

FRIENDS OF FORT TRUMBULL TO WELCOME

JERRY ROBERTS

DIRECTOR OF THE CONNECTICUT RIVER MUSEUM



In 1814, the British may have burned their ships and destroyed their rum, but they did not demoralize the New England town of Essex, on New England's Great River.

Although most people don't know the details of Connecticut's role in the War of 1812, Jerry Roberts, the dynamic Director of the Connecticut River Museum, has vowed to change that deficiency. On April 7, 1814, one of the greatest shipping losses of the war occurred as the British, stealthily rowing up the Connecticut River, attacked Essex. Although many people believed that the people of Essex gave up without a fight, Mr. Roberts has been working to show what really happened. Using new research from the Essex Historical Society, Mr. Roberts hopes to show that the Americans, despite overwhelming odds, fought bravely. The previous views, which rested upon legend and folklore, also believed that there was an American traitor who collaborated with the enemy. Roberts hopes to demonstrate that this belief was also erroneous.

In 2011, before Mr. Roberts came to Essex from the Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum in New York, he was aware of the Burning of the Fleet Day in Essex. As he contemplated accepting a new position, he decided, "The kind of town that hosts a parade to commemorate one of the worst days in its history is a place that I want to be."

Since his arrival in Essex, Mr. Roberts has experienced some of his own "worse days". After a significant fire at the museum, he successfully directed the rehab of the grounds and buildings. After these turbulent times, he has also turned his attention to focusing on enhancing and improving the exhibits at the 36 year old facility. In addition, he has doubled the museum's campus with the purchase of the Samuel Lay House, allowing a broader range of educational programs and activities.

Finally, he was also involved in ongoing efforts to get Essex recognized as a National Battle Site by the National Parks Service American Battlefield Protection Program. Next year, in 2014, when the 200th anniversary of the Essex Raid is commemorated, the town will celebrate having gained this federal recognition. For more information, go to www.ctrivermuseum.org

The presentation will be on May 30, 2013, at 7 p.m. at Fort Trumbull, New London, in the Conference Center behind the Visitors Center. The lecture is open to the public and new members are always welcome. Seating is limited.