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.

Please join us with Markham Starr at the MRHS meeting on September 28th for the full discussion!

MRHS Program Committee Announces Fall ’16 Lineup

Please join us for our general membership meetings this fall - and bring a friend or two! All events are open to the public and begin at 7pm with refreshments and socializing, then program at 7:30.

The meetings are held at the Mystic Congregational Church Hall at Broadway & E. Main St., Mystic.

September 28, 2016 ~ Markham Starr – The Last Trap Fisherman of RI
October 26, 2016 ~ Michelle Moon – The History of Coastal Tourism
December 07, 2016 ~ Beverly A Dodd – Lords Point, Just a Little History

Also, come visit MRHS & others at the Groton History Fair on September 24th!
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 narrow in on the year.

On the Groton side 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?
Mystic From The Air....

Noticeable on the Stonington side of the river 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?

Please do feel free to share your stories and observations to Lou Allyn at allynlouis6@gmail.com!
Survey Says: Thank You!

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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Archives Additions

Some items we’ve 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
- Material from the Charles B. Allyn Foundation via Joanna Case
- Two aerial photos of Mystic. (Shown on previous pages)
- Material about MRHS trips from the files of Joyce Everett
- A photo of 8 West Mystic Avenue (the Octagon House)

~ Dorrie Hanna

Volunteer of the Season: Austin!

We love volunteers & members of all sorts, seasons & abilities! We’d like to extend our thanks & appreciation to Austin Thorp - seen here exhibiting his mowing skills and upholding family volunteer traditions on the grounds of the Downes building this summer. Austin, age 11, is grandson to MRHS board members & contributors, Barry and Stephanie Thorp, and the latest addition to the MRHS House and Grounds Committee.

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Survey Chart:

**Immigration & Family Histories**
How & why did individuals and groups of people move to Mystic and what was life like for them?
- Quite Interested: 73%
- Somewhat Interested: 24%

**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: 49%
- Somewhat Interested: 39%

**War**
Mystic’s contribution to war efforts and how wars have affected Mystic - both collectively and as individuals at home and abroad.
- Quite Interested: 46%
- Somewhat Interested: 31%
MRHS May 2016 Annual Meeting Minutes

The Annual Meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. The President declared that a quorum of 25 members was present.

A motion was made, seconded and passed to dispense with the reading of the minutes from the 2015 Annual Meeting as posted on the Society’s website www.mystichistory.org. Treasurer Barry Thorp presented his annual report. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the report.

Nominations were made for election to the Board of Trustees for terms of three years: Liz Holland, Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild and John Parry, Stephanie Thorp. There were no nominations from the floor. A motion was made, seconded and passed to elect the slate as presented.

The President announced that William Everett and David Evans are retiring from the Board having reached their limit of nine years of service & thanked them for their dedicated service to MRHS on various committees and as officers. He also recognized all the officers, board members, employees and volunteers who continue to make MRHS a successful & respected local historical society.

There was no new business to be brought before the annual meeting. The Annual Meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m. The next Annual Meeting will be held Wednesday May 24, 2017.

May 2016 Board Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met at 7 p.m. on May 16, 2016. Attendees included: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, John Parry, Liz Holland, Dave Evans, Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild, and Bill Everett.

President (L. Allyn): A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the April meeting as published. • Two MRHS Board Members will be retiring this month: Bill Everett, who has been an MRHS member since 1975, and Dave Evans, who has been an MRHS member since 2003. MRHS greatly appreciates their extensive contributions to the Board. • MRHS is in the process of creating a survey to be sent to the membership around September to outline several potential initiatives. We are exploring the possibility of sending out the survey to the distribution lists of other local groups as well. • Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild, the newest Board member, has agreed to do an exhibit in the Ames Room of the MNL with photographs detailing houses and buildings that are no longer in Mystic. • The Mystic Fire Marshall conducted an inspection of our buildings on April 21; fire alarms will need to be inspected on an annual basis.

Corresponding Sec. (L. Glazer): No letters sent since last meeting.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): For the period 19 April through 15 May 2016, all deposits have been made 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-discernible commitments that include payments for utilities, postage for IRS tax mailing 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 (D. Hanna): The Curatorial Committee met May 15. Judy Hicks brought in some items originally given to the MNL to be donated to MRHS. The schedule at the Downs Building will be modified in the summer.

Finance (D. Evans): The annual audit was conducted with Barry Thorp, Lou Allyn, and David Evans, and the records are in good order – two months of financial records are randomly selected each year and matched up with receipts. In the future, receipts will be provided for the speaker fees to the Treasurer.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): On May 5, 2016 the computer updates and backups were performed. All equipment appears to be in good condition and functioning as designed.

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 is Rick Spencer “Historical Songs of Outlaws, Villains and Rogues” May 25, which is also the MRHS annual meeting. We will have a cake and a celebration. • There will be seven speakers for the Fall 2016/Spring 2017 season. We will discuss changing press releases to reach a larger audience.

Hospitality & Membership Subcommittee (C. Allyn): One new member.

Publicity (S. Thorp): Dorrie posts photographs on MRHS Facebook page every Thursday, Instagram account is gaining followers.

New Business Mystic Seaport has placed another order for 15 copies of Colors of Mystic.

The next meeting is June 20, 2016, 7pm at the Mystic Noank Library.

April 2016 Board Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met at 7pm on April 18, 2016. Attendees included: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, Lois Glazer, John Parry, Barry Thorp, Stephanie Thorp, Liz Holland, Jennifer Pryor, and Harry White (guest consultant).

Special Report (Harry White): Results of the planning meeting were discussed. The board will pick four initiatives to research more fully. A member survey will be discussed at the next planning meeting.

President (L. Allyn): A motion was made, seconded & approved to accept minutes of the March meeting as published. • A recent change was made to the MRHS membership dues structure and an analysis showed that some members dropped down to lower membership levels, likely to maintain their annual contribution amount. • Richard and Lou met with MNL Board and they were very receptive to any collaborative opportunities. For example, the library is open to having MRHS exhibits in the Ames Room. In the future, MNL and MRHS will swap notices of meetings in each other’s newsletters.

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

Treasurer (B. Thorp): For the period 21 March through 18 April 2016, 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-discernible commitments that include payments for utilities, postage for IRS tax mailing 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 (D. Hanna): The Committee met April 18. MRHS donated a large number of old Seventh Day Baptist newspapers to archives of the Seventh Day Baptist Church in Wisconsin. The Mystic Fire Marshall will conduct an inspection of our building April 21.

Finance (D. Evans): MRHS has moved money from a mutual fund into index funds.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): On Friday, 1 April 2016 the computer updates and backups were performed. All equipment appears to be in good condition and functioning as designed. Fresh battery was installed in each of the two desktop computer mouse.

Newsletter: A poem written in 1847 by a student at Portersville Academy will be included in the newsletter.

Program & Membership (M. Austin): Upcoming speakers are: Howard Veisz “The Gerda III” April 27 and Rick Spencer “Hisorical Songs of Outlaws, Villains and Rogues” May 25, which is also the MRHS annual meeting. We will have a cake and a celebration. • There will be seven speakers for the Fall 2016/Spring 2017 season. We will discuss changing press releases to reach a larger audience. • Michelle Moon’s talk had about 60 attendees and went very well. • R. Semeraro’s History Book Club at the Mystic Noank Library was successful.

Hospitality & Membership Subcommittee (C. Allyn): Five benefactor level members joined.

Publicity (S. Thorp): Press releases of the membership meeting will be sent out. Dorrie is posting photographs on the MRHS Facebook page every Thursday.

New Business: Mystic Seaport has placed a second order for Colors of Mystic. The first 15 copies sold and they ordered 20 more. MRHS now has an Instagram account: @mysticriverhistorical.

~ All minutes respectfully submitted by Elizabeth Holland, Recording Secretary ~
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 ad 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 and belonging.

Community: Old places give people a sense of shared community.

Economics: Old places foster a sustainable and equitable economy.

Portersville Academy, Summer 2016. The classically elegant “old place” and colorful sky inspired this photograph by Louisa Watrous, featured in a MRHS Facebook post, June 21, 2016.
Membership Updates

The following are new members.
Dr and Mrs Howard Brensilver of Mystic--Family
Mr Robert Everett of Asheville, N.C.--Individual
Jade Huguenot of Gales Ferry & Northampton Ma.--Individual
Mr and Mrs Michael Jacobs of Mystic--Family
Mr and Mrs Bill Thorp of Kenyon RI--Family.
Norman Boas passed away and was a member since 1979
Mina Ferguson passed away and was a member since 1978

~ Cindy Allyn, Membership

MRHS Gifts

Our thanks to the following who made gifts in 2016.
The Akeley Trust
BF Hoxie Co.1
Jane Imdahl
Mr and Mrs Andrew Langlois
Mystic Garden Club