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

by Catherine Deichman



Photo from Mystic Seaport / www.cthistoryonline.org

Like the "Independent", the 1862 sidewheel steamer "Escort" served in the Civil War and was also built by Greenman & Co. of Mystic. The company of three brothers had a strong business between 1837 and 1878, building a total of 97 vessels. This image is from an original stereograph image, likely taken after the war, ca. 1866 or later, when the vessel had returned to Connecticut and been outfitted for passenger & freight use by the Norwich & New York Transportation Co. In 1970, George Greenman's home was given to the Mystic Seaport by his great-granddaughter, and today is sited on Greenmanville Avenue as part of the Seaport facility.

As fall nears, the losses from the fighting at Port Hudson three months earlier continue to mount. John Parks of Mystic River, age 29, and William Colgrove, an 18-year-old musician, are the most recent casualties. A poem in the *Mystic Pioneer* reflects the community's grief.

*Tho' my darling is sleeping to-day with the dead,
And daisies and clover bloom over his head,
I smile, tho' I'm crying as I lay it away,
That battle-worn cap lettered "Co. K."*

Company K's losses seem to strengthen the community's resolve to win the war at any cost. President Lincoln's suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*, placing military law above the authority of the civil courts for the duration of the conflict, is favorably viewed. The *Pioneer* publishes a parable, "John Morgan's Substitute," casting the new Federal draft in moral terms. When appeals to duty fail, humor is used: "If I'm drafted, I'll go," he said. He was drafted and he went - to Canada." Local shopkeepers and consumers are adjusting to the new "Green-backs," also known as "Uncle Samuel's paper Dollars." The manufacturers of artificial limbs mask the horror of the battlefield behind impersonal statistics: their orders show that about four times as many men lose left legs as right, and four right arms are lost to every left arm.

In the local shipyards, the statistics are much less grim. One gunboat and three merchant steamers, averaging 1,000 tons, are at the wharves receiving their boilers and engines. George Greenman & Company has just launched a sidewheel steamer, *Independent*, and five more sidewheelers are on the stocks in yards along the river. A new Mallory screw steamer, to be called *Swamp Angel*, is scheduled to be launched before the end of the month.

Daily life provides many opportunities to escape the war. The Union Baptist Sabbath School picnic is a great success. The fall edition of Madame Demorest's *Mirror of Fashions* has arrived. Dr. F.T. Mercer offers to remove teeth using "nitrous oxyd, [sic]...much more pleasant to take than chloroform or ether, and not in the least dangerous." A Singing School for students of all ages is being offered at Washington Hall, while across the river in Floral Hall a performance by "The Old Swiss Bell Ringers," along with "Harpists, Solo Artists, and Quartette Brass Band," promises an enjoyable afternoon's entertainment. Captain Appelman on the smack *Pacific* has managed to dodge the Confederate commerce raiders and return from Bermuda with an unusual catch - thirty different specimens of angel fish for Barnum's American Museum at the corner of Broadway and Ann Street in New York City.



An aptly-named 1862 "Green-back".



from the CONTRIBUTOR'S DESK

Jim Kimenker

In last year's season-opening column I noted how the beginning of fall typically brings a flood of book reviews from the pulpit, often incorporated in eye-glazing sermons on life lessons gleaned from an impossibly rigorous summer's reading. I promised not to participate in that standard end-of-summer action, not from any particular distaste for sermons, but as practical matter—I had, embarrassingly, failed to finish a single book last summer. No such luck for you all this year, though. I actually did do some reading and one of the books, *The Last Battle*, about an event at the very end of World War II, was a surprisingly good read.

I was alerted to this particular book by a Bob Edwards interview with the author, Stephen Harding, which I heard on my way to work one morning (on SiriusXM Radio, and an interview show I've recommended in the past). The subject sounded beyond fascinating. It was a story about U.S. and German soldiers joining forces in the waning hours of World War II in Europe to protect French "honor" prisoners. Who knew?

First, let's agree (or agree to disagree) about what takes a war history book from just interesting to fascinating. It certainly helps to hook readers if the story is little known or otherwise not well-documented. As noted in the previous paragraph, this book definitely has that hook covered.

Second, one of the age-old problems with books on war is impersonalization. The decisions and actions of generals and officers are all typically well-documented, but the individual soldiers on the ground are, by necessity, generally ignored to keep the books under 1,000 pages. There are examples of a focus at the individual level—Stephen Ambrose's *Band of Brothers* comes to mind—but the focus is usually one-sided (in Ambrose's case, a single company in the American army). A focus on both sides of the Civil War was entertainingly created by the father and son duo of Michael and Jeff Shaara, but they focused on generals and officers for the most part and, additionally, could take liberties as their books were historical fiction.

Harding's book, *The Last Battle*, on the other hand, is an in-depth portrayal of all the characters involved in a little-known event at the end of World War II, involving Americans, Germans and, of all things, French prisoners. It's the story of a German "honor" prison in the Austrian Tyrol and its liberation (the prison was a remote, satellite extension of the Dachau concentration camp). What makes the story fascinating is the combination of the tale of the prisoners (all generally well-known luminaries from pre-war France) and their liberation by American and German soldiers, who found themselves defending the prison (an ancient Austrian castle) from SS troops bent on killing the prisoners (and them) before the war ended. Rather remarkable indeed.

Ok, ok, I can hear some of you grumbling that the story, remarkable or not, still seems like just another war story, and you'd be almost correct. But I trust you also remember that I consistently maintain the importance of both understanding the motivations and actions of individuals and, at the same time, striving to imagine yourself as "being there", to better appreciate why and how things happened. Well, the attraction of *The Last Battle* is that Harding does all your work for you. His focus on all the individuals involved (the French prisoners, the prison guards and commandant, and the American and German soldiers and officers) and his adept story-telling leave you immersed in the action and personally familiar with the story's characters. Harding helps attain that level of familiarity by including their back stories and, ultimately, what happened to all of them after the war.

So, reading *The Last Battle* is a win-win. You can read an entertaining and fascinating bit of history and, at the same time, sit back and relax without worrying that I might stop by to check on whether you're working hard enough to participate in the story yourself!



Photo: touristlink.com

"Schloss Itter" - the castle which housed the French VIP prisoners - is the site of the utterly unique instance when American & Germans joined forces in combat and the only opportunity in history for U.S. troops to defend a medieval stronghold.

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 - vacant

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



Thanks to Speakeasy Benefit Sponsors

by Lou Allyn

A special thank you to Dan Meiser, Co-Owner & Manager of The Oyster Club on Water Street in Mystic, and our own Bailey Pryor for sponsoring a Speakeasy Party last spring to benefit the Mystic River Historical Society. Additional thanks to generous co-sponsors include: artist Brooke Kanani, Mystic Gem Co., Goldsmiths & Silversmiths Co., and Abba's Cigar Shop.

The evening featured 1920s costumed flappers, guests, a jazz band, and even a "raid" by prohibition enforcement agents - who kindly let the festivities continue at the Oyster Club's "Treehouse" inaugural event and raising a snazzy \$3,130 clams-making whole our 2013 MRHS Budget.



Top: A dapper Lou and Cindy Allyn welcome well-costumed guests to the event.
Bottom: 'Agents' Frank Murphy and Greg Gilmartin wield badges and a 'tommy gun' to show the speakeasy crowd they mean business.

Early Inspiration for Historical Society

Josiah Brown recently unearthed on his farm, under a stone wall adjoining the Silas Wheeler estate, the full skeleton of an Indian youth with bow and arrow buried in the grave. What a pity Mystic has no historical society to take charge of such finds. In recent years Mystic has allowed enough of these to be taken away to fill a building with valuable and most interesting relics of early days. Why not make a beginning with this latest discovery?" ~ Mystic Times, 6/30/1906.

It only took sixty seven years for Mystic people to follow this advice and here we are celebrating Mystic River Historical Society's 40th anniversary this year!

Judy Hicks recently unearthed this tidbit from her computer archives and thought it poignant to share.

GeoHistorian Update

by Cathy Marco

We are very grateful to Rod DesMarais and his group who own the property of the former Central Hall who let us use their new fence to post our banner announcing MRHS's 40th Anniversary and the downtown GeoHistorian project for much longer than the three weeks they originally agreed - almost three months! They were extremely generous and very supportive of the project.

In the fall & next year's editions of Lighthousemaps map of Mystic, the GeoHistorian character will be included on the map along with a small ad highlighting the character and MRHS. The map is distributed at over 100 locations in our area with a distribution of over 300,000. Map users will have an opportunity to see where the GeoHistorian characters are located throughout downtown Mystic.

Cathy has been invited to speak at the September meeting of the Mystic Women's Club. She will relate the history of the GeoHistorian project and personally thank them for their generous contribution which paid for the banner and the decals on the 12 buildings.

Where this project goes next is anyone's guess. A number of other communities have shown interest... but we were the first in Connecticut!!

Right: Tina Detlej of News Channel 8 interviews independently-educated student, Hadleigh T. in front of Bartleby's at 46 West Main Street - one of the project subject buildings.



Above: GeoHistorian Day at the Mystic River Park on May 4, 2013
From left: Lou Allyn, President of the MRHS; Lauren McGugan, Mystic Middle School teacher and a project leader; Cathy Marco, as the Mystic GeoHistorian; Ed Haberek, Stonington First Selectman; Heather Somers, Groton Mayor.

Right: The GeoHistorian character with QR code. A full list of documentary shorts are also available by clicking/visiting mystichistory.org



Annual Meeting Minutes

The Mystic River Historical Society Annual Meeting was held on May 22, 2013.

The Annual Meeting of the Mystic River Historical Society was called to order at 7:30 pm by the President. A motion was made, seconded and passed to accept the minutes of last year's annual meeting which were published in the September 2012 edition of the Portersville Press.

The president recognized Cathy Marco as the leader of the GeoHistorian project and gave a special thank you to a soon to retire member of the Board, Betty O'Donnell. Betty has been on the Board for seven years and is an active member of the Program and Membership Committee and was a very helpful editor of the GeoHistorian scripts. When Betty and her husband Brendan move to Seattle she will be replaced by appointment of Cindy Allyn.

A motion was made seconded and passed to elect David Evans, Bill Everett, Jim Kimenker and Cathy Marco to their third three year term on the Board of Directors. Their contributions to the success of the Historical Society over the years are greatly appreciated.

The next Annual Meeting will be May 28, 2014. Being that there was no other business a motion was made, seconded and passed to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted, Louis Allyn

May Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, May 20, 2013. Attendees included: Aimée Allaire, Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Lois Glazier, Alan Greener, Jim Kimenker, Cathy Marco, Betty O'Donnell, Barry Thorp, and Stephanie Thorp

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

President's Report: The response to our request for contributions to our 40th Anniversary Fund has been very positive (\$2,760 to date) and is greatly appreciated. Bailey Pryor's All Hands on Deck speakeasy party was a big success with \$3,130 contributed to MRHS.

As a result of a premium increase notice of 75%, Sound Insurance is soliciting bids from other companies.

Corresponding Secretary: Four letters were written since the last meeting including one to Mrs. Richard Perkins with a list of donations in memory of Emily Perkins.

Treasurer's Report: All deposits have been made and all bills are paid.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Buildings & Grounds: Cleanup morning was held on Saturday April 20th. Present were Lou Allyn, Alan Greener, Kit Johnson and Rod Cook, and Barry Thorp. Stones were put back in the parking lot, trees were trimmed and weeds were pulled. The large dead overhanging tree branch behind the Downes Building was cut down and removed.

Curatorial: The Curatorial Committee met on Monday, May 20. A donation from the MRHS has been given to the Library Fair Silent Auction. Images were loaned to the Chamber of Commerce for the May 4 Downtown Stroll. Final paperwork for the Coogan/Morgan donation has been sent to donors. It was agreed to restore Betsy Boucher's three hours a week that had been previously cut from the 2013 budget. Arrangements are being made for coverage at the Downes Building when Dorrie is out of town. The Committee will not meet in June or July.

Education/Outreach: A\$183 was received from the Charles Barnum School PTO.

Finance: David Evans reported on the May 17, 2013 balance in our investment account, a gain of 9.9% year to date.

GeoHistorian Project: The GeoHistorian Project was launched on Saturday, May 4th with good attendance from the GeoHistorians and their families and friends as well as a few local politicians. Proclamations were read from the Governor, Groton Mayor, and Stonington First Selectman. The banner is on display downtown for most of the month of May. Channel 8 (New Haven) did a nice news piece on the project with the help of the Independent Home Scholars. The local newspapers did wonderful articles about the event. Since the Launch, discussions have been held with the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce and other tourism bureaus on ways to promote it. Stores and Hotels in the area have been given bookmarks and background information. Work is continuing.

Information Technology: The System Administrator performed a full back-up on May 16th and updated all application software, including security updates. All equipment performed well during the month.

Marketing: Press releases have gone out for the May members' meeting.

Newsletter: - A request was received from a member in Texas to stop mailing the print version because the online version was so well done.

Program & Membership: April's program on Mason's Island's very own Georgiana Fulton by Susan Bailey was engaging, fascinating and attended by 60 people. \$123 was generously donated that evening.

We are looking forward to Bettye Noyes' talk Bluff Point to Latimer Point this Wednesday, May 22nd and June 12th's special collaboration with Mystic Seaport in celebra-

tion of the Charles W. Morgan's restoration completion. Future programs are confirmed through March 2014.

No New Business.

The next meeting will be held Monday, June 17 at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Louis Allyn

June Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, June 17, 2013. Attendees included: Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, David Evans, Bill Everett, Sally Halsey, Betty O'Donnell, Richard Semeraro and Barry Thorp.

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

President's Report: What an exceptional year we have had: contributions and Mystic Woman's Club; grants; the Coogan family collection donations; shelving and storage in the Downes Building looks the best ever; Past Perfect is in very good shape and new Virtual Exhibits are being added; speakers and press releases resulting in turnouts at the membership meetings that we haven't seen in years; GeoHistorian Project; education programs at Portersville; issue after issue of great newsletters; over 300 names on our Gmail lists; five books and booklets on our digital publications MRHS - Bringing the History of Mystic to the World; sound & balanced performance of our Vanguard funds. Congratulations to everyone who made it happen.

Corresponding Secretary: 18 letters were written in May, including a letter to Mrs. Richard Perkins with a list of people who donated to MRHS in memory of Emily Perkins. Also a letter of thanks to Bailey and Jennifer Pryor for sponsoring the rum fundraiser party.

Treasurer's Report: At this time all deposits have been made and all bills are paid current. The Treasurer's account books are reconciled with the Chelsea Groton Bank statements. During this period income deposits of \$5,124.59, undeposited checks of \$189.00 and withdrawals of \$3,830.38 were recorded. Income during the period included two very generous grants from the Mystic Woman's Club totaling \$1000 and most generous gifts of \$1000 from the Evans Charitable Trust and \$2000 from the Coogan Trust.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Buildings & Grounds: No report.

Curatorial: Lou attended the second of two workshops about digital collections. The Akeley Trust has sent us their annual contribution towards the cost of housing their collection. A small display relating to the Mystic Liberty Pole has been set up at the Mystic & Noank Library. Dorrie will monitor MRHS email while she is away.

Education/Outreach: A total of \$553 was received from three schools.

Finance: David Evans reported on the June 17, 2013 balance in our investment account: a gain of 7.4% year to date.

GeoHistorian Project: Cathy has been busy contacting a number of sources to keep this project alive and going. The banner on West Main Street will be staying up for a while.

Information Technology: The System Administrator performed a full back-up on 16 May. The next planned back-up will be on or about July 1. Future monthly backups are planned for on or about August 1 and mid-September.

Marketing: Press releases were sent out for the June members meeting. Publicity of our membership meetings has resulted in many new attendees.

Newsletter: The 2013-2014 schedule will be issued with the September deadline.

Program & Membership: Our last two member meetings were great successes. Our May member meeting, at which Bettye Noyes talked about the rise of summer home communities in the area, was attended by 65 people and \$71 was given in donations. June's bonus meeting with Mystic Seaport's Quentin Snediker, Steve White and Matthew Stackpole talking about the Charles W. Morgan was very well-attended: 95 people and \$192 in donations! The Committee next meets this Thursday, June 20th.

Four new members have joined MRHS since the last Board meeting. 51 donors contributed \$2,800 to the 40th Anniversary Fund.

NEW BUSINESS

Walking Tour Reprints: David has a few edits to make. Sally will contact a potential donor.

Election of Officers

Officers elected for the new year are: President Louis Allyn, Vice President William Everett, Treasurer Barry Thorp, Corresponding Secretary Lois Glazier and Recording Secretary David Scott.

Committee Chairs

The following were appointed by President Allyn and confirmed by the Board:

Building & Grounds – Alan Greener • Education & Outreach – Cathy Mauritz • Finance – David Evans (6th year required a 2/3 majority vote of the Board) • Information Technology – Stephanie Thorp • Marketing & Social Media – Sally Halsey • Program & Membership – Aimeé Allaire • Special Committee – GeoHistorian – Cathy Marco. Jennifer Pryor will continue as the Newsletter Editor and Publisher.

The next meeting is September 16th, 2013 7:00 pm MNL

Respectfully submitted, Louis Allyn

Newsletter Patrons

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 CAPT AND MRS JOHN PORTER

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

Membership Updates



We welcome some new members to the MRHS. They are John and Deborah Aspinwall, James Good, John and Julia Parry, Lyndsey Pyrke- Fairchild, Tora Sterregaard, Ann Sullivan and Fred and Gail Yeo. Most of these folks joined as a result of wonderful program meetings during the year -- thank you.

We also regret the passing of four members. They are Gail Forster, Louise Pittaway, Lisa Reed and Ted Wydler.

- Cynthia Allyn, Membership Coordinator

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