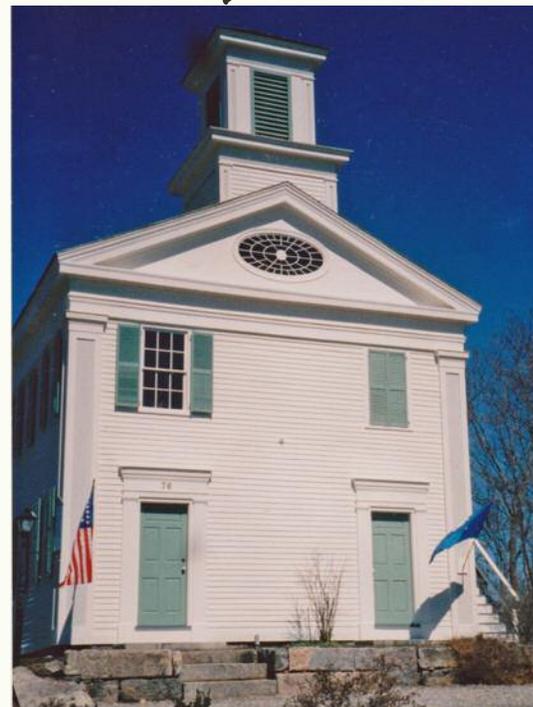


Celebrating MRHS' 40th Anniversary ~ A Historical Perspective *by Patricia Schaefer*



Above left: Looking south on High Street, the Portersville Academy can be seen with entrances facing east in its original location next to the Union Baptist Church. Above right: Portersville Academy in its current location at 74 High Street, just slightly south of the intersection with West Main. The building is now positioned parallel to High Street with entrances and the iconic oval window facing south.

The MRHS is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year! Come on December 4th to take a look back--at the early '70s, at what led to the formation of an historical society in Mystic, and at where we've gone since. From creating a focal point for people's Mystic-related "attic treasures," through school programs, newsletter, Portersville Academy, the Downes Archives Building, speakers, books, and more, to the electronic age of computers for information storage and communication, a web page, cell phone apps and who knows what next, MRHS has done its best to help people here and elsewhere appreciate and

understand its history. Pat Schaefer will present a program based on her short, illustrated history of the society which will be available at the meeting.

*Patricia M. Schaefer usually spends her writing time in the eighteenth century, especially with *The Diary of Joshua Hempstead 1711-1758*. Her book, *A Useful Friend: A Companion to the Joshua Hempstead Diary 1711-1758*, won the Homer Babbidge Award for the best work on Connecticut history in 2009. She found writing the MRHS history to be a nice change from her current project of proof-reading the printed diary against the manuscript.*

The Gift of MRHS Membership: Honoring the Past Keeps on Giving in the Future

For those who have (almost!) everything, please consider the gift of MRHS membership or patronage in their name, or the name of a loved one or business. Many levels of contribution are available, and all are appreciated. For more information, call (860) 536-4779 or email, info@mystichistory.org

Additional gift ideas, like beautiful books, guides & films featuring local area sites & stories, available online at www.mystichistory.org Or stop by 74 High Street Tuesdays 9am-noon or Wednesday & Thursdays 1-4. (Shop early! We're closed Thanksgiving week of November 28 and Christmas week of December 23.)



from the CONTRIBUTOR'S DESK

Jim Kimenker

Let's start this month's column with a trite observation: he (can we please agree that my use of pronouns is usually just a convention and should be read as shorthand for "he or she"?) who writes history helps establish the historical record and, ultimately, the "truth" of what happened. But we all know that historical "truth" is a relative concept, one that can bend with the opinions of the author. We've previously considered the problems associated with histories written by those with a purpose or prejudice. Consider the discussion regarding Caligula - a demented tyrant or a shrewd and calculating ruler (we know what the historical consensus is, but is it accurate)? History, after all, is as much about the present as it is about the past and, therefore, control of the past through a historian's hand provides a lever to also control how we think about our existing world and ourselves.

I can hear a near unanimous, "so what?" We all like to think we're sophisticated enough to recognize a tale obviously distorted by prejudice or personal conviction. And we depend, do we not, on distortions being corrected by the next storyteller, especially where original sources are or become available. We tend to treat original sources as the historical equivalent of antiseptic for truth telling. But even with multiple, apparently neutral, eyewitness accounts of the same scene, problems still arise due to different facts available to those observers. Consider, for instance, soldiers on opposing sides of a battlefield - their stories may have to be sorted out to arrive at the truth, since their individual viewpoint of the battle may color their perspective of what actually happened. And what do we do about conflicting stories told by people who were in exactly the same place at exactly the same time?

One anecdote will illustrate the problem with historical accuracy. The siege of Vicksburg, as vicious and bloody an event as any in the Civil War (especially given its importance to both sides), was nearing its conclusion. General John C. Pemberton, commander of the Confederate forces, and his subordi-

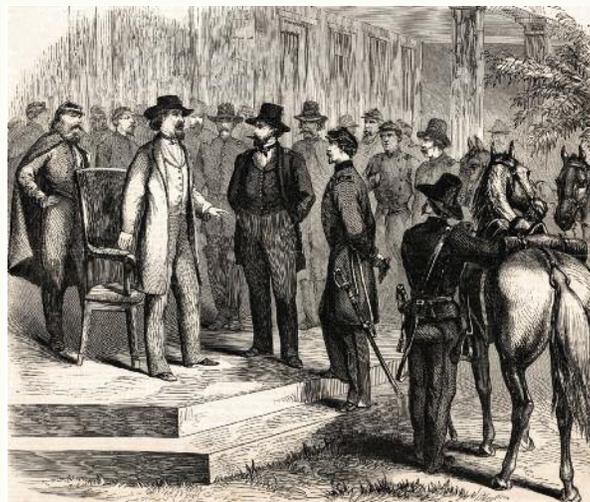
nates all agreed that victory was no longer possible. The time had come to consider only two alternatives - surrender or annihilation - and they agreed that surrender was preferred if acceptable terms could be obtained from General Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the Union forces. There was only one problem: Grant offered only unconditional surrender, something Pemberton did not feel he could accept. And therein lies the historical truth-telling dilemma for historians.

Pemberton and Grant, along with their staffs, met between the lines on the afternoon of July 3, 1863 to discuss the surrender of the city (remarkably almost simultaneously with Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg!). Both Pemberton and Grant later talked and wrote about what was said at the meeting and you would be forgiven if, after reading their individual accounts of the very same meeting, you were to conclude that one of them was deaf, blind or dumb (or all three) - their reflections just do not coincide. One historian reflected that over time, questions of historical accuracy seemed to become less important to them than assertions of honor and military prowess. What is the truth? One, the other, neither, or somewhere in between? It seems we'll never know for sure.

So, where does that leave us? One might throw up his (remember our agreed convention, please) hands and just give up, but that's not the historian's way, is it? Better to read the accounts and attempt to understand what might motivate our sources and thereby better understand the occasion. But, the

more important point here is not discerning the truth about the surrender of Vicksburg, but rather to remember that even original sources must be treated skeptically and with understanding. In other words, discouraging as it sounds, we really cannot grant almost any eyewitness or source, no matter how "original", irrevocable trust regarding the truth.

And that's why, as I routinely suggest, when we read history we're advised to read all of it and multiple versions of it. Who knows where the truth actually lies?



Original caption: Siege of Vicksburg - General Grant meeting the rebel General Pemberton at the Stone House inside the rebel work, on the morning of July 4.
Original source: Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, August 8, 1863 Artist Fred B. Schell from dickinson.edu

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 Secretary - Lois Glazer • Recording Secretary - Cindy Allyn

The Newsletter of the Mystic River Historical Society is published six times annually: September, October, November-December, January-February, March-April and May • Box 245 Mystic, CT 06355

Issues of the newsletter are available for online viewing at www.mystichistory.org





Guests tour the gallery at the Mystic Arts Center which features "100 Years of Photography in Mystic" through November 8th in honor of MAC's 100th anniversary. The exhibit is a cooperative project in part with MRHS and includes images from the Historic Society's archives.

"Where's Geo?"

If you are on the lookout for local history, you can now spot "Geo" on twelve buildings throughout downtown Mystic - and marked on the free Lighthouse Maps local editions with this note:

Geo Historian in Downtown Mystic

Sponsored by: Mystic River Historical Society

Address: 12 locations in downtown Mystic

www.mystichistory.org

"Where's Geo?" A fun way to learn history of Mystic enjoyed by all ages. It is a hunt to find the GeoHistorian characters located on 12 buildings in downtown Mystic. Six of the buildings are on the Groton side of the Mystic Drawbridge and six buildings are on the Stonington side. These characters are located on decals. When found, use your smartphone to scan the QR code and see an interesting, short historical video. The project was done by the Mystic River Historical Society along with students from Mystic Middle School, Stonington High School, and the Independently Educated Scholars of Mystic.

Thanks & News from the Downes Building

by Dorrie Hanna

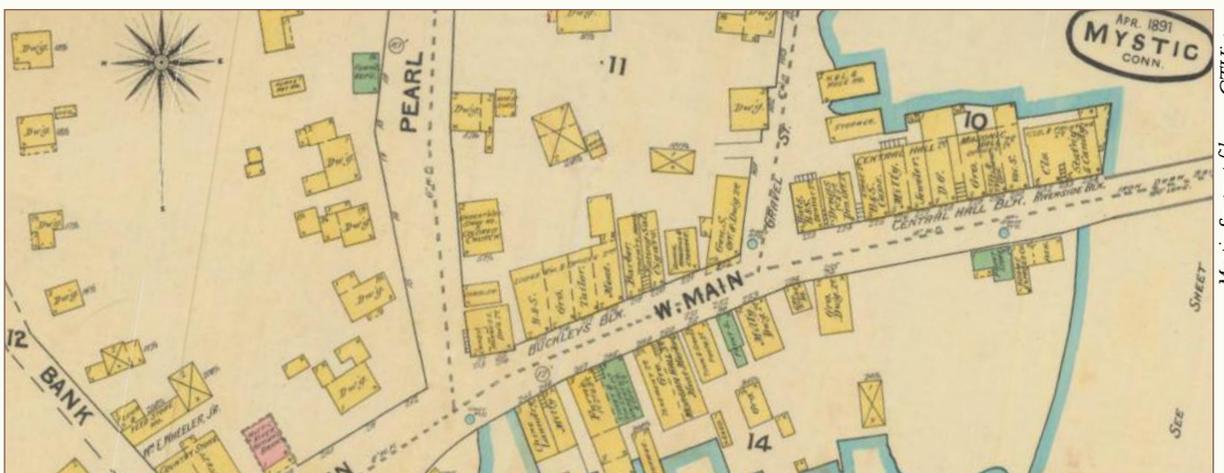
September and October have been very busy months for us at the Downes Building, and now the holidays are almost here. Yikes! Just a heads up that we will be closed Thanksgiving Week, Christmas Week and New Year's Week. This will give our staff some flexibility in their schedules, but of course we will keep tabs on phone calls, snail mail and emails during this time.

A big "Thank You" to the Mystic Art Center for including a "100 Years of Photography in Mystic" gallery in their recent photo show. It was a pleasure to work with them and to have them showcase some images from our collections. As always, I am so pleased when MRHS can work with other non-profits in our community.

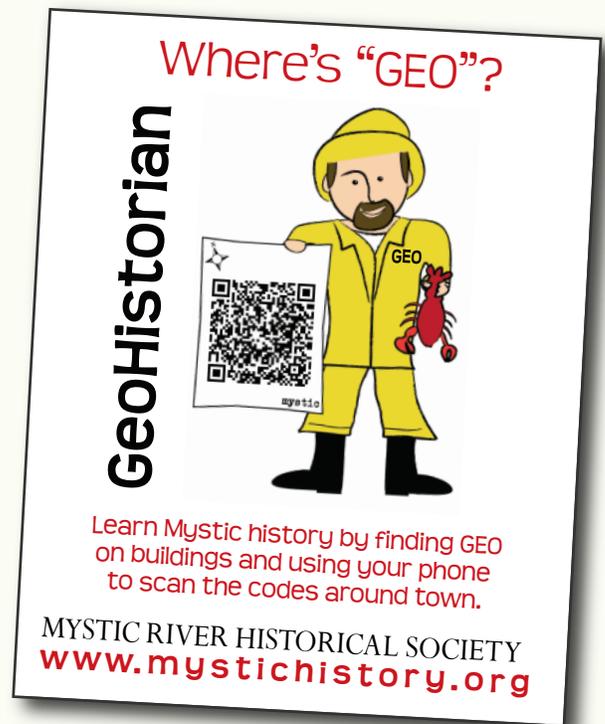
As you may know, The Day is publishing a book of historic photographs from New London County, which should be available for holiday giving. A number of images provided by the MRHS are included. We have order forms. We also have, of course, our own books and notepaper for sale. And don't forget the 40th Anniversary history of the MRHS researched & written by Pat Schaefer. This will be available at our December meeting and will be a nice complement to her lecture. We'll have it available on our website, too.

A vintage view of downtown Mystic buildings from an 1891 fire map. Note the inlet still coming all the way up to the intersection of West Main & Pearl Streets.

Visit the Mystic Arts Center exhibit for historic downtown images. Or stroll through downtown on both sides of the bridge with your smart phone and compare today's commerce with the GeoHistory films!



Mystic Seaport files on CTHistory



"Geo" with his QR code is visible on building plaques and soon also on this poster downtown. A full list of the Geohistorian project documentary shorts are also available by clicking/visiting mystichistory.org

Civil War Sesquicentennial Series - Life on the Homefront November 1863

by Catherine Deichmann

In accordance with President Lincoln's Proclamation, a national day of Thanksgiving is observed on the third Thursday of the month with a service at the Methodist Church. As the late fall chill closes in on distant battlefields, the demands of the war are heating up at home. On October 17th, the President called for 300,000 more men for the Union army, and authorized a draft to fill any shortage not met by volunteers. In mid-November, the town quotas are announced: sixty-five men are required from Groton, another sixty-five from Stonington. How will these quotas be filled?

After two and half years of war, most of the men willing to fight have already enlisted. The quota cannot be met by boys just coming of age or new arrivals to the area. This manpower shortage requires that bounties be offered to induce men to volunteer; the financial burden of these incentives already threatens to bankrupt some of the smaller towns in the state.

Volunteers under the October call will receive a bounty of \$302 dollars from the Federal Government. They will also receive \$300 from the State, payable at muster, and an additional \$30 per year paid in installments. To entice family men to enlist, the State pledges \$6 per month for support of the soldier's wife, and \$2 per month for every child under 14 (not to exceed \$10 per month - apparently five children under 14 was the government's limit). Each veteran volunteer - those

men with nine months service and an honorable discharge - will receive an additional \$100. In Connecticut, it is estimated that bounties for this call alone will cost the state "\$18 hundred thousand dollars."

By assuming the responsibility for bounties, the State hopes to end the ruinous competition between towns for the small pool of potential enlistees, a contest that pits wealthier communities against those with lesser means. The Legislature passes an act prohibiting "every town, city, and borough in this State...from making any appropriation for volunteers." But in reality, the towns still feel compelled to augment the Federal and State bounties to attract men to fill their quotas. Why would a man enlist from North Stonington, if Stonington was willing to offer him more money for the same risk?

Not only the towns' financial future, but their patriotism is in jeopardy. Local soldiers are sent home on furlough to speak at recruitment rallies; others write to the *Mystic Pioneer* extolling the comfort and camaraderie of their camps and admonishing those still at home to do their duty and enlist. "We sincerely hope," wrote a correspondent with Company C of the 21st, in camp near Norfolk, "that the men at home will promptly volunteer; - that it may always be said to the credit of the towns of Groton and Stonington that they filled their quota without resorting to a draft."

Civil War Sesquicentennial Series - Life on the Homefront November 1863

by Catherine Deichmann

An early Christmas gift arrives - letters from the crew of the bark *Texana*, which had been captured and burned by the Confederate tug *Boston* in the Gulf of Mexico in early June. The fate of the *Texana's* civilian crew remained a mystery to their families and friends for more than three months, until a letter arrived in early October from crewmember A.B. Wolfe, sent from Castle Thunder prison in Richmond. At the time, Captain Thomas Wolfe and his crew were reported to be in good health and good spirits. But recent reports of scores of Union prisoners arriving in Annapolis from Southern prisons suffering from starvation and exposure have led to fears for the safety of Mystic's own men. In late November, letters from Capt. Wolfe and mate Albert Sawyer confirm their health, and request "coffee, sugar, and other such eatables as you think best," along with Castile soap, pills and ointments. They are fortunate to be housed with Union officers in a former tobacco warehouse, rather than at Belle Isle in the James River, where six to eight thousand Northern enlisted men are held with only tents for shelter. No one knows how long the men of the *Texana* will be enjoying "Southern hospitality" in Richmond. Although there is an established procedure for paroling soldiers, there is no timetable for exchanging civilians being held behind enemy lines.

The uncertain fate of the *Texana's* crew is another reminder of the risks the war adds to the dangers of making a living at sea. On December 7th the steamer *Chesapeake*, en route to Portland Maine, is hijacked by a group of British "pirates" who had boarded as passengers in New York. During the night, when the steamer is twenty miles NNE of Cape Cod, they attack the sailors on watch, killing one and wounding another before subduing the rest of the crew. The *Chesapeake* steams to New Brunswick, where the remaining passengers and crew are transferred to a pilot boat and taken to St. John. While the *Chesapeake* is eventually freed by the Union navy before it could be armed and used as a privateer, the incident heightens war anxiety throughout New England. Although they are working in waters hundreds of miles from the contested South, local mariners in the fishing and coasting fleets are once again reminded of their vulnerability to attack.

The local fishing fleet has made its last trip of the year, and is laying up for winter. Word comes from Virginia that Mystic soldiers at the front doing the same, "working assiduously" to prepare their camps for winter quarters. On the battle front and on the home front, the third winter of the rebellion begins.

October Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, October 21, 2013. Attendees included: Aimeé Allaire, Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Lois Glazier, Sally Halsey, Jennifer Pryor, Richard Semeraro, and David Scott.

A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the September meeting as published.

President's Report: - Pat Schaefer & Lou Allyn will discuss MRHS in general and Pat's upcoming History of MRHS with Tom Santos on his CPTV show *Books and Things with Tom*. Taping is October 31; airing times to be announced.

Corresponding Secretary: No correspondence.

Treasurer's Report: The Year to Date Profit and Loss statement has been distributed.

STANDING COMMITTEES

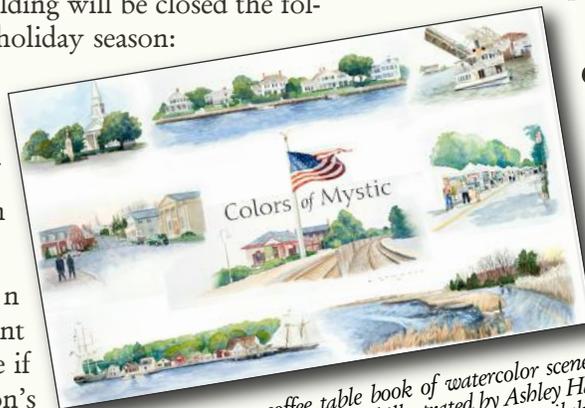
Buildings & Grounds: ASP Security has installed a smoke detector in the Downes Building and two in Portersville. During the transfer from the old system the control panel was "locked out" and had to be replaced with a new one. Work Day is Saturday October 26th.

Some of the exterior paint on Portersville Academy is peeling; the Board voted \$2,000 to scrape, prime and repaint (two coats) where necessary. Dave Scott and Lou will power wash the north side of the building this Saturday.

Curatorial: Prints of some photographs from our collection are included in the Mystic Art Center's current exhibit, which runs until November 5. MAC will donate these prints to MRHS after the show. Dorrie was pleased by the collaboration between MAC and MRHS. • 17 MRHS images were selected for the pictorial book of New London County being published by The Day. • Work continues on the MRHS 40th Anniversary History booklet. • We recently acquired a large number of letters that were found in the attic at Hummingbird Hollow Farm. They relate to the man who operated a Christmas tree farm on that site for many years. • The Downes Building will be closed the following weeks during the 2013 holiday season:

For Thanksgiving ~ Week of November 28; For Christmas ~ Week of December 23; For New Years ~ Week of December 30, reopening on Tuesday, January 7, 2014.

Education/Outreach: Van Riley, Stonington Superintendent of Schools, was contacted to see if there is any place in Stonington's curricula for local history and possible cooperative activities using



"Colors of Mystic" - a coffee table book of watercolor scenes of Mystic landmarks, was designed and illustrated by Ashley Halsey and commissioned & published by MRHS. It is available at MRHS and by mail order at mystichistory.org

MRHS's school house or in-classroom sessions. He replied "Thank you Lou... let me put something together and get back to you. I met last year with the Stonington Historical Society and they are assisting with a class at Stonington High School. I would love for our elementary and middle school children to have a taste of the rich local history. Thank you and I will be back in touch." • Lou passed around a historical research report by a senior at The Gunnery school as an example of a high school level local history project that MRHS might think about sponsoring. Also, Louisa Watrous is contacting a member of the faculty at UCONN Avery Point to see if there would be any interest in a college level research project using our collections.

Finance: The Finance Committee will meet November 6th to prepare the 2014 budget for the next Board meeting.

GeoHistorian Project: The latest edition (September 2013) of LIGHTHOUSEMAPS includes a GeoHistorian ad and 12 little Geo characters on the roofs of the buildings displaying QR codes.

The map is distributed to almost 100 locations in the greater Mystic area and shows locations of advertisers: see www.lighthousemaps.com/mystic-%E2%80%A2-noank%E2%80%A2-stonington-village.html for the map and a descriptive blurb under Attractions.

Information Technology: No report.

Marketing: Press releases continue to be sent out for all Membership Meetings.

Newsletter: Copy is due Friday October 25th for the Nov-Dec issue. Lou has figured out how to use the USPS website to create mailing labels with barcodes which will be required in 2014. He also mentioned the favorable comments received regarding Jim Kimenker's column.

Program & Membership: The Program-Membership Committee has most programs and topics set through May 2014 and are in the process of confirming with speakers through December 2014. We are looking forward to this Wednesday, October 23rd's talk on Nautical Folk Art by Norman Brouwer.

NEW BUSINESS

Colors of Mystic Notecards: Sally has begun discussions with Bank Square Books regarding a series of note cards using the Colors of Mystic images.

Next meeting is Monday, November 18th, 2013 7:00 pm at the Mystic Noank Library

Respectfully submitted,
Cindy Allyn

Newsletter Patrons

MR. & MRS. SULTAN AHAMED
CYNTHIA & LOUIS ALLYN
DANIEL & JANE BRANNAGAN
MR. & MRS. FRANKLIN DAVIS
KATE DIMANDESCU
DAVID & JEAN EVANS
MR. WILLIAM EVERETT
SALLY HALSEY
MR. & MRS. DOUG HANNA JUDY HICKS
MRS. DAVID HINKLE
MR. & MRS. FRANK MARCO
NANCY & TOM MCLOUGHLIN
MRS. MARJORIE MOORE
MR. & MRS. ROLAND PAMPEL
MR. & MRS. ROGER PANCIERA
CAPT. & MRS. JOHN PORTER

Calendar of Events

- Membership Meetings -

Wed., December 4th, 2013, 7:30p
(due to the late November Thanksgiving holiday)
Mystic Congregational Church Hall
at Broadway and E. Main St., Mystic
Patricia Schaefer presents MRHS' 40 Year History

Wed., January 22nd, 2014, 7:30p
International Ice Patrol will be the topic.

Wed., February 26th, 2014, 7:30p
Kate Dimancescu discusses Captain George & Anne Borodell Denison.

Membership Updates



We have two new members both at the Individual level. They are Elaine Smith and Gerry Badalucca. The renewal letters for 2014 will go out around the end of January/early February .

- Cynthia Allyn, Membership Coordinator

Non-profit Organization
Presorted Standard
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 17
Mystic, CT
06355

the
PORTERSVILLE PRESS
vol. xi. issue iii • november-december 2013



PUBLISHED SIX TIMES
ANNUALLY - FREE

74 HIGH STREET
P. O. BOX 245
MYSTIC, CT 06355

Tuesdays 9 A.M. - 12 NOON
Wednesdays 1 P.M. - 4 P.M.
Thursdays 1 P.M. - 4 P.M.
(860) 536 - 4779