

# custom house MARITIMES SUMMER 2023



We've turned 40! Photo, above: current New London Maritime Society trustee Lloyd Beachy is one of three original incorporators of NLMS back on June 13, 1983.



What matters most Photo top: 1.) PRESERVATION - A visitor at 1908 Ledge Lighthouse in June 2023; middle: 2.) HISTORY - NLMS founder Lucile Showalter in a portrait by Michael Peery; bottom: 3.) EDUCATION - Our Local History & Landmarks program in the NL Public Schools' third grade has run for 14 years. Happy Birthday to us!

## Turning a corner from the director

NL Maritime Society's 40th anniversary celebration was simply wonderful! Past, present, & honorary trustees showed up in force to toast NLMS. Trustee Adrianna Bates concocted a truly splendid meal for us all; Lloyd Beachy, the last standing of NLMS's original three incorporators, gave a rousing speech. Suzy Boada made an amazing cake, which Lloyd Beachy cut - per NLMS tradition - with the Heidehreich sword. Needless to say, there was plenty of catching up to do, and no one wanted the celebration to end!!

Far-flung trustees relayed their congratulations. Fifteen years ago when I started at NLMS Nick Hanke was the area director of US Customs and Border Patrol. A lover of US Customs history, he'd hold regional meetings at the custom house, passing out our newsletter to every agent. Now working in Washington and an NLMS honorary trustee, himself, Nicholas E. Hanke, MEP, NREMT, wrote: *Please pass on my best wishes to Trustees and Staff, as well as my heartfelt appreciation for all of their tireless efforts to maintain and foster the awareness and history of our maritime heritage, as well as U.S. Customs and Border Protection's and the former U.S. Customs Service's legacy in southern New England.* Thank you, Nick, and thank you to everyone of you who has helped this organization grow across four decades.

Last fall NLMS trustees had the foresight to plan a *Replace the Roof* campaign as our 40th anniversary goal. Despite our best efforts, water penetration issues at the museum have been constant. We applied for a Frank Loomis Palmer grant and received \$165,000 in seed money. Then last December, somewhat earlier than anticipated, the custom house roof failed.

When the state offered an incredible grant opportunity, NLMS applied and successfully passed the first round. However, in June, we received the devastating news that we did not receive the grant. The grant was for \$500,000, and combined with our Palmer funds would have allowed us to stop 99% of water penetration into the custom house building for the next 50 years. Now we are on to a Plan B -- a temporary solution. However, we launch the campaign for the permanent roof later this month.

We can do it. We will do it! NLMS is committed to its core mission of preservation. This organization was established in 1983 when passionate New Londoners, led by historian Lucile Showalter, rallied to save their local U.S. Custom House. The group formed NLMS and repurposed the building as the Custom House Maritime Museum, ensuring the preservation of New London's maritime history and landmarks.

New London's 1833 US Custom House was built at the height of the City's maritime power, when New London was the second-greatest whaling port in the world. City leaders had petitioned the U.S. Treasury to build them 'a gem on the waterfront'. Architect Robert Mills, best-known for his design of the U.S. national Washington Monument, provided just that. The custom house and NLMS are here to stay. With your help, we will continue safeguarding our 'gem' along with New London's maritime history for generations to come.

--Susan Tamulevich

*Local Friendly Authentic*



Photo, above: NLMS trustees past & present, and volunteers gathered on June 13, 2023 to toast our 40th anniversary.

## summer highlights - for full listings, go to [nlmaritimesociety.org](http://nlmaritimesociety.org)



7-15, 7-20, 8-5 - Little Gull excursions

- Explore Inside **LEDGE LIGHTHOUSE**, July through September. Climb up to the lantern room then go out onto the balcony! We'll take a 15-minute boat ride from the New London waterfront to reach the lighthouse in the middle of NL harbor, explore the light for about one hour, then return home. [brownpapertickets.com/event/6035140](http://brownpapertickets.com/event/6035140)

- Tours to climb **HARBOR LIGHTHOUSE** run *year-round*. The views at the top are spectacular! We meet at the lighthouse, then climb 116 steps to the lantern room – all the while learning about the 261-year history of Harbor Light, the oldest and the tallest lighthouse on Long Island Sound. [brownpapertickets.com/event/5127942](http://brownpapertickets.com/event/5127942).

- Special Excursion to **LITTLE GULL LIGHTHOUSE**. This is the rare opportunity to land at Little Gull Island and explore inside the lighthouse (est. 1802, current tower 1867) all the way up to the lantern. We are offering four, two & one-half hour trips aboard the high-speed *Silver Eel*. [brownpapertickets.com/event/6036735](http://brownpapertickets.com/event/6036735).



7-30, 8-27, 9-24 - Open Mic at the Museum

- Extended Excursion to **LITTLE GULL ISLAND & LIGHTHOUSE** for Plein Air Artists and Photographers. In partnership with the Little Gull Light Foundation, with Matthew Male, we are offering three different extended-length trips out of New London, CT, aboard the high-speed *Silver Eel*. All three trips take place Thursday, July 20 (rain date is Thursday, July 27). [brownpapertickets.com/event/6049847](http://brownpapertickets.com/event/6049847).

- **Open Mic at the Museum**, meets from 6-9 PM the last Sunday of the month: Share your original music, poetry, prose, stand-up, or just say what is on your mind. OpenMic welcomes performers of all kinds. Perform, or just enjoy. By donation. **July 30, August 27, September 24.**

- **JIBBOOM CLUB #1**, meets the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 1:30 PM. Join us for a talk, good company, coffee & cookies. Sponsored by the Maco Family Fund, the gatherings are FREE and open to all. **July 18, August 15, September 19.**



7-18, 8-15, 9-19 -Jibboom CLub

- **July 16, 1:30 PM.** Book signing: **Mark Borton**, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the 'Quoddy' Tidal-Electric Power Project'. Mark Borton tells the tale of 'Quoddy' which was to be built off the coast of Maine & New Brunswick and would generate enough electricity to power much of New England. An encore performance by Mark Borton who has thrice before entertained Custom House visitors with his tidal tales.

- Excursions to **RACE ROCK LIGHTHOUSE** will be listed very soon. Please watch our website [nlmaritimesociety.org](http://nlmaritimesociety.org) for updates on all summer lighthouse tours.

Be the first to know - sign up for weekly email new blasts: [nlmaritimedirector@gmail.com](mailto:nlmaritimedirector@gmail.com)

The Custom House Maritime Museum - your local, independent, community museum - open year-round - telling the stories of New London's waterfront!



from our on-line exhibitions librarian

### A Cadet at Fort Trumbull, 1944

When Johanna Rhodes of Paducah, Kentucky, came across our online exhibition about the Maritime Officers School at Fort Trumbull, which her father attended in 1944, it occurred to her that McGuire Library could be a good home for the papers and photos he had saved while in New London. We agreed and are pleased to announce that the John Herman Comisak Archive has now been added to our holdings about the school that trained merchant marine officers for duty during and after World War II. From 1944 to 1951, John Comisak served as an engineer aboard twelve Liberty or Victory ships, carefully recording their ports of call around the world in the pages of his Seamen's Handbook for Shore Leave. He had arrived at Fort Trumbull with engineering skills already gained aboard Mississippi River towboats and soon adapted that knowledge to the operation of larger ships. A chapter devoted to John Comisak is in preparation and will add a personal dimension to the exhibition by focusing on the career of one of the school's 15,473 graduates almost 80 years after he left Fort Trumbull as a newly minted merchant marine officer. ■

--Brian Rogers



from our summer intern

Hello, My name is Rockenson Charles. I go by Rock. I am excited to take on the role of Summer Program Coordinator here at the Maritime Society for the summer. I recently earned my Bachelor of Science in Management and Marketing from Albertus Magnus College. This summer, I am eager to put my skills to use at the Maritime. This experience will help me enhance all my skills. This experience will further develop my communication, leadership, and problem-solving abilities. It will help to strengthen my event planning and organization skills while working in a team-oriented and customer-focused environment. Additionally, the experience will deepen my understanding of the historical and cultural significance of the organization and contribute to my overall personal and professional growth. ■

--Rockenson 'Rock' Charles



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| Tour Leaders: Christina Corcoran, Estlin Davis-Smith, Stan Solinsky, Bob Teller.  |                                  |
| Intern: Rockenson Charles. Volunteers: Mohisha Prasad, Ashlyn Autrey.   |                                  |

**I'M JOINING THE NEW LONDON MARITIME SOCIETY!**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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Individual \$35 \_\_\_ Family \$50 \_\_\_ Contributor \$100 \_\_\_ Sponsor \$250 \_\_\_ Patron \$1,000 \_\_\_ Sign-up date \_\_\_\_\_

Cash \_\_\_ Check \_\_\_ - please make payment to New London Maritime Society Visa \_\_\_ Master Card \_\_\_ AmEx \_\_\_

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

*New London Maritime Society's mission is to protect, preserve, & celebrate New London's U.S. Custom House, three area lighthouses, and Long Island Sound, and to interpret the rich maritime life & history of the port of New London and the surrounding region through museum exhibitions, educational programs, and preservation initiatives. Learn more about us at [nlmaritimesociety.org](http://nlmaritimesociety.org).*

New London Maritime Society - Custom House Maritime Museum, 150 Bank Street, New London, Connecticut 06320 860.447.2501

I'm donating \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the Custom House. \_\_\_\_\_ Contact me about leaving a legacy.



from our Collections Manager

Hello! I have been volunteering with the collections at the museum since January 2022 and working ten hours a week with the collection thanks to a grant from CT Humanities (current grant ends this July) since December 2022. I am currently undertaking a full inventory of the collection. This involves photographing, measuring, and listing all museum objects on an inventory sheet, and trying to make connections with existing collections records. The next steps will be accessioning the items that are not yet officially in the collection and then adding them into the catalog. I have taken two classes run by the American Association for State and Local History (Collections Management and Caring for Museum Collections) and attended many workshops and webinars.

We have just officially joined Connecticut Collections, a cloud-based collections management system, overseen by the Connecticut League of History Organizations. We are in the beginning stages with this database but it will eventually mean that the collection of the Custom House Maritime Museum will be online and able to be searched by anyone anywhere. This will be wonderful for researchers and for the museum because it will encourage engagement and visitation.

--Denise Davies



from a past trustee now at work in a New London Fishing Boat

The various wind farm projects are moving ahead offshore of Long Island, Block Island, Marthas Vineyard, and Nantucket. Miles of electrical cable have been laid and buried on the sea floor and pilings are under construction for the wind turbine towers. There are a number of commercial fishermen opposed to the projects, but there are many of them who welcome the opportunity to earn good wages with their fishing boats during these lean times. Also, their understanding of the situation and the work of fishermen has been crucial in helping to soothe tensions on the water.

We are fortunate that the technology and methodology of building and operating offshore wind generators is relatively advanced having been developed and proven in European waters. As with any technology, as we build and learn, we we improve and refine.

As a professional mariner, I spent months steering and handling offshore supply vessels in the Gulf of Mexico "oil patch" and witnessed firsthand the incredible infrastructure of offshore oil extraction. I see a similar, cleaner industry growing here along the northeastern seaboard of the U.S. In the Gulf of Mexico, companies are having to go farther offshore into deeper and deeper waters to find suitable oil deposits. At sea, the wind will calm for a few days, but it will always return.

--Captain Rob Groves



We thank our partners & sponsors - Charter Oak Credit Union - Anthony and Elizabeth Enders - Chelsea Groton Foundation - Community Foundation of Eastern CT - CT Humanities - CT Department of Economic and Community Development, CT Office of the Arts - Eleven+ - Louise Novitch - John Michael Corcoran Museum Day Fund - Ludwick Family Foundation - Maco Family Fund - New London Cultural District - Frank Loomis Palmer Fund - Robinson+Cole - State of CT - Veolia / NL Water Authority.



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 150 Bank Street, New London, Connecticut 06320

[nlmaritimesociety.org](http://nlmaritimesociety.org)  
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photo: Ledge Light Foundation's Bruce Buckley and Phil Medbury, and NLMS volunteers Martin Bobensk, Rock Charles, and Al Doucette get the lighthouse ready for summer.