

River & Sound

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

Issue 18 🌱 Spring 2015



From the archives

Letters to Papa; Charlie Chadwick's Summers in Old Lyme

A recurring column about items of particular interest in our archive seems overdue. While the Tuesday Morning Work Crew is busy designing and executing an archive room, it was thought that our members might be intrigued to know something about accessioned artifacts awaiting their new home at 55 Lyme Street. After all, the archive is really the heart of any historical society, and ours is beating strongly due to the many donations of photographs, maps, deeds, records, law briefs, circulars, and other ephemera. Perhaps, the most interesting are letters which record daily events in the lives of the correspondents. One fears with email and texting so popular with those with nimble fingers, letter writing is fast becoming a lost art.

Fortunately, the Historical Society is blessed with friends like Caroline and Bob Ross, who recognized that they had acquired a treasure trove of Chadwick family letters written between circa 1878 to 1908. The Ross Family called to ask if the Historical Society would like them, and we have been in their debt ever since. Caroline Fraser Zinsser, a good friend of the Historical Society, went through over 448 letters and organized them in chronological order, no easy task, and done with Caroline's usual scholarly technique. These letters chronicle the ardent courtship of Alice Caruth by George Noyes Chadwick, their subsequent marriage, and the birth of their children. The Chadwick family lived in Brooklyn, New York where all five of their children were born. When they came on the steam engine train to visit in Old Lyme, they stayed with George's parents, Daniel Chadwick, a prominent lawyer of his day, and Ellen Noyes Chadwick, a talented painter. One of Ellen Noyes Chadwick's paintings entitled *Ferry Point, Old Lyme* depicts a bustling scene of maritime activity in the late 1800s near their house on Ferry Road.

George Noyes Chadwick's work as a successful dry goods merchant kept him in Brooklyn most of the time during the week, so Alice wrote him letters from Old Lyme, sometimes daily, keeping

him abreast of the family's activities, and expressing her hope that he would soon be with them again. Charley (who signed his name "Charlie" as he got older) had, like most young boys, terrible penmanship. His parents instituted "writing lessons" and Charley began his correspondence with his "Papa" in which he always enclosed a kiss, sometimes drawings of trains, a coal car, a locomotive, or sometimes sailing vessels. He invariably ended his letters with "and this is all" which he often explained meant that

he had run out of things to write about! The envelopes are themselves interesting—a letter sent from Old Lyme on August 18 in the morning would reach Mercer Street, Brooklyn at 1:30 p.m. the same day. As Charley became more comfortable with writing even in ink "without blots", his stories became very colorful including building an imaginary sailing ship out of shells and other materials found on the beach, and an exciting ride on a runaway horse. It has been great fun reading through these letters, and imagining what Charley's life was like. What comes through in the letters is that he had warm caring parents who encouraged his curiosity about the world around him. As has been established through some ancillary research, Alice and George Chadwick were very interested and active in the Froebel Society, a progressive approach to early childhood education based on the theories of Frederick Froebel.

Have we piqued your interest in the Old Lyme Historical Society archives? Stay tuned until our archive is up and running, and while we develop tools for the public to visit and do their own research. In the meantime, keep those interesting donations coming. Even though the archive isn't yet in place, we are able to acquire materials and accession them on our PastPerfect software. We then store them in a locked area of Town Hall.

—Alison Mitchell



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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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From the Co-Chairs

With little fanfare, the Society celebrated the first anniversary of our purchase of the former Grange Hall at 55 Lyme St. At the same time, we noted the continuing success of our capital campaign, which provided the funds to buy the building and to renovate it for our needs. Our most sincere thanks to all those who contributed. Work has begun on those renovations. Our work crew, Ellis Jewett, Skip Beebe, Kevin Cole and Ted Freeman, have converted the foyer into an office/reception area and will soon replace the front doors and windows with more energy efficient copies. We hope to move into our new office space in May. Planning for a new archive storage space and handicap access has also begun.

A successful plant sale in October, courtesy of Judge's Farm, added to our building fund. In November, we launched our third "Then & Now" calendar with a reception at the Lyme Art Association. Sales have again been a success and we thank all those who sponsored a month and those who have purchased calendars. Watch for the 2016 edition! Book sales on four successive December weekends at our building, the PGN Library and the Old Lyme Marketplace provided an opportunity for people to buy our publications. Thanks to Trustee Bob DiNapoli for his work. During this time we also held an open house.

A committee, comprised of representatives from the five towns of Old Saybrook, Lyme, Old Lyme, East Lyme and Salem worked to commemorate the 350th anniversary of The Loving Parting. The February 13, 1665 event created the original Town of Lyme (now Lyme, Old Lyme, East Lyme and Salem) by amicably separating it from the Saybrook Plantation. The current First Selectmen of the five towns signed a proclamation declaring February 13 to be "Loving Parting Day." The Committee continues to work on further commemorative activities.

March brought our annual antiques appraisal event, *Vintage!* Critical funds were raised for our scholarship awards and those attending were pleased, and frequently surprised, at what they learned. Thanks to all who supported the event.

Looking forward: On April 18 we will hold our Annual Dinner Lecture at the Lymes' Senior Center, featuring Old Lyme Historian John "Ned" Pfeiffer. Check our website, our Facebook page and local media for further details on this always popular event. On Memorial Day we plan to hold our first Tag Sale/Open House. We are anticipating a large and varied selection of items for sale. See the article on page 4. We will co-sponsor a concert by the Old Lyme Town Band on Sunday, July 19th at 3 p.m. on the south Town Green and we will host an open house during the Old Lyme Midsummer Festival Weekend. In September, we will repeat last year's successful fundraising dinner at Filomena's Restaurant.

Thank you again for your support and we hope to see you all at our upcoming events.

Timothy Griswold & Mark Lander
Co-Chairs, Board of Trustees
Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

Crossing the River, Before & After 1911

Wednesday, June 10th at 1pm at Lymes' Senior Center: Old Lyme Historical Society member Mark Lander will give a talk on "Crossing the River, Before and After 1911", that will highlight the ferry service which lasted almost 200 years and the 100-plus years of three highway bridges across the river. Learn about the two families who ran the ferry for much of its life, the fire which destroyed the last ferry and the trolley which crossed the river for six years. Mr. Lander will share reminiscences of people who remember the old drawbridge and include a display of photos. This event is free and open to the public.

Old Lyme profile

Evelyn MacCurdy Salisbury

If you live in Old Lyme, chances are you have heard of the MacCurdy-Salisbury Educational Foundation, which states its purpose as “the awarding of scholarships to students residing in Old Lyme who are enrolled in institutions of learning beyond high school.” You, or someone you know, may even have received one of these awards. But have you ever thought about why or how such a resource exists? Perhaps you have noticed the portrait that graces the Foundation’s newsletter, or viewed the original at the Library, and wondered about the beautiful, enigmatic Evelyn MacCurdy-Salisbury.

Much has been written about Evelyn—her intelligence, quick wit and exceptional good taste are all detailed in the histories of Old Lyme. But beneath the layers of Victorian propriety, she was a very complex and interesting person—a woman truly ahead of her time. Family papers speak of her generosity toward impoverished but hardworking scholars and her devotion, passion and drive regarding issues she felt strongly about.

Evelyn MacCurdy was born at the Sill House on November 3, 1823. Her parents were Charles Johnson McCurdy and Sarah Ann Lord. Evelyn’s mother was known for her skill at old-fashioned watercolor painting, and she instilled in Evelyn a love of beauty and art. Sarah was also famed for managing her household with a graceful hand and a fair sense of thrift. Nothing was wasted, and Charity was deemed an essential virtue.

When Evelyn was a young girl, there were several old women who, though of good families, found themselves in extremely penurious circumstances. Sarah Lord saw to these elderly neighbors, helping them beyond the basic necessities with little extra gifts of tea or sugar and other small luxuries. Evelyn took these lessons to heart, as evidenced by the story of a poor-but-worthy matron who arrived at the McCurdy residence to collect a parcel of gently-worn clothing and shoes. When Evelyn observed that the woman’s daughter was barefoot, she took off her own new shoes to give to the girl. The woman didn’t accept them, but it was clear that Evelyn understood the joy of charitable giving from a very tender age.

Sadly, Sarah Lord McCurdy died of consumption at age 35, when Evelyn was just 11. Her husband Charles deeply mourned the loss, and never remarried, vowing instead that he and Evelyn would “live for each other.” They became lifelong friends, and once Evelyn completed her schooling, she accompanied her father to Hartford, New Haven and beyond.

Charles J. McCurdy had accepted the positions of Judge of the Superior Court, and later, the Supreme Court of Connecticut. He introduced Evelyn to his circle of friends and political acquaintances, shared his political and intellectual interests with her, and “made her conversant with his legal affairs.” When Judge McCurdy was asked to serve as the United States Chargé d’ Affaires in Vienna, he asked Evelyn to accompany him. This time abroad greatly influenced Evelyn’s character. Her letters from Europe reflect a keen and observant eye, noting not just the beauty and grandeur of her surroundings, but describing a multitude of noteworthy personages whom the McCurdys met—a veritable “Who’s Who” from Queen Victoria to Horace Greeley.

When Judge McCurdy’s term in Vienna ended, he and Evelyn returned to Old Lyme, and in 1860, sold their house and moved into the ancestral McCurdy manse at what is now 1 Lyme Street. In November 1871, Evelyn married Edward Elbridge Salisbury, a professor of Sanskrit and Arabic at Yale. The couple’s letters show great affection and respect for each other. Together they published the exhaustively researched “Family Histories and Genealogies”, which remains an authoritative source today.

In her middle age, Evelyn was described by Katharine Ludington as strongly resembling “Queen Victoria and whether consciously or not, (she) dressed the part to perfection. . . Her voice was clear, rather high, and her enunciation crisp. She always made her points carry and she never hesitated to be pointed. She had a command of forceful English—entirely unmodernized. . . She would speak her mind to you, and then say—“Well, I have told you what I think—if you don’t believe me, I wash my hands of you!” Due to her forceful manner and strong opinions, Evelyn was not universally loved, but she was universally respected, and most people also considered her the town’s final arbiter on matters of good taste.

Judge McCurdy died in 1891, and left Evelyn the bulk of his remaining property, stating his “entire confidence in her judgment and kindness”, and expressing the hope that “she will make liberal provision for educational and other beneficent public objects in the town where I have passed my life and which I have loved so well.”

Evelyn had long been interested in higher education, and the *Sound Breeze* newspaper detailed her numerous ideas and proposals for the town. Though most of these did not come to fruition, she did not let this discourage or embitter her, and she and Edward remained tireless advocates, continually offering money and property toward educational causes. Evelyn seemed to accept, even relish, her role as provocateur. When the town decided to erect a Central School in 1894, she wrote wryly, “When we see what the town of Lyme is doing in the cause of public education, we think we have ‘provoked to good works’, if not ‘to love.’” When the new Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library was opened, Evelyn enthusiastically supported it, donating a collection of several thousand books and valuable chinaware. Upon her death in 1917, she left an exceedingly detailed will, donating large sums to benefit the library and local educational causes, including a handsome bequest of \$5000 to the Ladies’ Library Association.

The first expansion of the Library in 1925 was largely funded under the terms of Evelyn’s will. She also left a sum of money to establish a Trust that would become the MacCurdy-Salisbury Educational Foundation. Both the Foundation and the MacCurdy-Salisbury wing of the Old Lyme Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library are lasting memorials to Evelyn’s commitment to the education and betterment of the people of Old Lyme.

To learn more about Evelyn MacCurdy and other local women, see *Remarkable Women of Old Lyme* by Michaëlle Pearson & Jim Lampos, History Press, May 4, 2015.

— Michaëlle Pearson



Portrait of Evelyn MacCurdy ca. 1850, courtesy of OL-PGN Library Permanent collection.



Photo: James Meehan

The Tuesday Morning Work Crew

The "Tuesday Morning Work Crew" has been working to transform the former Grange Hall into the new home of the Old Lyme Historical Society. So far, they have built a reception/office area in the foyer of the building, installed energy-efficient front windows and doors and insulated all ceiling areas throughout the building. With the help of retired architect Steve Joncus, the Crew's current efforts are focused on creating an archives room and reconfiguring the stairway and lower level to provide a rear handicap entrance, reading room, work room and updated utilities. The Crew consists of Facilities Committee members (left to right) Ted Freeman, Skip Beebe, architect Steve Joncus, Kevin Cole, Ellis Jewett, and Norm Stitham (not shown), with assistance from Anchor Insulation, Sicuranza Electric, and Rings End.



Photo: James Meehan

The Loving Parting

Old Lyme First Selectwoman Bonnie Reemsnyder is shown holding a framed copy of the commemoration of The Loving Parting. The proclamation reads in part "In recognition of the 350th anniversary of the signing of the Loving Parting and the shared history of the Saybrook Colony with the present towns of Old Saybrook, Lyme, Old Lyme, East Lyme and Salem, February 13, 2015 is hereby proclaimed 'Loving Parting Day' ". Officials of all five towns signed the document and were given framed copies by members of the Loving Parting Committee which is made up of Historical Society representatives from each of the five towns. A televised discussion about the events preceding and following the amicable separation from the Saybrook Colony is planned for later in the spring.

Old Lyme Historical Society's Annual Dinner and Lecture "Wood: Our First Natural Resource"

The Old Lyme Historical Society will host its Annual Dinner and Lecture on **Saturday, April 18th** at 6pm at the Lymes' Senior Center, 26 Town Woods Road.

Old Lyme Historian Dr. John Pfeiffer's lecture, "Wood: Our First Natural Resource" will cover the pivotal role this important resource has played in the history of humankind, and of our town. Wherever humans live, wood is absolutely necessary. It has been the basis of our first tools and our first hunting weapons. It was our first building material and our first fuel. Next to air, water, and food, wood was essential. Throughout history, the availability of wood has been the determining factor of a civilization's success.

Our own history in Lyme has been greatly influenced by the availability of wood. The control of this resource was the focus of our first public meeting and was recorded on the first page of our Society records. Our Lyme founders and their descendants for the next two centuries continually reasserted their rights and responsibilities regarding wood.

The evening will begin with refreshments and a dinner catered by Coffee's Country Market; Dr. Pfeiffer's talk will follow. Tickets are \$35 per person in advance, or \$40 at the door, if there is availability. This event sells out every year, so it is advisable to get tickets early. Tickets are available at the Old Lyme Historical Society's office in the Genealogy Room at the Old Lyme-Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday 10 am to 12 noon), at Webster Bank in Old Lyme, and online at our website. For more information call the Old Lyme Historical Society at 860-434-0684.

Memorial Day Tag Sale

The Old Lyme Historical Society will sponsor a Tag Sale and Open House at 55 Lyme Street on **Memorial Day, May 25th** from 10am to 2pm.

Donations of quality items for the sale are welcome. Intake will be on Saturdays from April 11 - May 23, between the hours of 10am and 2pm.

We are seeking quality kitchen and dining room items, jewelry, books, records, tapes, CDs/DVDs, art, toys, tools, sporting goods, fashion accessories and similar items. All items must be in good condition. We will not accept large appliances or large pieces of furniture; electronics, computers or computer accessories; clothing or luggage.

All proceeds from the sale will be used to support our new home at the former Grange Hall. The building will be open to the public during the sale, with a display of historical photographs from our archives.