inspected by ASP security, 2 emergency lights were removed, and a new lock was installed on second floor door – we are now compliant with fire marshall’s directives. • The Downs Building will be closed July 19-21 and all of August. • A new dehumidifier was installed in the Downes Building.

Finance (TBD): There is no finance report this month.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): On May 29, 2016 the computer updates and backups were performed. All equipment appears to be in good condition and functioning as designed. A problem with the laptop computer, MRHS3, was detected and resolved by installing a fresh copy of the operating system.

Newsletter: (L. Allyn for J. Pryor) The next newsletter will not be published until September.

Program & Membership (M. Austin): The last remaining speaker of the session was Rick Spencer “Historical Songs of Outlaws, Villains and Rogues” on May 25, which was also the MRHS annual meeting. Rick was well received and there were approximately 45 attendees. We had a cake to celebrate the final session of the 2015/2016 season. There will be seven speakers for the Fall 2016/Spring 2017 season; four have been lined up already. George King is scheduled for April – he will bring a WW1 ambulance and give a talk about its restoration. We will try to have a themed year around WW1. We will discuss changing press releases to reach a larger audience.

P&M Subcommittee of Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): Five gifts came in within the last month.

Publicity/PR (L. Pyrke-Fairchild): Dorrie is posting photographs on the MRHS Facebook page every Thursday and the Instagram account is gaining followers.

New Business: Margaret and Lou created a draft of the survey for the membership. It will be sent out to MNL membership as well as to MRHS members. • Richard had 11 people at the History Book Club – The Warmth of Other Suns and In the Heart of the Sea were read during the past 2 months. Books have been selected for the next 5 months. We may publicize on the MRHS Facebook page. • Mystic Seaport paid MRHS $112.20 for Colors of Mystic.

Next meeting is September 19, 2016, 7pm Mystic Noank Library. The October board meeting is Monday the 17th.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Holland, Recording Secretary

NOTE:
The meeting April & May Mystic River Historical Society board meeting minutes and the May 2016 annual meeting minutes as well as archived minutes & newsletters can be viewed online at: www.mystichistory.org
Membership Updates

Welcome to the following new Individual Members:
Jeanne Baker • Mr. Robert Everett • Jade Huguenot

--- and new Family Members: Dr. & Mrs. Howard Brensilver • Mr. & Mrs. Michael Jacobs • Mr. & Mrs. Bill Thorp

We shall miss those who have passed away: Norman Boas, a member since 1979; Mina Ferguson, a member since 1978 and Mrs. Anthony Halsey, a member since 1999.

Events Calendar

7pm Wednesday, September 28th, 2016
The Last Trap Fishermen of RI - Markham Starr
7pm refreshments & socializing, 7:30p program

Mystic Congregational Church Hall, Broadway & E. Main, Mystic
“The tradition, spirit & work ethic of Rhode Island fishing culture.”

7pm Tuesday, October 11th, 2016
History Book Club - MRHS & MNL Partnership
The Activities Room, Mystic-Noank Library
“Lawrence in Arabia” by Scott Anderson

Wed., October 26th, 2016
The History of Coastal Tourism - Michelle Moon

Wed., December 7th, 2016
Lord’s Point, Just a Little History - Beverly A Dodd

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

Newsletter/Print Patrons

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MRHS Gifts

Our thanks to the following who made gifts in 2016.
The Akeley Trust
BF Hoxie Co.
Jane Imdahl
Mr and Mrs Andrew Langlois
Mystic Garden Club

Thank you!

The tradition, spirit & work ethic of Rhode Island fishing culture.