

# NEW LONDON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2009

## *A History of Social Service in New London*

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY SECOND SUNDAYS

The next two Second Sunday programs will provide a unique opportunity to learn a history of how we have been caring for one another in our region over the past couple of centuries. January's Second Sunday (the 10<sup>th</sup>) our speaker will be Tom Gullotta, CEO of the Child and Family Agency. Gullotta has recently published *Everychild ~ A Social History of Caring*, which shares the story of four local children's agencies dating back to 1809 and the founding of the Female Beneficent Society in Hartford.

The growth of American industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century included incredible costs to families and children in an age when government felt no responsibility for those injured. Exploring the Bradley Street Mission, established in 1859, the Associated Charities Building, B.P. Learned Mission, the New London Day Nursery, and people such as Charlie Potter, Mother Whittemore and Richard Mansfield, Gullotta's book travels from the 19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and up to today with the Child and Family Agency still at work.

While Tom reviewed the minutes of all of these organizations, much of the re-

search for the book was conducted at the Shaw Mansion with a large focus on the RB Wall Collection.

In order to accommodate a larger crowd, the January Second Sunday program will take place at 2pm at All Souls' Unitarian Church, located at 19 Jay Street in the new "Unity Hall." There is plenty of parking available, and the location is wheel-chair accessible.

February's Second Sunday, on the 14<sup>th</sup>, will feature Mary Lenzini, Executive Director of the Visiting Nurse Association of Southeastern Connecticut. The VNA is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and this will be an opportunity to look back at how far we have come in providing skilled nursing assistance in our region. Of course there have been vast changes in the nursing profession over those 100 years as well as amazing changes in medical practice.

As early as 1909 the Visiting Nurse Association of Southeastern Connecticut was at work. Black bag in hand, equipped with enema bags, dressing supplies, thermometers and little else, these pioneers visited their patients on foot, by horseback, or by bicycle.

### **January Second Sunday**

10 January; 2pm. Tom Gullotta.  
At All Souls Unitarian Church, 19 Jay Street, New London

### **February Second Sunday**

14 February; 2pm. Mary Lenzini.  
At Visiting Nurse Association of Southeastern Connecticut offices, 40 North Frontage Street, Waterford (next to Springhill Suites and the New London Mall)

Charged mostly with caring for the poor, new mothers and children, psychiatric and homebound tuberculosis patients, their nursing duties were combined with a large dose of social work.

This Second Sunday program will take place at 2 pm at the offices of the VNA of Southeastern Connecticut, 40 North Frontage Road, just inside the Waterford border next to Springhill Suites and the New London Mall.

## “Ye Towne’s Antientest Buriall Place” *Christophers, Part 2*

In the last newsletter we looked at the first Christopher and Richard Christophers and their wives. This time we’ll pick up with the next generation, and go on to finish all the Christophers stones in the burying ground.

After Richard Christophers’s death in 1726, most of his public offices were taken over by his eldest son, Christopher, born in 1682 or 1683. These include: town clerk, selectman, justice of the peace, county court judge, and judge of probate. Christopher held several other offices already. He had been appointed commissary (military supply officer) for the colony in 1710, naval officer for the port in 1714, and captain of the second trainband in 1715. This gets us into the niceties of colonial titles. In the records of the colony Christopher is referred to as “Capt. Christopher Christophers” from 1715 until 1722, when he becomes “Christopher Christophers, Esq.” by virtue of being appointed a substitute probate judge (to act if his father Richard were unavailable or disabled). Christopher was also the first moderator of the First Ecclesiastical Society, “formed in 1727 as a response to new laws that allowed each approved religious group to support its own, rather than the Congregational, minister.” (Schaefer, p. 39) This society became the governing body of the First Congregational Church. In 1728 he was appointed to make an “alphabet,” or index, of the colony’s law book.

Unfortunately for Christopher, he did not live to see the printed index, which was presented to the General Assembly in October of 1729 by Timothy Green.

Joshua Hempstead notes on February 4, 1729, “C. Christophers Esqr Judge of ye C. Court & Probate Died aged about 45 years. the C. Court Sat by Adjournment.. **Thursd 6.** . . . aftern at the funeral of the Judge.” Like his father Richard, Christopher has a table stone in the burying ground with a listing of some of the offices he held at the time of his death.

Christopher married Sarah Prout and had six children who survived to adulthood. The two boys were Christopher and John (another family name). There were also four daughters who all married and had children. Sarah died in April of 1745, as Hempstead records, “**Thursd 18** Madm Sarah Christophers Relict of Capt Chr. Christophers Esqr Died this morning of a Cancer. been Laid up all winter. aged 60 odd. **fyrd 19.** . . . aftern at Madm Christophers funeral. one of ye 8 Pall bearers. . . .” The pallbearers included the minister, Rev. Mr. Eliphalet Adams.

Christopher’s younger brother, Richard, who was born in 1685, does not have a separate tombstone. Richard assumed several of his brother’s offices, including naval officer of the port, deputy to the General Assembly, and justice of the peace. He was also sheriff of New London. Richard married Elizabeth Saltonstall, and they had at least seven children, six of whom survived to adulthood. He died January 17, 1736, and was buried the 20<sup>th</sup>. Hempstead “was one of the Bearers & had Gloves & Scarff.” The burial was in the Saltonstall tomb, which does not list the individuals interred within. Elizabeth remarried in August of the same year, to

Isaac Ledyard. She, as Hempstead remarked, “is about 15 years older than he. he but 32 and She about 47.”

The last Christopher Christophers to be buried in the Antientest Burial Ground is the son of the previous Christopher. This Christopher was born October 10, 1717. He graduated from Yale College in 1737 and was a merchant and longtime sheriff of New London. Hempstead notes that on September 24, 1753 he went “to wait on the Sheriff Mr Christopher Christophers on acct of my Granson Nathll miner [of Stonington] who Comes Recomend by the Selectmen & Captains as well as Justices to be a Deputy Sheriff.” There’s no indication in the diary that Hempstead was successful.

In 1762 Christopher was allotted £10 4s for “dieting” (feeding) prisoner John Knight for 51 weeks. Knight had

*(Continued on page 4)*

### New London County Historical Society Incorporated 1870

#### Officers

Deborah Donovan, President  
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Denis O’Brien, Treasurer  
Joe Selinger, Secretary

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2010  
Marilyn Davis, Dean Macris, Bruce MacDonald  
2011  
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2012  
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *Thanks to our Volunteers*

Last week we “decked the halls” at the Shaw Mansion, broke out the refreshments, and offered thanks to our wonderful volunteers who give so many hours to the New London County Historical Society. Our Volunteer of the Year is Carl Sommers who spends many, many, hours on the grounds of the Shaw Mansion, weeding, dead-heading, planting, watering and generally keeping the gardens in front of the Mansion looking their very best. His wife Carol is also a volunteer assisting Tricia Royston inside the house on our collections indexing project; and they’ve brought in their grandson Ben too. Thank you, Carl!

And thank you to all our volunteers, including our very involved board of directors who deserve special thanks for their willingness to guide the Society into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One of my goals this year was to get our board more involved in activating our committees, and they have, to a man (and woman) stepped up to the challenge. These efforts include our program committee, under Kevin Doyle’s leadership, which continues to arrange very interesting Second Sunday programs and to oversee our “Jane Perkins” events. Our publishing committee, headed up by Nancy Steenburg, has a great list of possible publications for the society including a book on our “treasures,” which Bill Peterson’s collection committee is compiling. Barun Basu is the new chair of the house committee, working with Edward on our accessible bathroom project; and our governance committee is working on collaborative projects with other local historical groups. (More to come on that). On top of committee projects, our board is actively guiding and assisting Edward in our fund-raising and membership activities. Thank you all!

Would you like to join this brilliant group of volunteers? Do you like to garden, plan events, read and learn about history? Are you a good organizer or a neatnik? Do you enjoy getting out and about in your community and lending a helping hand? A recent study of volunteering in American reported that, in 2008, 889,600 Connecticut adults, or 32.4% of the state's population gave over 108.9 million hours of service to various organizations!\* In 2010 why don't you consider becoming one of these much appreciated people and join your New London County neighbors in becoming an advocate for history and a helper in keeping our regional history alive and well.

Thank you and Happy New Year to you all!

~ Deborah Donovan

\*<http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/CT>

*New and Renewed Members*

Business—Brig Level

University of Connecticut, Avery Point Groton  
Connecticut College New London

Sustaining

Patricia & Tod Schaefer Mystic  
Claire & Bill Peterson N. Stonington  
Daniel & Deborah Connors New London  
Wally Trolan Groton  
Joseph & Noreen Selinger Stonington

Contributing

Mrs. John T. MacDougall New London  
Frank & Jackie Durrschmidt Mystic  
Kasey Goss New London  
J. Hogan & C. Duerk New York, NY  
Kevin Doyle New London

Family & Individual

Ron Decker San Diego, CA  
Olivia C. Patch Tolland  
Thomas Hare Chester  
Carolyn Johnson New London  
F. Hart Ewers Library East Lyme  
Katherine Davis N. Stonington  
James Streeter Groton  
Christopher Hurtgen Madison  
Paul A. Robinson Preston  
Lisa Clarke Perrin New London  
James Metcalf Killingworth  
Patricia B. Kurlansky Lyme  
Patty Oat-Judge Noank  
Sandra K. Chalk New London  
Barbara Kill Ledyard  
Dennis & Cheryl Bobb Hummelstown, PA  
Charles Plumb Sierra Vista, AZ  
Roy & Valerie Grimm Noank  
Mr. & Mrs. Carl Schultz Lisbon  
Gail-Marie Rogers Norwich  
Wayne G. Tillinghast Groton  
Nancy Winship Darien  
Doug & Lois Walsh Cortland, NY  
Paul Tetreault Sterling  
Carmela D'Esopo Old Saybrook  
Lee Fontanella New London  
John Ruddy Waterford  
Dr. William Willoughby Chicago, IL  
Horace Newbury Groton  
John L Simmond Norwich  
Robert & Margaret McAllen Weslaco, TX  
Raymond Field Stamford  
Carrie Bentley Waterford  
Roger N. Parks Pomfret Center  
Shirley Verhoeven Uncasville  
Lon D. Outen Kershaw, SC  
Randy Wilkinson Baltic  
Russell & Frances Vocalina Waterford  
Richard & Dottie Hoyt Groton  
Ruth Nagle New London  
Scott T. Rottinghaus New London  
Marvin Berger New London

Peter & Joyce Springsteel	Mystic
Bernard Balsler	Novi, MI
Lewis & Dona Marquardt	Austin, TX
Robert McInnes	Charlotte, NC
Deanna Bossdorf	New London
Robert Sanders	Pensacola, FL
Bob Groves	Waterford
Robert Nye	Waterford
William J. Sipser	New York, NY
Vivian Brooks	Waterford
Alan Ascare	Colchester

David Eck	Stonington
Doreen Schelkly	Norwich
Daniel Gately	Groton
Pam Chaplin	Gilman
Christopher Atwood	New London
Catherine Zahn	Pennington, NJ
Jessica S. Hayashi	Niskayuna, NY
Judy Dowell	Hillsboro, OR
Tom & Jany Doyle	Freeport, MI
Pamela Briggs	Ledyard
Meriwether Schmid	Riverside

## Christophers Part 2 (continued)

(Continued from page 2)

been convicted of murder in September of 1761, but petitioned the General Court in May of 1762 for a retrial, apparently in the hope of having the charge reduced to manslaughter. The retrial was granted, to be held in New London in September. The bill for “dieting” ran from October 21, 1761 to October 14, 1762, so presumably Knight was released or punished by that date. He does not appear to have been executed for murder.

Christopher married Elizabeth Allen in 1744. Their first son, Christopher, was born in 1746, but was not baptized until 1748. On October 30 of that year Christopher “had 2 Sons Baptized Christopher & Joseph. he hath been Separated from our Church Some years past & ye Last Sabath made Confession & was Restored.” (Hempstead) Christopher had been one of the people convicted of burning books under the influence of the traveling preacher James Davenport during the Great Awakening.

### Construction Contract Awarded

Working with Rick Gipstein of Lindsay Leibig Roche Architects, the historical society has awarded the contract for constructing a wheelchair-accessible bathroom and improvements to the classroom in the 1845 wing of the Shaw Mansion to LaBossiere Builders of Norwich, CT. Funded in part by a grant from the State of Connecticut utilizing Community Investment Act funds administered by

Elizabeth Christophers died in 1765, aged 38. Two of Elizabeth and Christopher’s sons died in their twenties and have stones in the burying ground. Christopher died in 1766, “aged 20 years and 4 months,” as it is expressed on his gravestone. John Allen Christophers, born in 1753, died in 1780 “in the 27<sup>th</sup> year of his age,” or aged 26. The elder Christopher died October 25, 1775. His accomplishments are not listed on his tombstone, but he does have a Biblical quotation, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord” Revelations 14:13.

Two last Christophers stones refer to the next generation. The Christopher Christophers who died in 1775 had a brother John, who does not have a stone in the burying ground. John’s son Peter, however, has a stone commemorating his first wife, “who departed this Life May 3d, 1791, in the 31<sup>st</sup> year of her age.” Peter’s death, “Feb. 19<sup>th</sup>, 1829, aged 81,” is also on that stone. The top of the stone is missing, but fortunately the foot stone, noting “Mrs. Abigail Christophers,” is still in place and legible.

~Patricia M. Schaefer

### References:

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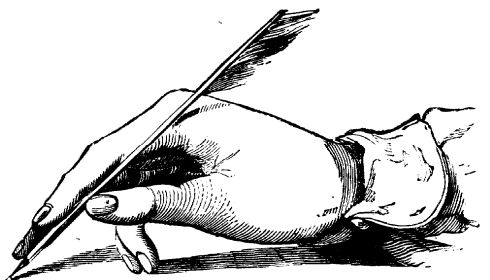
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Hoadley, Charles J. ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, Vols. 7 and 12.

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### Congratulations to Pat Schaefer

Pat’s amazing and long-term effort on *A Useful Friend ~ A Companion to the Joshua Hempstead Diary 1711-1758*, was recognized by the Association for the Study of Connecticut History. Pat was honored with the Babbidge Award from ASCH, recognizing her book as the best work on a significant topic of Connecticut history published in the previous year.

## ***“He Knew How to Die”: John Brown on the Gallows, December 2, 1859***

By Dr. David W. Blight

One hundred fifty years ago this week, John Brown, the radical abolitionist, walked out of the Charlestown, Virginia jail to a wagon containing his simple wooden coffin. He sat on the box as the wagon conveyed him a half mile to the edge of town for his appointment with the gallows. U. S. troops and Virginia militia guarded this most famous execution in American history, fearing attempts to rescue the leader of the shocking Harpers Ferry Raid. As Brown’s 59-year old body dangled in the cold breeze that morning with the starkly beautiful mountains as a backdrop, Americans all across the land contemplated the meanings of violence, slavery, and martyrdom as never before. And we have never managed to get John Brown – his deeds and his death – out of our consciousness.

Every discussion of the history of revolutionary violence or terrorism (choose your label) in American history begins with John Brown’s efforts to destroy slavery. Today, many have folded Brown’s story into a pleasing sense of the inevitability of the Civil War; Harpers Ferry is viewed as the ordained “first shots” of the nation’s tragic, but worthwhile, struggle to end slavery in a society as Brown so famously put it, “purged with blood.” Some admire Brown as America’s own righteous, Bible-quoting Spartacus somehow advancing our history, a redemptive hero who justifies our self-perception as a nation devoted to freedom and equality. Or, then as now, Brown can be dismissed as the midnight terrorist, the bloody agent of fanatical rage in the

name of God’s designs. These extremes can keep us comfortable with our prejudices and our desires, but blind to the authentic fated tragedy in Brown’s acts.

Saintly hero or evil monster, John Brown on the gallows has inspired and haunted American poetry, painting, fiction, and historical interpretation. A living ghost in the national psyche, he will not go away, especially in our post 9/11 world of ubiquitous political and religious violence. John Brown should and does still trouble us; his “soul” may “go marching on” in the song that bears his name, but we should never let him or his story rest too easily in the narratives we tell ourselves. History should never come so cheap as to simply make us feel good about murder in the name of vengeance for slaveholding. Yet, few at the time of his execution could resist the fact that vengeance (God’s or man’s) for more than two centuries of the destruction of the lives, the souls, the collective human future of millions of Africans and African Americans was a primal challenge in the struggle for the very existence of the experiment called the United States. The raid on the federal arsenal in October and the famous trial that followed were sensational events. But the public hanging, conducted on southern soil by the state of Virginia, was far more important in the long run. If Brown had

*Dr. Blight is professor of American History at Yale University, director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery and Abolition, and author of Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory.*

not been captured so readily, if a slave insurrection in Virginia had killed thousands and Brown himself had been merely shot on some country road and the body never found we would not be thinking about him today. It is all about the gallows. Brown said so himself in one of his many letters from jail while awaiting execution: “I am worth now infinitely more to die than to live.” And many of his admirers would say the same thing over the generations. Ralph Waldo Emerson gushed that Brown had “made the gallows as glorious as the cross.” By 1880, Frederick Douglass, to some extent a co-conspirator with the Old Hero, declared: “I could speak for the slave. John Brown could fight for the slave. I could live for the slave, John Brown could die for the slave.” In 1928, the poet Stephen Vincent Benet tellingly captured Brown’s lasting meaning: “He had no gift for life, no gift to bring/ Life but his body and a cutting edge, / But he knew how to die.” And in Jacob Lawrence’s haunting series of paintings of John Brown done in the 1930s, nearly every one of the 22 images contain some variation of a cross, formal or twisted, made of rifles and spears, or of Brown’s body itself. Lawrence’s Brown on the cross was America on the cross. And no use of this most powerful image of western culture – crucifixion – should ever make us comfortable in our stories.

*(Continued page 6)*

*John Brown (cont.)*

John Brown should confound and trouble us. Martyrs are made by history; people choose their martyrs just as we choose to define good and evil. And we will be forever making and unmaking John Brown as Americans face not only their own racial past, but the ever changing reputation of violence in the present. Indeed, as Robert Penn Warren, a fierce critic of Brown, nonetheless once said, it is the job of historians to pick the “scabs from our fate.” Love old John Brown or not, if we can do that with this subject we will learn a great deal about ourselves.

***Christmas Special***

For those people who love history, consider a gift membership in the historical society. Purchase an individual membership at \$25 or family membership at \$35 and you can add a 2009 ornament for only \$10 more!

***2009 New London Ornament Available***

The 2009 cast pewter Christmas ornament issued by the Historical Society honors New London Ledge Lighthouse on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its construction.

Familiar to anyone who has arrived in New London by sea in the past 100 years, the distinctive lighthouse was built in “Second Empire” style. With its companion, New London Harbor Lighthouse on the opposite shore, it guides vessels into one of the best harbors on the east coast.

We began issuing ornaments featuring historic structures in New London County in 2006 to honor the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Shaw Mansion. We still have a few of those remaining, as well as the 2007

***NLCHS Awarded NEH Grant***

The National Endowment for the Humanities has awarded a “We the People” grant to the New London County Historical Society to fund the creation of a preservation plan for the 55 oil paintings in its collection. Nationally recognized painting experts, Lance Mayer and Gay Myers, independent conservators associated with the Lyman Allyn Art Museum, will conduct an intensive survey of the collection in order to create the plan. Having a plan in place will make it possible to seek additional funding for the conservation and treatment of specific paintings in a future funding cycle.

James Leach, Chairman of the NEH writes, “The goal of the ‘We the People’ initiative is to support projects that explore significant events and themes in our nation’s history.” The society’s collection has a number of outstanding components with six Ralph Earl por-

traits commissioned for the Shaw family in 1792, and a large number of ships’ portraits and ships’ captains’ portraits associated with New London’s whaling years. In the Thomas Shaw portrait, Earl included a view in the background of Fort Trumbull with a large American flag flying over it. This alone makes this painting an important document of our nation as there are fewer than 100 images of the American flag that have been identified as being created prior to 1800.

Meyer and Myers clients have ranged from the Guggenheim Museum to the Art Institute of Chicago, and more locally, the Yale Center for British Art and the Wadsworth Atheneum. In 2009 they treated *Washington Crossing the Delaware* for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They look forward to having a project close to home and the opportunity to closely examine the Earl portraits.



Hempstead House ornament, and 2008 Custom House Ornament. They are limited editions though; while you can still get a full set, we can’t guarantee that for long.

Ornaments are 2.5 inches in diameter.

Available at the Shaw Mansion for **\$15**.