

The View from The Crow's Nest



Newsletter of the Mattapoisett Historical Society

Spring 2010 / Issue XIII

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



Photo by Penny Brewer

MUSEUM RECEIVES ASHLEY MURAL

By SETH MENDELL

This past November the Mattapoisett Historical Society and Museum received a large mural painted by the artist Clifford Ashley. The mural, or “chart”, was given by Mrs. Polly Duff Phipps of 20 Water Street, Mattapoisett and is possibly the largest single work of the artist. Measuring 6 by 16 feet, the mural details the south coast from the Connecticut River to Cape Cod including the islands of Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket. Clifford Ashley painted the mural in 1919 for his good friend Gilbert Hinsdale and the work remained in the family home at 20 Water Street for 90 years.

The house on the Mattapoisett waterfront was built in 1901 for William and Sophia Means. They had two daughters, Martha who married Gilbert Hinsdale of New York City and Mary who married Horace F. Field. Polly Field Duff Phipps is the granddaughter of Horace and Mary Means Field. The mural was attached to the sloped ceiling of the study or sunroom on the harbor side of the building. Due to its location on the ceiling, the mural survived the thirty-eight hurricane even though the room was flooded with five feet of salt water. Removing the 6 by 16 foot mural, with its



ridged backing, was difficult. However, with the expertise of Ben Rogers and Nate Bekemeier of Rogers Gallery, along with staging and seven more men, the deed was accomplished. The mural is now laid flat on top of the pews in the museum at 5 Church Street and can be seen by appointment (508-758-2844 or 758-4458) for the next several months before it is sent out for restoration.

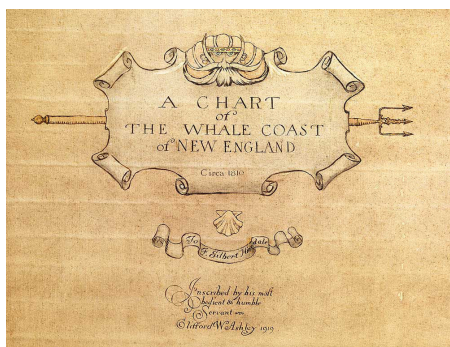
Clifford Warren Ashley, a southcoast artist, illustrator and author, is known for his many paintings detailing the whaling industry as well as local landscapes. Ashley was born in New Bedford in 1881 and died in 1947 in Westport, Massachusetts. His early life was spent on the New Bedford waterfront among the last of the whalers that had in earlier years been part of the city's world-wide whaling fleet. In 1904, Ashley shipped out aboard the bark "Sunbeam" to experience first hand life aboard a whaler. He witnessed the harpooning, "cutting-in" and "trying-out" of several sperm whales over a six-week period. He was one of a very few artists of his time to combine this practical knowledge with the professional training of an artist. Following his time aboard the "Sunbeam", he wrote an article for Harper's Monthly magazine entitled "The Blubber Hunters". In 1926 this article became the first two chapters in his book "The Yankee Whaler" which is considered one of the more definitive treatments of 19th century whaling. Perhaps he is best known as an author for the "Ashley Book Of Knots" published shortly before his death in 1947. This volume contains

descriptions and drawings of 3,854 knots and is accepted as the "bible" of knot-tying the world over.

During his life-time, Ashley painted some 350 oil paintings of which the New Bedford Whaling Museum has a great number in its collection. The Mattapoisett Museum is indeed fortunate to now have "A Chart of the Whale Coast of New England c.1810" painted by Clifford Ashley in 1919. Following its restoration and hanging, the mural will be one of the center pieces of the museum's collection and will bring visitors from near and far to view this magnificent work of such a well-known local artist.

Over the past four months, a number of conservators have viewed the mural to advise us in the restoration process. There are four steps to be considered. First, the mural must be cleaned with great care so that the work will not lose any definition or color. Next, the surface must be stabilized with a clear coat to protect and preserve the paint. With that done, the canvas must be separated from the wooden backing it has been glued to for ninety years, and rolled up on a large tube.

Lastly, the canvas must be re-attached to an acid-free backing so it can be hung in the museum over the pulpit in the church building. As you can see, this will take a year or more. For the summer months this year, the mural will be part of our special summer exhibit – "Mattapoisett – A Working Waterfront".



Photos by Erik Gould - Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum



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Ms. Karen Morley Westcott
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Mrs. Alice Williams
Mrs. Margot Wizansky
Mr. Richard Young

AND THANKS TO THESE ADDITIONAL SUPPORTERS:

Mr. and Mrs. Barry Bissonnette
Mrs. Penny Cole
Mr. and Mrs. Brad Hathaway
Mrs. Polly Duff Phipps
Delano Kindred Group
Ellis Cemetery Corporation
Mattapoisett Women's Club
NStar Foundation
Purrington House
Rogers Gallery



A VISIT FROM SARAH DELANO ROOSEVELT

On March 14 a group of about 40 or so local residents gathered at the Mattapoisett Library Meeting Room to hear from one of our more prominent local residents. And, when Sarah Delano Roosevelt arrived at 2:00 pm all properly attired in visiting clothes, including black veiled hat and gloves, we all knew we were in for a delightful visit.

Sarah Delano (as portrayed by Natalie Hemingway) spent much of her early life in Fairhaven where her family had a summer home. She spoke fondly of her early visits to Mattapoisett and Marion as well as of the times she spent at her family home. Evidently, it was a Thanksgiving in Fairhaven that most of the family would gather at one time to exchange news and stay in touch.

She spoke quite touchingly about her meeting with "Mr. James" who would become her husband despite a significant age difference. He was 52 and she was 26. But they had a good life together and traveled extensively through Europe. Her greatest achievement, however, was her son Franklin. The talk was illustrated by photographs of her family and a very rare one of Franklin in a wheelchair after he had been stricken by polio. She also spoke of Dr. McDonald of Marion who had been of significant help to Franklin in dealing with the early stages of polio.

One thing abundantly clear, however, was the feeling that she had toward her future daughter-in-law. When Franklin informed her that he had become engaged to his cousin Eleanor she gave quite a shout! She promptly made him promise that he would say nothing to anyone about it for one year. After he agreed she hurried him off to Europe for some extensive travel. She was not particularly successful in her attempts to keep them apart because the next year when she arrived in Fairhaven to celebrate Thanksgiving she arrived in time to hear Franklin announce that he and Eleanor were engaged!

Sarah (Natalie) concluded the visit by inviting attendees to come up and look at the photographs and ask any questions they might have. It was a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon.



Photo by Sarah K. Taylor
Courtesy of The Wanderer

SUMMER EXHIBIT - MATTAPOISETT - A WORKING HARBOR

BY ELOISE RICCARDELI

With the centerpiece of our summer exhibit being the Clifford Ashley mural, it seems fitting that our focus should be on the history of our harbor and waterfront. To quote from Charles Mendell's pamphlet *Shipbuilders of Mattapoisett* - "In its day Mattapoisett was the most famous whaleship building port in the world. The list of vessels known to have been built at Mattapoisett now numbers 400."

With that in mind, our exhibit will include maps locating the various shipyards, photographs of

currently existing building or sites that once housed such trades as ropewalks, blacksmiths, sail-lofts, coopers (barrel makers) as well as tools from our collection that were used by these early tradesmen. We hope you will make a point of visiting the museum this summer to see this very special exhibit. The various conservators who have been visiting the museum this spring to estimate work to be done on the mural have all remarked about what an exceptional small museum ours is! So - come!



The following article was published in the Standard Times on February 8, 2010

Mattapoisett Historical Society President Shares History of Elizabeth Islands

By Eileen Marum Contributing Writer

Raised on the shores of Buzzards Bay, Seth Mendell had sailed past the Elizabeth Islands countless times. He was always curious about their history. So he did what any good history teacher would do: He researched the subject himself.

Recently, before a packed house at the public library, Mendell, 77, shared his findings as part of the Mattapoisett Historical Society's Elizabethan Islands lecture series.

Mendell, who taught history for 35 years at Avon Old Farms School in Avon, Conn., is the president of the Historical Society. He held the attention of listeners for more than an hour as he narrated an intriguing story of exploration, discovery and piracy beginning with Capt. Bartholomew Gosnold in March 26, 1602.

He described how Gosnold sailed "to the New World" from England aboard the Concord with 20 colonists and 12 sailors.

Although Gosnold's original destination was Virginia, he missed his target and landed on Cape Cod in 1602 with four other men, making them the first Englishmen to set foot in New England, Mendell said.

"Sailing south around the Cape, they found 'many fair islands,' naming one island that was abundant in grapes and other fruit Martha's Vineyard after (Gosnold's) daughter and the string of islands between Vineyard Sound and Buzzards Bay the Elizabeth Islands after his Queen." Mendell said.

"Gosnold is credited for naming Cape Cod after the large number of cod caught in the area," he added.

The colonists remained on the island for three weeks, but tensions with the Native Americans together with a scarcity of provisions forced them to abandon the colony, he said. "They stocked up the ship with a cargo of sassafras, cedar, furs and skins and returned to England," Mendell said. "I almost felt the presence of early settlers and swashbucklers of old, living and working on Naushon Island," said Ann Wallace, a Mattapoisett resident, as Mendell described early island life and commerce.

"This is one of the most awesome and interesting talks I have ever attended," Jim Malloy of Sandwich said. "I have gazed at those islands for years and never realized all the rich history behind them." Giving the program a special dimension was the fact that Mendell relied on hard copies of charts and maps and an old-fashioned wooden school pointer to tell his tale — and transport his audience back to the early history of the Elizabeth Islands.



Photo by Erik Gould
Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum



CURATOR'S CORNER BY BETTE ROBERTS

SUMMER DOCENTS

Would you like a chance to really get acquainted with our museum and its wonderful collection of memorabilia of Mattapoisett history? Then sign up to be a docent one afternoon this summer. You, along with another docent, will welcome visitors and help them enjoy our museum. Call Bette at the museum at 508-758-2844 and volunteer.

CEMETERY WALK AND TALK

Another in the series of "walks and talks" in local cemeteries will take place on Sunday, May 23 at 2:00 pm in the Ellis Cemetery on Wolf Island Road. Bette Roberts, Museum Curator, will share the history and stories of this burial ground. Wolf Island Road can be reached from upper North Street or from Long Plain Road. In case of rain, the program will be held at a later date.



ART SHOW

Thanks to a group of local artists the Historical Society Art Show and Sale will return during this summer's Harbor Days weekend. The committee consists of Donna Junier, Barbara Poznysz, Sylvia Morrell, Jean Cummings, Claire Rezendes and Eloise Riccardelli representing our Board of Directors. The show will take place on the Museum grounds on July 17 and 18 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm each day. So please plan to come and bring your friends.

2010 Upcoming Programs

May 23	2:00 pm	Cemetery Walk with Bette
June 30	5:30 pm	Open House
July 7	7:00 pm	Ice Cream Social (Rain date: July 21)
July 17, 18	2:00 pm	Harbor Days & Art Show
August 19	7:30 pm	Seth Presents Fortier Photos
September 19	2:00 pm	Annual Meeting

While some of the information is still incomplete as we go to press, we want to be sure you know what the Historical Society has planned for you!



WORD SEARCH *By LISA HILL*

CHARLES ASHLEY KNOTS

N	A	R	H	G	M	F	A	L	S	E	G	E	E	H
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ANGLER
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CROSSING
CROWN
DIPLOMA
ELUSIVE
FALSE
FROG

GANGING
GRANNY
HALF
HEAD
HOBBLE
HONDA
INSECT
JOSEPHINE

LANYARD
LORN
MOORING
NAPOLEON
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