Mystic River Historical Society

Collections Overview, 2026

The Mystic River Historical Society's collections are comprised of 1,330 unique donations including over 6,000 photographs, 5,000 archival records, 450 objects and 500 books relating to the history of Mystic and the surrounding area. These records range from 1742-2026, with the bulk of our materials dating from the 1860s-1930s. Please note that the materials described in this overview have been processed and are currently available to researchers. This document does not cover backlog materials.

Photographs

The photograph collections include glass plate negatives, nitrate negatives, 16mm film, videotapes, daguerreotypes, tintypes, carte de visites, cabinet cards, cyanotypes, slides, photographic prints and digital photographs from the early 1860s – 2025. Professional Mystic photographers Everett A. Scholfield, George Tingley and D. O. Angell are well represented. Prominent subjects include scenes of Mystic (primarily concentrated on Downtown Mystic and the shoreline of the Mystic River), Mystic houses (primarily focused on houses within the Mystic River Historic District), class photographs from various Mystic schools, Haley Farm, Camp Mystic, the 1938 Hurricane, fires and family photographs/albums. Notable collections include:

- Akeley Trust Collection – Over 1,100 glass plate negatives, nitrate negatives and photographs from Mary Jobe Akeley's expeditions to the Canadian Rockies and the Congo as well as photographs of Camp Mystic.
- Constantine Collection – Over 600 photographs of Mystic taken by Mystic resident Julia Constantine in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Dickinson Collection – Over 500 photographs (mostly of Mystic) taken by Mystic resident Josephine Dickinson c.1910-1948.
- Stinson Collection – Over 1,300 photographs and tintypes of Mystic taken or collected by Jessie Stinson from the late 1800s – 1975. This collection includes numerous reproductions of photographs taken by George Tingley and Everett Scholfield as well as an album of photographs from the 1938 Hurricane.

Archives/Manuscripts

The archive collections include roughly 114 linear ft. of family/personal papers, vital records, legal records, financial records, business records, institutional records, maps, plans, architectural drawings, research notes and reference materials related to the village of Mystic and its people, businesses and institutions. Original documents range from 1742-2025, with the bulk of our material falling in the range of 1860s-1930s. The research notes and reference materials in our collection include copies or transcriptions of original documents dating as far back as 1646. Notable collections include:

- Business Records – Our collection includes records (advertisements, receipts, account books and ledgers) from a wide variety of Mystic businesses. Notable materials include ledgers and account books from the Rossie Velvet Mill, Dudley & Fish Co., Thomas H. Newbury Co., Edward H. Newbury Store, the Reliance Machine Co., the Standard Machinery Co., Seaport Heights Inc. and Albert Gallatin Stark's grocery store.

- Family Papers – Our archive includes numerous collections of family papers pertaining to some of Mystic's oldest and most prominent families. The largest of these collections are:
    - Burrows Collection – correspondence, memoirs, business accounts, ship's logs and genealogical notes from several generations and lines of the Burrows family.
    - Coogan Collection – correspondence, diaries and business accounts related to several generations of the Coogan and Morgan families, particularly related to their activities at the Coogan farm.
    - Fish Collection – diaries, correspondence, scrapbooks, financial records/household accounts and military records relating to several generations of the Fish family. This collection includes an assortment of Civil War records and 47 diaries kept by Nathan G. Fish, Simeon Fish, Helen Fish and assorted relatives, 1855-1928.
    - Grimes Collection – includes the diaries of Helen Clarke Grimes dating from 1905-1979 as well as family records from the Clarke, Burrows and Hill families.
    - Haley Collection – personal papers, business accounts and ship's logs from three generations of the Haley and Gates families. Includes shipping papers and correspondence of Capt. George Gates and business accounts from the Caleb Haley & Co. and Haley farm.
- Institutional Records – Our collection includes records (by-laws, meeting minutes, membership lists, correspondence, newsletters) from numerous Mystic organizations including the Union Baptist Church, the Society of Froshinn, the Mystic Garden Club, the Mystic Flag Committee, the Lower Mystic Cemetery Association, the Mystic Hook & Ladder Co., the Mystic Art Association, the Packer Family Association, the G.A.R., the Women's Relief Corps and the Mystic Junior Women's Club.
- Maps – The maps in our collection include original and reproduction maps of Mystic and the surrounding area stretching back to 1854. Notable maps include the 1854 map of New London County, 1868 Beers Atlas map of Mystic River & Mystic Bridge and 1921 map of Mason's Island (which all identify property owners), the 1879 illustrated map of Mystic River & Mystic Bridge and 1912 Aerial Map of Mystic (which both provide illustrated visuals of Mystic buildings), and the Sanborn Insurance Maps of Mystic from 1884,1903 and 1924 (which provide detailed descriptions of building construction). Also worth mentioning is a historical map of New London Country drawn by Mystic Art Association member S. Jerome Hoxie in 1935.
- Plans – The plan collection includes surveys and architectural plans for a variety of Mystic boats, buildings and streetscapes (originals and reproductions). Notable plans include architectural drawings of the Downes Building and Portersville Academy, plans for the proposed route of the Groton & Stonington Trolley, plans for the proposed road improvements to Baptist Hill in 1924, plans of property belonging to the estate of Isaac W. Denison in 1890, and boat plans from the Holmes Motor Co.
- Postcards – the postcard collection includes close to 2,000 postcards, c. 1892-1979. The cards are valuable visual records of Mystic and the surrounding area in the late 19th and 20th centuries as well as valuable records of correspondence from Mystic residents and tourists alike.

Library

Our reference library includes published genealogies, biographies of Mystic residents, histories of Mystic and New London County, town directories, CT State Registers, Groton Town Annual Reports and books by local authors. We also have a collection of historical texts comprised of family bibles and 19th century schoolbooks.

Objects/Art

The objects collection includes a variety of tools, glass bottles, textiles, small furniture, tableware, artwork, signs and personal effects that belonged to or were produced by Mystic residents and businesses. Notable items include a globe made by Mystic's Cheney Globe Co., several "Fenner Folding Cradles" produced at Willow Point, souvenir china produced by Thomas H. Newbury, 19th century writing desks belonging to Leonard Fairbanks and Nathan G. Fish, an early 19th century deer hide trunk believed to belong to Simeon Gallup, an oil painting by George A. Thompson, Packer's Tar Soap, the pipe of a Confederate soldier found on a Civil War battlefield by Lyman Hill and the original plaque from the John Mason monument.