

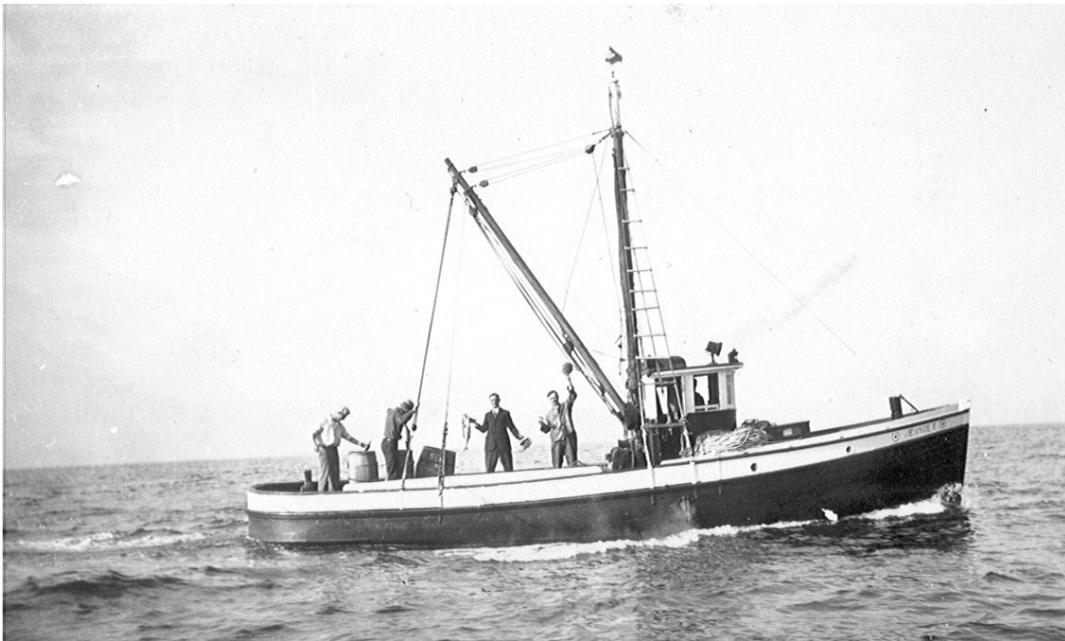


NOANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Presents

“Some Anecdotes of Prohibition in Noank”

By Steve Jones



The *Jennie T.*, pictured here c. 1930, had a colorful career in rum running. She was built in Noank in 1913 and was involved in two high profile busts before returning to Noank as a fishing vessel in 1923. 2002.035.016, gift of the Lithgow family.

JOIN US: 7:30 PM—WEDNESDAY, March 20, 2024

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

On January 17, 1920, the 18th Amendment went into effect, and for the next 13 years it was illegal to manufacture, sell or transport liquor in the United States. During the Prohibition, Long Island Sound became a hotbed of illicit activity as rum runners sought to smuggle foreign booze into New York City. The people of Noank had front row seats to the show. On Wednesday, March 20, local author and rum running expert, Steve Jones, will share some Noank anecdotes of the Prohibition—“anecdotes, because documentation is by nature hard to come by on an illegal trade which thrived on poor enforcement!”

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

Selections from the NHS Photograph Collection: The View from Prospect Hill Road

By John Wilbur, NHS Historian



View from Prospect Hill Road photographed by Mode Rathbun. 1989.122.003, gift of Mary Virginia Goodman

This photograph was taken from near the top of Prospect Hill. Evidently, the photographer thought highly of his work as this photo was used for picture post-cards. Just about all of the structures on Prospect Hill Road in this photo are still standing, and all save one were built circa 1893. The trolley trestle across the marsh has not been built yet, so this tells us that it is prior to 1904. Closer inspection shows that the old Methodist Chapel on Sylvan Street is still standing. It was razed early in 1902 to make way for a larger church (which still stands). Closer inspection also shows a few of the astonishing number of large buildings present in Noank a hundred years and more ago. The Palmer store, later the Universal, built in the latter half of 1899 towers over the surrounding buildings. So this photograph was taken right around the turn of the Twentieth Century. Even more important is that this photograph documents Noank at a critical moment in history—something more significant than the turn of a century—Noank was on the verge of getting electrical power. Close inspection shows that Prospect Hill Road

has a number of poles installed along its edge, but no wires are strung. Electrical power lines were being extended along the Noank road from Mystic in late 1899. The Palmer store and the Palmer Inn (on Bayside Avenue) were among the first buildings in town to be *built* fully wired for electrical power. Other buildings in town were being retrofitted with wiring, but they were built with oil/kerosene lighting in mind.

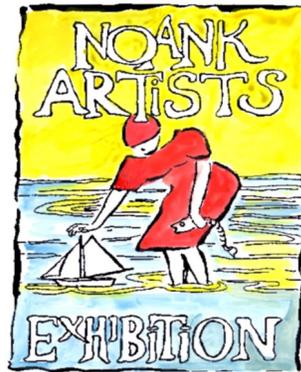
Halfway between Potter and Smith Courts, on the east side of Pearl Street is another large building sporting no fewer than four chimneys. Further south on Pearl Street, the towers of the Deacon Palmer House and the Ashbey House (hotel) watch over the street as it drops down grade before making a hard right turn, then quick left for the final run to the Shipyard. Just below the Ashbey House is another large building similar in size and layout to the Universal, known at one time as Caracausa Hall. This last building was three stories tall, the upper floors providing living spaces. The ground floor housed the store until Pete Shandeor

moved the business in November 1919, to the newer, more familiar building on the east side of the street, a block from Main Street. Also, although there is no proof to support such a claim, it is quite possible the dogs in the village outnumbered the trees, the large elms that lined Main Street notwithstanding.

Traffic on those streets ebbed and flowed in a pattern far removed from that in the 21st Century. As can be clearly seen, Main Street crosses the “Consolidated Road” (New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad as it was frequently referred to then) at grade, as well as at Front Street/Spicer Avenue. Both Front and Main Streets were major thoroughfares. At the time of this photo there was no bridge across the railroad, (Ward and Mosher Avenues will not exist for another thirty or so years) and the only other ways into town were the railroad itself, and that great super highway of its day, Long Island/Fishers Island Sound. Millions of feet of Southern Yellow Pine arrived at the shipyard each year via mid to large coasting schooners. Wood for the shipyard also arrived by road and rail, but in lesser quantities. Some people have speculated that the pronounced width of Main Street is due to the need to transport spars to the shipyard, but historical evidence suggests otherwise. Spar stock frequently arrived by rail, and in many instances would be unloaded by the shipyard derrick barge *Briareus* or *Triton* directly from the train (which was stopped on the Main Line) into the river. Much of the spar making and shaping was done in Mystic at J. B. Sutton’s, and the long spar stock would be towed up river. Sometimes vessels would be towed to Mystic to have their masts stepped, other times the spars would be dropped back in the river and towed back to Noank. Not too many towns would count a river as one of its streets.

SAVE THE DATE
NHS Annual Meeting and Dinner
June 19, 2024
At Palmer’s Provisions
17 Pearl Street, Noank

Calling all Noank Artists!



The 32nd annual Noank Artists Exhibition is set for June 29 through September 1, 2024 at the Latham/Chester Store gallery. This show is a wonderful community tradition in support of the Noank Historical Society and Noank area artists. An opening reception to meet the artists will be held on Friday, June 28, from 5 to 7pm.

Artists please note: Submission of artwork (1-3 pieces per artist) will be June 24th and 25th from 10am-2pm at the Latham Chester Store at the foot of Main Street, Noank. Art which represents the Noank area and maritime character is encouraged. Exhibition guidelines will soon be available on our website, noankhistoricalsociety.org and in the June newsletter.

Meanwhile, if you have any questions, please contact Carol Connor (860)912-7691 or Carole Erdman (860) 536-3652.



Noank in the News, 125 Years Ago:

“The many barges built in this little hamlet, although constructed in Connecticut and containing timber of the state's growth, have in their composition the product of seven other states of the Union. The keels are obtained from Ohio, the frames from Connecticut, iron from Delaware, planking from Virginia, windlasses from Maine, cordage and sails from Massachusetts, spars, though purchased from Mystic, originally from the pine forests of Oregon, spikes from New York and knees from New Brunswick. When one considers the original cost of various kinds of stock and the cost of transportation, he will readily see there is an enormous expense in their construction.”

-The Day, March 20, 1899

Noank Hospitality: The Palmer House and Bayside Inn, *By John Wilbur*



Postcard featuring the Palmer House, published by M.W. Rathbun, postmarked 1908. 1991.077.009, gift of Jack Fix.

When one thinks of New England “Watering Holes” of the Nineteenth Century, Noank would probably be very low on the list, if it was listed at all. There are no wide sandy beaches, or verandas to breathe deep the clean salt air. In Noank, the beaches were tiny and full of rocks, the air a battleground between the twin industries of fishing and lobstering assaulting the nostrils, as any one who has experienced an open bait barrel on a hot August day can attest, and the ears subjected to the incessant pounding and hammering of shipbuilding, and to a lesser extent, boatbuilding. Noank was a noisy, smelly place in those days. And yet, the fishing boats and ships under construction, the fishing and lobster boats as well as the docks were picturesque, to say nothing of the salty dogs who manned them. People thronged to see it all. Is it any wonder Noank tapped into the emerging tourist trade?

The first significant hostelry to be built in town was the Ashbey House on Pearl Street. But that story is for another day. This story is that of the second, larger hotel—one of the first structures built in Noank with electrification in mind. Some buildings in town were already wired in anticipation of electric power, but those were retrofits—this hotel was specifically built to use electric power. The big store Robert Palmer was building on Pearl Street probably holds the honor of being the first.

The Day newspaper first mentioned the new hotel on 6 October, 1899, reporting that “plans have been

drawn up for a three-story, complete with electric power and other modern conveniences.” A week later, ground was broken on the new hotel. George W. Allen of Mystic won the cellar/foundation contract: using stone found on site, augmented with 20,000 bricks. Allen wasted no time, and *The Day* reported the foundation completed on 1 November, 1899. The paper did not record whether Allen had time to take advantage of the herring run at the nearby railroad bridge at North (Beebe) Cove.

The rest of construction proceeded at a similarly rapid, and almost unbelievable pace by today’s standards. The roof timbers were erected by 25 November—completing the roofing required over 250 pounds of solder, 10,000 nails, and 3,360 sheets of tin. By the middle of February 1900 when the indoor plastering was nearly completed, two men had been seriously injured. The first injury occurred on 7 December when Jule Robeshaw cut his hand while hewing a bit of joist, the broad axe he wielded caught on his coat pocket on the downstroke, deflecting the blow into his left hand. The second injury took place five weeks later when George Howard of New London was struck in the head by a large hammer that slipped from the hands of a carpenter. Howard was knocked out for well over thirty minutes before Doctor W. M. Hill was able to restore consciousness.

May 1900 saw the arrival of a pile driver to build the hotel dock, for this hotel offered something very few others could match—an offshore fishing trip with the proprietor, Captain James H. (Jimmie) Sistare, a great bear of a man of swarthy complexion (he once claimed to the artist Reynolds Beal that he had Spanish buccaneer blood in his veins.) His shoulders were so broad it was said he couldn’t negotiate a standard doorway without tacking. Sistare was all muscle, forged during his time as a coal stoker at the Gas Works in New London, the town of his birth. He also had the grace and agility of a gymnast, and was capable of turning his six-foot, 260-pound frame in a full airborne somersault at the age of forty.



Aunt Edie, rigged for swordfishing, at The Palmer's Wharf

The hotel opened for business on 21 May, 1900 as The Palmer (Inn), and was an immediate success. The hotel was named after Deacon Robert Palmer, one of the financial backers of the hotel, and a good friend of Sistare's. Commodore E. William Hooker of the Hartford Yacht Club, one of the first guests, presented Captain Sistare with a brass saluting cannon.

The first season of operation concluded on 26 September, and over the winter the hotel received many improvements: salt and fresh water baths and showers, electric call bells, a large writing desk in the guests' "office", as well as a piano. All rooms were repainted, each a different color. Two 15,000 gallon water tanks were built on legs 55-feet high alongside the hotel to provide sufficient water pressure to all parts of the building.



Capt. James Sistare (left) and Ollie Beebe (center) onboard the *Aunt Edie*, with The Palmer visible in the background.
2004.013.075, gift of Paul Stubing.

The summer of 1902 saw Captain Sistare and hotel guests land two 300 pound swordfish at New London.

The fish were captured from the auxiliary sloop *Edith*. Later that summer Sistare sold *Edith* and contracted with Robert Palmer for a larger vessel, the 50-foot auxiliary schooner *Aunt Edie* (a pet name for his first wife, Edith). When the hotel closed for the season, Sistare would spend the winter fishing aboard his schooner.

The early twentieth century was a time that numerous artists such as Henry Ward Ranger, Reynolds Beal, and F. Stewart Green were active in Noank, frequently staying as guests at The Palmer. Ranger even chartered *Aunt Edie* for a brief fishing cruise in the winter of 1904.



Sketch in the guestbook of The Palmer done by Henry Ward Ranger of himself with Reynolds and Gifford Beal, May 10, 1902. The train hints at a popular means of transportation to Noank for visiting artists. 1974.004, gift of Douglas Anderson.

A fire broke out on Saturday 7 July, 1906 and was promptly extinguished, the hotel being full of guests at the time. Water and smoke damage was considerable, but within a week or so the effects were no longer noticeable.

And so the years progressed until September 1914 when Sistare sold the hotel to Charles L. Johnson, of Hartford. Sistare remained in charge for a brief interim period, but soon built a new hotel on the then main road to Stonington on Lord's Hill. It opened in 1917 and enjoyed success before Sistare's death in 1923. In February of 1915 Charles Johnson changed the name of the hotel to the Bayside Inn, made numerous renovations and planned on adding one hundred new rooms as well as a ballroom. Those expansions never materialized as World War One deepened, and Johnson sold the inn to Charles W. Morse (the new owner of the former Palmer Shipyard) in February, 1918 for \$10,000. Morse at that time was buying up most available accommodation in the area to house the rapidly expanding workforce at the shipyard. Employed

as a rooming house only, no meals were served in the hotel once renown for it's fine cuisine.



Interior of the lounge at the Bayside Inn.

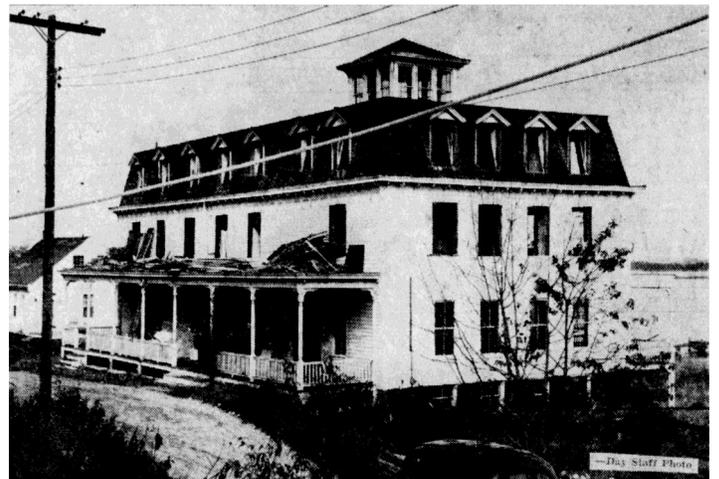
The postwar years are when things get a little muddled, or at least not well-reported. The business underwent numerous changes in ownership. On 23 October 1918, *The Day* reported H. F. Tracy from Vermont had leased the building. In the summer of 1919 Tracy strongly considered closing the hotel due to the drought in Noank. The next year the hotel was sold to Louis J. Webb, a hotelier from Hartford. A year later Webb brought a pair of suits of fraud against Charles Johnson in connection with his earnings from the hotel, but they were later dropped.

The next few years were tumultuous for Webb: the car he was driving struck and killed 7-year-old Charles D. Smith of Poquonnock, a fire broke out around a chimney in April of 1922, and on June 1922 Webb was arrested for serving smuggled liquor in the hotel. One wonders what Captain Sistare thought of that. (Sistare's "new" inn on Lord's Hill had a clause in its deed prohibiting liquor from being purchased or sold on the premises—supposedly still in force, which no doubt diminished its attractiveness as a hostelry for less abstemious owners.) Webb was arraigned in 1923 and jailed, being released in 1924. The next year the hotel was sold at auction to William H. Davidson of New London. Not much was done with the business or building, but once or twice a year rumors of a sale made it's rounds around town. None of these ru-

mors had any veracity to them. However, 1932 saw the dock rebuilt and shingles replaced on the sides of the building. For a number of years the site was a popular swimming destination for villagers.

No newspapers reported any new owners stepping forward, or the hotel opening for business, but it apparently hosted an exhibition of ivory carvings in June 1935, and an auction by US Marshals in 1937. The Savings Bank of New London owned the property in 1936, and engendered a certain animosity by closing the area off to swimming. Sidney C. Wood proposed using the hotel as the home for a boys camp—Noank Nautical Academy, but that idea too fizzled out.

Being so close to the water, and exposed to southeast winds, it is no surprise the hotel suffered damage in the 1938 hurricane. Some repairs were made, but by August 1940 plans were made to raze the building. The last known photograph taken of the building was published in *The Day* on 10 November 1941, most of the windows removed, and much lumber piled up on the porch roof, but the structure still recognizable. By 16 December, 1941, however, the job was complete. The Bayside Inn was gone. Much of the wood salvaged stayed in town, purchased by villagers, the remainder went to Springfield, Massachusetts.



The Bayside Inn in its last days, November 1941. Photograph by *The Day*, published November 10, 1941.

The Sylvan Street Museum is currently open to visitors and researchers, Mondays 1-4 pm or by appointment. Call us at 860-536-3021 or email us at noankhist@gmail.com with any questions, or to schedule a meeting.

Electricity comes to Noank: Noank in the News 125 Years Ago

“The boat now building for John Daboll and William P. Latham at the boat shop of Frank Davis is a handsome craft and will be initiated into the lobster business in the spring. Curiosity is centered on this craft, as she is different from the ordinary lobster boat in that she will be equipped with an electric motor, which will be put to the double duty of propelling the boat in calm weather and hauling the trawls when outside. This is a new departure and will be watched with great interest by the lobstermen of this village and others, and if it proves the success that is intended for it, it will not be very long when the whole fleet, with but few exceptions, will adopt motors. The one selected by Messrs. Daboll and Latham is of the Globe pattern and is capable of six horsepower. That this method of lobstering will be the means of eliminating a great deal of hard work is without debate...That the gentlemen interested in this undertaking are enterprising is to say the least, and that they will have much success is the wish of all.”

-The Day, January 21, 1899

This vessel was the catboat FALCON, launched April 8, 1899. She was 26.5 ft. with a 40 ft. mast, 33 ft. boom and 18 ft. gaff. Later articles in The Day called the vessel "a thing of beauty" with "lines as handsome as an old salt could wish."

“Henry Shirley, chief engineer of the hauling apparatus in the "head house" at the shipyard, has a great many friends and it is evident that one of these friends has, some time or other, imposed upon his hospitality. He has, in a snug corner of his apartments, a comfortable chair constructed out of a barrel, which he occupies when opportunity offers. Some one had dropped in on him for a short chat and found the chair so enticing, monopolized it for the best part of the day, causing its owner not a little inconvenience and obliging him to put the following device in operation. He has a small battery, from which a number of wires have been run to different parts of the chair and placed in such a manner as to attract attention, and which would probably leave a very noticeable impression on one not accustomed to the seat. Whether or not one of his

friends ever sat down in the chair to his discomfort, the writer never heard, but one thing is certain - Henry always finds the chair vacant now when he wishes to occupy it, and his friends venture no further than the door.”

-The Day, January 26, 1899

“The Mystic Gas and Electric Light Company have now in operation in Mystic and the borough the following number of 16 candle-power incandescent lights:

Mystic - 858

Stonington - 695.

There are 107 street lights in Mystic which make the total number of lamps 1,728. Of this number the Hyer-Sheehan Company, through their representative, T.P. Sheehan, have installed 1,212. T.P. Sheehan and men...will return later in the spring to install the street service in Stonington and Noank, should those villages decide to take it.”

-Stonington Mirror, February 28, 1899



NHS Seeks Volunteers

Would you like to volunteer in 2024? We are seeking museum docents for summer afternoons, as well as help during the year in the following areas:

Program Committee

Events Committee

Membership mailings

Newsletter

Publicity - print and social media

Nominating Committee

Meeting refreshments

Research projects

Work with the museum collections

If you have any interest in helping out, even for a few hours, please let us know. You can email at noankhist@gmail.com, or call Nancy (860)536-9253 or Anne (203)832-7064. Thank you to all!

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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