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Women of New England: Dress from the Industrial Age 1850-1900

by Laura Crow



Garments above left and middle are from the “Women of New England” exhibit curated by Professor Crow. They are an 1897 blue polka dot gown, and a cranberry brocade bodice with maroon silk taffeta skirt, c. 1880. Both items are part of the University of Connecticut Historical Clothing and Textile Collection of over 8000 items which Crow is helping to preserve as a virtual collection. Pictured at right is a dress and silk fabric display from Cheney Brothers Silk Manufacturing Company, Manchester, CT ca. 1908 ~ Connecticut Historical Society.

New England’s industrial revolution began in the countryside. While Boston, New York, and other urban areas were the centers of the financial world, manufacturers seeking skilled labor and waterpower established textile mills across rural New England. Large centers like Lowell, Massachusetts, and more modest industrial towns like Willimantic and Manchester, Connecticut, grew up in this process, but much textile production also took place in many small factory villages and industrial settlements that were scattered across rural New England, including Mansfield where the University of Connecticut now resides. Throughout the middle of the nineteenth century, thousands of rural women and children did domestic outwork, making hats, buttons, suspenders and other clothing items in their own homes for local merchants who paid them by the piece. The skills and fashion sense of these home workers were the focus of the exhibition, “Women of New England: Dress from the Industrial Age 1850 – 1900.”

Laura Crow is the Director of Design and Professor of Costume History, Design & Technology at the University of Connecticut’s Department of Dramatic Arts. She has designed costumes for Broadway, Off-Broadway and regional theatres and represented the USA at the Prague Quadrennial five times. Among her awards are: the Drama Desk, OBIE, American Theatre Wing, New York’s Villager, Chicago’s Joseph Jefferson, Bay Area Critics, three Drama-Logue awards, the West Coast’s Backstage West Garland Award and four ZONIs from Phoenix. She was included in the recent Lincoln Center Exhibition focusing on 100 women designers from the past 100 years.

Professor Crow is Vice Head of the Americas for the Costume Working Group for OISTAT (the International Organization of Scenographers, Theatre Architects & Technicians) and acts as liaison for the Costume Commission and the International Commission of USITT (United States Institute of Theatre Technology). She is proud to have been a Fulbright Senior Scholar, exploring & researching costume and dress of the Philippines, Cuba, Trinidad, New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro. She has authored two chapters for “Masquerade: A Panorama” due out in spring 2015. Her exhibition “Women of New England: Dress from the Industrial Age 1850-1900” was displayed in brief at the Connecticut State House, and in its complete form at the Benton Museum of Art and then at the Gallery at UCONN’s Jorgenson. Over 13,000 people visited the exhibition during its run.

~ Please join us for this program on Wednesday, December 3rd at the Mystic Congregational Church hall. ~



from the CONTRIBUTOR'S DESK

Jim Kimenker

Last month we reflected on how remembering history too fervently can interfere with empathy and understanding in the present. Like the brouhaha described in that earlier column over the erection of a monument, such matters seem almost silly to those of us not invested in the dispute. Other current disputes over matters "of long ago" are more violent and deadly. Either way, our view of those prior events is in so many ways a function of understanding ourselves and how we interpret the past--it's a matter of "us" in the present.

But, you may ask, understanding ourselves through our own eyes is arguably a narcissistic endeavor, is it not? In other words, we argue among ourselves about what we have become, without any real regard for how others may view the process or the result. And there's the point -- that lack of regard of how others view us may contribute to a lack of understanding of our own history.

An article in the New York Times' "Disunion" series last January, entitled "Teodoro Zamora's Commission", provides instruction in the value of considering our own past through the eyes of "outsiders". The story involves renegade "Tejanos" (Texans of Mexican extraction) who continued to fight what they viewed as mistreatment after the Mexican-American War, including discrimination, property confiscation and, effectively, ethnic cleansing. When Texas joined the Confederacy, these Tejanos saw an opportunity to recover their land and rights by supporting the Union. The Union reached out to them with the offer of army commissions, which some accepted. Some, however, could not.

Teodoro Zamora was one who rejected the offer of a commission. He had initially remained in Texas after the Mexican-American War, which resulted in the loss of half of Mexico's territory to the U.S. (the war was not universally popular -- Lincoln opposed it as justified with the "half-insane mumblings of a fever dream"). Zamora saw his family's farm confiscated and he eventually joined the resistance.

When offered a commission, Zamora appears to have agonized over whether to accept. Ultimately, he turned it down because a condition of acceptance was a requirement that he renounce his support of the resistance and swear an oath to support the U.S. and its laws. Considering the history of his people in the lands once part of Mexico and their treatment since becoming part of the U.S., Zamora could not do that.

But the more interesting basis of his decision was philosophical -- Tejanos and Mexicans viewed the Civil War as God's retribution for the taking of their land. In their view, the price of the invasion of Mexico and the peace agreement which forced Mexico to cede half their country to the U.S.

was the conflict that arose within the U.S. regarding the expansion of slavery into the newly acquired territories. In other words, as they understood it, the Civil War was a direct consequence of the war with Mexico and, in the minds of many Tejanos and Mexicans, was fully deserved by the U.S. As Zamora wrote in a letter to President Lincoln to explain his refusal of the commission, "you would plate your heart in gold or silver, even if you knew that it would kill you." The United States deserved to die because of those past actions.

So, what's the point of this? It's certainly not an argument to return all those lands back to Mexico or to pay reparations. And it's more than simply noting for the umpteenth time that history and its interpretation is in the eye of the beholder. More important, I think, is for each of us, as a "beholder", to recognize and attempt to understand that "other eye", because within such consideration can come a fresh understanding of not only our own history, but the history of other places.

Another thought in closing -- over the last few years we've been entertained by referendums in Quebec and Scotland about whether they should leave the countries of which they've been a part for hundreds of years (Catalonia in Spain is now lobbying for a similar referendum). One can only wonder if a failure to "see" history through the eyes of others encouraged those referendum movements. With the looming demographics of our own American southwest, should we be wondering if Zamora's descendants may one day clamor for a similar referendum?

Just saying . . .



The Battle of Vera Cruz. Bombardment of Vera Cruz (March 1847) in the Mexican-American War ~ 1851 Lithograph engraving by Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot based on painting by Carl Nebel. Wikipedia

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



Civil War Sesquicentennial Series: Life on the Homefront by Catherine Deichmann

--- November 1864 ---

In early November local waters once again become a field of battle, when the Confederate commerce raider *Tallahassee* captures and scuttles the Boston schooner *Goodspeed* and another vessel off Block Island. *Tallahassee*'s crew reports the destruction of three other vessels since running the Union Navy blockade at Wilmington, North Carolina. The crews of these vessels are being held prisoner in the raider's hold, but the crew of the *Goodspeed* are allowed to row to Block Island, where they raise the alarm. The Federal gunboat *Marblehead* is dispatched from Newport in pursuit of the Confederate "pirates."

The Presidential election temporarily eclipses the war news in the local press. The contest is seen as a referendum on the war itself. Locally, the Republicans under Lincoln are touted as the "Union" ticket, while the Democrats, led by General George McClellan, are called "Copperheads." Accusations of treason, trickery and ballot-forgery abound. Believing they are the Union's staunchest supporters, the army grants furloughs to soldiers at the front to return to their home communities to vote.

When the votes are tallied, the *Mystic Pioneer* announces "a crushing defeat" for the Democrats. The Republican victory is celebrated with a torchlight parade and "a ratification and jollification in honor of the Union ticket." But feelings of war weariness are strong, and the outcome is closer than the headlines allow. In 1860, the Republicans carried New London County by a margin of 1,707 votes; this time the margin of victory is a scant 741 votes. Lincoln holds onto Connecticut's six electoral votes, but not by the anticipated landslide. The final tally for the state: 44,691 for Lincoln, 42,285 for McClellan.

Governor Buckingham issues a proclamation designating Thursday, November 24th as a day of prayer and Thanksgiving throughout the state. In Mystic, the day is observed with an interdenominational service at the Union Baptist Church, the largest in town. There is a vacant chair at many Thanksgiving tables, but these husbands, fathers, brothers and sons are not forgotten. The community manages to send a feast to every company of their "boys" at the front. Their generosity includes 39 roasted turkeys, 20 roasted chickens, 60 mince pies, 62 pounds of cheeses, 17 loaf cakes, scores of cupcakes, 3 barrels of apples, 2 cans of pickled cabbage, 2 plum puddings, 1 barrel of onions, 4 boxes of sardines, 3 pounds of butter, 24 pounds of sugar crackers (cookies), and \$80 in cash. The holiday is marked by the unspoken wish that the next Thanksgiving Day will celebrate loved ones returned safely home.



--- December 1864 ---

The first blizzard of the season arrives early in the month, "much to the amusement of boys, and to the discomfort of older people." The onset of winter doesn't deter local shipbuilders, who are launching new vessels at a rate of two a month. Schooners loaded with spars and ship planking are frequent callers.

As the fourth Christmas of the war arrives, General Sherman sends President Lincoln a unique gift, the city of Savannah, Georgia. The Union noose continues to tighten around the Confederacy. But here at home, Christmas is a time to put the war aside. The local newspaper gives the following account of the holiday:

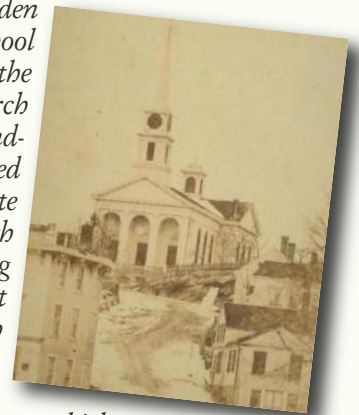
Christmas in Mystic was generally observed as a sacred festival day. The churches were all well attended, and as is usual with Episcopal churches, the one in this village was handsomely decorated with evergreens &c.. Monday was not kept here as in most other places, but Saturday evening [Christmas Eve] was the grand gala time with most of us.

At the Union Baptist Church at Mystic River Saturday evening, [there was] a tree well-laden with presents for the Sabbath School scholars and teachers. At the Protestant Episcopal Church (Washington Hall) was also a handsome tree bounteously provided with acceptable and appropriate presents for pastor and Sabbath School. Early Saturday evening the vestry of the Methodist Episcopal church was filled with the members of the Sabbath School connected with that church, to give and receive presents which were also hung upon a tree. Here the largest number of people were probably congregated on this [east] side of the river, although an entrance fee was charged spectators in order to raise part of the money with which to pay for some of the presents and that not too large a number of spectators should crowd into the limited lecture room. Mr. A.C. Tift, the superintendent of the school was presented with a fine album containing photographs of the scholars, and the pastor, Rev. V.A. Cooper, a purse of \$26. At the Greenmanville church (Sabbaterian) Saturday evening, a collation was provided for the children and the hearts of all made glad by the reception of presents.

Monday evening the Sabbath School children and teachers of the Congregational church enjoyed their treats and gifts in the hall recently vacated by the Masons. Their pastor, Rev. C.H. Boyd, was most bountifully supplied with groceries, provisions, &c., and the superintendent, Mr. Wm. Holmes, received several valuable presents.

A more happy Christmas time was probably never enjoyed here, or elsewhere, than the one just past. Both old and young seeming determined to do what they could to make their friends happy and forgetful of cares and troubles in a day of general and genuine Christian feeling.

~ *The Mystic Pioneer*, 31 December 1864



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September Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, September 15, 2014. Attendees included: Aimeé Allaire, Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Lois Glazier, Cathy Marco, Jennifer Pryor, David Scott, Richard Semeraro, Barry Thorp, Stephanie Thorp.

President (L. Allyn): A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the June meeting as published. • David Scott announced that he is resigning from the Board due to personal reasons. Lou thanked him for his service to MRHS as Chairman of the House and Grounds Committee.

Corresponding Secretary (L. Glazier): Three thank you letters were sent in July and one in August.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): The Treasurer's Report for July and August 2014 was reported and accepted: all deposits have been made & all bills paid current. The account books are reconciled with Chelsea Groton Bank statements. The Chelsea Groton checking balance is positive.

Building & Grounds (D. Scott): David Tetlow plans to repair the Portersville molding shortly.

Curatorial (L. Allyn, acting): Groton History Fair will be held Sept. 27 1 to 4 at the Groton Public Library. Dorrie will attend & take items to be given to other Historical Societies, as well as MRHS items for display and/or sale. • The Connecticut Archives Online (library.wcsu.edu/cao/) is an online repository of finding aids for archival institutions all over the state. CAO provides a template to encode the archives in EAD and will host them to their server free of charge - making it a cheaper & easier option than using Past Perfect Online. Betsy is working on finding aids for the Haley and for the Akeley Collections. • A revised Procedures manual is in progress.

Education/Outreach (M. Austin): The next edition of the local Mystic map will not include the GeoHistorian figure. Hits on the YouTube videos range from 84 to 159.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The System Administrator performed backups & updates throughout the summer, last on 4 September, 2014. Fresh batteries were installed in all computer mice. An up-to-date copy of the membership database files was installed on Computer 2 and Past Perfect was updated to version 5.0 D2. All equipment and software is operating properly and backups were done on schedule.

Marketing & Special Events (S. Halsey): On October 29 at 7 at the Library, Rudy Favretti will speak on the Rossies of Mystic, the Rossie Velvet Mill, and the surrounding historic district. This talk is sponsored by a collaboration of MRHS and the Mystic Noank Library working with the CT Humanities Council as part of their initiative Connecticut at Work ([see cthumanities.org/ctatwork](http://cthumanities.org/ctatwork)).

Newsletter (J. Pryor): The copy deadline for the next Portersville Press is the Friday following the board meeting - September 19th.

Program & Membership (A. Allaire): The Committee met twice since our last Board meeting. We have definite speakers through February 2015 and tentative speakers

lined up through May 2015. We are in hopes that two new members will be joining our ranks. • The committee asks each board member to assist at one member meeting per year. They would provide cookies and something to drink, help with setting up, and be at the check-in table as members arrive. We think it would be a friendly way of introducing trustees to our members and would be of great help to the committee. • Four new memberships were added since the last meeting. 39 Membership Renewal reminder letters were mailed this week.

New Business: None

Next meeting Oct. 20, 7 pm at the Mystic Noank Library

Respectfully submitted, Cindy Allyn

E.B. Read: A Local Historian's Work

by Lou Allyn

The recent obituary of E.B. Read, a long time local historian, mentions her love of local history and how it was reflected in her various pursuits. "In 1978, she published "Norwich, A Century of Growth," detailing the economic history of Norwich, and in 1980, "Mystic Memories." After retirement, she taught adult education classes in local history in Norwich and Stonington. She wrote many articles for the Stonington Historical Society's "Foot Notes," including "String of Pearls," which traced the growth of the textile industry in Eastern Connecticut. She also wrote the histories of the Mason's Island Yacht Club in 1992 and of the Mystic Art Association in 1993 in celebration of its 80th anniversary."

Since the E.B. Read collection at the Mystic River Historical Society contains many of E.B.'s photographs, prints, lecture slides, lecture notes, newspaper clippings, and historical documents in addition to many of her publications I thought it would be of interest to our members to list what is available at the Downes Building.

#1997.017 DVD and Videocassette *MIYC, The Way It Used to Be* Personal memories of Mason's Island Yacht Club members. 1999

2006.143 *Mystic Memories 1654-1979* First edition 1980, 80 pages and a revised second printing 1981. Mystic history containing many local names, events, and places.

#2006.176 *The Mystic Art Association: 80th Anniversary* Published by the Mystic Art Association in 1993 40 pages.

#2007.008 series folders: Material related to Mystic Island, also known as Ram Island.

Mystic Island VOL.XXI, No.2 February 1984 Bulletin of the Stonington Historical Society

Mystic Island VOL.XXI, No.3 May 1984 Bulletin of the Stonington Historical Society

Historic Mystic Fold out brochure with 40 photographs and maps of Mystic 1840-1870 and 1870-1930.

Packer Tar Soap Factory November 1985 Bulletin of the Stonington Historical Society
Article Ram Island Lightships

Booklet *History of the Mason's Island Yacht Club* 1992 30 pages with many photographs

Ed. Note: Other MRHS publications are available online at amazon.com for your home shopping convenience!

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Calendar of Events

Wed., Jan., 28th 2015, 7:30p
Mystic Congregational Church Hall
at Broadway and E. Main St., Mystic
Captain Lahti and The History of the Naval Submarine Base

Wed., Feb. 25th, 2015, 7:30p
Jennifer Emerson discusses Whaling Wives

Wed., March 25th, 2015, 7:30p
Anne Farrow presents The Logbooks: Slavery in New London County

Renew or become a Member of MRHS and receive email updates about all our meetings & events. Contact us at: info@mystichistory.org or 860-536-4779.

Membership Updates



Our 2014 membership list is included in this issue -- if you think your name should be there and we missed it, please let us know. Membership renewal letters for the year 2015 will go out around the end of January. We appreciate everyone's support.

Two of our long time members recently passed away. They are Anna Coit and E B Read.

~ Cindy Allyn, Membership

~ The Membership Issue ~

Tuesdays 9 A.M. - 12 NOON
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