

FOREVER

USA

custom house MARITIMES

SPRING 2013

Celebrating 30 years of the New London Maritime Society



New London Harbor Light (detail). United States Postal Service 2013. Howard Koslow.

2013: A YEAR THAT WILL LIVE IN MY MEMORY AND THAT OF THE CUSTOM HOUSE MARITIME MUSEUM.

Every once in a while we all experience a confluence of happy circumstances that just cry out for a celebration. Well, 2013 is one of those years for us at the Museum. It is the 30th anniversary of founding of the New London Maritime Society, thanks to Lucille Showalter and her happy band of supporters in 1983, thus saving the Custom House from the fate of going private!

It is the 180th anniversary of the design and erection of the Custom House itself, the oldest continually and presently operating Custom Office in the nation. It is the year when the U.S. Postal Service will offer a Forever Stamp depicting our own New London Harbor Lighthouse, a unique tribute.

It is the fifth year of Susan's excellent leadership as Executive Director of the Museum. It is the fifth - and final - consecutive year of my Presidency of the organization. It *may* be the year that we are awarded stewardship of Race Rock Lighthouse, currently under evaluation in Washington.

You want more? I'll give you more. It is the 80th year of my birth, already celebrated with open heart surgery - successful, I might add - and with a private party and chocolate cake arranged by my great friends at the Custom House.

SO, LETS HAVE A GALA. MAYBE TWO GALAS.

We are planning a least one celebration (aka fund-raiser) to be held within the next few months for the people of New London and the region, designed specifically to raise funds to paint the iconic Lighthouse that is the pride and property of all of us. And we will need all of us to participate. For the goal to get this done is at least \$100,000.

Folks, let me tell you: getting older is a state of body; getting "old" is a state of mind, and a choice. Get involved, in our efforts at your community Museum and in anything that interests you. And stay involved.

Here I quote AUNTIE MAME AND HER FAMOUS CAUTION: "LIFE IS A BANQUET, AND MOST POOR SUCKERS ARE STARVING TO DEATH." Don't starve. Have your fill. And join us. That's what we're doing. --Geprge Sprepace, president NLMS



It will cost about \$100,000 to scaffold, tent, scrape, and repaint the lighthouse. We also have damage from Superstorm Sandy to fix, including the walkway and sea walls. Over time, we also hope to rebuild the dock. Watch for our fund-raisers or donate at nlmaritimesociety.org.

January through March, the Custom House Maritime Museum is open Thursday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday from 1--5 PM. April through December, the museum is open Tuesday through Sunday (closed Monday), from 1--5 PM. or by appointment, 860-447-2501.

NEW LONDON HARBOR, CONNECTICUT

Two Major Milestones on the Horizon

This year we will reach celebratory milestones for the New London Maritime Society and its Custom House Museum: the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Society in 1983, and the fifteenth anniversary of its library, dedicated in 1988. When she first envisioned a cultural institution centered on New London's maritime past and present, the late Lucille Showalter intended that a library of maritime studies would someday be a part of it. Much else had to be accomplished first, however, the immediate objective being to acquire the architectural gem at 150 Bank Street to house the programs and exhibits that would bring the new society to life. The building itself would be the society's prime exhibit: an 1835 Greek Revival structure built for the ages where customs revenue, then the sole source of funds for the federal government, was collected for the port of New London. (Income taxes were not imposed until the Civil War era.) On February 26, 1983, The Day paper announced that the Custom House was on the federal "chopping block," and a lively and prolonged series of editorials, articles, and reader letters ensued. The Maritime Society was incorporated in April and immediately launched a membership drive, sponsoring public events to raise awareness of its intention to acquire the Custom House -- which succeeded in 1985 after a two-year effort. A decade-long renovation soon began. With help from the Society's trustees, Lucille Showalter obtained a number of federal, state and local grants and loans to plan and execute with local firms the work that resulted in the stately landmark we occupy today.

While most of the Custom House Museum was given over to exhibit spaces which would double as program venues, a room on the second floor was designated for a library. This year we will celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of its establishment. On May 8, 1998, the future library was formally dedicated to the memory of Frank L. McGuire, honoring his many years of legal work on behalf of the Society, and his unflagging support of its mission. A planning committee worked from 1998 to 2000, considering the many issues involved in creating a working library, and board chairman Benjamin Martin designed the elegant floor-to-ceiling cherry shelving and cabinetry that was so beautifully installed by Robert Chalmers. The collection occupying those shelves has grown steadily with generous gifts from Society members and trustees, and by purchases of books, nautical charts, maps, prints, photographs and 19th century documents with an acquisitions fund established by the extended family of Frank McGuire and a number of McGuire family friends.

Laurie Deredita, our cataloger, regularly adds these acquisitions to Connecticut's online library catalog, and in recent months has added a number of items unique to that database. Last fall we welcomed another volunteer, Eugene MacMullan, who is using his expertise as a book conservator to repair books, construct protective boxes for fragile older items, and place clear mylar protectors over worn dustjackets. Mr. MacMullan began by conserving two deteriorated scrapbooks about Ocean Beach Park that had been assembled in the 1940s by Mrs. Showalter.

A library must be more than an interesting collection in good repair and handsomely housed, however: In his most recent 12-month report the Librarian logged fifty-six requests for information (most via email) and received over fifty Thursday afternoon visits in person, not counting those who step into the library during a guided tour. The most unusual email request came from the editor of a Russian journal of Polynesian studies concerning a New London sea captain and a 19th century incident at Easter Island; he later mailed us the issue reprinting our email exchange. Information requests are received in roughly equal numbers from local residents and from people in other parts of the country who learn of us through the Museum website. The website also offers the Librarian's "book of the month," usually a recent acquisition that contains references to New London or to one of the Museum's particular interests.

As it approaches its fifteen-year milestone, the library consists of some 2100 books and pamphlets, over twenty archival document boxes, 19th century customs records on microfilm, several maritime periodical backfiles, the Robert Stewart Steamship Model Collection, and many nautical charts, prints, and special newspaper editions, together with the historical materials that were on the premises prior to 1998: the Robert Mills portfolio of Custom House renderings, the correspondence of New London customs collector Ingoldsby Crawford, the Harold Cone local history collection, and the glass plate negative collection. In addition to this rich array of physical resources we enjoy the use of an up-to-date computer that provides access to the wealth of maritime and historical information available on the Internet. An exhibit of highlights from the library will be on view this summer to commemorate its fifteenth anniversary as well as the three decades that have elapsed since the founding of the New London Maritime Society.

Brian Rogers, Librarian



New volunteer John Guccione is a Merchant Marine engineer. We recently purchased the former lighthouse lens from the Orient Point Lighthouse. John was able to wire the light and put it together so that it now whirrs, flashes and turns--part of the new lighthouse display.

SPRING CALENDAR go to www.nlmaritimesociety.org or Facebook 'Custom House Maritime Museum' for the latest updates

NLMS SPECIAL EVENTS

March 21 - *Third Thursday* lecture, 6:30 PM. **Dr. Nicholas J. Spera**, principal of Groton's Marine Science Magnet School, will talk about the students' experiments with local fish farming. Admission is FREE for NLMS members, \$8 all others. Space limited to 45. Call 860-447-2501 to register.

April 12 - Friday, from 6:30 to 8 PM. **Real McCoy Rum-Tasting** - to benefit the Custom House Tent! Try the new Real McCoy Rum; hear Steve Jones talk about the real McCoy; and watch the film, which was made locally and opened at the Garde in 2008. Rum tasting & hearty hors d'oeuvres. RSVP: Tickets: \$20 members, \$25 all others.

April 18 - *Third Thursday* lecture, 6:30 PM. **Glen Fedzer**, visiting professor USCG Academy, will talk about the USCG and the US Dept. of Stater in Sierra Leone. Admission is FREE for NLMS members, \$8 all others. Space limited to 45. Call 860-447-2501 to register.

April 28 - Sunday, 1-5 PM. **Silhouettes**. Have artist Deborah O'Connor create a silhouette of you, your child, or your pet! A perfect Mothers' Day gift. Silhouettes - \$30, copies \$15. Appointments for sittings are required. Call: 860-447-2501

May 1 - reservations taken for **Sentinels on the Sound: Lighthouse Weekends** - every Saturday in July and August, we will host a variety of lighthouse boat trips off the Custom House Pier, a series of Lighthouse lectures and special events. Call 860-447-2501. www.nlmaritimesociety.org

May 19 - Sunday lecture, 2:00 PM. **Capt. Glenn Sulmasy**, USCG, will present a History of the United States Coast Guard. Admission is FREE for NLMS members, \$8 all others. Space limited to 45. Call 860-447-2501 to register.

NLMS EVERY MONTH

Third Tuesdays - **Jibboom Club #1 Gams** - Reviving Jibboom Club #1 with maritime talk, good friends & cookies. 1-4 PM.

Wednesdays - **Custom House Maritime Matters**, on Metrocast cable channel 25, with host George Spreace, from 5-6 PM.

Third Thursdays - Lecture, Special presentations, and Jibboom Roundtables. FREE members, \$8 all others.

Sign up for our weekly e-mail events blasts - write to nlmaritimedirector@gmail.com



NEW in the Museum Shop! - Stamp sets, ink pads & note cards.

Visit the **Museum Shop** for new & vintage maritime books, toys, nautical dinnerware, semaphore scarves, old-time gifts, and ornaments. We have Lighthouse Keepers caps, Old Town Mill corn meal for Johnny Cakes, balloon-powered toy boats, Mark Shasha books & prints; USCG video about the *Eagle*; whale bottle openers, photographic prints by Bonita Waesche, John Mock CDs, New London cards, & coffee mugs.

I'M JOINING THE NEW LONDON MARITIME SOCIETY!

Name _____ phone _____ e-mail _____

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Individual \$35___ Family \$50___ Contributor \$100___ Sponsor \$250___ Patron \$1,000___ (this entitles you Life Membership!)

Cash___ Check___ - please make payment to New London Maritime Society Visa___ Master Card___ AmEx___

Number _____ Exp. date _____ Security code _____

Benefits of membership include *free* admission, invitations to special events, discounts, and a newsletter.

Custom House Maritime Museum 150 Bank Street, New London, Connecticut 06320

April - December, we are open Tuesday through Sunday, 1 to 5pm
Call us at 860-447-2501 for information or to make an appointment.



January - March, we are open Thursday through Sunday from 1 to 5 pm
Facebook Custom House Maritime Museum, www.nlmaritimesociety.org

This winter, a major project of the New London Maritime Society was preparing an application to the National Park Service to take on ownership of Race Rock Light Station. To bolster that proposal, we offered two-for-one memberships in January. We also formed alliances with two favorite partner organizations: the Ledge Light Foundation, which works to preserve the red brick lighthouse in New London harbor; and the Henry L. Ferguson Museum on Fishers Island, located just a short skip from Race Rock at the entrance to the Atlantic from Long Island Sound. The good news is that, together, we now number 750 strong! We three organizations are collaborating on the summer's *Sentinels of the Sound: Lighthouse Weekends*, and will be working together on other exciting events in seasons to come. *You* are invited to be part of the fun. Make this the summer you finally get to Fishers Island. Take Project 'O' out to peruse Ledge Light. Visit the lighthouse exhibition at New London's Custom House and climb the 118 steps up the Harbor Lighthouse. You never know whom you'll meet at the top!

From the LEDGE LIGHT FOUNDATION

The board of directors of the New London Ledge Lighthouse Foundation, would like to extend a big thank you to the Custom House Maritime Museum for its gracious offer to extend complimentary family membership in the Custom House to all current Ledge Light Foundation members. Over the past several years, we have partnered with the Custom House on various lighthouse related projects. As we move forward, we hope to expand that relationship and look forward to an exciting 2013 summer season.

The **New London Ledge Lighthouse Foundation** continues its work to restore and preserve Ledge Lighthouse and to improve the tour experience. Tours to the lighthouse are open to the public and run from July through September. Project Oceanology, on the University of Connecticut campus at Avery Point in Groton, books the tours and transports the visitors to the lighthouse in their comfortable blue research boat. In the summer months, you can call Project O at 860-445-9007 to book your tour. Once on the lighthouse, the knowledgeable volunteer tour guides of the New London Ledge Lighthouse Foundation enhance your tour. There are many rooms with informational exhibits and galleries, an air conditioned theater running the documentary, "Ledge Light", a gift shop, and a furnished "keeper's room." Each tour spends ample time at the lighthouse so guests can explore every room. And, we guarantee you will see Ernie, the keeper whose ghost is said to haunt Ledge Light! Many new exhibits are in the works for 2013. If you haven't seen Ledge Lighthouse yet, or you've seen it in the past, book a tour and come on out to see all the wonderful changes that have been made. After visiting the lighthouse, the Project O boat will cruise up the Thames River for more sightseeing. It's a fun way to spend a summer afternoon! Bring the whole family! Tours are open to everyone over the age of seven.

We were able to get out to Ledge Light after Superstorm Sandy ravaged our area last Autumn. The lighthouse fared well with the exception of some damage to the outside access stairway. As soon as the weather allows, we hope to make the necessary repairs. As you can well imagine, a structure in the middle of Long Island Sound is difficult and expensive to maintain. We are always in search of new funding sources, and even the smallest donation can help us in our efforts to improve and maintain Ledge Light.



Donations can be made online at www.LedgeLighthouse.org, or you can send your donation to New London Ledge Lighthouse Foundation, P.O. Box 855, New London, CT 06320. All donations are completely tax deductible. For more information about Ledge Light, events, products and more, go to our website. We are always looking for volunteers and ideas.

Marcie Gipstein, LedgeLight Foundation

www.ledgelighthouse.org

From the HENRY L. FERGUSON MUSEUM

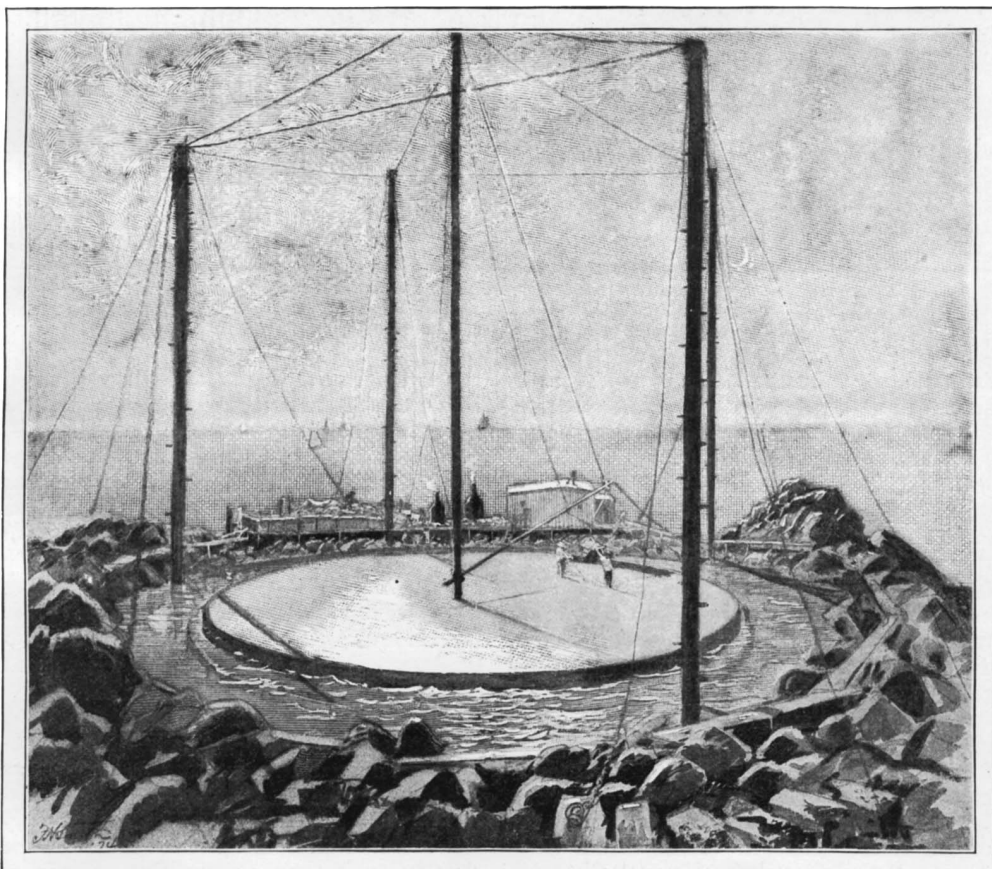
A Collaborative "Race Rock Light" Exhibition

In recent years the **Henry L. Ferguson Museum (HLFM)** on Fishers Island has initiated active collaborations with several mainland institutions. This year we are extremely pleased to have established a working relationship with the New London Maritime Society (NLMS) and its associated Custom House Maritime Museum. Guided by its dynamic director Susan Tamulevich, the NLMS has been sharing expertise and providing digital scans of images and maps for the HLFM's 2013 exhibition entitled "Race Rock Light." After our show closes in the spring of 2014, we will in turn loan back to the NLMS those parts of our exhibition that are useful for display in the Customs House Maritime Museum. In the last several months we have sent the NLMHS selected photographs and documents from our files to aid its effort to secure ownership of Race Rock Light. It's a win/win relationship with a two-way flow of research and images that could easily expand to encompass a variety of subject areas in years to come.

Our "Race Rock Light" exhibition chronicles the history of this legendary light from conception to completion with a focus on the remarkable construction feat accomplished by engineer Francis Hopkinson Smith and his partner on the project, New London's own Capt. T.A. Scott. The show opens on Sunday, June 30, 2013 and will remain up until mid-June 2014. We extend an invitation to all members of the NLMS to visit this exhibit and others at the Henry L. Ferguson Museum. Details of our hours of operation can be found at our website www.fergusonmuseum.org.



The Fishers Island Ferry schedule can be found at www.fiferry.com. As there are no taxis on Fishers Island, the process of getting to the HLFM without a car can be difficult. We are located approximately one mile from the ferry dock at the edge of town. It's a pleasant walk in good weather for you traverse between Fort H.G. Wright's old Parade Ground on one side and its former Officers Row on the other. As you approach town, you pass through a cluster of summer cottages built when Fishers Island first was first established as a resort in the late 1870s and early 1880s. However, if the weather is bad—or "heading south"—I would suggest bringing a car over, or postponing your trip until the weather improves. Please call the Museum if you have questions or any problems. Our phone number is 631-788-7239.



CONSTRUCTION OF THE RACE ROCK LIGHTHOUSE, LONG ISLAND SOUND.

This picture, showing the state of the foundation on September 5, 1874, is from a Sketch by Mr. F. Hopkinson Smith, the constructing engineer.

There is no admission fee for individuals or small groups that visit the Henry L. Ferguson Museum. In recent years we have been charging a fee of \$5 a head for groups of ten or more. Given our relationship with the NLMS, that fee will be waived for organized groups of any size that visit under the sponsorship of the NLMS. We look forward to your visit!

Pierce Rafferty, Director, Henry L. Ferguson Museum, Fishers Island, NY

www.fergusonmuseum.org.



1909 postcard image

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