

**Minutes of the
Eliot Historical Society Meeting
McPherson Hall, First Congregational Church
October 10, 2023**

Present were 23 and 3 on ZOOM

President Tracey Graffam-Dickson opened the meeting at 7PM and welcomed everyone. We were reminded of next month's program with Anne Gass speaking about her book on women's suffrage and the December Annual meeting and Holiday party.

PROGRAM: Our speaker Frankie Thomas was introduced and he spoke on the history of the clipper ship *Nightingale* that was built at Eliot's Hanscom Shipyard. Frankie lives next to the former Hanscom Shipyard (Green Acre) and back in 2010 he was prodded by his sister, the late Sharon Kibat, to give his first presentation for Eliot's Bicentennial. Frankie is especially suited to give this presentation, not only because of his proximity to the former shipyard, but with his background as a seaman, and being a Hanscom descendant.

The *Nightingale* was built in 1851 by Samuel Hanscom, with brother Isaiah doing the design work. Isaiah went on to a career in the US Navy as a Ship Constructor. The keel for the clipper ship was laid in February of 1851 and she was sent to Portsmouth to be rigged out and was launched in June. It was named the *Nightingale* in reference to the great Swedish opera singer – Jenny Lind (1820-1887). As the story goes it was outfitted in great finery with the plan to take Ms. Lind, who was in the United States, at the time, touring with P.T. Barnham, back to London for the World's Fair. The recent movie "The Greatest Showman" touches on part of this story.

Frankie took us through the various owners. Being an "extreme clipper" she was built as a trading ship, bringing goods to and from various places, China, India, England, Australia. The faster the goods could be traded and brought back to the ports, the more money a ship could make. Under captain Samuel Mather the *Nightingale* became the fastest of the clipper ships. In this first run he brought the ship into London, from China, one week before the British ship arrived. Eventually there were financial troubles and around 1860/1 she was sold and became a slaver until captured by the *Saratoga*, off the coast of Africa. 900 people were unloaded before she returned to the United States. During the Civil War, she became the *USS Nightingale* and was placed into blockade service for the US Navy, in the Florida area.

After the Civil War, the Navy sold the ship. Western Union used her for laying communication cable from Russia to Alaska. She was then sold to a Norwegian company who took off the deck house and made it into a bark to haul lumber between Norway, England, and Halifax. She was abandoned at sea in the North Atlantic in 1893, in route from Liverpool to Halifax, NS. More recently a man in Sweden found the Jenny Lind figure head, that adorned her bow, in a barn of an antique dealer who had been using it as a scarecrow.

Several publications were mentioned. Frank Mather, in the 1924, when he was over 90 and living in Rome, wrote the story of his brother Samuel Mather- "A Clipper Ship and Her Commander". The Atlantic Monthly published it in installments in their magazine. The story of the finding of the Jenny Lind figurehead can be found in "Jenny Lind and the Clipper *Nightingale* Figurehead" by Karl-Eric Svardskog and the story of the Hanscom Shipyard in "A Race of Shipbuilders, The Hanscoms of Eliot Maine" by Richard E. Winslow. "Clippers of the Port of Portsmouth and the Men Who Built Them" by Ray Brighton also has mention of the Hanscom clipper.

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<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-81209454/view?partId=nla.obj-81210885#page/n0/mode/1up>

BUSINESS

- 1) Minutes for the June, September and October meetings will be presented for formal approval at the November meeting.
- 2) We took a few minutes to talk about Eliot Festival Day and to thank Paul and Julie Johnson and Marjorie and Skip Brown for making our presence felt at this annual Eliot event. We had many people stop and the most common interest was for the cemeteries. At the school house Jan Cerabona sold several books and notecards and had several interesting conversations. She brought with her to this meeting the 1910 Centennial Book reprint and some other books and items for sale. The month of October we are having a “special” with the 1910 Centennial Books at \$10 each or 2/\$15.
- 3) Education: Jan Cerabona reported that for the month of October she is accepting requests to open the schoolhouse, by appointment and we also have invited the Eliot Select Board to make an appointment, in an effort to educate them on the work we do. She also reported a great deal of interest being shown to our Facebook page and interactions between the South Berwick FB page and our own, with Rick Becker and Rosanne Adams sharing information and pictures.
- 4) Collections: Julie Johnson, with help from Jan Cerabona, has been working on organizing the collection. Paul Johnson shared a 1993 *Farmer’s Almanac* article that talks about the 1918 flu epidemic, “The Worst Disaster”. The article says that in only 10 months, it killed more Americans than those who died in all the wars of the century combined. In the second week of October 2600 Philadelphians died and, in the third week, 1500. Paul was especially struck by the situation then and how our own recent Covid epidemic mirrors it, in the response, the measures taken, and deaths. The statement, at the end of the article being just as true today - “People just don’t take flu seriously. It’s hard to convince them that it could be a real hazard”. He gave it to Rosanne to share in the newsletter.

NEXT MEETING: November 13, 2023

Meeting closed at 8:30pm

Respectfully submitted,
Rosanne M. Adams, Secretary