

The View from
The Crow's Nest



Newsletter of the Mattapoisett Historical Society

Fall 2011 / Issue XVI

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

Seth Mendell Appointed Town Historian

By Katherine Gaudet

On August 9, 2011, the Board of Selectmen acting on the recommendation of the Historical Commission appointed Seth Mendell, President of the Mattapoisett Historical Society, as Town Historian. Francis Rowland, who died in 2006, had served in that position until his death. Mr. Rowland and Seth's father, Charles, founded the Mattapoisett Historical Society and Museum in 1958.

Mr. Mendell stated, "I am humbled that they picked me to follow in the footsteps of Francis Rowland. I've always had the utmost respect for him and his knowledge of the Town's history." Family footsteps have long echoed through the town of Mattapoisett. Mr. Mendell has ancestors on both sides of his family and for whom he is named. On the Mendell side, Captain Seth Mendell was in the Mattapoisett militia during the War of 1812. His discharge papers from 1820 and his sword are displayed in the



Seth Mendell pictured with his great, great grandfather, Nathaniel Freeman, a whaler who lost his life in the Indian Ocean.

Museum. His great-great grandfather's (Nathaniel Freeman) portrait hangs in the museum. Mr. Freeman's sea chest is also on exhibit. He lost his life in 1838 in the Indian Ocean while serving as first mate aboard the *Liverpool*, a whaler out of New Bedford.

Mr. Mendell's journey with the Historical Society began with a red VW bug. Working at the time at Avon Old Farms School in Connecticut as the Head of the Development office and as a Russian history teacher, he and his wife, Alice and their two daughters Phyllis and Margaret would return to the area for summers. "My dad would shanghai me to go with him to pick up artifacts in his VW for the Museum. While the Carriage House was being built and after, I would move things around." It was the beginning of his love affair with town history.

In 1990, the Mendell family moved back to Mattapoisett and the following year Mr. Mendell became a board member of the Historical Society. In 1996, he became the President, a post he has held since. In his tenure, he has lifted the Museum to new heights. He added an Annual Appeal, developed "The Crow's Nest" (quarterly newsletter) and boosted membership. He has devoted time to maintenance of the buildings and installed UV glass in the storm windows to protect the Museum's collections. Following in his father's footsteps, he has garnered many new artifacts such as the mizzen mast from the *Wanderer*, signs from the Mattapoisett Inn and the Mattapoisett Diner, furniture and most recently, Clifford Ashley's mural. A recent visitor

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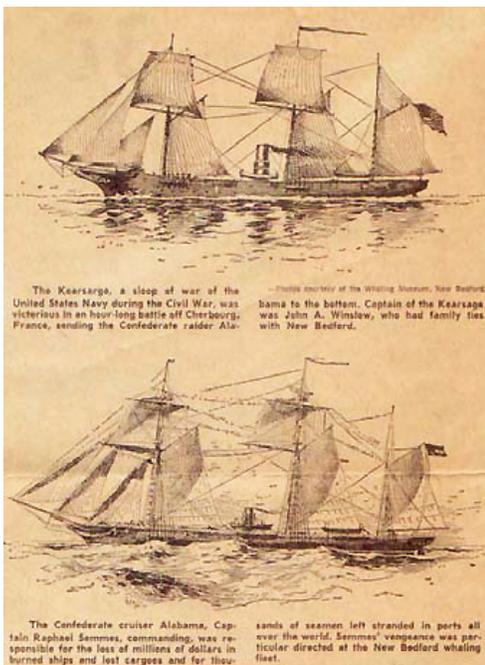
Seth Mendell (continued from cover)

to the Museum enthused, “I never knew this was here and I can’t believe the extent of this collection!”

Mr. Mendell is also a prolific writer and speaker. He has delivered talks on all aspects of Mattapoissett’s history, among them: the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, whaling, saltworks, shipbuilding, the Elizabeth Islands, Prohibition, the construction of Cape Cod Canal, World War I and World War II. He always speaks to a full house.

Plans for the future of the Museum continue to percolate. Mr. Mendell is writing a new town history, “Mattapoissett Through the Centuries: an in-depth view of our quaint New England seaside village.” He continues to raise funds for the substantial restoration of the Clifford Ashley Mural project, and is publishing a view book for it as well.

Mr. Mendell sums up his time with the Mattapoissett Historical Society, “It has been a team effort all the way. I am indebted to the members of the Society’s Board and our curator, Bette Roberts, for all their help and support. As for myself, I literally eat, drink, and breath this place everyday.” Mattapoissett is extraordinarily lucky that he does!



Top:
Union Vessel
Kearsage

Bottom:
Confederate
Raider
Alabama

Civil War - Another Chapter in Mattapoissett’s History

By Katherine Gaudet

This past summer in conjunction with Heritage Days, Seth Mendell delivered another chapter of his history of Mattapoissett to a packed crowd at the town library. Listeners were regaled with stories of the South Coast’s involvement in all facets of the war.

After Fort Sumter fell, Abraham Lincoln, only in the fifth week of his first term, called for 75,000 men to be recruited from the northern states. In 1861, Mattapoissett had a population of 1700 people. A quota of 180 men was called for.

To entice men to sign up, a \$100.00 signing bonus was given for one year of service; a \$125 bonus was given to those who promised three years of service. Mattapoissett paid for these by floating bonds. Mattapoissett men participated in every major battle of the Civil War: Bull Run, Gettysburg, Antietam, and Shiloh, to name a few.

As the war unfolded, the women of Mattapoissett would gather weekly at Purrington Hall (now the site of Shipyard Park) with their sewing, knitting and crocheting to share the letters they had received from their loved ones. In this way, they learned about the battles, the loss of life, and the good and bad news of the day.

More than any other area, the New Bedford area was well aware of the animosity between the South and the North. New Bedford had become the northern terminal for the Underground Railroad, that chain of helping hands which started in the Carolinas and Virginia. The Quakers welcomed the slaves. For more than a century they had welcomed a very diverse population that arrived in the city on whaling vessels. Frederick Douglass, a slave who rose to fame as a great orator, was smuggled into the city along with Lewis Temple who developed the toggle harpoon.



Mr. Mendell then talked about the Stone Fleet. As the war developed, the North was anxious to blockade all Confederate ports such as Savannah and Charleston, and the Mississippi River. The Federal government bought forty-five whaling ships whose bilges they filled with fieldstones. Farmers from Acushnet, Rochester, and Lakeville were paid fifty cents a ton for the stones they brought from their fields to the wharf in New Bedford. 7,500 tons of stones were purchased! The ships were then sailed in November of 1861 and sunk in the harbors. Unfortunately, because currents changed and ships moved, it did not have the hoped for effect of blocking the harbors.

New Bedford whalers suffered many hardships during the Civil War. The Confederates commissioned the English to build three frigates: the Florida, the Alabama, and the Shenandoah, who “bit into the whaling industry and sank many ships.” The Alabama was situated in the Azores. It was not only built by the English but manned by them as well, since the Confederates did not have trained seaman. Of the forty-five ships that she sank, twenty-five of them were New Bedford whalers. The Shenandoah’s captain, James Wordell, was so ruthless that he not only sank 34 ships during the war, but he continued to do so after the war was over. Even though sailors showed him evidence that the war was over through newspaper reports, he sank another fifteen or twenty ships. Eventually, England was forced to pay for the losses incurred by the sinking of the North’s ships. Mr. Mendell ended his talk with the sinking of the Alabama in the English Channel by the American frigate, Kearsage, in 1864.

Mattapoissett Historical Society *Fifty-Third Annual Meeting 2011*

The fifty-third annual meeting of the Mattapoissett Historical Society was held on Sunday, September 18th at the Museum on Church Street. Following a welcome and moment of silence, President Mendell called on Vice President Katherine Gaudet to read the minutes from last year’s meeting. Maureen McCarthy then distributed the treasurer’s report and commented that the investment account was down due to the economy, but the Society was solvent with money in the bank to pay the bills.



Alice Mendell and Bette Roberts

Before calling on Bette Roberts for the curator’s report, Mr. Mendell read a letter to the assembled members from Bette in which she said that after nearly 25 years as curator of the Mattapoissett Museum and Carriage House, she felt it was time for her to step down from that position. “I wish my resignation to be effective on September 1, 2012...The museum will always be special to me and I will continue to support it and do what

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Anecdotal Footnote:

Mattapoissett resident, Kate Merck, is closely connected to the whole Alabama debacle. Her great-grandfather, William Maxwell Evarts, participated as counsel for the United States in settling the Alabama claims.

In 1871, Evarts appeared before the Tribunal of Arbitration at Geneva which decided in 1872 that Great Britain had “failed to use due diligence” to

prevent the Confederate raiders from going to sea. It was through his efforts that the Tribunal awarded the United States \$15,500,000.

Evarts was appointed Secretary of State by president Hayes in 1877 and served for all four years. He was elected US Senator from New York in 1885. He won many important law cases. As Attorney General, he was counsel for the defense of President Andrew Johnson’s impeachment. He got him off by one vote!



Christmas Caroling, 2011

By Katherine Gaudet



On December 11 from 2:00-3:30 pm, Mattapoissett's children and their families are invited to an afternoon of old-fashioned Christmas caroling through Mattapoissett's village. The final stop of the day will be at the Kinsale Inn to regale the appreciative crowds. Afterwards, hot chocolate and cookies will warm up participants back at the Museum. Don't forget to bring your jingle bells!

Annual Meeting (continued from previous page)

I can as a volunteer.” In her report Bette commented that attendance was up this year over the last several years, probably due to the hanging of the Clifford Ashley Mural as well as the Civil War exhibit. She thanked the many docents who helped with the staffing of the museum during the summer and said one of the highlights of her years as curator was working with so many wonderful people.

In his remarks, Mr. Mendell thanked Bette for her many years as curator and said that she will be missed. He went on to say, now her retirement has been formally announced, the Board of Directors will begin a search for a new curator. In his assessment of the year, President Mendell said the restoration and celebration of the Clifford Ashley Mural was certainly the highlight. He thanked everyone for their support of the project, particularly the members of the board and the many donors who made it possible.



Gift of artist Mike Mazer "First Responders"

Following the business sessions of the meeting, Mr. Mendell introduced Mike Mazer to comment on his gift to the museum of one of his paintings, "First Responders," depicting the Bouchard oil spill in 2003. Mr. Mazer has exhibited all over the world and in his remarks he said, "It gives me great pleasure to give this painting to the Mattapoissett Museum." Mr. Mendell thanked him on behalf of the society.



Next to come to the podium was Richard Morgado to talk about his gift of a two part glass barber pole to the museum. "My father, Albert Morgado, cut hair for thirty years in the small shop on Church Street. This barber pole had belonged to Abraham Skidmore who cut hair in the shop before my dad. When my dad sold the shop to Jodi Bauer, he kept the pole. I am pleased now to give it to the museum for all to see." Mr. Mendell thanked him for such a wonderful local artifact to add to the museum's collection. Everyone was then invited to share refreshments and a cake in Bette Robert's honor.

This barber pole, a gift of Richard Morgado, originally belonged to Abraham Skidmore whose shop at 19 Church Street is currently operated by Jodi Bauer.



The Duff family is presented with a framed print of the Ashley Mural

Historical Mural Debuts

The following article appeared in the August 4 edition of the Sippican Week and was written by Eric Fox. Reprinted by permission.

Mattapoisett – Seth Mendell stood in front of a full crowd at the podium in the Meeting House, now the Mattapoisett Historical Society Museum. The pews were filled. The balcony was crammed with people. Though everyone was listening to Mendell their eyes were fixated on the 6 by 16 foot mural hanging behind him.

The Clifford Ashley mural, donated by Mrs. Polly Duff Phipps of Mattapoisett depicts the Southcoast to Cape Cod and includes the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. Ashley was a prominent painter in the early 20th century and is also known for authoring the "Ashley Book of Knots." The mural, or chart, was completed in 1919 and is called "A Chart of the Whale Coast of New England, c. 1810." It remained in the house at 20 Water Street for 90 years, surviving even the 1938 hurricane.

"This chart is gigantic." Mendell, the Historical Society and Museum president said. "But it tells the whole story of all the towns and their industries. The details and characteristics of each town's history with oil and ships, it's all there."

After a long and costly restoration process, Mendell added he couldn't be happier with how well the piece had been preserved. He said hundreds of donors and volunteers made it possible.

"It's painted by a local artist," he said. "Stayed in a local home. And now it's here. We can continue its story."

Books depicting close-ups from the mural are to be printed as well. Ashley created characters and images for each town, and Mendell said these books would be made available soon.



CURATOR'S CORNER

By Bette Roberts

My highlight, since the last issue of our newsletter, has been the annual visits to the Museum by the third graders from Center School. The four classes take turns walking down to the museum on successive Friday afternoons to spend about an hour learning about Mattapoissett history and participating in a scavenger hunt that gives them an overview of the great collection of memorabilia. It is always a pleasure to watch and listen to their enthusiasm as they, together with the teachers and parent helpers, tour the museum. Some of the comments heard by the students were:

“Thank you for letting our class go to the museum. I like history now.”

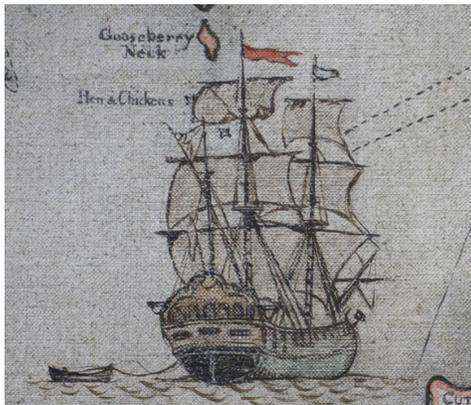
“I liked the stagecoach house because it had lots of interesting things.”

“I really liked the scavenger hunt.”

“All the ancient artifacts were cool.”

“It was great. I'll come back soon.”

Roxanne Bungert, whose mother was Dell Jenkins, has given the museum various items of clothing – most made by Dell, including the beautiful costume she made for the Bi-Centennial. One particularly interesting item is a pair of black fur and leather driving gloves—large ones with long cuffs, no doubt dating back to the early 1900's and open-touring cars. Thank you, Roxanne.



Bring the Clifford Ashley Chart into your Home!

The Mattapoissett Historical Society recently published a View Book with 60 full page images from the chart complete with captions and historic commentary. Also included is the story of the restoration of Ashley's wonderful chart. The book is currently on sale for \$25 at the Museum and local stores. The Museum is open Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm; please call 508-758-2844.

Annual Appeal

Our annual appeal is currently underway. We hope that you will consider making a gift to help support the Mattapoissett Historical Society and help to finalize the restoration of the Ashley mural.



WORD SEARCH

By Lisa Hill

Hurricanes and Tropical Storms

U R N E Y I Y T F I F
 F L O N D O G H R H T
 N E N E O N A I E G D
 C A D R R O A R H L R
 D A E I I B M T T O A
 A N R A A I R Y S R U
 D N C O N N I E E I O
 B O B E L L E I N A D
 D D Y O L F O G A D E
 H I A B E L I H A A A
 Y E R U O F Y T R O F

Thirty eight
 Forty four
 Fifty
 Carol
 Edna
 Brenda
 Donna
 Gloria
 Bob
 Connie
 Diane

Belle
 Irene
 Dog
 Esther
 Doria
 Danielle
 Edouard
 Danny
 Floyd
 Hermine



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Vice President
 Katherine Gaudet
Secretary
 Jennifer McIntire
Treasurer
 Maureen McCarthy

Members at Large
 Nate Bekemeier
 Jim Broadwater
 Tom Copps
 Lisa Hill
 Mary Beth Morse
Curator
 Bette Roberts

2011 Upcoming Programs

Sunday, December 11, 2:00 pm

Caroling through Town

Sunday, February 12, 2:00 pm

Cuttyhunk & the Elizabeth Island by Seth Mendell

Part III Pasque, Nashawena and Penikese

Sunday, March 18, 2:00 pm

“Big Mamie” and its role during World War II by Christopher Nardi, curator of Battleship Cove

Watch the website and Wanderer for location of programs and other events.



MATTAPOISETT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Thank you for your generous support.

Do you remember where this weathervane stood?



*Find the answer on our website at
www.mattapoissetthistoricalsociety.org.*