



The Henry L. Ferguson Museum

Newsletter Vol. 23, No. 1 • Spring 2008

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From the President

As I write this letter, the buds on the shad trees are swelling and signs of spring are everywhere. The ospreys are rebuilding their nests and all occupants from last year have returned. Oystercatchers are on the beaches sounding their alarm calls when approached too closely. These birds, along with the Piping plover (federally threatened and NY State endangered), and Least tern (NY State endangered), lay their eggs close to the high tide line in a scrape in the sand. Least terns and Piping plovers have nested on Fishers in past years and we hope for their return in the future. The eggs of all these birds resemble small beach rocks; therefore those walking along our beaches during the nesting season should be alert to the presence of breeding birds. This year, we have posted signs on Stony Beach in an attempt to protect any birds nesting there.

The spring season at Fishers also brings with it the return of many wood warblers which can be seen during the month of May. These birds begin to arrive in late April as soon as the insects hatch out in abundance. Warbler watching is particularly good on Fishers Island due to the fact that we are slightly behind the mainland with regard to the leaf-out of trees. This makes it somewhat easier to observe these quick-moving birds as they flit amongst the trees. The Museum trails, particularly the Boker Doyle Sanctuary and Clay Pit trails are excellent spots for glimpses of the many wood warblers that migrate through during May. Spring is a joyous season on the island.

We are looking forward to a busy summer that kicks off with Museum director Pierce Rafferty's "Maps of Fishers Island" exhibit which will be unveiled at our official opening on June 28, 2008. We hope that you will join us as we celebrate not only our Annual Opening, but also the 90th birthday of our President Emeritus, Charlie Ferguson.

A variety of lectures and programs have been scheduled during July and August. Also planned are several boat excursions and a series of programs for children, including a planetarium show, and talks featuring live raptors and snakes. Please see the newsletter's back page for dates and details.

The Land Trust continues to pursue land acquisitions under the able guidance of our Vice-President Bob Miller. The Museum is grateful to FIDCO for their continued assistance and cooperation in setting aside open space parcels. The Land Trust is truly one of the most important components of

the Museum. Every acre saved from potential development provides habitat for the flora and fauna of our island while simultaneously protecting our valuable natural resources such as tidal and freshwater wetlands and ground and surface waters.

The Museum would not be what it is today without the support of many Fishers Islanders. I extend my thanks to all who have become "Friends of the HLFM" and contributed in other ways to our endeavors. We are very grateful to the Chubb Group of Insurance Companies and Charlie Wilmerding's Altus Partners for once again sponsoring our annual exhibit. I also wish to thank all of the Museum Board members for their time and efforts on behalf of the Museum.

We hope that you visit the Museum often and take part in our programs and excursions. The Museum is a great place in which to learn about our island's fascinating history, its archaeology, and its natural history.

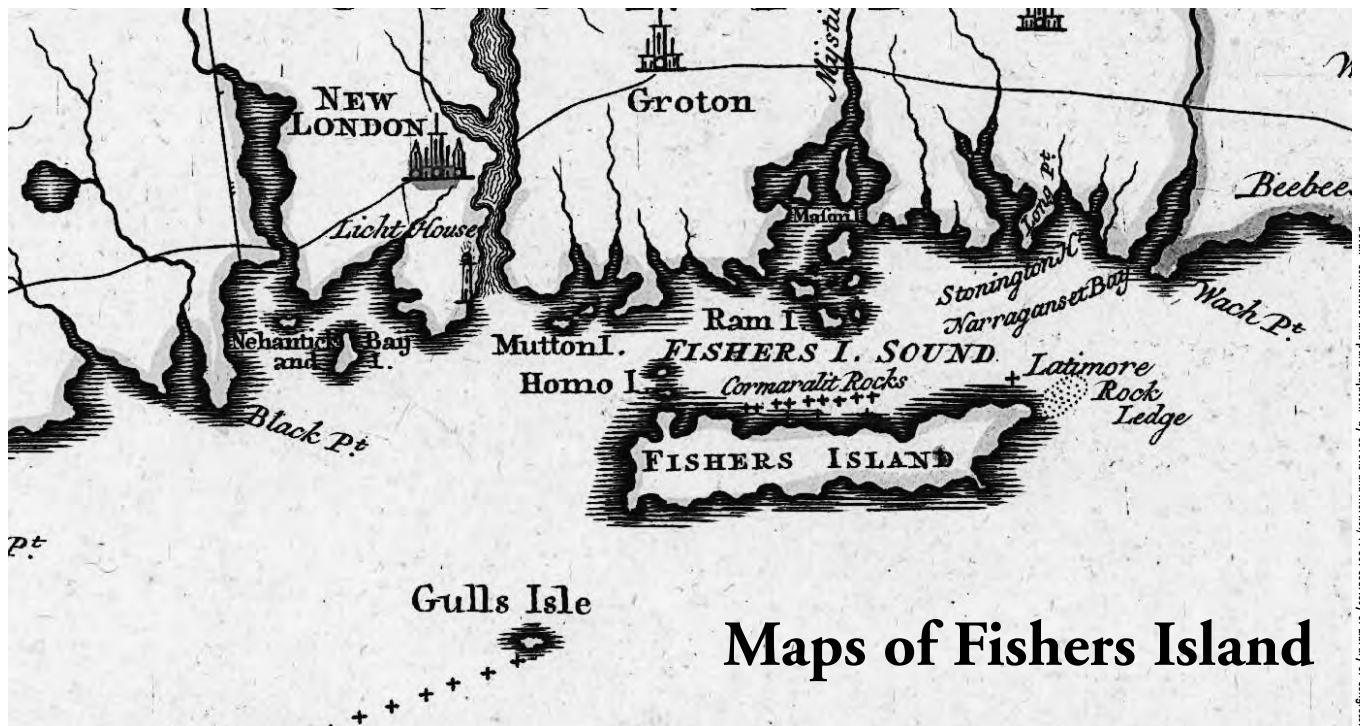
I am looking forward to another island summer and hope to see each and every one of you at the Museum!

—Penni Sharp, *President*



Sign on Stony Beach, May 6, 2008

The Henry L. Ferguson Museum 2008 Annual Exhibition



Detail "Connecticut and parts adjacent" by Covens and Morten, 1780. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

Maps of Fishers Island

This year's exhibition features maps of Fishers Island and environs from first European discovery to date.

Exhibition sponsored by:



ALTUS PARTNERS



Please join us for our opening reception & for a celebration of Charlie Ferguson's 90th Birthday: Saturday, June 28, 2008, 5-7 p.m. at the Museum. ALL WELCOME

NATURE NOTES

By Penni Sharp

During the first warm rainy nights in late winter or early spring, a ritual occurs throughout the woodlands of the northeast, including Fishers Island. This is the return of amphibian species to their breeding pools. Typically, the breeding areas are “vernal pools,” wetlands that are receiving much attention due to well-publicized accounts of the decline in amphibian species. A vernal pool is a seasonal or permanent body of water in a defined basin or depression that lacks a fish population and supports or is capable of supporting the breeding and development of amphibian or invertebrate species. True vernal pools have neither an inlet nor an outlet and often dry out by mid to late summer. These ephemeral wetlands are now recognized as habitats that support unique biological communities, especially with respect to amphibians and invertebrates. Many other wildlife species including reptiles, birds, and mammals, although not dependent upon these habitats, consistently utilize them for functions such as resting, shelter, and feeding. Species that are dependent upon the pools for successful breeding are referred to as “obligate” vernal pool species and include Mole salamanders (so named for the fact that most of its life is spent underground), Wood frogs and Fairy shrimp. Obligatory vernal pool species known to be present at Fishers are the Spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*) and the Wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*).

Vernal pool species spend most of their adult life in dry uplands, returning annually to the pools in order to breed. Once eggs are laid, the adults leave the pools. The eggs hatch and the larvae develop to emerge from the pool as juveniles. This process can take several weeks to several months depending upon the species. The adult amphibians remain faithful to their breeding pools, thus land development in close proximity to a vernal pool can have dire consequences upon amphibian populations. Roadways can cut off travel paths, sometimes preventing adults from reaching their breeding pools.

The Spotted salamander is a large salamander that can reach up to 6 to 8 inches in length. Adults are black, bluish black or gray in color with two rows of round yellow spots



Spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*) Courtesy of Vernal Pool Association

running lengthwise down the back from the eyes to the tail tip. The rows of spots may be irregular or straight. Larvae are olive green above, lighter colored below, and have no strong markings except near the tail tip. They also have bushy gills. Newly metamorphosed Spotted salamanders have light bellies and smaller dorsal spots. Spotted salamanders are secretive salamanders, which is why they are infrequently seen. Most of their time is spent underground in burrows of other animals or in crevices under logs or rocks.

With this species, courtship, breeding, and egg-laying all occur underwater. Females lay their eggs in the water, in clumps or masses, and may deposit over 300 eggs in one mass. These globular masses of eggs are covered with a jelly-like coating which may be clear or white and are usually attached to twigs in the pond. The aquatic larvae hatch in about 4-7 weeks and complete metamorphosis during the summer. Spotted salamanders may live for over 20 years.

The Wood frog is a medium-sized frog that has a dark, mask-like patch extending backwards from its eyes. Wood frogs are typically brown in color, but can range from shades of reddish-brown to almost black. As the name implies, this frog is not an animal of ponds and streams, but one which spends its life in the woodlands and vegetated wetlands. In early spring, shortly after emerging from its winter dormancy, the Wood frog makes its way to vernal pools for breeding. The males begin their noisy, duck-like quacking chorus which persists throughout the breeding season when the temperature is above 40°F. After breeding, females deposit large, gelatinous globular masses of up to 3,000 eggs. These masses are attached to aquatic vegetation and are often laid communally. The eggs hatch within three weeks and tadpoles transform within six to nine weeks. After mating and egg laying, the wood frogs leave the vernal pools to spend the rest of the year in the adjacent uplands. In winter, Wood frogs have a unique ability to survive the freezing of their body tissues. World-wide there are only a few species of vertebrates that can tolerate freezing.

Many of the vernal pools on Fishers are on Land Trust property. This ensures that these interesting amphibian species will continue to have protected habitat on our island. •



Wood frogs (*Rana sylvatica*) Courtesy of Vernal Pool Association

FISHERS ISLAND HISTORY

By Pierce Rafferty

Last year's Museum newsletter included an article that was originally published in a Connecticut agricultural magazine in 1859. The writer painted a stark portrait of mid-19th century Fishers Island as an all-but-abandoned farm property in serious decline that had been stripped of its resources by generations of absentee Winthrop owners. The writer called for an enterprising capitalist to step forward and buy the property in order to open it up for land sales to the legions of farmers who needed good farms and were heading west to find them. These land sales, the writer posited, would naturally lead to improved roads and a daily steam boat connection to the mainland. Fishers Island would thus dispel its gloomy "air of neglect" and live up to its potential of being "as thriving a community as can be found in New England."

Several years after this clarion call for new ownership, Fishers Island did change hands. In 1863, Robert Ralston Fox, a wealthy retired manufacturer, purchased all of Fishers Island for \$55,000 from an intermediary who had just bought it from the heirs of William H. Winthrop. However, instead of selling individual lots to farmers, Mr. Fox moved to the island with his family and proceeded to develop it as an undivided estate, a grand private stock farm. For eight subsequent years he poured resources into the property, rebuilt its infrastructure, and brought the livestock herds back to levels not seen since the early days of Winthrop ownership. Unfortunately, Mr. Fox's untimely death in 1871 derailed his ambitious farm operation on Fishers Island. His widow, more used to society in Brooklyn Heights than the rigors of farm life on Fishers Island, found herself suddenly in charge of an estate featuring a series of working farms whose inhabitants included dozens of farm workers, some 2,000 sheep and hundreds of prized cattle.

For the next several years, Mrs. Fox worked with the executors of her husband's estate to chart a course for the Island's future development that focused more on people than animals. It's likely that they floated the idea of selling the property for mentions of such a sale appeared in local newspapers. These in turn led to speculation about possible new uses for Fishers Island, including a proposal to relocate Sing Sing Prison to our shores from its home "up the river" in Ossining, New York. The following article on the subject appeared on May 2, 1873 in the *Greenport Watchman* (L.I.). It is reprinted in full.

Removal of State Prison

The assembly has passed a bill looking to the removal of the State Prison from Sing Sing and providing for Commissioners to select a new site for the prison. Mr. Husted, of the Westchester district in which the prison now is, has for years been urging its removal, and is reported to have said that in his opinion Fisher's Island in Long Island Sound would be a proper site. This idea has been broached before, and we have referred to it more than



Sing Sing on Fishers Island?

once or twice. It strikes us favorably. The chances of escape would be reduced to a minimum; the island has an area of fertile soil large enough to produce grain and vegetables, pork, mutton and perhaps beef, for the consumption of the convicts; there are beds of clay from which brick might be advantageously made; manufactures, of the kinds which the State is likely to engage in, could be carried on as cheaply, perhaps more so when the facilities of water carriage is considered, as any inland locality; and no inhabited region is near enough to be blighted by the moral contamination or the physical dread inspired by such an institution. We presume the island could be purchased at a reasonable figure. It has been until recently, and perhaps yet is, advertised for sale. We do not know what price the family of Robert R. Fox, its present proprietors, ask for it, but the island is rated for taxation on the assessment roll of this town at \$40,000.

Needless to say, Fishers Island did not become "Alcatraz East," although it has acquired the moniker "the Rock" along the way. Research in the clipping files of historical newspapers has not turned up any other proposals to transform our fair isle into a prison site.

A Double Death and Socialism Thwarted

The death of Mr. Charles W. Gordon, general manager for E.M. & W. Ferguson on Fishers Island, made the newspapers twice almost two decades apart. Mr. Gordon's first death notice ran in *The New York Times* on October 22, 1898.

CHARLES W. GORDON of Fisher's Island, the Republican and Democratic candidate for Coroner of the island, died yesterday. He was forty-five years of age, and had already served two terms as Coroner.

The paper ran a follow-up story on October 25, 1898:

Mr. Charles W. Gordon is Very Much Alive

To the editor of *The New York Times*: I notice in to-day's publication of your paper an obituary notice of my death. As I am very much in evidence at the present time, I trust you will not discontinue my subscription to your valued paper, and, if not too much trouble, give me the source of your information. Signed CHARLES W. GORDON Fisher's Island, N.Y.

We present our compliments to Mr. Gordon. We are glad that he is alive, and trust he will so continue until long after the expiration of the period sometimes called the "allotted span." We trust, also, that he will continue a reader of THE NEW YORK TIMES, which we will strive, as heretofore, to make worthy of his perusal. The item of which Mr. Gordon complains was furnished by the Standard News Association. It is a blunder of a kind that happens about once in a dozen years or so. No care or foresight can guard against it, especially when the misinformation is supplied, as in this instance, by an agency which is usually trustworthy. — Ed. TIMES.

During the ensuing decade, Mr. Gordon repeatedly ran for coroner of Fishers Island and won handily each time. He was a popular and respected figure and consequently received the endorsement of both major political parties. Year in and year out his name appeared on the ballots printed in Riverhead, L.I., and each time he coasted to victory. The same positive result was expected in 1917, but this time there was a complication: Mr. Gordon was already dead when he was nominat-

ed. Unfortunately the detached and distant Southold County had received no word from Fishers Island of his demise. The nomination of a dead man for coroner generated headlines and news stories across the nation, including this one from the *Nevada State Journal* on Nov. 8, 1917:

DEAD MAN NOMINATED; SOCIALIST ELECTED
Riverhead, N.Y., Nov. 7. — The unwitting nomination of a dead man for coroner of Fishers Island by both republicans and democrats in Suffolk county won the election to that office for the Socialist candidate, Nicholas Lewin. However, since Fishers Island...is now entirely under government control, it is a moot point whether the coroner will have any jurisdiction.

Ultimately the socialist — who had received only a tiny portion of the votes and didn't live on the Island — was blocked from handling Fishers Island's dead, including Mr. Charles W. Gordon, whose actual demise caused more of a stir than his previous false ending.



The Board of Trustees would like to extend its heartfelt thanks to all who gave as Friends of the Museum, to its Land Trust, or "in memoriam" during 2007. We are grateful to each and every one of you! We would also like to give special thanks to Altus Partners, Inc. and CHUBB for co-sponsoring our 2008 annual exhibit.

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Please excuse any inadvertent misspellings or omissions.

Recent Additions to the Museum's Collection

The following is a list of donors and the diverse items that they gave in 2007.

Karen Edwards Alberghini: Stay from wrecked vessel found at North Hill beach in 2006.
Anonymous: 32 photos of MV *Mystic Isle*, MV *Olinda* & Race Rock Light.
Kiki Arnold: Reproduction of MAP OF LOTS ON FISHERS ISLAND (traced 1919 & surveyed 1878).
James H. Baker: Field trial photo of William Witt & Jim Baker (10/27/1940).
Richard S. Baker: FI Farms wooden block with map of FI; hawk migration article from AUK (10/22/22); 6 snapshots of Boy Scout Jamboree on FI (1952); 1 photo of ice house on Middle Farms Pond (c.1952); 2 FI postcards.
Marc & Ann Banks: Lobster holding pen & FI school ruler.
Andrew & Helen Braun: Guest book, program & 4 photos of Ferguson Reunion (June 2004).
Clem Cleveland: David Hoch mystery set on FI & "Sea Breezes" FI School magazine.
Ellen R. Conant: 12 FI postcards.
Michael Crupi: Photo of picnic on FI beach (1921).
Betsy Cullen: Watercolor of North Hill by Nancy Truesdale (1954); b/w photo of ladies lunch at Big Club.
Wesley Davidson: Misc. photos of B.G. Rafferty residence; 15 photos of Calhoun house under construction (formerly Rafferty); owl painting by C.B. Ferguson (1960).
Jeff & Catherine Edwards: FI Fire Dept. ballot (1992).
Roberta Elwell: Framed photo of blue lobster & Ducks Unlimited cup.
George & Sandy Esser: 4 pieces of intact crockery from the Mononotto Inn.
John C. Evans: Collection of FI Pharmacy labels (c.1920s); plans, correspondence & 82 photos documenting the construction of & launching ceremony for MV *Munnatawket* (1976-78); 11 photographs by Charlie Morgan of MV *Mystic Isle* (1975).
Harry & Susie Ferguson: 60 books, 1 map and 7 framed photographs dating from the 1820s to the 1930s from the library of Henry L. Ferguson, primarily ornithological books and volumes relating to the history of FI and the Winthrop family.
Marian Ferguson: 3 "sporting life" photos of Sam Ferguson & friends.
FI Club: Parsons & Wait album with 106 photos of houses built by the firm on FI and views of the FIC clubhouse under construction & completed.
FI Yacht Club: 6 annual membership directories.
Frick Art Reference Library: Paperwork, correspondence and photos relating to the business and social relationship of Henry Clay Frick and E.M. & W. Ferguson.
William Furse: Color photo by donor of Camp Tabor caddy barn.
Cindy Lawler Gillan: 2 FI School year books (1976 & 77).
Edward Goss family: Book entitled "Growing Up on Fishers Island: The Folk Culture Paradox," that features interviews with and reminiscences of Fishers Islander Edward C. Goss.
Carol Grey: Misc. FI postcards.
Florence Grieb: "Morning Mist" painting by

Charles B. Ferguson (2007).
Hay Harbor Club: Wooden trunk belonging to Master Sergeant C.H. Dean, Ft. H.G. Wright.
Clarkson Hine & Charlotte Hine Soback: 92 photographic prints and 151 negatives documenting the building of the infrastructure at the east end of FI, NY as part of the Olmsted Plan (1925-1927) taken for or by Donald Franklin Hine, engineer. Collection includes surveyors in the field; the construction of the FI Club golf course and the Filtration Plant; laying of water mains and telephone lines; laying of electrical cable from Groton Long Point, CT to Chocomount Cove, FI. Included are misc. west end views.
Nancy Hunt: Napkins and matches from christening ceremony for MV *Munnatawket*.
Island Community Board: 29 back issues of FI Civic Association annual reports.
Richard Kennedy: Sporting life coffee mug.
Barron Kidd: 4 natural history books.
Patricia B. Knowlton: 3 photos of HHC & Mansion House Hotel (c.1910s).
Mr. & Mrs. Frank Mackinson: 15 field trial photos (1930s-40s).
Carey Matthiessen: 1 copy of his book entitled: "Forage Fish and the Industrial Fisheries."
Leslie McElwreath: 21 HHC prize ribbons & medals; LP "Fishers Island Fun."
Alex McKown: Race Rock Light figurine by Harbour Lights.
Linda Musser: 30 posters for Island Concerts (var. dates).
Jay Lester Parsons: 17 FI postcards (var. dates).
Susie Parsons: FI promotional brochure "On Sea & Sound" (1922).
Sharon & Tim Patterson: US Corps of Engineers' metal symbol.
Betty Peishoff: 5 real photo postcards showing Jack Peishoff on livery wagon & crew of SS *Restless* (c.1910s).
Mary Jean Pelham: 8 FI school photos & cheerleader's patch (1940s).
Sarah Hollis Perry: Letter and page from photo album showing Adams House (today Herrick)

on FI (c.1930s).
Pierce & Vicki Rafferty: 34 Farmer's Almanacs (published in New London, 19th & early 20th century); 9 popular magazines with articles on FI; 5 early FI promotional brochures; FI High School magazines (1931-34).
Sarah H. Porter: 52 ceramic ashtrays produced for FI chapter of Ducks Unlimited. 12 different designs with multiple copies of most; 5 Ducks Unlimited coffee mugs.
Jack Raridon: Wooden sign with carved map of FI (c. 1950s).
Bill Ridgway: "Map of Woodland Trails" by E.A. Matthiessen (1965).
Mr. & Mrs. Frank Brooks Robinson: 2 FI souvenir pennants.
Diana Sargent: Watercolor of osprey by wildlife artist Art Lamay (untitled & undated).
C.L. & Bill Scott: 6 pieces of souvenir china with FI illustrations (c.1910s).
Penni Sharp: Conn. Botanical Society book.
Grace Shaw: FI School graduation program (1955).
Martha Davis Soper: Detached photo album page with FI images (July 1903).
John Spofford: Architectural model for Lammot DuPont's FI residence.
Paul Vartanian: 9 vintage photographs of English springer field trials (various dates).
Sue Schongar Whitten: Giclee print of painting by donor of Guard Shack.
Jacki Williamson: Mansion House clotheshanger (circa 1940s) & FIC towel (circa 1950s); trophy engraved "H.H.G.C. Ladies Club Champion, 1978."

Museum Acquisition Fund purchases include: 3 Ft. Wright menus with rosters (1930s); Ft. Wright sweetheart pillowcase; Markle Golf Derby trophy (1938); 2 Samantha Weber engravings of Chocomount Beach; 7 Ft. Wright real photo postcards; 5 Pequot Inn tee shirts (various dates).

Please excuse any omissions.



FI School basketball team 1949, one of eight FI School photos donated by Mary Jean Pelham

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of The Henry L. Ferguson Museum is the collection, preservation and exhibition of items of Pre-History, History and Natural History of Fishers Island and, through its Land Trust, the preservation in perpetuity of undeveloped property in its natural state. It is organized for the education and enjoyment of the Island's community and visitors and for the protection of habitat for the Island's flora and fauna.

Museum Speakers 2008

Pierce Rafferty and Barry Bryan will give a talk on the history of the east end's Olmsted Plan. Sunday, July 27th, 4 pm at Union Chapel.

Bryan Danforth, an associate professor at Cornell, will give a talk on bees and the importance of conserving native bee pollinators. Sunday, Aug. 3rd, 4 pm at Union Chapel.

Dr. Kevin McBride, director of Research for the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, will speak on his joint archaeological work with Dr. Bob Ballard on the continental shelf off Block Island. Sunday, August 10th, 4 pm at Union Chapel.

Helen Hays, director of the Research Center on Great Gull Island, will speak about her studies of one of the largest nesting concentrations of common terns in the world and the largest for roseate terns in the western hemisphere. Sunday, August 24th, 4 pm at Union Chapel. (2008 Smith Vaughan Lecture on a Natural History Subject.)

Childrens and Family Programs

Come Meet Birds of Prey. Maggie Jones and Kim Hargrave of the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center will introduce us to live owls and other creatures while talking about the unique adaptations of birds of prey. Family program for ages 5 & up. Weds., July 9th, 2 pm to 3 pm at the Museum.

StarLab Planetarium. A Children's Museum of Southeastern Connecticut program (CMSC). Kids will learn about the stars from within an inflatable planetarium that reveals the night

sky. Primarily for ages 5 to 12. Two 45 min. programs: starting at 1:30 pm & 2:30 pm on Monday, July 14th at the FI School Gym. Each program limited to 20 people. *Advance registration required.*

Snakes, Snakes, and More Snakes. (CMSC program.) Did you know that snakes smell with their tongues? Herpetologist Linda Krulikowski will share both knowledge and her collection of fascinating animals with the kids. Primarily for ages 3 to 12. Two 45 min. programs: starting at 1 pm & 2 pm on Weds., July 23rd at the Museum. Each program limited to 20 people. *Advance registration required.*

Take an Oceanographic Cruise aboard UConn-Avery Point's Research Vessel *EnviroLab II*. For all age groups, ages 6 and up. Thursday, August 7th. Departure time, dock location and cost to be posted. Limited to 50 people. *Advance registration required.*

Mucking About with Pond Life. (CMSC program.) Children will use nets to gather small pond critters and identify them and other surrounding birds and aquatic plants. Two 45 min. programs: starting at 1:30 pm (for ages 3 to 6) and 2:30 (for ages 7 to 10) on Thurs., Aug. 14th. Pond location to be posted. Dress for a mess! Each program limited to 20 people. *Advance registration required.*

Wanted for Hay Harbor Club Centennial Book: Hay Harbor Club photographs (sports activity, costume dances, etc.) and ephemera (old golf scorecards, invitations, snack bar coupons, etc.) from all decades. (Contact Pierce Rafferty.)

Nature Walks

During the summer, Nature Walks will start at the Museum at 2:00 p.m. on Thursdays unless posted.

Museum Hours

June 29 to Labor Day: Tuesday through Friday: 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; Sunday 11 a.m. to 12 noon. Closed Mondays.

Off Season Hours: To be posted. For special appointments: Please call Museum director Pierce Rafferty at the Museum (631)-788-7239; or e-mail fimuseum@fishersisland.net

The Henry L. Ferguson Museum

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