

# NEW LONDON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2010

## *New London's Maritime Heritage Park on the Parade*

June 5th is the day we will celebrate the rededication of the Parade in New London. The \$10,000,000 project to reclaim this public space is almost complete. The traffic flowing down State and left on Water Street will still be there, but hopefully it will be moving more slowly, and visitors to the city at the train station will be able to see a Whale's Tail fountain, a much more inviting parking garage entrance, open spaces and a view up into the downtown.

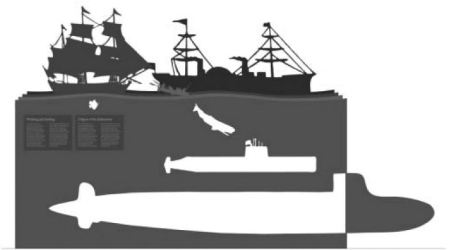
Part of the funding for the project was what remained of a grant to create a Thames River Maritime Heritage Park. Thus there are ten text panels placed around the Parade honoring New London's maritime heritage. These are mounted on walls near the Union (Nathan Hale) Schoolhouse, on large bronze silhouette sculptures, and on a granite post by the Whale's Tail.

The panels tell of different elements of New London's history and its connection to the Thames River harbor beginning with the Native Americans who used the resources of the river long before the English settlers arrived. The colonial economy, revolutionary New London, Nathan Hale, privateering, the

*Amistad* incident, the changing 19th century maritime economy, whaling, the Coast Guard and the submarine industry each have their due.

What anyone can say about these topics in less than 200 words of course is very limited, which is why each text panel ends with the question: "Where can you go to learn more?" Here the readers are directed to two or three of the many historic sites and resources available in New London County.

Participating in writing the text were representatives from New London Landmarks, the New London Maritime Society, the Sons of the American Revolution, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, the city's Planning Department, the municipal historian Sally Ryan, and



the New London County Historical Society. So next time you are waiting for a train or listening to a concert or eating lunch al fresco on the Parade you can also fit in a history lesson.

On the waterfront, at the foot of the hill, a fort with cannon emplacements was located facing the river. Directly behind the fort was a large open area reserved for the militia—the parade ground—as military marching is fashioned. And thus this plaza got its name.



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

In the last newsletter, we discussed John Coit, the oldest son of Deacon Joseph and Martha Coit, and John’s descendants who are buried in the old burying ground. This time we will look at two more sons of Joseph and Martha, and their descendants who lie in the burying ground. All of the Coit stones are grouped together, although not necessarily in a strict family order.

William Coit was born January 25, 1676, and married Sarah Chandler, sister of his brother John’s wife, June 9, 1697. They had three children, only one of whom survived to adulthood. William died May 7, 1703 “aged about 27 years” as his gravestone says. His widow married John Gardiner of Gardiner’s Island. William and Sarah’s younger son, William, who had been born in January of 1702, worked for (or with) Joshua Hempstead for close to a year building boats. During an epidemic of ague and fever that was prevalent in New London in December of 1717, “Willm (alias) Billy Coit Died Last night Sick but 2 days.” There is no stone for him in the burying ground.

The only one of William and Sarah’s children to grow up, Daniel, does not have a stone there, either. His first wife, Lydia, does. Hempstead records in his diary on January 22, 1741, “. . . & to visit Capt Daniel Coit who Lost his wife Last night about 3 Clock. She was taken Sudenly about 9 with an Extreem pain in her head & soon Speechless no means that was used availed anything. in the 40<sup>th</sup> year of her age. She was ye 3d daughter of Richard Christophers Esqr & the first of them that hath Died.

Tho all the Sons being 5 tht were men grown & all Elder than She hath been Dead Some years. . . fryd 23 I was at home all Day Save only at the funeral of Ms Coit toward night. was one of ye 6 Bearers, mr adms & 5 Justices yt had Scarves & Gloves.” The relative importance of the bearers was a reflection of Captain Daniel’s status. He was many times a deputy to the General Assembly, town clerk from 1736 until he died in 1773, with only a one-year gap from 1757-8, and would later in 1741 be appointed justice of the peace, another position he continued to hold until his death. Daniel married Mehetabel Hooker in 1742, and Elizabeth Jeffrey Stow in 1764. Neither of these has a stone in the burying ground.

Daniel and Mehetabel had several children, the oldest of whom, William, was born November 26, 1742. The Coit family genealogy says he graduated from Yale in 1761, although Caulkins does not list him with the town’s Yale graduates. He was a sea captain, and active in the Revolution. He and his wife, Sarah (Prentiss), had several children, the fifth of whom, Nancy (Ann in the Coit family genealogy), was buried in the old ground with this sad inscription:

In memory of Miss Nancy Coit,  
Daughter of William and Sarah Coit.  
She was born March 30, 177\_\_ [0]  
and died March 30, 1792.  
A Mournful birth Day to her  
Friends.

Caulkins notes that the day was also meant to be her wedding day and that the stone was erected by her love. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate the stone. It should be slightly behind and to the right (as you face them) of

the main batch of Coit stones. It may be one of the stones in that area that no longer has a face.

Solomon Coit was the fifth son of Deacon Joseph and Martha, born November 29, 1679. He was married three times, and the first two wives are buried in the old burying ground. Solomon’s first wife was Mary Stevens, whom he married December 24, 1706. She died July 7, 1713, aged 24, one week after giving birth to her daughter Mary, their fourth child and second one who lived to adulthood. This Mary married Ivory Lucas, and in 1749 was a widow living in Ogletown, Delaware, where Joshua Hempstead delivered a letter to her from her father Solomon. On his way home he stopped, was once again entertained

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### New London County Historical Society Incorporated 1870

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# Mental Meanderings

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*"We all need a past - that's where our sense of identity comes from."*

Recently I "discovered" a new (for me) author – Penelope Lively, British and an impressive writer of novels. Some of these are 'historical' in that they look at a story in its historical context; others are only 'historical' in that the characters are unalterably shaped and influenced by their past; or perhaps whose personal history is what it is because of the larger history in which it exists. Complicated I know – I am sort of musing here, but I have been struck when reading Lively by some of her comments on history and how it exists all around us, even when we are least aware of it, and how the past permeates how we look at the world of the present.

We live in a region, both the micro region of New London County and the macro region of New England, that is saturated with history and it has given those of us who have lived here for all our lives (or most of our lives) a sense of identity that is different from the identity of, let's say a Texan. (I lived in Texas for awhile and really, people do think differently about themselves then do we Yankees.)

Some of this shared identity is certainly about non-historic things: food (chowder, lobsters, baked beans, fried clams, blue and cranberries); sports (Red Sox, UConn basketball), places (Cape Cod, Mystic, the White and Green Mts., the Berkshires), you get my drift. But a lot of the way we look at or understand ourselves and our community has to do with what happened before us, and who came before us.

Those of us directly involved with the New London County Historical Society, and those involved with all the other small and large historic organizations in our region, are in almost constant touch with those events and those people, through their artifacts, their papers, their "stuff," which we collect and preserve and exhibit and try to interpret for those in this "present." We use this past to understand the present and to plan our future (our mission statement by the way.)

We could use your help in realizing this mission. If you have papers or documents or articles in your family attic that tell a story of the past, however insignificant you may think them, consider talking to us about adding these things to the NLCHS collections. If you have a story to tell (perhaps of working as a "Rosie Riveter" at EB during WWII or of life in New London County when trolleys ran everywhere), contact us so we can record and save those stories. If you have an idea for an exhibit, a program for adults or students, or for a book, let us know. You are all part of our region's history and that history is part of your and all of our identities.

I will end with another Lively quote that reminds us how history works: *"The present hardly exists, after all—it becomes the past even as it happens."*

~ Deborah Donovan

# New and Renewed Members

## Sustaining

Nancy Steenburg Mystic

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Deborah Donovan New London  
Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. McLellan  
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Ms. Betty A. Pinson Waterford  
K.C. Whelen Madison

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Laurie and John Deredita New London  
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Samuel and Elinor Green Englewood, FL  
John Balchunas Groton  
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## Coits Part 1 (continued)

(Continued from page 2)

“very Bountifully,” and took her return letter to Solomon. Her mother lies under a stone lettered by Hempstead. Elizabeth, Solomon’s second wife, also has a stone lettered by Hempstead. She was the widow of Thomas Short, the first printer of Connecticut, when she married Solomon August 8, 1714. Thomas had died in 1712, and also has a stone in the burying ground, although not near the Coit stones. His stone appears to have been lettered by Hempstead as well. Elizabeth died March 25, 1715, aged 32, of measles. According to Hempstead’s diary, there was a bad measles epidemic at the time.

Neither Solomon nor his third wife, Abigail (Cary), has a stone in the burying ground. He died August 26, 1753, and she the following April. Hempstead commented that she was “Aged 70 odd Died of a plursie. She was his 3d wife & lived with him about 40 years (had no child). Deacon Carys Daughter of Charlestown.”

Nathaniel, the third child of Solomon and Mary Coit, was born May 30, 1711. He was a sea captain, active in the Irish and West Indies trade. He was also married three times, but only his first two wives have stones in the old burying ground. The first wife was Margaret

Douglass, whom Nathaniel married November 6, 1735. They had eight children, the last two of whom were twins. One of these died July 11, 1752, and Margaret died July 17, aged 35. Nathaniel married Mary (Christophers), widow of John Braddick, July 13, 1754. She died October 10, 1755, aged 29. “She was lately DD of a child & had the fever & Canker. She was his 2d Wife & he her 3d Husband. She was Daughter of Richard Christophers Decd the 2d.” (Hempstead) Neither the third wife, Love (Richards) Rogers, whom Nathaniel married in 1759, nor Nathaniel himself, has a stone in the burying ground. The Coit family genealogy does not have a death date for Nathaniel.

“Capt. Nathaniel Coit Junr,” as his gravestone styles him, was the second child and first son of Nathaniel and Margaret, born December 1, 1738. He married Borraddill Latimer July 5, 1764. They had eight children before Nathaniel died April 24, 1783, of prison ship fever. Borraddill did not remarry, and died March 4, 1807, aged 63. Both have stones in the burying ground.

~Patricia M. Schaefer

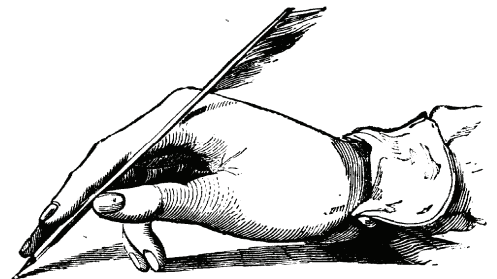
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### Join Us in Welcoming Summer Interns

Claire Herbig of East Lyme, a student at Colby College, and Laura Boynton of Milford, a student at Hamilton College will be spending their summer learning and assisting at the Shaw Mansion where they will experience the life of a small but rich (in historical resources) historical society/museum/library/historic house.



Become a fan of the New London County Historical Society on Facebook.

### Upcoming Events

- 5 June — Parade dedication
- 6 June — Vintage Base Ball at Fort Trumbull
- 26 June — Vintage Base Ball at Fort Trumbull
- 27 June — Historic Garden’s Day
- 21 August — Vintage Base Ball at Lebanon Town Green
- 21, 22, 28, 29 August — “Secrets of a Locked Trunk”

## *New Exhibit ~ “Votes for Women”*

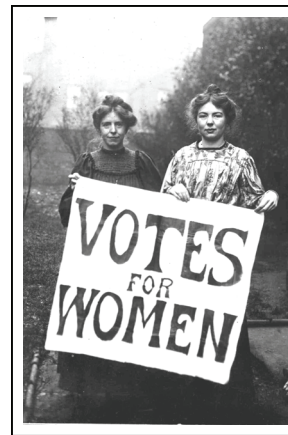
**N**inety years ago women got the vote... but it wasn't easy for the women of Connecticut. Both Connecticut senators voted against the proposed amendment for women's suffrage, with New London's own Senator Frank Brandegee being one of its most vocal opponents. Brandegee refused to even meet with the women campaigners.

It took over a year after the initial Congressional proposal for the necessary thirty-six states to ratify the amendment. Connecticut was not one of the thirty-six. It was only after the Amendment was part of the Constitution that Connecticut ratified it. Even this did not go smoothly. Governor Marcus Holcomb had refused to call a special assembly for ratification and initially vetoed it.

Opposition in Connecticut was such that some suffragists suggested that women campaign in nearby states where there was a chance of success.

Edna Leighton Tyler was the daughter of Col A.C. Tyler and lived in the family's grand home, The Elms, on Pequot Avenue. But an early life of balls and parties was not enough for Edna. Edna worked as a photographer with a studio on State Street and later in her home on Gardner Avenue. One of the early leaders of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Edna was present at the first meeting of the Equal Franchise League. During the First World War, she dedicated her time and energy to the Red Cross, work she continued to do for the rest of her life. She and many others also expected that they would be rewarded with the vote after the war. When they encountered stubborn resistance from Connecticut politicians, *The Boston Globe* reported that Connecticut women and particularly Edna Tyler were “fighting mad.”

Throughout her life, Edna continued to be active, working as a photographer until 1954, and holding leadership positions in the League of Women Voters



at local and state levels and in the Red Cross until her death in 1970. Given the hostile environment of their early days, the efforts of New London women should be all the more appreciated. Under a large banner of Votes for Women, a new display in the Shaw Mansion highlights their story. On display are notes from the Equal Franchise league, personal correspondence, and petitions as well as an early scrapbook of the League of Women Voters.

~Tricia Royston

## *Secrets Of a Locked Truck ~ A Visit with Miss Perkins and Family*

Miss Perkins and some of her family members will present a “first-person interactive performance with tea” over two weekends in August. Tickets will be available for both Saturday and Sunday late afternoon performances on 21 and 22 August and 28 and 29 August. In a variation on the “Tea with Miss Perkins,” the performance will first be presented and tea and period-appropriate refreshments will follow.

The setting for our story is 1876. Miss Perkins and her niece, Elinor, have been rummaging through the attic of the

family's ancient house. They've found a small locked trunk which obviously once belonged to a member of the family, but what lies within? With Mother's permission (and with her curiosity aroused as well) they are determined to find out.

In 1876, the Shaw Mansion was home to Mrs. Nathaniel Shaw Perkins, her son Nathaniel Shaw Perkins, Jr., her daughter Jane Perkins, her granddaughter Elinor Griswold, (daughter of Mary Perkins Griswold who died in 1863), and two servants. In 1907 Jane Perkins sold

the house to the New London County Historical Society to be its permanent home; by placing the story thirty years before that event we return to the centennial year, a time when many Americans began to truly look back at what had been accomplished since we declared our independence. Visitors will have an opportunity to be transported back in time and will see how the concept of preserving history might be older than you think.

**Call today to make reservations.**

## Connecticut's Historic Gardens Day ~ 27 June

Sunday 27 June the Shaw Mansion joins with Connecticut's Historic Gardens in celebrating Historic Gardens Day. Included in the regular admission price will be special tours and lectures. In the morning Connecticut Master Gardeners will provide tours of the Shaw Mansion Garden. In the afternoon Miss Perkins and some of her friends from the 1860s



will return to take over her garden. Miss Perkins will offer a guided tour sharing "the Language of Flowers," and at the end of the day they will portray a *tableau vivant* recreating Winslow Homer's famous painting of a croquet match. Strawberry shortcake will also be available.

Connecticut's Historic Gardens is a collaboration of 14 historic sites across the state, each of which features the historic landscape as one of its attractions. Other sites close to



New London include the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, and the Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford

The one acre park-like environs of the Shaw Mansion creates one of the largest green-spaces in the center of the city.

You should visit!

## New and Renewed Members

*Continued*

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Siro Toffolon	Old Lyme
Armand Lambert	New London
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Eleanor Read	Mystic
Ronald Loomis	New London
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Bethany and Gordon Angell	New London
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Helen M. Sandalls	New London
Bruce and Patty Stark	Lyme
Kathryn C. Clark	Waterford
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Clark van der Lyke	New London
Helen Rozwadowski	New London
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Norma Jeanne Huish	Thatcher, AZ
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Betty and Chapman	Groton
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Alice Dickenson	East Lyme
CAPT James S. O'Rourke	Essex
John Hempstead	LaCrosse, WI
Sheila Galagan	Washington, DC
Denise Andrus	Tilton, NH
Mike Dreimiller	Gales Ferry
Genevieve Rafferty	New London
Mary Thatcher	Stonington
Ralph and Judy Wadleigh	Falmouth, MA

## Governor Rell Proclaims Shaw Mansion Day

Governor Rell proclaimed 30 April 2010 to be Shaw Mansion Day in the State of Connecticut and Congressman Joe Courtney dropped by to cut the ribbon as the New London County Historical Society celebrated the completion of a \$60,000 project to add an accessible classroom and bathroom to the Shaw Mansion.

The project was made possible by support from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, the Community Foundation of Southeastern Connecticut, the Frank Loomis Palmer Fund administered by the Bank of America, and a matching grant from the State of Connecticut's Historic Preservation Funds, administered by the Commission on Culture and Tourism.



New London County Historical Society President Deborah Donovan spoke of the difficulty of making some of our historic treasures accessible to individuals who have mobility problems and praised the State for their assistance. Rick Gipstein of Lindsay Liebig Roche Architects was the consulting architect on the project, and the contractor was LaBossiere Builders of Norwich.