

River & Sound

Old Lyme Historical Society
"The history of Old Lyme – the people of Old Lyme"

Issue Ten 🍀 Summer-Fall 2011

"The Charm of the Place": Book, reception explore Old Lyme in the 1920s

The Old Lyme Grange Hall is a central character in the Historical Society's latest publication, *The Charm of the Place: Old Lyme in the 1920s*. So it was fitting that on a warm and sunny November afternoon, the hall served as the site for the launch of this, our sixth book.

Providing a welcome committee for the approximately 150 attendees were Ellis Jewett's two vintage automobiles parked outside the Grange Hall. Inside, as author Carolyn Wakeman signed copies of the book and pianist Don Joffray played 1920s music, Tom Schellens's exhibit of images from the book sparked memories, conversations, and revelations about Old Lyme.

The Charm of the Place describes Old Lyme's economic expansion during the 1920s, explores the town's role in the national Grange movement, and sketches the background of 17 businesses whose advertisements have adorned a canvas screen in the Old Lyme Grange Hall since 1929.

The genesis of the book was the 2007 discovery and unfurling of this screen (it had remained rolled up and undisturbed at the back of the Grange Hall) by members of the Historical Society. Among them

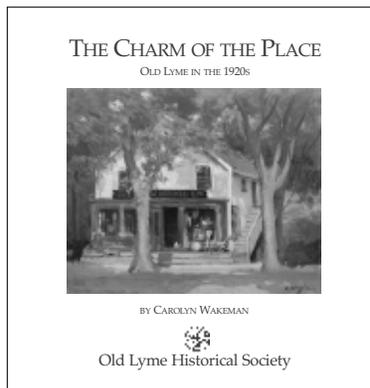


were intrepid researchers Jennifer Hillhouse, James Noyes, and John Stratton. Joined by Professor Wakeman—who grew up here and graduated from Old Lyme High School in 1960—they embarked on an exploration of the social, economic, and architectural landscape of Old Lyme in the 1920s.

The outcome of their effort is an 88-page, four-color book designed by James Meehan and edited by OLHSI trustee emerita Alison Mitchell. Illustrations include reproductions of paintings of Old Lyme along with photos, postcards, and pages from diaries and scrapbooks. An insert to the book features a map of the main street of Old Lyme during the 1920s.

The \$20 book may be purchased at the OLHSI office in the Genealogy Room at the PGN Library, through PayPal on our website, and at the Florence Griswold Museum. Also available for \$20 is a limited-edition reproduction of a historic map of the town of Old Lyme.

The OLHSI is immensely grateful to Essex Financial Services and Essex Savings Bank for underwriting the exhibit, and to Old Lyme grange steward Norman Stitham for making the Grange Hall available and preparing the space for the event.



Photos: Norman Stitham

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Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

Old Lyme Historical Society Inc., P.O. Box 352, Old Lyme, CT 06371

www.oldlymehistorical.org



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Grauly, Marilyn
Green, Dolores

Patrons

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Griswold, Timothy
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Hack, Barbara
Hansen, Martha
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Jewett, Ellis and Mary Ellen
Joffray, Susan and Don
Kenny, Margaret
Kline, Karin and Ken
Kolber, Stanley and Christina
Koski, Raymond and Barbara
Lander, Mark and Ann
Laurence-Hannas, Christy
Lawrence, Gerard and Fleur
Levy, Tedd
Littlefield, Janet
Lockwood, Dann and Kathleen
Ludington, Jane
Lyman, Van and Julie
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Machnik, Ellie
Mather, Grace
Mattoon, Sidney
McLean, Jean
McCook, Patsy and Whelan, Sidney
McNamara, Ramona
McQuade, Judy and James
Meehan, James
Miles, Charles and Lorraine
Miller, George
Mitchell, Alison
Morrison, Susan
Munnely, Jeanne
Nelson, Emily
Nichols, Jeanne
Nobile, Shelly
Nowosadko, Nicole
Noyes, Jim

King, Cheryl
Rafal, Dyanne and John
Spangler, Jane
Todd, Jill and Charles
Wakeman, Carolyn and Tierney, Robert
Wilmerding, Adela
York, Jacqueline and Allen

* deceased

Noyes, C. Lee and Michele
Oakley, Harry
O'Connell, Joan
O'Donnell, Sabine
Pannell, Leland
Pearson, Michaelle and Lampos, James
Perkins, Ned and Barbara
Pullen, Mary
Read, Donald and Jean
Read, Judith and Danenhower, Sloan
Reis-Lishing, Joann
Richardson, Gregg and Rathkey, Julia
Robins, Ruth
Rowan, Lynda and Rasie, Sylvia
Rueb, William and Sandra
Sagan, Elizabeth and Richard
Sargent, Jean
Schellens, Tom
Scott, Helen
Shippee, Patricia and Nathan
Sinay, Majbritt and Cooper, Robert
Sisk, Mrs. Robert (Jean)
Sjursen, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold
Smith, Angela
Snow, Emily
Sopneski, Edward
Speirs, Donna
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Stitham, Norman and Marilyn
Strohla, Nancy
Stutts, Susanne
Sturges, Ralph and Janet
Swope, Harold
Traskos, Barbara
Turner, Molly
Tyler, Humphrey and Susan
Vivieros, Michael
Vowles, Dee
White, Joanna
Whitley, Elizabeth
Wilson, Renee
Winters, Carol
Winters, Karen
Wodell, Mr. and Mrs. W. P.
Wolcott, Ed and Lyn
Woods, Wendy
Zinsser, Caroline and William

Are you a customer of Essex Savings Bank?

If so, mark your ballot ... for the OLHSI!

Each year, through its Community Investment Program, Essex Savings Bank donates 10 percent of its after-tax net income to local nonprofit and community development groups.

Every bank customer is allowed to complete one ballot form and to vote for up to three groups. These votes determine the amounts allocated by Essex Savings Bank.

Balloting: **February 1-March 15.**

Please cast your vote for us!

OLHSI forms new white-glove group



In a new effort, a group of OLHSI volunteers affectionately known as “the Aggies” (Archive Guys and Gals) have been meeting weekly to don white gloves—and to decipher, sort, categorize, and protect a variety of items that have been donated to us. These include letters, rosters, programs, clippings, legal documents, and maps. From left: Mark Lander, Ellis Jewett, Alison Mitchell, Jim Noyes, Janet Littlefield, Travie Mitchell, and Carol Winters. More recently Roger Breunig, Susan Morrison, and Carolyn Wakeman have joined the archive group.

Photo: James Meehan

Have you seen? Missing: Bronze plaque

During the construction of the first Baldwin Bridge (1947-48), a Native American steelworker, Edward Kezer, fell to his death, either from the bridge or from a crane. His sacrifice was noted by a bronze plaque mounted beside the sidewalk on the Old Saybrook side of the bridge. The plaque, although visible from the highway, was probably readable only by pedestrians on the bridge. The sidewalk was narrow and not separated from the highway by any sort of barrier, so the sidewalk was probably used very little.

When the present bridge was under construction, Ian Hubbard, in his book *Crossings* (published before the bridge opened), stated that the plaque would be transferred to the new bridge. This idea was noted on one of the informational signs at the scenic overlook: “the plaque was transferred...” However, the plaque was never placed on the present bridge.

A representative of the Connecticut Department of Transportation told me that they are aware of the intention to move the plaque, aware of Mr. Hubbard's book, and aware of the faulty information on the sign. They have no idea of what became of the plaque, though, and they have promised to continue to look into it.

In light of Mr Kezer's sacrifice, in light of the history represented by the plaque, and in light of the contributions made by Native Americans, this plaque deserves to be re-installed—or replaced, if necessary.

—Mark Lander

Lobster bake—rain or shine!



Although Sunday, August 14 dawned rainy and cool, spirits were high and appetites hefty as a crowd of 80 OLHSI members of all ages ventured to Griswold Point to the Griswold home front porch for lobster, clam chowder, and corn on the cob. The lobster bake was the first in a series of family-friendly gatherings that we'll be scheduling regularly.

Photo: Michaëlle Pearson

The mission of the Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc., is to collect, preserve, and interpret the rich history of Old Lyme and its environs for the benefit of its residents and visitors.

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NEWSLETTER

Editor: Patsy McCook *Designer:* James Meehan

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Benefits of OLHSI membership

- A subscription to this semiannual newsletter
- Advance notice of forthcoming events
- Invitations to member-only events
- Priority status to obtain genealogical research material at the PGN Library
- A 10% discount on our books, and the opportunity to purchase them in advance
- Discounted rates for certain events
- Opportunities to learn about the history of Old Lyme
- Training in conducting historical research
- Training in conducting oral history interviews, and the chance to become part of our Oral History project
- The realization that your tax-deductible contribution is supporting a vital cultural resource.

Join us in bringing Old Lyme's past to the present!

Become an OLHSI member or renew your membership NOW.

OLHSI memberships run on a calendar year.

Dues are fully tax-deductible.

New member Renewing member

Are you interested in volunteering with the OLHSI? If so, what areas are of interest to you?

Please make your check payable to the Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

You may also use PayPal, on our website.

Thanks for your generosity!

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Student \$10 Individual \$20 Family \$35 Patron \$100
 Business/Corporate \$100 Benefactor \$250 Lifetime \$500

My check for \$ _____ is enclosed.

The OLHSI is a non-profit corporation incorporated in the State of Connecticut.
It is a registered charity with the state Department of Consumer Protection and is recognized by the IRS for 501(c)3 status.

Old Lyme profile

Mary Jean Vasiloff

With the exception of her teenage years, which she spent in Illinois, 81-year-old Mary Jean Vasiloff has always lived in her family's 18th-century farmhouse off Whippoorwill Road. McCulloch Farm, of which Mary Jean is co-owner with her son Chris, is Connecticut's oldest and largest private Morgan horse breeder, producing around 350 registered Morgans since 1945. The farm is now home to 23 of these beauties: 20 adults, plus 3 foals born last spring.

The property was established in 1930 by Mary Jean's parents, Warren and Ruth McCulloch, as a working farm where they and their four children—Mary Jean was the youngest—raised beef and dairy cows, sheep and goats, pigs and chickens, and ducks, geese, and turkeys. Of the farm's 600 acres, 100 were taken by eminent domain in the 1940s with the construction of the Blue Star Highway (now I-95), 450 are held under a Nature Conservancy easement for land protection, and 15 are used for pasture.

At the age of 9, Mary Jean made a decision that led to her designation as “the black sheep of the family.” In contrast to her three siblings—David, George, and Taffy—she knew that farming was in her future, and she announced to her parents' amusement that she wanted to be a horse breeder. She quickly made good on her decision, breeding her first horse a year later.

In the 1950s and 60s, Mary Jean and her husband, now deceased, along with their two sons, participated in major Morgan shows and club trail rides throughout New England, and Mary Jean proceeded to devote her life to breeding, selling, and leasing these horses. Earlier this year she was inducted into the American Morgan Horse Association's Breeders' Hall of Fame.

The first, and most versatile, American breed, Morgans are sturdy and highly intelligent. Mary Jean's respect and love for these animals is palpable. “Even from birth they do a lot of everything.” Bred to be useful—they were ridden by every general in the Civil War—Morgans are “easy keepers.” Their tough feet preclude the need for horseshoes, and their equipment, food, and treatment are less

expensive than those provided to other breeds. Mary Jean is selective about what she breeds, placing a high priority on bone structure and psychological disposition.

In addition to serving as a place for breeding, McCulloch Farm has fulfilled a teaching role for visitors from Connecticut and beyond. For 50 years the farm was the site of an annual “versatility event,” designed to educate people who enjoy, but do not know a lot about, horses. Every September, purchasers of Morgans from Whippoorwill Farm would return to demonstrate to the audience the details of training and caring for a horse, as well as this breed's many traits and accomplishments.



Photo: Karen Pennar

McCulloch Farm's other major events—the “Foals and Flowers” and “Foals and Foliage” open barn programs, held annually over Memorial Day and Columbus Day weekends, respectively—are as well attended as ever. Guided by “barn kids” (volunteers young and old), visitors get to meet the horses, walk around the farm, and ride on a horse-drawn carriage. This year's Memorial Day event attracted a crowd of 2,000. The farm, which also serves as a resource for the town of Old Lyme, is particularly popular as a venue for family reunions.

Mary Jean's instinct as a teacher has another outlet. Despite a self-diagnosed case of dyslexia, she has written books about horses.

Alone With My Horse (1978), a guide to buying, rearing, and interacting with horses, was followed by the “Hum N Bill” series for children.

Although the horse business has seen many changes—horse-shoes, grain, hay, stables, and veterinary bills are hugely expensive, and in 2011 few families have a backyard—the farm remains very much what it was decades ago. And in spite of a stroke, arthritis, back problems, knee replacements, and bouts with Lyme disease, Mary Jean hasn't changed much, either. She is still active, whether it's planting, harvesting, haying, or cleaning out stalls. While acknowledging that she is slowly “winding down” her breeding program, she has no plans to leave the place not only of her birth but also of the birth of those many Morgans.

—Patsy McCook

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Now & Then...



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