



the PORTERSVILLE PRESS

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Third Annual APPRAISAL DAY & FINDS MEETING - March 23rd

Haul out those special treasures! Appraisal Day is here again! Rummage in your grandmother's jewelry box and your hiding holes for the special brooches and bangles you have always wondered about, pull out the boxes of old books from generations past, unwrap the silver, dust off the gizmos and whatnots and bring them all to the Mystic River Historical Society Appraisal Day on March 23rd at the Mystic Congregational Church meeting hall

Our appraisers will include: Trina McCandless from McCandless Custom Jewelry and Appraisal, Waterford, specializing in jewelry; Tim Bell from Peaceable Kingdom, Stonington, specializing in porcelain, pottery, glassware, antiques and collectibles; Paul Russ from Russ Appraisal Services, specializing in antiques and fine art; Patricia Hval from Fine Consignments, Westerly. Specializing in jewelry, porcelain, art pottery, and books; Allison Goodsell, from Allison Goodsell Books, Kingstown RI, specializing in used and rare books and postcards and Jennifer Lacker, from J London Restoration, Stonington, specializing in furniture and furniture restoration.

The cost will be \$10 per item, as many as you like within reason. You may bring anything that it is possible for you to bring. There will be people to help you bring your items safely into the hall. These are verbal appraisals only. If you discover something truly special and would like a formal written appraisal, you may contact the appraisers later.

Each appraiser will select two or three items of special interest, with the owner's permission, to display and discuss at our regular evening meeting at 7:30p. This is great fun for the rest of us and opens our eyes to possessions we never thought had any value!

Everyone is welcome, seating and refreshments are provided while you wait your turn, so pass the word to friends and neighbors and come!



In Pursuit of Gen'l George Washington - April 22-27 House Garden & History Adventure!

If you are hoping to join the MRHS intrepid travelers and just have not told Helen or Joyce yet - please call and send in your deposit check! We have a few places left that are going fast. Several experts have told us that the weather WILL be beautiful and we know that our trip will be fun and the participants will have a great adventure.

We are pleased to say that one of the Garden Tour stops in the Williamsburg/Jamestown area will be the Godspeed Cottage, the only residence on historic Jamestown Island and the home of the Director of Archaeology for the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. It has never before been included on the Tour.

We will also enjoy lunch at the Nassau Club in Princeton, NJ, on our way home to Mystic. We are grateful to the thoughtful new member who made this treat possible! Call today and secure your spot!

The trip is Sunday, April 22nd, through Friday, April 27th. All transportation, overnight accommodations, baggage handling, breakfasts, several lunches and dinners, snacks, as well as all admissions, sightseeing, and special guides are included in the total cost of \$995.00 double occupancy; \$1270 single occupancy. A non-refundable \$200 per person deposit (payable to MRHS) should be sent to P O Box 245, Mystic CT 06355 as soon as possible. Cancellation insurance can be arranged upon request and is advised. Final payment is due March 22nd and is non-refundable. The beautiful scenery, historical insights, lovely spring flowers and congenial company are free!

Please call Helen Keith (536-8284) or Joyce Everett (536-6339) if you'd like to be part of the adventure!

Lou Allyn

I am very pleased to announce that we have a new member of the Board of Directors: Bettye Noyes. Bettye was recently elected Chairman of the Curatorial Committee, which also makes her a member of the Board. She joined the Historical Society in 1989 and has been a faithful curatorial volunteer for quite a few years.

Emails to Constant Contact subscribers were sent out regarding:

- The upcoming members meeting in February.
- Posting of back issues of our newsletter, the Portersville Press, on our website www.mystichistory.org made possible by our Webmaster, Stephanie Thorp.

Early response to the question of "would you prefer to receive the newsletter by email or postal mail?" is running about 50/50. Our printing and postage cost per issue is around \$330; converting half of this to email would save over \$1,300 per year. Our membership database and mailing label expert, Barry Thorp says he can set up a new field to manage a change in the mailings. After more responses have come in, the Board will decide what to do. Of course, people will always be able to change their mind.

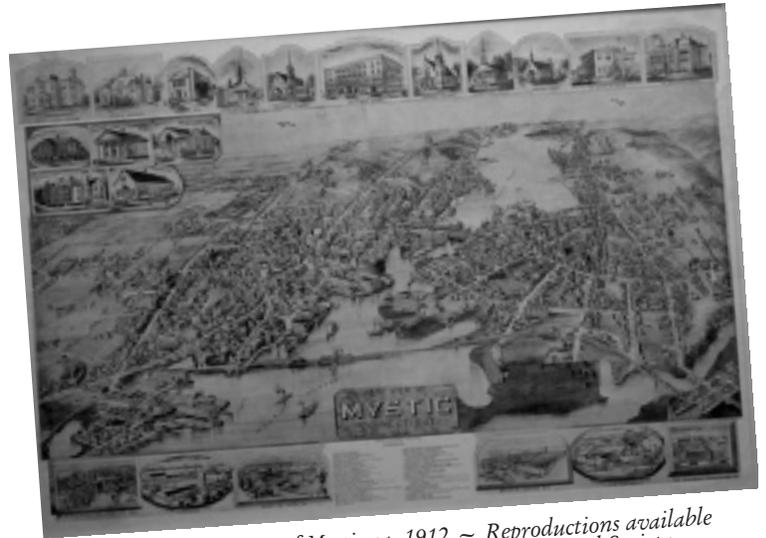
If you are not on the Constant Contact distribution list and would like to be, please email me at lallyn@snet.net

One of the interesting new features at our monthly meetings is Show and Tell. Members are encouraged to bring in items of local historical interest and tell us about them. Among the items we have seen in the last few months were a Civil War sword owned by General S.D. Lee, an Allyn musket used at the Battle of Groton Heights, a diagram of family pews in the Union Baptist Church, an Ellery Thompson painting of a dragger, a Greenman needlepoint foot stool and Thomas Courter's honorable discharge Civil War document. If you have something that is interesting, please bring it to a meeting.

I'm looking forward to seeing you at our monthly meetings.

The MAP CABINET PROJECT

-D. Hanna



A Birdseye View Map of Mystic ca. 1912 ~ Reproductions available for purchase at your favorite Mystic River Historical Society.

Helen Keith and I have spent many a Wednesday afternoon lately doing an inventory of the contents of the map cabinet. Although we refer to it as a "map" cabinet it contains a great deal more than maps! There are oversized photographs, framed photographs, original artwork, advertising items (such as calendars from by-gone Mystic businesses), oversized documents (such as Civil War military rosters), blueprints, site drawings, and more.

Our goal is to make it easier to locate all of this material and we started by grouping like items together. Then we allocated a drawer or drawers for each category e.g. maps, photos, art, etc. We are noting items that have not yet been accessioned so they can be added to the database.

The computer records for previously accessioned things will be updated to give the new locations. I know it doesn't sound like a very glamorous job, but believe me it will be worth it! And along the way we've discovered some real gems that I, at least, had no idea that the MRHS owned. A special "thank you" to Helen for her help on this chore – yet another way we're trying to provide better access to our wonderful collection.

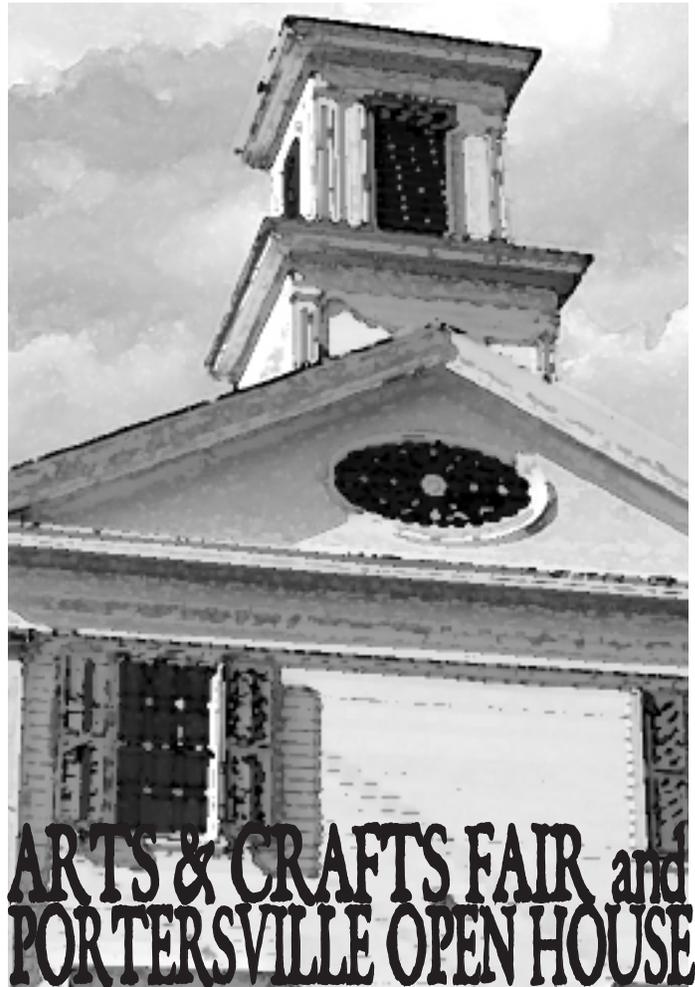
*The Newsletter of the Mystic River Historical Society
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by the Mystic River Historical Society
Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355*

MRHS Buildings SLATED FOR REPAIR & REFURBISHMENT

J. Porter

Some major work is scheduled for both of our buildings this spring. The chimney flashing on Portersville Academy is being repaired. The deficient flashing was discovered during a recent house inspection. The Downes Building is in for even more work. The roof is being replaced. The original cedar shingle roof has deteriorated. A replacement roof of architectural asphalt shingles will be installed. The Groton Historic Commission approved this material change at their meeting on 2/20. The new roof will cost about half what a new cedar shingle roof would cost. Connecticut Restoration will be doing all of the roofing work.

The Downes Building is also in need of exterior painting. We will also replace the shutters with new, cedar shutters to match those on Portersville Academy. Simonds and Company will be doing the work. The Finance Committee had budgeted for this expected work, but as always, maintaining property is not cheap



- L. Allyn

MRHS SPRING "GARDEN PARTY" ATTENDEES WANTED - B.Y.O.R.*

*Please do join us on
Saturday, April 14th
from 9am - noon
to help tidy the grounds for spring!
Raking, sweeping, trimming,
and general yard work
will be the order of the day.
RSVP to John Porter
(860) 433-7342 or jporter@gdeb.com*

** Bring Your Own Rake!
Or broom or pruning shears!*

The Spring MRHS Arts & Crafts Fair and Portersville Open House will be held in the Portersville Academy from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Saturday June 23rd. This event is being held so that our members, local residents, and the wandering tourist will have an opportunity to walk through the freshly painted and renovated schoolhouse while at an enjoyable Fair. Wine and other drinks and refreshments will be served. Twenty percent of all sales will benefit the Society.

Any member is invited to participate as an exhibitor and/or a helper. Response to a recent Constant Contact email has been very positive with over a dozen people interested in exhibiting and the same number or volunteers to help set up, etc. If you have not already responded please let us know if you would like to participate (call Lou Allyn at 536-9363 or email lallyn@snet.net). If you have something historical to display or something you have made but don't want to sell, we want to display these as well.

The MARY ADELAIDE RANDALL

From the Pages of History with Ellery Thompson



Ellery Thompson (1899-1986) was born in Mystic and spent his adult life fishing the waters off southern New England. He was an author, a painter and an all-around character. In addition to writing such books as "Draggerman's Haul," Ellery spent much of his later years putting stories from his life down on paper. The Mystic River Historical Society newsletter will publish excerpts from some of

Ellery's reminiscences, most written in 1960s and 1970s, looking back on his life. Marion Krepcio of Stonington was entrusted with Ellery's manuscripts and she is generously sharing them with the historical society and allowing society member Marilyn Comrie to edit them for publication in the newsletter.

Ellery was descended from the Thompsons, Denisons and Wilcoxes on his father's side of the family and from the Chapmans, Rathbuns and Packers on his mother's side.

My father as captain on the ferryboat Governor Winthrop in 1908 had great admiration for the deep-sea fishermen who sailed their smacks and schooners up the Thames to pack out their catches.

When Pop got his first boat – a 26 footer with a three-horse Little Giant gasoline engine – Pop saw to it that I didn't have too many idle moments. There was fishing gear to be made and repaired, lobster pots to be baited, bilges to be pumped dry. When I flopped into bed at night, I was all through until sunrise – that is, unless Pop hauled me out long before dawn to catch a slack water or fair tide at the grounds. Sometimes lobstering was a stinking mess.

Shortly after my father got his first powerboat in 1908, the excursion steamer City of Lawrence was outbound down the Thames River from Norwich, with Block Island her destination. She never made it. Near the mouth of the Thames, she ran into thick fog and, in rounding Eastern Point too soon, the steamer plowed into an underwater reef at Black Rock. Shennecossett Beach was a couple of steamer lengths away.

Although passengers and crew were taken off, the steamer was done for, a total wreck. My father had set out

lobster pots around Black Rock. So in days to come, we watched that wooden-top steamboat disappear as salvagers and looters stripped her. Some iron framework of her hull was to remain visible for years, until all that remained was a sad memory.

After the City of Lawrence wrecking, plans were being made to build a home-dwelling lighthouse on Southwest Ledge near the mouth of the Thames River, with its light signal to be three white flashes and one red. From our house on the slopes of Groton, we could practically watch progress on building the light. And just before the upper story and roof went on the light, along came the multi-masted coasting schooner Mary Adelaide Randall in the fog to pile up on the Southwest Ledge, with her jibboom poking up directly over the nearly finished light.

The T.A. Scott ship salvagers pulled her off without too much damage to her hull, but the Randall's troubles were just beginning. The Mary Adelaide Randall was owned by Captain Jason Randall, who, when ashore, was a busy superintendent at our Congregational Sunday School in Groton. He had a large home on Ramsdell Street, not far from the Ramsdell Street one-grade school which I had attended at the age of 6 in 1905 – the year my brother Morris was born. But fire destroyed the school as I finished first grade.

The captain had a large nose that appeared redder than it should be. And we young boys thought that its coloring was caused by drinking whisky. The demon rum business had been fired at us in Sunday School. Finally, after some boating consultation with my father – a pretty coastwise guy – I came to the reluctant conclusion that wind and wave off the coast might be partly responsible for the weird coloring. After all, Pop's nose was no shrinking violet.

A year after the Randall grounding on Southwest Ledge (the lighthouse was now finished), the ill-fated schooner piled up in fog on the west shores of Block Island, only a boat length away from the jetty leading into Salt Pond harbor, just south of the spot where many of the frozen victims of the Larchmont steamboat disaster came ashore. On my first trip to Block Island, on board the old side-wheeler Block Island out from Norwich, New London and Watch Hill, my father pointed out the oaken bones of the well-stripped Mary Adelaide Randall. What a pity.

Next month, Ellery writes about the dangers of lobstering in the Sound.



The New London Ledge Light: A Brief History

The "Southwest Ledge Light," to which Ellery Thompson refers on the previous page is known today as the New London Ledge lighthouse. The stately brick building was one of the last lighthouses built in New England, representing a rare early 20th c. offshore lighthouse that is not of cast-iron construction. It reportedly owes its distinctive French Second Empire style to the influence of the wealthy home owners on the local coast, who wanted a structure in keeping with the elegance of their own homes - many of which were destroyed in the 1938 hurricane.

By the early 1900s, New London, with its protected harbor at the mouth of the Thames River, had made the transition from whaling center to industrial city, necessitating an addition to the New London Harbor Light for adequate vessel traffic direction. Lobbying for the lighthouse began in 1890 with an official recommendation from the Lighthouse Board being made in 1903. At first the new station was going to be placed on Black Ledge, which would have left Southwest Ledge an unmarked hazard between the new lighthouse and the shipping channel, so Southwest was finally chosen as the site.

The lighthouse was built by the Hamilton R. Douglas Company of New London which also built Groton Town Hall. The crib it stands on was constructed by the T.A. Scott Company in Groton and towed to the site, where it was filled with concrete and riprap and sunk in 28 feet of water. Beginning operation in 1909, the name of the new light was changed in 1910 to New London Ledge, to avoid confusion with the identically named Southwest Ledge Light at the New Haven breakwater. It was automated in 1987. Sources: www.lighthousefriends.com, www.lighthouse.com



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January 2007 Meeting Minutes

Betty Anne Reiter

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met at the Mystic Chamber of Commerce on Monday, February 12, 2007. Those present were David Evans, Bill Everett, Joyce Everett, Tim Evers, Dorrie Hanna, Helen Keith, Betty O'Donnell, John Porter, Jennifer Pryor, Betty Anne Reiter and Stephanie Thorp. Board members who were not present had been excused. Keith called the meeting to order at 7:30. Minutes of the January meeting were accepted with one correction; the speaker at the January meeting was Melissa Ryan.



In Correspondence, Keith reported for Werner that three thank you notes and a letter to the church confirming the May meeting date were sent.

Treasurer Everett distributed reports and noted he is learning the programs used for creating the financial reports. Keith suggested the balance sheet be emailed to Board members prior to the meeting to allow time for review.

For President Allyn, Keith noted that the email ballot to elect Bill Everett was unanimous. The relative humidity in the Downes Building is below 30% and is being evaluated by Allyn & Porter. The Five Rivers Consortium is considering sponsoring a Spring History Fair at the Crystal Mall. MRHS has indicated an interest in participating; the cost is \$50 per organization.

In Standing Committees, for Building & Grounds, Porter compared three roofing estimates and moved that CT Restoration replace the flashing on the Portersville chimney and install asphalt shingles on the Downes building. He had a preliminary meeting with the Historic District Commission and received concurrence on the use of asphalt shingles. A final Certificate of Appropriateness is expected at the 2/20/07 meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Porter also received three estimates for external painting and shutter replacement on the Downes Building and moved to contract with Simonds & Co. to paint the Downes Building and replace the shutters. After discussion, the motion passed unanimously. Porter reminded all that volunteers are needed for the Spring Yard Cleanup on April 14th from 9:00 a.m. to noon.

In Curatorial, Hanna & Watrous are continuing to enter older material into PastPerfect and to "prune" those items which are not yet entered that are not directly related to Mystic. The Curatorial Committee will meet February 21 to elect a committee chair and discuss policies & procedures. A Show & Tell has been prepared for the meeting on February 23rd.

In Education & Outreach, Keith's committee met on January 23rd at the Mystic & Noank Library. Several new

people attended the meeting. Due to the schedules of school teachers Tylaska and Leonard, and the desire to move the school program to the fall, a letter was sent to teachers offering the program three mornings a week from mid-September to mid-October 2007. Understudies for the teachers have been identified.

A members' arts and crafts exhibit is planned for June 23rd from 9 to 4. Allyn will chair this event.

Six family activities will be available in Portersville. Three will allow children to make something to take home and three will be done there (e.g. dress up in period clothing). The Family Activity Centers, downstairs in PVA, will open later this summer. They will be open Tuesday mornings and Wednesday and Thursday afternoons when the Downes Building is open. They will also be used when school groups visit PVA.

In Finance, Keith reported the committee received the estimates for the work at the Downes Building and determined that funds are available. After these bills are paid, the committee will look into long-term investments. When the paperwork is complete, MRHS will send \$750 to match the Mystic & Noank Library contribution to the grant for the newspaper project. The next meeting of the Finance Committee is March 5th at 4:00 p.m. at the Downes Building.

A Board member raised the possibility of grants for building maintenance work. The discussion concluded that grant funds are usually not available for this type of work. The Committee reassured the Board that the five-year plan has attempted to plan for necessary repairs.

No reports in Hospitality, IT, Marketing & PR or Membership, although Porter suggested that we follow up on trying to involve new members in committees and other volunteer opportunities.

In Programs, Evers will set up for the February meeting. Appraisal Day is being organized and volunteers are needed on March 23rd.

For Special Projects, Everett mentioned that four to six places are still available for the Spring Tour.

On behalf of Strategic Planning, prior to the meeting, Keith distributed the following job description to the Board regarding Collections Manager:

Job Title: Archives Manager

Hours: minimum of 6, maximum of 12 per week

Salary: \$15.00 per hour

Accountability: Reports to, and is responsible to, the MRHS Board of Trustees

General description of position:

The Archives Manager oversees the operation of the archives building, the MRHS archival personnel (paid and volunteer) and the MRHS collections (present collections, as well as incoming and outgoing), including manuscripts, photographs, and artifacts. The Archives Manager serves as an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees and may be asked to serve on one or more of the following committees: Curatorial, Finance and/or Strategic Planning.

Key duties and responsibilities:

- Oversee the work of the Office Manager, Volunteers and Curatorial Assistants; Maintain procedures for processing collections; oversee rearrangement, re-labeling, etc. of the collections when necessary or as requested by the Curatorial Committee or the MRHS Board; oversee the Past Perfect data-base system in cooperation with the IT chairperson.

- Help patrons with research and photographic reproduction requests. Select items for “show & tell” at monthly meetings. Support and coordinate requests for loan of MRHS materials. Support and coordinate creation and display of exhibits at MRHS or at outside sites.

- Maintain a log of time spent and tasks accomplished; submit monthly report of hours worked to Treasurer and of work accomplished to the Board; prepare an Annual Report when requested by the President.

- Maintain filing system for correspondence, Deeds of Gift, research queries and such other files as may be needed.

- Prepare annual budget requests for the office and the archives; with the Office Manager maintain a list of supplies and obtain them as needed.

- Manage the Connecticut Humanities Council Grant renewal process, including the re-application for the grant for the next two years, and the mid-year grant reports. Maintains an accurate and up-to-date CHC Grant file.

- Oversee the Akeley Collection, owned by the Mary Jobe Akeley Trust, but maintained and housed in our building.

The following corrections were made:

- The title was changed from Archives Manager to

Collections Manager to be more inclusive of the manager’s responsibility for all materials.

- “Oversees” was changed to “Directs” in the first key responsibility, i.e., “Directs the work of the Office Manager, Volunteers and Curatorial Assistants...”

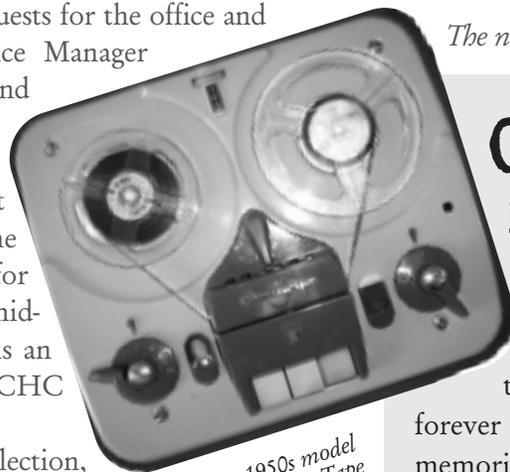
- The bullet beginning “Manage the Connecticut Humanities Council Grant renewal process...” was changed to read “Manages any grants pertaining to the collections.” Keith moved that the job description as amended be accepted and it was approved unanimously.

In Unfinished Business, the kayakers’ guide has been distributed for editing.

David Evans reported on the walking tour project. He has reviewed previous walking tours and materials from other towns for ideas. New tour materials would emphasize ease of use, ready availability and a number of small self guided tours, available for free. The materials would include a picture or sketch of each building with a brief narrative, would fit in tourist brochure racks, and be available at a variety of locations for tourists. Existing funds could be used to cover printing costs or we could solicit additional support. Evans will continue to investigate this project.

It was suggested that several community members would make excellent subjects for oral histories. A committee would be needed to research the best methods. Transcriptions would be required.

The next meeting will be on March 19th.



A late 1950s model Grundig TKS Tape Recorder

Oral History Project Seeks Talent for Transcription

The MRHS would like to create a team of transcription artists and other interested volunteers for our Oral History Project. Help us to forever capture moments in time through the tales & memories of resident historians and “voices of experience” like Ellery Thompson. Interested? Contact Kit Werner at royalwerner@sbcglobal.net

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CALENDAR NOTABLES

Appraisal Day & Meeting - Friday, March 23rd 1-4p & 7:30p
Parish Hall of the Congregational Church, Broadway
Mark your calendar for this favorite annual event!

Spring Cleaning Day - Saturday, April 14th, 9am
Portersville Academy & Downes Building Grounds
Bring your friends & good spirits for a spring tidying!

General Meeting & Program - Friday, April 27th, 7:30p
Parish Hall of the Congregational Church, Broadway
Join us for a meeting and then a presentation from Melissa Ryan on Searching for Bonhomme Richard.

Member Arts & Crafts Show - June 23rd 2007, 9 - 4
Portersville Academy & Downes Building Grounds
Plan now to showcase & admire the talents of MRHS members!
See article on page three of this issue.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

We welcome some new members to the MRHS family:
Individuals - Deborah Bates, Mrs. Joan Ness
Contributing- Sheila Bodine

NEWSLETTER PATRONS

Many thanks to the patrons below for their support:

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