

December Program: What Johnny Reb & Billy Yank Left Behind

-Paul Ingle

On December 1st, Jack Rajotte will present a program entitled: “ What Johnny Reb and Billy Yank Left Behind”, which will look at the Civil War soldier and his hardships through the artifacts excavated on battlefields and campsites throughout the South.

Jack started an interest in metal detecting in the 1960s, however in 1980 his Company transferred him to the Washington, D.C. area where he became interested in the Civil War. Jack found his first Civil War bullet at South Mountain, MD a battle that took place two days before the great 1862 Battle of Antietam. He begins to do research and began to understand that these battles were not just dates or words in history books.

It was during this time of his research of soldier’s journals and diaries that “history caught up with him.” Jack discovered that “the bullet or button that he had found had a human aspect. 140 years ago someone was there and the terrors and feelings of that person, whose history he had uncovered through the layers of time could still be felt.

Jack will talk about the average Confederate soldier who did not even own a slave and only fought because the North had invaded his land, and the average Northern soldier who fought because it was his duty. Through his artifacts you will know what “see-

ing the elephant” meant, what camp life was and what was carried into battle. These artifacts that he has excavated tell a story and Jack will be there to interpret and bring these artifacts to life as he explains the significance as it correlates to the dire times of that era where General William Tecumseh Sherman summed it up when he said: “War is all Hell!”

Since retiring Jack Rajotte has become a vocational archeologist, past president of the Arthur Bastro Archaeology Society, Volunteer Dig Coordinator for the Connecticut State Archaeologist and a Gungywamp Society tour guide. He is active in archaeology digs throughout Connecticut. Jack is a student of 18th ceramic in particular and 18th century artifacts in general. Cooler weather will find him identifying and cataloging historical artifacts at UCONN, pursuing family genealogy, local historical research, speaking at schools and historical societies. For the past six years he has directed the archaeology excavation on the Revolution War Major General Joseph Spencer home site in East Haddam. Jack has over forty years experience with metal detecting and now supports archaeology site investigation through this experience. For over a decade metal detecting activity was directed on recovery and study of Civil War artifacts throughout the south.

Please join us at the general meeting on December 1st.



Civil War bullet



Confederate Calvary Button

ARTS & CRAFTS SHOW ~ Karen Havrilla

It seems as though the announcement in September’s news letter stirred up some attention, just as we were hoping that it would. We would like to invite members and the general public to see the talents of the MRHS. We would also like to showcase the Portersville Academy.

Right now we need to know what the interest level is for such an activity. If you would be interested in displaying and or selling your arts and crafts work, or if you

are interested being on the committee that will produce this kind of a show, now is the time for you to speak up. As soon as we know who out there is interested, we can take the next step.

Please e mail me at ekhavrilla@sbcglobal.net or call the MRHS to leave me a message. Thanks and happy crafting.





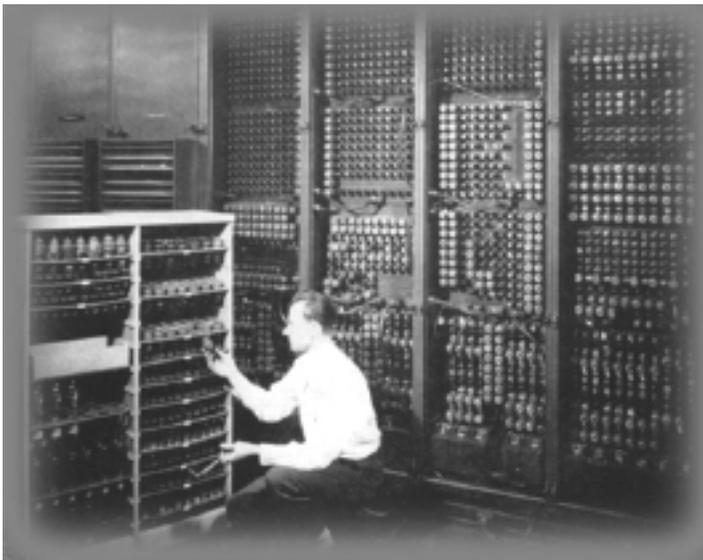
from the PRESIDENT'S DESK

Lou Allyn

A Community: The traditional historical society is faced with declining membership rolls and participation as people and families have less and less free time to allocate among the many demands for their attention. On the other hand, people as much as ever want to belong to some kind of community.

I like to think of our Historical Society members as a small community sharing information and experiences and bonded together by a common interest in the history of Mystic and its people. We gather for events such as monthly meetings with interesting speakers and social times afterwards, bus trips, fund raising and membership parties, pot luck suppers, works days, committee meetings, special events, open houses, and so on. But, these events only happen on a frequency of once per month or less.

The Society endeavors to tell its members and other interested local people about these events via our monthly newsletter, press releases, special mailings and our website www.mystichistory.org. These communications are effective but they are all essentially infrequent one-way methods. Therefore, what might be done to supplement these methods to increase participation in and awareness of the MRHS community?



Vintage computer monitoring efforts

Constant Contact Email: In order to enhance the “community” aspect of MRHS we want to add more dimensions to the relationship between the Society and its constituents. One program to do this is a new email service called Constant Contact Mail, or CCM. CCM allows

MRHS Board and Committee members to send out emails at any appropriate time to everyone on a general distribution list as well as notices and program information to selected addresses. Recipients can then quickly respond back by email reply. For example, a preliminary notice about a bus trip to Virginia would be emailed out to the general mail list. Those who express an interest in the trip would email back a reply. Those replying would be saved to a new list of interested parties. Then more detailed information and forms could be mailed to this interest list at a later date. Also, at any point, anyone with a question or a suggestion can send an email and receive a response within a day or so.

CCM will also be useful for distribution of:

- 1 Reminders of the next monthly meeting.
- 2 Notification when the website is updated.
- 3 Information about new acquisitions.
- 4 Membership surveys and questionnaires.
- 5 Press releases and newspaper articles.
- 6 Forms to sign up for events.
- 7 News of volunteer activities.
- 8 General questions & information from membership.

Coming Soon: Our CCM evaluation is nearly complete. Then anyone with email will be invited to go online to CCM and add (or delete) their name and email address from the service. If you would like to explore CCM on your own at this time go to www.constantcontact.com and click on Take A Tour.

For several years now I have been sending out several emails a week to almost 500 email addresses with general information that is of interest to residents of Masons Island and to those associated with the Mason’s Island Yacht Club. During this time many people have expressed their enjoyment at being “kept in touch” with their island communities. It would not surprise me if this happens with the MRHS as well.



Don't forget: Shop MRHS!

- Fine Reproduction Maps ~ Suitable for Framing ~ Just \$1 •
- MRHS Canvas Tote Bags ~ Specially priced \$7.50 •
- Charming Wooden Toys from .60 •
- Mystic: An American Journey DVDs \$15 •

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with a combined issue for November and December,
by the Mystic River Historical Society
Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355*

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. This month, Ellery writes about his experiences as a crewman on the great Sound steamers that once traveled between this area and New York City.

Bow Watchman, cont. from October Issue

I was greatly thrilled on the day I entered the famous Browning-King clothing store in New York, to be fitted for my uniform ulster and cap with its narrow strip of gold braid. I vowed that, some day, I would come back and buy my fancy every-day short clothes – a vow I was to keep in 1921 to become the best dressed fisherman in the New London area. These ankle-length ulsters, blanket lined, were necessary to ward off the chill winds of New York harbor and Long Island Sound. Imagine, the price was less than \$20. Today the cost would be several hundred.

Pilothouse cleaning day was on Saturday at New London – a job for bow-watchman and quartermaster. Billie took one side and I the other, the one with the most brass to shine.

On the following Saturday we changed sides. Saturday was fire drill day, with the captain and government inspector of hulls surveying the drill from topside. Hoses spurted water, and port side life boats were swung out. I had charge of No. 2 near the pilothouse. My crew included a sailor, a cook, and a colored porter. But only one life boat with crew was lowered. My turn would come on Nov. 1, 1915. I knew what to do. The Lowell must never be found wanting.

cont. on p. 6

Curatorial Collections Process

-Dorrie Hanna

If you attended our October general meeting you got a glimpse of a recent donation to the MRHS – a pew diagram from the Mystic Congregational church circa 1910. But do you know what actually happens when someone—maybe even you—gives us something for our collection? Briefly, the process goes like this.

You stop in at the Downes Building with your kind donation. Presently we are not able to properly store and care for larger items such as furniture and clothing, but we are always interested in photographs, letters & documents, and other small items that relate to the history of Mystic.

We ask you to fill out and sign a Temporary Custody Receipt and provide us with a little information about the item and an indication of what you are willing to have us do with your gift. We give you a copy of the signed receipt for your records.

As soon as possible we enter the information in a temporary record in our Past Perfect database. Typically the items you give will be listed under your name, e.g. "The Jane Doe Collection". Each collection has a unique number.

We review each donation to determine if it is appropriate to add to our collection. Because of space limitations we give preference to Mystic items. If it turns out that we don't feel the item is appropriate for the MRHS we can return it to you if you so wish. Otherwise we may donate it to another history organization or we may set it aside to be sold with the proceeds to benefit MRHS.

When we decide to add the donation to our collection, we generate a Deed of Gift and a Thank You Letter. We will send these to you, asking that you sign the Deed of Gift and return it to us. When we have the signed Deed of Gift and we are thereby the new legal owners of the item(s), we update our computer record with



*Mystic Congregational Church
Historical Churchgoers have now
entered the annals of the MRHS*

additional information and perhaps an image. Then we label, pack and store our new acquisition on our shelves where it will be accessible to researchers.

September 2006 Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met at the Mystic Chamber of Commerce on Monday, October 16, 2006.

Leech gave a Treasurer's report with account & investment balances and positive net income YTD vs. a budgeted loss. Major differences against budget are a gain in membership dues and DVD sales offset by inventory replenishment expenses. Accounting for trips was changed to show revenue and expenses on one line as net income. This will remove large offsetting numbers from the reports. Accounting for the CHC grants was changed to move grant revenue and curatorial expenses paid by the grant from the P&L report to the balance sheet. Matching funds paid by MRHS remain as an operating expense. The report was accepted unanimously.

Historian Hicks will look into organizing the slides in PowerPoint into presentations.

Evers plans to run the pedicab in the London Food Stroll event on October 18th although compensation will not be offered.

For Building & Grounds, Porter noted plans for a professional inspection of the roofs of the PVA and Downes Building. A motion was made & unanimously approved for the \$200 inspection cost. Volunteers installed moisture-vapor barrier sheeting under PVA on September 23rd. Volunteers were: Lou Allyn, Tim Evers, Alan Greener and John Porter. Mark Mitsko replaced (without charge) the large stone that had fallen from the driveway retaining wall and his recommendation to re-grout the wall in the spring has been added to the capital investment plan. Porter is waiting to hear from Committee Chairs re volunteer needs in order to create a volunteer section on the website.

For Curatorial Matters, Hanna reported the collection discard system: The items are donated to other more appropriate organizations or collected to be sold pending contacting a dealer. The Committee researched archivally correct cleaning materials including HEPA vacuum cleaners and Shaklee cleaning products. No products containing petroleum or silicone should be used.

In Education & Outreach, Havrilla noted that five home-schooled students attended a program at the end of September. Problems occurred on behalf of attendees that affected adequate planning. Spring classes are expected with the continued plan to shift programs to the fall.

The Finance Committee (Keith) met on October 2nd to begin the budget process. It was agreed to simplify the operating budget for ease of understanding with some changes: It was decided that Special Events would be reported as net profit or loss only, with the participation fees and expenses not included in the annual budget. It was also decided to account for the CHC grant for our curatorial assistants separately. Memorial donations and/or matching gifts will be credited to the Operating Budget, unless the family requests

an alternative or if the Board feels the amount donated warrants special handling. Work began on the anticipated expenses portion. It was agreed that all postage & handling expenses would be recorded under Administrative, not by committees. Capital improvements will not be included in the Operating Budget, but instead under a long-range plan. The Committee will meet on Monday, October 30th at 4 p.m. to finalize the budget for presentation to membership.

For Funding, Allyn reported that plans are being made for the Fine Living and Gift Expo. Bank Square Books will be contacted about a delivery of additional DVDs.

Hospitality's, Greener said signs are posted advertising the next meeting, additional site suggestions are welcome.

In IT, Thorpe noted that website update is underway, with reports being submitted. The site has a PDF version of the newsletter posted as part of a plan to try a rolling three month posting of newsletters with a counter. Board will discuss website purpose next month.

In Marketing & PR, Halsey sent out PR for Peterson's talk. The Fine Living and Gift Expo will take place on November 19th at the Mystic Marriott from 10 - 6 with

Porter and Allyn volunteering assistance. The Mystic DVD will be shown & other decoration suggestions are welcome. Each nonprofit is allowed one silent auction item. The MRHS brochure has been drafted; it is planned to have it completed for the Expo.

In Membership, Allyn noted that several new members have joined and 2005 non-renewal questionnaire letters were sent to 23 people. The Board discussed the definition of "Life" membership and Membership Committee will come up with a proposal for presentation next month. Allyn also presented Constant Contact's online email service as a method to manage our membership email addresses & could be useful for reminders, notices & surveys. A trial was agreed with current list of about 60.

Ingle & Everett reported success in last month's program and trip respectively.

In Strategic Planning, Keith made a unanimously accepted motion to accept the revised list of committee responsibilities with the exception of the as yet undefined Funding Committee.

For New Business, Hanna presented information about the Mystic & Noank Library's application for a \$5000 CHC grant to be used to convert newspapers on microfilm to digital format. The grant requires matching funds. The Library will match with staff time, equipment, PR, etc., but will need additional support and is looking for co-sponsors. A motion was made that MRHS co-sponsor the microfilm digitization project and contribute a sum to be recommended by the Finance Committee and approved by the Board. The motion passed unanimously.

The next meeting is November 20th.





*The Covered Bridge at the Shelburne Museum in Shelburne, VT. Originally built in 1845 to span the Lamoille River in Cambridge, VT, the bridge was dismantled and moved to the museum in 1949 where it is now situated over a man-made pond. This is a truss-style bridge, a design patented by Vermont inventor Thodore Burr in 1804. It measures 168 feet in length with two vehicle lanes and a footpath.
Photo by Elizabeth (Betty) F. Foster*

MRHS Vermont Trip a Success

- Joyce Everett

The Mystic River Historical Society headed to Vermont on Sunday, October 8, for three days of exploring and eating and leaf peeping. The weather was beautiful, the company was the very best, and everyone appeared to be having a good time.

We went first to the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum where we were met by the director, Arthur Cohn, a Benedict Arnold scholar as well as a delightful and enthusiastic teacher. The following day we spent the entire day at the Shelburne Museum, beginning with a guided tour of the Tasha Tudor exhibit. We headed off in twos and threes and fours to explore the rest of the museum, grateful for the regular appearance of the jitneys, benches by inviting duck ponds, and the wonderful sunshine. Each group included something different in their day, so we had many tales to tell. Our last morning we stopped at Quechee Gorge to enjoy the view and shop, headed on to the Woodstock Inn and their Harvest Lunch, and ended with a private viewing of the Old Constitution Inn in Windsor, led by William Jenney of the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation.

We had the best tour group of all time - everyone was ready to depart on time, no one was ever lost, and no one was ever grumpy! What a great group!

...And More Travels on Horizon

- Joyce Everett

The MRHS is on the road again April 22-27! Please let us know if you think you would like to be part of the group. We will be stopping at special spots in the Philadelphia area as well as celebrating the 400th anniversary of Jamestown, the anniversary of the decisive Revolutionary maritime battle at Yorktown, and spending the day at Williamsburg. Gardens will be in bloom wherever we go. We would love to have your company!

APPRAISAL DAY 2007

The annual Mystic River Historical Society Appraisal Day will take place on Friday, March 23rd, at the Mystic Congregational Church. We are beginning to assemble the appraisal team and we would welcome your suggestions for knowledgeable and tireless appraisers! Also, what special areas of expertise would you welcome?

Ellery Thompson *Continued from page 3*

A half hour before leaving port, our navigational gang would congregate in the pilothouse for some enjoyable idle chatter, or talk on any subject important to the Lowell and other steamers. At such times, I got to know what a fine man was Captain Pettigrew. I would be the first to leave to check the running lights. Then I would report. "Running lights burning bright, Sir." "Aye"

Then it would be down to the bow for me, until, after the captain retired to give over the center window to the 1st pilot, I would be called up from the bow to continue watching from the second port window of the pilothouse. It was an easy way of life, but I would get so sleeping - partly due to too much day-time prowling around and going without normal sleep.

There were a few times when I said to myself, "What in blazes am I doing out here on a steamer in Long Island Sound, when all the boys I grew up with are tucked in bed at home?" And then I would think about the boys of past generations going to sea at 14 and 15, and of how they had to climb aloft on a gale-lashed sailing vessel, and with grub more wormy than fresh. Then spotting a red or green running light on the approaching schooner, I would call out.

"Red light showing two points off our port bow! Looks like a coasting schooner, Sir." "Aye, I see her."

One night, after leaving New London at midnight, the Lowell steamed into a howling gale from the westward - wind velocity about 45 knots. And with us doing about 15 knots, my position on the bow was a wind-blown experience. My new bow watchman's cap was blown off my head to disappear astern. Facing a 60-knot breeze on an October night in mid-Long Island sound was not child's play. Suddenly a hail came from the pilothouse. Unable to hear clearly, I climbed the ladder to a position beneath the front window.

"Come inside," ordered the pilot. On entering, I found Captain Pettigrew slipping into his heavy blue ulster, a bit shabby in comparison with my new one. "Ellery," he said, "something is thumping on top of the pilothouse. We've got to secure it, whatever it might be."

So, out we went into the gale and climbed aloft, where the captain located the trouble - a loose hatch - and secured it, with the gale tearing at him. I was just there as sort of insurance. Who says that captains of sound steamers have an easy life all dressed up in gold-braided uniforms? Not Captain Pettigrew.

My worst moment at bow watching was in the East River when, after discouraging a would-be suicide from leaping overboard at Hell's Gate (It's the shortest way to heaven," he cried) a hunk of horse manure blew off the Brooklyn Bridge to hit me smack in the eye.

Each week I visited Fulton Fish Market on the East Side, looping over around Battery Place on the El at a cost of a nickel, getting off just below the Brooklyn Bridge and the Chelsea Line pier.

South Street in 1915 still featured not only Fulton Fish Market, a fishy institution if there ever was one, but berthed sailing ships with their jibbooms poking up toward the upper floors in ship chandleries and warehouses. On visiting Fulton Fish Market, with its innumerable stalls - some with offices hanging out over the East River - I would stop in at the office of N.S. Gates, a Mystic-born fish monger who had come down to New York to help sell fresh fish caught by boats and traps from southeastern Connecticut. Mr. Gates was only one of several who came from my home area to wholesale fish in the Big City. Others included the Chesebro brothers, Caleb Haley and his brother, Seabury, and three Keeney brothers.



Fulton Fish Market

"The smoky riverbank dawn, the racket the fishmongers make, the seaweedy smell, the sight of this plentifulness always gives me a feeling of well being and sometimes they elate me." --writer Joseph Mitchell

In years to come, I was to ship many trips of fish to the John Feeney Company, long after the Feeneys had died, when "Jim" Coyne headed the old firm.

At one pier opposite the foot of Beekman Street, I looked down on a newly arrived powered schooner from Nantucket, as baskets of large-size lemon sole flounders (blackback flat fish) came swinging up to be dumped into fish carts, to be wheeled into the market for sale.

On leaving the market, I walked up Fulton Street, thinking of all the Alger books I had read and enjoyed, of how a poor boy could strike it rich on the streets of lower New York City. But my riches would come from the delightful memories I now possess.

More on Ellery and the City of Lowell next month.

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CALENDAR NOTABLES

Fine Living and Gift Expo
Sunday, November 19th from 10 - 6 at the Mystic Marriot

Holiday Farmers' Market
Sunday November 19th from 12 to 3 at Denison Homestead
Farmers market, plus 18th century Reenactors cooking a Thanksgiving Dinner and demonstrating period crafts and skills.

Appraisal Day
March 2007
Mark your calendar for this favorite annual event!

Member Arts & Crafts Show
June 2007
Plan now to showcase & admire the talents of MRHS members!



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MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

We will miss Mr. Harold Gegenhimer - Life member since 1985- who has died recently. The MRHS extends sympathy to his family.

Renewals include: Newsletter Patrons Mr. & Mrs. Robert Krusewski, Melinda Carlisle and Individual - Amy Stiles.

Recent new members are: Audrey Golub and Tim & Sue Shepard - Contributing, and Chandler Kissell - Individual.

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