

Sandy Bank Sentinel

2nd Series, Vol II, Issue 2

The Journal of the Malden Historical Society

Autumn, 2018

Exhibit Opening Monday, October 22

Special Meeting Tuesday, October 30:

Uncle Sam Wants You: New England, The First World War, and the Making of Modern America

This November will mark the 100th anniversary of the armistice that ended World War I. The Malden Historical Society in conjunction with the Malden Public Library is pleased to announce the opening reception on **Monday, October 22 at 6pm** of their new exhibit, *War and Remembrance: Malden in the Great War*—An exhibition of posters, photographs, and artifacts from the collections of the Malden Public Library and the Malden Historical Society. If you cannot make the opening reception the exhibit will be open Mondays 6-8pm and Wednesday 2-4 pm and some Saturdays. On **Tuesday, October 30 at 7pm** the Malden Historical Society will welcome MIT history professor Christopher Capozzola who will give a presentation entitled *Uncle Sam Wants You: New England, The First World War, and the Making of Modern America*. In April, 1917 when Uncle Sam pointed at Americans and said, “I Want YOU”, how did they respond? How did they mobilize schools, churches, and communities to support the war? And how did they monitor and suppress their anti-war neighbors? Drawing particularly on the history of New England communities, (including Malden!) this talk explores a crucial moment in America’s history and its lessons a century later.



Professor Capozzola graduated from Harvard College and completed his Ph.D. at Columbia University in 2002. At MIT he teaches courses in political and legal history, war and the military, and the history of international migration. From 2015-17 he served as the Secretary of the Faculty, and in 2018 was named a MacVicar Faculty Fellow, MIT’s highest honor for undergraduate teaching. His research interests are in the history of citizenship, war, and the military in modern American history. His first book, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford University Press, 2008) examines the relationship between citizens, voluntary associations, and the federal government during World War I. In 2010, *Uncle Sam Wants You* won the Lois P. Rudnick Book Prize of the New England Studies Association. A collation will follow the program. Please plan to join us for both of these special events.

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A Stockpile of Saltpeter and Gunpowder in Edgeworth

By Marianne Julia Zammuto

Saltpeter is a common name for nitre/niter. Nitre, which promotes rapid combustion, made up about half of the ingredients for gunpowder used in weapons during the War between the States (more commonly known in the North as the Civil War). The two other main ingredients were charcoal and sulfur. Prior to the Civil War, the United States (US) was purchasing gunpowder from the British colony of India. By 1863, Chile replaced India as the primary source of imported nitre.

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861, with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, and it ended in April, 1865, when Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at the Appomattox Courthouse. Difficulty in procuring nitre and gunpowder at the beginning of the Civil War necessitated storing these items. Accordingly, for \$25,000, on March 28, 1864, the Navy Department (Navy) purchased from Benjamin L. Allen, Joseph P. Ellicott, Samuel W. Swett, and Ambrose H. White 7.3 acres, consisting of 6.5 acres of dry land and .8 acres of mud flats, located at Commercial (formerly Webster) and Medford (formerly Green) streets in Malden, on the west bank of the Malden River, to "use as a nitre storage depot" (Depot). Previously, a linen mill was on the site, according to a Navy report. In official documents, the Depot is referred to as the Nitre Depot and the Malden Naval Nitre Depot. Other documents refer to the Depot as, for example, Nitre Depot at Malden, US Nitro Magazine Malden, Nitre Works Malden, US Naval Ordnance [*sic*] Depot, US Naval Niter [*sic*] Depot, and Naval Depot.

On May 14, 1864, the Massachusetts Legislature approved "An Act Ceding Jurisdiction to the [US] Over Certain Lands in Malden" (Act of 1864), including the buildings thereon, "for a naval and military ordnance yard and depot, but not to be used for the manufacture or storage of gunpowder, gun cotton, cartridges, loaded shells, or any other similar explosive material that may

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Malden Historical Society

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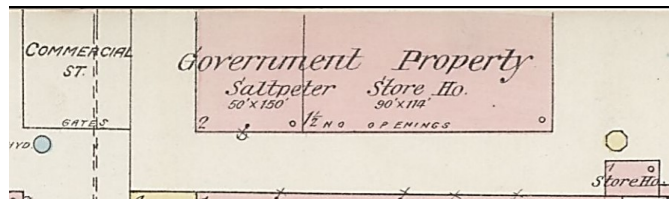
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Stereoview of the grounds of the Nitre Depot in 1877. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, catalog no. USN 901489.

The Act provided that Massachusetts would retain concurrent jurisdiction with the US over the land with respect to all civil and criminal processes, and that exclusive jurisdiction would revert to and revest in Massachusetts if the US no longer used the land for the purpose described. On June 16, 1866, the Navy placed

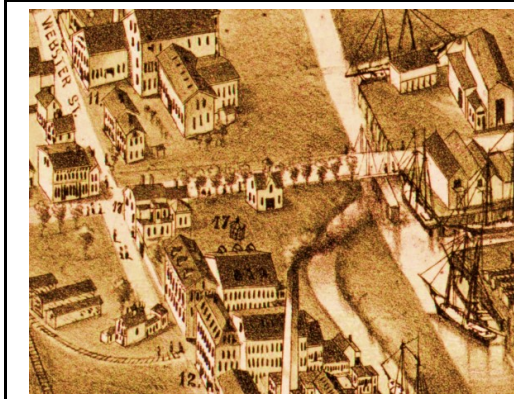


(1887) Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Malden, Middlesex County, Massachusetts.
Sanborn Map Company, Jun. [Map] Retrieved from the Library of Congress,
https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn03774_001/.

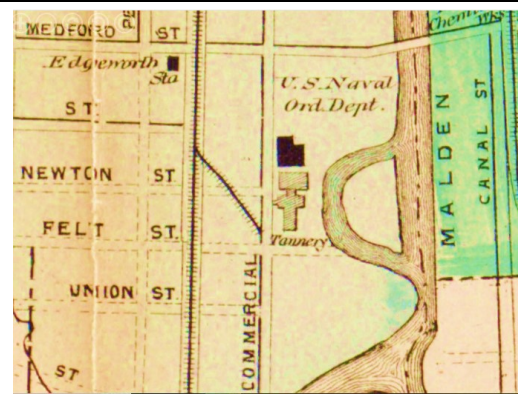
the Depot under the jurisdiction of the Charlestown Navy Yard Commandant.

In a report dated October 12, 1869, the Navy Bureau of Ordnance recommended the construction of an additional depot, to be located in the middle of the US, in an area accessible by railroad and by canal, as “the present one [in Malden] contains quite as much as it is advisable to accumulate in one place; chiefly because, when the whole stock is brought together, accident or design would dissipate it in an instant.” At that time, 3,659 tons of nitre were stored at the Depot. As of June 30, 1882, five structures, all constructed of brick, were on the Depot site: a vault for storing nitre, officers’ quarters, an engine house, a watch house, and a barn.

The Act of 1864, forbade the storage of gunpowder at the Depot, but page 4969 of the Congressional Record—House, 1884, indicates that gunpowder and nitre, valued at around \$2,000,000 [in 2018, \$49,328,471], were then stored at the Depot. Eight years later, the National Newspaper Directory and Gazetteer reported the value of the nitre stored at the Depot as \$4,500,000 [in 2018, \$119,868,184].



Downs, A. E. (Albert E.), and O.H. Bailey & Co.
 "City of Malden." Map. 1881.
 Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center,
<https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:x633fc80h>.



W. A. Greenough & Co, and Geo. H. Walker & Co.
 "Map of the city of Malden." Map. 1890.
 Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center,
<https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:8336h3145>.

On February 3, 1911, the Boston Daily Globe, *Rubber Shoes Go Up in a \$200,000 Blaze: Huge Storehouse Full of Goods at the Converse Plant in [E]dgeworth Destroyed. Main Plant Saved—Water Pressure Low—Nitro Stores of the Government in Danger*, reported:

“ . . . Flying sparks also ignited the roof of one of the buildings of the [Depot] . . . nearly a quarter of a mile distant, but before any serious damage resulted the blaze was extinguished. There was much apprehension in the neighborhood tenements during the rubber factory fire and it was not until long after the flames were under control that vigilance was relaxed at the storage plant of the government’s powerful explosives.”

In 1914, Representative Ernest Roberts introduced House Bill 17019, to donate the Depot property to the City of Malden for park purposes. The bill did not become a law because Franklin D. Roosevelt, Acting Secretary of the Navy, advised the Chairman of the House Committee on Naval Affairs that the Navy might need the property in the future. During the Great War (later referred to as World War I) through 1921, boats taken off of interned ships, sections of airplane hangars, hemp, lumber, and miscellaneous gear were stored on the property. By 1917, the Navy had removed all of the nitre from the Depot, and it did not use the Depot during World War II.

The Navy declared the Depot surplus property on June 7, 1926. On May 16, 1927, the Navy issued the first of several multi-year permits to the Xaverian Brothers of the Immaculate Conception Parish (Xaverian Brothers), Malden-Medford, to use the property as a playground “in common with persons of all religious sects or denominations.” Between approximately 1927 and 1935, the Navy unsuccessfully attempted to sell the Depot property. No bidder offered the prescribed minimum price of \$60,000 in 1934 or 1935. The Navy again declared the Depot surplus property, on October 30, 1947. Based on its appraisal of March 30, 1948, the Navy assigned a “[f]air value of \$40,000 for land and government owned improvements.”

Between May 16, 1927, and August 5, 1948, within the ten-foot-high brick masonry wall that the Navy had erected around three sides of the Depot, the West Side Athletic Association (WSAA) of Malden financed the construction of the West Side Stadium, consisting of a football field, a practice field, stadium stands, a cinder track, and a field house, at a cost of more than \$80,000, not including labor or time. The WSAA also paid to insure the stadium and, generally, for about 40 years beginning in 1934, underwrote the school’s

athletic expenses. At a pre-game ceremony on November 14, 1948, the stadium was dedicated to the late Brother Gilbert, who was the first headmaster of the Immaculate Conception Boys (later Malden Catholic High School, from 1932 to 1936. It was renamed "Brother Gilbert Memorial Stadium."

For the difference between the fair value and the public benefit allowance, one dollar, the War Assets Administration conveyed to the Xaverian Brothers/Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston a Deed of Release and Consent, dated August 5, 1948, with the provision that, if a national emergency were declared in the future, the US would have "full unrestricted possession, control and use of the said premises." Until August 5, 1973, the Xaverian Brothers (later Malden Catholic High School, Inc.): (1) could not change the use of the property, (2) had to file a semi-annual report to the War Assets Administration (later to the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare) about its use of the property, and (3) could not sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of the property.

To consolidate warehouse stocks of its finished goods, the Converse Rubber Shoe Company leased the Depot for several years. In late September, 1947, the 50-member high school football squad was quarantined in the field house at the stadium for two weeks, per order of the chair of the Malden Board of Health, after its left end was diagnosed with infantile paralysis.

In July, 1974, the Malden Redevelopment Authority (MRA) took Brother Gilbert Memorial Stadium by eminent domain, for the Industrial Park Urban Renewal Project. The MRA sold the property to Combined Properties on May 12, 1978. On the site now is the Riverview Business Park, 300 Commercial Street, whose tenants include Mystic Valley Elder Services and Comcast.



Stereoview of the Grounds of the Nitre Depot in 1877. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, catalog no. USN901487.

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MALDEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

36 Salem Street

Malden, MA 02148

EXHIBIT OPENING

*War and Remembrance:
Malden in the Great War*

Monday, October 22

6pm, Malden Library

Upcoming Events

Monday, October 22, 2018

Opening Reception

War and Remembrance: Malden in the Great War

An Exhibition of Posters, Photographs, and Artifacts from the collections of the Malden Public Library and the Malden Historical Society

6:00 pm, Lower Art Gallery, Malden Public Library

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

Professor Christopher Capazzola

*Uncle Sam Wants You: New England, The First World War,
and the Making of Modern America*

7:00 pm, Maccario Room, Malden Public Library