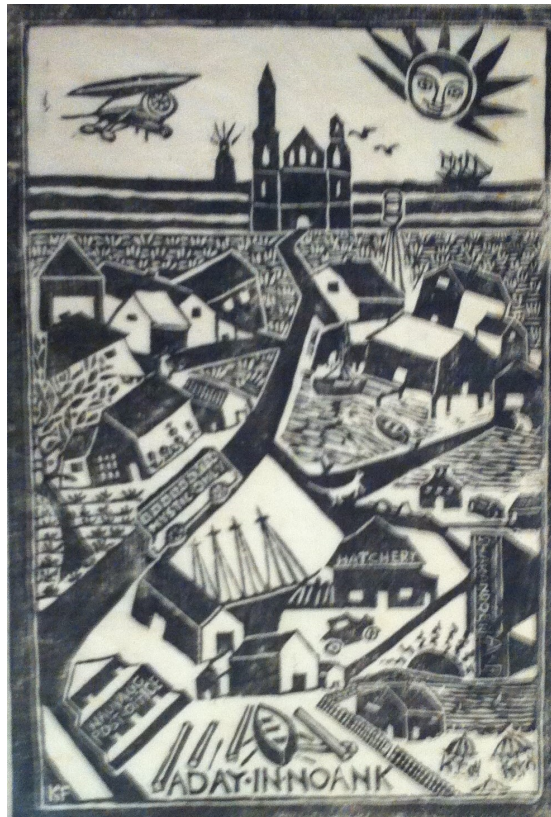




NOANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Presents: “A Noank Sampler,” by Fred Fischer



“A Day in Noank” by Katherine Forrest, 1933 (2017.011, gift of Betty Tylaska)

JOIN US: 7:30 PM - WEDNESDAY, March 16, 2022

Zoom Program

Join us on March 16th for an online screening of the film “A Noank Sampler,” with an introduction by the director, Noank’s own Fred Fischer. Like the Katherine “Speedy” Forrest print above, the film is not meant to be a strict history of the village, but a look at the nooks and crannies that make it unique—as observed by a group of its own residents. In addition to interviews and oral histories, the film contains archival materials from the wonderful collection of the Noank Historical Society, as well as photos from individuals and impressionistic footage of present-day Noank.

This program will be held virtually through Zoom. You can email us at noankhist@sbcglobal.net to receive an invitation link, or you can register to attend yourself at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/tZUpc-vgrT8pGtcSIcQ29RiMNO28a-11YttU>

Heroism in the Race: August 13, 1928

By Chris Lane

The details of the following event are taken from a description apparently prepared for the people responsible for choosing recipients of the Carnegie Medal for Heroism.



Ernest Davis aboard the *Ada May* the afternoon on August 13, 1928 (a day after Robert's 17th birthday) the *Ada May* was about a mile southwest of Race Rock Light House in approximately 200 feet of water, a light breeze blowing and the tide running a little at near slack water.

A description of the method for rigging and hauling lobster pots may be helpful for visualizing the events of the day. Three lobster pots, weighted with stones and bricks so that they will sink and remain somewhere near where they are set in the strong currents, are secured about thirty feet apart to a warp or line about 500 feet long, the upper end of which, when the pots rest on the bottom, is attached to either a wooden buoy or two glass balls, which can be seen on the surface at slack water.

In hauling the pots the buoy is grabbed as the boat is steered alongside and the end of the warp is passed through a pulley on a crane located on the port side of the boat as shown in the picture above. Three or four

On a beautiful August day while tending lobster pots in the Race aboard Ernest Davis' 24 foot boat *Ada May*, Mr. Davis, a seasoned fisherman, and his helper, Robert W. Lane, a high school senior and Mr. Davis' nephew, would encounter the unexpected. Just another day of fishing in local and very familiar waters, would result in Robert's near drowning and Ernest earning a Carnegie medal for heroism.

At about three o'clock in

turns are then taken around a winch and the labor of hauling the heavy three-pot trawl is performed by the engine, located at the forward end of the cockpit near the steering wheel.

In this instance Mr. Davis and Robert had hauled the pots up from the bottom, roughly coiling the line on the floor of the cockpit. They had removed the lobsters and had baited the pots which were to be thrown back and left overboard for another hauling in a day or two.

While Mr. Davis steered the boat, which was running at a little more than half-speed or about four miles an hour, Robert, who incidentally was then in the senior class of Bulkeley High School for boys at New London, Conn., had cast the pots over the side one at a time. As the pots sank toward the bottom, Robert grabbed the loosely coiled line from the deck and threw it over after the pots, the usual procedure, to prepare for the next trawl.

In stooping to do this a coil of the line — just how cannot be explained — caught around the boy's neck and dragged him to the stern of the boat.

In the instant before the rope tightened about his neck Robert yelled, attracting his uncle's attention. Hearing the shout, Mr. Davis, at once took a turn on the cleat mounted on the crane, his intention being to stop the line from paying out any further, and seized his fishing knife, which is always kept in a strap on the cabin bulkhead for an emergency of this sort. He supposed that the line was caught about the boy's leg, as this had happened not infrequently among other boats of the fleet.

In the next instant, Mr. Davis, seeing that the line was instead around the boy's neck, threw the hitch off the cleat, realizing with unusual clear-headedness that, with a strain on the line between the boy's neck and the cleat against the strain of the rapidly sinking pots being pulled through the water by the boat, the boy's head would be cut off.

Robert braced himself on his hands and knees for a fraction of a second at the stern of the boat, but unable

to help himself against the pull of the pots, he was jerked overboard next moment.

Hardly had he disappeared beneath the surface, however, than Mr. Davis, knife in hand, dove in after him and, grasping the line between Robert and the pots, cut it free, barely nicking the boy's neck as he did so. (This was Mr. Davis's first attempt at swimming or diving in over thirty years, as he had worn a truss during most of that time, having a bad rupture.)

Both men were dressed in oilskins and hip-boots and as they came struggling to the surface it was a fight to keep their heads above water, although both were good swimmers. The boat by this time had left them behind. No other craft was within hailing distance. No one, of course, had witnessed the event as all the lobstermen of the fleet were busy with their own pots.

Although Mr. Davis had seized hold of Robert as he came to the surface, the boy assured him he was all right. In a minute or so they had each succeeded in kicking off their boots and in getting out of their oilers. In the meantime the run-away boat, its wheel having been left thrown over, was describing a wide circle and was heading toward them.

Mr. Davis was directly in the boat's path and in danger next moment of being run over. It was necessary for him to put out both hands and fend himself off as the bow of the craft bore down on him in the swell.

Robert was a little to one side and from that side the recently cut line of the pot gear was still trailing behind the boat. He grabbed it and the line caught at the cleat on the crane. He began to pull himself, hand over hand in toward the boat. The line then loosened suddenly and he went under. A moment later and it had caught on the cleat again. Once more Robert began pulling himself toward the boat. Once again it slackened. The boy was under again and then again it held; and now Robert succeeded in pulling himself in to the stern. In spite of the fact that the propeller was turning dangerously close beneath his feet, Robert seized the rudder post and pulled himself aboard.

Mr. Davis was still fighting to keep up; but, as he admitted afterwards, mighty near "all in." Robert jumped to the control, sped up the engine and brought

the boat about and to a stop alongside Mr. Davis, whom he helped to get in over the rudder, which, on a boat of this size, is the only place from which it can be boarded from in the water.

Both men lay down on the floor of the cockpit a moment to get their wind. Neither was otherwise any the worse for their adventure, except that Robert wore a scar, like a narrow collar about his neck where the line had burned it, forming a scab.



Robert Lane and Ernest Davis

As the scene unfolded, Sidney Wilcox, also of Noank, had, from some distance seen the men in the water and headed toward the *Ada May*.

"I didn't know what to think. I never was so scared in all my life as when I saw the two of you overboard. There ain't one man in a hundred would 'a' done what you did, Ern Davis."

From the account, "The only account of the mishap is to be had, of course, from Mr. Davis, and Robert. Both bear an excellent reputation in their home town and their accounts of the rescue check up. Only Mr. Davis's clear-headedness and self-sacrificing promptness saved the boy from being dragged down by the neck with irresistible swiftness in over 200 feet of water; and only Robert's stamina and coolness when he had pulled himself aboard the run-away powerboat saved his uncle from drowning.

Two weeks after this incident a young man was drowned out of New London when he was pulled overboard from a lobster boat with a rope around his

leg; and there have been other cases where men have been caught; but never about a man's neck.

There can be no question of Mr. Davis having risked his life to save the boy and to those who go down to the sea in fishing boats Mr. Davis's act will be appreciated as one of unusual quick-mindedness and unhesitating self-sacrificing heroism."



Epilog:

Sadly, in a chilling twist of fate, the very next year, as a freshman at Wesleyan University, Robert died by drowning in a swimming pool. As my father Adrian Lane's older brother, he would have been my uncle had he lived.



Noank News: The Noank Fire Company



Members of the Noank Fire Company No. 1, c. 1921, assembled outside the original firehouse near Cedar Street. The Noank Fire Co. was founded in 1895, and has been serving the Noank community since.

100 Years Ago:

The Day, March 7, 1922: "The second of the series of pool games between the firemen and the fishermen is scheduled to take place on the tables at the quarters of the fire company tomorrow evening. The firemen have a lead of 68 points from the previous match but the members of the opposing team feel confident that they will make a much better showing and cut the lead considerable in these next games."

The Day, March 20, 1922: "Brush Fire on Prospect Hill: A brush fire that threatened destruction to several houses on Prospect Hill was fought by the members of the of fire company and others for over an hour Saturday and it was only by the hardest kind of work that there was no loss. The fire started near the residence of Patrick Cahill in Brook Street and driven by the northwest wind, it raged across the vacant lots spreading to the eastward and southward, until there was an immense body of fire to contend with. Charles Zucardy and Edwin Rollins were directly in the path of the fire and at times it seemed very doubtful if they could be saved.

There being no water in the vicinity, except wells and cisterns, the fire engine was not put to work and the blaze was fought almost entirely with brooms and cedar trees, some chemicals and water from buckets. This is the first time in three years that the lots have been burned over and the brush and dead grass, both dry as tinder, made a very hot blaze and one that was very hard to subdue."

The Day, March 30, 1922: "There was a large attendance at the old fashioned dance given in Unity Hall by the members of the fire company. These dances are increasing in popularity and besides affording an enjoyable evening's entertainment they are turning money into the treasury of the company."

The Day, April 22, 1922: "A stubborn fire in the walls of the Bayside Inn, off Front Street, owned by J.L. Webb, called out the fire department shortly after 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon and gave the firemen a hard fight for nearly an hour. The fire started from a fireplace on the main floor and traveled between the floors, and partitions of the three stories of the structure. Only in one or two places did the flames break

through and give the firemen any idea of their location, it being necessary to chop holes in the floors and walls in many places in order to make the chemicals and water effective.

Much credit is due the members of the fire department for their prompt response and the manner in which the fire was handled, their quick and effective work saving the building. The blaze was fought from all three floors and the basement, which kept it confined to the southwest corner of the structure. The damage is estimated at \$2,000, the greater part of which was caused by water, the nature and position of the fire making it necessary to flood that section of the structure in which the blaze was located."

50 Years Ago:

The Day, February 23, 1972: "Noank—A 75-year-old barrier against women has been broken by the Noank Volunteer Fire Co. Members have agreed to allow female companions to join them for an annual dinner meeting beginning at 6:30 p.m. March 20 at Skipper's Dock Restaurant.

Firemen in the past have voted down numerous proposals favoring admission of women to the annual function. Officials say records give no indication the opposite sex has been included in the program since the company was organized 75 years ago.

'If you mentioned it, you had to be prepared to come down from the nearest pole later,' commented one member. Jack Shaw, secretary for the company, called the decision 'long overdue.'

Change in attitude is attributed by some members to 'wives' who feel time for fire company needs takes husbands out of the home too often. 'Also, maybe there's a feeling the meeting would be a nice night out with our spouses,' said one member. Wives, in return, are greeting the announcement with enthusiasm.

The decision was voted unanimously by 20 members at a meeting at the firehouse. The vote represented about one quarter of the company's total membership.

H.W. Jones of Smith Court and Fred Cauldwell of Pearl Street will be general chairmen for the event.

Plans include a social hour beginning at 6:30 p.m. and a roast beef dinner at 7:30 p.m. Local merchants will be in charge of tickets beginning Saturday for members and guests. Dancing will be from 9 p.m. until midnight. The brief business session includes election of officers.



NHS Awarded Grant Funding for 2022

We are thrilled to announce that the Noank Historical Society was awarded \$6,900 in funding from the CT Cultural Operating Support Grant for 2022.

Support has been provided to NHS from CT Humanities (CTH), with funding provided by the Connecticut State Department of Economic and Community Development/Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) from the Connecticut State Legislature.

cthumanities

The Sylvan Street Museum will be open to visitors and researchers by appointment throughout the winter. Please call us at 860-536-3021 or email us at noankhist@sbcglobal.net with any questions, or to set up a date and time.

Selections from the NHS Photograph Collection

By John Wilbur, NHS Historian



A thousand words, but which thousand? Is this a Noank smack rearing up into a massive sea as she sails into the river after a week-long fishing trip to Nantucket Shoals? Not quite. Where is the story here: the foreground, the background, or something else? In photography terms it all depends on your depth of field, but let's take a more holistic view and absorb all the information on offer.

We'll work our way into this magnificent bit of photography, (selected because of clarity and sharpness of the image) one of a series of photos taken the same day. The schooner is a model, 36 inches long, hollow, but fitted with a substantial lead keel. The model was given to Adrian K. Lane by Captain Henry Langworthy, who, aside from being one of Noank's leading fishermen, was also a benefactor to Noank's youth (he also gifted the first *Dauntless* to the Noank Sea Scouts). This model is more along the lines of a yacht than a fisherman, and this photograph was probably taken mid-April of 1935. Voyage 213 of *The Downton* mentions

“Jack (Wilbur) and I and Leonard Reid went out to sail my (model) schooner for which I made a new staysail. Wind NW

and we sailed her up to Ram Pt where we landed. When we went ashore I broke the rudder off her. She sailed fine.”

The model was certainly capable of carrying sail in a manner befitting both the donor (Capt. Langworthy had a reputation as a bit of a “driver”) and the spirit of her teenage skipper. She also was capable of a fair turn of speed, and spoken of in reverential tones by those who sailed her.

But not everyone is enraptured by the model. To some, the Noank shoreline in the background is more interesting. The shoreline is very different today, and much of what's in frame is now gone. At far right is the State Lobster hatchery, built in 1905 and destroyed in the 1938 hurricane. Two flattish-roofed wings were added to either side of the hatchery circa 1932, and one of these is plainly visible in this photo. The large building just above the model is the old Morgan Block. During WWI the Morgan Block was refurbished, heated, wired, and used to accommodate shipyard workers in addition to feeding same as the “Ye Old Noank Tavern” (even then we weren't safe from the “Ye Oldes”). Later, the building came to be named Corona Hall, and used for meetings, dances, the odd boxing match, and the home of the aforementioned Noank Sea Scouts un-

til it was destroyed by fire in September 1937. The house at far left was under the curve of Snake Hill, and at the time of the photograph occupied by Al and Cornelia Haring, who ran a boat rental business in the same general area. The house was seriously undermined by the hurricane and razed shortly thereafter.

But arguably the biggest story is the debt of gratitude we owe our intrepid photographer, a boy not quite 15 who had the desire to photograph his command at sea. Photos like these would probably fire a young man's imagination through the long, cold Noank winters. Historical documentation is sometimes a sneaky thing. It insinuates itself into the casual and humdrum facets of life, then leaps out at you years or decades later. I don't doubt that when Adrian Lane took this photo he thought he was merely documenting a day sail on the river, but little did he realize that so much in this photograph would change so drastically, and for that matter so soon.



George Hewitt and Betty Avery on their wedding day, June 6, 1944. 2003.040.008, gift of the George Hewitt Estate.

Call for Donations: Noank Weddings

Were you a Noank bride or groom? Was one of your relatives or ancestors? The Noank Historical Society is currently seeking loans or donations of items related to Noank weddings—past and present—for a summer program. We are happy to scan photographs or documents at the Sylvan Street museum, and return the hard copies to any person who does not want to part with their originals.

We are interested in all sorts of material including:

- Photographs, slides and videos
- Written stories and reminiscences
- Invitations and programs
- Marriage certificates
- Newspaper announcements



Marriage certificate of Amelia Earhart and George Palmer Putnam, married in Noank in 1931. Courtesy of the Purdue University Archives.

If you have any items or stories you would like to share, please contact Nancy Codeanne (860-536-9253), Debbie Bates (860-536-4747), or the historical society (860-536-3021 or noankhist@sbcglobal.net).

In Memoriam

Arthur Angelo DeBiasi Jr., 1950—2021
 Arnold Jordan, Sr., 1926—2021
 Jean Cushman Knapp, 1931-2022
 Lillian Knowles, 1925-2021
 William Gordon Lange, 1936—2021
 Karen Kilpatrick Lewis, 1946-2022
 Edgar Durwood Main, 1929—2021
 Blair Munyon, 1947-2021
 Betty Noyes, 1918—2021
 Scott Franz Schramm, 1963-2021
 Susan Hooker Woodward Twing, 1944—2021



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All photos in the Noank Ledger belong to the NHS Photograph Collections unless otherwise noted.

If you have any questions, concerns, and/or articles to share in the Noank Ledger, please contact us at Noankhist@sbcglobal.net. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the mailing of the ledger, or address changes, please contact Elizabeth Boucher at P.O. Box 9454, Noank, CT 06340