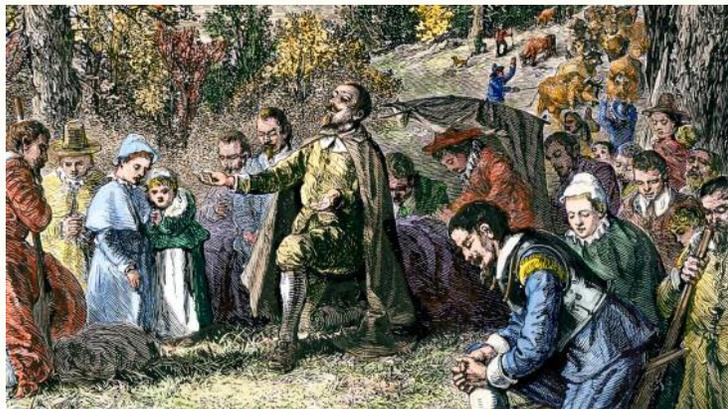


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December: Welcome to the Seventeenth Century with Katherine Dimancescu



Two perspectives of seventeenth century Connecticut: One, a romanticized autumn rendering, and the other a contrasting harsh winter portrayal of Rev. Thomas Hooker (1586 - 1647) leading the 1636 emigration from Massachusetts to begin what would become the Connecticut Colony.

On the eve of her second book's publication, author & historian Katherine Dimancescu's enthralling December presentation will share historical highlights from her forthcoming narrative. The audience will be transported back in time to manors, moors, and mansion houses of seventeenth century England and New England. Ms. Dimancescu will share captivating ancestral stories of personal reinvention, romance, sacrifice, family life, and bravery. These stories will be interwoven with tales of the founding of the Connecticut Colony, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and the Providence Plantations. Attendees will hear fascinating insights about what it took to settle and survive in seventeenth century New England. By the time Ms. Dimancescu's presentation comes to an end attendees will come away cognizant of whether or not they too would be able to arrive, adapt, and thrive in seventeenth century New England.

In 2014, Ms. Dimancescu spoke to MRHS about her first book, "The Forgotten Chapters: My Journey into the Past." We are pleased to have her return to discuss her second work on Wednesday, December 2nd at 7pm for refreshments & socializing, with the program beginning at 7:30.

Katherine Dimancescu is an author and independent scholar who divides her time between Massachusetts and Connecticut. She received her masters' degrees in international relations from the University Of Westminster and also the London School of Economics and Political Science and her B.A. in History from Denison University. Her historical and genealogical research has since revealed that she herself is a Denison who attended the university named for its 19th century benefactor, William S. Denison -- a descendant of the Mystic local, Captain George Denison.



Lower Mystic Cemetery: Godfrey Memorial Library as a Resource

Fellow MRHS member Charlie Beebe sent me a reminder that the Godfrey Memorial Library has an extensive online database of cemeteries. Go to www.godfrey.org and select the Godfrey Scholar icon. On the page that comes up, select BROWSE BY CATEGORY, Cemeteries. Then select *New London County Cemeteries, Mystic, Lower Mystic Cemetery*. This brings up the cemetery page. The credit says "(Photographed and transcribed by Ed Laput of Colchester, CT.) The cemetery is still in occasional use and well maintained, the information was taken from the stones, the Connecticut Death Index and the Social Security Death Index. Records and pictures as of August 2010."

You can also go to www.findagrave.com and Search for a Cemetery. The clarity of the words in the pictures varies between the two sites.

~ Lou Allyn

Holiday Closings at the MRHS Downes Building

We will be closed during the weeks of Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. Of course, we will monitor email and phone messages even if the office is closed. *Happy Holidays!*



September 2015 Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, September 11, 2015. Attendees included: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Margaret Austin, Dave Evans, Bill Everett, Lois Glazier, John Parry, and Richard Semeraro.

President (L. Allyn): A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the June meeting as published. • Portersville painting by Ferraro Painting and Restoration is complete. The cost was \$11,750 plus \$400 to repair wood in the cupola. • The Denison Homestead Board has considered our proposal regarding their use of an Ashley Halsey watercolor of the Homestead. Treasurer David Evans will respond to us. • The Board agreed to be open to discussion that Portersville Academy could be used as a Mystic Visitor Center should there be an interest. • **Lower Mystic Cemetery:** Joanna Case and Judy Hicks have joined the Board of the LMC Association. Gloria Fowler showed Lou how to use L-shaped brass dowsing rods how to find unmarked graves.

Corresponding Secretary (C. Allyn): Two thank-you letters for gifts were sent.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): At this time all deposits have been made in the bank and all bills are paid current. The Treasurer's account books are reconciled with the Chelsea Groton Bank statements. Funds were transferred from the Vanguard Money Market Fund to the checking account for payment to Ferraro Painting. The present balance in the Chelsea Groton checking account is positive.

Curatorial (L. Allyn/D. Hanna): The Curatorial Committee met September 21, having not met in July or August. Volunteers filled in while Dorrie was on vacation and assisted a number of visitors and callers. All the paperwork for the book transfer to the Library has been completed. A draft of a new Image Use form was presented for the Committee's input. MRHS will have a table at the Groton Public Library's History Fair this coming Saturday, the 26th. Betsy Boucher has issued a seven page Past Perfect Users Manual; it will be tested by a novice user. Dorrie is posting photos to Facebook: Mystic River Historical Society on a weekly basis.

Finance (D. Evans): The current balance in the Money Market fund is respectable. The Committee plans to present a preliminary budget for 2016 at the next Trustee's meeting.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): No report.

Newsletter (J. Pryor): Copy for the September/October issue is due this Friday -- the weekend following the board meeting.

Program & Membership (M. Austin): The Committee met September 17, 2015. John Parry has joined the Committee. Speakers for October and December are in place.

P&M Subcommittee of Hospitality & Membership (C. Allyn): The Board agreed that they would take turns being the host at membership meetings. Dues renewal reminder letters will be sent out in the next few weeks to 56 members.

Publicity/PR (S. Thorp): No report.

New Business R. Semeraro reported that he and L. Allyn will meet with Christine Johnson, the new Mystic/Noank Librarian, to discuss areas where our two organizations could work together. One potential area is to encourage and facilitate use of the historical book collection at the Library.

Next meeting October 19, 2015, 7:00 pm Mystic Noank Library. Meeting adjourned 7:44pm

Respectfully submitted,
Cindy Allyn, Recording Secretary



Handy Tip:
The board meeting minutes from may be found online in our newsletter archives. The minutes are published after they have been approved -- generally one to two months after the meeting. Online archives currently date back to 2006.

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



MRHS Membership 2015-16

To All MRHS Members ~

This is the issue of the Portersville Press where we are pleased to list all our members for the year 2015 including our newest Life member, Judi Caracausa. If your name is here, we sincerely thank you for your continuing support of the Mystic River Historical Society. It is your dues that provide the money to staff and maintain the Downes Building, print and mail this newsletter, provide a local history resource to the Mystic community, and so on.

If you don't find your name on the list we are sad to say that you have not yet paid your dues for this year. If you really would like to maintain your membership and Newsletter subscription please send \$25 Individual or \$50 Family or \$75 Contributing to PO Box 245, Mystic right away. Thank you!
Margaret Austin – Program and Membership Committee Chair, Cindy Allyn – Membership, and Lou Allyn - President

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The Unforgettable Summer of 1949: Part I -- by Edward Rouse Pryor

A few years ago, Patty Copp started collecting stories from her friends & neighbors on the subject of "How I Came to Mason's Island."

She asked Ed Pryor several times if he would write something -- anything -- he did. The following by Ed just shows what sitting down and starting to write about the "good old days" can lead to. I expect that many of the names, places and events will evoke some of your memories as it did mine.

~ Lou Allyn

My parents and younger brother Jim moved to Mystic in the early fall of 1947. My older brother Lee and I were both away at school and we arrived at Christmas. We moved into a large Captain's house on Prospect Street just above West Mystic Avenue. Both Paul Connor and young Russ Burgess lived in that house at later times.

Our new next door neighbors were Blunt and Marion White and children Bill and Pat. They owned a summer cottage on Masons Island (now occupied by their grandson (and Pat's son) "Rock" {and May} Rockwood.)

Blunt's main claim to fame at that time was owning and racing "White Mist" a majestic and graceful white yawl as well as owning the paper tube factory in downtown Mystic. But then the new consumer activity called television edged in... Very few people at that time even owned a TV... and, with three channels, the offerings were pretty thin. One weekly comedy show was the Milton Berle show. Milton had been a "B" grade Vaudeville performer who apparently had lost his job so he decided to try the new medium of TV... Most of his weekly shows were, by-and-large, just awful.

Most people watched Milton Berle because he was the only show in town, but that made him even worse. He developed the dreadful habit, like Red Skelton, of laughing at his own jokes... while the audience groaned and the laugh machines laughed.

One Saturday evening the always exuberant Milton came out with one of his worst groaners and it was finally too much for Blunt White who decided enough was enough and calmly walked to the hall closet, seized his 12 gauge shotgun and returned to the den. "Get behind me, Marion, I can't take any more of this..." and he slowly, deliberately raised the shotgun.

Carefully... and with clear pre-meditation he aimed and squeezed the trigger. From the location of what had formerly been a television set, a giant ball of sparks radiated outward as shards of the finest Raytheon black-and-white cathode-ray-tube floated across the den. This prompted Marion to shout out the window "Blunt has just shot Milton Berle". Although there were never any formal charges, the neighborhood consensus was that Blunt was entirely within his rights and "Why didn't I think of that myself". Blunt's stature rose amongst his peers and his fame spread throughout the region as the man who had shot Milton Berle.

Other neighbors were Charlie and Dottie Brooks and their daughters and Len & Patty Moore. Charlie owned the local jewelry store on Main Street and was at the same time the Managing Director of the fledgling Mystic Seaport. Len & Patty Moore owned a farm down the hill toward Noank and commuted in for the summer from Brooklyn. Patty was the originator of the now world famous MIYC 4th of July Bike Parade.



Mystic Academy 1948 First row: Richard W (White?), Arthur Hawkey, Billy Hunt, Clyde Daniels • Second row: Bernice Fowler, Patricia Watrous, Sue Colgrove, Willa T. Schuster, Joyce Danesi, Mandy Loutrel, Alva T? • Third row: Nathan Smith, Jimmy Lathrop, Carolyn ?, Brenda Paine, Judy Bogue, Joanna Rossi, Ronny Willette, Bobby McNeil • Fourth row: Walter L., Louis Allyn, Jimmy Pryor, Bobby Keeler, Allan Lamb, Gory Williams, Kenneth Morgan, Robert Bankel, Paul Taldo, Johnny L., Kenneth Gatchet. Teacher Ms. Brown, at center was also Mason's Island resident's Sue Johnson's niece.
Ed. Note: **Further details & corrections, as well as primary document images are welcome!**

They had Brownie, Sissy (Sarah Hallberg), Margot (Greener) and Dion who all became good friends of the Pryor's - young and old. Sody and Nancy Soderberg and their four daughters were also nearby. Sody did high quality mostly nautical etchings and was a part of the very strong Mystic art contingent. They had lived on Masons Island until the '38 hurricane flooded them out and they moved to high ground on the hill in Mystic. Also nearby: The Schusters - Dr Schuster became the family dentist and their children, especially Willa T, became lifelong friends - and Bill and Marnie Heyniger, on West Mystic Avenue. Bill Jones (later the General Manager of Electric Boat) lived at the end of our lane; Bud Lathrop who had sold the Lathrop Engine Company to Burmeister & Wain had begun to turn the acreage near his place up above the library into a housing development called "Windy Hill" (He later developed the south end of Jupiter Island in Florida, as well.)

Anyway, all of these people (and more like the Colegroves, the Rodney Smiths and the Battles) not only became friends but were also members of the Masons Island Yacht Club. In those days there was no limit on the number of off-islanders who could be members so my parents quickly joined and were warmly welcomed by on-island and off-island members.

My younger brother Jim entered Mystic Academy where he had classmates that included Lou Allyn, Jim Lathrop, Mandy Loutrel, Willa T Schuster, and Sue Colegrove -- all of whom had a Masons Island affiliation. This group reestablished the connection as adults and has had an annual reunion ever since (although three of them have passed away in recent years).

The summer of 1948 I got a job delivering lobsters all over southern New England for Ernie Abbott who then was a wholesale lobster distributor. My brother Lee got a job as a rigger at Electric Boat, and we both spent much of our free time at the MIYC.

That summer, Jack Horn, who was an army veteran of World War II (and who used to regale us with his war stories mostly involving illicit booze and an M-1 battle tank) was, for the second year in a row, the counselor of the Masons Island Yacht Club - and a good one. He ran things with an iron hand and since the Horns were old time members of the club no one interfered with the way he wanted to do things. He strongly believed the club was basically a sailing club and the other activities were just a concession to people of weak character who lacked the dedication to spend all their time sailing. According to Jack, you would have to have been born an idiot to actually like the wimpy game of tennis - dashing about on a confined hot, hard surface with a stringy racquet swinging, sometimes futilely, at an idiotic bouncy ball. Where's the freedom... the majesty... the grandeur in that? Swimming was strictly a necessity. Something to keep yourself alive when the sailboat unexpectedly turned over and sank.

He also thought the just-released footwear like these new-fangled Sperry Topsiders were for fashion models and uppity social sailors (like at Wadawanuck) not for real sailors (like at Masons Island)... so all the Masons Island kids went barefoot when they sailed, particularly when they raced against the Wad Club.

Fortunately for us all, Bocce had not yet immigrated from the dusty villages of Sicily... or Jack, bewildered and in total disbelief, would have probably resigned his counselorship and departed by

Cape Cod knockabout for Okinawa to find the four cases of vintage Sake that were still in his M-1 tank when it sank in a pool of quicksand: "Bunch of ungrateful deadbeats, not one of 'em had the fortitude to go back and get the Sake... And after all I'd done for them."

I spent as much time as I could at MIYC that summer considering the demands of my highly responsible truck driving job at Abbotts.

The following summer, the summer of 1949, I returned to Mystic from boarding school in Virginia somewhat later than I had originally expected, nearly certain all the worthwhile summer jobs would already be taken.

A touch of envy rolled over me when it was revealed that my older brother, Lee, had gotten the dream summer-job of a lifetime - a crewman on the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute's 140 foot ketch Atlantis skippered by none other than Adrian Lane of Noank. They spent the summer exploring the oceanographic properties of the mid-Atlantic and chasing the dream of Columbus Iselin, (Woods Hole's chief scientist and a good friend of my father's), trying to find the "return" of the Gulf Stream. Lee's participation in that "exploration" was the basis for his admission, many years later, into membership in the Explorers Club in New York. Iselin thought the "return" would be under the Gulf Stream but it later proved to be much farther to the east and a part of what is now known as the great thermohaline conveyor as identified and characterized by Wally Broecker of Columbia University.

In those days, MIYC only had one counselor who did everything: First and foremost, in accordance with the Jack Horn dogma, sailing. But also, in accordance with the members wishes, swimming and tennis. The newly hired 1949 counselor, the replacement for Jack Horn, after a few weeks on the job, did not work out and either quit or was dismissed thus leaving a job opportunity for someone of my qualifications.

Having just returned and heard of this fortuitous turn of events, I thought my best approach was to start by at least making myself visible - an apparently qualified unemployed student athlete. So the next day after a quick precision sail out to Latimer's Reef in a borrowed Cape Cod knockabout and after a half dozen high speed laps from the dock to the raft and back to display my swimming prowess, I casually jogged up to the club porch, dried off and began quietly contemplating just how I should approach the Rear Commodore, Warren Clark, about the apparent availability of the counselor's slot... When he suddenly appeared out of nowhere and began to ask me questions:

"I understand you have a senior life saving certificate..."

"Yes sir, I do..."

"And you're a pretty good sailor?"

"Yes sir."

"Can you teach sailing?"

"Absolutely."

"Can you start and finish a sailboat race?"

"Piece of cake".

"How'd you like a job as the counselor of Mason's Island Yacht Club?"

My heart was in my throat: Interesting, adventuresome... "I'd love it".

After two years under the able leadership of Jack Horn, the sailing program at the club was on a firm footing. The club raced Kittens for the kids (large plywood sailing dinghies, about 11' long and very beamy, nearly 6' wide), and 18' Cape Cod knockabouts (planked wood hull, sloop rigged) for the adults. We had eight or nine of each that raced most of the time. Kids raced Wednesday and Saturday in the Kittens. We had many very proficient and dedicated junior sailors: Karen Soderberg, Margo Moore, Hugh Cole, Duncan Henderson, Martha Soderberg, Danny Van Winkle, Rusty Loutrell, Hugh and Ellen Smith and Dick Gledhill come to mind, but there were many others.

Since almost all of the kids already knew how to sail, giving formal sailing lessons was pretty much restricted to the very youngest. My other sailing duties included establishing the race course (for the kid's races) and starting the race, following the fleet, then shifting over to the finish line.

Adults raced Cape Cod's on Saturday and Sunday. The race committee pretty much established the course and gave assistance to me for the start and finish.

One of the off-island club member couples I failed to mention earlier were Lou and Helen Cross. They had no children but fit in well socially at the club and Lou was a truly dedicated and very competitive sailor. Helen was in charge of the Mystic Seaport Store. Lou seemed to virtually always win the Cape Cod class races. It was rumored that he had "rounded" the leading edge of both his centerboard and rudder and had "tapered" (or shaved) the trailing edge, which definitely would streamline those surfaces. Whether this was illegal or just smart boat preparation was never discussed.

Bill Dodge brought in four of the presumed best sailors in the area (including himself) and they conducted a "round-robin" with the four fastest MIYC Cape Cods. The Lou Cross boat handily won all four races thus furthering the suspicion about the boat.

On Thursday evenings "The Young" meaning, in this case, roughly the college age group (with spillover downward into the upper high school bracket and upward into the post-college-but-unmarried bracket) would meet at the bonfire area of the club to hold a "Beer and Singing-Around-the-Bonfire" party. This gathering was the predecessor to what is now the "Thursday Night Family Picnic".

Participants at various times were: Mary Jane Rowe; Judy, Mimi, and George Merrow (Jack Washburn's cousins); Brownie and Sissy Moore; Josie Cole; Lee Hirsche; Gretchen Kennedy; Postie Moore; Sue Glocke; Jack and Hank Horn; Betsy, Nikki, and Sally Winslow (all three of whom ended up marrying Island boys); my brother Lee and I; Barry Learned and her younger sister Faith; Tony Halsey; Keith and Bill Leavitt; The Constantine daughters, Nancy and Betsy; Dick Grover and his sister Polly. Occasionally others would come: Moose Herbert; John Wheeler; Pom Robinson, Patty Briggs (Copp) and her sister, Ann.

This was the pre-canned-music and pre-rock & roll era so everyone generated their own music. We'd sit around the camp fire and sing songs like "Moonlight Bay", "Bicycle Built For Two", "Seven Old Ladies Locked in the Lavatory", "Good Night Irene", "You Are My Sunshine", "The Muffin Man", with perhaps a uke or guitar and drink beer and tell stories and jokes between songs. At indoor parties we had parlor games like "Charades" and "Pass the Lemon with your chin". This was a fun way of getting to know the girls sitting on both sides of you since transferring the lemon - with no hands-allowed - usually required some pretty intimate (and funny) upper body contact on the part of both parties.

At dances with a live band we had "current" novelty dances like The Bunny Hop, The Mexican Hat Dance and the relatively new Jitter Bug as well as the old standbys like the Fox Trot, the Waltz, and, of course, The Charleston. Good, clean fun, but a somewhat different world from now.



The durable theme "Moonlight Bay" was written in 1912 by Edward Madden & Percy Wenrich, and was the title of a 1951 film starring Doris Day. Online, click here to hear Bing Crosby's rendition.



"Nylla," G.S. Allyn's Elco, leads the Mason's Island Yacht Club "Kittens" sailing dinghies and young captains in a boat procession.

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Calendar of Events

Wednesday, December 2nd, 2015

7:00p refreshments & socializing, 7:30p program

Katherine Dimancescu's "Welcome to the Seventeenth Century" will transport audience members back in time to manors, moors, and mansion houses of seventeenth century England and New England.

No meeting in January 2016

Due to frequent weather concerns, the programming committee has voted to discontinue the January membership meeting.

Renew or become a Member of MRHS and receive updates about all our meetings & events.

Contact us at: info@mystichistory.org or 860-536-4779.

Membership Updates



~ Please see inside for this year's complete membership list - 'Hope to see you there!' ~

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