

# custom house MARITIMES

Autumn 2015



Above: Looking out from New London Harbor at lighthouse, sailboats, a ferry and schooners.



Above: NLMS Trustee Jean Murphy introduces students to the Amistad story; middle: Trustee and ex-USCG lighthouse keeper Doug Allen manages our shop; bottom: Todd & Marcia Gipstein of the Ledge Light Foundation join NLMS president George Spreca at the lighthouse conveyance.

## Summer's Best-Laid Plans...

You can't always tell... We anticipated it would take four-to-five-years to raise the funds to repaint Harbor Light. In fact, 80% of what we needed—approximately \$450,000—came in one fell swoop less than 24 hours after the campaign was announced: a single call from Lisa at the Carpenters Union offered us carpenters, painters, and enough scaffolding to surmount the tip of the lighthouse lantern. You—the community—followed suite with \$165,000 in donations. It was a fantastic surprise, and again we say: *thank you*. The entire restoration, from announcing the campaign to completing the work, took just 18 months, from June 2013 to September 2014.

At the same time, we used Super Storm Sandy/FEMA funding to rebuild storm-damaged masonry at Harbor Lighthouse. Our property survey revealed we had room for a three-foot wide, grade-level sidewalk across the ledge along our north border allowing us direct access to the lighthouse, entirely on our own property; so we started building. This should have taken two months to complete, but we were stopped in our tracks. Here we now are, 18 months on, mired in a lawsuit, having had to cancel our fall Open House.

On the brighter side, we benefitted from two unanticipated 'gifts' this summer, as well as one we'd worked towards for many months. First, the *Amistad* moored here, in New London, from May through September. This visit allowed Custom House volunteers to work with historian Marcus Rediker to revamp our telling of the story and revitalize our work with school groups. A second gift was that we briefly became local host to *el Galeon*, a massive, Spanish reproduction 16th-c. galleon. Working with Barbara Neff and New London Port Authority, we sold tickets for visitors to board the ship and *Partied with the Pirates*, raising a respectable \$1,000 to support the museum.

The much-anticipated transfer of ownership of Ledge Lighthouse to New London Maritime Society was our third gift this summer—and true cause for celebration.

This was not the summer we'd anticipated. It was a true mix of good and bad. But summer's over and looking beyond the immediate issues, we need to rethink what the Maritime Society can do with its now enviable assets. We have a terrific museum, excellent programming and partners, three lighthouses (and as co-plaintiffs in the suit to prevent the sale of Plum Island, we may be considering a 4th). We welcome your suggestions. It's time to take a fresh look around us and re-envision what our brightest future might be.

—Susan Tamulevich, executive director

from the President, New London Maritime Society

TO THE PEOPLE OF NEW LONDON COUNTY - YOUR LIGHTHOUSES, YOUR LEGACY

**We Need You to Speak up for Public Access to Harbor Lighthouse at the Zoning Board of Appeals Hearing, Thursday, Sept. 24, 6PM, New London City Council Chambers**

In 1801, the New London Harbor Lighthouse (NLHL) was built on its present site, replacing the lighthouse that protected shipping there since 1760. One of the oldest lighthouses in the country, Harbor Light represented the State of Connecticut on the USPS lighthouse stamp series in 2013.

In 1833, the Custom House was built, now the oldest continually operating Custom Office in the nation.

In 1879, Race Rock Lighthouse was built off Fishers Island, in the vicinity of many shipwrecks.

In 1909, Ledge Lighthouse was built to complete the protection of commerce in New London.

In 1983, Lucille Showalter, Greg Stone and others saved the Custom House from a private sale, founded New London Maritime Society (NLMS) and developed the Custom House Maritime Museum, a community museum safeguarding and show-casing the rich history of this region.

In the year 2000, the Federal Government passed legislation offering the ownership of some lighthouses to successful non-profit organizations in order to keep them in good repair, in the public domain and open to the public, as they had always been. NLMS applied in 2002 for ownership of NLHL. After seven years of negotiations, NLMS was given ownership of New London Harbor Lighthouse in 2009, one of the first to be successful in this effort.

In 2013, after only 10 months following our application, NLMS was given ownership of Race Rock Lighthouse, a testament to its stewardship of NLHL.

Just two years later, in August 2015, NLMS was given ownership of Ledge Lighthouse, with Ledge Lighthouse Foundation as its lessee, in the service of the public as a fine museum. On that occasion, representatives of the Federal Government suggested that NLMS was the best example of the success of the 2000 Federal legislation.

Initially, the Custom House Maritime Museum conducted tours, from land and by sea, of NLHL, a function that it had served for many decades with the US Lighthouse Service and US Coast Guard – as depicted in paintings, in old photos and in formal instructions given to its lighthouse keepers. NLMS also arranged for the painting and rehabilitation of the NLHL and its grounds, at a cost of nearly \$550,000, something that could not have been accomplished without the great generosity of organized tradesmen and companies in the State, as well as of individual citizens. That effort, extending over several months in 2014, strained the patience of our immediate neighbors.

One neighbor raised the issue of our access to the lighthouse through a right-of-way over their property, which had been used regularly since 1927 when the adjacent keeper's house was sold off privately. That prompted us to seek an alternate access to the lighthouse.

But when we attempted to build that alternate access on our property along the northern property line, demarcated by a granite marker, by brass plugs in the sea ledge, by the remnants of an earlier fence, by photos made when that house was originally being constructed, and by a complete land survey, we were threatened with injunction – despite the fact that the owner had already placed pool equipment over the property line in trespass.

The results over the last 18 months, described in several newspaper articles, have included NLMS as defendant in a Federal lawsuit, as an unwilling plaintiff in a State lawsuit, and as an appellant against an action by the New London Zoning and Building Authority. The result has also been the nearly complete interruption in our efforts to keep the property and the NLHL open to reasonable visitation by the people (and also to the region's school children as an enrichment opportunity in their study of Local History), and the expenditure of substantial funds for legal representation instead of for public opportunities to visit this National Historic Landmark.

We at NLMS consider this sequence of events, all of which we can and will prove, as unfortunate in the extreme. WE SEEK YOUR HELP, THE PEOPLE FOR WHOM WE UNDERTOOK THIS PATH 15 YEARS AGO, to do what you can to help us resolve these issues. The most immediate opportunity for you to help is to attend the Hearing by the Zoning Board of Appeals regarding the 'Cease and Desist Order' now pending.

The Hearing, rescheduled once by the City, will take place on Thursday, Sept. 24, 6PM, in New London City Council Chambers. Please attend and express your support for the efforts of New London Maritime Society / Custom House Maritime Museum on your behalf.

It's your lighthouse; your attendance could make the difference.

If you believe the lighthouse is significant and should be open to the public please make your voice heard!

If you have questions regarding any of the above, please contact Susan Tamulevich (Executive Director) or myself (George A. Spreccace, M.D., J.D., President). THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

—George A. Spreccace, president

*Like us on facebook to keep up with all the news!*

We have facebook pages for Custom House Maritime Museum, Custom House Maritime MUSEUM SHOP, New London Harbor Light, Race Rock Lighthouse, Sentinels on the Sound Summer Activities, and New London Lighthouse Inn.

# AUTUMN'S HERE! And here's the run down...

**Monday, September 21, 5-7 PM**, Opening reception celebrating the **225th Anniversary of the US Customs Service & the 180th Anniversary of the New London Custom House**. RSVP 860-447-8700.

**Thursday, September 24**, We need you at the Hearing by the Zoning Board of Appeals regarding the 'Cease and Desist Order' now pending at New London Harbor Lighthouse. The meeting is at 6 PM and will be held in the City Hall Council Chambers, 181 State Street, New London, Connecticut.

**Sunday, October 4, 2 PM**, pianist **José Garcia-Leon** presents, *100th Anniversaries and Other Celebrations*, performing works by Wild, Surinach, Albéniz, Debussy, Poulenc, and Gershwin.

**Saturday, October 17, 10:45 AM**, You, too, can be a cartoonist! We had quite a lively cartooning class this summer and the students produced some fantastic drawings, including the droll composite of New London's Custom House, *above*. **Jon Buller** leads another 'How to be a Cartoonist' Workshop on four Saturdays: **October 17, 24, 31, and November 7**, from 10:45 AM to 12 noon. The Workshop is \$40, all materials included. Children ages 8 and older are welcome. Adults often sign up, too -- we don't discriminate.

**Saturday, October 17, 2 PM**, Some of the most-evocative items at the Custom House are the deep-sea dive helmets and gear on display in the museum lobby, on loan from professional diver Jay Kane, and Ed Uditis. On **Saturday, October 17, at 2 PM**, collector, dive instructor, and trustee of the Historical Diving Society, **Ed Uditis** will present a talk about the history of diving paraphanelia. For reservations: call 860-447-2501.

**Saturday, October 24, 5:30 PM**, Who doesn't love oysters! Join **Sarah Malinowski**, of Fishers Island Oyster Farm, and chefs **Elisa Giommi & Amelia Lord** for an inspiring, educational *Sea to Table: Talk & Tasting*, and *Cooking Class with Dinner* on **Saturday, October 24** focusing on OYSTERS. *Sea to Table* is a series of *Talk & Tasting* sessions each featuring a local seafood farmer/fisherman, paired with *Cooking Classes with Dinner* presented by chefs Elisa and Amelia, all held at the Custom House Maritime Museum. Participants may sign up for just the talk or for both the talk and the cooking presentations. Each talk includes the opportunity to sample the seafood being discussed. The cooking class features a full dinner and Safe Harbor's *1790 Lager* (a tribute to Connecticut's Coast Guard Summer), sponsored by Thames River Wine and Spirits.

**Sunday, November 1 at 2 PM**, Two years ago, **Pierce Rafferty**, director of Fishers Island's Henry L. Ferguson Museum, loaned us his authoritative exhibition on the building of Race Rock Light; the lighthouse was constructed between 1871 and 1878 by New London's Captain T. A. Scott. Pierce will be back on **Sunday, November 1 at 2 PM**, to present an illustrated lecture that examines the full sweep of Captain Scott's extraordinary career both in marine construction and salvaging countless wrecks in the region during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Our award-winning **Harbor, Sunset, and Full-Moon Lighthouse boat tours** continue through October. **Jibboom GAMS** - friendly gatherings with a speaker - take place **every third Tuesday afternoon**.

For details and to learn more about what we do, please visit our website: [nlmaritimesociety.org](http://nlmaritimesociety.org).



Top: our Summer Cartoonists; Jon Buller will offer a new Cartooning Workshop starting October 17; bottom: On Sunday, October 4th, pianist José Garcia-Leon performs, '100th Anniversaries and Other Celebrations.' See page 4.

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_

I want to support the **Ben Martin LIGHTHOUSE FUND** \_\_\_ Please accept this donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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



## SPECIAL EXHIBITION this Fall

### NATIONAL CUSTOMS MUSEUM FOUNDATION UPDATE

The very successful San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park Exhibition celebrating the 225th anniversary of the US Customs Service closed in mid-February, having been extended for 2 months. The National Park Service hosted the Exhibition and estimated that 25,000 people visited the site since the show opened in July 2014.

Plans are being finalized to move part of the Exhibition to New London, Connecticut in September, 2015. In addition to highlighting the rich history of the US Customs Service, this Exhibit will include information on Customs enforcement of laws involving Slavery and Human Trafficking. We plan to honor several African American Customs Officers who impacted the history of the US.

NCMF hopes many of our retired Customs Officers will visit the Exhibition, which is scheduled to run through the fall.

NCMF continues to identify potential sites for future Exhibits. Presently the 2016 Exhibit is anticipated for display on Ellis Island in New York City harbor. Other sites under consideration are: Monterrey, CA, Galveston, TX, Key West, FL and the LA Maritime Museum located in Long Beach harbor.

NCMF thanks all those who made donations in the recent past. Substantial donations were made by Milton Wu, Paul Andrews, John Rennish, and Pat O'Brien.



—Robert Murtagh, *president*  
National Customs Museum Foundation

Robert Curley, *left*, of the New London Customs Office, will be featured in the exhibition.



The Custom House MUSEUM SHOP has every type of whale, from clocks, *left*, to plates, pads, and cast iron bottle openers. The SHOP is open every day (except Monday), between 1 and 5 PM. Call 860-447-2501.

### US Customs Service - Did you know?

Established 226 years ago, Customs is the oldest Federal Law Enforcement agency and predated the Department of Treasury by 90 days.

Customs revenue was the major source of Federal revenue till 1913 when IRS was created.

Customs revenue paid for the Louisiana Purchase, Purchase of Florida, and Purchase of Alaska.

Customs is one of the few Federal Agencies that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Customs protects 96000 miles of border and processes approximately 1 million persons a day.

Customs enforces over 600 laws for 40 other Federal agencies.

Two US Presidents were Customs Officers - US Grant and Chester Arthur.

## Pianist José García-Leon

On Sunday, October 4th at 2 PM, New London Maritime Society presents a piano recital, *100th Anniversaries and Other Celebrations*. José García-León will perform piano works of E. Wild, Surinach, Albéniz, Debussy, Poulenc, and Gershwin.

[It is the 100th anniversary of the births of Earl Wild (yes, the pianist, who happened to also be a composer) and Carlos Surinach (a Spanish composer who lived in New Haven most of his life). In essence, Jose has picked great music from his 3 heritages: Spain, France and the US.]

José García-León was born in Seville, Spain. After graduating with highest honors from the Conservatorio Superior de Música de Sevilla, he moved to New York where he completed a Doctorate in Musical Arts at the Manhattan School of Music. José Garcia-Leon is the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at The Juilliard School; he last performed at the Custom House Maritime Museum four years ago.

José García-León is a first prize winner of numerous national and international competitions, including the Artist International Competition of New York. Dr. García-León has performed extensively throughout Europe, the US, Russia, Latin America and South East Asia.

The Spanish tall ship *El Galeon*, visited New London for 11 days in late July and early August.





## Visiting Lighthouses

At the Custom House this summer we have been researching the history of public visitation to US lighthouses. Turns out visiting inside lighthouses was always a popular activity and one that the US Lighthouse Society, and later the US Coast Guard, actively supported.

(Just the other weekend, two visitors on two different Full Moon Lighthouse boat tours told stories about being welcomed at Ledge Light, in the early 1980s, when it was still manned by the Coast Guard. They got to tour, play pool(!), climb up into the lantern. In fact, one person commented there was a 'Visitors Welcome' sign posted out at the light!)

The American public built and maintained the nation's lighthouses, and the US Lighthouse Service, then USCG, managed them until 2000, when the US Lighthouse Protection Act passed and local 'friends' groups, like the New London Maritime Society, were encouraged to take on stewardship of individual lighthouses.

In 2009, NLMS took ownership of Harbor Light. We soon began letting people in to tour the lighthouse: neighbors, students, lighthouse lovers; a favorite event was our annual -- free -- Open House. As recently as last year, a great, generous public effort by the New London community allowed for Harbor Light's restoration. We were looking forward to a great lighthouse season in 2015.

Traditionally, a lighthouse was more than just the beacon -- it encompassed a bundle of uses: fog horn, a dock and boat for life-saving, a fog horn, the beacon - of course, and public visitation always was encouraged - it was written into the keepers' handbook.

The passage below was provided by noted lighthouse authority Jeremy d'Entremont. It is from page 10 of the INSTRUCTIONS AND TO GUIDE LIGHT HOUSE KEEPERS AND OTHERS BELONGING TO THE LIGHT HOUSE ESTABLISHMENT issued in 1870:

27.) Light keepers are expected and required to be courteous and polite to all visitors who conform to the regulations and otherwise behave in a proper manner They will show them the illuminating apparatus buildings and any other objects of interest at such times as may not seriously interfere with their light station duties but visitors must not be permitted to handle the apparatus or utensils nor to mark the plateglass walls doors windows or railings nor to soil or deface anything on the premises Special care must be taken to prevent visitors from scratching their names or initials with diamond ornaments upon the glass of the lantern the apparatus and windows of the towers

28.) Visitors must not be admitted into light towers or lanterns unattended by a keeper The number of visitors proper to be admitted into a lantern at one time must be determined by the principal or attending keeper who will be guided by the capacity of the lantern and a due regard to the protection of the apparatus against injury from contact and over crowding At light stations situated near cities towns or watering places if necessary the inspector of the district may authorize the keepers to post a notice on the premises informing visitors at what hours they may be admitted to the towers and lanterns so as not to interfere with the regular and proper exhibition of the lights Visitors are not to be admitted into lanterns between sunset and sunrise as a general rule but should it become necessary to depart from this rule at any time for special and sufficient reasons keepers must be careful to see that they do not obstruct the lights by placing themselves between the light and the sea side of it No charge is to be made and no fee to be received by any keeper for admitting visitors to light houses.

This was CT Coast Guard Summer. Festivities included a visit to New London by the USCG sail-training vessel, the barque *Eagle*.



