

NEW LONDON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2012

Captain Richard Law and Jupiter Against the Ice by Nancy Steenburg

In 1805, more than 100 years before the disastrous encounter between the HMS *Titanic* and an iceberg, a New London ship captain was a key player in a similar disaster. Richard Law, a grandson of Connecticut Governor Jonathan Law, had served honorably in the U.S. Navy during the American Revolution on the *Trumbull*, and eventually made his career as a ship's captain in the merchant service. His many maritime exploits were well-known to New Londoners. He successfully defended American shipping from French privateers in the West Indies in 1799. He was the first American captain to sail into New Orleans after the port was opened to American trade in 1803. At the culmination of his career, in 1822 Law became the Collector of the port of New London, serving at the post until 1830. Yet Law faced a disaster in 1805 that could have scuttled his career.

Captain Law at the helm of the *Jupiter*, home-ported in New London, left the Downs in England on 6 March 1805 on a return voyage with a hold full of cargo valued at half a million dollars and 65 passengers and crew aboard. A month later on the morning of 6 April, the ship was off the southeastern quarter of the Newfoundland Bank, latitude 43, longi-

tude 49, when a huge ice labyrinth surrounded the vessel. The bergs threatened to hem the ship in, limiting its mobility; alternating they threatened to collide with the hull, smashing the ship to the bottom of the sea. At times huge icebergs completely blocked the ship's forward passage, forcing it to maneuver in the field of broken ice, seeking a way out of imminent danger.

During the entire day, Captain Law never left the helm; in fact he had not slept the previous night because of his worry about the dangerous conditions. As night fell, floating ice islands still

trapped the ship. Most of the passengers had remained on deck all day, prey to intense fear as they watched their captain's attempts to save them. Few went below decks for supper, leaving the meal untouched. Hours more the captain, crew, and passengers suffered in fear, watching the movements of the ice and the attempts to avoid disaster.

By midnight, 27 of the passengers, exhausted from their death watch, had gone below to try to sleep. Remaining

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Thames River Cruise Visits War of 1812 Site of Refuge for Decatur's Squadron ~ SAVE THE DATE

Plan on joining the Historical Society on Saturday afternoon 20 October for a fabulous time of fall foliage, wine-tasting, friendship and history! Once again Cross Sound Ferry has graciously donated the *SEAJET* for a leisurely cruise up the Thames River to Norwich and back. This year we will focus on the War of 1812 and sites associated with Commodore Stephen Decatur whose squadron of three ships ended up trapped on the Thames River from June 1813 through March 1815. You can listen to historians, or to Music from the War of 1812, or you can simply relax and enjoy the scenery and the flight of wines that will be offered by Gordon's Yellow Front Wines and Spirits. (Be sure to ask about special case pricing available only on the cruise!) Loading begins at 12:30 pm, we'll leave the wharf at 1 pm and be back at 4 pm. Tickets for this important fundraiser for the society will be \$50 for members and \$60 for non members. Make your reservations today!

“Ye Towne’s Antientest Buriall Place”

The Two Captains Robert Latimer

In the last newsletter we covered most of the members of the Latimer family who are buried in the Antientist Burial Ground. This time we will cover Captain of the First Trainband Robert Latimer, and the family of a later Robert, another captain who eventually moved to Tennessee.

The first Robert Latimer was the son of Robert and Ann Griggs Latimer, born February 5, 1664. His father had come from England on the *Hopenwell*, and was a trader and master of vessels engaged in coastal trading. According to the online Latimer genealogy, he was lost at sea in 1671. His estate was settled in 1693, after his children were grown. Our Robert inherited the family homestead, “on the Town Street and Winthrop’s Cove.” Over the years he “amassed a considerable estate in land.” He purchased lots on Williams and Vauxhall Streets, “covering the ridge of Post Hill. Westward of the town plot, he inherited a considerable tract of swamp and cedar land, on one portion of which Cedar Grove Cemetery was laid out in 1851, the land having to that time remained in the possession of his descendants.” He also owned a farm at Black Point, and “an unmeasured quantity of wild land in the woods,” in what is now Montville, then New London North Parish. (Caulkins)

As early as 1707 Robert sometimes served on the governor’s council, technically the upper house of the legislature. Gov. Gurdon Saltonstall lived in New London. It was the custom for the governor’s council to handle some colony business between the sessions of

the General Assembly. As not all of the governor’s “assistants,” or formal members of the council, lived near New London, prominent citizens were recruited to make up a quorum when needed. Robert served at least eight times between 1707 and 1721, dealing with a variety of problems, including colony boundaries, “insolent” Indians, and providing horses for Frenchmen on their way to a peace conference. He appeared before the council at times, also, once as one of the selectmen complaining about the (lack of) work ethic of the ferryman.

Robert rose through the ranks of the militia, becoming ensign (an officer just below a lieutenant) of the first trainband in 1704, lieutenant in 1708, and captain in 1715. In April of 1727 Joshua Hempstead noted in his diary, “a Trayning day. the first & Second Company. Capt Lattimer Laid Down his Commission & Lt Richd Douglass was Chosen in his Room . . .”

Hempstead and Latimer worked together a number of times on such projects as inventorying estates, building the schoolhouse chimney, dividing land, “Concluding with ye Shepherd” (who received £14 for the sheep’s dung), and running the town boundary between New London and Lyme. An apparently complicated dispute between Madam Sarah Knight and Sampston Haughton about property boundaries was “at Last Effectted & wee all [Latimer, Chapman, Prentis, and Hempstead] advanced 7s 6d a peice toward the Accommodation & Sampson pd 5 more.” (March 2, 1727). It seems that the committee

charged with selling common land for money to build the courthouse, made up of the men listed above, had sold some of Madam Knight’s land to Haughton. This was not an uncommon occurrence, given the rough nature of the terrain and the habit of marking boundaries with references to trees and heaps of stones, but it could lead to hard feelings and prolonged negotiations.

According to the Latimer genealogy, Robert married twice, both times to women named Elizabeth. He married Elizabeth Dymond in January 5, 1693, and their son Robert was born in April of that year. Elizabeth died in October. In 1697, Robert married Elizabeth Buck, with whom he had another four children. The genealogy is rather confusing on several points of this

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The War of 1812 Bicentennial Arrives

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Much of our planning to commemorate the “forgotten” war will be brought to fruition for the region this summer and fall. *The Rockets' Red Glare* – the book – will be celebrated at a book-signing on Friday evening 8 June. And then “*The Rockets' Red Glare*” – the exhibition – will open at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum on Friday evening 6 July. We hope you'll join us for both of these events.

Glenn Gordinier, the Albion Historian at Mystic Seaport, is the primary author and will join us for the book launch at the Shaw Mansion (4:30-6:30). With him will be Andy German, the editor, as well as several of the other contributing authors. These include: James Boylan, Meredith Brown, Fred Calabretta, Tertius de Kay, Jerry Roberts, Nancy Steenburg, and Matt Warshauer, as well as our own Frances Caulkins (of course she won't be there, except in spirit). Edward Baker, serving as the publisher for the historical society, was actively involved in the creation of this book lending his guidance and hands-on knowledge to get all the pieces in place. The 112 page paperback book is gorgeous and so full of local history I guarantee you will want to get your own copy (\$18 at the Shaw Mansion or on the website online shop).

The Lyman Allyn is a wonderful venue for our exhibition which draws on the collections of all of the partners in the project: Mystic Seaport, the Stonington Historical Society, the New London Maritime Society, and the Lyman Allyn, as well as NLCHS. With artifacts from the period such as the Stonington Battle flag, a Congreve rocket carcass, the frock coat of a wounded defender of Stonington, paintings, documents, and ship models, the story of how the residents of coastal Connecticut survived two and a half difficult years will inspire you.

Look also for the launch of a new website: warof1812ct.org – which we are in the process of finishing as I write – this will make some of the book and some of the exhibit available to anyone with an internet connection. Edward is working again with Andy German, designer Trish LaPoint, and website developer Joel Bergeron on the site that is made possible with the support of a grant from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut.

In November the Association for the Study of Connecticut History, ASCH, will also be providing a full day symposium on Connecticut and the War of 1812 at Connecticut College and visiting the exhibition. Nancy Steenburg is the ASCH vice-president, and I'm currently the treasurer.

We have many partners on these projects and have received wonderful financial support from foundations and the Connecticut Humanities Council. But we can truly “pat ourselves on the back” for this work because of the leadership we have brought to these partnerships. Only the New London County Historical Society has a mission which spans the region, a mission that includes all the stories from our past, a mission that is supported by you – our members. So we ask you again for that support – buy a copy of the book, renew your membership, buy a ticket for the Thames River cruise on 20 October, respond generously to our Annual Fund appeal. We thank you.

~Deborah Donovan

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The Two Captains Robert Latimer (continued)

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Latimer family's major life events, as when it lists Elizabeth Buck as the first wife and gives dates which clearly show she was the second wife. The dates are also sometimes suspicious, as when October 15, 1693 is given as the first Elizabeth's death date. This is the date on which Robert had his son baptized, according to the First Church records. Neither wife has a stone in the burying ground.

Putting together the genealogy and the church records, and adding a dash of Joshua Hempstead, gives us this picture of Robert's descendants:

~Robert, born 1693, married Mary Huntley of Lyme June 17, 1731. They had three children. Robert died in 1766.

~Jonathan, born 1698 (not 1689 as the genealogy claims, since that was several years before Robert married for the first time), was baptized September 5, 1703. He married Borrakil Denison April 6, 1721. They had eleven children, including the other Robert we will discuss.

~Samuel, baptized September 5, 1703, married Elizabeth Hallam July 11, 1723. They had eleven children.

~Peter, baptized September 5, 1703, married Hannah Picket April 23, 1732. They had nine children.

~Ann, born about 1705, married John Colefax, and had three children. Their first son, George, was baptized March 17, 1728, after his parents "made an open confession of their fault for having a Child too Soon. . ." (Hempstead)

None of these children of Robert and Elizabeth has a stone in the burying ground, although several of their descendants do. Robert's stone is slightly below the Brooks tomb near the en-

trance, a short stone which is still quite legible. He died "November ye 27th, 1728, aged 67 years." Hempstead "Sat up at night" with the corpse, and was one of the bearers at the funeral on the 29th. The lettering on the stone looks as though it may have been done by Hempstead, also, who bought pre-decorated headstones and lettered them. Unfortunately, Hempstead's records of gravestone customers are not complete. He has numerous references to working on stones, but frequently without giving details.

The younger Robert was baptized as an infant February 22, 1732, and married (or was published to--Hempstead is unclear) Elizabeth, the daughter of Edward and Grace Hallam, June 8, 1755. She had been baptized April 23 of 1732. Their daughter Elizabeth was buried April 3, 1756, according to Hempstead. Her gravestone, which is readable, says she died "March 1756." Her mother "died October 17, A. D. 1760, aged 28 years and 7 months." This stone appears to have been recut at some point, and is very legible. It is flat on the ground toward the rear and somewhat to the left in the burying ground. Her daughter's stone is nearby. After his wife's death, Robert married Lydia Bulkley in 1761, and moved to Tennessee along with his brother Jonathan and Jonathan's family. The Latimer genealogy does not list any other children for Robert.

Patricia M. Schaefer

References:

Blake, S. LeRoy. *The Later History of the First Church of Christ, New London*. New London: Press of The Day Publishing Co., 1900. This has baptisms and marriages performed by the ministers of the church. Many marriages were performed by justices of the peace, and so are not listed in these records. First Church marriage records are also online at http://dunhamwilcox.net/ct/new_lond_marr_1church.htm

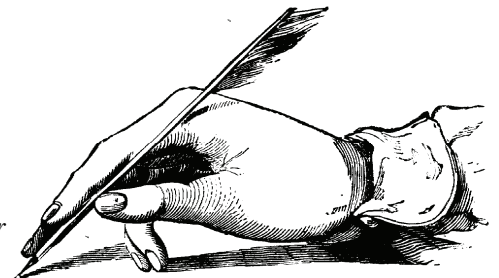
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Captain Richard Law in the Ice Field (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

at the helm, Law steered the vessel away from a large ice floe that bore down on their lee, but unfortunately the hull struck upon a small piece of submerged ice that broke through the starboard bow. So light was the touch and so low was the sound of impact that Law initially did not realize that his ship was in danger. Then one of the crew burst onto the deck, and in terror yelled, "Captain, the ship is filling!"

Law immediately went below and saw that gash in the bow had doomed the *Jupiter*. Nevertheless, he ordered his men to rig both the pumps to try to delay the inevitable sinking. He then returned to the deck, addressing those passengers who had remained on deck. He told them that he would do whatever he could to save their lives, but unless they kept a strict silence and obeyed his orders, all would die together. Law ordered the lowering of the only two life boats. 38 men, women, and children climbed into the longboat, under the charge of the second mate. The steward had quickly gathered what provisions and water he could lay hands on, and he threw these pell-mell into the boat. The few remaining passengers on deck, Law, and the first mate leapt into the smaller boat as the *Jupiter* sank into the waves. The vortex of the settling ship nearly pulled the second boat down with it.

The tragedy was that the 27 people who had gone to their cabins, exhausted by the terrors of the day, went down with the ship. Law believed that there was not time to wake them, and

that the two small life boats would have swamped with any additional weight. So sudden was the strike, so immediately did Law have to make a decision that he had to sacrifice those 27 people to be able to have a chance to save the rest. Law had to accept the responsibility of saving some passengers at the cost of the lives of others. He faced an additional agony. One young man, among the passengers who had remained on deck, knew his mother and sister were sleeping below deck, unaware of their doom. At first he climbed quickly and silently into a boat, but at the moment the boat pulled away from the sinking hull, he demanded that the mate return, to allow him to die with his family. The mate refused to alter course; the young man leapt from the boat back to the deck and sank as the *Jupiter* sank. In less than 30 minutes from the seemingly gentle tap of ice against the bow, the ship was gone.

Law ordered that the two boats be tied together, the larger towing the smaller. Using oars the yawl pulled first one direction, then another, seeking an exit from the ice field. The terrified passengers expected momentarily to see their tiny vessels crushed between threatening icebergs. For over 24 hours the two tiny ships struggled to escape, and finally on 9 April the survivors cleared the field of icebergs, only to encounter a stormy sea. The larger boat, carrying the 2nd mate and 38 passengers, feared the smaller boat in tow would founder, and cut it loose, leaving 8 men on their own. The two vessels floated apart and Captain Law, in the small boat, lost sight of the larger boat.

A rainstorm began, and the smaller boat seemed in danger of filling and founder-

ing. By noon on 9 April the rain abated, and the smaller boat was able to make way under oars. The 8 men had no provisions; the steward had thrown what he could into the larger boat. All suffered frostbite and exhaustion. The boat was so small that only one man at a time could lie down. The only water receptacle was a gold snuff box used to dip into the rainwater in the hull, and the men took turns dipping their shirtsleeves into the snuff box and sucking on the moisture.

In the days before radio, the men seemed doomed, but by that afternoon they saw a sail on the horizon. The fishing schooner *Joanna* out of Gloucester rescued the 8 men. Captain Henry Quiner abandoned his fishing voyage and took the men to Marblehead, reaching shore on 24 April. The fortunate survivors were Captain Law, his first mate, the Honorable Robert B. Kennedy, James B. Temple and James Alberg of London, John Tappan of Boston, one seaman, and one steerage passenger.

The passengers in the longboat also survived, rescued by an outward-bound vessel and taken to Europe.

Source: Manuscript "Memoir of Captain Richard Law" by Frances Manwaring Caulkins in the collection of the New London County Historical Society

THE ROCKETS' RED GLARE ~ Connecticut and the War of 1812 ***Exhibit Opens Friday 6 July***

The War of 1812 is more than simply a footnote to our history. It was a turning point that shaped much of what occurred in Connecticut after that time. Embargo and wartime scarcity fostered local manufacturing with new mills beginning the transition of Connecticut from rural to urban. Wartime contracts started the armament industry which has been a staple of Connecticut's growth. As a result of the war England agreed to recognize the "freedom of the seas" which was a necessary pre-condition for the growth of our

whaling industry. And the War of 1812 created a national identity for the United States — especially through the pride in our naval victories — that previously was barely alive.

The war was also not some distant event for the people living along the coast of Connecticut. The enemy that

had destroyed this town only 30 years earlier was visible every day, interdicting our commerce and attacking our shores.

We've been planning this exhibition with our partners for over two years. Come see the stories from our own backyards in this world-shaping event.

THE ROCKETS' RED GLARE ***The War of 1812 and Connecticut***

Book Launch Celebration at the Shaw Mansion Friday evening 8 June, 4:30 pm to 6:30. Reception, book signing, and a few short presentations. Please join us.

New and Renewed ***Members (continued)***

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Connecticut's Historic Gardens Day~24 June

Connecticut Master Gardeners will be available to provide tours of the Shaw Mansion garden and answer questions. Later in the afternoon, Miss Perkins and some of her friends from the 1860s return to her garden to offer a guided tour sharing, "The Language of Flowers." During the day a local croquet club will play a match and demonstrate the secrets of the game. Strawberry shortcake will be available. \$5 Admission.

Visit with Miss Perkins Every Saturday!

Throughout July and August our Saturday museum educator will be Jennifer Emerson dressed in her period attire. She'll be doing "third-person" interpretation rather than trying to portray Miss Jane Perkins all the time, but this summer would be a great time to bring your visitors to the Shaw Mansion for a very "insiders" tour.

Vintage Base Ball at Dodd Stadium

Sunday afternoon, 15 July, come to Dodd Stadium for a demonstration game of base ball as it was played in 1861 at 2 pm, and then stay for the Connecticut Tigers game. Truly a fun day! Tickets at \$8.00 are available at the Shaw Mansion, or from any Thames Base Ball Club member.

Books available from the New London County Historical Society

<i>The Amistad Incident as Reported in the New London Gazette & General Advertiser.</i> (NLCHS)	\$5
<i>The History of the Amistad Captives.</i> (NLCHS) A reproduction of a pamphlet by JW Barber, 1840.	\$10
<i>Black Roots in Southeastern Connecticut, 1650-1900</i> by Barbara Brown and Dr. James Rose. (NLCHS) This republished book is a milestone in genealogical research of African Americans and Native Americans in New London County.	\$35
<i>The Diary of Joshua Hempstead 1711-1758.</i> (NLCHS) Revised 1999. Personal journal serves as fascinating and invaluable account of Connecticut life in early 18 th century.	\$75
<i>For Oil and Buggy Whips: Whaling Captains of New London County, Connecticut</i> by Barnard Colby. Biographical sketches of local whaling captains document New London's role in this industry.	\$18
<i>Greetings from New London.</i> (NLCHS) Collection of early 20 th -century postcards from our archives.	\$10
<i>Life on a Whaler</i> by Nathaniel W. Taylor. (NLCHS) Story of Taylor's two-year Antarctic voyage as physician aboard New London's <i>Julius Caesar</i> (1851-53).	\$25
<i>A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture.</i> (NLCHS) Autobiography of former slave Venture Smith, originally published in 1798. NLCHS facsimile of 1897 edition.	\$5
<i>New London Goes to War - New London during World War II</i> by Clark van der Lyke. Our newest publication: drawn from the records and correspondence of the New London City Council. (NLCHS)	\$11
<i>The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut</i> by James A. Slater. Fully illustrated with photographs, this book provides a description of and maps the burial grounds of eastern Connecticut.	\$40
<i>Common to this Country: Botanical Discoveries of Lewis & Clark</i> by Susan Munger. Illustrated volume exploring plants discovered by Lewis and Clark on their westward expedition.	\$23
<i>The Day Paper</i> by Gregory N. Stone. History of New London's award-winning daily newspaper.	\$30
<i>Steam Coffin: Captain Moses Rogers and the Steamship Savannah Break the Barrier</i> by John Lawrence Busch. New London native son Moses Rogers and the first crossing of the Atlantic by a steam-powered vessel.	\$35
<i>Murder of Mayhem? - Benedict Arnold's New London, Connecticut Raid, 1781</i> by Dr. Walter L. Powell. Excellent research in a small readable format.	\$10
<i>History of New London, Connecticut: from the first survey of the coast in 1612 to 1860</i> by Frances Caulkins With a new introduction and a revised index 2007 (NLCHS).	\$60
<i>Prospero's America: John Winthrop, Jr., Alchemy, and the Creation of New England Culture, 1606-1676</i> Excellent new history from Walter Woodward, the Connecticut State Historian.	\$45
<i>"The Rockets' Red Glare:" The War of 1812 and Connecticut,</i> by Dr. Glenn S. Gordinier. Companion to the bicentennial exhibit; excellent local history tied to national and international events (NLCHS).	\$18
<i>A USEFUL FRIEND—A Companion to the Joshua Hempstead Diary 1711-1758</i> by Patricia Schaefer (NLCHS) A truly useful resource guide, if you have the Diary, you should have this book; includes a subject index to the Diary.	\$25
<i>History of Norwich, Connecticut: from its possession by the Indians to the year 1866</i> by Frances Caulkins With a new introduction and a new index 2009 (NLCHS).	\$60

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