

Annual Secretary's Report 2025

Old Mystic History Center

Welcome to the 58th Old Mystic History Center Annual Membership Meeting and Luncheon:

This year, our weekly operating hours were Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. We also welcomed visitors by appointment, particularly those interested in research.

In 2025, we hosted over 100 visitors, a 25% increase from last year's attendance. Some came with specific research goals, while others visited out of curiosity. Our guests traveled from across Connecticut and beyond, including states such as New York, Washington, Vermont, and Rhode Island. Within Connecticut, visitors came from Stonington, Mystic, Old Mystic, Waterford, Westerly, Wethersfield, Plainfield, Fairfield, Lebanon, Rocky Hill, Groton, New London, Noank, Hamden, Ledyard, Preston, Ridgefield, and Glastonbury.

The Old Mystic History Center continues to maintain both a website and an active Facebook page. Our Facebook page currently has 1,200 friends and 1,300 followers. While most of our followers are from the United States, we also have international friends from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, Japan, and India.

Membership support remains our primary source of income. We currently have 83 paid members, with membership renewals still coming in. It is estimated that we will have over 100 when all renewals are received.

The Old Mystic History Center continues to retain the name Indian and Colonial Research Center as an authorized member of the Connecticut Genealogical Society.

Memory Bank/Old Mystic Oral History Project

This year we interviewed George Crouse and Niel Spillane. Bob Mohr manned the video equipment, and Paul Grant- Costa directed volunteers who helped to transcribe audio.

Project volunteers will be asked to create vignettes from the transcriptions that may be added to the website for public viewing as well as creating various exhibits at the Center that focus on people, places and events. We plan to add this data to an interactive map.

More interviews are in the works.

Newsletter

Under the direction of Board member Deb Keehn, our Newsletter, produced with the help of volunteers, contains articles of interest about Old Mystic as well as announcements for upcoming events.

Collections Activity

Bill Mitchell donated several notable items, including a scrapbook containing Anna Slocum Coit's Westerly Sun newspaper articles from the 1890s to the early 1900s, a selection of Southwest Indigenous pottery gifted to him by Eva Butler, and a photograph of the Mystic Union Baptist Church.

John Goodrich contributed two colonial-era powder horns, a hand-carved wooden spoon, several possible Indigenous tools, and a set of historic newspaper articles. The Board plans to scan these articles for long-term preservation and future access.

The owners of the Bower House, an American Gothic-style residence located approximately 200 feet south of the Center, invited OMHC representatives to review items marked for disposal. Bob, Marcus, and Cora examined materials stored in an old outbuilding. Originally owned by the Gallup family, the property yielded a variety of historical items, including boxes of old receipts, history books, parts of a spinning wheel, a headboard, four volumes from a seven-volume dictionary set, and a Gallup family ledger. Several State of Connecticut documents were also discovered.

Among the salvaged items is an account book once owned by A.B. Taylor, who served as an agent for the Mystic Manufacturing Co. and later managed the Woolen Mill in Old Mystic. The account book includes supply orders, correspondence, and remarkably well-preserved swatches of original woolen cloth, with colors that remain vibrant.

Len Potter donated three photographs of buildings likely taken on Shewville Road in the late 19th or early 20th century.

Ruth Crocker donated a silk wall hanging depicting a tiger, formerly part of the Charles Q. Eldredge collection.

An inventory of the Hinckley Collection has been completed. This collection documents the history of the Hinckley family from the 18th century through the early 1900s. It features personal letters detailing daily life, Civil War correspondence, financial records, land transactions, and photographs.

Lastly, the glass slides from the Waite Collection have been successfully scanned and completed.

Grants

This year we were awarded grants from the Mystic Woman's Club (\$500.00) and Chelsea Groton Bank (\$500.00). The David Butler and Ruby Smale Charitable Foundation has been donating quarterly to the OMHC. The foundation supports organizations that their parents or grandparents founded, especially Eva L. Butler.

Public Outreach

In May, Board members and volunteers staffed a table at the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed's Spring Waterfest, engaging with attendees and sharing information about our organization.

On June 12, we welcomed several visitors during Connecticut Open House Day. Guests enjoyed guided tours of our facility and had the opportunity to meet and speak with Board members.

We were also featured in an episode of Nautical Tales and Nature Trails: Recreation in Southeastern Connecticut and Southern Rhode Island, produced by Southeastern Connecticut TV. Board member John Goodrich was interviewed by the host, highlighting our work and local history.

In October, we participated in the Westerly Historical Society's History Fair, continuing our efforts to connect with the wider community and promote regional heritage. Marcus Maronn, Deb Keehn, and Steve Chapman were on hand to staff our table there.

Community Picnic

We have been exploring the possibility of reviving the Old Mystic Community Picnic

Volunteers

Volunteers have logged over 1000 hours this year, working at the Center and also remotely. Our dedicated volunteers work diligently, not only to help visitors with research, but they also answer phone inquiries, catalogue items in our collections, work on data entry, assist in bookkeeping and regulatory filings, write articles for, and distribute our quarterly newsletter, and administer our website and Facebook page, they also help maintain the building and the grounds. Student volunteers have been transcribing interviews for the Old Mystic Memory Bank Oral History Project, and volunteers have been digitizing glass slides completing the Waite collection and are now moving on to the Coates collections. Our extensive scrapbook collection continues to be entered into the database, as are our notebooks.

Student Volunteers

Student volunteers gain valuable experience and knowledge while strengthening their academic résumés. Volunteering with OMHC is a mutually beneficial opportunity—students develop practical skills, and OMHC benefits from their enthusiasm and contributions.

Maintenance

Routine upkeep continued this year. The gutters were cleaned, and the large tree on the property was professionally pruned. Additionally, the cobblestones at the front of the building were thoroughly cleaned, improving both appearance and safety.

OMHC Goals for 2026

- Create new exhibits,
- Increase fundraising efforts to ensure OMHC remains a viable and stable organization,
- Increase outreach opportunities for the community,
- Continue to upgrade our website to promote the OMHC and its research possibilities,
- Move forward with our Memory Bank Oral History project,
- Recruit volunteer interns from local colleges,
- Continue to grow our membership base,
- Find more space to house our growing collections.

These continuing initiatives will help us to carry out the mission of the OMHC and reach a wider audience.

Board of Directors

Paul Grant-Costa
George Crouse
Cora Grunwald
Richard Guidebeck
Sharon Maynard
Bob Mohr
Deb Keehn
John Goodrich

Volunteers:

Marcus Maronn
Steven Chapman
Patrick Strout
Alexis Coughlin
Lily Dorsa
Hannah Delgrego
Pablo Armijo
Christopher Gabianelli

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon I. Maynard
Acting President