

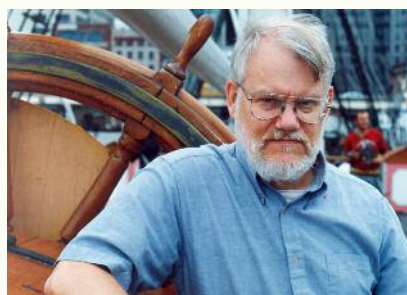
Nautical Folk Art with Norman Brouwer in October



Photo from SilviaAntiques.com

Walrus tusk scrimshaw folk art from the 19th century. Each tusk is engraved with an individual portrait of a formally-attired Victorian - one, a stylish moustached gentleman, the other, a gentlewoman in a full-length gown. English, c.1850, 22 1/2" The tusks are available from Silvia Antiques of Nantucket for \$3500.

Historian Norman Brouwer brings his 50 years of maritime experience to MRHS's October Member Meeting. He will be presenting Nautical Folk Art on October 23rd, 2013 at 7:30pm at the Mystic Congregational Church's Parish Hall. The talk will focus on art created by seamen on commercial sailing vessels from the late 18th century to the early 20th. Carvings, paintings, drawings and other items were made by sailors during their long voyages at sea. The men's living and working conditions, theories on the origins of these crafts and specific folk art elements and symbolism will also be explored. Mr. Brouwer will be showcasing some pieces of nautical folk art from his own personal collection, as well as photographs of many more items.



Mr. Brouwer was the Maritime Historian and Curator of Ship Restoration at South Street Seaport in New York City for over 30 years and now consults for Mystic Seaport, is involved in ship restoration projects, travels worldwide and speaks and writes extensively on maritime history.

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An original hand-made 19th c. canvas "Ditty Bag." Functional as well as decorative, the bag was a sailor's go-to for small tools & equipment. The ditty bag and larger sea bag were typical first projects for apprentice in the sailmakers or working seaman as their construction incorporated the primary skills needed in the sail-making trade. 13" H x 9 1/2" dia. \$500 from Silvia Antiques of Nantucket.

History Fair Saturday, September 28 at Groton Public Library from 1-4p - free!

Come visit us! The Mystic River Historical Society will be on site, as well as the Groton Historical Society, Indian & Colonial Research Center, Friends of Fort Griswold, DAR-Anna Warner Bailey Chapter, Avery Association, Descendants of American Textile Workers, New London County Historical Society and others. There will be a raffle, entertainment & performances, including Joseph Potter, a Colonial American magician.



from the CONTRIBUTOR'S DESK

Jim Kimenker

As regular column readers may have noted, my mind makes connections between items that would normally remain unrelated to the uninitiated. So, bear with me here as we again tour the seemingly unrelated.

My wife, Jen, and I recently attended a performance of Tchaikovsky's magnificent "Swan Lake" by the New York City Ballet. For those not familiar with the story, Prince Siegfried (not the brightest bulb) is celebrating his 21st birthday, when his mother, the Queen, enters and in true, buzz-killing style, points to her ring finger—our hero is expected to pick a girl to marry. Siegfried acts appropriately horrified, but the party is definitely over and his best friend, Benno, suggests they go hunting down by the lake instead (what are friends for, after all). And that's when the fun begins, because at the lake Siegfried meets the "girl" of his dreams, a swan (surprise!), who, along with all her girlfriends, apparently, is really a girl turned into a swan during the day by an evil sorcerer. Siegfried swears eternal, faithful love to her (the usual prerequisite to ending the spell). But the sorcerer then tricks Siegfried into also swearing eternal, faithful love to the sorcerer's daughter, by transforming her to look like our favorite swan/girl. Result? Because Siegfried technically broke his oath to be forever faithful to the swan/girl, his failure condemns her (and the girlfriends, too, apparently) forever to "Swandom". The ballet ends with Siegfried prostrate on the ground, mourning his loss. I silently urged him to man up—come on — even a first-year lawyer could easily have overcome the legal technicalities.

That got me to thinking. The author of "Swan Lake" requires the viewer to suspend disbelief to make the story believable - we grant acceptance of the story's essentials for the sake of the story. What might we "take for granted" in terms of the study of history? For instance, do any of us believe we're racist when studying history? I certainly don't, and I'm confident all of you would answer similarly. However, some articles in the *New York Times* "Disunion" series made me reconsider. The articles revolve around the events that unfolded in New York City over 4 days in July 1863, ironically barely a week after the Union victory at Gettysburg.

Commonly known as the draft riots, they are not well known or understood, as New Yorkers did their best to forget about them after the Civil War. I was fascinated by the racism aspect, as I had previously not thought of the riots that way.

I knew that blacks suffered in the riots, but not the extent. Rioters blamed blacks as the cause of the war and their own misery - targeting black businesses and homes, and attacking blacks at random, even children. Blacks were beaten, mutilated, dragged through the streets, and lynched from lampposts. Puzzled by my basic ignorance of the facts, I wondered about what I really knew about the black experience in the north before and during the Civil War. Not much, it turns out.



A depiction of New York's race riot response to 1863 conscription laws.

Consider also Jeremiah G. Hamilton, one of New York City's first black tycoons and the subject of one of the *Times*' articles. A black tycoon? Now truthfully, how many of you have ever heard of any ante-bellum black tycoons? I certainly had not. Yet Hamilton was larger than life prior to the Civil War and his story is remarkable. As the *Times* notes, "his very existence flies in the face of our understanding of the way things usually were in New York in the mid... 19th century."

But my purpose here is not to retell stories of the black experience. Rather, it is to explore the things we take for granted in our perceptions of history. You might argue that it's obvious that our understanding of the past is hurt if we rely on stereotypes or baseless assumptions. But, to what extent are we each guilty of suspending disbelief and ignoring the obvious to allow our understanding of history to remain comfortable and more palatable to our inherent prejudices? I realize that I certainly have some work to do.

So, we'll give Siegfried and the audience a pass for accepting the feathery fate of the swan/girl. But let's agree that what is acceptable at the ballet is not acceptable regarding the study of actual events. For that, perhaps we should take a moment to analyze those events where, if the truth be told, we recognize the symptoms of disbelief suspension. We might not only learn new things about the past, but also about ourselves.

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





Where in Mystic? This c. 1940 vintage postcard features a bucolic autumn setting and bears "Greetings from Mystic, Connecticut." A random auction item, the card has nothing else identifying information about the location, or sender/recipient. Is it the view toward Pequot Hill? Lantern Hill? If you have any insights, please feel free to send to: jenniferspryor@gmail.com

Remembering Willa

by Dorrie Hanna

Willa T. Schuster passed away this summer. There are few who can equal her long and caring involvement in so many Mystic organizations. She was an avid reader, a fine writer and an enthusiastic bridge player. In fact, "enthusiasm" was what Willa was all about. She was enthusiastic about Mystic and served our town well, working with the Mystic Junior Women's Club, the Bi-Centennial Committee, the Art Festival, the Girl Scouts and the Mystic Art Center. Willa was awarded the Mystic Chamber of Commerce Community Service award in 1983.

Her many years of involvement with the MRHS were so valuable. She was a committee chair, a trustee, and president for multiple terms. Our organization flourished under her leadership. She had a knack for encouraging others to get involved and she knew almost everyone in town. My own association with MRHS was a direct result of her asking me to do something for a house tour. At that point, I wasn't even a member of MRHS! I subsequently spent many afternoons and evenings at meetings in Willa's living room, making new friends and getting more involved myself.

It's hard to imagine her busy life with the physical challenges she faced as a person. And yet she ran a business, ran organizations, and made a difference to Mystic in countless ways. It was a privilege to know and to work with a woman like Willa.



An example of another of her talents, an untitled impressionist style painting by Willa T. Schuster, c. 1957. Recently auctioned by The Hamilton Group/Robert Glass Auctions.

A Happy Ending

by Dorrie Hanna

In June I received the following email just as I was about to leave on vacation—

We are trying to find a home for this lovely piano, made in Derby, CT by the Sterling Piano Co. It was purchased by Elizabeth and John Watrous of Mystic (Burnetts Corners) for their young daughter, Mary Jane, born in Mystic 1887. This piano remains in the family and is owned by the daughter of Mary Jane. Aside from a train ride from Mystic to Western New York c. 1917, the piano has never been outside the family home and is in remarkable condition.

The owner, age 93, is co-historian for the town of Hinsdale, NY and it is her desire to have the piano returned to its 'native' area. Might you have suggestions? It would be donated and the interested organization or party would need to make arrangements for transportation.

Another bit of information is that the family home in Burnetts Corners is now a bed and breakfast. By chance, are you familiar with it and could you provide contact information?

The writer and I exchanged a few messages and I thought no more about it. Last week I was delighted to receive this follow up—

. . . I contacted you regarding the 1902 Sterling piano. It had been purchased new by the John Watrous family of Burnett's Corners in Mystic. . . pictured is Helen Bryant De Golia, aged 93, granddaughter of Elizabeth and John Watrous. Helen was interested in having her mother's piano go to an appreciative new home and I am happy to report its adoption! A local licensed piano technician was most impressed with its condition and history and is planning to restore it, with an open invitation for Helen to visit it at any time. We are thrilled! I so appreciate the information you sent regarding possibilities for adoption in your area, also placing us in contact with the B&B in Burnett's Corners (whose neighbors are Helen's cousins.) Many thanks!

I just love it when things work out!



Helen Bryant De Golia, age 93, pictured here with the 1902 Sterling piano purchased by her grandparents, the Watrouses of Burnett's Corners, Mystic.

September Meeting Minutes

The MRHS Board met Monday, September 16, 2013. Attendees included: Aimeé Allaire, Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Lois Glazier, Sally Halsey, Cathy Marco, Cathy Mauritz, Richard Semeraro, Barry Thorp and Stephanie Thorp. A motion was made & approved to accept the minutes of the May, June & Annual meetings as published.

President's Report (L. Allyn): A motion was made, seconded and passed to elect Cindy Allyn as Recording Secretary

Corresponding Secretary (Lois): Eight letters have been written - for speaker thanks and membership renewals.

Treasurer's Report (B. Thorpe): All deposits have been made; bills paid current and the accounts reconciled with bank statements. Expenses were essentially normal payments for services & dues. A search for less costly building insurance is under way as prices have spiked over last year's bill.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Buildings & Grounds (Allan for Greener): Groton Town has installed *No Parking This Side of the Street* on the west side of High Street across from our parking lot. • ASP Security Systems surveyed the smoke detectors in both buildings. A motion was approved for \$600 to replace three obsolete detectors which will be connected to the existing alarm box.

Curatorial (C. Allyn): Sept. 16. meeting discussed the 9/12 public scanning session in conjunction with a book being published for The Day. In addition to MRHS collection images, we had about 10 folks show up with pictures to share. We'll be at the Groton Public Library History Fair Sept. 28 from 1-4. Work continues on the booklet celebrating 40 years of MRHS, which should be available in December.

Education/Outreach (Mauritz): We are seeking activity volunteers and a replacement for our Portersville Academy

schoolmaster who has retired. Concerns about changing curriculum standards may require a shift in our programs - it was suggested that schools be contacted to find out how we might work together. It was also recommended that the committee be expanded to two or three members, Board or not.

GeoHistorian Project (Marco): We thank Rod DesMarais & his Central Hall property group for their generous support and letting us post our banner announcing MRHS's 40th Anniversary and the GeoHistorian project for an extension of almost three months! • The fall & 2014 editions of Lighthousemaps' map of Mystic will include the GeoHistorian lobsterman icon along with a small ad highlighting MRHS. The map is at over 100 locations with a distribution of over 300,000 - widespread opportunity to promote both MRHS & the project in downtown Mystic. • Cathy has been invited to speak at the September meeting of the Mystic Women's Club on the history of the GeoHistorian project and will thank them for their generous contribution which paid for the banner and building decals.

Information Technology (S. Thorpe): Full back-up performed on 13 Sept. All systems are working as expected. An additional one Terabyte external hard disk has been purchased to handle larger image file size back up.

Marketing (Halsey): PRs have gone out for fall meetings.

Program & Membership (Allaire): The Committee met in June & September. Most programs & topics set through and/or in the process of confirming through December 2014. No September member meeting but we are looking forward to October 23rd & Nautical Folk Art by Norman Brouwer.

New Business: Richard Semeraro raised the topic of how to encourage writings about local history. (Lou will bring to the next meeting an example of a Gunn Scholar research report by a student at The Gunnery School in Washington, CT.)
October 21st, 2013 7:00 pm Mystic Noank Library

Respectfully submitted, Cindy Allyn

Civil War Sesquicentennial Series - Life on the Homefront: October 1863

by Catherine Deichmann

As fighting continues along several fronts from Virginia to Louisiana, Mystic's citizens are particularly attentive to the whereabouts of their local "boys." The 1st Heavy Artillery, 1st Cavalry, 5th and 14th Infantries are all engaged near Bristoe in western Virginia. The 10th Infantry is participating in the siege of Charleston, SC. The 12th, with a large complement of Stonington men, is slogging through the bayou with General Banks' Teche Campaign in western Louisiana, while the 8th and 21st Infantry regiments are encamped in relative comfort around Norfolk, VA. The 21st is inspected by Colonel Donohoe of the 10th NY, who judges the regiment to be "as fine as any I have had the honor to inspect." Despite their positive report, the inspection reveals the extent of the regiment's losses, mainly from disease: the 21st left Connecticut in the fall of 1862 with a full complement of one thousand men; after a year in the field, there are only 594 men present for duty.

In Mystic, shipbuilding runs a close second to war news in importance. Local pride swells with the launch of two new screw steamers in a single week, one from the Mallory yard, and the other from Maxson, Fish & Co.. More contracts for new vessels continue to arrive. In mid-October, a suspicious late-night fire at the Greenman yard threatens to upset production. The fire was discovered by the watchman at the nearby Mallory yard, who sounded the alarm. The fire destroyed the shop containing models

of the more than 150 vessels built at the yard. It also destroyed the building where the Greenman employees kept their personal tool chests, a loss of fifty to one hundred dollars for each man. Lines of citizens passing buckets of water from the river to the blaze helped to save much valuable ship timber. The final tally put the uninsured loss at about \$12,000, not including the individual losses of the employees. Fortunately the southwest wind prevented the flames from reaching either of the two vessels currently on the stocks. A subsequent investigation found the cause to be "spontaneous combustion of some waste cotton saturated with oil used for packing," stored in the locked room where the fire originated.

As the third winter of the war approaches, shortages of consumer goods begin to be felt. Coffee is among the commodities in danger of being priced far beyond the reach of most households, since huge quantities are being bought up by the War Department to keep hundreds of thousands of Union soldiers on their feet. Creative entrepreneurs seize the opportunity, marketing coffee "supplements" to fill the need. One of these, Leibig's Essential Coffee, "combines the exquisite aroma of Java Coffee, with the highest essential excellence of the most choice Dandelion." Appealing to the pocketbook as well as the taste buds, the advertisers remind their readers that "it costs less than Ordinary Green Coffee and requires less than half the quantity to give the same degree of strength."

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Calendar of Events

31 DAYS **OCTOBER** 31 DAYS

- Membership Meeting -
 Wed., Oct. 23rd, 2013, 7:30p
 Mystic Congregational Church Hall at Broadway and E. Main St., Mystic
Norman Brouwer on Nautical Folk Art

- Membership Meeting -
 Wed., Dec. 4th, 2013, 7:30p
 Mystic Congregational Church Hall at Broadway and E. Main St., Mystic
Patricia Schaefer speaks about the History of MRHS

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.

30 DAYS **SEPTEMBER** 30 DAYS

The Membership Issue!



- Cynthia Allyn, Membership Coordinator

We have included in this issue our current list of members - please see page five inside. New and renewed members are welcome year-round, and our renewal letters for next year will go out around the end of January. Feel free to contact us at info@mystichistory.org or (860) 536-4779 for more information.

We thank our 52 donors who contributed to our 40th anniversary fund. The total received was \$2840!

~ Thanks to all for your continuing support! ~

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