

ROWAYTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



EXHIBIT HOURS
Tuesdays 9:30 am – 3 pm
1st Sunday of the month
1 – 3 pm
and by appointment
**Seaside Delights Gift Shop
HOURS**
Monday - Saturday 11 - 3
and by appointment

177 ROWAYTON AVENUE, ROWAYTON, CT 06853

FALL 2018

NEW MARITIME MUSEUM coming to Pinkney Park

RENOVATION WORK CONTINUES on our new maritime museum, the only museum in our region that will focus on local maritime history and the Long Island Sound. The board is hard at work planning exhibits for the new space, including two that are particularly relevant today (see below): Oystering in Norwalk and Native Americans on the Sound.

OYSTERING IN NORWALK

To learn more about Norwalk oystering, we spent a very special day with Norm Bloom, owner of Copps Island Oysters in East Norwalk, one of the last traditional oyster farms in the US. We invited RHS members to join us and were treated to a boat ride on the historic oyster boat *Grace P. Lowndes* to view Copps' oyster beds and watch their dredging. A tour of the oyster house and a fascinating oral history of the oyster industry in our region was given by his staff of educators. Norm Bloom and his team are brilliant stewards of our shoreline and show their care through sustainable and careful harvesting practices.



A LITTLE HISTORY

Dating back to the 1800s, Norwalk has been known as one of the oyster capitals of the world. The rich nutrients flowing from the many nearby rivers and tributaries combined with the protection from the islands and the cool shallow waters form an ideal spot for shellfish growth.

Native Americans who frequented the shoreline of Connecticut benefited

2018 has been another successful year for the RHS. The Bell Island exhibit, work on a documentary on Village Creek, the summer cocktail party, trips on a Copps Island oyster boat, and the 8th annual Chili Cook Off capped off a range of educational and fun events for all ages. For more highlights of 2018, please be sure to check out pages 6-7 of our newsletter.

Plans are underway to update the interior and expand the Barclay Boathouse and Frank Raymond Maritime Collection to reinterpret the collection and include a history of the Five Mile River. We are grateful for the generous financial support we have already received from the Sixth Taxing District, the Rowayton Civic Association, Fairfield County Bank, Laurel Bank, members, and residents.

Your continued support ensures that we can enrich our community with interesting and relevant programming and events. Become a member and help preserve our shared history. We look forward to seeing you all at the Holiday Open House and Train Show on November 25th!

THE ROWAYTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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from the rich bounty of shellfish and abundant aquatic life. The rich intertidal flats were populated with clams and oysters, making for a convenient source of food. Countless mounds of shells found by archeologists of the region attest to oysters being a staple of Native American diet.

By the 17th century **European Settlers** had discovered the rich oyster beds of Long Island Sound. They not only found a source of food for themselves, but an important product for trade.

Connecticut oysters developed a reputation as the most desirable in the world and began to be shipped everywhere. As a result, the shellfish beds began to be regulated. This important step allowed for the private

ownership and cultivation of the beds, increasing the yield and allowing for importation of seed from other regions.

19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

The industrial revolution and the development of infrastructure such as regional roads and railways advanced the oyster industry. In 1874, Norwalk oysterman Peter Decker introduced steam power in oyster dredging. By 1911, the peak year for oystering in the Norwalk beds, the fleet brought in nearly 25 million pounds of oysters. Overfishing, ecological degradation, and a devastating storm in 1950 wiped out much of the oyster industry. Pesticides used in the late 20th Century to limit the spread of West Nile Virus added to the devastation.

21ST CENTURY AND COPPS ISLAND OYSTERS

Norm Bloom, owner of Copps Island Oysters has been harvesting and farming oysters since he was a small boy, learning the trade from his father, Norman Bloom Sr., and his uncle Hilliard Bloom, twin brothers and co-founders of Talmadge Brothers Oysters in South Norwalk. The family has been plying the wa-

ters since the 1940s and through various purchases of businesses and shellfish grounds, now controls over 22,000 acres from Greenwich to New Haven and 2,000 acres in Delaware Bay. In 1989, Norm formed his own company, Copps Island Oysters, and since then, with a fleet of fifteen boats, has grown into one of the largest privately owned oyster companies on the East Coast. Copps Island Oysters is committed to preventing the mistakes of the past by maintaining the sustainability of their oysters using farming techniques that enhance the environment needed for oysters to thrive. They partner with organizations such as Earthplace, Harborwatch, and Soundkeeper to provide a sustainable product while preserving and monitoring the waters of the Long Island Sound. ■



RARE NATIVE AMERICAN FORT UNEARTHED IN NORWALK

With great excitement, archaeologists working for Connecticut's Department of Transportation announced last August that an extremely rare and significant Native American fort and settlement on the banks of the Norwalk River was uncovered. An undisturbed area in the heart of the former palisade fort of the Norwalke Tribe miraculously escaped disturbance. Ross K. Harper, PhD, senior archaeologist with Archaeological and Historical Services of Storrs says, "There are only a handful of sites on the Long Island Sound rim, few this early, and not as intact." The site has yielded several thousand artifacts and soil samples which will provide details about the native people who spent time here, especially during the Contact Period, 1615 to 1641. Very little is known about this critical time in history when the Old World and the New World first came together.

TREASURES UNEARTHED

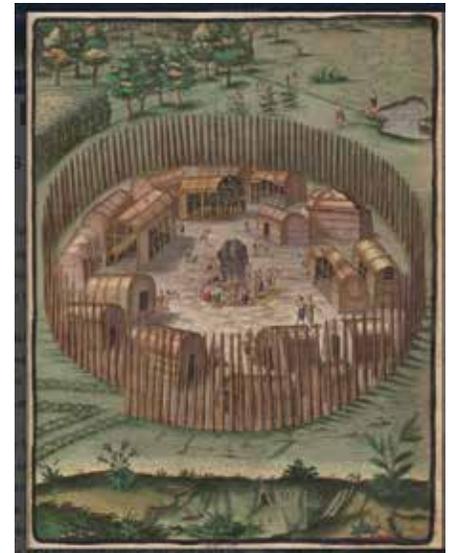
Found so far are two possible hearths, pottery, weaponry, and a storage pit, an area where the Norwalke stored dried corn, beans, and pumpkins over the winter. The archaeologists have determined that the food storage pit was later used as a refuse pit. There is evidence of corn, beans, blueberries, strawberries, huckleberries, and hickory nuts. A time-capsule picture of their whole diet is revealed — including deer, bear, duck, bobcat, skunk, and raccoon as well as cod and plenty of shellfish — clams, oysters, and mussels.

Early finds at this site include evidence of trading, particularly with the Dutch, as they established themselves in nearby New Amsterdam (New York). A flintlock was found as well as a musket ball, axes, a trade hatchet, and lead shot. Additional evidence of trade with European settlers include Dutch-made glass beads, and projectile points made of ballast from Europe.



EXCAVATION IS PRESERVATION

All the artifacts and features are being documented with drawing and photography, and will go to UConn Storrs to be chemically preserved and analyzed. Dr. Harper notes, “...so much detail and research will be going on for years and years, even after we are gone because we are excavating so meticulously and using scientific methods. In terms of its significance, it’s hard to overstate how important this is.” Once the analysis is done, a comprehensive report will detail what has been found. The State Archaeologist will be working with the Norwalk Historical Society in the future on exhibiting finds.



A Native American fort

We
need
YOUR
help!

As part of the RHS’s ongoing commitment to present local history, the newly renovated Raymond Boathouse at Pinkney Park will highlight the stories of the people and places that have made the maritime history of Norwalk unique.

But we need your help. We are grateful to our members for their financial support and hope you will join us in our effort to bring the history of our fisherman, mariners, Native people, and ecology to the City of Norwalk.

*Please consider a membership to the RHS or a donation towards the Raymond Boathouse. **This newsletter is the only solicitation you will receive from the RHS this year, and we need our community’s support.***



FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES

Story of My Life (part 1) by Ruth Thomes Ruggles 1889 – 1975

“The year after the big blizzard of ‘88,” my Mother answered when I asked her when I was born [in Rowayton.] All through childhood, events were dated in relationship to that snowbound time and the story of all that happened intrigued me. I always wished it would happen again. When the last train from N.Y. came through and several commuters were unable to get to their homes, my Mother took them in. Drifts were piled up above the windowsills, and for three days no one was able to get outside the house. My Father, at the time, was laid up with a broken leg. So they were “content to let the north wind blow in baffled rage outside our door, and felt the warmth and coziness of home.”

The first big event that I can remember was my Grandmother and Grandfather’s 50th wedding anniversary, on Christmas day, 1894, when I was put up on a table to recite a toast to them. There was a big dinner for the relatives and close friends which Rindie, our devoted colored girl had helped prepare, and who was included in the picture of the gathering. My Grandfather, Augustus Thomes, I can remember, for he would hold me on his lap and show me the big family Bible. He was a fine looking, dignified gentleman....

My father was in the coal and feed business and later, a bridge and dock builder. I can see him at our big table, with blue prints spread out before him, and see him working with complicated figures. I can well remember, when he took me out to the outhouse, turned me over his knee and gave me a well-deserved spanking, for I had mimicked a neighbor who had called out in a raucous voice, “Morrison, Morrison, come home.” He was an ardent fisherman and each summer went with a group of friends to Block Island on a three-day’s fishing trip. Before the chestnut blight, we always went off into the woods nutting. The last time we found only a few, and hating to go home and admit our bad luck, we filled the basket with something else and put our few nuts on top. It was some time before anyone discovered our hoax. When Russ and I were old enough to ride, he bought bicycles for all of us, and what a lark to all go off together. My Mother had a special outfit; long laced boots and a divided skirt. One day she ventured off alone to ride to South Norwalk, but on the first long hill she lost control and went over the handlebars, so was brought home battered and bruised, but survived and never lost courage to try again.

When I was small we had only lamps, and how I hated to wash the chimneys, for that was a chore I had to do, for Mother thought we should share in doing the many chores, and I realize now what good training that was. Our house was heated by a big coal stove in the kitchen and a

pot bellied one in the dining room with an open radiator above to give a wee bit of warmth upstairs. In winter we would hustle down stairs to dress in front of the stove. We took our Saturday night baths in a big tin tub in the kitchen. Before my father died he had had some modern innovations—a furnace in the cellar, electric lights and a bathroom. Someone had to go down into the cellar at an early hour to stoke up the furnace. My Father often said that he hoped the day would come when he could just push a button and have the heat come on. I have thought of that many times since, when even in zero weather, I would get up to a cosy room. Later we had the novelty of a telephone, the wall variety, which had a crank you turned to get the operator.

Well I remember the excitement of the first automobile in the village, bought by our paperhanger, Ed Stevens, who was indeed a character and a great tease. His aged Daddy, “Uncle Jimmy,” as we all



Ephraim Thomes

called him, would put the paste on the paper and Ed would slap the long strips on the wall with dexterous rapidity.

Spring and fall housecleaning was really cleaning. No vacuum cleaners then, so carpets had to be taken up and beaten on the grass. Johnny Taylor was our standby. He had been a slave boy in the Civil War and was brought back to Norwalk by one of the Northern soldiers. Everybody liked him for he had the sunniest disposition and a hearty laugh. He was considered such a saint by the little flock in his church, that when he died he was immortalized by a memorial window with his head, over which was a halo. I shall never forget his funeral on a hot summer’s day. We also had a woman who went about putting down people’s carpets. She wore a bag fastened to her waist, full of tacks, but would take out a handful and put them in her mouth, for it was easier to grab one in that way. Wonder that she didn’t swallow one, for always, she tried to talk at the same time.

Our house, as did all then, had a big pantry where most of the mixing of foods was done. My Mother bought in quantities, for convenience and economy—flour and sugar by the barrel and never less than a bushel of apples or potatoes. No corner drugstore or hot dog stand for hangouts, but we did spend hours at the blacksmith’s shop. The smithy was another one of those kind men, who understood children, and was never too busy to make them welcome in the smoky, dark shop. Bright sparks shot out from the fire, and we would watch him put a shoe into the flame by fastening it to a long iron rod. Then when he put it on the horse’s hoof and drove nails into it, we could never have

condoned or watched such cruelty, unless we had trusted his word that it didn't hurt. Sometimes he would bend a horseshoe nail for a ring for me to wear.

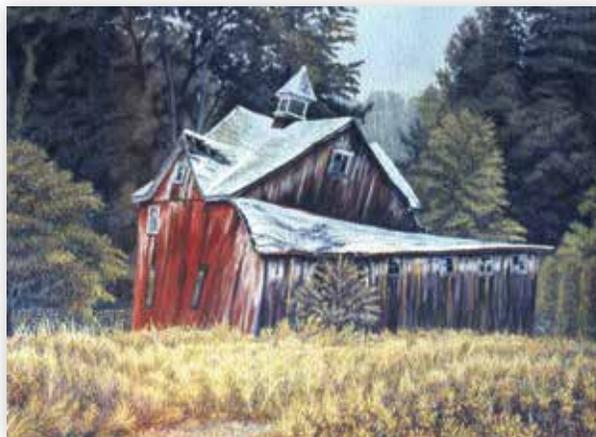
No supermarkets in those days, and the grocery man, Robert Raymond, came to get our order and to deliver. He always came whistling to the back door and call out, "Any soap, starch, yeast or molasses today?" He was the one who first interested me in birds for he was an enthusiastic bird watcher with a keen eye for spotting unusual things. When he called my attention to a humming bird's nest right near our doorstep, and also spotted an albino robin, I realized we didn't have to go far to learn fascinating things about Nature. I often rode with him to his store, a long distance away and through a lonely, woody road, but I was never fearful of walking back alone. Isn't it a pity that in this present day world, we would be afraid. In later years this same good man built a tennis court near his home, where he taught us to play that wholesome game. This led to my interest in later years in the Davis Cup matches, to which I went several times with Russ.

My father and another man, George Bryant, had built houses just alike—both up on terraces with a common artesian well and a flagpole. Uncle George, as we called him, was a very pious man, and very strict about the observance of the Sabbath. He wouldn't pick an ear of corn from his garden on that day. My Mother's theory was to not do anything that would disturb anyone who wanted to be quiet on Sunday. Uncle George worked in a factory nearby where they made velocipedes and baby carriage wheels, so as children, Russ and I spent hours there riding around on the top floor. We were always fascinated, watching the men put long sticks of wood into the steaming oven, then when pliant, turn them into the shape of a wheel. Aunt Mamie Bryant was a child's best friend. She always called us over when she was frying doughnuts and would give us the "holes."



Ephraim Thomes and family

New Additions to the RHS Collection...



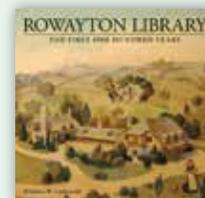
...include a series of photographs of Bell Island by Jeanette Young-Pertz, a print by Dana Laird (Westmere Barn, above), a painting by Stuart Pertz, and letters, poetry, publications, and journals of poet Dorothy Cowles Pinkney.

THE Place to Shop to Find the Perfect Gift! The RHS Gift Shop

Looking for something new and different to give as a hostess or birthday present? Stop by Seaside Delights, our award-winning gift shop in Pinkney Park, which features fun and creative gift ideas, Rowayton-wear, fisherman's finds, and plenty of new items perfect for the holidays! The shop is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 am until 3 pm through the holiday season. You can also order by email at seasidedelights@gmail.com and pick up your items at the store.



A very special present for that Rowayton person on your list: A new book on the Rowayton Library



Although the Library has been Rowayton's cultural hub for more than 100 years, its history has never been put down on paper in any great detail until now—complete with vintage photos, fun anecdotes, and plenty of local history. The book is available for sale at Seaside Delights in Pinkney Park and at the Rowayton Library.

Highlights of 2018

NEWS FROM THE Pinkney Memorial Garden



The garden has never looked better. It was conceived of in 1996 and has been enjoyed by hundreds of people every year since, cherished as a beautiful, tranquil escape from the busy world. It is now one of the most beautiful spots in Rowayton and is a joy to experience. The RHS manages the garden and pays for its upkeep, and Rowayton Gardeners now tend to it, with Pamela Proctor on site almost daily. Additionally, Kathy and Gary Leeds have re-landscaped the flagpole garden, tend it regularly, and arranged for the Gardeners to install a sprinkler system and lighting on the flagpole. We are so grateful for all the help these wonderful gardeners provide. Volunteers are always needed to help keep the garden looking its best. If you would like to join the team, please contact the RHS at info@rowaytonhistoricalsociety.org.

BELL ISLAND: FUN IN THE SUN

BELL ISLAND: FUN IN THE SUN and its colorful history was the subject of the RHS exhibition this year. Generous loans from the Rowayton community plus our own holdings provided a colorful and informative narrative featuring vintage post cards, photographs, drawings, paintings, and artifacts of the history of the island. Classic themes of times gone by and the present included bridge jumping, martini parties, lobster bakes, parades, Prohibition, hurricanes, and water sports.

The stories of the many families that have contributed in making Bell Island the unique and tight-knit community it is are featured throughout the exhibit.

It was a pleasure hosting the Bell Island Improvement Association for a lively end of summer cocktail party and inspiring to see the residents' dedication and interest in preserving the history of this very special part of town. The exhibit can be seen through January.



Bell Island by James Flora



**Who makes the best chili around?
The 8th Annual Rowayton Chili
Cook-Off was a tasty success.**

On October 20th, hordes of chili-lovers thronged to Pinkney Park for the RHS 8th annual Chili Cook-Off, where teams competed for the honor of first, second and third prize. The competition was hot, with a wide range of participants, including the Darien Fire Department trying to beat last year's reigning champs the Rowayton Fire Department. Plenty of cold beer, live music, and cornbread from Rowayton Market topped off the event.

IT WAS A DELICIOUS DAY!



First prize
Rowayton Fire Department
Second prize
Rowayton Library
Third prize
Holy Frijoles!
Best Restaurant Chili
O'Neill's Pub

SUMMER MAGIC ON FIVE MILE RIVER:

Our cocktail party celebrating Bell Island



*Bell Island-themed party hats;
party scene at RHS; and Brian
Kammerer's bridge-jumping hat!*

The Rowayton History Book Club



The History Book Club, co-sponsored by the Historical Society and Rowayton Library, continues to meet bi-monthly. We hope you will join us.

The next meeting will be held Wednesday, November 28th at 7pm at the Library and is open to everyone. The book is *When Montezuma Met Cortés* by Matthew Restall.

Copies will be available at Rowayton Library. Admission is free and refreshments will be served.

Newly Plaqued Historic Homes

Over the past year, the RHS has issued six historic plaques to the following houses:

ON COVEWOOD DRIVE:

The Samuel W. Hoyt, Jr. Co. House, 1925

ON ROWAYTON AVENUE:

The LeGrand and Mary Craw House, c.1848

The Captain John S. L'Hommedieu Barn,
c.1890

ON WESTMERE AVENUE:

The Charles Stevens House, c.1907

ON WOODBINE STREET:

The Andrew and Mary Elek House, c.1908

IN MEMORIAM

LOIS MASON PINKNEY (1927-2018)

The Board was saddened to learn of the death of Lois Mason Pinkney, the wife of William Pinkney, III. Mr. Pinkney is the grandson of William and Gertrude Dibble Pinkney and spent many happy days at the Pinkney House with the family.

Mrs. Pinkney was a kindergarten teacher for many years and had been involved in many civic organizations in their community. In addition to their regular jobs, she and her husband operated a rare book business, traveling the country to do book shows. They also had a home print shop as a hobby, printing their own stationery, Christmas cards and signage, as well as amusing themselves with other projects.

She leaves behind a daughter, Kristen Pinkney (Thomas F. Bregani) of Greenfield, NH; her two sons William Pinkney IV (Bonnie) of Simsbury, CT; and Jett Pinkney (Judy) of Coral Springs, FL and four grandchildren.

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Rowayton Historical Society

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

RHS Holiday Bazaar

Saturday, November 24, 12-5pm

Sunday, November 25, 12-7pm

One-stop shopping to find that perfect something for everyone on your list, hand-crafted by local artisans: vintage postcard pillows; unique Rowayton gifts; children's clothing and accessories; jewelry; placemats, napkins, and runners; seaside ornaments; and candles for every room in the house.

Admission: \$1 per person.

Special Preview of the Holiday Train Show

Sunday, November 25, 2-3:30pm

Enjoy a private preview of everyone's favorite train show.

Email info@rowaytonhistoricalsociety.org for reservations.

Refreshments will be served. \$25 per family.

Holiday Open House

Sunday, November 25, 4-6pm



Including Brian Kammerer's amazing model trains and an exhibit of a vintage Rowayton Christmas.

"LIGHT UP ROWAYTON"

After you've been to see the model train show, join your neighbors immediately afterward in Pinkney Park for the annual holiday tree lighting sponsored by the RCA.

2019

January 2019

History Book Club: *When Montezuma Met Cortés*

Wednesday, January 23 at 7pm at Rowayton Library.

Books will be available to borrow at the Library.

Refreshments will be served.

February 2019

Lecture: *That's Weird!* A look at some of Connecticut's oddest artifacts as a gateway into a deeper understanding and appreciation of our state's history.

Saturday, February 23 at 2pm at the Rowayton Community Center, 33 Highland Avenue. Refreshments will be served.

General admission \$5; RHS and NHS members free.

March 2019

Program on Women In History: TBD

at the Rowayton Community Center, 33 Highland Avenue.

Refreshments will be served. General admission \$5;

RHS members free.

AMAZON SHOPPERS: When you order online, make RHS your Smile partner, and Amazon will donate a small percentage of every sale to the museum. Simply enter the Amazon website via www.smile.amazon.com and make the RHS your recipient. Quick and easy, and every little bit helps. **THANK YOU!**