

# custom house

## MARITIMES

WINTER 2011



New London Public School 4th-grade SEMI students discover rainbows of light refracted through the Fresnel lens in the lantern of New London Harbor Light.

## THE STAGE IS SET

Seems like we have been cleaning and organizing and planning things here at the Custom House Maritime Museum for far too long. In fact, for the last two years we have been ‘setting the stage’!

The good news is, almost without realizing it, we’ve moved beyond all that. This year the museum’s educational programs have taken flight. In 2010, we can report that visitors of all ages have attended events and classes at the museum that are a testament to all our preparatory work. We are, in fact, achieving our mission: to teach and preserve the maritime heritage of New London.

This fall, we began a three-year partnership with the New London Public Schools. Working with teacher Jody Barthel, eighty SEMI—School Enrichment Model Initiative—students in grade 4 and grade 5 (students who have met or exceeded grade level expectations), are visiting us, either at the museum or the lighthouse, every month. We use stories about New London Harbor Light, the Amistad incident, the *Grandma Sue*, and New London whaling to teach core curriculum lessons in the sciences. Along the way, these “Lighthouse Kids” are learning from members of their community about how lighthouses are designed, how light is diffracted through the Fresnel lens, about maritime-navigational tools and the history of our harbor. These students will now serve as ‘ambassadors’ to their classmates to pass these experiences and lessons along. We are proud of this new association.

Elysa Engleman’s University of Connecticut class in Public History spent the Spring semester working in the Frank L. McGuire Maritime Research Library. Their project was to prepare an application for the Custom House to the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. The challenging application, requiring months of research, was submitted in July. This fall we received word that the Custom House Maritime Museum was *the first and only* Connecticut site accepted into this national program.

Our reach truly became international, when the United Nations invited us to bring an Amistad exhibition to New York. Installed in March in the lobby at UN headquarters, the exhibit became backdrop to the annual Day of Remembrance commemorating the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Several of us traveled to Manhattan for the opening and museum director Susan Tamulevich had the opportunity to address the crowd; she recounted New London’s role in the fabled incident. It was humbling to witness the respect the international community paid to this story, which is so well-known to all of us. With help from the Connecticut Humanities Council and the Connecticut Historical Society, in May we opened a new Amistad exhibition at the Custom House, which is now on permanent display in our Lucille Showalter Gallery. There were three days of festivities as we welcomed the friendship schooner *Amistad America* to New London from Cuba. With Kente Cultural Center, Provenance Center and the City of New London, our *Amistad: Revolt to Freedom* events brought drummers, the singers Nzinga’s Daughters and scholar James Walvin from the University of York.

April through December, the Custom House is open Tuesday through Sunday (closed Monday), from 1 to 5 PM. January through March, our hours are Thursday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday from 1 to 5 PM, or by appointment.



In October, members of Sea Scout Dragon Ship 584 volunteered to clean New London Harbor Light in preparation for visits by the Lighthouse Kids.

# NEW LONDON MARITIME SOCIETY

## President's Report to the Membership

### Greetings.

*Good news:* Our new public access TV show is off and running. Entitled "Custom House Maritimes", the show airs live on MetroCast Channel 25 every Wednesday, 6-7PM and is co-hosted by Susan, our Director and by myself...with telephone call-ins.

Our first guest was Rod Johnstone, designer and builder of one of the most successful sailing vessel lines: the J Boats.

Our second guest was Candace Sanford of Stonington who introduced us to Nathaniel Palmer, who at the age of 21 captained his own vessel and discovered Antarctica.

Our show on Wednesday, Oct. 20 focused on our newly acquired New London Harbor Lighthouse.

Thereafter, our planned shows will include Patrick Kennedy of Kennedy Marine, who will share with us his experiences in the Gulf of Mexico during the recent disaster; The Jibboom Club with Archie Chester; the holdings of our Museum itself; the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Academy in New London...and many more. JOIN THE ADVENTURE.

Meanwhile, given the difference between the quality of our programs and our attendance:

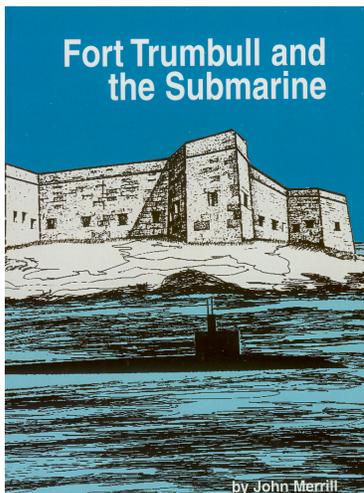
HAVING A WONDERFUL TIME. WISH YOU WERE HERE.

George A. Spreccace, M.D., J.D., President and Board Chairman

## Remembering John Merrill

John Merrill, who died on September 13, was a good friend to area libraries, including our own, being both a user of their services and donor to their collections. The six concise books he wrote on aspects of the history of submarine technology are unique contributions to the literature of science and technology originating right here in New London.

The Frank L. McGuire Maritime Library is proud to have John's books in its growing collection on submarines, certainly one of the most important topics in local maritime history. And we are sure John would have been pleased to know of the substantial donations of submarine-related books and documents we have received in recent months and weeks from Gordon Napier of Westerly and Carey Congdon of New London. Together with John's own books, these donations and others have enriched our holdings, building on the large photographic archive of the Submarine Base formed by the late Harold Cone and acquired for the Maritime Society by founding director Lucille Showalter.



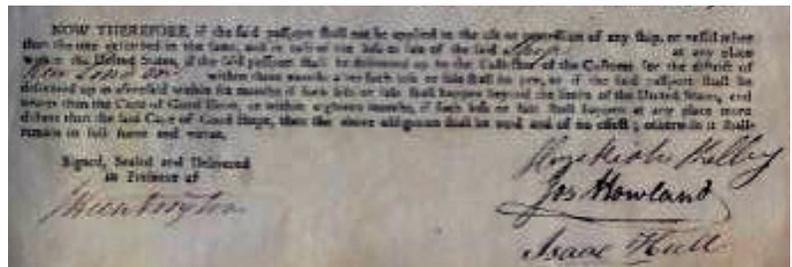
John was the retired head of the Electromagnetic Systems Department of the Naval Undersea Warfare Center (NUWC, often called the "Sound Lab") at Fort Trumbull -- once visible from our windows -- and drew on this experience for the books he enjoyed writing in retirement: "Meeting the Submarine Challenge," "Looking Around: A Short History of Submarine Periscopes," "Fort Trumbull and the Submarine," and others. *cont. left*



## NLMS Annual Winter Celebration - Join Us!

Join us December 16 for a lively concert by the teen, sea-chanty group, the S.S. Chanteens, which we've combined with our annual Winter Celebration. This event is *Free* for members of the New London Maritime Society.

The students are from New Haven's Sound School Regional Aquaculture Center --an ideal home for sea chanteys. Sea music was introduced to the school several years ago on a week-long sailing trip in Maine, which sparked the formation of a Maritime Culture class. The idea was to offer Maritime History accompanied by the songs of life at sea. Song soon filled the air around campus, and the magic of this language became contagious. The S.S. Chanteens formed in 2002, with many of its members coming from the rowing and sailing teams. Paula Daddio, previously of the trio *Shipping News* acts as the group's advisor. Although the members of the group change every few years, they all have an incredible love of the water and a passion for chanteys and other traditional music.



*War of 1812, anyone? In preparation for an upcoming exhibition, we are searching for all things War of 1812, especially items related to south-eastern Connecticut. By coincidence, we recently received a gift from Richard Carson, whose father-in-law William MacKay was a U.S. Customs agent in New London in the 1960s. While working here, Mr. MacKay saved a remarkable Bond Book (1796-1804) from disposal. On page four is a certificate signed by NL's first customs agent, Jedediah Huntington, (appointed by George Washington), for Issac Hull of Derby, soon-to-be of U.S.S. Constitution fame. We believe Hull may have been responsible for later giving the Custom House front doors made from wood of the U.S.S. Constitution. The wood would have been taken when the ship was refurbished in the 1830s. New London's U.S. Custom House was built in 1833 and opened in 1835, exactly 175 years ago in November 2010.*

*Thank you, Mr. Carson, and to everyone else: KEEP LOOKING!*

In due course his work was noticed by the maritime community and in 2007 he received the John Gardner Maritime Research Award from Mystic Seaport's G.W. Blunt White Library.

John's single-minded commitment to education was highlighted posthumously when his family suggested that contributions in his memory be made to Connecticut College's Charles E. Shain Library, co-sponsor of the Sound Lab lecture series founded in the late 1990s by John and several of his NUWC colleagues. These annual public events honor the history of the Sound Lab (which moved to Newport, RI, in 1996) by bringing speakers to New London who have gained national recognition by demonstrating the ways science and technology can help solve many of the problems of our nation and the world.

Brian Rogers, Librarian

SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

Rod Johnstone and the Story of J Boats - *Sailing World's* Boat of the Year - On view through April 2011.

SPECIAL EVENTS

December 16 - NLMS Winter Celebration with S. S. Chanteens: Join us for songs, cookies & good cheer. 6:30 PM. FREE members, \$8 all others.  
Making Kids' Books - A Class for Adults with Jon Buller- four Thursdays: February 3, 10, 17, 24, 6:30 to 8 PM, \$75.

EVERY MONTH: watch the Web site for program details [www.nlmaritimesociety.org](http://www.nlmaritimesociety.org)

Third Tuesdays - Jibboom Club #1 Gams - Reviving Jibboom Club #1 with maritime talk, good friends & cookies. 2-5 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](mailto:nlmaritimedirector@gmail.com)

Director's Report Susan Tamulevich

The mission of the New London Maritime Society's Custom House Maritime Museum is to protect and preserve New London's U.S. Custom House and New London Harbor Light, and to promote and interpret the maritime life & history of the port of New London and the surrounding region through museum exhibitions and educational programs.

~ This fall, New London Harbor Light formally (finally!) was conveyed to NLMS from the federal government. Last month, we received our first lighthouse grant, from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, and now are preparing an architectural assessment of the structure. New London Harbor Light was established 250 years ago; in October we held a lighthouse birthday party! A special lighthouse weekend of events and tours is planned for July 2 & 3, 2011.

~ The Custom House Maritime Museum, water-tight for the first time in 175 years, is getting some long-needed upgrades inside and out: this year we added a handicap-access ramp at the back of the building (thanks to the City of New London's CDBD funding) and, to make our programs more accessible to everyone, we've redesigned the large main-floor gallery to function as our primary meeting room (complete with grand piano!).

~ We're now on television! Watch for *Custom House Maritime Matters* on New London's local cable TV. Community-friendly, we actively support such downtown initiatives as New London Local First & the summer activities on the Parade.



~ Our three-year program with the New London Public Schools' 'Lighthouse Kids' means New London youth are hearing the stories of our harbor from those who know it best. The photo, above, shows Archie Chester relating the story of his grandfather's boat, the *Grandma Sue*.

*We still need your help!* We work so hard because we do not receive funds from any other agencies. Become a member, attend—and bring a friend—to our events, volunteer, donate!

What is the Whaling City? *You* are! Come on, get involved.



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\_\_\_ Membership year begins May 1

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.

*New London Maritime Society's (NLMS) mission is to preserve New London's U.S. Custom House and Harbor Light and promote & interpret the maritime history of the port of New London and the surrounding region through museum exhibitions and educational programs.*

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

This Holiday Season visit our **Museum Shop**, with its vintage books on nautical topics, and maritime & New London history. We've nautical matches, toys, beautiful ribbons, hand-made baskets, & whale bottle-cap openers! And Fridays in December we are open until 8 PM.



*At the Custom House Maritime Museum, we're keeping New London's history alive & the downtown vital! But we can't do it alone & need your help. Become a Charter Business Supporter. You'll receive this handsome, framed certificate (above), all benefits of membership, & our eternal thanks!*

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New London Maritime Society  
Custom House Maritime Museum

150 Bank Street  
New London, Connecticut 06320

[www.nlmaritimesociety.org](http://www.nlmaritimesociety.org)



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