

# NEW LONDON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2013

## Two Months — Two Amazing NEW Resources

In March and April two new resources for learning about New London's colonial past will debut here in town. Stories and people tied directly to our city and region that will have an impact far beyond.

For our March Second Sunday program (appropriately since March is a month we focus on women's history), author Michelle Coughlin will share her research into the story of Mehetabel Chandler Coit, born in Roxbury, Massachusetts, but living much of her life here in New London. Coughlin has taken what may be the oldest extant diary written by an American woman, as well as a

number of surviving letters to and from Coit, to recreate that life in *One Colonial Woman's World*. Coit kept writing intermittently from age fifteen to near her death — writing of travel and business transactions, receipts, poems, and the web of family interconnectedness. Coit was contemporary with Joshua Hempstead, both of them dying in the same year, but this book provides a rare glimpse into a woman's worldview of that time.

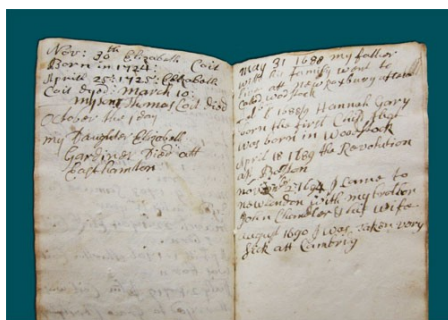
Plan on being here, Sunday 10 March at 2 pm, at the Shaw Mansion. Books will be available for sale and Coughlin will sign books at a reception to follow. Members free; others \$5.

In April we will debut Allegra di Bonaventura's long-awaited book revealing the life of Adam Jackson, who lived much of his life as a slave to Joshua Hempstead. In her book, di Bonaventura describes the complexity of this master/slave relationship and traces the intertwining stories of these two families until the eve of the Revolution.

Di Bonaventura was inspired to use the Hempstead manuscript ten years ago as the primary source for her PhD dissertation in history at Yale. A dissertation that was awarded the Egleston Prize

recognizing the best work in history that year. But it took her those full ten years to add to the picture, and during that time she pursued and received a law degree from Yale so that she could understand the complexities of a legal system that Hempstead would have known well.

This event is co-sponsored by the Hempstead Houses and the Public Library of New London and will take place at the Library, 28 April at 2:30pm. Books will be available for sale at a book signing reception.

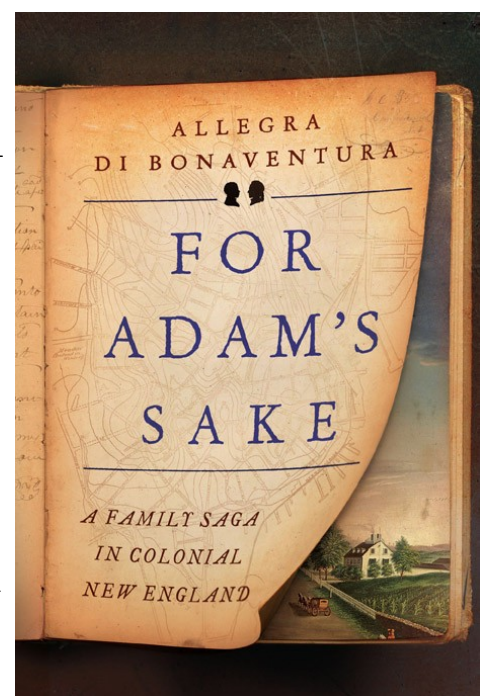


### One Colonial Woman's World

The Life and Writings of  
MEHETABEL CHANDLER COIT



Michelle Marchetti Coughlin



## *“Ye Towne’s Antientest Buriall Place” Douglasses Right and Left*

February and March of 1725 were sad months in New London. An epidemic of an unspecified but virulent disease had struck, sickening and killing many of the townspeople. On Friday, March 5, Joshua Hempstead wrote in his diary, “fair warm & pleasant wether over head. but the Most Sorrowfull time yt Ever was Seen in N. London. for Mortality their Lyes now this morning. 6 persons dead & 1 negro Woman of Gortons.” He records a total of 28 deaths in the month of March alone.

Three of the dead in the epidemic were men of the Douglass family. The first, Thomas Douglass, Jr., died February 25, “a youth about 17 year old” (Hempstead). His funeral, which Hempstead attended, was the next day. Thomas had been born February 18, 1707/8, the third son of Thomas and Hannah (Sperry) Douglass. His stone in the burying ground is short and somewhat spalled, meaning the outer layer of the brownstone has flaked off.

The older Thomas was the son of Robert, who had married Joshua Hempstead’s aunt, Mary, in 1665. Thomas was born May 15, 1679, and married Hannah November 25, 1703. They had nine children in all, only one of them a daughter. They also brought up at least one other child, a nephew named Jabez Chappel. In January of 1754 Hempstead notes that Hannah “took [Jabez] to nurse & bring up from Less than a year old to 21 & his father agreed with her husband Thos Dowglas . . . to give him Ten Pound for it. & paid it before he Died wch was 41. year ago.”

Thomas was a collector of the minister’s rate and a member of the Congregational Church. He was elected sergeant of a trainband in April of 1723. He might have lived up near Lakes’ Pond (now, much expanded, Lake Konomoc), since Hempstead mentions borrowing a horse from him to get home when his own mare ran away as he was “at work in ye woods above Lakes pond getting oars” in July of 1721. Thomas certainly had a green thumb. Hempstead records going “to Tho Dowglass’s with Jno & Sol Coit & our wives to eat watermelions” in August 1713. Watermelons are not easy to grow on the Connecticut shoreline even with modern hybrids and technology. This Thomas was the second Douglass victim of the epidemic, dying March 3, 1725, aged 45. is widow, Hannah, married Samuel Chapman in 1731 and died in 1758. She does not have a stone in the burying ground.

The third Douglass to die in the epidemic was the oldest. Deacon William Douglass was born April 1, 1645, in Boston, the son of William and Ann, and moved with his family to New London in 1660. He married Abiah Hough in 1667, and they had eight children. Both William and Abiah were taken into the New London Congregational Church in 1670, and on the death of his father, Deacon William, in 1682, this William also became a deacon. Hempstead notes at least one occasion when “Deacon Douglass Prayed” (October 3, 1714) because Mr. Adams, the minister, was absent.

Abiah died in February of 1715, and Hempstead “went to Deacon Douglas’s

to make a Coffin for his wife who died this morn.” Five months later he records “Deacon Douglass Published to M[ary] Bushnell,” who was a widow. They were married in July. She survived him.

Despite having made a will as early as January of 1714 (written by Joshua Hempstead), Deacon Douglass lived until March 9, 1725. A deacon was a man of importance at that time. Hempstead describes the funeral procession: “Thursd. 11. . . . I was out to Deacon Douglass’s funeral . . . , the Deacons Corps Stopt att Capt Latimers & their the 6 Bearers had their Scarfs & gloves & 12 to Carry & all the watchers had Each a pair of gloves.”

Hempstead was hired to letter the gravestones for all three Douglass men. On July 8, 1726, he notes “In the

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### New London County Historical Society Incorporated 1870

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## Happy Spring!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Soon the gardens will be in bloom, and visitor traffic to the Mansion will increase. In the coming months we have some exciting and interesting projects and events coming up for members and non-members alike.

First and foremost, thanks to all of you who have so generously supported the New London County Historical Society through your donations to the annual fund. Each and every donation is important to the success of the Society. To those of you who have not yet sent in your donation, we welcome donations year 'round, and our fiscal year doesn't close until August 31<sup>st</sup>.

As our Collections Committee chairperson Bill Peterson notes, we are adding a new type of stewardship, directed at preserving, protecting, and restoring some of our treasures. The first treasure is a painting of the whale ship house flags of New London, by New London painter John Ewen, Jr., identifying the signals of the various New London whaling firms. It is an important part of our collection, a painting that links the Shaw-Perkins family to the peak of successful whaling out of New London. We are seeking 16 pledges of \$125 each – one for each of the sixteen flags represented in the painting – to restore the painting in time for the visit of the *Charles W Morgan* to New London in 2014. We plan to have an exhibit of the Society's whaling items to coincide with the *Morgan's* arrival and the successful restoration of the painting. We have already received 3 pledges of \$125 each to get this effort underway.

We are presenting a number of upcoming programs that I hope will interest all of you. Please come to one, or to all, to learn and to cherish the history of New London.

On March 10<sup>th</sup>, at the Shaw Mansion, author Michelle Coughlin will discuss her new book *One Colonial Woman's World: The Life and Writings of Mehetabel Chandler Coit*. (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012) The author researched Coit's life

in New London from 1694 until her death in 1758, using archival records at the Shaw Mansion. The talk will focus on Mehetabel Coit's life and the diary, on how the author came upon the diary, and how she brought the diary to life with her research. One reviewer said of the book: "This book is a stunning development, the first deep examination of an unknown diary that affords a very rare glimpse into women's lives in this time and place." We will have copies of the book available for sale and signing after the talk.

On April 23<sup>rd</sup> we will hold a book launch for Allegra di Bonaventura's long awaited new book *For Adam's Sake: A Family Saga of Colonial New England*, (WW Norton, 2013.) This new book, based on the author's extensive use of the Society's manuscript of the Joshua Hempstead Diary, and so much more, chronicles the relationship between Hempstead and his slave Adam. The New London Public Library will host the event, at 2pm, co-sponsored by the Hempstead Houses, and we will have copies of the book available for sale and for signing by the author. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> New London celebrates National Maritime Day.

In June we will hold our summer garden party with the skillful assistance of Society member and Master Gardener, Susan Munger. Come learn about landscape design in the past or pick up some pointers for your 21<sup>st</sup>-century gardens.

~Nancy H. Steenburg

## New and Renewed Members

### Educational Partners

University of Connecticut	Avery Point
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### Friend

Stephen Wall	Westerly, RI
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### Family & Individual

Edward C. Murphy & Doris Edmond	New London
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(Continued on page 6)

## ***Douglasses Right and Left***(continued)

(Continued from page 2)

morning Sett up 3 pr gravestones 1 for Deacon Douglass & 2 for Thos Douglass & his Son. . ." The Deacon's table stone, another indication of an important person, reads: *Here lyeth the body of Deacon William Douglass, who died March ye 9, 1724-5, in the 80 year of his age.* The two Thomases have similar wording on their stones. Gravestones, except for table stones, came in pairs, headstone and footstone. The footstone was much shorter and frequently marked only with initials.

The older Thomas Douglass has one other son buried in the burying ground. Capt. Nathan Douglass was born April 15, 1721, and baptized June 18<sup>th</sup> of that year. Hempstead records that he was "took into ye Chh" on November 25, 1744. Nathan and Anne Dennis were "published" on December 1, 1745, and married on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. They eventually had eleven children, all baptized in the Congregational Church. All lived to adulthood, and all but one married. The youngest, Thomas, born in 1770, died unmarried at sea at the age of 24.

The Douglass genealogy states that Nathan at first lived on part of the family farm, "but, being too fond of active life and enterprise to restrict himself to farming, he sold his house and land to his brother Robert, Dec. 20, 1751, and removed to town. . . . He kept a house of entertainment. . ." Hempstead, however, gives the distinct impression that Nathan was a shoemaker. On Friday May 23, 1746, Hempstead "went to Nathan Douglass's & had a pr of Shoes Cut out my Leather." He picked up the completed shoes on June 12. On another occasion Hempstead had Nathan make

two pairs of shoes, and in December of 1755 says, "I was with adm Carting Tann from Nathan Douglass's to Mend the Highway," tan being the leftover bark used in tanning leather.

Caulkins says that Golden Street was named that because Nathan's "house of entertainment . . . known by the sign of a golden ball" stood at the head of it. She also says that the street was not laid out until after the burning of the town in 1781. Perhaps Nathan changed his line of work, or perhaps this Nathan was of the next generation. Tanning is very smelly process, hardly something that would be carried out near an inn. Whatever his profession, Nathan became the captain of the first trainband in May of 1766. Oddly, he does not show up in the colonial records as having held any other militia officer rank (ensign or lieutenant) before then.

Nathan and Anne share a headstone in the burying ground. It says that he "departed this life March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1786, aged 66 years." Anne died April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1790, also aged 66. None of their children has a stone in the burying ground.

In the next newsletter we will cover the other descendants of Deacon William who are buried in the Antientest Burial Place.

Patricia M. Schaefer

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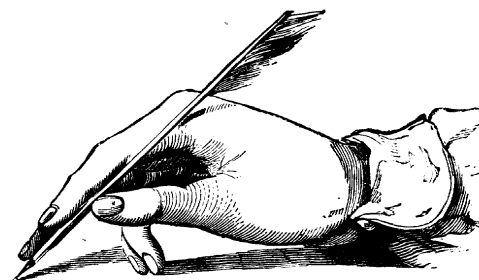
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**Hoadley, Charles J.** ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut.* Hartford: Press of Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1872. Also online at [www.colonialct.uconn.edu](http://www.colonialct.uconn.edu).

**Prentis, Edward**, *Ye Antient Buriall Place of New London, Conn.* New London: Press of the Day Publishing Co., 1899.



## *The Women of New London in the Civil War*

By Nancy H. Steenburg

1,118 New London men enrolled in the state militia companies that fought in the far-flung battles of the Civil War, nearly half of the adult male population. Interestingly, however, only 632 of those men were actually “New London men” while over 500 New Londoners had paid the \$2 commutation tax to escape military service. Thus the balance, nearly half, of the New Londoners who served in the army comprised transients, men who were sailors who could not find a berth, out-of-work laborers from outlying communities, and others who joined the army more for the income than for any patriotic motives.

Nevertheless, the women of New London rallied to provide moral and material support for the men of New London serving the Union cause. Early in the war, they directed their relief efforts toward their family members and New London men and militia companies, as happened throughout the north. A veritable flood of comforts vied to relieve the sufferings of native sons. The logistics of transport and delivery were almost certainly a mess in the early months of the war. By the time a woman had dispatched a box of food and clothing for her husband or son, that loved one's unit might have marched on to another battle, leaving the carefully prepared donation to languish in the freight office – undeliverable or pilfered by non-combatants.

That was when the United States

Sanitary Commission stepped in to bring order to the chaos, and to enlist the charity and relief efforts of concerned mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives for all men serving to sustain the Union, not just for the local boys. On October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1861, the U. S. Postmaster General sent a broadside to all post offices, asking them to organize the women of their districts to help the Sanitary Commission “for the holy cause of the Union.” Disorganized relief efforts in the first months of the war had led to waste and inefficiency and had created “unnecessary trouble in official quarters by the variety and irregularity of the offers of help.” The Federal government sought women's labor, skill, and money in the preparation of “lint, bandages, and other stores.” It was very clear that military officials believed most women were not capable to served as trained nurses, and the Army actively discouraged women from flocking to the front to nurse the wounded. The female role was to fill the gaps in military preparedness.

A major problem for the U.S. Army was that in the spring of 1861 nobody had expected a long war. The government had enough trouble providing uniforms, tents, and weapons to supply the Union army. Hardly anyone had thought out the details for creating and supplying military hospitals to treat the wounded and sick soldiers. During the early months of the war, Federal hospitals were almost entirely destitute of hospital and medical supplies. An early Sanitary Commission report stated, “The principal want experienced by the sick was found to be clean and appropriate hospital clothing. But for the benevolent women, our soldiers

would have been compelled to lie sick and wounded in the clothes in which they entered hospital wards, and which, in many cases had not been changed or even washed for weeks before.”

The women of New London rallied to help the noble cause. In late 1861 they formed an organization called the Soldiers' Aid Society to gather money for the purchase of materials and to manufacture clothing, hospital necessities, medicines, and comforts for the sick and destitute among the soldiers, “*beyond and outside* of the provided means of the service.” The Society held meetings twice a week at the First Baptist Church. Organizers called for the cooperation of all ladies of the city to devote a “small portion of time to labor for its objects, and by the countenance and contributions of money and material by the gentlemen.” They promised they could ship “the fruits of its labors free of cost to the sufferers themselves, wherever they may be, at or near posts and camps of the army,” and guaranteed that “no part of the gatherings shall be frittered or wasted in applying them.”

Who were the women who made up the New London Ladies' Soldiers' Aid Society? Not surprisingly, the officers of the Society were the wives of New London's social and economic elite. Mrs. Albertson of 72 Hempstead Street, in the upper reaches where more affluent residents lived, was the president. Mrs. Nathaniel Shaw Perkins of Bank Street was the first vice president. Not only was her husband a well-known physician in New London, the family business, Perkins and Smith, had been one of the town's successful whaling firms. In addition, two of the Perkins' sons served in the army during the war. Mrs. James Totten, Mrs. William

Hamilton, and Mrs John Dickinson, all from more affluent sections of town, served as the other vice presidents. The next level of officialdom for the Society consisted of 25 managers. This group included notable names such as Mrs. Lippitt, wife of an attorney living on the corner of Hempstead and Granite Streets, Mrs. Thomas Shaw Perkins, sister-in-law of Nathaniel Shaw Perkins, Mrs. Rev Ezra Withey, wife of a local minister, and Mrs. A. R. Harris, wife of the town liquor agent. Yet some lady managers came from a more humble background. Mrs. Henry Ames was merely a boarder at 25 Bank Street. Mrs. Parker Smith was a widow, and Mrs. Crowell was the wife of a mere mechanic. Other managers came from such obscure or lowly backgrounds that they did not even merit a mention in New London's street directory.

Following the list of officers, managers, and collectors were 104 members – women who would spend the following 3 and a half years contributing to an amazing flow of clothing, bedding, bandages, and foodstuffs that the women of New London produced and collected, all for the benefit of nameless men serving the Union cause. What was most notable about this initial list of members was that the women came from all social and economic ranks in the city. They included Mrs. Joshua Bolles from Moun-

## ***New and Renewed Members***

*(Continued from page 3)*

William & Susan Blaisdell	Groton
Gloria Fowler	Noank
John K. Keeney	Canterbury
Paul Harrison	Niantic
Beverly R. McPhail	New London
Adam Spreace	New London
Frank & Lydia McLaughlin	New London
Charles Beebe	Mystic
James Avery	New London

tain Avenue, wife of a mariner, Mrs. George Rogers, widow of a U. S. Navy captain, Mrs. William Potter, whose husband owned a paint shop at 8 Bank Street, Bridget Delia Howe, whose husband was a laborer, and Mrs. Samuel Green, wife of a ship captain. These women not only transcended class lines; they also transcended demarcations of religion. Although the Methodists contributed items from the Methodist sewing circle, many of the members attended different churches in the city – the First and Second Congregational churches, the various Baptist Churches, the Unitarian Church, the Seamen's Bethel, and St. James Episcopal Church.

The members resided near Bank Street, State Street, and Huntington Street. Being close enough to walk to the County Court House seemed a key factor. Bank Street was the home to 15 women; they included Mrs. Nathaniel Shaw Perkins, the wives of several other whaling merchants, the wives of several bankers, and the wife of a colonel in the U.S. Army. Almost all came from a background of ease and luxury, but initially all participated in making garments for the soldiers or bringing donations for their relief. State Street provided 12 more members; almost all of them were wealthy, including Mrs. Thomas W. Williams, the wife of one of New London's wealthiest whaling merchants and investors. Hempstead Street and Huntington Street provided 14 more members.

Rose C. Longo
Christine Cartes
Leah Burrows
Carl & Carol Sommer
Elizabeth A. Noyes
Melanie Marks
James R. & Jean Way
Brent Owen
Frederick C. Shakir

Niantic
Milton, FL
Janesville, WI
Waterford
Noank
Fairfield
Haddam Neck
Wethersfield
Quaker Hill

Allen V. Polhemus	Uncasville
Betty Ann Chapman	Groton
Ann Ledger	Groton
Betty A. Pinson	Waterford
R.Adm. Arnold & Joan Danielsen	Niantic
Dr. David & Keli D. Levine	Sands Point, NY
Jason Cassese	Middletown
Kelly & Gary Milton	Groton

These included the wives of some of New London's wealthiest men such as Mrs. Henry P. Haven, whose husband partnered with Thomas W. Williams. Mrs. Havens's sister-in-law was New London's famed historian, Frances Manwaring Caulkins, yet Miss Caulkins's name never appeared as a worker or a donor at any of the Society's meetings.

Perhaps surprisingly, many of the members were what early Americans would call the lesser sort, poor widows, Irish working women, and the wives of seamen and laborers. What they had in common with the wealthy women of New London appears to have been a strong desire to help the men in the army.

The Society soon set its bi-weekly meetings at the New London County Courthouse at the intersection of Broad and Huntington Streets. For most of the next three and a half years they met every other week to work providing for the troops. They clearly took to heart the statement of the U. S. Sanitary Commission: "Every woman and child in our northern homes has insensibly caught the spirit of the Commission's work while contributing their handiwork for the succor of the soldiers."

**To Be Continued ...**



## *Books available from the New London County Historical Society*

<i>The Amistad Incident as Reported in the New London Gazette &amp; General Advertiser.</i> (NLCHS)	\$5
<i>The History of the Amistad Captives.</i> (NLCHS) A reproduction of a pamphlet by JW Barber, 1840.	\$10
<i>Black Roots in Southeastern Connecticut, 1650-1900</i> by Barbara Brown and Dr. James Rose. (NLCHS) This republished book is a milestone in genealogical research of African Americans and Native Americans in New London County.	\$35
<i>The Diary of Joshua Hempstead 1711-1758.</i> (NLCHS) Revised 1999. Personal journal serves as fascinating and invaluable account of Connecticut life in early 18 <sup>th</sup> century.	\$75
<i>For Oil and Buggy Whips: Whaling Captains of New London County, Connecticut,</i> by Barnard Colby. Biographical sketches of local whaling captains document New London's role in this industry.	\$18
<i>Greetings from New London.</i> (NLCHS) Collection of early 20 <sup>th</sup> -century postcards from our archives.	\$10
<i>Life on a Whaler,</i> by Nathaniel W. Taylor. (NLCHS) Story of Taylor's two-year Antarctic voyage as physician aboard New London's <i>Julius Caesar</i> (1851-53).	\$25
<i>New London Goes to War - New London during World War II,</i> by Clark van der Lyke. Drawn from the records and correspondence of the New London City Council. (NLCHS)	\$11
<i>The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut,</i> by James A. Slater. Fully illustrated with photographs, this book provides a description of and maps the burial grounds of eastern Connecticut.	\$40
<i>Common to this Country: Botanical Discoveries of Lewis &amp; Clark,</i> by Susan Munger. Illustrated volume exploring plants discovered by Lewis and Clark on their westward expedition.	\$23
<i>The Day Paper,</i> by Gregory N. Stone. History of New London's award-winning daily newspaper.	\$30
<i>Steam Coffin: Captain Moses Rogers and the Steamship Savannah Break the Barrier,</i> by John Lawrence Busch. New London native son Moses Rogers and the first crossing of the Atlantic by a steam-powered vessel.	\$35
<i>Murder of Mayhem? - Benedict Arnold's New London, Connecticut Raid, 1781,</i> by Dr. Walter L. Powell. Excellent research in a small readable format.	\$10
<i>History of New London, Connecticut: from the first survey of the coast in 1612 to 1860,</i> by Frances Caulkins With a new introduction and a revised index 2007 (NLCHS).	\$60
<i>History of Norwich, Connecticut: from its possession by the Indians to the year 1866,</i> by Frances Caulkins With a new introduction and a new index 2009 (NLCHS).	\$60
<i>Prospero's America: John Winthrop, Jr., Alchemy, and the Creation of New England Culture, 1606-1676</i> Excellent examination of New London's founder, from Walter Woodward, the Connecticut State Historian.	\$45
<i>"The Rockets' Red Glare:" The War of 1812 and Connecticut,</i> by Dr. Glenn S. Gordinier. Written to accompany the 2012 exhibition at the Lyman Allyn, this work is full of local connections to this war that shaped Connecticut (NLCHS).	\$18
<i>For Adam's Sake: A Family Saga in Colonial New England,</i> by Allegra di Bonaventura A new work exploring the lives and families of Joshua Hempstead and that of Adam Jackson, his slave, and other early New London families.	\$30

### These *Images of America* titles available from NLCHS

<i>New London</i>	\$20
<i>New London Firefighting</i>	\$20
<i>Reinventing New London</i>	\$20
<i>Naval Submarine Base New London</i>	\$20
<i>Lighthouses and Life Saving along the Connecticut and Rhode Island Coast</i>	\$20
<i>Groton</i>	\$20
<i>Groton Revisited</i>	\$20
<i>Mystic</i>	\$20

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