

ROWAYTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

177 ROWAYTON AVENUE, ROWAYTON, CT 06853



EXHIBIT HOURS
Tuesdays 9:30 am – 3 pm
1st Sunday of the month
1 – 3 pm
and by appointment
**half shell gift shop
HOURS**
Monday - Saturday 11 - 3
and by appointment

FALL 2015

PEOPLE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE *at the* RHS

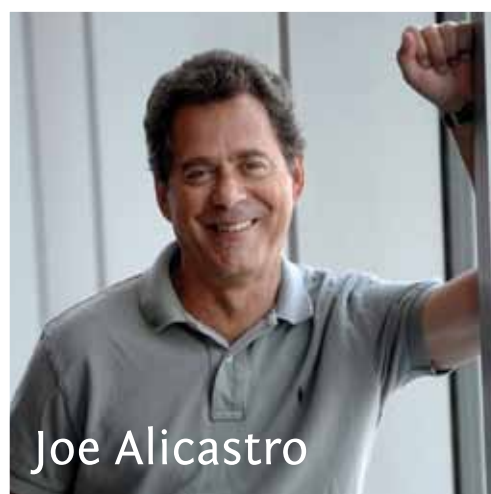
Joe Alicastro and Peter Morrison

Collecting and preserving oral histories of Rowayton has been a priority of the RHS board, and over the past few years, we were extremely fortunate to procure two highly respected film professionals to help.

Professor Joe

Alicastro: a three-time Emmy Award-winning producer at NBC for 30+ years, Joe traveled extensively around the globe covering breaking news, including the fall of the Berlin Wall, the breakup of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, the Gulf War, and the liberation of Kuwait. He served for many years as a Special Events Producer for NBC's extensive political coverage, a producer for NBC News at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino and most recently acted as Senior Producer for NBC News Education Nation. The former Chair of Broadcast Journalism at the New York Film Academy, Joe is the MACOMM (Master's in Communications) Program Coordinator for News and Broadcasting.

Joe now teaches graduate classes at Sacred Heart University as well as undergraduate courses in Broadcast News Reporting and Producing, TV News Magazine. Joe reached out to students interested in learning documentary filmmaking and worked with them to create short films about Rowayton. The first three films are completed and will be shown at the Community Center on March 20th at 2 pm. We hope you will join us.



Joe Alicastro

2015 has been an exceptional year for the RHS! The *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner!* exhibit, the unveiling of the new Connecticut Impressionist gallery at the Pinkney Museum, our *Tribute to Our Veterans of World War II* show, the summer cocktail party, and the 5th annual Chili Cook Off capped off a range of educational and fun events for all ages. For more highlights of 2015, please be sure to check out pages 4-5 of our newsletter.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Rowayton Turkey Trot, a trained archivist has spent the last four months painstakingly scanning and rehousing several hundred images from Society's rich archive of photographs dating back to the beginning of photography. It's our goal to have the entire collection professionally archived; please consider a donation towards this effort to preserve these photographs for future generations.

Your continued support ensures that we can enrich our community with interesting and relevant programming and events. Become a member and help preserve our shared history. We look forward to seeing you all at the Holiday Open House on November 29th!

THE ROWAYTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

continued on page 2

Joe Alicaastro *continued from page 1*

“My students at the School of Communication and Media Studies at Sacred Heart began work on the most ambitious project they have yet undertaken; an oral history of Rowayton. We hope that this project contributes to the knowledge of what makes Rowayton such a special place. The Historical Society is at the heart of the preservation of the long history of our village, and we hope to continue our collaboration and expand this wonderful undertaking.”



The Ginger Man / Cask Republic

Sincere thanks to the Ginger Man/Cask Republic of South Norwalk for their second year of setting up a beautiful bar complete with beers, wines, and all the trappings, including friendly staffers, as their donation towards the RHS' annual fundraiser V Day cocktail party. Their generosity made a big difference towards the event's bottom line, allowing the RHS to put funds normally spent on alcohol towards the preservation of local history.

Peter Morrison



In addition to generously bringing in his own professional crew to record several interviews himself, Peter set up an archive of all the completed recordings on a hard drive, in preparation for editing. Peter is an

award-winning video director and producer working in healthcare and corporate communications. As a founding partner at Osprey Communications (now a WPP/Grey Group Company), he spent the past 25 years overseeing all video and new media production.

Peter has directed video programs for large and small pharmaceutical companies, corporations, advertising agencies, and not-for-profit foundations. Prior to Osprey, he had been involved in the production of several television shows and commercials, features films and IMAX movies, as well as the first-ever 3D music video featuring Aerosmith. He credits his success to his appearance on the Howdy Doody Show at the age of 6.

Special thanks also go to our Oral History team of Donna Gauthier and Francine Hubbell, the Sacred Heart students Cathy Roberts and Katy Andersen, and of course to those who shared their stories.

Lisa Wilson

An inveterate researcher about our city, Lisa Wilson has published several pictorial histories of Norwalk. Here's an excerpt from Lisa's book on Roton Point, on sale at the RHS gift shop:

SS BELLE ISLAND

The **Belle Island** was an 842 gross ton passenger ship, 212' x 42', built in 1925 by Harry A. Marvel of Newburgh, New York for Steamer Belle Island Co., Inc.

- The vessel was the only one to run excursions from New York City to Roton Point Park in Rowayton until 1941.
- In 1942, she was sold to the U.S. Army Transportation Corp. and renamed **Colonel James A. Moss**.
- In July of 1942, she was lend-leased to the British Ministry of War Transport and managed by Coast Lines Ltd, London.
- In February of 1943, the **Belle Island** was returned to the US and managed by the Rubber Development Corp. (U.S. Government) ferrying rubber supplies down the Amazon River.





- In June of 1943, she was sold following a boiler room fire at Santos to Ary Cesar Burlamaque in Sao Paulo, Brazil and renamed *Maria De Lourdes*.
- In 1955, *Belle Island* was deleted from Lloyds Register—no trace of her anywhere (probably scrapped or abandoned).

My journey of collecting images and artifacts of the former amusement park Roton Point Park has taken me on many tangents and new discoveries. One postcard I found on eBay of the *Belle Island* steamship contained the following message on the reverse of the postcard:

Mr. T. J. Smith,

On Saturday you were brought to my mind most impressively for I had a sail up the Hudson on the *Belle Island* and noticed from the Brass Plate that Townsend J. Smith was its designer! Are you he?

— Cordially, Mr. E.R.

Written after the question mark, in another hand, is “Yes”.

Now having the name of the designer, I found a publication called “Steamboats in Monmouth County: A Gazetteer” (2003) by Megan E. Springate. Included in that publication were many photos of the *Belle Island* as she was being built at Marvel’s Yards between December 1924 and November 1925.

The Steamer Belle Island Co. was founded by Captain Frank V. Drake of New Hamburg, NY and operated for many years out of New York City to points along the Atlantic coast as far north as Bar Harbor, Maine. Two of his steamers, *Belle Island* and the smaller *Seagate* provided service to Roton Point Park. *Seagate* provided shorter trips from the Bronx.

One of the main reasons that Roton Point Park’s last season

was 1941 was that in 1942, the U.S. war shipping administration had requisitioned 11 American passenger ships which were transferred to the British Ministry of War Transport under the lend-lease agreement. Their future role was described as “for use in the European war area as hospital and accommodation ships”.

Three of these ships were not to make the hazardous Atlantic crossing. One of them, the *Belle Island*, was found to be unseaworthy and unsuitable to attempt a North Atlantic crossing. The other eight ships went on to become a Decoy Convoy, code name ‘Maniac’, in September 1942—sent into the haunts of U-Boat “wolf packs” that were hunting down and destroying the supply ships that were Britain’s lifeline.

After *Belle Island* was deleted off of Lloyd’s in 1955—no trace of vessel—perhaps she became a dive site somewhere?

Highlights of 2015

guess who's coming to dinner!

notables on rowayton's guest list



Margaret Hamilton



Marlon Brando



Louie Armstrong

What do Babe Ruth, Alexander Kerensky, and Marlon Brando all have in common? They all spent time in Rowayton, along with a myriad of other interesting people like Lillian Hellman, Bert Lahr, Louie Armstrong, Jules Feiffer, Max Ernst and Helen Keller. Wonderful anecdotes of their time here added to their fascinating life stories on exhibit at the museum until early November.



A few highlights of the show:

- **Paul Newman** and his wife **Joanne Woodward** frequently visited their friends Sandy and Bruce Falconer at the Falconers' home on Tavern Island.
- Best known for her portrayal of the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), **Margaret Hamilton** rented a house on Flax Hill Road during the 1970s. Rowayton, Brookside and Marvin Schools had Read-a-Thons at that time, and the prize was lunch with her, which generated great excitement.
- **Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington**, who led his orchestra for over 50 years, performed at Roton Point Amusement Park in Rowayton on August 13, 1933.
- The Academy Award-winning actor **Marlon Brando** used to attend large summer parties here hosted by summer resident Jack Goldman, a director of Simon & Schuster, along with other such theatrical luminaries as Loretta Young, people from the literary world, and neighbors like Fred and Harriet Schwed, Harry Marinsky, Shelley Trubowitz, and Ruth Krauss and Crockett Johnson.
- In the late 1960s, Joan Wilson, Anne Rose¹ and Dallas Ernst operated the Five Mile River Gallery at 101 Rowayton Avenue and highlighted many abstract expressionists there, including Dallas' father-in-law, Dadaist **Max Ernst**.

Celebrating our World War II Veterans

Two very special loans capped off our salute to World War II veterans as part of the 70th Anniversary tribute to the end of the war. Rowaytonite Paul Veeder loaned us seven of his extraordinary hand-crafted WWII shadow boxes, highlighting in great detail specific scenes of wartime Europe. Adding to the exhibit, an anonymous collector of war images showcased a number of his favorite WWII propaganda posters. The Government's aggressive propaganda campaign to galvanize public support for the war became a wartime industry, almost as important as the manufacturing of bullets and planes, and the posters evoke powerful emotions of the era.



¹Anne Rose is the mother of the author Daniel Asa Rose who will be speaking in Rowayton on February 19th. See upcoming events on back page for more details.

Impressionists in Connecticut

A new art gallery was unveiled this spring in the front hall showcasing the RHS's collection of Connecticut Impressionist paintings which have been restored, cleaned, and reframed, thanks to generous donations of our membership. A highlight of the exhibit is George Muendel's

Rowayton Harbor, Ice House, on loan from Rowayton Library, which was reunited with several other Muendel pieces in the RHS collection. Muendel moved with his wife to Rowayton around 1908 and lived here until his death in 1948. In 1914 he was awarded first prize by the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford for his painting "*House Across the River*,"

now part of the Historical Society's permanent collection. Also featured in the exhibit were Impressionist works of long-time Rowayton resident Leo Dorn, painter, woodblock artist, craftsman, Thomas School teacher from 1927-1949, and a founding member of the Silvermine Art Guild.

Special thanks to Rowayton Library, Blaikie Hines, Diane Peters, and Ring's End for their contributions towards this exciting addition to the museum.



The OLD SCHOOL FIELD

Rowayton's iconic sledding hill and the site of Village Fairs, UCNS Christmas Tree sales, and countless pick-up games of soccer and stickball has been known since 1940 as the "Old School Field," the site of the old Rowayton School, demolished when the new school was built. But about 15 years ago, the City put up a sign claiming the area was called "Old Witch Park," frustrating many long-time residents. Thanks to the efforts of Holly Diamondis, with backing from the Sixth Taxing District and the Rowayton and Norwalk Historical Societies, the City recently agreed to change the name back to "The Old School Field." A new sign has just been posted, complete with an image of the old schoolhouse. We are grateful for Holly's determination and efforts.



RHS Intern is First Prize Winner at the Montreal Film Festival

Our very talented intern Ellery Rose Lamm just won first prize at the Montreal Film Festival for her extraordinary animated film! We are so proud of her and but not surprised at all that she won this coveted prize. View Ellery's film at: <https://vimeo.com/123908509>

Ellery is a college senior, life-long Rowayton resident, and was also awarded the Jamie Cassels Undergraduate Research Award by the University of Victoria which allows her to do an independent study with her film professor where she's mixing audio storytelling and visual mediums. We can't to see her next project.



Ellery Rose Lamm



New Additions to the RHS Collection



Greg Roberts generously donated several treasures from his personal antique collection, including a piece of Trench Art from World War I, a brass matchbox cover made from a German military uniform button.

Trench art is any decorative item made by soldiers, prisoners of war or civilians, offering an insight not only to their feelings and emotions, but also into their surroundings and the materials they had available to them. Not limited to World War I, the history of trench art spans conflicts from the Napoleonic Wars to the present day. Although the practice flourished during World War I, the term 'Trench Art' is also used to describe souvenirs manufactured by service personnel during World War II.

This piece of World War I history was a wonderful addition to the RHS archives, helping to flesh out a poignant element of the war narrative, and we are grateful for Greg's generosity.

Among other additions to the collection was a hard-to-find album with cover art by Rowayton's Jim Flora. Thanks to Lynne Pratt for unearthing this gem.





Over the past year, the RHS has
issued five historic plaques
to the following houses:

CUDLIPP STREET:

The Elizabeth Morrison House, c. 1912

The George Cudlipp House, 1862

HUNT STREET:

The Charles E. Stevens House, 1893

VINCENT PLACE:

The Mary A. Barclay House, c. 1911

The Albert V. and
Gertrude Burke House,
1933

Newly Plaqued Historic Homes



The Mary A. Barclay House
c. 1911
6 Vincent Place



The Albert V. and
Gertrude Burke House, 1933
8 Vincent Place



If you think your house may
qualify for a plaque,
and you would like more
information,
please email us at

info@rowaytonhistoricalsociety.org.

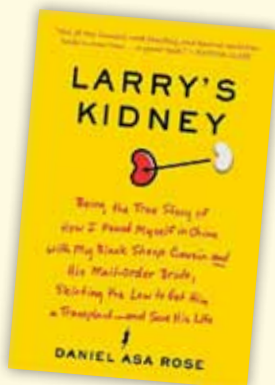
SAVE THE DATE:

Author Daniel Asa Rose Returns to Rowayton

Join us on Friday, February 19, 2016 at 7 pm for a special talk by Daniel Asa Rose who will share wonderful anecdotes about his Rowayton childhood, including friendships with Ruth Krauss and Crockett Johnson, his career as a writer, and his new novel *Larry's*

Kidney: Being the True Story of How I Found Myself in China with My Black Sheep Cousin and His Mail-Order Bride, Skirting the Law to Get Him a Transplant—and Save His Life.

General admission \$5, free to RHS members
Rowayton Community Center, 33 Highland Avenue

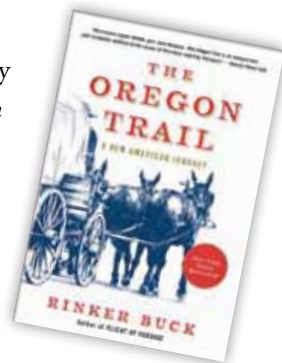


New!

A Rowayton History Book Club

Beginning in January, 2016, the RHS and Rowayton Library will launch a new history book club. The first title will be *The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey* by Rinker Buck, the true story of traveling the length of the Oregon Trail in a covered wagon with a team of mules—in the 21st century. Traveling from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Baker City, Oregon, over the course of four months, Buck is accompanied by three cantankerous mules, his boisterous brother, Nick, and an “incurably filthy” Jack Russell terrier named Olive Oyl.

The book group will meet at Rowayton Library and is open to everyone.



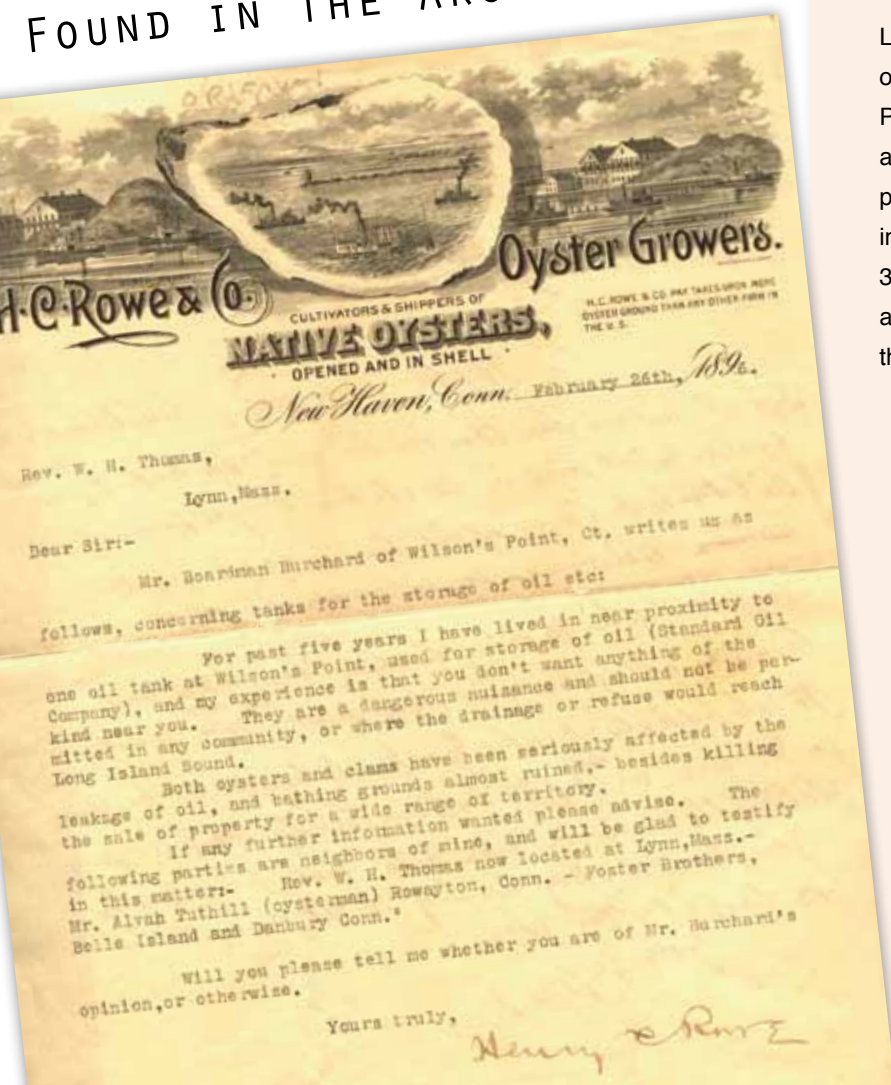
THE Place to Shop to Find the Perfect Gift!

The RHS GiftShop

Looking for something new and different to give as a hostess or birthday present? Stop by the **half shell**, our gift shop in Pinkney Park, which features *Seaside Delights*, filled with fun and creative gift ideas, Rowayton-wear, fisherman's finds, and plenty of new items perfect for the holidays...be sure to stop in! The shop is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 until 3 pm through the holiday season. You can also order by email at seasidedelights@gmail.com and pick up your items at the store.



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Rowayton Historical Society

P.O. Box 106 177 Rowayton Avenue
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Coming Attractions

RHS Holiday Bazaar & Holiday Open House Sunday, November 29 4-6 pm

HOLIDAY BAZAAR One-stop shopping to find that perfect something for everyone on your list, hand-crafted by local artisans: Nautical Vintage Postcard pillows; unique Rowayton gifts; children's clothing and accessories; jewelry; place-mats, napkins, and runners; seaside ornaments; and candles for every room in the house.

RHS HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE Including Brian Kammerer's amazing model trains set in a miniature Rowayton and an exhibit of a vintage Rowayton Christmas.

"LIGHT UP ROWAYTON" After you've been to the model train show, join your neighbors immediately afterward in Pinkney Park for the annual tree holiday lighting sponsored by the RCA.



January 2016

History Book Club: The Oregon Trail:
A New American Journey by Rinker Buck

Wednesday, January 20 at 7 pm at Rowayton Library. Books will be available to borrow at the Library. Refreshments will be served. *General admission \$5; RHS members free.*

Lecture: "Above-Ground Archaeology at Mount Lebanon Shaker Village"
by Professor Ernie Wiegand

Friday, January 15 at 7 pm at the Rowayton Community Center, 33 Highland Avenue. Refreshments will be served. *General admission \$5; RHS members free.*

February 2016

Author Talk: Daniel Asa Rose Rowayton-born Rose shares wonderful anecdotes of his life, his career as a writer, and his latest novel.

Friday, February 19th at 7 pm. Rowayton Community Center, 33 Highland Avenue. Refreshments will be served. *General admission \$5; RHS members free.*

March 2016

History Adorned: Floral Arrangements Inspired by the Art Collection of the RHS
Sponsored by the Rowayton Gardeners. Saturday, March 12 and Sunday, March 13. 10-1 pm.

Growing up in Rowayton: Three new documentaries crafted from oral histories recorded by the RHS. Sunday, March 20th at 2 pm. Rowayton Community Center. *General admission \$5; RHS members free.*

May 2016 – November 2016

Keys to the Kingdom: The Story of Locks in Connecticut from the Collection of Pete's Locksmith, Darien

2016