

The View from The Crow's Nest



Newsletter of the Mattapoisett Historical Society

Fall 2013 / Issue XX

Fifty-four years of preserving the past for the benefit of the future.

Twenty Years at the Mattapoisett Historical Society *Mendell Endowment Announced*

The following is a transcript of Seth Mendell's final President's Address given at the Historical Society's Annual Meeting on September 29, 2013.

I have always been associated with the museum because my father was instrumental in setting the Mattapoisett Historical Society up, along with others in the late 1950s. After Alice and I moved up here in 1990, Bob Coquillette approached me about becoming a Board member in the summer of 1991. Following Hurricane Bob at the Annual Meeting, I became a member of the Board.

Jo Pannell was President at the time, and Bette Roberts was our Curator. After several meetings and listening to the Treasurer's Reports, I asked where the \$20-30,000 the MHS had in its treasury was being kept. I was



Seth Mendell after receiving a plaque of appreciation for his many years as President

Wanderer photo by Felix Perez and Marilou Newell.

told it was at the Plymouth Bank in a savings account. With my background in development at Avon Old Farms School, my first thought was we should be putting that money to work for us. And that is what we did. We opened two investment accounts and several certificate of deposits which were paying well at that time.

In 1994-95, the museum was faced with becoming handicapped accessible. The cement sidewalk was put in on the east side of the building, a new doorway was cut into the side of the Carriage House and a new handicap bathroom was created. This endeavor practically emptied our coffers, and I remember Jo Pannell's parting words, said with a smile, as she finished her term as President of the Board and as I was about to begin mine, "I've spent all the money, Seth. Now you've got to raise some more." That was in 1996. We set about to do just that.

Coming from an Academic background, I was familiar with an Annual Appeal, and starting in 1997 we did our first mailing to the membership to ask for an annual contribution to help meet the operating costs of the museum. At the same time, we approached certain individuals for capital gifts.

In terms of the museum, we were busy in the late '90s reviewing the collections. Fortunately we had two very talented women on the Board at the time: Eloise Ricciardelli and Barbara Easterday. These two women went through the entire collection and found in many cases that we had four, five, six, sometimes eight of a similar item. So with the help of Frank McNamee of Marion Antiques, we had several yard sales of excess items. We certainly appreciated that they were donated, but it was better that they went to someone who could use and appreciate them rather than have them sit dusty in storage.

We made mistakes. One mistake almost cost me my life! Alice and I were in Florida visiting my 90 year old mother and I told her what we were doing, and she said "You're not getting rid of my great-great grandmother's cradle are you?" and I said "Well no, I don't think

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Twenty Years at the Mattapoissett Historical Society (continued from cover)

so.” But the first thing I found when I got back to the museum was that, yes it was on the list to go. So we quickly did an about face, and saved my life. I had been rocked in that cradle when I was a baby, as was my mother and grandmother.

Another area we worked on in 2000 was our newsletter, The Crow’s Nest. For years Bette Roberts had been putting out a single sheet updating the events at the museum. However, we had so much more to offer—history and pictures. Now after approximately twenty issues of The Crow’s Nest, we actually have a collection of historical articles of Mattapoissett’s past matched with appropriate pictures.

This led us to further publications. In 2003, the Collectors of Mattapoissett Postcards, namely Brad Hathaway and Natalie Hemingway, along with several others, approached the Mattapoissett Historical Society to see if they would be interested in publishing a postcard book. At this point in time, our fundraising was beginning to bear fruit and after talking it over with our treasurer, Malcolm Campbell and our Board, we decided we could make the investment. It certainly would be a big step in fulfilling our mission of “Preserving the Past for the Benefit of the Future.” Reynolds De Walt printed the 140 page volume in full color, and as everyone knows it has been successful, allowing us to make back our investment many fold.

In 2007 for the Sesquicentennial celebration, the MHS wrote and had printed the 64 page Souvenir Booklet. Gifts enabled us to sell the book inexpensively, and it, like the Postcard book, has been very successful. It was also during this time that Malcolm Campbell, our Treasurer, told me that now that we had nearly \$200,000 in the treasury, we needed professional help for our investments. Consequently, we were advised by a financial advisor to put all of our money into Vanguard Investments and get rid of our individual accounts and certificate of deposits. We formed an investment committee and now we have a well balanced portfolio.

We continued our summer exhibits and grew our acquisitions including documents, photographs and artifacts such as a large piece of the Wanderer mast, the blubber pot which lives outside, and, of course, our beautiful Clifford Ashley mural.

It was in 2009 that Mrs. Polly Duff Phipps called me and asked if the Historical Society would be interested in a

large mural painted by Clifford Ashley. I replied I was not familiar with the mural, but would like to see it. She was going out, but she would leave the side door open for me (Polly and I are cousins). I went in and out into the sunroom where she said the mural was, but I looked around and didn’t see anything as most of the room was windows overlooking the harbor. When I turned, I happened to look up and there was the mural on the slanted ceiling 16 feet long and 6 feet high. My first words were “Oh my God”.

Realizing immediately we needed help, I went down to see my friend and fellow Board member Nate Bekemeier at Roger’s Gallery. It just so happened that Ben Rogers was in the shop at the time when I entered. I explained that the Mattapoissett Historical Society had just been offered a large mural painted by Clifford Ashley. Their reply was “It’s not Clifford Ashley - he did not paint murals.” I said “This one is signed Clifford Ashley 1919.” They both turned, and out the door we went.

Our first major concern was where we would put it. Nate and I rushed back to the museum with a long tape measure and measured the wall between the balconies over the pulpit. It would just fit with only inches to spare on each side.

There were obstacles to overcome. The mural was in need of cleaning, restoration and remounting all of which would be extremely expensive. After thirteen months of lying on top of the pews in the museum, the money had been raised and the mural went to Boston to be restored by Giovanni Pocobene.

During the restoration it became apparent that what was needed to fully appreciate Ashley’s work was a view book



Ashley Mural on the wall over the pulpit in the Christian church building of the museum

to help tell the story that Ashley portrayed in his painting. Again, capital gifts made possible the printing of the book, and the entire project, including the restoration and hanging of the mural, saw funds raised amount to a total of \$95,000.

Several years ago when Bette Roberts announced her decision to retire, the Board of Directors made a conscious decision that the new Curator be hired to spend more hours in the museum and to work on both outreach and activities in the museum. As you know, Bette was strapped for time as she already juggled the Mattapoissett Historical Society, the Congregational Church, the Library and the Women's Club. However, more hours in the museum means more money. And that is why we have announced the Mendell Endowment for the Curator.

A search committee was formed and out of seven candidates, Elizabeth Hutchison was selected. She has

done what we had hoped would happen: our number of visitors has increased, our programs have increased both in and out of the museum, and we have just experienced a very successful September exhibit Remembering the Hurricane of 1938.

Let me close by saying that I certainly have enjoyed being part of the museum and Society over the past twenty years, and want to let you know that I am not through. We have three books in the works, and Elizabeth has many projects in mind. However, projects like this take not only time but money. That is why the Mendell Endowment of the curator is so important at this time. We need to ensure that our museum will continue to grow and at the same time we can take on additional projects. I am pleased that Jennifer McIntire has stepped forward to take my place as President and know with the help of the other board members this can be accomplished.

The summer Art of Knots Exhibit and September's Hurricane of '38 Exhibit brought many visitors into the Museum both young and old.





The Great New England Hurricane of '38

By Maureen McCarthy

On an overcast Sunday afternoon, September 1st, Seth Mendell fascinated an audience of about 125 with amazing details of the disastrous September 21, 1938 Hurricane. He started talking a bit about previous storms that had affected the area going back as far as Pilgrim days in the 1600s. There were also hurricanes in the intervening years, but none had quite the impact as the Hurricane of '38.

It was known at the time that there was a hurricane in the waters of the Caribbean, but it was expected to make landfall in Florida. A couple of factors changed the direction of the storm and sent it straight up the Eastern seaboard at a rate of 30 mph. One factor was the Gulf Stream with its warm water and the fact that it parallels the East Coast. The other factor was a very unusual jet stream, one that was actually similar to the jet stream we had this summer. The jet stream at the time had a pronounced southern dip that drove the edges of the stream way, way down to the Southern states. That left a high pressure situation in the Northeast as well as one in Bermuda. This unusual pattern left the Hurricane "no choice" except to come up between the two highs over the warm waters of the jet stream and head directly for New England.

The local residents had enjoyed a lovely morning with a bit of an overcast, but by midmorning the weather had started to change with gathering clouds and increasing winds. By early afternoon the signs were clear that something major was on the way. With the winds coming out of the Southeast, folks settled in to ride out a Sou'easter. However, early indications showed that this was no ordinary storm. By four o'clock the water in the harbor was over the wharves, waves were cresting on top and it was still not high tide. Efforts were made to bring boats in, but by this time it was too late. Waves and a tidal surge had water already into Main Street and Water Street. Town Hall had water on the first floor, and standing water was everywhere.

A lovely restaurant, Anchorage By The Sea, which stood on the waterfront, exploded as waves crashed through the back of the building. Other buildings on the wharves were swept away, some had the backs of their houses destroyed and water controlled everything.

After the storm, the results were devastating. Pico Beach, Crescent Beach and Antassawamock were virtually swept clean. Many of the majestic elms along Water Street were gone, and debris was strewn as much as a quarter mile inland. The town organized a force of 75 men and New Bedford sent over 190 men to help clean up and look for lost residents. The town lost 8 residents and sustained a million dollars' worth of damage. The memory of the storm and its losses still remains a vital part of our history.

There is a rather ironic story to be told, whether it is true or not. It seems a New York man wanted to buy a barometer as he lived on Long Island and was interested in watching the weather. He went to Tiffany's and ordered the best available. It finally arrived, in mid-September, and he enthusiastically set it up. What he saw made him furious so he boxed it up and took it back to Tiffany's. He told the clerk "This must be broken; the barometer shows that a hurricane is coming and everyone knows that is going to hit Florida". When the man returned home, his house was gone, swept away by the Hurricane of 1938.



Facebook Page

The Mattapoissett Historical Society is now on Facebook!

Please be sure to check out our page and like us!



Curators Corner

By *Elizabeth Hutchison*

It has definitely been a very bust summer season here at the museum. July and August brought over 300 visitors to the museum which kept our fabulous docents hopping.

With a grant from the Mattapoissett Cultural Council, we expanded our Children's Programs, running a five week program for 4 to 6 year olds called *Little Explorers*. The children enjoyed various activities from making boats powered by balloons to making homemade lemonade and ice cream. It was great to have the museum swarmed with little ones every Thursday afternoon. We also ran two other programs for older children, one on knot tying, and the other on making toy boats from recyclables. Both were very well received, and the children had a blast.

We also spent the summer working on the Hurricane of 1938 Oral History project, as well as the exhibit itself. Our four High School volunteers, Emily Audet, Lizzie MacLellan, Ruhi Raje and Brianna Perry, interviewed 12 of our Seniors who remembered the Hurricane, and also volunteered their time to help put the exhibit together. Also thank you to Nancy Gauvin, Peg Olney and Lisa Hill for lending photographs, newspapers and remembrance books to the exhibit.

The Hurricane Exhibit and its related events were very warmly received by the community, with 275 people visiting

the museum for the exhibit or attending the lecture or film events. I am pleased that we were able to remember such an important happening in Mattapoissett's history in such a significant way.

Our year-round volunteer program is up and running. Volunteers at the museum are currently sorting through our collection of photographs as we prepare to scan them into the digital database. We have noticed that our collection dwindles in the 1920s. If anyone has any photographs of significant Town events, the town itself, etc. from the 1920s onward that they would be willing to donate to the museum, I would love to see them so that we might pick out photographs that will best help the Historical Society tell the history of Mattapoissett.

As we race towards the Holiday Season, we hope you will take the time to visit the museum this December to view the Holiday exhibit, join in some fun, and to get your Christmas shopping done! We will be open Saturday, December 7, 14 and 21 from 9 am to 12 pm and will be featuring some new merchandise including nautical ornaments, key chains and Mattapoissett Snow Scenes stationary-perfect for Christmas cards.

Recent Acquisitions:

- 2013.6 Painting by A.D. Tinkham of the entrance to Cuttyhunk Harbor
- 2013.7 *Ashley Book of Knots* by Clifford Ashley
- 2013.8 Photos by Eldredge M. Hiller-Pico Beach, Mattapoissett Before and After the Hurricane of 1938
- 2013.9 *Piloting and Seamanship and Small Boat Handling* by Charles F. Chapman
- 2013.10 *Historical Collections, Being a Collection of Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, &c., Relating to the History and Antiquities of Every Town in Massachusetts, with Geographical Descriptions* by John Warner Barber
- 2013.11 Edward Francis Snow diary 1856-1859
- 2013.12 Photo album of Purrington and Cannon Family
- 2013.13 Photographs of the Hurricane of 1954
- 2013.14 Hiller family Genealogy
- 2013.15 1920s faux fur coat and Hoop-la hoops for bouffant skirts
- 2013.16 What's Cooking in Mattapoissett
- 2013.17 Mendell family land deeds from the late 1700s
- 2013.18 Painting "Salt Making on Buzzard's Bay" by George E. Errington



Mattapoissett Historical Society Fall 2013 Calendar of Events

- November 7 ***The Wanderer: Building, Voyages and Disaster Lecture at 7 pm.*** Join Seth Mendell to explore the life and death of the last whaler built in Mattapoissett's shipyards. Program is Free, donations Accepted. Mattapoissett Historical Society, 5 Church Street.
- December 7 **Museum Opens for the Holiday Season! 9 am-12 pm.** Join us to see the new **Toy Train exhibit** and enjoy nostalgic Christmas decorations. **Shop for unique gifts** featuring Mattapoissett. Light Refreshments will be served. Free, donations accepted. Mattapoissett Historical Society, 5 Church Street.
- December 8 **Christmas Caroling at 3:30 pm.** Adults and children accompanied by adults are welcome to join with Members of the Mattapoissett Historical Society to serenade the town. We will meet at the Mattapoissett Historical Society and will carol our way around town, stopping at the Inn at Shipyard Park to serenade the patrons. We will end at the Historical Society for Hot Chocolate. All are welcome for this delightful Christmas Event! Free. Mattapoissett Historical Society, 5 Church Street.
- December 14 **Museum Open for Holiday Shopping and Toy Train Exhibit. 9am-12 pm.**
Drop in Christmas Craft 9 am- 12 pm. Join us to craft a simple, yet beautiful rope wreath ornament to help decorate your tree. Free, donations accepted. Mattapoissett Historical Society, 5 Church Street.
- December 21 **Museum Open for Holiday Shopping and Toy Train Exhibit. 9am-12 pm.**
Vintage Christmas Cartoons 9 am- 12 pm. Come down to the museum and relax while viewing Christmas Cartoons from the 1930s, 40s and 50s and enjoying some hot chocolate. Free, donations accepted. Mattapoissett Historical Society, 5 Church Street.

WORD SEARCH *By Lisa Hill*

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Mattapoissett Village Streets

MAIN	BEACON
MAHONEY'S	SHIPYARD
TOBY	FOSTER
WATER	FREEMAN
DEPOT	SHIP
HAMMOND	DEXTER
PEARL	CHURCH
CANNON	PEPPERBUSH
BARSTOW	CAPTAINS
MECHANICS	LINHARES
NORTH	BAPTIST
OAKLAND	RAILROAD
ATKINSON	



SUPPORT YOUR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Mattapoissett Historical Society is supported through the generosity of individuals, families, foundations and businesses who wish to help us *Preserve the Past for the Benefit of the Future*. In addition to being a member, please consider other ways you can support our efforts:

Memorial Gifts or Contributions in Honor: Mark an anniversary, a passing, or honor a loved one with a donation to the Historical Society

Bequests: Naming the Mattapoissett Historical Society as a beneficiary in your will will leave an enduring legacy for the future.

Corporate Matching Gift Programs: Please check with your employer to see if they offer a matching gift program.

Business Sponsorships: We offer many ways for local businesses to sponsor the Historical Society and its efforts.

Thank you to the following Businesses for their support:

Brownell Systems, Inc. Fisher & Rocha, Inc. Reynolds DeWalt Printing W Wood Painting
 DG Service Company, Inc. Mr. Andrew McIntire Rogers Gallery

VOLUNTEER!

If you have an hour or two a week and are looking for an interesting and fun way to spend some time, please join our year round Volunteer Program.

Are you interested in:

- ◆ Programs (both public and school groups)
- ◆ Acquisitions Registration
- ◆ Public Relations
- ◆ Museum Shop
- ◆ Exhibits
- ◆ Office Administration
- ◆ Research
- ◆ Museum and Artifact Maintenance

If you have a particular interest, we have a need! We look forward to hearing from you!

Please call or e-mail Elizabeth Hutchison with any questions.

(508) 758-2844 mattapoissett.museum@verizon.net



Mattapoissett Historical Society

<i>President</i>	Jennifer McIntire	<i>Members at Large</i>	Nate Bekemeier	<i>Curator</i>	Elizabeth Hutchison
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MATTAPOISETT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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