

# River & Sound

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

Issue Twelve ❧ Winter 2013

## OLHSI archives finds a new home

On a bright morning last December, a strange caravan processed down Meetinghouse Lane, past the site of the first Meetinghouse (built in the 1660s) and past the crest of Johnnycake Hill where generations of youngsters have enjoyed winter sledding. It turned the corner at what is now known as 1 Lyme Street, where Judge Charles McCurdy and his daughter, Evelyn, lived. The house was across the street from the First Congregational Church before it was destroyed by fire in 1907—and rebuilt in 1910, in a fifth incarnation.

This procession consisted not of horse-drawn wagons bearing household supplies, but rather of SUVs, pickup trucks, and compact cars. The vehicles carried boxes of maps, photographs, letters, invoices, and itemized lists of household items (for example, myrrh needed by the McCurdy family).

Also included were newspaper articles, law briefs, plot plans, exhibit materials from OLHSI events, and other ephemera donated to the Society. Most of these already accessioned materials were encased in gray archival boxes and acid-free plastic sleeves.

Leading the caravan was Ellis Jewett, member of an old local family that worked in the funeral trade. Also serving in this energetic crew were members of the archive committee—Roger Breunig, Mark Lander, Janet Littlefield, Alison Mitchell, Carolyn Wakeman, Susan Morrison, and Carol Winters—and OLHSI



*Moving crew: From left, Ellis Jewett, Carol Winters, Roger Breunig, Carolyn Wakeman, Janet Littlefield, Alison Mitchell. Top: Mark Lander.*

Photo: Michaëlle Pearson

board member Michaëlle Pearson. The team managed to shoehorn more than 2,000 items into space at the Old Lyme Town Hall that has been generously made available by the town.

The journey was based on the need to move these materials from the basement of a board member's house to a more secure location. In discussions between OLHSI co-chairs Dyanne Rafal and Timothy Griswold and Old Lyme First Selectwoman Bonnie Reemsnyder, an agreement was reached to store the materials downstairs. Access is being worked out, with the expectation that the archive committee will soon be able to continue its work using a downstairs conference room.

The Old Lyme Historical Society is most grateful to First Selectwoman Reemsnyder and her staff for appreciating the significance of our archive in preserving the history of Old Lyme. The archive committee looks forward to welcoming new donations and additional volunteers to assist in this effort. In the short term, the Society has purchased PastPerfect, a museum and historical society software program, and has begun the process of transcribing data with the eventual goal of making our collection available on the internet. So the journey that began in 1645 for our town will continue in cyberspace for the next millennia.

—Alison Mitchell



Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

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[www.oldlymehistorical.org](http://www.oldlymehistorical.org)

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*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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*OLHSI officers, from left: Martha Hansen,  
Dyanne Rafal, Timothy Griswold, Carol Winters.*

Photo: James Meehan

## *From the Co-chairs*

December 2012 was an eventful month for the Society. In a public event at the Lyme Art Association, we launched our 2013 Now & Then Community Calendar, beautifully designed by James Meehan and featuring photos of 12 local buildings or locations as they exist today and as they existed decades ago. Led by Alison Mitchell, the Society identified sponsoring property owners who each purchased a month, described the building, and listed its events throughout the year. (The Center School PTO purchased a month featuring the 1934 Center School building and its 1913 predecessor; current Center School students wrote the description.) The demand for months was so strong that we have a waiting list for next year's sponsors. A few copies are available at a discounted price, so if you'd like to have your own part of Old Lyme history, please go to the "Merchandise" section of the Society's website.

Also in December we moved the Society's archive from a private house to a room in the lower level at Town Hall. Beyond offering greater security and climate control, this location will enable our volunteers to work on the archive in a nearby meeting room. To Ellis Jewett goes our heartfelt gratitude for providing metal shelving for the archives and coordinating the move. On a related note, we've purchased PastPerfect software to better catalog our archived materials and manage our membership database. Martha Hansen played a primary role in evaluating and obtaining this software.

The coming months will see no shortage of activity. On March 17 we will again host "Vintage!" to which attendees are encouraged to bring their own heirlooms for evaluation by professional appraisers. And this spring Old Lyme town historian John "Ned" Pfeiffer will give his annual historical lecture at the Lymes' Senior Center. Space is limited, so please check our website for details.

As OLHSI memberships expire in January, we ask you to renew your membership and encourage friends and family to join, now. Your support, through dues and volunteering—see page 4 of this issue for opportunities—is crucial to our mission of identifying and documenting Old Lyme's history. We look forward to seeing you at one of our events.

*Dyanne Rafal  
Timothy Griswold*

*Chairs, Board of Trustees  
Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.*

## SAVE THE DATE Vintage! Antiques Appraisal



*Lyme-Old Lyme High School's History Club member Ian James looks on as Carol Brevard of Brevard Appraisal and Estate Services examines an antique lamp at last year's Vintage!*

Photo: Catherine Christiano

This year's antiques appraisal—popularly known as “Vintage!”—will be held from 1:00 to 5:00 PM on **Sunday, March 17** at the Old Lyme Town Hall. Each verbal appraisal costs \$5 per item; there is a three-item limit per person. Once again, all proceeds of the event will benefit the OLHSI scholarship fund.

Five appraisers will be available: Steve Lutar, of Guilford Coin Exchange; Curt Wendler, an expert on antique and rare books; Nancy Hoffman, a specialist in textiles, kitchen items, farm items, and primitive country furniture; Carol Brevard, who appraises art work, pottery, and ceramics; and Isaiah Griffith, an expert in toys, hunting/fishing/military items, precious metal items, jewelry, flat and hollow ware, and decorative items.



## Copies of 2013 Now & Then Community Calendar still available

The Society's inaugural (2013) Now & Then Old Lyme Community Calendar features archival photos of local buildings and landscapes juxtaposed with contemporary photos of the same scene. Each month was sponsored by one of 12 organizations: the Center School PTO, Coffee's Country Market, the Cooley Gallery, the Florence Griswold Museum, the Lyme Art Association, the Lymes' Youth Service Bureau, the Nearly New Shop, the Old Lyme Marketplace, the Old Lyme-Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library, the Old Lyme Town Hall, the Sound View Beach Association, and the Village Shops.

To purchase a copy at a discounted price (\$10 plus shipping), please contact us at [www.oldlymehistorical.org](http://www.oldlymehistorical.org). Copies are also sold in the OLHSI office in the Genealogy Room at the library.

## Missing plaque found

In early 1948 during construction of the original Baldwin Bridge, a native American steelworker named Edward Kezer fell to his death from the bridge. A fellow worker also fell, but he landed in the water and survived.

Mr. Kezer's sacrifice—his death was the only fatality—was recognized by a bronze plaque placed alongside the pedestrian walkway on the Old Saybrook side. When the present bridge was being built in the early 1990s, it was announced that the plaque would be transferred to the new bridge.

Two years ago I went looking for the plaque but could not find it on the bridge near the dedication plaques for the two bridges, nor at the scenic overlook in Old Lyme. On contacting the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT),

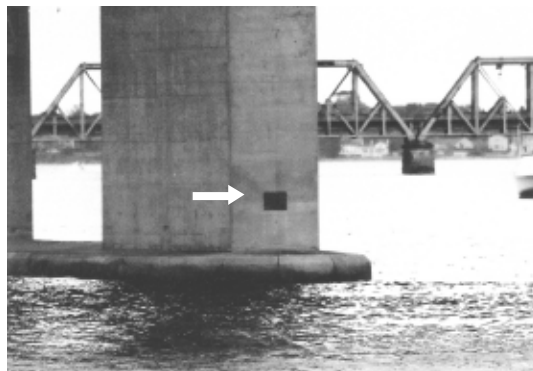


Photo: Jennifer Hillhouse

I was told that they were aware of the intention to display the plaque.

After a year or so, a ConnDOT representative informed me that a bridge survey team had found the plaque, not in storage but on one of the bridge supports—six to eight feet above high water, many yards from shore, and visible only to boaters. Still, most important is that the plaque exists and can be seen by some. It reminds us of Mr. Kezer's sacrifice, of the heritage of Native American steelworkers who have contributed much to bridge and building construction, and of the fact that history is still all around us.

—Mark Lander



# Volunteer!

Along with other community service organizations, the Old Lyme Historical Society has joined the **Old Lyme-Lyme Volunteer Connection**. This online resource for potential volunteers was developed by Noah Christiano, a high school junior living in Old Lyme and the son of OLHSI board member Catherine Christiano.

At present we need help in two areas:

(1) **Staffing our office** in the Genealogy Room at the Old Lyme-Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library. The office is open Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 11 AM to 1 PM.

(2) **Responding to inquiries** that we receive through our email account. Many of these questions are concerned with genealogy or the location of an ancestor's burial site. We welcome volunteers who are interested in local cemeteries and would like to conduct research in the Genealogy Room.

For complete descriptions of local volunteer opportunities, visit the Old Lyme-Lyme Volunteer Connection at

[volunteer.truist.com/ollvolunteer](http://volunteer.truist.com/ollvolunteer)

## (Re-)Join us in 2013 as we bring Old Lyme's past to the present

### Benefits of OLHSI membership

- A subscription to our newsletter, *River & Sound*
- Your own copy of Lyme Street walking tour
- Advance notice of and discounted rates for selected events
- A 10% discount on our books, and the opportunity to buy them in advance
- Priority status to obtain genealogical research material at the PGN Library
- Training in historical research techniques, and opportunities to be involved with our oral history project
- The realization that your tax deductible contribution is supporting a vital cultural resource.

## 2013 Membership

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

\_\_\_ Additional donation

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.

Join or renew your membership online at [www.oldlymehistorical.org](http://www.oldlymehistorical.org)

## Charles Griswold Bartlett: Mapping Old Lyme's waterways

Charles Griswold Bartlett was a self-styled pilot of Old Lyme's waterways. He was of the tenth generation of Bartletts in the U.S.; his ancestor Robert arrived from England in 1623 aboard the *Ann*. One of his great-grandfathers was Governor Roger Griswold, so we younger Griswolds called him "Cousin Charlie." His father, Charles Bartlett Sr., was principal of the Black Hall School.

Cousin Charlie graduated from Yale in 1899 and lived in New Haven and Old Lyme with his wife, Marion. His sister, Henrietta, a Shakespeare scholar and bibliographer, lived next door. The three were childless but took great interest in all of us young cousins. Cousin Henrietta had us to formal tea and after tea read us chapters from *The Hobbit*, newly published in 1937. Cousin Charlie taught us how to sail on his small sailboat moored just south of "Cape Cod" (at Smith's Neck, not Massachusetts).

As he had navigated the local waters for over 60 years, the U.S. Department of Commerce asked him to record the waterway names, some passed down for generations. He used a map done by Yale's Cartographic Laboratory and also the 1947 U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Chart #215. His map, using the names of the 1890s, was published in 1951.

The three Bartletts, much loved by all of us, died in the 1960s and are buried in the Griswold Cemetery on the Black Hall River.

Cousin Charlie's map includes three rivers that feed into the Connecticut River. The **Black Hall River's** source is Black Hall Pond, near Rogers Lake, named for the area first occupied by the Griswold family near the mouth of the Connecticut River. The name "Black Hall" may be derived from an English estate or hamlet, or possibly from "Black's Hole," a sod hut where a black servant remained with the farm tools while the white settlers fled nightly back to the safety of Saybrook.

The **Duck River** rises by Jumping Rocks near Library Lane. Supposedly Native Americans leaped off these rocks to prove their courage. The **Lieutenant River** is thought to be named for Lt. Reinhold Marvin, who was imprisoned by the Brits in New Haven but allowed to visit his lady love in Old Lyme. He had to swim the river! A fourth river, the Back River, on the east side of Great Island, is unique. It lacks a source, but flows north or south with the tide.

Other major features of the map include Great Island, also called Poverty Island, and in a 1917 survey, Peckham Island. Outer Poverty island is no more. Griswold Point, also called Poverty Point and Black Hall Point, is named for Matthew Griswold, who was granted property in return for services to Governor Fenwick of the Saybrook Colony.

Smith Neck, site of the Black Hall School, has a large state landing at the south end and a small town landing near the first bend in the road. Ben Marvin Creek leads to the Lieutenant River via the Dugway, or Dug-Away, which was created after the railroad had blocked the creek and a passage had to be excavated. Watch Rock is so named because the peaceful local Indians could watch there for potential attacks.

Greenfield Point, now called Old Lyme Estates, was named for a Mr. Greenfield, who lived atop Meetinghouse Hill. One of the Black Hall School boys kept a canoe at Canoe House Point. "Cape Cod," where cousin Charlie moored his boat, was shaped similarly to Cape Cod, Mass. "Madagascar" was likewise named for its resemblance to the island off the east coast of Africa.



*A scene near Swaney's Landing, Black Hall River, circa 1909.*  
Photo: Jennifer Hillhouse collection.

Many early Old Lyme men were mariners who sailed the world's oceans. Locally renowned seamen included the four Chadwick brothers, who were all captains. And as an agricultural community, Old Lyme saw its marshes allocated to farmers who used the salt hay for bedding and mulch. The water gate at The Dyke helped control the tidal flow into the Griswold Point marshes. Jake's Landing was named for local hunter and trapper Jake Slate; Joe's Creek after Joe Robins; and Judge's Creek after Judge Matthew Griswold. The origin of Rude's Island is unknown. It is no longer there,

nor is Pug Harbor, which was at the west end of Judge's Creek.

These serene backwaters are perfect for kayakers. Visible are fiddler crabs, terrapin, kingfishers on the hunt, even carved initials dating to 1864 on the rocky ledges on the west side of Great Island. Cactus grows among the rocks, and there is a one-foot-diameter well, on Great Island's Gibraltar Hummock. A hermit named Johnny Dingle lived on Great Island until September 1938.

Comparing maps from different times shows how the names, waterways, and coastlines have evolved. The hurricanes of 1815 and 1938 shaped and reshaped the coastline and waterways. Last year's Superstorm Sandy caused huge changes in Old Lyme's shoreline. Tons of sand were washed away in some areas and piled up in others. Judge's Creek was silted up years ago, and Griswold Point is now an island, except at low tide.

All these formations are dynamic: not only the sites themselves, but also the names, which come and go with the years. Who were John Smith, Peckham, Greenfield, Rude, and Robins? Perhaps their stories may be found in the Genealogy Room at the Old Lyme-PGN Library. Cousin Charlie's map is there, alongside numerous other maps of local interest. For more information regarding the history of this area, see the OLHSI's publications, including *Poverty Island* and *The Hurricane of 1938*.

—Jennifer G. Hillhouse

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*Boxwood Manor Inn, 2013*

Photo: James Meehan

*Now & Then...*



*Boxwood Manor Inn, circa 1928*

Photo courtesy of Old Lyme Historical Society