



NOANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Presents:

“The Palmer Company Store to
Palmer’s Provisions: 125 Years of
History on Pearl Street”

By Andrew Blacker

JOIN US: WEDNESDAY, June 19, 2024
6:00 p.m.—Dinner at Palmer’s Provisions
7:30 p.m.—Annual Meeting and Program

*Palmer’s Provisions and Pizza,
17 Pearl Street, Noank*

The Robert Palmer & Son Company Store was built on Pearl Street c. 1899 and has served as a grocery store or community market almost continuously since that time. The store originally catered to employees of the shipyard and allowed them to charge their grocery accounts against their wages. In the years after that business dissolved, the building has housed P.J. Shandeor Meat and Groceries, The Universal Food Store, Noank Community Market, Sherman’s Market, Mothership Natural Kitchen and Market Place, No Anchor Fine Food and Provisions, and Palmer’s Provisions and Pizza. The upper floors have been put to use in all manner of ways—from meeting halls to a dance school to a sail loft to a theater. Join us on June 19th to hear the fascinating history of this building from the proprietor of Palmer’s Provisions, Andrew Blacker.

Members and friends of the Historical Society are also invited to join us at Palmer’s Provisions for dinner ahead of the program. In addition to the standard menu, a summer dinner menu will also be available (see the next page for more information). Pre-ordering is strongly encouraged, but orders from the standard menu can also be accepted on the night of the meeting. Water, coffee and tea will be available, and people are also welcome to bring their own beverages. We hope to see you there!

The public is cordially invited.
<http://www.noankhistoricalsociety.org>

Noank Museum Opening Reception—July 6, 2024

The Noank Historical Society is hosting a reception to kick off the start of our summer season. Join us at the Mary C. Anderson Building on Sylvan Street for light refreshments on Saturday, July 6, from 3-5 p.m.. The museum will continue to be open throughout the summer from July 7—September 2 on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, 1-4 p.m.

This summer we will be debuting a new exhibit on one of the last great seafarers from Noank, Capt. Jack Wilbur. The exhibit features original photographs and artifacts loaned from John Wilbur, and details Jack's childhood in the village, his career in the merchant marines, his experiences fishing out of Noank and his achievements in wooden boat building. There will also be expanded exhibits on Noank in WWI and Colonial Noank.

AN EVENING IN NOANK

If you would like to join us for dinner on June 19th we will be meeting at 6:00 pm at Palmer's Provisions and Pizza, 17 Pearl Street. This community event is a great opportunity to develop or renew friendships and catch up with neighbors. **Items from the standard menu will be available**, as well as items from the new summer dinner menu. Items from the summer menu will only be available by pre-order.

Summer Dinner Menu/Proper Plates

Served with a small house salad and garlic bread

Chipotle Chicken Pasta: Penne, chicken, bacon, onions, spinach, chipotle, heavy cream \$30

Seared Salmon over Pesto Veggies: Baby spinach, cherry tomatoes and mushrooms, tossed in pesto and grilled \$32

Steak Frites: 12 oz. NY Strip, gorgonzola, garlic parsley butter, wilted spinach, fries \$34

Chicken Parmesan: Two breaded chicken cutlets with tomato sauce topped with melted mozzarella, served over penne \$28

Eggplant Parmesan: House breaded eggplant with tomato sauce topped with melted mozzarella, served over penne \$27

Meatballs over Penne: Four house meatballs, roasted peppers, house tomato sauce topped with melted mozzarella, served over penne \$28

Desserts

Flourless Chocolate Cake \$8

Crème Brûlée \$9

Cheesecake \$9

***Items from the standard menu are also available—check the Palmer's Provisions website for details. Please visit Palmer's or call (860) 415-9715 to pre-order.**

Noank Artists Exhibition

The annual Noank Artists Exhibition will feature works by artists from around the region when it opens for the season on Saturday, June 29. A village tradition going back more than 30 years, the show will present a diverse range of media, including original paintings, photographs, sculpture and prints.

The show, which is held at the Latham/Chester Gallery at the foot of Main Street, kicks off with a Meet the Artists reception on Friday, June 28, 5-7 p.m. Besides enjoying the show, visitors to Noank will find several restaurants, dozens of historic homes, and three-state views of Fishers Island, N.Y., Masons Island, and, on a clear day, Block Island, R.I.

More than 50 artists are expected to participate. All works are for sale, with part of the proceeds benefitting the Noank Historical Society, the show's sponsor. Artists install new works when pieces are sold, so the show updates constantly.

Gallery hours are 1 to 4 p.m., Wednesdays through Sundays until September 1.

For questions or additional information, please call Carol Connor (860) 912-7691 or Carole Erdman (860) 536-3652.

Featured Artist: Ray O'Connell



Creative process

The act of creating things is what defines artist Ray O'Connell. Soon after his own creation, he took to finger painting and drawing with crayons and never stopped. At a very young age he started watching one of his brothers, who was ten years older, paint a scene with a couple of deer standing in a field. This provided the inspiration to get his career as an artist started.

Favorite Materials

Finding the best way to produce art has always been an important goal. Ray has experimented using a multitude of mediums to produce art over the years. Starting with oil paint and progressing through phases where he used acrylic, water colors, water soluble oil, pastels, inks and mixed media just to mention a few. As of late, he has experienced great results using Heat-Set oil paint. These paints do not dry until they have been heated to 265 degrees Fahrenheit for five minutes. The beauty of these is the ability to paint wet into wet until he is ready to start a new layer. After heating them, he is able to paint on top without disturbing the layer underneath. The fact that they are nontoxic and odorless is a great advantage over other mediums. Ray has learned to use other technologies to help produce art in the most efficient way possible. For example, using an iPad along with a number of apps, such as 'Procreate,' he is able to speed the whole process up. He also uses It to create great compositions and special effects.

Art Community

Participation in the local art community has enriched his life. Ray has given demonstrations on the use of the Heat-Set oil paints at the Mystic Museum of Art and other places. He has also taught other artist how to use the app mention above. He organizes and runs a group of plein air painters who get together every Monday during the summer. He also runs a life drawing group, along with a couple of local artists at the Old Mystic Community Center.



100th Anniversary of the Great Shipyard Fire

By John Wilbur, NHS Historian



Noank Shipyard After the Fire

“I can remember now the day in 1924 (I was in first grade at the Noank Grammar School) when the Baptist church bell rang signaling the great shipyard fire. . . We were let out of school early and I went with my father later in the day to see what we could see.”

— Jack Wilbur, *Recollections of Noank*

So begins Jack Wilbur’s eye-witness account (one of a number in the NHS collection) of the fire which nearly destroyed Noank Shipyard. There were two fires within a short time of each other, the second of which was one of the worst Noank-specific calamities the town endured in the first half of the Twentieth Century.

The first fire began in the evening of Saturday, 16 May 1924 in a storeroom adjacent to the shipyard offices. The Noank Fire Department was summoned and the blaze was promptly extinguished, but not before windows and doors were broken to gain access.

Two days later, at 2:10 in the afternoon a far more serious fire started in a pile of shavings heaped up against the Joinery Shop. Much of the wood used in ship con-

struction at Noank was southern yellow pine, a rot resistant, extremely resinous wood with a high calorific value. It burns readily, and it burns hot.

Noank Fire Department was the first to respond to the new blaze as well. Probably influenced by their recent experience, they headed for the dock to draw water from the river. Unfortunately, before the fire truck could put a stream on the fire the pump gears stripped, rendering it impotent. Not only that, but the Noank fire truck and firemen were now trapped on the dock by the spreading flames. In the words of J. Halstead Brown, speaking at a 1969 presentation of the Noank Historical Society, *“they had to stay down there in the hottest place there was.”* Brown would later become the Chief of the Noank Fire Department.

Neighboring fire companies—Mystic, Stonington, New London, and Westerly responded to the call. *“We did enjoy watching the old Ahrens Fox pumper from Westerly that was stationed near the houses of Wayland and Gus Morgan [bottom of Chesbro Avenue],”* recalled Jack Wilbur. *“It had never been too successful in West-*

erly where it was required to take suction from hydrants, but in Noank, where it could get unrestricted suction from the sea, it was doing a really fine job.”

Other fire companies fought the fire from wherever they could, be it backyards or the shipyard itself. Fighting so large a fire the firemen found themselves dealing with an unexpected shortage—fire hose. Distances were colossal when measured in flights of hose. The Niagara Fire Company from New London alone used over a half mile of hose. The new Stutz pumper of the Stonington Fire Department kept two hoses charged at 120 psi, and most of those lengths were weeping through the jacket. Had the pressure not been reigned in almost every flight of hose might have been ruined. Adding to the difficulties was the fact that the fire occurred during low tide, and some trucks initially sucked mud from the bottom of the river.

Aside from the mutual aid companies, three tugs with fire nozzles (*Commissioner*, *Harriet*, and *Alert*) departed New London to assist. They were able to attack the fire directly from the river. The wrecking tug *Commissioner* in particular did heroic work as it worked in close proximity to the flames hosing down a tank containing an estimated 500 gallons of gasoline. Her efforts went unseen due to the flames, but her whistle announced she was on the job.

Contemporary reports of the fire note the speed with which it spread, as well as the intense heat generated. Halstead Brown remarked, *“Another little problem we had was that it was very dry at the time and the ground all around there was several feet deep with nothing but pine chips. That lasts in the ground. The sap, or pitch, was preserved and anywhere you walked you’d see little fires starting all around under your feet.”*

A number of ships and boats were being serviced at the yard, and in the early stages of the fire efforts were made to save them. Those already in the water were cast adrift or towed out of the flames by the tugs from New London. Some were out of the water, like the government tug *General Richard Arnold*. Although her hull was built of steel, the *Arnold*’s superstructure

was wooden and caught fire. With the ways on fire, the only way to save the vessel was to give her an impromptu launching. Once afloat men boarded her, extinguished the flames, and towed the vessel to safety. Another problem was three incomplete Ferris-type freighters left over from the World War I shipbuilding boom. Amid two of the freighters stood a fifty to seventy-foot tall wooden crane. This burning pillar of flame caused much anxiety until it collapsed, fortunately without causing further damage or injury. A southwest wind carried the flames towards a group of fishing vessels moored nearby, which were spared when the wind shifted to the southeast, but now threatened houses on Spring Street. Bucket brigades formed to wet down dwellings and structures on private property to minimize the chances of spreading. Neighbors pitched in to help neighbors, and the Firemen’s Aid of Noank provided cake, sandwiches, and coffee to the exhausted and hungry firemen. For all the rapid spreading of the fire, highly combustible fuel for it, and large area, the fire was contained in approximately two and a half hours, albeit extremely tense and exhausting hours. Another hour of hard labor had the fire all but extinguished, leaving a once-busy shipyard a ruin of smoldering embers. Nevertheless, the Neptune Fire Company from Stonington worked steadily for five hours and twenty minutes, and did not return home until early Tuesday morning.

The relief was short-lived. A fire re-flashed Tuesday evening, and fanned by an east wind threatened to consume the machine shop. Once again, the entire exhausted Noank Fire Department responded and eventually extinguished the blaze.

Fires rarely are sources of amusement, but in the same 1969 Historical Society presentation Clifford Phelps related an entertaining story about a machinist working on a trawler close to the flames:

“I was working with an old fellow, installing oil burners when oil burners first came out for commercial use on ships. I left him below in the engine room to go up to the stock room. When I came out the shipyard was blazing. Instead of going back down to tell him I just went to fight the fire with everyone else. He had a

brand new Maxwell and he had been driving it back and forth to work. An hour or two after I left him he came up on deck and found everything ablaze. He almost died right there. He had left his Maxwell over in a shed right near the blaze and that was all burned down...But in the meantime the men who had ridden in with him (they couldn't get into the car for he had the keys in his pocket) got a gang and picked up the car and carried it way down in the cornfield below.” (The cornfield was the name of an area about where Abbott's is today.)

In another amusing vignette, the *Stonington Mirror* reported that the Westerly men were standing in the river holding their suction hose clear of the mud at the bottom of the river while eating ice cream!

Considering the scale of the calamity, and number of firemen involved in fighting the fire, it is remarkable that nobody was injured, including the Noank firemen trapped on the dock. Many of the precious fire hoses, however, did not survive the blaze, and the fire department held a bazaar weeks after the fire to raise money for replacement hoses.

It was estimated that the population of Noank observing the fire swelled by a factor of three. Spectators flocked to watch the spectacle, and no doubt the streets were jam-packed with cars.

The damage to the yard was estimated at the time as \$150,000 (approximately \$2.7 million today), two thirds of which was covered by insurance. Not all was lost, however. The machine shop, all the specialized tools within, and the galvanizing plant, as well as one of the freighter skeletons all survived, as did numerous yachts in winter storage. Work started immediately rebuilding the ruined facility into a more efficient operation, tailored to better suit the changing needs of its

clientele. The 150 employees would not be out of jobs. Although new construction of ships, barges, and car floats was unlikely, a new 80-foot tank barge was launched in the middle of August. By that time, the shipyard was also building many small one-design sailboats—the well-known “Wee Scott.”



The aftermath of the great shipyard fire, 1924.
2024.003, gift of C. William Stamm

There's little doubt that the fire had a profound effect upon the future of the yard. It never regained the stature it enjoyed during the Palmer era or war years. It still advertised itself as a repair facility for vessels of all sizes, weeks after the fire. The yard continued on for fourteen years, until the hurricane delivered another body-blow. Once again, the yard absorbed staggering damage and rose from the wreckage. Three small wooden minesweepers were built in 1942 for the US Navy, but that was the true swan song of shipbuilding in Noank.

In July of 1970 the wreck of the *Alice L. Pendleton* caught fire. The resultant glow in the southern sky caused Jack Wilbur to comment, “*I haven't seen that since the shipyard fire of 1924.*” A testament to the memories imprinted on a boy in the first grade 46 years earlier.

In Memoriam

Maureen Block—1943-2024
E. Zell Steever—1942-2024



Curator's Corner

The Noank Historical Society has received several new additions to our museum collection in the past year. A framed copy of the 1868 Beers Atlas map of Noank, complete with a Noank business directory, was donated at the end 2023 by Kent Kelley and is now hanging on the west wall of the museum.

In April 2024, we received a collection of papers from the Spicer family as well as a 1920s photograph album from C. William Stamm. The album includes some exceptional photographs of the Noank shoreline, Nawyunckqua Camp Fire Girls summer camp, the Harvard-Yale boat race, the great shipyard fire of 1924 and the total solar eclipse seen from Noank in 1925.

Additional donations include the Eagle Scout uniform of Bob Kress (Troop 20, Noank), slides of the Noank shoreline in 1947, photographs of the Noank Sea Scouts c. 1938, a collection of Noank postcards, a collection of papers on the history of aquaculture in the Noank area, and artifacts from the Noank Fire Department. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to donors Carole Erdman, Mary Moriarty, Carol Connor, Jay Loudon, Kent Kelley, Nancy Treadway, John Wilbur, C. William Stamm and Irene McDonough.



"Jack the Follower is around the village at present and has been following several people to their homes."

- The Day, June 30, 1899

"Noank has a new kind of strawberry syrup for soda water, one drink making a man gloriously tipsy. Thereby hangs a tale which temperance people interpret as an evasion of the liquor law. This beverage is designed for particular customers, and a mistake in this direction caused a laughable result the other day."

-The Stonington Mirror, July 16, 1874

Nominating Committee Report

By Shirley McFadden

At the annual meeting, the Nominating Committee will present the following nominees to serve a four year term on the Board of Directors, 2024-2028: Paul Bates, Rose Powell, Debby Thompson and Rick Waters. A vote will be taken on all names and any others that may be proposed by the membership.

We also have two vacancies in the Board for the term 2023-2027. Vacancies are open for both the Board Member and Curator positions. We welcome any Noank Historical Society volunteer to serve on the Board of Directors.

Nominating Committee members are: Joan Butler, Nancy Codeanne, Shirley McFadden and Judith Hesp.

Membership Report

By Anne Lawrie

Our 2023-2024 fiscal year is quickly closing, and as of May 15, 2024 we have a total of 487 members. It is now renewal time for the year 2024-2025. Membership dues are \$20.00 for individuals, \$30.00 for a families, and \$50.00 for a contributing membership.

Membership renewal envelopes will be sent out separately. Checks should be made payable to the Noank Historical Society and sent to P.O. Box 9454, Noank, CT 06340. You can also renew online through the [membership page](#) of our new website.

If you would prefer to receive a digital copy of the newsletter you can join our mailing list by emailing us at noankhist@gmail.com. Members who are moving to a different address in the winter, or are moving to a new residence permanently should notify us so that we can update our records.

Your dues directly support the preservation of our diverse historical collections, the development of museum and virtual exhibits, and the publication of our quarterly newsletter. We appreciate your continued support!

Noank Historical Society Members and Donors (through May 2024)

The Noank Historical Society would like to recognize our members and donors for their support this past year. Your dues and donations allow NHS to continue to collect, preserve and share Noank's history, and to help sustain Noank's community heritage. Please accept our sincere appreciation for all of your contributions.

* *NHS members who gave additional support with their dues (Contributing, Friend and Sustaining memberships)*

+ *NHS members who responded to the annual appeal with a donation*

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Noank Ledger Editor: Elizabeth Boucher

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If you have any questions, concerns, and/or articles to share in the Noank Ledger, please contact us at Noankhist@gmail.com. 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

Noank Historical Society's "Noank Artists Exhibition" 2024

On view June 29 - September 1, 2024, Weds - Sun 1- 4pm
"Meet the Artists" reception is Friday, June 28, 5-7pm
At the Latham Chester Store Gallery (foot of Main St., Noank)

The annual Noank summer art show has been a community tradition for over 30 years, celebrating our area through the work of local artists. The Noank Historical Society is grateful to the participating artists, who donate 30% of their sales to support our mission.

INFORMATION FOR THE ARTISTS :

Receiving dates for artwork: Monday, June 24 and Tuesday, June 25, 10am - 2pm

Pick up date: Tuesday, September 3, 10am - 1pm

The exhibition is open to current members of the Noank Historical Society.

Checklist for artists' requirements:

- ◆ Renew NHS annual membership: Either go online to noankhistoricalsociety.org, or send a check to Noank Historical Society, P.O. Box 9454, Noank CT 06340. Membership dues are \$20 per individual or \$30 per family.
- ◆ Along with your 1-3 pieces of original artwork (*see guidelines below*) bring with you: your calendar to schedule required gallery sitting (at least one 3-hour session), and your updated artist's bio
- ◆ On receiving day, fill out and sign a form acknowledging that 30% of the sale price of work sold will be retained by NHS, and that NHS shall not be held responsible for loss or damage of work
- ◆ Fill out a gallery entry form for each piece of artwork
- ◆ Make time on receiving day for a 10-minute training session on new sales procedures
- ◆ Bring a plate of finger food to the opening, June 28 at 5-7pm

Guidelines for original artwork to exhibit (no digital reproductions or prints):

- ◆ All fine arts media (painting, drawing, sculpture, photography) are welcome
- ◆ All artwork must be for sale
- ◆ Art which is indicative of our area and/or maritime character
- ◆ For paintings, drawings and sculpture: 1 - 3 pieces may be exhibited, with size not to exceed 40" on longest side (including frame)
- ◆ For photography: 1 or 2 photographs (of local scenes only) per artist, not to exceed 11" x 14"
- ◆ All work must be identified, framed and wired for hanging (no brackets please). Sculptors must supply pedestals.
- ◆ A piece that is sold during the show may be replaced by another one of your pieces
- ◆ *The receiving committee reserves the right to decide if an artist's work can be hung*

Guidelines for artist's sale of prints and cards:

- ◆ One copy each of priced and matted prints may be left for sale in artist's own rack (no prints or digital artwork on wall, no framed prints in bins.)
- ◆ Cards made from original art may be sold
- ◆ Artists must supply their own rack (not too large) for unframed artwork to be sold

Questions? Call Carol Connor (860)912-7691 or Carole Erdman (860)536-3652

*The entry forms are available on receiving day and at www.noankhistoricalsociety.org