

NOANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Presents:

“Mystic Built: Ships and Shipyards of the Mystic River”

By Bill Peterson

JOIN US: 7:30 PM
WEDNESDAY
March 15, 2023

*The Latham/Chester Store,
108 Main Street, Noank*

Historian Bill Peterson will discuss the revised, expanded and reissued edition of his 1989 book “Mystic Built: Ships and Shipyards of the Mystic River, Connecticut.” For 135 years, from 1784 to 1919, yards along the six-mile tidal stretch of Connecticut's Mystic River launched well over 1,400 vessels. In ports around the world, "Mystic Built" became synonymous with the quality and beauty of Noank and Mystic vessels. Drawing on more than twelve years of research in manuscript archives, period newspapers, and historic photograph collections, Peterson describes the individual shipyards and shipbuilders and places them in their local and national contexts. The revised edition includes in depth discussions of the importance of shipbuilding and the ships built along the Mystic River, a list of all known vessels built in Noank, and updated information on local shipbuilding and related trades in the 20th century.

The public is cordially invited. Refreshments will be served.
<http://www.noankhistoricalsociety.org>

Noank Has a Long Tradition of Markets on Pearl Street



Interior of 17 Pearl Street, c. 1930. 2023.002.002, gift of Joan Russell.

One of the first donations of the new year is this photograph of Peter Joseph Shandeor standing with three employees inside his Noank grocery store c. 1930, given to the historical society by Joan Russell. Shandeor's business, "P.J. Shandeor, Meat and Groceries," was one of a long line of groceries and markets that have operated out of 17 Pearl Street since the late 19th century.

The building was originally home to the Robert Palmer & Son Company Store, which catered to employees of the Palmer Shipyard and allowed them to charge their grocery accounts against their wages. A golden eagle adorned the gable of the store. It had been salvaged from the stern of a vessel wrecked on Fishers Island in the early 1800s, then affixed to the stern of the SHANNON. Following a life at sea, it was found a home on the gable of the William Latham store, before being painted, gilded and attached to the Pearl Street building. During its tenure as a company store, the second floor of the building also served as a community center for the shipyard workers. Unfortunately, by 1910, the Palmer & Son's Store was unable to keep up with their accounts and began the process of

dissolving the business. The actual closing on the store took close to two years and the building stood vacant for several more before it was purchased c. 1919 by Peter Shandeor.



The Robert Palmer & Sons Company Store at 17 Pearl Street c. 1899. Note the eagle directly below the highest set of windows. 1995.001.001, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Palmer.

Shandeor was born in New London in 1891, the son of Italian immigrants. As a young man he worked as a clerk in a New London grocery store, before moving to Noank to open his own business. In 1924, he married a Noank native, Lois Butson, and the two lived out the rest of their lives in the village. During this time, the store was just one of four groceries located in Noank, but it had additional significance as a community center. While the Shandeors owned the building, the third floor was opened up as a theater and dance hall – to the delight of many of Mystic and Noank’s young people. The Latham School of Dance also operated out of the third floor, and Noank’s campfire girls met regularly in a room on the second floor.

In early 1947, the business was purchased by Pat Quaratella and his brother-in-law, Dan Simonelli, and became “The Universal Food Store.” Sal Quaratella also joined as a partner in the business. An opening day advertisement in *The Day* sang its praises, claiming that Universal was “the latest in high tech; radical chic in the grocery world...engineered so that every article is within easy reaching distance for every shopper.” This new modernized “supermarket” was heralded as a “credit to the progressive spirit of its owners.” Despite the modern amenities, Universal retained a community spirit. Local customers were allowed to purchase groceries on credit and pay for their purchases on a monthly basis. Noank ephemera, contributed by staff and customers, adorned the walls. Universal stayed in the Quaratella family (Sal’s son Frank took over the business in 1989) and remained a mainstay in Noank until it closed in 2011. In the years since, the site has been home to the “Noank Community Market,” “Sherman’s Market,” “Mothership Natural Kitchen and Marketplace” and “No Anchor Fine Food and Provisions.” Most recently, it re-opened in August 2022 as “Palmer’s Provisions and Pizza.”



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Noank in the News:

150 Years Ago...

“Charles H. Smith has opened a boat builder’s shop at the lower ship yard of R. & J. Palmer. Mr. Smith is possessed of much go-ahead activity, and though young, has the reputation of being a skilled workman in his chosen occupation. From our knowledge of his character and habits, we concede that the word fail is not in his vocabulary; but to make success in this enterprise doubly sure, he has acquired the services of Charles Hadley, formerly of this place, who has but few equals in the art of modeling and constructing tiny craft.”

-The Stonington Mirror, January 2, 1873

125 Years Ago...

“Noank Wants It: Noank people who have been approached on the electric light matter are most pleased with the prospects of having it a reality, and are ready to give their support and assistance.”

-The Stonington Mirror, January 21, 1898

“Boom at Noank: The ship building boom is on at Noank. Three steamboats are being constructed and the keel for a tug will be laid this week. Several barges and boats are still being built and the future has a bright look for the firm of Robert Palmer & Son.”

-The Stonington Mirror, February 22, 1898

Selections from the NHS Photograph Collection

By John Wilbur, NHS Historian



2022.016, from the postcard collection of Arno Baur (gift of Eddie Baur and Norma Combs)

This is a postcard of the Noank waterfront, circa 1910. The location is just south of what is now Ford's Lobsters, and although the boats are idle, the photograph does convey a sense of industry. It is evidently spring: trees are in leaf, but the white sloop still has her winter cover, and a boom tent is rigged on the black schooner. The door/hatch on the winter cover is open, and presumably the owner or a workman is currently below, getting the boat ready for the coming yachting season. The case for this being spring and not fall is that the powerboat closest to the camera shows topsides streaked with rust, dust, or dirt more in keeping with a winter's layup than a summer where routine use, maintenance, and cleaning would preclude such a condition.

The background reveals an assortment of sheds right on the waterfront just north of the State Lobster Hatchery, whose gambrel roof is visible above the bowsprit

of the schooner. A white hulled power vessel is tied to the Hatchery dock. Also of note is the windmill on the property of Henry Ward Ranger, presumably used to pump water.

To return to the schooner: the name on the bow reads *T DODGE*. This is the schooner smack *W T Dodge*, built by Robert Palmer & Sons for Block Island interests in 1895. She is significant in that she is the last all-sail fishing smack built in Noank. Another schooner, *Laura Reed*, was built by Palmer a few months later, but she was built as a "yacht" for John Luce of Niantic. Both schooners were eventually purchased by Noank fishermen, and entered the Noank fishing fleet.

W T Dodge was launched 28 February, 1895, and towed directly to New London where the fishing fraternity pronounced her a "real beauty." She was named after Wm. Talbot Dodge, one of Block Island's

leading citizens, and for 13 years was employed in fishing and occasionally freighting, and a gasoline engine was installed in January 1905. In 1907 she participated in the search for survivors of the ill-fated steamer *Larchmont*.

Charles and Jens Jenssen of Noank bought the vessel in 1908, and she took her place in the Noank fishing fleet. She stranded off the north end of Block Island in fog that November, but was refloated with the help of the Sandy Point Life Saving Service Station crew. On 25 March 1909 she got free from her mooring during a “big blow” and drifted across Noank Harbor, fetching up against the steam auxiliary sloop *Mizpah*. Fortunately, men were aboard *Mizpah* at the time and secured WTD alongside before she landed on the railroad.

Fishing was very poor in the spring and summer of 1909, and since she only paid \$2.50 per share, her captain laid her up for the summer and went to visit family in Norway.

W T Dodge was in trouble again on the north end of Block Island on December 7, 1910. This time she was driven ashore in a blinding northeast snow storm, impaling herself on two rocks. The crew were rescued, not without some difficulty by the Life Saving Service crew, and the vessel given up for lost. Upon hearing of the tragedy, Captain Jenssen immediately chartered the schooner *Phebe* and departed for Block Island to salvage rigging, what gear he could, and maybe the boat itself. Thankfully, the stout hull outlasted the storm, and by using sealed barrels as floatation, the Revenue Service cutters *Dexter* and *Gresham*, with considerable effort, dragged the schooner off the bot-

tom. *Dexter* towed the wreck, with her decks awash, to New London, and a Chappel tug towed her around to Noank, where she was hauled out for further evaluation. Aside from the two large holes in her bottom, her keel was mostly gone, sternpost shredded, and planking damaged. Surprisingly, none of her frames were broken. Repairs took about one month, then she resumed fishing. For the next ten years she kept herself out of trouble, finishing her Noank days when sold on 24 March 1921, by her then-owners Captain Henry Langworthy of Noank, and William Davis of Westerly. (Langworthy had repurchased a larger schooner, the *William A Morse*, that January.)

W T Dodge was reflagged and reregistered in the Bahamas, and next made the news the evening of 12 April 1922 when she was arrested in New York City with a cargo of liquor allegedly bound for St. Pierre, Miquelon, Canada. There the trail goes cold. What happened to her thereafter is beyond the historical record, but at least this photograph remains.

The Noank Historical Society is looking for members to join our Board of Directors. If you have any interest, please contact Nancy Codeanne at 860-536-9253 or noanknan@yahoo.com.

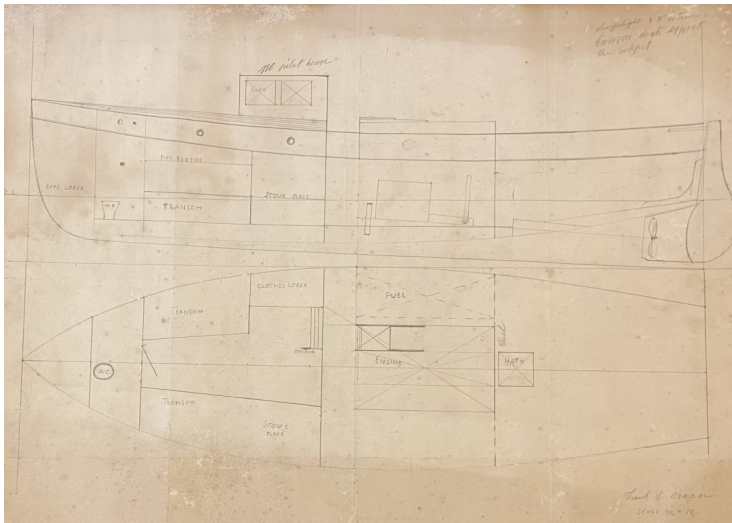


Noank in the News

100 Years Ago...

“A new fishing boat for New Haven fishermen was launched from the shop of Frank Bracci & Co on Morgan Point yesterday morning. This new craft is one of the most complete fishing boats ever turned out by the local shops, her equipment including everything that a fishing boat should have. She is 32 feet long and is built on the same model that is found to be practical by the local fishermen. Her power plant is a 52 horsepower Frisbie motor, with electric starter and generator. When the new craft left the launching ways she was ready to start for her home port.”

-The Day, February 2, 1923



Boat plans sketched by Frank Bracci.
2023.003, gift of Tim McGuire.

Frank S. Bracci arrived in Noank with a Master Draftsmen License after serving in the Merchant Marines as a ships carpenter and rigger. During WWI he was employed at the Palmer Shipyard as a foreman, and after the war he built his own shop at Morgan Point. He specialized in cat boats, fishing boats, cruisers and schooners, including the BABY I, BABY II & PAL. He also built two homes on Morgan Point—cottages for Professor Harry Jepson and Mrs. Bumsted. Blueprints for both homes were donated to NHS by Tim McGuire in 2022.

“The famous rum running case of the sword fisherman JENNIE T., seized at a local wharf on July 23, 1921, in which there were arrests, is likely to come before Judge Wolfe in superior court next week. Curt Miller and Joseph Miller are the defendants. Both have been out on bail.”

-The Day, February 3, 1923

The JENNIE T. was built in Noank by Chrisholm Stewart in 1913 and launched July 4 of that year. Less than a year into Prohibition, the sloop made national headlines as the first rum running vessel captured in New Haven waters. In July of 1921, crew members were caught red-handed unloading approximately \$30,000 worth of Scotch whiskey (some newspaper accounts estimated the value at up to \$50,000). Following another brush with the law off Block Island in August 1923, the JENNIE T. was purchased at public auction by Fred Musante and returned to Noank as a fishing boat.



The JENNIE T out fishing, c. 1930. 2002.035.016, gift of the Lithgow family.

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@gmail.com with any questions, or to set up a date and time.

100 Years Ago...

“While the local boat building shops have not been as busy this winter as they were last year there has been some business going on at all of them and before summer opens they will have added several new boats to the fleet in this vicinity. At the shops of Webster Eldredge work has been started on the construction of a 31 foot pleasure boat to be ready for the coming season. At Rogers shop work is progressing rapidly on the new fishing boat for Loren Ellis. The Bracci shop has not turned out anything since the completion of the 32 foot fishing boat for New Haven fishermen, which was launched about a month ago. Mr. Bracci is expecting a contract, soon however.”

-The Day, February 28, 1923

“William Ellis and men have completed the planking on the menhaden boat ELIAS WILCOX, now being built for the Wilcox Fertilizer Co. of Mystic at the Noank shipyard. Contractor Cromwell has commenced the joiner work on this craft and it will be hurried to completion. Towboat XIPHIAS has been hauled out and painted at this plant. Other work for which this yard has contracts will soon be commenced.”

-The Day, April 2, 1923



Steamer ELIAS F. WILCOX in Mystic, CT c. 1923. Photograph by George Tingley, from the collections of the Mystic Seaport Museum.



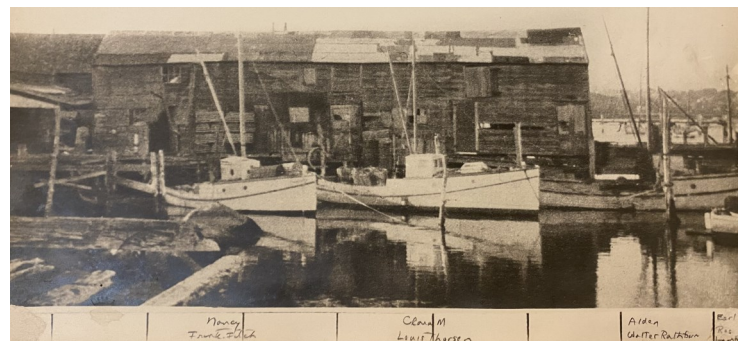
2021.024.002, gift of Stephanie & Barry Thorp

This silver plated creamer-pitcher was made in Waterford and presented to Elizabeth Thorp in honor of the launching of the steamer ELIAS WILCOX. The engraving on the front reads: “Launching Str. ELIAS F. WILCOX, Compliments Noank Shipyard, Sponsor, Miss Elizabeth W. Thorp.” In his “Recollections of Noank,”

Jack Wilbur recalled that he had “witnessed the launching of the newest of the large Menhaden steamers, ELIAS F. WILCOX in 1923. Never again was I to witness the launching of such a large vessel in Noank.”

“An amusing incident occurred not long since, when Capt. Frank Fitch, a staunch prohibitionist with not a thread of wetness in his makeup, who sailed a boat of a rather suspicious smoke screen color, was hailed by a government boat and ordered alongside on suspicion of being a rum runner. The NANCY will be painted white this season.”

-The Day, April 6, 1923



The NANCY, on the far left and painted white, tied up at North-Dock. 1975.121.0001, gift of Mr. & Mrs. Emil Silberman.

In Memoriam

Judith “Judie” Campbell, 1944—2022

Paul Andrew Connor, 1943—2022

George Ouelette, 2022

David G. Williams, 2023



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