

River & Sound

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

Issue Eleven 🍀 Spring 2012

Vintage! benefits antiques owners – and OLHSI scholarship program

The Old Lyme Historical Society's scholarship program was established in 2009 to support high school seniors living in Old Lyme, including those attending school elsewhere, who plan to major in history in college.

On March 18 the program was itself a beneficiary, of a well-attended event—Vintage!—at the Lymes' Senior Center. Styled after the popular "Antiques Roadshow" program, Vintage! consisted of verbal appraisals given by four professional antiques experts who graciously volunteered their services for the day.

Residents from across our area brought an eclectic mix of items to be appraised. A convivial atmosphere pervaded the center through the afternoon as attendees swapped stories about their items while waiting their turn to meet with an expert. Energetic OLHSI members



At the senior center: antiques owners, appraisers, and volunteers.

and volunteers, including several from the new Lyme-Old Lyme High School history club, kept the lines moving briskly.

Appraisers for the program were Isaiah Griffith (vintage toys; hunting, fishing, and military items; gold, silver, and precious metal items; jewelry, flat and hollow ware, and decorative items), Curt Wendler (books, autographs, photos, posters, and ephemera), Nancy Hoffman (textiles, linens, kitchen items, farm implements, and primitive country furniture), and Carol Brevard (paintings, prints, engravings, and ceramics).

All proceeds from Vintage! will benefit the Society's scholarship fund. Given the enthusiastic response to this afternoon, we hope our appraisal program will become an annual event.

—*Michaëlle Pearson*



Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

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www.oldlymehistorical.org

Lost and Found... At the conclusion of the Vintage! event, we discovered a 2,000-page publication at the senior center: *The Standard Catalog of World Coins* (18th edition), Krause Publications. The book is now safe and sound in the OLHSI office. We hope that its owner will stop by to claim it during our office hours—Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, 10 a.m. to noon.

Inside this issue

<i>Co-chairs' letter</i>	2
<i>Transportation archives</i>	2
<i>New history club</i>	3
<i>The Nehantics</i>	3
<i>Other archives</i>	3
<i>Old Lyme profile</i>	5
<i>Now & then</i>	6



Co-chairs' letter

What a year! The past several months have given us much to note, and crow about. Two of our projects stand out: the steadfast efforts of our archive committee, “the Aggies,” to decipher, categorize, and protect a wide range of papers and artifacts; and plans by our oral history committee to disseminate, in audio and video formats, the interviews they began conducting in 2010. We’ve also staged an antiques appraisal event to benefit our scholarship program, held our fifth dinner lecture on local history, overseen the launch of a history club at the town’s high school, and published our sixth book.

Another highlight is the series of historical tidbits presented at board meetings by several trustees, most frequently Aggie chair Mark Lander. These “living history” reports range from the history of Rogers Lake to the saga of a missing plaque on the Baldwin Bridge. Mark also researches

various modes of transportation in Old Lyme; the first installment in his series appears below. These and other essays will be posted on our website. Thanks to our trustee, board secretary, and webmaster Martha Hansen, the website is a vital source of OLHSI information, including alerts to coming events.

We offer a hefty thanks to Mark and Martha—and to you, our loyal members. Your support helps make possible all the successes detailed in this newsletter.

*Dyanne Rafal
Datsy McCook*

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

From the transportation archives **The trolley along the shoreline**

It may be hard to believe—trolleys are typically an urban phenomenon—but Old Lyme once had trolley service. In the early 20th century, many U.S. cities were connected by systems with heavy cars able to travel up to 60 mph. Though the topography of the Connecticut shoreline precluded such high speeds, trolleys linked New Haven with New London. Both were connected to Boston, New York, and other cities.

In 1905 the Shoreline Electric Railway was chartered by the state’s General Assembly to build a line from Stony Creek (where it connected to the New Haven city line) to Old Saybrook. In addition to laying tracks on town streets, beside highways, and through vacant areas, the railway was to erect bridges, power poles, and power stations and trolley barns. The charter also specified that whenever the trolley line crossed railroad tracks, it had to be on a bridge, not at grade level, although it connected with railroad lines in a few places.

The trolley line ran down the main streets of every town it served. Outside of town it ran along highways or “cross-country” on dedicated rights-of-way to shorten the distance. Service to Old Saybrook began in 1910.

Permission was granted to extend the line across the Connecticut River to Old Lyme and Flanders and also to Essex, Deep River, and Chester. When the first highway bridge was built across the river in 1911, tracks were laid on it; the first trolley crossed in 1913. East of the river, the tracks turned right at the junction of today’s Halls Road

and Route 156 and continued to Ferry Road, then turned left on Lyme Street and continued on the Post Road to Flanders, where they connected with New London’s system and a branch line to Niantic and Crescent Beach. At first—until the Ferry Road bridge over the Lieutenant River was strengthened—the cars were too heavy to cross, and passengers had to get out, walk across, and board a New London city car.



Trolley on Ferry Road.

The trolleys ran on the hour from around 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Unlike most intercity trolleys, they averaged only about 17-18 mph, although they were capable of at least 40 mph in the country. The fare was five cents for each three-mile segment.

By 1919 the trolley was gone, a victim of competition from the railroad and the auto, limited funds, the death of long-time financial supporter Morton Plant, a power plant breakdown, a strike, and a collision resulting in 19 deaths. A little later the line was reactivated as the New Haven and Shoreline Railway, but only as far as Old Saybrook and just for a few years. Following the second passing of the trolley, the railway substituted buses on the same route. These survived until the mid-1950s.

The trolley had its moment of glory but was never destined to be with us for long. Today its only vestiges are buildings, rights-of-ways used for power lines, and washboarded road shoulders where, when the rails were pulled up, the crossies were left behind and paved over.

—Mark Lander

Local history club launched at high school

Historical Society trustee Dr. Joanne Hedwall does double duty at Lyme-Old Lyme High School, teaching business and technology and serving as the school-to-career liaison. Now she has another role: co-creator, with town historian and former teacher Dr. Ned Pfeiffer, of a local history club at the school. Their goal is to give students an opportunity to find out more about the history of the Lymes and to develop a relationship with the OLHSI.



From left: Alison Scott, Marley Bocian, and OLHSI co-chair Dyanne Rafal at Vintage!

The club's first involvement with the society was to volunteer at our March 18 Vintage! event. The students have also started keeping a journal chronicling their initial adventures, held speaker meetings, photographed local sites, and organized the planting of a time capsule once the high school renovation is completed. They hope to link with nearby school history clubs.

Officers for the current school year are president Alison Scott, vice president Marley Bocian, and treasurer Ian James.

To learn more about the club and how to join, please contact Joanne Hedwall at jhedwall@region18.org.

The Nehantics: *Who they were, where they went, and where they are today*

On Friday, May 4, at a sold-out event, we welcomed town historian and professional archaeologist John (Ned) Pfeiffer to the Lymes' Senior Center for the Society's fifth annual lecture and slide presentation. In this year's talk, which followed a dinner catered by Coffee's Country Market, Dr. Pfeiffer described the origins, decline, and re-emergence of the Nehantics: Native Americans who inhabited the area from Westbrook to Waterford and north to the Eight Mile River.

The Nehantics' presence here dates to 3,000 years ago, when their population totaled more than 2,000. As a result of epidemics brought by colonists to the New World, as well as the practice of impressment—the taking of men into the Navy by force—and migration to western states, fewer than 200 Nehantics existed here by the 19th century.

Those who remained were assimilated into and educated in the ways of American culture, ultimately becoming outcasts who concealed their heritage. (Many changed their names to English ones, and the Nehantics were the first group to convert to Christianity.) Having lost their traditional ways of life and their self-respect, many fell victim to alcoholism and other forms of self-destructive behavior.

In recent years families of Nehantic descent have made efforts to revitalize their culture—by conducting genealogical research, producing oral histories, and publicizing their ancestors' sacrifices and contributions.

From other archives

White Elephant Sale marks 76th year

Associated with the birth of the Buddha, a white elephant is rare and revered. In Southeast Asia, however, the gift of a white elephant from a monarch was traditionally considered not only a blessing but also a curse—as a sacred (and valuable) animal, it could not be put to practical use. In the United States, the term “white elephant” has come to mean a possession no longer wanted or needed that can be donated to a charity or a rummage sale.

One of New England's largest and most popular rummage sales is the White Elephant Sale, sponsored by the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme. Annually for two days in July, antiques and art work, electronics and housewares, books and boutique items, sporting goods and tools, and clothing for men, women, and children—25 categories in all, displayed inside the church and in tents on the front lawn—are sold for bargain prices. Even so, these sales yield some \$60,000 each year.

More than three-quarters of the proceeds are donated to charities based along the Connecticut shoreline, and the balance goes to national and international programs. The 2012 WES is the 76th consecutive year of the sale, which initially raised \$200: a significant amount at the time.

Since its origins, the sale has been organized by the church's Ladies Benevolent Society—now known as the LBS, in light of a membership that has grown to include men and non-church members. At the sale itself, donors and volunteers alike also include people of all faiths and backgrounds from nearby communities.

This year's WES will be held a week later than usual—on Friday, July 13 (9 a.m.-2:00 p.m.) and Saturday, July 14 (8:00 a.m. to noon).

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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Benefits of OLHSI membership

- A subscription to this semiannual newsletter
- 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.

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

___ 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.

Old Lyme profile

James B. Noyes

Jim Noyes is known, and beloved, as a contractor who has constructed and renovated countless buildings around Old Lyme. But his outside “work”—nonpaid construction here and in nearby towns—is equally impressive.

In the 1980s and 1990s, along with other men at the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme, Jim volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, through which he supervised the construction of 18 houses in Groton, Norwich, New London, Waterford, and Jewett City. He also converted an office building on Montauk Avenue in New London to a soup kitchen, now known as the Community Meal Center. Volunteers from the Congregational church still prepare and serve meals there regularly.

Jim is particularly proud of a hometown accomplishment, the creation of the Lymes’ Senior Center. In the early 1990s Old Lyme had enjoyed a long-standing tradition of providing meals and other social services for the elderly in several locations: Christ the King Church’s parish hall, the fire house in South Lyme, and the Rogers Lake community center. It gradually became clear that the sites were inadequate for this purpose and that a full-fledged senior center more convenient to residents of Lyme was needed. Jim served on the committee that chose the site—Town Woods Road—and was a member of the building committee.

Now on to the missing ingredient: money. A group made trips to Hartford, where they successfully lobbied legislators. But the funds received were only half the needed amount, so Jim and his friends made up the difference. In addition to collecting donations from seniors, they persuaded the American Legion and the towns of Lyme and Old Lyme to contribute funds as well as the land. Volunteers, including Jim, provided \$75,000 worth of labor. (Jim, who subsequently served on the center’s board of directors, remains an unofficial repairman there.) The center opened in 1996.

The youngest of seven children, Jim grew up on a small farm—“everyone in Old Lyme owned one”—at the intersection of McCurdy and Shore roads. His childhood was spent rowing, crabbing on the Connecticut River, and swimming in the Duck, Black Hall, Lieutenant, and Connecticut rivers. Starting in 1929 he attended the predecessor to today’s Center

School, a schoolhouse for nine grades. During the year between that building’s demolition and the opening of the new school in 1935, classes were held at the Congregational church—two in a meeting room (one on the stage; “it was pretty crowded”) and one each in the kitchen and on the second floor. Jim attended grades six through nine at Camp Rainsford, a “fresh air” camp in Black Hall. Heating was provided solely with wood stoves.

Meanwhile, as Old Lyme, and the rest of the nation, plunged into the Depression, Jim’s father was laid off from work at Stanley Davis’s furniture factory on Lyme Street. (He was able to find work refinishing antique furniture.) Still, recalls Jim, “everyone was poor, so no one thought they were poor. Things were on an equal basis, and no one knew the difference.”

In 1941 during his senior year in school, Jim worked at the A+P across Lyme Street, not only in the summer and after school but also during study hall. He eventually replaced the butcher, who “didn’t want to work for peanuts,” and was subsequently given a raise, from 20 to 22 cents an hour.

After graduating from high school in 1942, Jim enlisted in the Navy, where he participated in invasions of Africa and Italy and—to relieve pressure at Normandy—southern France. During the war he met Helen Tostevin, from North Dakota. They were married in 1946 and then moved to Old Lyme. (Helen died in 2001.) After briefly living in the back of his family residence, they bought a house on Buttonball Road, and Jim worked for a local builder in Old Lyme. Once he and Helen started a family—they had three children, Walt, Jack, and Bruce—it was time to start his own business.

Jim, who celebrates his 90th birthday this year, now lives on Blood Street with his “life partner,” Doris Hungerford. A founding board member of the Old Lyme Historical Society, he helped orchestrate the creation of our archives in 2009. A new committee, “the Aggies” (Archive Guys and Gals) organizes and safeguards these documents and artifacts. Though Jim is now a trustee emeritus, he remains engaged with the Aggies—and an inspiration to the Society and the town of Old Lyme.

—Patsy McCook



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Sound View shop, 2010

Now & Then...



Sound View shop, 1940s