

NEW LONDON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2008

Teamwork brings Hidden Sea Moss Treasures to Light

In May, the NLCHS newsletter featured an article about the beautiful and impressive algae collections created in the late 1800's by New London resident, Eliza French Gage. Eliza, published poet, author of children's books, and a serious naturalist, lived in New London from 1809 until she married in 1853 and left her beloved harbor for upstate New York. She returned to New London as a widow and took up her studies of marine algae once again, this time comparing the changes that had taken place over her nearly thirty years away. From her correspondence, we have learned more about Eliza, and just how seriously she took her studies, keeping up-to-date with all the important botanical classifications of the time and attempting to

identify all the species of algae in New London waters. Happily now others are taking her seriously as well.

Last spring when librarian Tricia Royston wanted Eliza's "Sea Moss" albums to get more of the attention they deserve, director Edward Baker, knew the person to call — Jim Carlton, Director of the Williams College — Mystic Seaport Maritime Studies Program and an international expert on introduced marine species.

This summer he was leading a team examining and classifying the algae of the Mystic River. He and his assistants came to the NLCHS to see what we have and to potentially make compari-

sons between the present and the past represented in the albums. Smith College student Rachel Rock-Blake was so enthusiastic that she proposed an independent study/senior project based on the Eliza French Gage collection. Rachel will be guided by Jim Carlton and Professor Paulette Peckol, a specialist in marine algae and a professor at Smith College. Smith has an important botanical collection and a serious interest in the history of women botanists. So, together we hope to give Eliza French Gage the attention she deserves. Jim Carlton thinks this will be a "superb project." We agree.

Life is good

Effective at the beginning of the year 2009, the price for LIFE membership has been raised to \$1000 by a vote of the Board of Directors. So for the next two months, you can purchase life membership at half that cost, \$500 — now that's a Christmas present that would impress and would help your historical society and community.

Christmas Planning

The third in our series of pewter ornaments will be ready in time to hang from your tree or to put into a Christmas stocking. This year we feature the Robert Mills, US Custom House, home to the New London Maritime Society, on its 175th anniversary. Previous ornaments (still available) featured the Shaw Mansion and the Joshua Hempstead House.

Our Christmas open-house and Volunteer recognition reception will be held on Wednesday 19 December. MAYBE by then Pat Schaefer's long-awaited book, *A USEFUL FRIEND — A Companion to the Joshua Hempstead Diary 1711-1758*, will be ready. Stop in just to check! And certainly the *History of New London* will be on many Christmas gift lists.

In the last newsletter we looked at the New London land which Joshua Hempstead divided among his children and grandchildren in his 1758 will. This time we will discuss the land Hempstead owned outside of New London, both that listed in his inventory and some other that he had given to his children before his death.

Numerically speaking, there were far more pieces of land in New London (which at that time included Montville and Waterford) than outside it. Thanks to the Stonington farm land, however, the out of town land was worth almost £150 more than the New London land:

about 500 acres of land in a farm at Stonington £3,250

41 1/2 acres of land in Stonington £135

8 acres of land in Groton near Peter Crary's £28

about 120 acres of land at Colchester £345

The largest piece of land, the farm in Stonington/Mystic (now Old Mystic), had been Hempstead's grandfather's, then his father's. It was sold during his mother Elizabeth's widowhood, but Hempstead won it back in a court case that lasted several years. Originally 200 acres, he purchased more land and eventually expanded it to 500 acres. Hempstead worked that farm himself for a number of years, with help from his sons and his slave, Adam, then rented it to tenant farmers until 1751, when his grandson Joshua was in a position to take over. It is not clear from the diary what sort of rent young

Joshua paid. The farm deserves its own article, which will be in the next newsletter.

The Colchester land, which was willed to son Robert, was also rented to tenant farmers. As early as January of 1714 Hempstead *Leased unto Benja Graves of Colchester 100 Acres of Land for 3 years at 5s 0d p annum at Poagwonk* [now part of Salem]. A few years later Graves also leased the use of some pasture *for wintering one Beast in Each year.* (May 30, 1718) By 1722 Richard Tozar and Jonathan Daniels of Colchester were using the farm. In 1745 Hempstead *Leased out to Sd [Samuel] Dodge by Parrole ye Sd S E Cornr of my farm below ye Run of water wch was formerly fenced in by kilburne & also ye witch medow.* (May 31). It is not clear if this was part of the same land involved in the earlier leases.

Like Hempstead's New London land, the Colchester land was in at least two pieces. In his will, he says:

Item I having heretofore sold fifty acres of my Colchester land which I designed to have given to my daughter Abigail Minor and given her the money which it was sold for, therefore I shall not give my said daughter any more of my land in this my will. . .

This is probably the transaction described in May of 1754. *Wednsd 22 . . . wee also measured my land on the N Side John Dodges & made it 50 acres & 131 Rod wch John Dodge Junr would buy & will give L20 an Acre. pay 1/2 next Christmas & the other 1/2 1 year hence.* John Dodge (presumably Senior) also *agreed with me*

for my Dark hollow & to give me L200 L100 down & L100 next may & Come down Next Monday come fortnight (with a good Bondsman) to make writings &c. (May 30, 1754) Hempstead had previously been offered L200 for the *Swamp att ye Dark hollow 7 acres & 3/4* by a Benjamin Morgan (May 24, 1754). Hempstead does not say why he preferred to sell to the Dodges. Dark hollow is in the area of the end of Sullivan Rd. in Salem, off Rte. 85. Dodge did not have his bondsman lined up by the agreed-on date, but on Saturday June 22nd Hempstead records that he was *at home in the aftern Writing Deeds &c for John Dodge. I Recd L100 Bonds for L500 & the Deed Deposited for L600 (in Capt Coits hands) untill I am Secured.*

The eight acres in Groton that had been Hempstead's father's, also apparently sold by Elizabeth Hempstead,

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New London County Historical Society
Incorporated 1870

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In September I took myself on vacation to the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario, where for four days I feasted on theatre, including a great production of "Hamlet." What has this to do with the New London County Historical Society? Ah. "Hamlet," like so many of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, is chock full of words, lines and speeches that are part of our cultural memory, usually hidden away and unrecognized, but helping us express ourselves when least expected. Several of those lines, a remnant of that week up north, have kept me company for the last few weeks. Foremost among them but slightly altered are words spoken by Claudius: "*When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions.*" I invite you to change the word "*sorrows*" to "*worries*" to understand the state of my mind of late.

Recently worries by the battalion have come to most, if not all of us, as individuals, as citizens, or as volunteers and staff at the New London County Historical Society. The chief worry is financial. Personally we are watching our 401(k) and home values plummet and are worrying about heating our homes, fueling our cars, and paying for our children's education, not to mention their food. At the same time we at the NLCHS are watching our endowment's value sink, the cost of the Shaw Mansion and its collection's maintenance and security increase, and the growing difficulty our dedicated friends and members may have in offering us their financial support.

But, lest I sound too pessimistic about "*these slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*," there is also good news to report as we have "*taken arms against a sea of troubles.*" In the last year at the Society we have been very successful in both building our membership and in creating programming to engage our visitors, young and old, old and new. Actually, it is very likely that our programming is one of the reasons for our increased membership. "Tea with Jane Perkins," "New London Through Time and Place," and "Tales of Death and Mourning," all have brought local history alive for visitors to our home at the Shaw Mansion. The Flock Theatre's performance of "Pride and Prejudice" also brought us new visibility in the community. These are gratifying developments that we will continue and will build upon. As Hamlet said in a different context, "*the play's the thing*," which "caught" the interest of new visitors to the Shaw Mansion.

To return to my first paragraph: without our even realizing it, the ideas and the words of Shakespeare are part of our lives. The same is true of our history, whether or not we are conscious of it. Our goal in the upcoming months and years is to foster a sense in our community that our history is an essential of our lives today here in southeastern Connecticut, and that we all own that history, its artifacts, its stories, its people. We trust by continuing to bring that sense of ownership forward, our support from the community, in time and treasure, will continue and will grow, come what may. We hope we can count on you.

~Deborah Donovan

¹William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Other quotes from *Hamlet*.

New and Renewed Members

Jeff Rubin	Oberlin, Ohio
John Ruddy	Waterford
Mr. & Mrs. Carl Schultz	Lisbon
Thomas Evanko	New Britain
Emily Nassetta	Worcester, MA
Sean & Julie Bennett Jones	Groton
Wayne G. Tillinghast	Groton
Mrs. John T MacDougal	New London
Dorothy & George Avery	Chevy Chase, MD
Catherine Zahn	Pennington, NJ
Dominic DeBrincat	Mansfield
Jeff Flower	Old Lyme
Cynthia B. Allyn	Groton
Hillary Hewitt	Sydney, Australia
Bernard Balsler	Kingwood, TX
John Geary	Uncasville
Elsie Lignelli	New London
Dr. Scott Rottinghaus	New London
Peter & Joyce Springsteel	Mystic
Dr. Martin J. Butler	New Bedford, MA
Jessica S. Hayashi	Niskayuna, NY
Marvin Berger	New London
Dianne Brown	Norwich
Robert Sanders	Pensacola, FL
Kevin & Deirdre Cavanagh	New London
Judy Dowell	Hillsboro, OR
Robert M. Nye	Waterford
Ruth Nagle	New London
Mrs. Francis C. McGuire	New London
Richard & Dottie Hoyt	Groton
Rodney D. Williams	Groton
Pamela L. Briggs	Ledyard
Rachel Rock-Blake	Northampton, MA
Robert McInnes	Charlotte, NC
Lewis & Dona Marquardt	Austin, TX
Vivian Brooks	Waterford
Thomas J. Olsen	New London

Contributing

Frank & Lynda McLaughlin	Mystic
Joseph Selinger	Stonington
Roy & Valerie Grimm	Noank
Charles & Bettie Chu	New London
Daniel & Deborah Connors	New London
Meriwether Schmid	Riverside
Deana Bossdorf	New London
Francis & Russell Vocalina	Waterford
Kevin Doyle	New London
Christopher Atwood	New London

Sustaining

F.M. & J. Durrschmidt	Mystic
Wally Trolan	Groton
Claire & Bill Peterson	N. Stonington
Pat & Tod Schaefer	Mystic

Life

Patricia C. Thevenet	Voluntown
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(Continued from page 2)

was recovered earlier than the larger farm. The recovery was a long process. Hempstead first mentions getting a writ to sue Peter Creery in November of 1713. In May of 1715 he reported *I was at Court al day. my action was pleaded agst Creery Capt [whic]h Defended. I gained ye Case.* It was not until December of 1716 that he could say **Wednsd 5...** *I went to Groton. ye Constable Samll Fish delivered me ye .8. acres of Land yt I Received of Peter Creery at Mistick.*

Hempstead had it re-surveyed in 1720, with a road laid out from the Stonington-Norwich road to the southwest corner of the property. The exact location of the piece is difficult to determine because of the usual description by abutters, but there are a few clues. The survey shows that it was near the upper part of the Mystic River (now Whitford Brook), because one of the boundaries was Winthrop's twenty rods along the river. The early Winthrops had been granted a great deal of land all over southeastern Connecticut. One of those grants was twenty rods (330 feet) either side of the fresh water part of the Mystic River to bring down timber from Lantern Hill. Presumably they also farmed or otherwise cultivated the land.

Another clue is that the land was bounded westerly and southerly by Peter Creery's land. Creery had inherited his father's house, which is still standing at 251 Shewville Road in Groton. The house is a little north of Hyde Pond Court on the other side of Shewville. While there is no record of where on the property the house was, it does

help locate at least Creery's property as being more toward the southern than northern end of Whitford Brook.

In December of 1726 Hempstead *Let out my 8 Acres in Groton & Mr Winthrops 20 Rod agst it to Peter Creery for 35s p year for 7 year & he to leave it Sufficiently fenced.*

(Hempstead was by then business agent for the Winthrops.) He mentions giving Creery another lease in April of 1744, and receiving *20s of Peter Creery for 2 yrs Rent.* Probably Creery continued to lease the land, as Hempstead does not mention either having another tenant or working the land himself. It was given to Mary Hempstead Pierpoint by Hempstead's will. She and her husband Thomas sold it to Nathan Creery on Sept. 5, 1759, for £36.

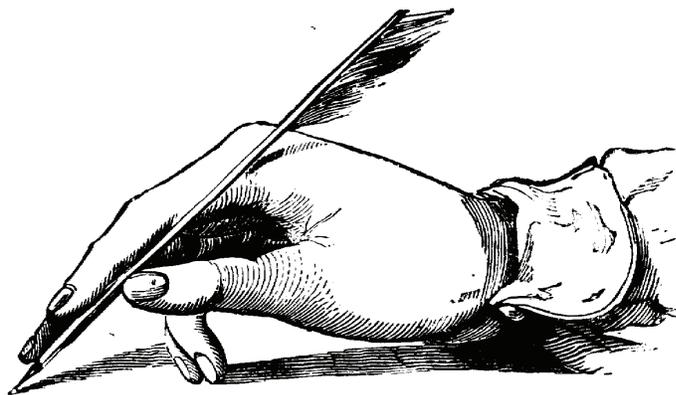
The other, 41 ½ acre piece of land in Stonington, was also willed to Mary

Pierpoint. She sold it in 1776 to Deacon Elisha Bennett, who built a house on the property. That house is also still standing, at 58 Wolf Neck Road.

Interestingly, Mary Eldridge (Hempstead's granddaughter) received use of the "house and land she now improves" for ten years from the date of the will, but it is not listed separately in the inventory. Her husband Christopher bought a three acre lot of land and built a house on it in 1769, when the ten year tenancy was up.

Patricia M. Schaefer

Note: Information on land and houses in Old Mystic is from *A History of Old Mystic 1600-1999*, by Kathleen Greenhalgh, published 1999.



New Business Member

Brig Level — Educational Partner
Connecticut College

Looking at the 1920's ... with help from our volunteers

Votes for women, prohibition, urbanization, crime, modern American literature...how do our images of post World War I life relate to what really went on in New London in the 1920's? The NLCHS scrapbooks offer us insights. The increasing social and political work of women at the time are highlighted by a few fascinating scrapbooks; one kept by Mary Reese Mitchell details her first decade with the New London League of Women voters, another by Ruth Dudley Sperry, a reporter on the New London Day, covers women's issues in detail, and a third by Ada Chase concerns the Women's Council of the Norwich Girl's Community Club and other community organizations of the time.

But men kept scrapbooks, too, and one of the most important was kept by E. Frank Morgan, twice mayor of New London. Volunteer Ann Horsman has been investigating and creating a finding aid for it. Ann writes:

Turning the pages of a brown, hardcover ledger that measures 17"L, 7"W, 5 and 1/4"H, I wonder who recycled this grocery store account book into a scrapbook of articles about New London government when E. Frank Morgan was mayor of New London, 1918-1921. Newspaper articles, mostly about monthly meetings of New London Common Council, and some memorabilia are pasted over the handwritten record of grocery store sales, making

the pages, now brown and brittle with age, thicker than the remaining blank pages. Yet the sturdy binding still holds them together.

This is fascinating reading, a wealth of material about New London as World War I ended and the post-war era began, a decade short of 100 years ago. Part of the fascination is in comparing what appears there with what I have read a few hours earlier when the Day is delivered to my door at 5:30 am. Army troops going off to war, other troops being welcomed home; concerns about a flu epidemic; the need to rebuild roads to accommodate increased traffic; how to attract new industry; how to attract shipping; what to do about inadequate funds for school buildings; changes in the city charter.

Also interesting are items about the piggeries used for garbage disposal; regulation of milk delivery due to health concerns; development at Ocean Beach; prohibition (18th Amendment); women getting involved in politics (19th Amendment).

In these pages one sees what goes on in the police and fire departments, the lists of building permits, names of those involved in and elected to city politics, problems relating to hospitals, housing development.

From Ann's description you can see just how relevant the 1920's are... scrapbooks are just the beginning.

The cast of "Spirits of Shaw Mansion:"
Kevin Doyle as Benjamin Perkins, Penny
Havard as Ellen Perkins and Jennifer
Emerson as Jane Perkins



Family Matters — Learning more about the Perkins Family

While many of the basic facts about the Shaw and Perkins families are well known – birth and death dates, who married who – many of the details about the people who inhabited this house are not. In the hundred years since Jane Perkins sold the Shaw Mansion to the historical society and moved out, much of the family story has been lost or forgotten. During the last year, both Jen Emerson and I have done a lot of digging to uncover more about the families that lived, worked, and died here.

The Shaws, who first built and lived in the house, are the better known family. Nathaniel Shaw Jr. served as Connecticut's Naval Agent during the Revolution, and he is the subject of our "Plunder & Peril: New London In the American Revolution" exhibit. It's his name on the plaque outside the house. But the Perkins family lived here for longer, made their own mark on the architecture of the house, and was not short on distinguished members of society either. Elias Perkins was a member of the U.S. Congress for a term, mayor of the city and a judge, and entertained the Marquis de Lafayette in the dining room. Two of his grandsons were U.S. consuls to Hawaii and Tahiti, and several of the men in that generation lived for a time in faraway locales: Chile, Guatemala, California, and Arizona. Perkins family members helped create banks, railroads, aid societies, and businesses.

These details, and so many others we have discovered, have helped us create two living history programs and a tem-

porary exhibit so far this year. The first program, "Tea with Miss Perkins," was an interactive experience this summer where audience members ate, drank, and conversed with Jane Perkins, and were served by Mary Geary, the maid, in 1876. Personal details about the Perkins family and their times were woven effortlessly into pleasant conversation. It was tremendously successful and led us to create our second program, "Spirits of the Shaw Mansion." This limited-engagement performance was held over the weekend of Oct. 24 and 25, and opened up the Mansion at night, for a dimly-lit tour of the rooms by three members of the Perkins family: Jane, Benjamin, and their mother Mrs. Ellen Perkins. Audiences experienced the house, the family, and the customs of 1863 – a much more somber time in the family's, and the

nation's, history. This time of the Civil War is also reflected in our temporary exhibit in the front hall "Cash, Courage, and Comfort Boxes," created by our summer intern Emily Nassetta. Benjamin and William Perkins, two of Jane's brothers, fought in the Civil War and are featured prominently in the exhibit.

Both of our "Perkins programs" have received a great deal of support and praise from our members and the community. There is still more to be discovered about this family (and we won't neglect the Shaws!) and we look forward to building upon our successful programming in the next year.

~Heather Tichenor

Closed Saturdays — The Shaw Mansion will be closed on Saturdays from November to mid-May.

Do we have your e-mail address?

We don't want you to miss anything

The "Teas with Miss Perkins" were so popular that Jen and Heather, with Kevin and Penny, created a new program — "The Spirits of Shaw Mansion" — which hadn't been fully developed when our last newsletter went out in late August. For this "late breaking" news we sent out press releases and listed the event in calendars, and we sent out an "E-MAIL BLAST" to all of our members, that is, the members who have given us their e-mail addresses, and have kept us abreast of the changes in their e-mail addresses. Did you get the note?

Please send us your e-mail address and address changes so that you won't miss a thing.

info@newlondonhistory.org

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>Tapestry: A Living History of the Black Family in Southern Connecticut</i> by Dr. J.M. Rose and B.W. Brown An introduction to the role of African Americans in early New England history. Contains genealogies. (NLCHS)	\$5
<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>In the Footsteps of George Washington</i> by William G. Clotworthy. A guidebook to Washington sites along the East Coast, including the Shaw Mansion.	\$25
<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>Peter Strickland: New London Shipmaster, Boston Merchant, First Consul to Senegal</i> by Stephen Grant A New London connection to maritime trade with Africa at the end of the 19 th century.	\$18
<i>Leviathan The History of Whaling in America</i> by Eric Jay Dolin A good one-volume history of an important local maritime enterprise.	\$28
<i>A USEFUL FRIEND—A Companion to the Joshua Hempstead Diary 1711-1758</i> by Patricia Schaefer (NLCHS)	\$25

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<i>Naval Submarine Base New London</i>	\$20
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