

River and Sound

Issue 6 Summer 2009

Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.
"The history of Old Lyme—the people of Old Lyme"



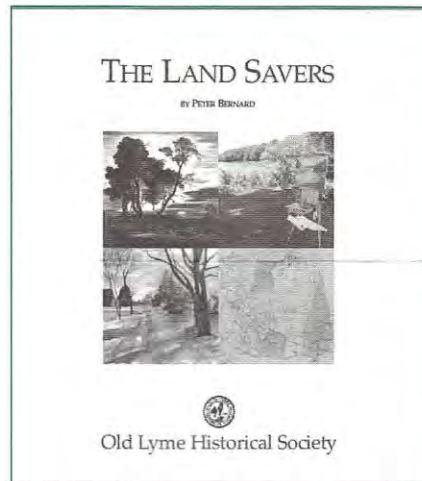
Land preservation book to be unveiled at Florence Griswold Museum reception

The Old Lyme Historical Society's latest publication, *The Land Savers*, will be launched on Friday, September 18, at a reception hosted by the Florence Griswold Museum. The event, chaired by OLHSI trustee Dyanne Rafal, is scheduled for 5 p.m. in the museum's Marshfield House.

The Land Savers is the result of a cooperative venture by the OLHSI with the museum and the Old Lyme and Lyme Conservation Trusts. An anecdotal, illustrated overview of local land preservation, the book describes the role that American Impressionist artists played in identifying and applying to canvas the Lyme and Old Lyme vistas that were subsequently preserved.

The book, the fourth in the Society's series of monographs and the first four-color publication, was written by Peter Bernard. Other contributors are George James, who researched and wrote about local conservation efforts; Burnham Carter, Jr., editor; and James Meehan, designer.

The 70-page book contains ten reproductions of paintings by Henry Ward Ranger (who spawned American Impressionism) and well-known Impressionist painters Childe Hassam, Edward Rook, Willard Metcalf, Charles Ebert, George Thomson, Edward Simmons, Frank



Vincent DuMond, William Robinson, and Walter Griffin. Also included are Thomas Nason prints, conservation maps, contemporary artwork, and photographs.

To publicize the areas now designated as open space, representatives of the Old Lyme Conservation Trust will be on hand at the reception to organize hikes along some of these trails.

The Society is immensely grateful to David and Mary Dangremond, who this year established a revolving endowment, the

Dangremond Publication Fund, to support our publishing efforts. This book is the first fruit of their generosity.

Admission to the reception is \$15. Attendees will receive a \$10 coupon toward purchase of *The Land Savers*, whose sale price is \$30. ☀

Inside this issue

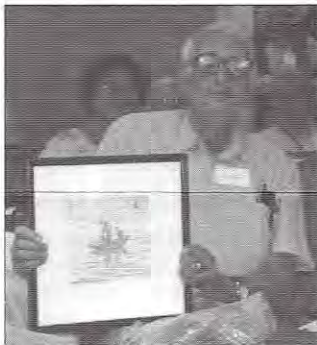
OLHSI annual meeting	2
New scholarship program	2
Name that tool!	3
Slavery in the Lymes	3
Did you know?	4
Yesterday's treasures	5

Society celebrates fourth anniversary, welcomes new trustees

General members and friends joined the OLHSI board at the PGN Library on June 15 for the Society's annual meeting. In addition to reviewing the past year's accomplishments and announcing planned events, the OLHSI elected ten new trustees: **Barbara Bair, Roger Breunig, Delores Green, Susan Griggs, Julia Griswold, Martha Hansen, Mark Lander, Dyanne Rafal, Bill Stewart, and Karen Winters.**

In addition, we bid a sad goodbye to three trustees: **David Bikerman**, who set up and filed our initial incorporation papers and our application for nonprofit status; **Toodie Foote**, our first secretary, whose cheerful demeanor

will be sorely missed; and **Lee Howard**, who, while pursuing a long-postponed writing project, has promised to provide her wise counsel as needed.



Jim Noyes receiving the OLHSI Chairman's Award.

Photo: Carol Winters



OLHSI members ride along the parade route in a horse-driven carriage provided by Foxglove Farm. Departing trustee David Bikerman conceived of the float.

Photo: Michellee Speirs

Also at the meeting, this year's Chairman's Award was presented to Jim Noyes. The award honors an individual or an organization that has made a significant contribution to the preservation of the history of Old Lyme. Chair Alison Mitchell noted, "Jim has demonstrated dedication to Old Lyme: its past, its present, and its future. His wealth of knowledge about people, places, and events is just short of amazing, and we are fortunate to have him as an unerring resource. He also has a charm to knock your socks off." Jim received a framed, signed print of one of Catherine Christiano's illustrations for the Society's first monograph, *Poverty Island* (2006). ☀

New OLHSI program promotes the study of history

One of our most exciting ventures this year is the establishment of the Old Lyme Historical Society Scholarship, given annually to a local high school senior who plans to major in history in college. Students living in Old Lyme, including those who attend schools elsewhere, are eligible to apply. The scholarship committee assesses the applicants' written summary of their history-related goals, their grades, and their financial needs.

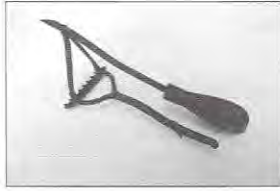
This year's scholarship was awarded to Laurel Camean, who will attend Syracuse University. Her professional goal is to become a curator or museum director and, possibly, a town historian.

OLHSI trustee Carol Winters conceived of and heads the project. If you would like to make a special donation to support the fund, or if you know a student who might be interested in applying, please call Carol, at 434-5132, or e-mail her, at MEMEW6@aol.com. ☀



UPDATES

Name that tool!



Earlier this year the Society installed a showcase outside its office in the PGN Library and produced our first display: artifacts collected from Poverty Island. We are now putting the finishing touches on a second exhibit—a collection of tools that trustee Jim Noyes has amassed over many years.

One of the artifacts, depicted here, has us absolutely stumped. Do you know what it might have been used for? If you have an answer and you can provide documentation, please call the OLHSI office, at 860-434-0684. The prize: a copy of our new monograph, *The Land Savers*. ☀

Historian John Pfeiffer brings to light slavery in our region's past

As part of a series of talks on the history of Old Lyme and its environs, the OLHSI welcomed a sold-out crowd to the Lymes' Senior Center on May 29 for a lecture and slide presentation, "Slavery in southeastern Connecticut: a view from Lyme," by Old Lyme's historian, John Pfeiffer. Attendees enjoyed a dinner catered by Coffee's Country Market before the presentation.

Drawing on 17th- and 18th-century primary sources—local land, probate, census, and cemetery records—Dr. Pfeiffer made the following points:

- Until recently, most history books characterized the North as representing the abolitionist, anti-slavery point of view, while popular literature and films typically whitewashed or sanitized the Northern component of slavery.
- Puritan social theory regarding humankind supported the idea of each race having its own station in life: the "lesser" races were placed on Earth specifically for the use of the "upper" race. Slavery was therefore a legitimate way of life for white Christians. It was necessary and in accordance with the way God had arranged the world.
- Northern slavery began shortly after the founding of New England's Puritan settlement, focusing first on the Native American population and then realigning itself toward trade in and importation of African slaves.
- In the 17th and early 18th centuries, most families in Lyme were farmers who needed to augment their supply of farm labor. Owning slaves was a solution to this problem.
- As farm slaves, Africans were preferable to Native Americans, who were familiar with the area and therefore more likely to escape.
- Southeastern Connecticut's best-known slave, Venture Smith, worked enough additional hours to earn the money to buy his freedom. He also bought his wife and children out of slavery.
- Although the policy of slavery in southeastern New England began to diminish around the time of the Revolutionary War, it was not abandoned until the early 19th century, and only in part for humanitarian or ethical reasons. A more likely explanation is that in a region with decreasing agricultural profits, slavery was no longer cost-effective.
- The last documentation he was able to unearth concerning a slave in Lyme was dated 1816. ☀



Ken Coffee and John Pfeiffer

Photo: Bob Dunn

Did you know...?

(a recurring feature about an Old Lyme resident, historical building, or artifact)

Stanley Davis

As remembered by Andrew Pfeiffer in 2008

In the summer of 1933, at age 16, I worked for Stanley Davis, the nationally known furniture maker. He had a handsome old two-story brick house and a showroom and gift shop on Old Lyme's Main Street next to the Art Association. His workshop was on Mill Lane.

I boarded with Rook McCulloch, a family friend, on Whippoorwill Road (today the Morgan horse farm). Each morning I rode my bike down the then-dirt road to the Boston Post Road. Some days I biked towards the center of town, past the grand old houses on Main Street, to the Davis Gift Shop and Gallery, where I helped Mrs. Davis clean and dust. Other mornings I bicycled to the workshop, where I was an apprentice.

Stanley Davis's workshop was located in a mill on the Mill River, across the water from where the Steube fish ladder is today. It was there that Mr. Davis fashioned furniture reproductions of the finest quality in solid walnut and Honduran mahogany. He made tables, chairs, highboys, mirrors, and chest-on-chests in various old styles such as Queen Anne, Chippendale, and Colonial.

A water-powered tub wheel at the dam ran a countershaft in the workshop by means of a pulley and belt arrangement. The countershaft, which ran the length of the workshop, was supplied with belts to which Stanley's woodworking tools were coupled as needed—band saws, lathes, and drills. As an apprentice, I was taught the use of these tools and many others. Stanley Davis was a great craftsman and artist.

In 1933 he was probably in his late 50s or early 60s. From the time he was a boy of 12, it had been necessary for him to work long, hard hours, and he had little use for the present young folks. He was afflicted with deafness from an early age, and this disability colored his outlook for his

entire life.

He was not kindly to young people; he was often impatient, cranky, and temperamental. He advised me to find some other kind of work—in his opinion, I would never be any good with my hands. However, he was a good teacher, and working with him that summer I learned the basics of woodworking tools.

Next to the Davis workshop was a farm, Finnegan's. While biking past the farm, I often saw the Finnegans' little girl, Jessie, playing in front of their house. Many years later, when she married, she became Jessie Smith. She served as Old Lyme's town clerk for many years.

Among the Davis employees were Joe Dorr (who lived on Mile Creek Road next to Ben Franklin Road) and Walter Dean (who lived on Sill Lane). Walter occasionally delivered furniture to customers in a truck, and sometimes he took me along to help him unload. Often we made deliveries throughout New England, as well as to New York and New Jersey—a long day's trip in those days.

In 1946 or 1947 Stanley Davis's house, showroom, and gift shop were torn down to make room for construction of the Connecticut Turnpike, now Interstate 95. He then moved to Essex.

Two years ago I visited the site of the 1933 workshop. The current owners of the property, Sandra and James Tripp (a sculptor), came out to speak to me. Portions of the workshop still exist, and they have been converted to a beautiful, delightful house. The present dam is new, as the old one was destroyed in the 1970s during a flood. A few pieces of the old metal mechanisms were recovered, and they now serve as garden sculptures. ☼

During World War II Andrew Pfeiffer worked on the Manhattan Project in the research department of the Westinghouse Corporation in Bloomfield, New Jersey. After the war Westinghouse workers went on strike, and the Pfeiffer family—by then comprising Andrew, his wife, Marianne, and a young daughter—relocated to Old Lyme, where they raised three children. Andrew was a consultant in medical research instruments; in a shop attached to his home, he designed and built instruments for medical researchers in universities and hospitals in the United States and abroad. Since retiring, he has dedicated himself to his longtime hobby, amateur radio. While Marianne gardens, he designs, improves, and builds antennas.

Museum-like McCurdy Road house held “yesterday’s treasures”

The house at 1 McCurdy Road, now the property of Christ the King Church, was home to five generations of the Lord family, including Trudy (Mrs. Wells) Barney. One of her descendants by marriage has generously donated to the OLHSI some wonderful archival material about the family. Meanwhile, we have obtained a copy of a 1970 issue of *Antiques* magazine with an article describing, in tantalizing detail, the house’s features and furnishings (William T. Donoho, “Living with antiques in Old Lyme, Connecticut,” *Antiques*, December 1970, pp. 922-926). Some excerpts:

One of the most gracious and well-appointed of the New England houses in which George Washington spent a night is “the McCurdy house,” at 1 Lyme Street. Across from it, facing the Town Green on the south end of Lyme Street, is a prefabricated box-like house built in the early 19th century by the Marvin brothers for their elderly parents, who lived in Old Lyme. The brothers, owners of a lumber mill in Albany, New York, cut a load of boards and six-by-six timber and shipped the pieces down the Hudson, along Long Island Sound to the mouth of the Connecticut River.

The house was assembled on the site of the family homestead. A few years later, one of the daughters of the McCurdy family, Sarah Anne, moved there with her new husband, Stephen Lord. Subsequent owners added wings and a porch, which created a graceful Greek revival façade, as well as rooms in the back. The house had the aura of a museum. In the tradition of successfully melding all periods, Mrs. Barney kept yesterday’s treasures ready for the needs of the future. These included:

- An early copy of a French wallpaper in a rusticated-stone pattern
- Wallpaper printed in Alsace-Lorraine from the blocks of an American paper. The wallpaper contained a scene from the battle between the *Constitution* and the *Guerrière* that alternated with a portrait of Commodore Isaac Hull, the *Constitution*’s victorious commander during the War of 1812. (Commodore Hull was related by marriage to one of Mrs. Barney’s ancestors.) Finding this wallpaper provided comfort to the family after the 1938 hurricane. During the storm a tree near the house had uprooted, causing the chimney to collapse through the roof and ceiling.
- A portrait of the Continental Army’s General David Forman, another ancestor of Mrs. Barney
- A portrait of another ancestor, a ship owner, with vessels and a warehouse in the background
- A traditional set of three Chinoiserie tole trays
- A Federal mahogany sideboard
- A pair of Connecticut transitional chairs with Spanish feet
- Graduated Staffordshire pitchers
- An American Empire breakfront bookcase with Gothic astragals and a wide overhanging cornice
- A Bilbao looking glass
- An elaborate early Victorian mirror
- An Empire mantel of black and yellow gilded marble
- A Connecticut cherry serpentine chest with quarter columns and ogee-bracket feet
- A ball-and-claw-foot drop-leaf table holding a pair of Chinese coffers
- A lamp shade, showing New York’s Castle Garden, made from a contemporary bandbox
- A Charles I needlework box
- Hepplewhite chairs
- An elaborate early Victorian mirror
- A large fireplace equipped with a crane and a brass kettle
- Candlesticks, andirons, and fireplace equipment made of bell metal
- A collection of burnished copper
- The office where a son-in-law practiced medicine during the Civil War. At one point there was, literally, a skeleton in the closet, which Mrs. Barney’s grandfather had studied in medical school. The closet also contained a fitted case of formidable-looking surgical instruments.
- A cabinet containing a spectacular collection of mounted birds from South America, presented by one of the doctor’s patients, in lieu of cash
- An American four-poster bed with pineapple carving
- A large mahogany bow-front chest of uncertain (Philadelphia or New York) origin
- The Currier & Ives *American Farm Scene* of 1858 in its original gilded frame
- A child’s portrait (by an itinerant 19th-century painter), known in the family as “Uncle Charlie as John the Baptist.” ☼

Postscript: With the sale of the property to the church, these treasures have been distributed to Mrs. Barney’s grandchildren, who are scattered around the world.

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

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
OLD LYME, CT
PERMIT #11

For potential donors...



Thanks to an arrangement with Essex Financial Services, the OLHSI is now able to accept

contributions in the form of stocks and bonds. To learn more about this service, please leave a message for Alison Mitchell at our office: 860-434-0684.

Want to get OLHSI news by e-mail?

Several OLHSI supporters have asked to be notified by e-mail about forthcoming events.

To be added to this list, please contact us at olhsimail@gmail.com and give us your e-mail address. Thanks!



Website in progress



In the words of a college-age OLHSI supporter, "History rocks." With this as our mantra, we're raising funds to upgrade our website. The goal is to create an attractive, eye-catching vehicle for communication—especially with younger audiences.

The Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

was established in 2005 to preserve and analyze the social, civic, economic, and political past of the Town of Old Lyme.

Board of Trustees

Alison Mitchell, *Chair* Patsy McCook, *Vice Chair*
Martha Hansen, *Secretary* Carol Winters, *Treasurer*
Tim Griswold, *Assistant Treasurer*

Barbara Bair, Roger Breunig, Bob Dunn, John Flower,
Delores Green, Julia Griswold, Susan Griggs,
Jennifer Hillhouse, Mark Lander, Jim Noyes,
Dyanne Rafal, Tom Schellens, Helen Scott,
Bill Stewart, Judy Tooker, Karen Winters

Patsy McCook, *Newsletter Editor*

P.O. Box 352, Old Lyme, CT 06371

Telephone: 860-434-0684

E-mail: olhsimail@gmail.com

Website: www.oldlymehistoricalociety.org