



A Local History Mystery: Where is Jane Smith Denison? - Jane Preston

Perhaps a question that is more to the point is “Where is the portrait of Jane Smith Denison that used to hang in the parlors of the Road Church on Pequot Trail?”

Jane Smith Denison was the daughter of Nathaniel Smith and Mary Denison of Groton. She was born January 13, 1731 and married George Denison, great-grandson of Captain George Denison on February 23, 1748 when she was just 17 years old. Eleven children were born to George and Jane from 1750 to 1772. Their sons George, William, Gilbert and Elisha all served in the Revolutionary War. Tragically, Elisha, who was only in his early teens, died on the British prison ship *The Jersey*.

Esther Denison was George and Jane’s 10th child and next to youngest daughter. In 1790 Esther married Enoch Burrows at the Denison Homestead which was known as Pequotsepos Manor. Enoch, a prosperous merchant and shipbuilder, was the son of Judge Silas Burrows and Mary Smith Burrows. Enoch built a beautiful home for his bride in Old Mystic with marble steps and a marvelous view of the Mystic River and here Esther and Enoch raised a family of three children. This home is still standing in Old Mystic on Route 27.



Continued on p. 3

Portrait of Esther Denison Burrows

Local Journalism & History of The Day “Indian Relics Found” - Dorrie Hanna

At our annual Membership Meeting & Pot Luck on May 27th, Gregory N. Stone will discuss the history of The Day Trust and its importance to the survival of local journalism in southeastern Connecticut. Theodore Bodenwein, publisher of *The Day* from 1891 until his death in 1939, successfully competed with more established newspapers in New London, by, among other things, stationing correspondents to cover the news in locales like Niantic, Mystic, Noank and Poquonnock Bridge and thus building loyal readerships in the region’s outlying areas. The late James McKenna, the Day’s Mystic reporter in the 1950s and 1960s, and Joe Wojtas, the current Stonington reporter, descended from that tradition, which Bodenwein sought to preserve by placing his newspaper in the ownership of a trust. Stone will discuss that episode in American journalism history and its importance today, as local newspapers attempt to deal with the upheavals in journalism.

Greg Stone retired in 2007 as deputy editorial page editor of The Day. He is an adjunct instructor in journalism at the University of Connecticut at Avery Point and author of the book The Day Paper: One of America’s Last Independent Newspapers. He lives in Old Mystic.



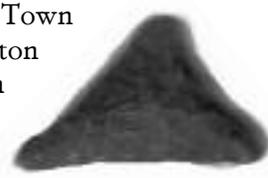
A collector’s vintage Souvenir Edition of the New London Day marks the historic event of the 1938 Hurricane.

Mr. Josiah Brown recently unearthed on his farm, under a stone wall adjoining the Silas B. Wheeler estate, the full skeleton of an Indian youth with bow and arrow buried in the grave. What a pity Mystic has no historical society to take charge of such finds. In recent years Mystic has allowed enough of these to be taken away to fill a building with valuable and most interesting relics of the early days. Why not make a beginning with this latest discovery?

~ Mystic Times, 30 June 1906

Judy Hicks suggested this interesting piece for Portersville Press and I am delighted to submit it. But I got to wondering where this skeleton might have been discovered so I did a little research. It turns out, as far as I can determine, it might not have been found in Mystic per se. Silas B. Wheeler was a descendant of one of the first settlers of Stonington, Thomas Wheeler, (as in Tom Wheeler Road, I presume) and he farmed his ancestor’s original land. Josiah Brown was harder to locate, but then I thought of the Brown family that operates Wychwood Farms out on North Stonington Road. Hmmm.

To make a long story short, and to meet the editor’s deadline, I think maybe these “Indian relics” were found in the Town of Stonington or North Stonington and so, even if Mystic had had an historical society in 1906, the relics would more properly be preserved elsewhere.





from the
PRESIDENT'S DESK

Lou Allyn

Since this is my last President's letter I thought it might be a good time to reflect upon my years with the Mystic River Historical Society.

Cindy and I moved back to Mystic in 1998 and began reconnecting with the community. It wasn't long before Sara Lathrop asked me to paint signs for a House Tour. Then childhood and nursery school playmate Jim Lathrop suggested that I would enjoy being on the MRHS Board. This appealed to me since, according to The New London Day October 4, 1973, James H. Allyn (my dad) was historian for the newly formed Mystic River Historical Society.

A little while later George Keith died and I somehow found myself replacing him as chairman of the Building & Grounds Committee. It started out as low-key way to get to know the Society but soon turned into major excitement with the project to perform major repairs on Portersville Academy. With the expertise of Early New England Restoration and money from a major capital fund raising effort work was started in 2002. While I was enjoying that project friend Jim, who was Treasure at the time, asked me if I would like to do his job since he had to leave it for another commitment. Fortunately, John Porter stepped up to head Building & Grounds and finished the PVA project, quite successfully, on time and within budget.

Being Treasurer was a great experience since it involved many different aspects of the Society. I started using Quick Books for the accounting and was off and running. Converting the fiscal year to the calendar year made life easier, while figuring out the IRS non-profit Form 990 was a learning experience.

This was all very fine, but in 2005 the Bylaws were changed so that no one could hold an Officer's position for more than 5 years. In 2006 Dorrie Hanna could no longer be President so Joyce Everett got husband Bill to volunteer to be the Treasurer and I was elected President. Then the pace stepped up a notch or two.

I have really enjoyed being President and working with all our Trustees and Officers and Committees and other volunteers: helping them to participate and contribute as their time and interests took them. (You probably read their 2008 Annual Reports in this year's February issue.) There were also some individual things I remember accomplishing with all their help and support:

- Recruited as Trustees: Cindy Allyn, David Evans, Tim Evers, Jim Kimenker, Cathy Marco, Bettye Noyes, Betty O'Donnell, Stephanie Thorp, and Lois Glazier (nominee).
- Set up our Constant Contact email system.
- Created a 1938 Hurricane lecture.
- Wrote and published "A Kayaker's Guide to the Mystic River".
- Changed the Members meetings to Wednesday evenings and started "Show and Tell".
- Hired Helen Keith as Office Manager when Emily Perkins retired.
- Hired Dorrie Hanna as Collections Manager and Louisa Watrous as Assistant Collections Manager.
- Strongly encouraged clean up of "unknowns" in the archives and transfer of non-Mystic items to other local historical societies.

I will miss conducting our monthly Board and Members meetings but look forward to continuing in the life of MRHS as a participating member on various committees. And, I will always be able to proudly carry the title of Past President.

~ Lou

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.

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Officers:

*President - Lou Allyn • Vice President - John Porter
Treasurer - Bill Everett • Corresponding Secretary - Kit Werner • Recording Secretary - Cathy Marco*

•
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Where is Jane Smith Denison?

Continued from p. 1



Silas Dennison

Their youngest was a son, Silas, who was to become the confidant of several United States Presidents. He was present at the bedside of James Monroe when he died in 1831.

In her twilight years Jane was known to all as Grandmother Jane. She passed away at age 98 in 1829. Sometime after her death Silas had a portrait of his grandmother painted to show his love and respect for her.

In 1903 Grace Denison Wheeler wrote an article for the local paper listing Jane's portrait as among those on display at Road Church. During that same year, Grace also refers to the portrait in her book *Old Homes in Stonington*. These are the last records we have of the existence of her portrait.

Somewhere between Jane's death in 1829 and the 1903 article and mention of the portrait in Grace Denison's book the portrait was donated to the Road Church by Mary Burrows Green, the daughter of Silas Burrows. Mary was born in 1826 and Silas had passed away in 1876 so the portrait presumably was given to the church somewhere in the mid to late 19th century.

A 1933 article also by Grace Wheeler again describing the portrait collection at the Road Church makes no mention of the portrait of Jane Denison. What happened to it during that thirty year period? What events might have taken place at the church that could account for the portrait's disappearance?

Many changes have taken place at the church over the years. It is no longer a place where town meetings are held. Prior to the construction of Sunday school rooms that were built in the basement many of the portraits had been housed there. The church parlors have undergone many changes. Did these changes have any effect on the location of the Denison portrait?

In the late 1990's Roberta Martin, the church historian, and I arranged to make the remaining items in the collection as a donation to the Stonington Historical Society. There were photographs and pictures of previous pastors, deacons, and other well respected members of the church but no portrait of Jane Denison was found in that collection.

Where is Jane Smith Denison? Will we ever find the solution to what happened to Silas Burrows' tribute to his grandmother?



Copy of what is believed to be the Burrows portrait of Jane Smith Denison. (All pictures courtesy of the Denison Society)

Do You Have Your Tickets? - Sally Halsey

Have you bought your tickets yet for Rooms and Blooms, a Mystic House and Garden Tour on June 20? As this is the Historical Society's and Garden Club's major fundraiser, we hope that every member of both clubs will support us by purchasing tickets in advance and by helping on the day of the Tour! If every one of you brings a friend, that's double the fundraising, and twice the fun for you. Or get a group together to support two of Mystic's community organizations, and make a day of it!

Tickets are available at Bank Square Books and the Whaler's Inn. You may also purchase them online by visiting either website: www.mystichistory.org or www.mysticgardenclub.org Or, if you prefer, send a check for \$22 per person made out to Mystic House and Garden Tour, and send to PO Box 422, Mystic, CT 06355. Please include a SASE. Donations above the cost of the tickets are also graciously accepted, and will be shared equally by both organizations.

Children 12 and under are free, the tour is rain or shine and jitney service will be available as well, so there's no excuse to miss it! This is a one time only chance to enter the homes and gardens of some of Mystic's loveliest properties. For more information, call Sally Halsey at (860) 271-3980.

Long Island in Autumn....

Set your sights on Long Island in mid-October! The MRHS Wanderers will be heading off to explore the beautiful gardens and grand estates of Long Island for our fall trip. We are still in the early planning stages but we have a wonderful guide to take us through the areas near Oyster Bay, we plan to visit one small maritime museum and make a stop at a winery, and we hope for your input on other stops as well. Please send your suggestions to jeverett38@aol.com and plan to come!

April 2009 Meeting Minutes

- Cathy Marco

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met at the Mystic Chamber of Commerce on Monday, April 20, 2009. Board members present were Lou Allyn, David Evans, Tim Evers, Bill Everett, Joyce Everett, Sally Halsey, Jim Kimenker, Cathy Marco, Betty O'Donnell, Jane Preston, John Porter, Jennifer Pryor and Kit Werner. Guests in attendance: Kay Janney and Lois Glazier.

President (Lou Allyn): The Appreciation Reception for our Patrons will be held at Judy Hick's house from 4:00 – 6:00pm. We appreciate Judy letting us use her home for this purpose once again. Lou demonstrated the use of his new gadget “the Docupen”, a portable scanner for scanning. He has been experimenting with it on newspapers, books, notes, photos, reference materials, maps, etc. The next Board meeting is May 18. This will be our last Board meeting before the annual meeting. At the Board meeting on June 15th, we will vote on the new officers and committee chairpersons.

Treasurers Report (Bill Everett): Things are going smoothly. Cash looks good right now.

Corresponding Secretary (Kit Werner): There were 42 letters of thanks sent this past month: 40 related to membership renewals & newsletter patrons; one to Fred Burdick, our speaker at our March meeting; and 1 misc.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Buildings & Grounds (John Porter): The Annual Grounds Cleanup will be held on Saturday, April 25th starting at 9. The Downes Building was power-washed last week. The cost of the service was \$250.

Curatorial (Dorrie Hanna, Collection Manager): Noank Historical Society and Stonington Historical Society have received the items we set aside for them. Items are ready for Westerly Historical Society and New London County Historical Society. Inventory and paperwork are on-going for items to be donated to the new Groton Historical Society and to North Stonington Historical Society.

In support of a fellow Mystic non-profit organization, Dorrie is preparing a MRHS donation of two framed color photos of old postcards to the Mystic and Noank Library Fair Silent Auction.

Education (Tim Evers): Starting May 5th, we will be hosting over 300 school children from the 1st and 3rd grades on their visit of Portersville Academy. The third graders will be coming on Tuesdays and the first graders on Thursdays. Unfortunately we had to turn away one school since we didn't have enough time to accommodate them. We believe we have “cracked the code” to get the interest in our educational program to the schools which is personally contacting the appropriate people in the local elementary schools through email! We are most thankful to the eleven volunteers who will be helping with these

visits. We really appreciate their help!

Outreach: Lou reported that our program to advise local non-profit organizations on how best to organize and care for their archives has started with an inventory of the Mystic Chamber of Commerce files. A report with recommendations will be prepared and reviewed by the Curatorial Committee before presentation to the Chamber. The Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center has also agreed to participate in the program.

Finance (David Evans): Our balanced portfolio has done pretty well, considering the market. Our funds have gone down a little over 5% versus the S&P down 11%. We should stay status quo for now.

IT Committee (Stephanie Thorp): Barry performed the monthly system update and file backup tasks on April 4. All systems were verified to be in good operating condition and functioning properly. Updates included Windows XP, Microsoft Office, McAfee Internet Security. Barry's detailed reports are available on request. He also installed Windows Live, Internet Explorer 8 and Silverlight, as recommended by Microsoft. Stephanie performed monthly update to the website. She added the April Portersville Press and updated the Events Calendar.

Marketing (Sally Halsey): The Press Release has been sent out for this month's program, and added to electronic calendars. We will also have our own Mystic River Historical Society Facebook page. Once it is ready, it will be announced.

Membership (Cynthia Allyn): We have two new members: Ted Parker as an individual membership and Pat Miller as a contributing membership. We also have new newsletter patrons: Mr & Mrs Roger Panciera and Elizabeth & Peter Sorensen. We have had a good response from the renewal letters mailed out the beginning of April and dues are coming in at a good rate. In addition, we have had a number of unrestricted gifts from very generous members.

Nominating (Tim Evers): The following nominees will be submitted to the membership for vote at the annual meeting: Betty O'Donnell, Tim Evers, John Porter, Kay Janney, and Lois Glazier.

Program (Paul Ingle): The Annual Membership and Pot Luck meeting is Wednesday, May 27 at 6pm.

Special Events (Joyce Everett): The New York City trip is ready to go (April 24 and 25). Unfortunately we had two people cancel due to illness. Meanwhile, Joyce announced plans for a Long Island trip for mid-October with one overnight. Initial plans are for a visit to Sagamore Hill (Teddy Roosevelt's home, www.nps.gov/sahi/).

House Tours (Sally Halsey and Joyce Everett): Rooms and Blooms is going along smoothly. We had a lovely cocktail party at the Ettingers' home for the homeowners and committee chairs. The Kimenkers have offered to host a pre-view cocktail party on June 14 for homeowners and larger

donors. The two clubs are working together well, and we have a lot of volunteer help, but can always use more. Joyce is in charge of the house docents and cookie donors. Helen has written the booklet, Dorrie is editing and compiling the ads, etc. and is the liaison with Blue Moon, the booklet designer, and Susan Lund will do a final read-through for edits. Tim and Cally Evers are in charge of operations: signs, jitneys, etc. as well as organizing a bagged lunch to benefit St. Mark's charities. There is a house chair meeting on May 7 at Joyce Everett's home. Kit Werner has volunteered to do the thank you notes for the tour. Members and others have been calling to volunteer to hostess, bake cookies, help serve cookies and lemonade, but we still need more. Our cookie chairman is Laura Kezer. Jennifer Pryor has a group of interested young people who would like to help serve lemonade. If you can help out with any task for the Rooms and Blooms event, please call Joyce Everett (536-6339) or email (jeverett38@aol.com).

Walking Tour (David Evans): The Chamber is reprinting the walking tour brochure for redistribution. There will also be a supply available for the Rooms & Blooms event in case people want to continue touring the area.

NEW BUSINESS

Tim Evers suggested a new project: an illustrated (water-color) guide of homes or locations in Mystic. He shared a beautifully illustrated guide for the Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation by 2004 Stonington High and Skidmore College graduate, Ashley Halsey (www.ahalsey.com). We discussed and Tim will research this further and report at our next Board meeting.

The By Laws require reports from the President, Treasurer and committees as appropriate at the Annual Meeting. A motion will be requested to accept these reports as published in the Newsletter.

An update to the Disaster Preparedness booklet is needed for the Downes Building and Portersville Academy. A work session is needed to update contact names, include section on what to do in long term power failures, etc.

Lou asked for a motion to clarify that the curatorial and office staff are paid for their "desk work" and not for their voluntary work, including attendance at meetings. The motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously.

Next Board meeting is May 18th.

The next General Membership Meeting is May 27th.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy Marco, Recording Secretary



Volunteers & Cookie Bakers...!

If you are able to volunteer, and/or make cookies for the House Tour, please contact Joyce Everett at jeverett38@aol.com or 536-6339.

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CALENDAR Notables

They Called Me Lizzy... Tue., May 12, 12:30 \$20/\$25
 Mystic Congregational Church Hall, 43 E. Main St.
 MCC Women's Fellowship presents a luncheon & performance "They Called Me Lizzy... From Slavery to the White House". Stephanie Jackson is Elizabeth Keckly int the true story of the author & dressmaker to Mary Todd Lincoln. Proceeds go to local charities. For more, call 860-536-4259

Membership Meeting & Pot Luck Wed., May. 27, 6p

No Membership Meeting in June

Rooms & Blooms Sat., June 20, 2009

A Mystic House and Garden Walk! Tickets are \$30 on the day of the event, or \$22 in advance, at Bank Square Books, The Whalers Inn or online or mail-in order at www.mystichistory.org Pre-purchased tickets allow holders to begin their tour at any property without the wait! Volunteer? Call Joyce 536-6339. For advertising possibilities - call Dorrie at 536 - 4453.

Newsletter Patrons

We deeply appreciate the support of our 2008-09 Newsletter Patrons, including new patrons Mr. & Mrs. Roger Panciera and Elizabeth and Peter Sorenson.

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Membership Updates

- Cindy Allyn, Membership Chair

Recently, there are two new memberships including:
 Individual - Ted Parker • Contributing - Patricia Miller

MYSTIC RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING & POTLUCK SUPPER

Wednesday, May 27th at 6^{pm}

Mystic Congregational Church Hall at Broadway & East Main St., Mystic

featuring Gregory N. Stone and "History, Importance of The Day & Local Journalism"

Please bring a dish to share and BYO plates & utensils. Be ready to enjoy historical discussion, fun, friendship & your neighbors' tasty recipes!

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