

custom house MARITIMES

AUTUMN 2013

Celebrating 30 years of the New London Maritime Society



Above: The foundation of New London Ledge Lighthouse, ca. 1908. Photograph courtesy the Henry L. Ferguson Museum Collection.

New London Maritime Society

30th ANNUAL MEETING - November 10, 2013

At age thirty, New London Maritime Society's vision is growing. Three decades ago, the founders, *The Day*, and the people of this city created a new institution designed to preserve New London's 1833 U.S. custom house within an organization dedicated to preserving the history of maritime New London.

Recently, for the first time in two hundred+ years, and for one time only, the federal government began divesting itself of its—*our*—historic lighthouses. Because preserving the region's maritime history is our mission, we rose to the challenge; if not us, who would step forward to preserve these sites for future generations?

Three years ago, the New London Maritime Society adopted the city's Harbor Lighthouse, and just two months ago took ownership of a second lighthouse: Race Rock. Now, in partnership with the Ledge Light Foundation, we are applying for a third—and last—property: New London Ledge Light.

But there's a greater plan at work, too, one that's organized *geographically* (not following political boundaries), for preserving the true essence of maritime New London. The idea is to look out across the waters of Long Island Sound and partner with groups along the shoreline: conservationists, historians, boaters, commercial fishermen, residents, with the hope of creating a larger mutually-supportive entity. The Maritime Society's goal now is to preserve not just the stories but the whole of our maritime resources within the framework of a national maritime heritage park. We're already at work!

Next year is the quatro-centennial of Adriaen Block's mapping of Long Island Sound—the first chart ever drawn of this watery region. What's the connection? At our Annual Meeting coming up on **Sunday afternoon, November 10, at 2 PM**, NLMS will present exciting plans for 2014. Our featured speaker is historian/conservationist **Tom Andersen**, of **Save the Sound**. Tom will tell the story of Block and his fellow Dutch sailors, and help launch the New London Maritime Society's year-long celebration of Long Island Sound. Hear about where we've been and what's ahead. There will be some surprises, too!

Please be a part of it. Tickets are \$35. The Annual Meeting begins at 2 PM, Dinner & the Program commence at 2:30 PM. The event will be held at the Port 'N Starboard, Ocean Beach Park. **Call 860-447-2501 to make your reservation, ASAP.**

Be part of Something BIG! We hope to see you there.

special events

NOVEMBER

2 Opening SECONN Diving exhibition

10 NLMS Annual Meeting

DECEMBER

5 Winter Celebration
21 Museum closes for the winter holidays

JANUARY 2014

9 Museum reopens



We've had a lot of help this year in getting the museum ship-shape. Above: modeler **Richard Griffith** shows the whale boat model he recently restored for us, including making a full set of whaling tools.



Above: Document conservator Eugene MacMullan.

Document Expertise

Last October, when Eugene MacMullan volunteered to be our book and document conservator, we welcomed his support without fully appreciating what it would mean. Eleven months later we know exactly what it means. For many years Gene has been the conservator for the library of the New Haven Colony Historical Society, and is now bringing his expertise into play at the McGuire Library. He particularly enjoys working with books, restoring broken bindings, repairing tears, and reattaching loose pages, after which he fabricates a protective customized "phase box" that allows them to stand securely on the shelves. This summer he performed this work on our choice copy of the federal government report of the great blizzard of 1888; although it was in fairly good condition, the front pages were loose and the gold-stamped title on the soft leather cover needed protection.

Several other tired volumes have been made whole again, and some historic documents and nautical charts have been cleaned, repaired and de-acidified. Photographs are being placed in protective sleeves, and dustjackets that have become chipped or torn are being encased in transparent protectors, improving both the look of our shelves and the utility of the individual books. An unusual challenge was posed by Lucille Showalter's crumbling scrapbook documenting the first four years of Ocean Beach Park, from 1941 to 1944. Repair was not possible, so Gene photocopied the large brown, brittle pages on oversize paper, bound them together, and encased it in a phase box, rendering this colorful fragment of local history accessible once again.

Working at the high counter of the Customs Office just across the hall from the library, Gene joins us every Thursday afternoon to carry on this highly specialized work. We are grateful for his invaluable contributions and look forward to his second year as a member of the library team.

Brian Rogers
librarian, Frank L. McGuire Library, NLMS



Be Part of Something BIG!

Our Summer campaign to raise funds for the restoration of New London Harbor Light has so far secured nearly \$90,000 in funding and possibly an equivalent amount in donation of in-kind services! Our goal is \$100,000 and we're getting there...

Over winter, these funds will allow us to carry out much of the testing necessary for the full restoration, with Phase 1 work on the exterior scheduled for Spring, 2014.

Thank you to all our many donors! Sponsors of Lighthouse Saturdays & the Lighthouse Fund include: The Chester Kitchings Family Foundation, Frank Loomis Palmer Fund, Veolia Water / New London Water Authority, Hefel Masonry LLC, Captain Scott's Lobster Dock, Ocean Beach Park, The Big House B&B, Cristifori Foundation, CTrides, New England Regional Council of Carpenters, Stone Masons Union, John Mock, Dave Fallon, Fishers Island Ferry, Cross Sound Ferry, Dominion Foundation, and the Eschenfelder Family.



Above; Chris Bachant, of Connecticut Carpenters Local 24 and representatives from BRAND scaffolding visit Pequot Light with NLMS director Susan Tamulevich. A number of unions and craftsmen have come forward to join our 'Be Part of Something BIG' campaign. Plans are underway for Phase One restorations late next Spring. With grant funding from the state, we also plan to do the testing necessary to complete a full restoration.



Above: Don't forget to visit the **Museum Shop!** Left: We saw 80+ visitors at Pequot Light at our 2nd Open House Day in September.

Find out first! Sign up for weekly e-mail blasts - write to: nlmaritimedirector@gmail.com

www.nlmaritimesociety.org



This winter, we host two exhibitions devoted to diving off our shores. Mark Munro's five-year exploration of a local wreck: *Three's the Charm - Phyllis: A Shipwreck in Fishers Island Sound*, and SECONN Skin Divers Club's collection of artifacts representing the region's collective maritime history: *New London and our Maritime Heritage - An Underwater View*. You're invited to the **Opening reception: Sat., Nov. 2, 5 to 7 PM**. Both shows remain on view at the Custom House through February, 2014.

Left: We had a full season of 14 weeks of lighthouse boat tours. Most trips were sold out, with only one trip canceled due to rain.

WOW, WHAT A SUMMER!

The Custom House Maritime Museum hit its stride this summer with a kaleidoscope of programs, successes and offerings for you, the people of this maritime region. We hope that you are taking the opportunities being presented by our volunteers, by our supporters and by our Director Susan Tamulevich by and her effective part-time assistant, Rachel Perry.

Of these developments, none is more important to our collective future than our commitment to preserving the lighthouses of this region in the public domain for posterity. In your behalf, we now own and are stewards of New London Harbor Lighthouse and of Race Rock. We are making application to assume ownership of Ledge Light to support and insure the continued great work of Todd and Marcia Gipstein and their Ledge Light Foundation in enlarging and promoting the Ledge Light Museum on site. And we are working with others to establish a National Maritime Heritage Park in Long Island Sound, to include home ports in Rhode Island, New York, and Massachusetts in addition to New London, CT. This is our Brand. This is your Legacy.

In this effort, we absolutely need your financial help: from your membership dues to New London Maritime Society, to your contributions - large and small, to personal and corporate grants and endowments, to the donation of in-kind services. We cannot do this alone. This is your opportunity - and your responsibility - to "Be Part Of Something Big", something for the ages.

The memorable line in the movie: "If you build it, they will come." Well, we are building it. Now Please Come!

Thank you very much.
George A. Sprepace, M.D., J.D., president

Custom House Maritime Museum - open year-round - telling the stories of New London's waterfront.

April through December, the museum is open Tuesday through Sunday (closed Monday), 1 to 5 PM.

January through March, the museum is open Thursday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday, 1 to 5 PM, or by appointment. Call: 860-447-2501.

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 \$1,500__ (This entitles you to Life Membership)

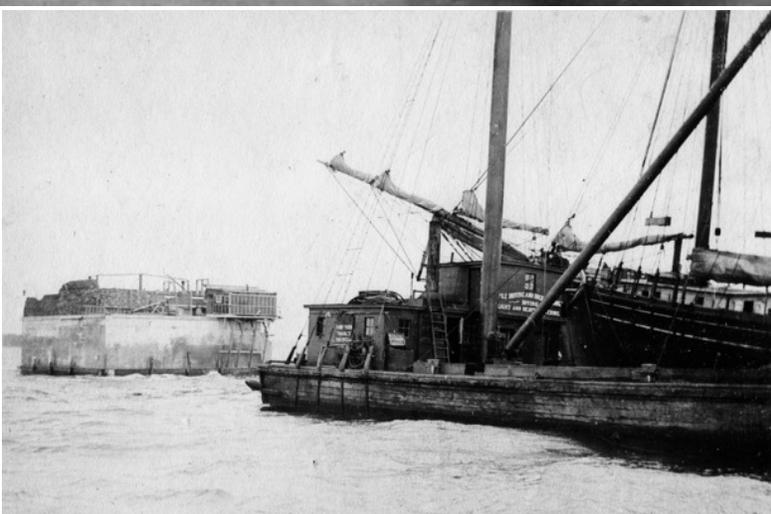
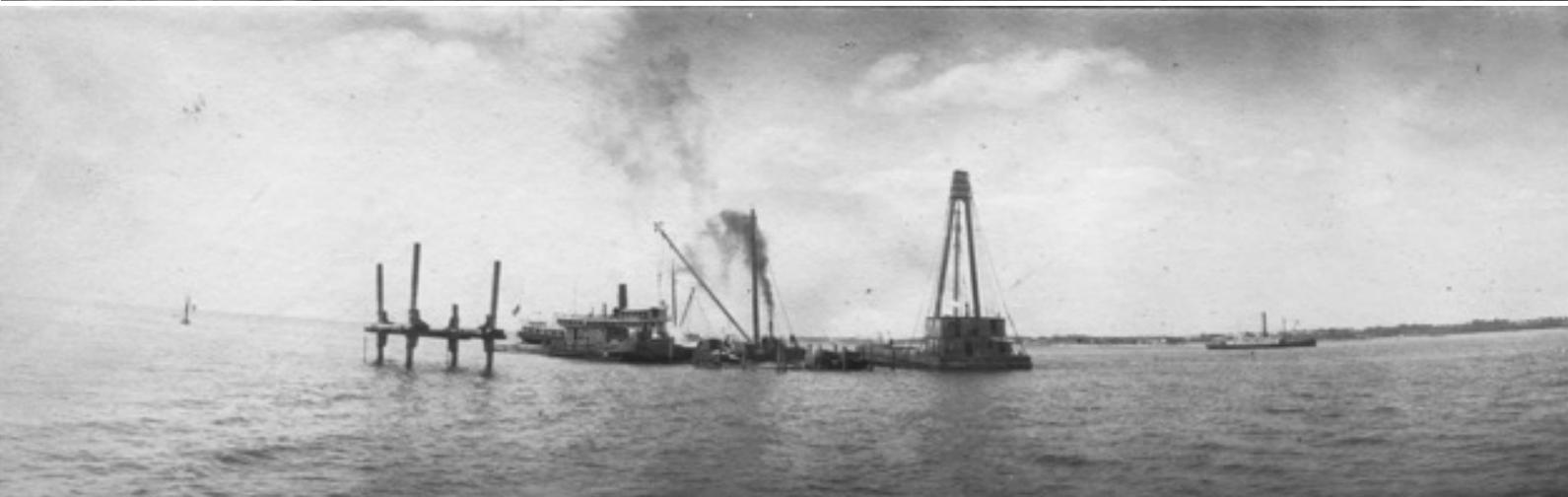
Cash__ Check__ ~ please make payment to New London Maritime Society Visa__ Master Card__ AmEx__

Number _____ Exp. date _____ Security code _____

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

150 Bank Street, New London, Connecticut 06320, 860-447-2501





Director Pierce Rafferty, of the Henry L. Ferguson Museum, shared these 1908 photographs of construction of the lighthouse foundation over Southwest ledge by New London's T.A. Scott Company, above, and also the image, left, of the Mary Adelaide Randall, which wrecked on the rocks while the lighthouse was under construction. Scans of these photographs are in the Ferguson Museum collection.

The first step in the construction of Ledge Light's foundation was for New London's T.A. Scott Company to construct a wooden crib onshore, which was floated out to Southwest ledge and then filled with concrete and rip-rap. In all, 162,000 feet of yellow pine were used to make the crib, which held 3,500 barrels of concrete. When set and hardened, the lighthouse's foundation block was 52 feet square and 35 feet high. Work on the lighthouse crib commenced in October 1908.

This November, the New London Maritime Society, in partnership with Ledge Light Foundation, applies for permanent stewardship of New London Ledge Light.

News from the Ledge Light Foundation

New London Ledge Light had a very special visitor in September when **Rick Bonanno**, who served in the USCG on Ledge Light in 1958 - 1959, made a pilgrimage cross-country to visit Ledge Light and see the exhibit that **Todd Gipstein** created using Rick's photographs of life on Ledge Light. From chipping ice, to listening to Elvis records, from sunbathing to swabbing the floors, Rick's photographs—50 in all—give a charming glimpse of daily life on the lighthouse. We enjoyed a delightful morning at the light with Rick and his brother James. Rick recalled for us what it was like working and living at the lighthouse for a year. Also included in the new History Room is a panel Todd created using historical photographs given to us by the **Henry L. Ferguson Museum** on Fishers Island consisting of stunning images of Ledge Light being built in 1908 - 1909. One even shows a ship that ran aground during the construction of the base by Captain T. A. Scott. As always, we are hard at work on more new exhibits for next season.



The New London Ledge Lighthouse Foundation has received a 50:50 matching grant from the **1772 Foundation**, as administered by Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, to help replace many of the failing windows at Ledge Light. The windows are over 30 years old and are a major source of problems within the structure. We will replace as many windows as possible using this matching grant, but it won't replace them all, as the lighthouse contains 42. We are also seeking private donors interested in purchasing a window or two. A brass plaque with the donors' name will be placed on each of these privately funded windows. Please contact us at info@LedgeLighthouse.org if you'd like to find out more.

We had a very successful summer season of tours out to Ledge Light--most were completely sold out, with groups of 50 guests! Thanks to all who were able to visit, and a special thanks to our enthusiastic volunteer tour guides.

We're hopeful that 2014 will be an exceptional year for the New London Ledge Lighthouse Foundation. Mark your calendar for next summer and plan a visit to Ledge Light, meanwhile, visit our website, www.LedgeLighthouse.org and "like" us on Facebook [www.Facebook.com/New London Ledge Lighthouse](http://www.Facebook.com/NewLondonLedgeLighthouse).

Finally, The New London Ledge Lighthouse Foundation has been the steward of the light since 1988, when the last keepers left. Now, the Coast Guard is offering it to a qualifying non-profit for ownership as it divests itself of buildings it no longer needs (the light and horn will continue operating as aids to navigation). We are partnering with the New London Maritime Society on the complex application and are hopeful that the GSA and National Park Service will agree that the New London Harbor Light, Race Rock and Ledge Light should all be managed by local stewards and award us the deed to Ledge Light, a local maritime treasure.

As these beacons have always worked together to lead the way into New London harbor, so too our organizations are working together to preserve these lights and increase their role in the cultural and educational life of this area.

-- Todd & Marcia Gipstein, Ledge Light Foundation



Top: SECONN Skin Divers Club at the Custom House. SECONN presents an exhibition of local diving finds this winter at the museum. Above: NLMS trustee **Jennifer Hillhouse** worked for months to secure the two beautiful buoys which now flank the front of the Custom House Maritime Museum. Here is Jennifer with several of the workers who helped on the project.

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

New London Maritime Society



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Section from East to West
through the Centre of Building