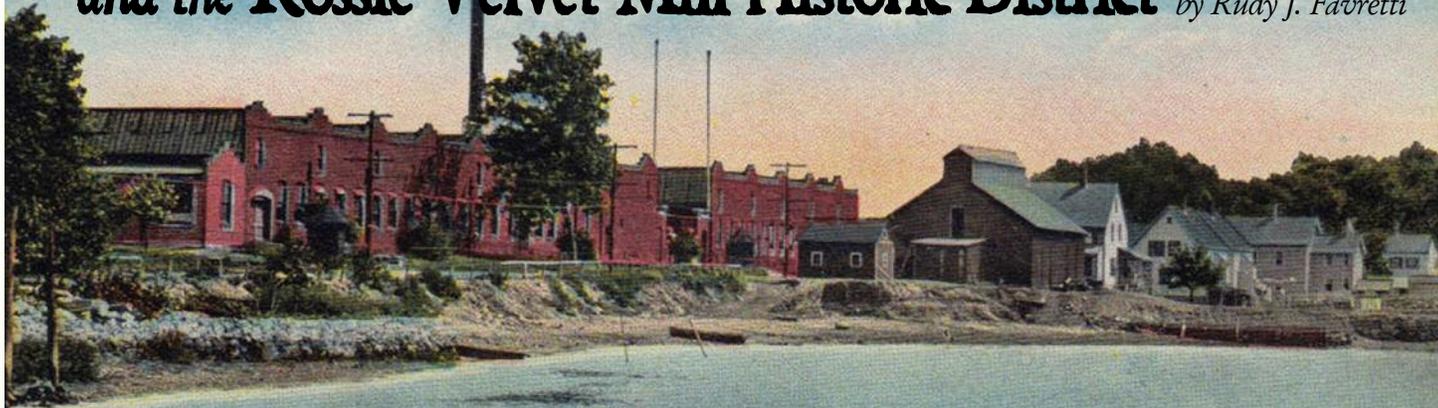




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October Extra Program: From Clipper Ships to Textiles and the Rossie Velvet Mill Historic District *by Rudy J. Favretti*



The "Rossie Velvet Co., Plant from Waterfront, Mystic, Conn." from an early tinted postcard.

MRHS and the Mystic Noank Library are pleased to present a special collaborative program aligning with the CT Humanities Council Initiative, "Connecticut at Work" on Wednesday, October 29th at 7pm at the library. Rudy Favretti will discuss the establishment of the Rossie Velvet Mill in Mystic, the forces that caused it, and how it generated a large development along the east side of Greenmanville Avenue. This area is now referred to as "The Rossie Velvet Mill Historic District" and it was placed on the Department of the Interior's National Register of Historic Places in 2007.

Rudy J. Favretti is a Professor Emeritus of Landscape Architecture at the University of Connecticut and extensively published author with over forty years of private practice in land planning and scenic & historic preservation. He is currently on the National Register Review Board for Landscape Architect licensing and has previously served on Conservation, Historic District, Planning & Zoning and Inland Wetlands boards for the town of Mansfield, CT. He has been honored by the Garden Clubs of Connecticut and for Historic Preservation by the Garden Club of America, the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and more. Rudy is proud to be a Mystic Native, although his birth certificate correctly reads "Stonington." He was born within the Rossie District.

The Mystic Connection Redux *by Dorrie Hanna*

You may remember my article earlier this year regarding the gentleman from Germany who was researching the Rossie family. [Jan/Feb'14, p.3] I heard from him again earlier this summer and want to share what he had to say—

My search has definitely come to an end, to a very satisfying and successful end. I have found all my relatives and gathered all their vital dates. In the very end of my search - and I had already given up on this last question mark - I even managed to find Christine Smith, my cousin Gregory's ex-wife --- and very much to my surprise there are two children from her marriage with Gregory. Thus two more cousins of mine. The family has grown!! So everything ended with a big surprise.

At the moment we are exchanging information concerning the family history, but as far as the pure family tree is concerned I am thru with everything. And let me recall that it all began with your friendly willingness to help me, and that it was also you who gave me the first hint to Christine Harrison Smith. Thanks again for all your support and accommodation.

Maybe there is a little bit of information I can give you in exchange. You remember Rudy Favretti who was asking you for my address? He also turned out to be an indispensable help . . . [he] sent me a document of preparing the Mystic Velvet Mill District to be named "Historical Site", and there were many photographs in this document depicting most of the old houses that were to be part of the planned Historical Site. Some of these photographs, however, showed "unimportant" moments of common people's everyday life. And their unpretentiousness is what made them so valuable and important to my eyes. Because I wanted more of this kind of pictures I asked Rudy to make a contact with their owner. The owner is Mrs. Eleanor Jamieson, the daughter of the photographer, Marie Fritscher Tatro . . . Real photos of Mystic local life at the beginning of the 20th century!

Making this kind of connection and helping folks with their research is my favorite part of my job at MRHS!

Dorrie Hanna wears Curator & Research Caps, among many others, and can often be found among the desks and archives at the MRHS Downes Building.

May Meeting Minutes

The Board of Trustees of the Mystic River Historical Society met on Monday, May 19, 2014. Attendees included: Aimeé Allaire, Cindy Allyn, Lou Allyn, Bill Everett, Lois Glazier, Sally Halsey, Jennifer Pryor, David Scott, Barry Thorp, Stephanie Thorp. A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the April meeting as published.

President's Report (L. Allyn): Alan Bentz is mailing a \$790 donation to MRHS from May's successful Cachet Day at Portersville Academy. • Lou met with Stephen Bartkus, Curator of the Gunn Memorial Library & Museum in Washington, CT to discuss their use of PastPerfect Online, a collection search module (www.gunnlibrary.pastperfect-online.com). Currently, MRHS uses Virtual Exhibit, an online photo gallery.

Corresponding Secretary (L. Glazier): 16 thank you letters were mailed in April.

Treasurer (B. Thorp): On 12 May the treasurer's files were audited by the MRHS Financial Committee, including the MRHS 2013 Federal IRS Form 990 - copies are available at the Downes building. The checking account is positive with all deposits & bills made and paid current. Treasurer's books are reconciled with Chelsea Groton statements.

Building & Grounds (D. Scott): On Portersville's lower level, David found one rotten window sill which will be repaired.

Curatorial (L. Allyn, acting): The Curatorial Committee met on May 12. The Privacy Policy adopted by the Board at April meeting will be added to Deed of Gift form. Lou is the new treasurer of the Lower Mystic Cemetery Assoc. and is arranging for their files to come to MRHS. Judy Hicks' cemetery project with Joanna Case is resuming. The Committee doesn't meet in July & August.

Education/Outreach (M. Austin): No report.

Finance (D. Evans): The Finance Committee met on May 12 for internal review of the Society's 2013 books. Two months of randomly selected accounts were reviewed, examining & matching invoices, receipts and disbursements against our QuickBooks records and Chelsea-Groton Bank statements. All was facilitated by excellent preparation of materials by Barry Thorp, including detailed copies of the QB check register. The Committee found the accounts to be in good order and is satisfied that our 2013 financial statements accurately reflect MRHS operations, with no issues that suggest a need for change in procedures. They did recommend that Dorrie

Hanna maintain an adequate amount of petty cash at the Downes building, authorizing up to \$50. • The Treasurer submitted a post card return to the IRS for 2013 and took initiative to prepare the more detailed Form 990 return for our files as some grant proposals require.

Information Technology (S. Thorp): The System Administrator performed backups and computer updates on May 17, 2014. All equipment appears to be in good condition and functioning as designed. Past Perfect update Version 5.0 CD1 was installed and checked.

Marketing & Special Events (S. Halsey): Press releases continue for MRHS activities. • Sally presented the Finance Committee's proposal to seek corporate or foundation support for our monthly programs, noting that donations cover only a part of the speaker fees, refreshments and hall rental expenses. The Board agreed and also agreed with her proposal to sell Colors of Mystic online.

Program & Membership (A. Allaire): Met on May 15th. They look forward to Alan Ganong's talk on Local Sawmills in May and discussed that April's program had a low turnout, perhaps as it wasn't local enough to the usual crowd, although Glenn Gordinier's talk on sailors & surfers was excellent. • Programs are set through January 2015 and the topics of local geology, Gungywamp and local houses were discussed as possibilities. • A huge thank you to Bettye Noyes who has decided to step down from the committee. We all appreciate the energy and positive attitude and she will be missed!

New Business: Regarding MRHS books which are at the Mystic Noank Library, a motion was made & passed that Curatorial could bring back to the Downes Building any books they wished to keep. A motion was then made & passed that all remaining books would be donated to the Library to manage as they see fit. The intent is to have a limited number of books directly related to Mystic's history at MRHS for research, while making the remainder readily available to the general public at and/or financially benefitting the Library. The Board also concurred with the Policy regarding items not appropriate to the collections that "Such items shall be disposed of at the discretion of the Curatorial Committee." • Bill Everett will present the Nominating Committee report at the Annual Meeting: Aimeé Allaire, Louis Allyn, Margaret Austin and Richard Semeraro to be nominated as Trustees.

Respectfully submitted, Cindy Allyn

Editor's Note: The Board is on hiatus in July and August. June Meeting Minutes will be published after their approval at the next Board meeting in September.

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

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Hurricane of '38 & Life in the Boatyards

by Anson Morgan via Lou Alllyn

September 21st is the 76th anniversary of the Great New England Hurricane of 1938: You may have noticed at some point that this topic is a big bobby of mine. Last winter to my great pleasure I found eight pages about the hurricane in Mystic in a manuscript "A Life in the Boatyards" written circa 1984 by Anson Morgan (MRHS 2006.221.0002 pages 30 to 38. Anson worked at the Franklin G. Post Boat Yard (now Seaport Marine at 2 Washington Street, Mystic.) His descriptions of conditions during the hurricane and afterward are the most vivid and detailed of any I know of for Mystic.

Lou Alllyn

....

During the hurricane of 1938 Bill was working feverishly on the dock attempting to tie up the boats more securely and grabbed the lines attached to the sherlegs used to hoist the masts out of boats. These lines went through pulleys located at the top of the ship legs some thirty feet above the dock. The wind was so strong that it blew Bill off the dock clutching the lines in his hands out over the river like a merry-go-round and swung him in a circle back to the dock. This is about the time Bill and everyone else decided to vacate immediately as the sheet metal was breaking away from the shed roofs sailing through the air like giant kites and the water was getting higher and higher over the docks.

It all started out as a peaceful enough day, although there were some signs which should have been more closely observed. It was just before three o'clock in the afternoon and I went to the bank to tend to the normal deposits. On coming out of the bank I saw the direction signs on bank square rotary begin to fall over under the force of the wind. These signs were mounted on a heavy cement base and I thought that this was a pretty strong wind much more than I had ever seen before. I got into my car, drove east on Main Street over the bridge and turned down Cottrell Street towards the

boat yard. At that period there were a row of Elm trees on each side of the street and the limbs and branches were breaking away and falling into the street. I escaped being hit and drove into the parking space in front of the office. By the time I walked up the stairs to the office and entered the wind was whipping through the office. In no time the windows in the office was being blown out, the water was covering the parking space and we all made a quick exit to the cars. Mrs. Steube (a customer boat owner's wife) was in the office with her two little poodle dogs all scared. Manny Faria ran to his car and Mrs. Steube and the dogs followed him inside. Frank & Ernest Post and Frank Cross climbed into my car and I started to drive East on Washington Street and attempted to turn North on Willow but the combination of falling limbs and rising water prevented the car from moving.

off and windows rattling we were pretty safe. The water just reached the kitchen floor spilling over a little onto the floor when the cellar door was opened. We all remained in the house until the wind began to die down and the water receded. Ernest was suffering with a bad cold but just as soon as permissible walked to the boat yard with his father and the rest of us knowing there was nothing we could do at that time and thinking of how our families and properties had survived started the long walk home through debris, fallen wires and mud taking to the open fields along the roads to avoid these obstacles. Harry Edgeration and I headed for Old Mystic starting up Willow Street and immediately into the massive wreckage of the Methodist Church which had completely collapsed to the ground and spilled out onto the street. Destruction was evident everywhere as we struggled over the fallen



Boat and building damage at the Post Yard after the Hurricane of 1938.

We all jumped out in a sea of water and ran across Hereshacks yard and the open land to the Post dwelling at the corner of East Main and Jackson Avenue. The water was practically waist deep by this time and half way up the back stairs leading into the kitchen of the house. In a matter of minutes the water had reached to the level of the kitchen floor which was probably five or six feet higher than the ground level, All this time the wind was increasing and had reached the point of hurricane velocity. The house was and is a heavily constructed structure and with the exception of some outside blinds being torn

trees and tried to avoid the fallen wires and the going got tougher as we reached the [Elm Grove] cemetery. There the trees were more numerous in a close pattern along each side of the street and combined with the fallen telephone poles and the tangled mass of wires it was impossible to walk in the street and this is where we jumped over the wall and managed to pick passage through the fields and cemetery all along the road. The conditions improved

when we reached the more open fields where the Old Mystic shopping center is now located. Naturally we saw evidence of the height of the water had reached in some low spots. Damage to practically all house or structures and when reaching our house across the street from Bill Kennedy's brick house I was not surprised to see the large sections of the garage leaning against the back porch. Mildred was fine and I quickly learned that everybody at Grams house were okay although the big pine trees were down.

...Continued on page 4

Hurricane of '38 & Life in the Boatyards, *continued*

The most serious result of the storm to us was the lack of electricity, no lights, no water. We got together some candles and a couple of kerosene lamps but there was no water as the pump for the well was electric. We were fortunate in a way because Charlie Burdick, next door, had an old outside well where we and the other neighbors could get a little water for drinking and some cooking. No bathroom facilities so we visited our neighbors outhouse, I tried turning the pump drive wheel by hand without much success. We did have a kerosene heating unit in the kitchen range and Propane Gas burners on the stove. Bill Kennedy's family were not that lucky for they has an electric stove so they used our stove. Also lucky that it was warm weather as the central heating furnace required electricity to operate. It was a couple of weeks before the electrical maintenance men recruited from all parts of the country were able to replace the fallen poles and rewire the service.

The following morning I walked down to the boat yard. Naturally there had not been time enough to clean up the passage down the road so it was necessary to climb over trees laying in the path, around the downed telephone poles and wires, and through the cemetery. Workmen for the town and highway crews did an excellent job in clearing out most bad spots but it was necessary for any cars or vehicles moving to detour through the cemetery using the cemetery roads for several days. On arrival at the boat yard it was as expected. Everything had been awash in the flood waters, there was mud all over which somehow got tracked up on the second floor office; windows were blown out, anything that had not been secure in the file cabinets was strewn all over the place. Downstairs in the stockroom it was a real mess. The rushing of the water turned over open containers of paint, oil, turpentine, etc. The water rose to a height of three or four feet and Shipmate Coal Stoves used on boats were full of water and the paint, oil mixture. Everything below the high water was soaked and discolored. We had an old iron safe on the floor under the counter and when I opened the door water rushed out and the content consisting of old contracts, ledgers, ship's licenses, etc. were all completely soaked. Most important, of course, was the machinery, tools, stock and supplies stored on the ground floor of the boat shop, machine shop and storage sheds, and the hundred and fifty boats already

hauled out for the winter. My first assignment was to make an inspection of the damage to each boat and prepare a report for the owners. Most of the boats had been awash and either moved or floated out of the winter cradles or had moved cradle and all.

As a result they were in every conceivable position, some had structural damage from contact with each other or the shed itself. The storm had blown off sections of the corrugated sheet metal forming the roofs and sides, the large wooden doors were torn off their hinges and lay against the boats in many cases, the entire roof, sheathing, rafters and all were down on top of the boats, It was necessary to make a survey of each for the owner and for insurance claims. In most cases the boats were covered by either port risk or full, marine insurance but the sheds and boat shops were not covered by wind and flood insurance. You bet wind damage endorsements were taken out by most business firms and homeowners after that. Flood insurance was difficult as insurance companies did not offer this protection. The boats that were outside either on land or in the water received severe damage. Some simply floated along with the rising water and were left high and dry on inland locations and had to be righted up, or cradles built under them and slide over the land to the water or loaded on some other means of transportation. The storm caught practically all the boat owners and fishermen unprepared. There were a few fishing boats in the river, one of which was Grover Eldridge's schooner "Reliance". It was tied up in the railway slip at the main dock when the storm hit with the crew on board and it rode out the storm but some of the other boats did not come through so good. The boat "Diane" (an auxiliary sailing vessel) floated up the river along with a large schooner "Alice" owned by the yard and a couple of smaller boats crashing into the highway bridge abutments and sank. They were probably the first boats to be raised and brought back to the yard. Several of the employees at the Climax Tube factory waited a little too long and they managed to catch hold of a small boat floating by and rode and navigated the boat up the streets to high land. A gang of two or more Post employees were working on a boat at the lower end of the yard and took refuge on

a larger cruiser and they sailed up through the boat yard through the gate on Washington Street between the cottage and the lumber shed. The boat went aground with the retreating water. Arvine Miller's crew then departed for home. My Pontiac car which was abandoned by us in front of the Hershek house on Willow Street W8S apparently almost completely submerged under the water proven by the fact the next morning I found a large 12" x 12" several feet long construction timber had floated through the window and when the water fell this log was left inside the car. Upon advise of my friends and Joe Santin I traded it in immediately for a second hand Chevrolet which had escaped the storm. Come to think of it, the Pontiac was the last brand new car I was to own, I always owned second hand cars after that. My car was not the only one left submerged at the yard. Frank Post had a custom built Pierce Arrow, which he had taken in trade on a new boat he built for Webster Knight of Rhode Island. Frank decided to have it reconditioned in Providence and spent approximately a thousand dollars (a huge sum in those days) to



Salvage operation on the schooner "Alice."

have the car completely gone over to correct the salt water damage. I recall that even the steel springs forming the cushions had to be replaced to insure that they would not rust out later. My friend and fellow office worker, Manny Faria, probably came out the best on his Buick. He assisted Mrs. Steube and her dogs out of the office just before we left and they drove East on Washington Street across Willow one block where they were forced to abandon the car and sort shelter in one of the houses then on the South side of Washington Street. They two all survived the storm without harm physically but Manny's car was flooded out with the others.

Mr. and Mrs. Steube were naturally grateful for Manny's assistance and attentive help and made Manny a gift of a new car.

Because I am expressing my thoughts and experiences at the boat yard I will not make any attempt to describe the entire picture except to say the eye of the hurricane passed right along the coast and places like Watch Hill, Misquamicut and Atlantic Beach in Rhode Island and New London's Ocean Beach and the Connecticut shore suffered extreme damage. Added to the hurricane, several business blocks on Bank Street in New London burned in probably one of the largest fires in the history of that city. Newspapers covered the stories pretty thoroughly with many pictures and there are a number of publications which can be found in the local libraries and historical society records.

One of the things that the Post's took considerable pride in was up to the time of this 38 hurricane all the Post built boats were in active service or accounted for but the storm spoiled this as some of the Block Island fishing boats and many pleasure craft were severely damaged, sunk or lost, some rebuilt by different owners, so later knowledge of them became lost. Due to the method in which the yard was built up with fill being continuously covered with a layer of gravel, one section at a time while the rest was in actual use, more fill, more gravel, so over the period of years the ground level gradually became higher and higher and bigger and bigger. Therefore until the ground level reached its present height every time we had a high tide especially in the fall of the year the entire yard would be covered with water for a couple of hours until the tide went down. The boat shop, stockroom and shed floors were on high enough ground to

escape this flooding until the 38 hurricane when the water reached a height of about three feet in the buildings. The fill program continued after 38 and although the ground level of the yard was higher year after year it

hills that surround the village. Due to the preparations and the fact that the storm never did develop to the forecasted violence the actual damage was quite far less than anticipated. Prior to 38 because the land fill was considerably smaller and lower it was quite common for high tides and storms to flood but the buildings were always high enough until 38. I had heard Gramp tell of his experience in



Motor yacht well aground on Gravel Street, just upriver from the Post Yard and north of the drawbridge.

was not too uncommon for the yard to be flooded once or twice a year but never again to the height of the 38 hurricane. In 1954 the hurricane "Carol" threatened to be another 38 experience. This time we were better prepared, moving all the stockroom merchandise from the floor to above the 38 high water line, secured the doors and windows, moved all the portable machines to a balcony in the boat

the great blizzard of 1888 and so it would seem that such a storm pops in about every generation.

Mildred's brother, Walter Schoeter's, boat made all the hurricane pictures published. His fishing boat "Ruth" was at its usual mooring in Stonington at the fish dock and the storm floated it up the harbor and landed it on the New Haven railroad tracks high and dry along side or in back of the derailed passenger train. The popular picture* shows the twisted tracks with the "Ruth" on top of them with the railroad, train just ahead. Probably the only picture of a large fishing boat and a train riding, the same railroad tracks. The "Ruth" was a total loss, Walter had a new boat built for him in Maine and named it "Walter & Irene" after his two children. It was a little before my Post connection but I believe the



The Train Bridge awash in debris and stranded boats.

shop, used wooden horses topped with planks to form a platform on which electric motors and anything else normally on the floor level was placed, boats in the water at the docks were double and triple tied so they would float up and down with the rising water but still hold their position, raised any possible item around the yard such as lumber to a safe height and last but not less drove all the automobiles, tow trucks, etc., both business and personnel, to high ground in the

"Ruth" was built for Albert Jones by Post. Circumstances following the storm made it to Walters advantage to have the new "Walter & Irene" built in Maine.

Images courtesy of Mystic Seaport Museum.

**Photo reference may be the one taken by A. Morgan Stewart and visible in the article "An Unannounced Visitor" at climate.gov*

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Calendar of Events

Sat., October 4th 2014, 9am - noon
MRHS Work Day

Wed., Oct 22nd, 2014, 7:30p
Mystic Congregational Church Hall
at Broadway and E. Main St., Mystic
Catherine Deichmann presents discussions on the Civil War

Wed., Oct 29th, 2014, 7:00p
Special Program at & with Mystic Noank Library
in alignment with CT Humanities' "Connecticut at Work"
Rudy Favretti and the Rossie Velvet Mill

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



We have four new memberships to the MRHS. They are Ken and Judey Buckbee, Sharon Carlee, Marcus Maronn and Tom & Marie Olson. We will be sending out our second membership renewal letter in September (dues for the year 2014) -- thank you to all who did renew during the year and we hope others will renew after receiving the second letter.

- Cindy Allyn, Membership

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