

# custom house MARITIMES WINTER 2023



We've commissioned a full building assessment and preservation plan for Ledge Lighthouse. *Photo, above:* NLMS president **Christina Corcoran** entering the lantern room.

## the beginning of a brand new year from the president

Last Saturday I was asked to lead a tour to Harbor Lighthouse on a frigid and snowy afternoon, my first tour of 2023. I was skeptical because there was a layer of snow and ice on the grass and rocks leading to the light. Alexa had notified me that morning not to expect temperatures higher than 20 degrees with wind chills in the single digits. I was relieved to see that the couple traveling from Pennsylvania remained enthusiastic despite the frigid conditions. Harbor lighthouse is the oldest and tallest in Long Island Sound, with a spectacular view of the river, the sound, the islands, and at least 6 other lighthouses. After braving the ice and snow to climb the circular cast-iron stairs (116 of them) to the lantern room, we were surprised at what we did NOT see. There was a thick frost on the windows preventing the spectacular view we were expecting. As we scraped a small area of frost off of the window, a foggy outline of Ledge Lighthouse appeared out in the Harbor. The last of the snow drifted down to the water, covering the backs of a group of ducks who seemed oblivious to the conditions. We knew we were lucky to be able to experience this very special visit to a very special lighthouse right here in New London. But there is so much more....

This frosty adventure is just the beginning of a brand new year volunteering with the NLMS.

Last summer was a wonderful trip through lighthouses, outings, puppet theater, lectures, soirees, Open Mic, Pirate night, education programs, fundraisers that include a dinner at Lighthouse Inn, a movie premier and garden party at Fishers Island, unexpected trips to Little Gull Island Light, Race Rock, and so very much more. If you read the email blast you know the story of the New London Maritime Society and the role they play in the community.

The NLMS operates the Custom House Maritime Museum under the direction of our talented and seemingly tireless director, Susan Tamulevich along with dedicated volunteer docents and tour guides, and NLMS members who care deeply about our mission.

But did you know we do so much more? We also have custodianship of three beautiful lighthouses. We love to see visitors from all over the country, but especially from New London and the local area. We have been stewards of Harbor lighthouse since 2010, Race Rock from 2013, and Ledge Light from 2015. We rely on grants and donations to continue with our important stewardship of four amazing historic structures. How do we do it? Well.....we cannot do it alone!

I would like to remind members of the community not to take these treasures for granted and to please make an effort to help us in our mission. Forget about the trip to the Caribbean Islands this summer and make a trip out to our own islands and our three beautiful lighthouses. Invest in a NLMS membership and become stewards of our fascinating maritime history.

And please do not forget to stop at the Custom House Maritime Museum to tour or just to say *hi* on your way home!

--Christina Corcoran

*Local Friendly Authentic*



It's a New Year! *Photo top:* Visitors from Pennsylvania braved February snow to tour inside Harbor Lighthouse; *middle:* Capt. David Henry, who administers Little Gull Lighthouse, is the NL Maritime Society's newest trustee and our partner for summer's lighthouse tours; *bottom:* A family visiting the Custom House took advantage of our many nautical hats and the selfie stage.



Tannia Hotchkiss, above, delivered to us a model of the ship *Amistad*. The delicate wooden model was created in 1985 by her father Wesley Akin Hotchkiss, who for 30 years was director of the American Missionary Association -- a group that was the direct descendant of the committee formed in 1839 to defend the people who were enslaved aboard the *Amistad*.



3.21 - Jibboom - Jonathan & Emilie Waters



4.18 - Jibboom Club - Louise Harrison



3.26, 4.30, 5.28 - Open Mic

## WHAT'S UP FOR SUMMER ?

Here's a preview of what we're thinking about for the months ahead.

- We're working to expand upon last year's Lighthouse tours, and in particular the affordable-to-local-families \$5 tickets to visit inside our local lights.
- We are partnering again with **David Henry**, who oversees **Little Gull Light**. There will be tours for the 2nd year to that extraordinary beacon, including special trips for birders, artists, and photographers.
- A **4th biennial conference for local lighthouse stewards** will take place in late spring. It's a chance for us to share information and resources.
- New Jersey artist **Christian Fiedler** installed a half dozen pinhole cameras at **Harbor Light** -- and at dozens of other east-coast lighthouses last fall. We hope to exhibit the results!

This summer also is New London Maritime Society's **40th anniversary**. Our priority is fixing the roof once and for all. We're planning a Gala, too. Watch for it!

### VOLUNTEER AT THE CUSTOM HOUSE – it's rewarding & fun!

Please consider volunteering with us! We know our members have just the talents & skills we need.

Come on, join with a friend & bring your coffee. We're looking for docents, lighthouse lovers, cleaners, fixers, people with construction knowledge, someone to distribute posters! Want to be in a parade? -- we need you, too!

Email: [nlmaritimedirector@gmail.com](mailto:nlmaritimedirector@gmail.com)

## 2023 highlights - for full listings, go to [nlmaritimesociety.org](http://nlmaritimesociety.org)

- Tours to climb **HARBOR LIGHTHOUSE** run *year-round*. The views at the top are spectacular! We meet at the lighthouse, then climb 116 steps to the lantern room – all the while learning about the 261-year history of Harbor Light, the oldest and the tallest lighthouse on Long Island Sound. [brownpapertickets.com/event/5127942](http://brownpapertickets.com/event/5127942).
- **Open Mic at the Museum**, meets from 6-9 PM the last Sunday of the month: Share your original music, poetry, prose, stand-up, or just say what is on your mind. OpenMic welcomes performers of all kinds. Perform, or just enjoy. By donation.
- **JIBBOOM CLUB #1**, meets the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 1:30 PM. Join us for a talk, good company, coffee & cookies. Sponsored by the Maco Family Fund, the gatherings are FREE and open to all.
- March 12, **NL St Patrick's Day Parade** - pirates & mermaids: march with us!
- March 21, **JIBBOOM, Jonathan Waters & Emilie Waters Harris**, of Thimble Island Shellfish Inc, Stony Creek, CT present a talk on the past, present, and future of oystering in Connecticut.
- March 26, Open Mic at the Museum
- April 18 **JIBBOOM, Louise Harrison**, Long Island Natural Areas Manager at Save the Sound, will present **Envision Plum Island Preserved**: the natural and human history of Plum Island. She will describe the Preserve Plum Island Coalition's campaign, which asks President Biden to proclaim the island a National Monument for ecological conservation, historical preservation, and the discovery and celebration of our shared cultural heritage.
- April 30, Open Mic at the Museum

Be the first to know - sign up for weekly email new blasts: [nlmaritimedirector@gmail.com](mailto:nlmaritimedirector@gmail.com)

The Custom House Maritime Museum - your local, independent, community museum - open year-round - telling the stories of New London's waterfront!



# Petitioning the State Legislature

Connecticut Arts Alliance, Connecticut Humanities, and Connecticut Tourism Coalition are working together on an Arts, Culture, and Tourism Funding Roadmap which offers legislators a guide to meaningful, reliable, and equitable investment in these important contributors to the state's economy and workforce. Previously, only the largest tourist sites: (think aquarium, seaport, theater) received earmark funding from the state. The goal of this effort is to continue the support to smaller institutions developed in the COVID years, (we wouldn't have survived COVID without it!). NLMS took part by testifying before both the Commerce committee and the Conservation & Development subcommittee of the Appropriations committee. Here is some of what we said.

NLMS is both a museum and preservation organization. Wholly Independent, we receive no operating support from the City or state. Our work is rewarding but, day-to-day, it's a hard and struggling spot to be in, as we have to knock ourselves out just to break even.

Never the less, we run & have grown NL's Custom House Maritime Museum for 40 years. The Custom House is an anchor in downtown NL. For the past 15 years the museum has been open 5 days a week, including every weekend, year-round. (Whereas much of the downtown closes on Sundays, we are there for travelers dipping into town as they travel down I-95.) People in the community, and especially our students, bring family and visitors to the museum to show off their local maritime heritage.

Over the last 12 years NLMS has taken on stewardship for three lighthouses through the federal 2000 Lighthouse Preservation Act. In terms of commerce and tourism, what we offer is authentic & evocative. Had NLMS not stepped up and taken them on, these landmark beacons likely would have been sold to the highest bidder and rendered off-limits to the public forever!

You all understand how LIS was formed, with it's ledges, erratics, islands, and jagged coastline: SE Connecticut has a large, fascinating concentration of lighthouses, many of them privately owned.

Today there is no other place in the world where you can take a tour, like Cross Sound Ferry's, to see 12 lighthouse by boat, have lunch downtown, then visit our lighthouse exhibition at the Custom House, with the opportunity to visit inside three remarkable lights, including NL Harbor Light: the oldest and tallest on Long Island Sound – it's an onshore light, so you can visit year-round. We are dedicated to lighthouse preservation and public access. Our tour experience: small, personal, authentic – is exactly what visitors want. And every time a visitor touches Long Island Sound, they gain a greater appreciation and love for our natural environment.

NLMS received no operating support from the state – until COVID. Yet –despite all COVID-related challenges – with the financial boost of some operating support, last year the Maritime Society was finally able to focus on our mission and grow our programs in an impactful way. Maintaining lighthouses and leasing a boat for tours is expensive, but with a NL Water Authority grant to allow for \$5 tickets for local students and their families, we were able to book tours on a regular schedule every Saturday and Sunday across the summer. (Previously, due to lack of funds, we had to set up tours one-by-one, which did not easily allow tourists to plan ahead or even participate.)

Why is this important? Being able to focus on the tours – the programming – and offer them regularly meant the tours were filled: half-filled with local families with \$5 tickets, and half with tourists dying to get inside Ledge or Harbor Lights, and who needed that advance schedule to plan their visit. We appreciate the transformative help we received in 2021-22, and hope it will continue. ■

## MARCH MADNESS

30% off Sale\* in the Shop through March 26!

Visit the Custom House Museum SHOP for MARCH MADNESS: through March 26, everything in the Shop is 30% off! *Photo, right:* Thursday docents Regan Morse and Bill Tuttle, *far right:* Sunday docents Ann-Marie Perry and Lea Jewitt in the Shop. \* not to be combined with any other discounts.



## I'M JOINING THE NEW LONDON MARITIME SOCIETY!



Name \_\_\_\_\_ phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Individual \$35\_\_\_ Family \$50\_\_\_ Contributor \$100\_\_\_ Sponsor \$250\_\_\_ Patron \$1,000\_\_\_ Sign-up date \_\_\_

Cash\_\_\_ Check\_\_\_ ~ please make payment to New London Maritime Society Visa\_\_\_ Master Card\_\_\_ AmEx\_\_\_

Number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. date \_\_\_\_\_ Security code \_\_\_\_\_

Benefits of membership include *free* admission, invitations to special events, discounts, and a newsletter.

*New London Maritime Society's mission is to protect, preserve, & and celebrate New London's U.S. Custom House, three area lighthouses, and Long Island Sound, and to interpret the rich maritime life & history of the port of New London and the surrounding region through museum exhibitions, educational programs, and preservation initiatives. Learn more about us at [nlmaritimesociety.org](http://nlmaritimesociety.org).*

New London Maritime Society - Custom House Maritime Museum, 150 Bank Street, New London, Connecticut 06320 860.447.2501

I'm donating \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the Custom House. \_\_\_\_\_ Contact me about leaving a legacy.





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| Tour Leaders: Christina Corcoran, Estlin Davis-Smith, Stan Solinsky, Bob Tellier.   |                                  |



Photo: architect Walter Sedovic with Bruce Buckley at Ledge Light.

Go to [nlmaritimesociety.org](http://nlmaritimesociety.org) to keep up with what's up!

We thank our partners & sponsors - ARPA - Bodenwein Foundation - Charter Oak Credit Union - Chelsea Groton Foundation - Community Foundation of Eastern CT - CT Humanities - CT Department of Economic and Community Development, CT Office of the Arts - Eleven+ - Friends of Marie Elena Noack - Louise Novitch - John Michael Corcoran Museum Day Fund - Maco Family Fund - New London Cultural District - Frank Loomis Palmer Fund - Robinson+Cole - State of CT - SVOG U.S. Small Business Administration - Veolia / NL Water Authority.

**New London Maritime Society**  
**Custom House Maritime Museum**  
 150 Bank Street, New London, Connecticut 06320  
*Photo: Frederick Douglass: Advocate for Equality*  
 a traveling exhibition on view through March 12, 2023.

[nlmaritimesociety.org](http://nlmaritimesociety.org)  
*local friendly authentic*