



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

JUNE 2012 NEWSLETTER

Ruth Callander House Museum, 492 Main St., Portland, CT 06480; Tel: 860-342-5455
www.PortlandHistSoc.Org

PRESIDENT'S LETTER


For the second year in a row, the weather cooperated with us! Saturday, May 12 was a beautiful sunny day for hundreds of people bargain hunting in Portland. Sellers were able to set up their treasures under blue skies and the people came, shopped, and carried away their bargains. Our **16th Annual Town-wide Tag Sale** was a success again this year due to the hard work of our volunteers. From collecting and pricing items at the Callander House garage to baking goodies for our food sale, from hanging signs to soliciting map sponsors, from delivering poles to cooking up hot dogs, we have the best volunteers! Many thanks to all our volunteers, the townspeople who listed tag sales on our map, the local sponsors of the map, and the thousands who came to town and bought our "treasures." Thanks to all those who tried to travel around, through and in Portland that day between 7:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. We appreciate that you practiced patience! A major fundraiser for the Society, the tag sale allows us to offer free educational programs for the community and to maintain the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History.

This spring's special exhibit, "*Scouting in Portland,*" featured Girl Scout and Boy Scout uniforms, collectibles, photographs and handbooks. The exhibit was the brainchild of Girl Scout leader Alicia Currier. It grew from a tiny idea to be more than we ever could have imagined. The exhibit was a wonderful collaboration between the Society, the Scouts and Portland residents young and old. It has been interesting to hear your stories and share those scouting treasures. Many thanks to each of you who loaned us scouting items. If you are active in a local organization that would like to celebrate its years of service in Portland, we are available to help you put together an exhibit about your group. Call me at 860-342-1927 with exhibit ideas/items.


The Society is working with St. Mary's to identify the students in a collection of photographs from St.

Come join the fun!

It's an
**ICE CREAM
SOCIAL**



with entertainment by
Rare Occasion
Barbershop Quartet



Tuesday, June 26 at 7 pm
Portland Senior Center

Mary's School. People continue to find family members and friends in these photographs that range from the early 1900's to its closing years. We are still looking for photos of the later classes, from the 1960's and 1970's. These were on your diplomas. If you have your diploma photo, we would like to borrow it to scan, and of course, will return it to you. Contact Deb at 860-342-1927.

At June's Executive Board meeting, the **Trustees** presented their draft of a 5-year plan for our future. It was accepted and it is hoped that the plan will be ready to present to the membership in the fall. The **Collections Board** continues to develop a policy that will help us focus on collecting items, information and documents that will preserve Portland's rich history. (continued on page 2)

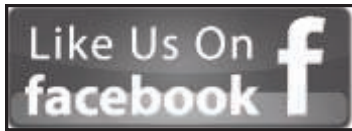
President's Letter (continued from page 1)

On Tuesday, June 26, our program meeting will be at the Senior Center, 7 Waverly Avenue, at 7:00 p.m. It will be an **Ice Cream Social** honoring the recipients of the **William J. VanBeynum Awards** and featuring the **Barbershop Quartet "Rare Occasion."** The VanBeynum award was established to honor the memory of the man, who tirelessly volunteered his time fifty years ago to research, promote, and document the history of Portland. The award recognizes an individual or organization/business for an outstanding contribution of time, talent or service to the Society's mission to collect, preserve and share Portland's past. We hope to see all of you there. The Executive Board will provide ice cream, toppings and real whipped cream to cool you down! **Join us at 7 p.m. to build your ice cream sundae and stay to enjoy our musical program.**

Have a great summer, and stop in and see us at the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History!

Deb Ellsworth 860-342-1927

Portland Historical Society Social Networking



We now have a page on Facebook for sharing press releases and other information about the Society. Please visit <http://www.facebook.com/PortlandHistSoc>, and click the "Like" button to stay informed. *Bob McDougall*

Docents

We always welcome volunteers who wish to spend time learning about our exhibits and discussing them with museum visitors. Watch for our new Docent Training Program. Call Gene at 860-342-0306 when you would like to join us. *Gene Sullivan*

16th Annual Town Wide Tag Sale By the Numbers

Tag Sales participating this year - 156
Tag Sale proceeds to Society funds - \$5200
Active Society Volunteers over the last year - 53
Thanks again to everyone who helped, participated, enjoyed! *Tag Sale Committee*



How many Masons does it take to put up a tent? As many as we can get! The men of Warren Lodge #51 again donated time to the Town Wide Tag Sale putting up and taking down the tents, and delivering and picking up tag sale poles. Thank you Masons!

Ruth Callander House Conditions Assessment Begins

In the interest of responsible stewardship, the Ruth Callander House Committee has begun the task of developing a plan for appropriate restoration, preservation and maintenance of the Ruth Callander House (RCH), built in 1714. This will begin in June 2012 with a complete Conditions Assessment performed by Crosskey Architects: architect Bill Crosskey; historic preservationist Marguerite Rodney; structural engineer Jim Grant and MEP engineer Mark Gendron. This team will survey, evaluate, and document the condition of the building; perform analysis of all code compliance; review appropriateness of current building use; develop and prioritize scope of work for building envelope restoration; estimate costs and produce a report. In addition, a National Register nomination will be created to increase future funding options. A Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grant has been awarded by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation to cover half of the expense of this project.

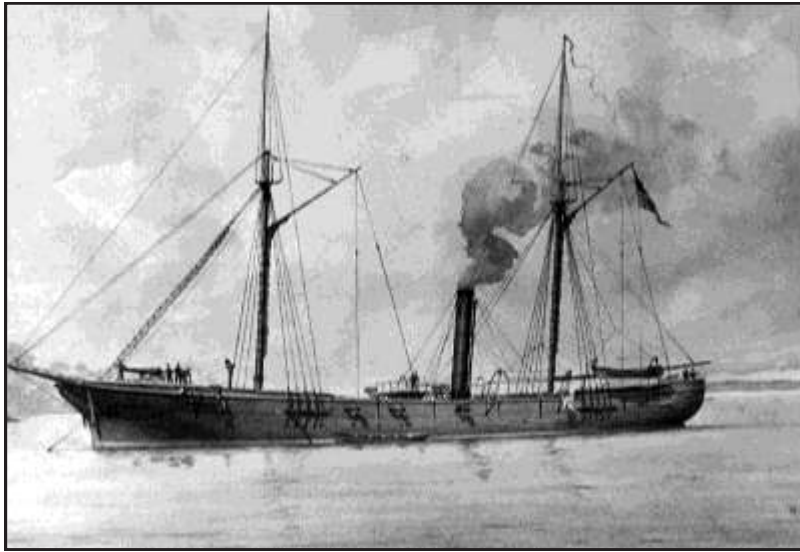
The Society will use this information to create a *Maintenance and Stewardship Manual* for the RCH. This will include plans for renovation/preservation, cyclical maintenance requirements and a record of all renovations and maintenance performed, and will be a terrific resource for our all volunteer organization to take proper care of our Museum building in the future. During this process, we hope to obtain valuable information to use in all the Society's planning for the future. *Ruth Callander House Committee*

HISTORY...

Gunboat USS Cayuga

by Rick Gildersleeve

At the start of the Civil War, in April 1861, the U.S. Navy was composed of only ninety vessels, and of those fewer than twenty were immediately available for service. As a result, Abraham Lincoln accepted a proposal to quickly build gunboats that would protect the coast in the North as well as isolate the South by blockading her coastline and the Lower



*USS Cayuga, a painting by R.G. Skerrett
U.S. Navy Art Collection, Washington, D.C.*

Mississippi Valley. This was known as the Anaconda Plan. The need for the gunboats was urgent and proposals were sent out to many shipbuilders. Twenty-three of these Unadilla class gunboats were eventually completed. Because of the urgent need they were referred to as “90-day gunboats,” although most took almost six months till their commissioning. Each displaced 691 tons and was 158 feet in length, with a twenty-eight foot beam and a nine-and-a-half foot draft. As a combination of old and new technologies, they were two-masted fore-topsail schooners with two-cylinder coal-burning steam engines. Thus powered, they could achieve ten to eleven knots. They carried a crew of between sixty-two and 114 men, depending on the mission assigned.

The term “gunboat” seems like somewhat of a misnomer for the Unadilla class boats. They were adequately - but not heavily - armed. Each carried one 20-pounder Parrott Rifle, one 11-inch Dahlgren smoothbore, one 12-pounder smoothbore and two 20-pounder howitzers. The 11-inch Dahlgren weighed almost eight tons and could throw a 150 lb. shell about two miles. Later in the war the armament varied from boat to boat. While these gunboats didn't carry a lot of armament, they could inflict lethal damage to another ship or a fort.

The shipyard of S. Gildersleeve & Sons received a

proposal and made application to build a one of these gunboats, which was accepted. (The Goodspeed Shipyard in East Haddam also built one.) In his memoir, Sylvester Gildersleeve says they started gathering the material immediately - mostly oak - and the keel was laid in July of 1861.

The *Cayuga* was launched at the Gildersleeve Shipyard on October 21, 1861, fulfilling the promise of a “90-day gunboat,” at a cost of \$125,000. She was then towed to the Brooklyn Navy Yard for fitting out, which would have included her armament as well as some protective armor and other military fittings that wouldn't be available in a civilian shipyard.

She was commissioned on February 21, 1862, with Lt. Napoleon B. Harrison, Commanding Officer, and Lt. George Hamilton Perkins, First Lieutenant and Executive Officer.

There was no time for a “shakedown cruise”; the *Cayuga* sailed out of New York Harbor on February 28th, headed for the Gulf of Mexico, and arrived in Mississippi Sound on March 26th, capturing two Confederate schooners as prizes on the way.

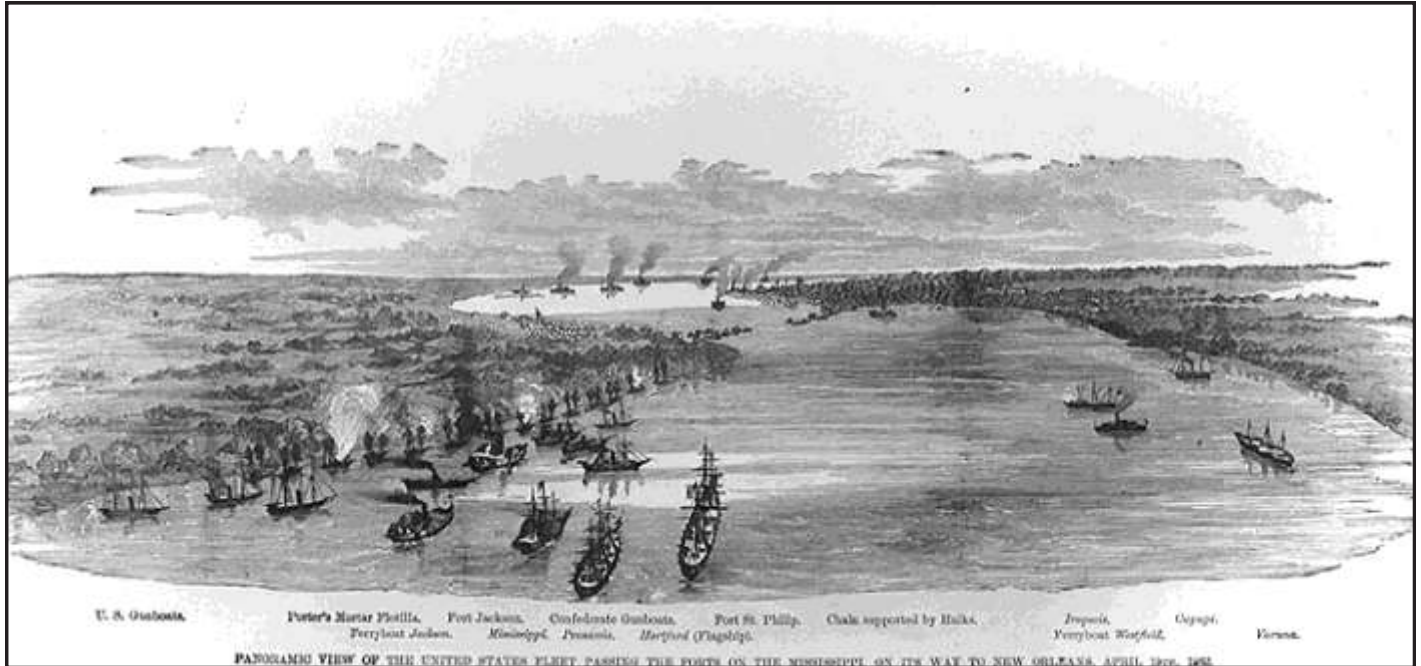
On March 31st, the *Cayuga* joined the West Gulf Blockading Squadron for service in the Lower Mississippi and the Texas Gulf Coast. There were fifteen large and many small vessels in the fleet that started gathering in the Lower Mississippi, under the command of Flag Officer David Farragut, aboard his flagship the Sloop-of-War *USS Hartford*. Their assignment was to get past and destroy the two forts, Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip, on either side of the river,

(continued on page 4)

Gunboat USS *Cayuga* (cont. from pg. 3)

that defended New Orleans - which was about seventy miles further up the river - and then to capture the city itself. New Orleans was the Confederacy's biggest city, and one of the busiest ports in the world. This was to be strictly a naval operation; there were no supporting ground troops. But once captured, there would be a small army of occupation to hold the city.

its place as the first vessel in the first division, which was to lead the attack on the forts. At 9:00 a.m. the first shot was fired when a Union mortar boat - converted schooners - sent a shell into one of the forts. The mortar boats were cleverly covered with brush and hidden on the riverbanks, so the forts couldn't tell where the shells were coming from. Each mortar boat carried one enormous 13-inch mortar that fired a 285 lb. ball. The *Cayuga*



Panoramic View of the United States Fleet passing the Forts on the Mississippi
U.S. Naval Historical Center

April 14th, 15th and 16th were largely spent taking on coal, shells and gunpowder from supply ships. By coincidence, the *Barque J.C. Kuhn*, built at the Gildersleeve Shipyard in 1857 and since bought by the government, was one of these supply ships. At 2 p.m. on the 16th, they finished coaling and then cleared the decks for action. They also covered the sides of the ships with mud to make them blend in with the river. Then they steamed up to their station, which was four miles below the forts. Late in the day on the 17th their lookout spotted a light up the river and then realized it was a large fire ship that had been sent drifting down the river into the Union fleet. The *Cayuga* sent out small boats with grappling hooks and were thus able to tow it out of the way. In the evening of the 17th they were able to see the lights of Fort Jackson for the first time and had to dodge another fire ship drifting down the river.

On Friday, April 18th, at 5:00 a.m. the *Cayuga* took

weighed anchor and went out into the river in view of the forts and opened fire with the pivot gun on the forecastle and the Parrott guns. She immediately received heavy shelling from the forts, and several more fireboats were sent down, but the current carried them ashore.

The *Cayuga* was firing shells with 15-second fuses, but by 3:00 p.m. she had used them all up, and so she went back a few hundred yards to the Flag Ship so the captain could report to Farragut. Farragut ordered the rigging of the *Hartford* manned, and they gave the *Cayuga* three cheers. After dark the *Cayuga* went up the river to within half a mile of a heavy chain, which the rebels had strung across the river, to close it off. The chain was held up by the coal barges attached to it, and there was a shackle in the middle of it that could be opened for Confederate ships to pass. The *Cayuga* stayed on picket duty there all that night.

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The Splendid Naval Triumph on the Mississippi, April 24, 1862
Currier & Ives lithograph, 1862

Ships are identified as (starting at top left center, up the river, running down to the right, then across toward the left): Confederate steamers, USS Cayuga (leading the Union column), USS Pensacola, burning confederate steamer, USS Varuna, USS Oneida, USS Mississippi (engaging the ram Manassas), USS Richmond, USS Kineo, USS Hartford (flagship, in collision with a fire raft), USS Brooklyn and USS Winona.

U.S. Navy Art Collection, Washington, D.C.

Gunboat USS Cayuga (cont. from pg. 4)

On Saturday, April 19, the *Cayuga* weighed anchor at 5:00 a.m. and returned back to the fleet. They received some 20-second fuses and then were retired by Farragut to let the second division take their turn. Before leaving they requested, and received permission, from Farragut to go back and fire three more shells at the forts. Then they retired and dropped anchor astern of the mortar boats. One of the mortar boats was so jarred by its mortar's recoil that it sank, with no loss of life.

On Sunday the 20th, the second division retired, and the third took their turn shelling the forts. It was reported that both forts were badly damaged, with many men killed and one fort on fire. The *Cayuga* took on a quantity of shells and gunpowder, and the deck was again cleared for action. Commodore Theodorus Bailey, who was Commodore of the Gunboats and sec-

ond to Farragut, went onboard the *Cayuga* and announced that he was making her his Flag Ship and that the general attack on the forts would commence the next day. On Monday night, in preparation for the attack, two gunboats were able to break the chain strung across the river. Accounts vary as to how this was accomplished, but it was done.

For the next three days, however, the *Cayuga* and other gunboats would venture up river closer to the forts and fire on them and then return downriver. All the while the mortar boats were keeping up a 'round the clock shelling of the forts, doing what we would call today "softening the target." Confederate fire-

boats were frequently drifting downstream and had to be dodged or pulled to shore.

Finally, on Wednesday, April 23rd, Farragut went aboard the *Cayuga* and announced that the attack would commence that night. At 6 p.m. they anchored on the right-hand side of the river and signaled the other ships to form up behind them. All hands were mustered on the quarterdeck, and Lt. Commander Harrison made a speech. Then Commodore Bailey spoke and said the *Cayuga* had been selected as Flag Ship of the right-hand column and was to lead the fleet into the attack.

At 2:00 a.m. on the 24th, the *Cayuga* received a signal from the *Hartford* to get up steam, and at 3:00 a.m. they got under way, leading the right-hand column. The original plan was to attack with two columns, but Farragut thought that might create too
(continued on page 6)

Gunboat USS *Cayuga* (cont. from pg.5)

much confusion in the smoke-filled darkness, so the left column was ordered to fall in behind the right column. At 3:30 a.m. they got past the place where the chain had been and then put on full steam. At that point they were discovered by both forts and everyone opened fire.

The *Cayuga* was nearest Fort St. Phillip, on the right-hand side of the river, and the fort's guns were aimed too high, so many of the cannon balls went over their deck. Because the fort was surprised, they didn't have time to lower the cannons, so although she was hit, the *Cayuga* suffered little damage. She continued to pass both forts, but just beyond lay the Confederate Fleet. Three rebel boats attacked the *Cayuga* as a combined force, but she was able to finish them off with the pivot and Parrott guns. By this time all the ships in the fleet were up the river and engaging both forts.

There are two published first-hand accounts of this battle, both written by crewmembers on the *Cayuga*. With dozens of vessels and two forts all shooting at each other in the confines of the river, both accounts give the impression of mass-confusion, with cannon balls flying in every direction and a steady stream of fireboats loaded with bales of burning cotton drifting down the river.

In one of the accounts, Lt. Perkins, the *Cayuga's* executive officer, describes a fight with the Confederate ship *Governor Moore*:

"Our short fight with the *Governor Moore* was very exciting. We were along side of each other and had both fired our guns, and it all depended on which could get reloaded first. The large forward gun on the *Governor Moore* was a 10-inch, and ours an 11-inch, and we were so near they were almost muzzle to muzzle. Ours was fired first, and Beverly Kennon, the captain of the *Governor Moore*, is now a prisoner aboard the *Cayuga*." Capt. Kennon said that one shot killed thirteen of the gunboat's crew, and disabled the vessel.

The *Cayuga* was still leading the way up the river, and shortly after dawn they spotted a regiment of rebel infantry encamped on the shore. Lt. Perkins says, "As we were very close in, I shouted to them to come onboard and deliver up their arms, or we would blow them all to pieces. It seemed rather odd for a



Paymaster's Clerk Samuel B. Massa
Samuel Massa Papers, Syracuse University Library

regiment on shore to be surrendering to a ship! They hauled down their colors, and the colonel and command came onboard and gave themselves up as prisoners of war."

The other account was written by Paymaster's Clerk Samuel B. Massa. After they had passed the forts he wrote that "the rebels along the shore can be seen waving white flags. Amongst the officers we captured were two Colonels, four Captains, several Lieuts. and a number of other officers." He further says that, "During the hottest of the fight we all seemed to think it was the Fourth of July and when orders were given to lie down after firing, for our safety, we were so excited most of us ran to the side of the boat to see where our shot was going to strike." Samuel Massa also had to assist their surgeon in the amputation of a foot after his steward had "given out" - one of the powder boys had been hit by a shell.

After clearing both forts and sinking or burning the Confederate fleet, Commodore Farragut arrived in the *Hartford* and ordered all ships to anchor and take a rest before attacking New Orleans, which was now
(continued on page 7)

Gunboat USS Cayuga

(cont. from pg.6)

about twenty miles up the river. In passing the forts, the *Cayuga* had been hit forty-six times, in the hull and masts, but no serious damage was done. Six men were wounded, but there were no fatalities.

The next morning, April 25th, the ships all got under way again, with the *Cayuga* still in the lead. At about 9:00 a.m., New Orleans came into view. There were still two more fortresses to pass, however - the Chalmette Batteries - between them and the city. The batteries appeared to be abandoned, but when the *Cayuga* got within range, the men concealed inside opened fire with their cannons. After taking fourteen hits, the *Cayuga* backed off until more ships arrived to help. Both the *Hartford* and the *Pensacola* arrived shortly thereafter, and the batteries were quickly silenced.

After arriving at the city, the fleet anchored in front of it, and Farragut ordered Captain Bailey and Lt. Perkins of the *Cayuga* to go ashore and demand its surrender. They headed for shore in a small launch with a few men and a flag of truce. Needless to say, they were not well received and there were cries of "Hang them!" from the angry mob that had gathered on shore. They succeeded in getting safely to City Hall, where the Mayor and the Confederate General who had the city under martial law refused to surrender. But neither could the city be defended, and in early May Union General Benjamin F. Butler, with a force of 5,000 men, took over the occupation of the city.

On April 29, 1862, after assisting in transporting Gen. Butler's troops up the river from the Gulf, the *Cayuga* received orders from Farragut to return to New York for repairs. All the other ships in the fleet brought



Capt. Theodorus Bailey and Lt. George H. Perkins on their way to demand the surrender of New Orleans

their mail to them - to be mailed in New York - and they departed at 5:00 p.m. As they passed the ships in the fleet they were cheered by men lining the rigging of all the vessels.

As a result of the outcome of the Battle of New Orleans, having taken the city with a minimum loss of life and ships, Farragut was promoted by the U.S. Congress to the rank of Rear Admiral, that rank having been created for him. Until then, officers higher than Captain were Flag Officers. For their actions in the battle, three crewmen of the *Cayuga* were awarded the Medal of Honor. They were Captain of the Afterguard Wm. Parker, Quartermaster Edward Wright and Boat-

swain's Mate Wm. Young. Young's citation reads in part, "While both forts opened fire simultaneously, striking the vessel from stem to stern" Young "Calmly manned a Parrott gun throughout the action."

After her much-needed repairs were completed at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the *Cayuga* returned to Admiral Farragut's fleet. She participated in operations above New Orleans, on the Mississippi, and the bombardment of Baton Rouge and Donaldsonville, La. In the years 1863 - 1865 the *Cayuga* served along the Gulf coast doing patrol duty and catching the occasional blockade-runner.

In July of 1865 she was ordered back to New York, where she was de-commissioned later that month and sold by the government in October. She was converted to a merchant steamer and became the aptly named *Veteran*. As the *Veteran*, she showed up on merchant ship lists into the 1880s. She had been rebuilt around 1875 in what was then her homeport of Somerset, Mass. The *Veteran* last appears on the List of American Shipping in 1886. After twenty-five years of hard work, she was no doubt old and tired.

CALENDAR

All programs are held at the Portland Library,
Mary Flood Room, at 7:30 pm.,
unless otherwise indicated.

Programs

Jun 26 - Ice Cream Social - Entertainment by Rare Occasion Barbershop Quartet - hear talented *a capella* singers interpret Irving Berlin, Tin Pan Alley luminaries, and many others, all in barbershop style while enjoying ice cream and your choice of all the fixings - Portland Senior Center at 7:00 pm

Sep 25 - "Sound Rising" program by Richard Radune, author and historian - dynamic presentation about maritime activity in the Long Island Sound and Connecticut River between 1750 and 1820

Museum Exhibit Openings

Aug 5, Sep 2 - Museum open 2-4 pm, or call Claire 860-335-8581 for appt. Watch for new open hours.

This Summer at the Museum:

The White-Overton-Callander House, a 1714 Colonial - Our Museum, It's history and future - join us as we explore almost 300 years of this building's past and begin planning its future

New Military artifacts - Edward Rousseau's complete military trunk - from letters to officer study books, from hats to shoes - it is all in the trunk!

New Acquisitions - join us as we work through the many historical items recently acquired.

NEWSLETTER - Claire Frisbie, 3-15-12, 860-335-8581

June 2012 Newsletter!

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