



NOANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

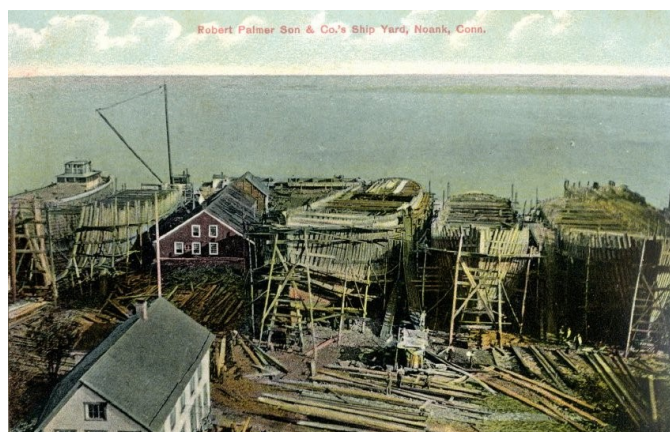
Presents:

Images of Noank: A Postcard and Photograph Tour

By John Wilbur



Main Street, looking west, Noank, Conn.



Robert Palmer Son & Co.'s Ship Yard, Noank, Conn.



The Palmer House, Noank, Conn.

Home at last. Have been doing my mucky hair gained seven pounds in ten days. Will have to get up the boat as my lungs mend very slowly. J.W. Perkins Jr. Noank Ct.



F8010 Town Dock, Noank, Conn.

JOIN US: 7:30 PM

WEDNESDAY, September 15, 2021

The Latham/Chester Store, 108 Main Street, Noank

Join us for a tour of Noank's olden days, as seen in the Noank Historical Society's archive of historic postcards and photographs. Weather permitting, this meeting will be held outdoors on the grounds of the Latham/Chester Store.

The public is cordially invited.

www.noankhistoricalsociety.org

Noank News, 150 Years Ago

Connecticut wins its battle with New York for jurisdiction over Ram Island:

“The decision of Judge Woodruff, declaring the coast island of Connecticut to belong to her jurisdiction, does embrace Mystic Island [Ram Island], in the opinion of eminent lawyers. Judge Woodruff distinctly intimates that only the most explicit declarations to the contrary in the patent of the Duke of York itself, could take the jurisdiction of adjoining islands from the colony or state to which they naturally belong. Now the Warwick charter, under which the Duke of York and his successors claim jurisdiction for New York, makes no mention of Ram's Goat (or Mystic) Island. Hence it is in the same category as the Norwalk Island. Fisher's Island is not named in the patent, through Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard are. The case of Fisher's Island is otherwise peculiar. Gov. Winthrop, who came into possession, minding only the main chance of personal ownership, received his title from Connecticut, then from Massachusetts, which claimed as far west as the Mystic River, and actually exercised it in the appointment of magistrates in Stonington, then Southerton; and he also took his title from New York, to meet every possible conflict of jurisdiction. But he himself regarded it as rightfully belonging to Connecticut and Connecticut by her legislation continued to assert her rightful jurisdiction till the matter went by lapse of time and sheer default to New York. Judge Woodruff says nothing about "ship channels," or any agreement making them the limit of state jurisdiction; that is either assumed or if temporarily adopted, not binding, for these Norwalk Islands are so similarly situated. It is the opinion of those best posted at Hartford, and was so regarded before Judge Woodruff's decision, that an assessment of any of these islands by an adjoining town, would be deemed legal, and confirmed by the courts. This probably will be the way it will be tested.”

- Stonington Mirror, June 1, 1871

While CT and NY were fighting over Ram Island, an entirely different sort of fight was occurring on its shores. In the absence of any official State oversight, both Ram Island and Fishers Island became hot spots for activities that were not strictly legal, including

bare-knuckle boxing. The year before Ram Island was officially placed under CT's jurisdiction, on March 2, 1870, it was the scene of a lightweight world championship prizefight:

The fight between Billy Edwards of New York and Sam Collyer of Baltimore, for the lightweight championship of America, and one thousand dollars aside, came off on Wednesday morning last on Bradford's (better known as Mystic Island) about five miles from Stonington, and resulted in a victory for Edwards, and his backer, Harry Hill, also Collyer, and his trainers, passed the night on the island. Over 2000 persons were on the ground before nine, and many were on the mainland, unable to procure boats to transport them to the scene of conflict.

At five minutes before ten they entered the ring. Both were in fine condition, and had evidently undergone severe training; both seemed confident of victory. Edwards was extremely quiet and unassuming in his bearing. Doony Harris and Bob Smith acted as seconds for Edwards, and Barney Aaron and Oney Geoghan for Collyer. Billy Tracy was chosen referee. From the beginning both men fought with the most determined blows. The rounds were short but sharp. Edwards showed great superiority over Collyer in science. His blows fell with terrific rapidity and effect, and after a few rounds Collyer's face presented a bloody and ghastly appearance, while Edwards' face showed scarcely a mark.

In the first round Edwards gave Collyer the first blow, which sounded all over the ring and drew forth loud cheers. In the second round Edwards struck Collyer a terrific blow on the forehead, drawing blood and knocking Collyer down. In the 41st round Collyer came up looking distressed but fought bravely. Edwards, however, struck him three times in succession, the last hitting Collyer with terrific force, knocking him senseless, and for a time he was thought to be dead. His seconds saw that it was all over, and threw up the sponge. Edwards was loudly cheered. This is the second time he has defeated Collyer.

...Continued on page 7

Aunt Maude and the Author, *by Andrea Lithgow*

Once upon a time, my mother's aunt, Maude Weeks, and her parents and siblings resided on Riverview Avenue in the house later occupied by the Rathbun family. The family consisted of parents, Abner and Augusta Weeks; two brothers, Sylvester and Richard; and sisters, Bertha, Esther, Eleanor, Luella and Maude. Like most Noankers in those days, they were poor and lived a fairly Spartan lifestyle. Living as they did, in a fishing village, I'm fairly sure that fish comprised a major part of their diet. Most of the neighbors were either fishermen or boat builders. Family members all had their chores to do and there was little to break up the monotony aside from church on Sundays and the occasional dance at one of the town's meeting halls.

Then one day a stranger came knocking at the kitchen door and, for a brief moment, there was a bit of excitement for, at least, one of the girls. Although Maude had not ever met the man in person, everyone in the village was aware of the writer who had commissioned a small cabin to be built on one of the tiny islands in the sound. There were whispers about the scandalous activities with overnight guests and nude swimming. When the writer and his guests rowed over for supplies, the town's residents watched and listened for any bits of gossip they might share later with friends and neighbors.

On this particular day, Arthur Henry's mission was to procure a kitten and he had been told that the Weeks family happened to have a recently weaned litter of Maltese. It seems that he found living alone on the island quite desolate and downright boring when no friends were there to spend time. As he explained in his book, his first choice would have been a puppy, but since there were none to be found, a kitten was the obvious second best alternative.

As he describes it, his knock was answered by: "a young woman, perhaps nineteen, who invited me in before she knew my errand, and stood near me, listening with an amiable expression in her eyes while I told it." My sister and I have seen photos of Aunt Maude

and we both agree that she could not be described as beautiful or even pretty, but there is a certain hint of mischief about her smile and a sense of fun in the way she appears to carry herself. I'm sure that this was the aspect of her that Mr. Henry was seeing when he went on to say: "If I were an artist, she would appear on some canvas of mine, for her face and pose as she stood before me gave a perfect expression to Simplicity, Innocence and Sympathy, and were beautiful because of these."

Thanks to Maude's sister, our aunt, Eleanor Weeks Musante, we heard the story many times of the author who came to the door hoping to acquire a kitten and how the incident was later included in his book, "An



Maude Weeks (center)

Island Cabin." It seems that when he asked to see the available felines, she was already holding one which she had chosen for herself. This kitten had a gold locket tied around its neck on a length of blue ribbon. She quickly scooped up another kitten to offer the visitor. But he expressed a preference for the kitten with the locket and she acquiesced but insisted that he should also take the second so that they might provide company for one another when he wasn't on the island. To further convince him, she added that her father had said she could only keep one of the kittens and the rest would be

drowned. (Sadly, that was how unwanted kittens were dealt with in those days.) And so, she reasoned, they would be saving three kittens if he were to take two and she kept one. As they agreed upon their deal, Mr. Henry took hold of the two kittens and as he attempted to pull them away from her, the tiny sharp claws of the now frightened pair clung to the fabric of her blouse causing the button to come undone and expose far more than was meant to be seen. The blouse was quickly re-buttoned and the kitties placed in a covered basket for their voyage to the island. That was all we ever knew of the story until much later when a copy of the book was located. I'm not sure that Maude or any of the family ever had the chance to read it.

I suppose Aunt Eleanor must have because she seemed to know a good deal more about the incident than she would have heard from her sister. In the book, Mr. Henry tells of removing the ribbon with the locket from the kitten's neck after it gets accidentally tangled in the poor animal's mouth and nearly choking it. In his words: "I removed it and hung it with its golden heart on a nail in the wall. Such things have little meaning for me, but this trinket does, at least, no harm, and while I do not need it to recall the one who gave it to me, I should miss it now."

Many years later, my sister, Penny, was curious about the tale and went searching for a copy of the book, "An Island Cabin." In the Noank of the 1950s if you couldn't get to the library, there were two very good sources for books right here in the village. One was Florence Oliver and the other was Mary Virginia Morgan; both had extensive collections of books and were happy to share. Penny chose to ask Mrs. Morgan as her niece, Elsie was a close friend and Penny spent a good deal of time at the house on Sawyer Court. The volume was easily located and Mary Virginia flipped through the pages eventually locating the sought after passages. She began reading aloud to my sister who was, at that time, a young teenager. I relish envisioning Mary Virginia with her booming voice, reading aloud these somewhat racy passages. Abruptly, she stopped reading, slammed the book closed and handed it to my sister. "You'll have to read the rest for yourself." I have to think that was one of the very few times in Mrs. Morgan's life when she was truly embarrassed and at a loss for words. (I refer to her as Mrs. Morgan because, at that time, she had not yet met and married Mr. Goodman.)

For many decades, we were aware of Aunt Maude's connection to Arthur Henry's account of his summer on the Isle of Quirk in his book "An Island Cabin." So it was a bit exciting when Steven Jones decided it was worth publishing a new edition. I had occasion

to sit and talk with Steve one afternoon at the Noank Historical Society Museum on Sylvan Street. I mentioned to him that my Aunt Maude was the woman with the kittens. I suppose I rather expected some sort of accolades for coming forth with this bit of insider trivia. Instead, Steven tactfully dismissed my claim, saying that everyone sees themselves or a family member or friend in books of this sort. I supposed that he was right and sort of put aside the tale of Aunt Maude's kittens and the wardrobe malfunction.



It wasn't until quite recently that the memoir was a topic of conversation on Facebook. Another reader had posted a link to the book and, although I already own a copy, I clicked the link out of curiosity. I was taken to a view of the original hard cover publication with a feature which allowed a look inside the volume. It first

opened to a blank page followed by a page which listed the publisher, the date of publication in 1902 as well as Library of Congress number, etc. Next was the dedication page (this page had been omitted from the 2010 edition) blank except for two words, dead center, in a flowery font: "To Maude". I think I was breathless for a minute. I know that tears came to my eyes. It was such a small, fleeting moment in time. I don't think they ever met again. Yet that poignant moment meant enough to him that he never forgot and she found it important enough to relate the tale to her sisters who, in turn, kept the story alive for future generations. I suppose that little account of the accidental wardrobe mishap was considered quite shocking in its day. Therefore, those involved would only whisper about it in private and never repeat the story publicly. But, times change and we have become much more broad minded. The sweet story deserves repeating and I don't think that Aunt Maude would mind that I've chosen to tell it here.

To Maude

The Vagabond Hurricane of 1903, by *NHS Historian John Wilbur*

On 16 September 1903, amidst news of a train being derailed after hitting a cow in Shelton, a horse being stuck in a muddy creek on Groton Long Point, and William W. Latham's departure for Maine (to superintend construction of the Great Wass Island Life Saving Station), readers of *The Day* might have missed the Special Storm Bulletin in the lower right corner of page one: "The local weather bureau is in receipt of the following special from Washington: Northeast storm warnings at 10 AM displayed from Delaware Breakwater to Philadelphia. Severe storm apparently central over New Jersey. High northeast to north winds today, diminishing tonight."

Being within a week of the Autumnal Equinox, the villagers, and certainly the seafarers of the town were wary of a "Line Storm" (the fabled equinoctial gales that occurred when the sun was "on the line"[equator]). The 16th was indeed blustery: two menhaden steamers of the Wilcox fleet were unable to land at Latimer Point and forced to seek shelter in Mystic until the storm had passed, but not before one of them lost 75,000 fish, swept overboard by high seas. In town the gusty winds complicated fighting a chimney fire in the old Morgan block at the bottom of Smith Court. The lighthouse tender *Armeria* was no doubt relieved to have accomplished delivering supplies to three lighthouses in Fishers Island Sound the day before.

Not surprisingly, much of the Noank fishing fleet was at sea south of Long Island and down to Delaware Bay. The schooners *Ester Anita* (Capt. Silas Latham), *M. A. Baston* (Capt. John E. "Ed" Morgan), *Benjamin W. Latham* (Capt. Henry Langworthy), and *Gracie* (Capt. Wallace Brown) were among the multitude fishing in the New York Bight that day. Before the storm passed, two of these captains, and three other men from these vessels would be drowned (along with numerous others from various ports), adding to the ever growing list of Noank's sons "lost at sea."

Generally accepted to be the fourth system of that season, the storm that broke upon the waters off the Jersey coast, came to be known as the "Vagabond Hurricane." First reports of the tropical storm placed it well to the northeast of Antigua. From there it strengthened and maintained a generally northwesterly track which brought it to the Jersey coast four days later as a hurricane with winds in the vicinity of 80 mph, down a bit

from an estimated peak of 100mph the night before.

Lying in its path lay the fertile fishing grounds of Five Fathom Bank and the eastern approaches to Delaware Bay. Newspapers of the time estimated that over two dozen schooners from the Fulton Fish Market fleet (of which many Noank boats were included) were at sea that day. Unsurprisingly, conditions at daybreak were poor and deteriorated rapidly as the morning progressed.

The tragedy that unfolded aboard the *Ester Anita* is covered in great detail in "Captains B.F. Rathbun of Noank," as well as "Noank: Celebrating a Maritime Heritage," but the salient facts are thus: The schooner was riding at anchor on a new cable. As seas began to sweep the deck it became clear that the vessel was in mortal danger of being driven under. Most of the crew sought shelter in the forecabin/galley. Captain Latham was apparently loath to cut his expensive new cable, and before he could be convinced otherwise, a particularly large sea boarded the schooner and carried him, and two other men overboard (Lewis Wilcox and Alfred Peat, although the name Peter Barr or George Pierson, instead of Peat, was reported in different newspapers). The sole man left on deck alive, Steve Bagnall, somehow managed to singlehandedly hoist the reefed foresail, cut the anchor cable with an axe, and get the boat underway. Once freed of her tether, the schooner rode much better, and as the crew emerged from below they were able to work the vessel offshore until the weather moderated and ultimately arrived at Fulton Fish Market with a harrowing tale to tell.

The plight of the *M. A. Baston* is no less tragic, and if anything, more remarkable. She was twenty years-old, and a shallower-draft vessel than *Ester Anita*, under the command of John E. Morgan, and had been at sea for six days. Captain Morgan was slightly older than Latham, and both were highly respected, elder statesmen of the Noank fleet. Early that morning Morgan scrapped his plans for a day's fishing and decided to seek shelter under the breakwater at the mouth of Delaware Bay.

Maybe because the breakwater and potential shelter were on a lee shore, the run for harbor was abandoned and Morgan put the boat about and decided to take his chances with anchoring.

Carl Anderson described (in a nationally syndicated article) the extraordinary events which followed:

“We were feeling round for an anchorage when we threatened to run afoul of a sunken two-masted schooner which lay directly in our path... We were running head on to the craft, and simply had to slew off, which put us broadside to the seas, which were running mountain high.

“Capt. Morgan and Ned Peterson were at the wheel, and I had run forward to stand by the fore-staysail halyard to jibe her, when a big sea took her and over she went on her side. I just had time to grab a bit of the rigging and held on, although I had no idea but that we were all lost. Capt. Morgan and Peterson were swept off when the wheel was torn away, and we never heard of the captain, although Peterson, as he floated away, called to loosen one of the dories and put out for him. Poor fellow, three of the dories had already been splintered and carried away by the seas and nobody was able to get at the other.

“We all expected to go in a minute or two when a curious thing happened, the sails were lying over in the water, when a howling gust of wind came along and swept under them. A sea swept under us at the same time, and with the lift of the wind the vessel righted and stood up right as a trivet. It was like a miracle, and we all raised a shout and turned-to to work the smack.”



Tombstone of Capt. John E. Morgan, 1838-1903

Word of this tragedy first reached Noank by telegram from New York, and being a typically terse means of

communication, details were scarce. It wasn't until Captain Langworthy arrived in Noank by train on the evening of the 17th that a more complete account of the disaster could be told. He was able to assuage fears for the safety of *Gracie* and her crew shortly before Captain Brown himself arrived in town.

But there was more bad news yet to come. The Thames Towboat Company's tug *Nathan Hale* was northbound with the barges *Narragansett* and *S. R. Mead*, both barges loaded with coal. The barge *Narragansett*, owned by Deacon Robert Palmer, was formerly the steamship of the same name belonging to the Stonington Steamboat Company. Built in 1866, she had already been sunk once before following her infamous collision with the steamer *Stonington* in 1880. Alas, the hurricane proved too much for her this time, and she foundered off Absecon, NJ. Her master, Captain Henry Specht (of Noank), and crew of four were rescued by the *Nathan Hale*.

Noank was not alone in shouldering the burden of loss in this storm. No fewer than four other fishing schooners were lost, as well as the New London-owned coasting schooner *Hattie A. Marsh*. The *Marsh* was loaded with a cargo of paving stones for Philadelphia and her master was intent on anchoring in the lee of Delaware breakwater. Events, however, compelled him to anchor in the open roadstead, but the anchors failed to hold. *Marsh* dragged her anchors until she fetched up on the breakwater itself. She was a total loss, taking her master, Captain J.B. Mahaffey (of New London) and four of her crew with her. The breakwater, which Mahaffey hoped would provide safety instead proved an agent of destruction. Additionally, the storm destroyed the recently-completed Harbor of Refuge lighthouse on the east end of the breakwater. A further tie-in to Noank is that the *Marsh* was owned in part by Carlos Barry, a sailmaker, and at one time part owner of the Smith Barry Co., a boat-building concern located at what is now Ford's Lobsters.

M. A. Baston limped into New York on the 17th showing the strains of her recent exertions. A week later she finally arrived in Noank under the command of Cliff Cartwright with her bulwarks stove-in and topsides generally in shambles. At Noank she was repaired, refitted, and ultimately sold to interests in Savannah, Georgia, departing for that city on 31 October.

Ester Anita was laid-up for a few months in New York, and was rumored to be sold to interests at Fulton Fish Market. Steve Bagnall assumed command in 1904. The schooner eventually wound up as a Saba Island packet and was still sailing as late as World War II.

By the time the storm dissipated over Ontario, at least 57 people were dead, hundreds of houses destroyed, and over \$8 million in damage were attributed to the storm. Such was the reach of Noank in 1903 that so many of her men and vessels could converge so far from the village, and with such tragic results.



...*Noank News*, continued from page 2

Among the most distinguished 'roughs' present were Walter Brown, the great oarsmen; Harry Hill, the keeper of a low dance house in New York; Kit Burns, the keeper of a dog pit on Water Street, New York; William Farley, alias 'Reddy the Blacksmith,' Barney Aaron, Rocky Moore, Harry Lazarus, Mike Coburn and a number of lesser lights in the profession.

Edwards and Collyer left the island soon after the combat and took the six o'clock train for New York. Eight cars comprised the train, and every one was crowded. There ought to be a law to stop such brutal and disgusting exhibitions."

-The Stonington Mirror, March 5, 1870

Years later, Noanker Charles Smith, then 18, excitedly recalled watching the fight from a birch tree outside the arena and talking with Collyer at the Noank station after the fight. Other locals were less than thrilled by these "unwelcome visitors":

"The sensation of this week has been the flying visit of the representatives of the corrupt city government of New York to this quiet village. They came to attend the Collyer-Edwards prize fight, which had been anticipated for several previous weeks by the sporting fraternity of the great cities around us. Wednesday was the appointed day, but the exact location of the worse than brutish scene was known to but a few. It was

however definitely stated that it would take place in one of the New York islands, near which we are so unfortunately situated. The through train from the metropolis on Tuesday night, and the Wednesday morning boats, brought the ugliest and most beastly looking set of men together at New London that it has ever been our professional duty to look down upon. We pass over in pitying silence the detailed particulars of the fight which took place on Bradford's Island [Ram Island] (we would prefer not to honor it with the name of Mystic Island). It is sufficient to say that Edwards punished Collyer fearfully in 42 rounds in forty five minutes. We reverently say that it would have been a benefit to society if they had killed each other. At the close of the sinful proceeding, between 300 and 400 of the party crossed in boats to Noank, and thence walked up to Mystic. They took possession of the depot by sheer force of numbers, filling all the rooms and crowding the platform to utmost capacity. The first question asked after their arrival was "where can we get something to drink!" Not receiving satisfactory answers, they started down street in squads, and it was positively amusing to see them go from one place to another in their fruitless search. People may say that it is just as easy to get rum now in this village as it was before the temperance movement was made, but those New York aldermen and their friends talk differently. If their curses could affect Mystic, it would be immediately troubled with all the plagues under the sun. As many as could sit at the table at the Hoxie House were supplied with food and after they had paid for it, the door in the dining hall was unlocked and they were allowed to leave the hotel. The restaurants, bakeries and even private families were levied upon to satisfy the ravenous hunger of the visitors. So far as we have heard, they paid for what they received."

-The Mystic Journal, Saturday March 6th, 1870

Editor's Note:

The editor apologizes for a misprint in the March 2021 issue of the Noank Ledger. The 1721 home referred to as the Samuel Burrows house is in fact the "Lemuel" Burrows house.

The Sylvan Street Museum will be open to visitors and researchers by appointment throughout the fall. 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.

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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