

# River and Sound

Issue 1 Winter 2006

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



## New society focuses on bringing life to town's past



Old Lyme's 2005 Memorial Day parade marked the Society's first public appearance. OLHSI members wearing apparel typical of earlier townspeople staffed a festive float and distributed membership brochures.

Like many other New England communities, Old Lyme was originally centered on farming, fishing, and shipping. But the town was also a crossroads of commerce on the east bank of the Connecticut River, so it soon assumed a role beyond the size of its population or economic strength. Over the years, many elements of Old Lyme's history have been preserved by organizations, families, and individuals. A good deal is still coming to light about the everyday lives of residents in the past and the social, civic, economic, and political currents that shaped the present.

Yet much more can be done to explore the town's past and make it relevant to current and future residents. This is the goal of the Old Lyme Historical Society, which encourages the collection and analysis of stories, documents, and artifacts that convey the everyday history of town residents over the years. The Society is working closely with other groups that have assembled their own histories and collections.

The Society, whose organizing committee took shape in the fall of 2004, was incorporated as a nonprofit non-stock corporation in Connecticut in February 2005. Last May the OLHSI registered with the state Department of Consumer Protection and applied for nonprofit IRS 501(c)(3) status.

Old Lyme's relative stability endows it with an accessible history, one that has been carefully preserved in residents' attics and basements, and living rooms and photo albums. Local information that covers the past hundred years or so is available—and deserves to be learned by any student of American life. ◊

### 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 over its 340 years.

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P.O. Box 352, Old Lyme, CT 06371  
[www.OLHSI.org](http://www.OLHSI.org)  
[info@oldlymehistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@oldlymehistoricalsociety.org)

# “First Settlers” project traces Old Lyme’s creation, growth

*“Wharas thar hath been several propositions between the inhabitants of the east side of the River and the inhabitants of the west side of the River of the towne of Saybrook toward a Loveing Parting...”*

Thus begins the opening paragraph of the Articles of Agreement between Saybrook and the “plantation” of Lyme, written in February 1665. This agreement has come to be known as “The Loving Parting” and was a milestone in the English settlement of the Connecticut colony.

Now, a group of persistent sleuths—the OLHSI’s Archive Committee—has decided to profile the earliest settlers, first by setting the scene in 1667, the year that the “plantation” was named by order of the General Court. The Lyme plantation at that time covered about 80 square miles of land on the east side of the Connecticut River.

The first settlers of Lyme were Matthew Beckwith, Peter Blatchford, John Borden, Thomas Bradford, William Briggs, Wolston Brockway, Captain Thomas Bull, Henry Champion, John Comstock, Balthazar DeWolfe, Thomas Dunk, George Duren, Richard Ely, Matthew Griswold, Joseph Hand, John Huntley, John Lay, Thomas Lee, Hugh Lees, William Lord, Lt. Renold Marvin, the Rev. Moses Noyes, Joseph Peck, Robert

Perigo, Henry Peterson, John Robbins, Richard Smith, John Tinker, John Tillotson, Ens. William Waller, Capt. Abraham Watrous, and Ens. Isaac Watrous.

Members of the Archive Committee have begun focusing a few of these 32 settlers. Materials still held by the families’ descendants or deposited in Connecticut libraries, historical societies, universities, and other repositories will be reviewed by the committee. The intent is to describe “a day in the life” of one or more of the families in a noteworthy year of our national history. Committee members will choose a year and attempt to capture some significant impact that national events had on each family. Suggested years are 1667, 1700, 1776, 1800, 1812, 1863, 1900, 1914, 1941, 1950, 1965, 2000, and 2005.

If you have information about these settlers or their descendants, we would like to hear from you! Please write to us at OLHSI, P.O. Box 352, Old Lyme, CT 06731 or send an e-mail to [alisonmitch@adelphia.net](mailto:alisonmitch@adelphia.net). ◊

## First OLHSI publication

### Chronicling the roots of Lyme-Old Lyme “separation”

In 1818 the newly ratified Connecticut constitution was sending shock waves into an almost 200-year-old system of town governments based on church societies, which could levy and allocate tax funds. The constitution specifically prohibited spending tax money on churches, effectively separating church and state. But what of the previous, church-based “governments”?

These social forces—the Separatists versus the Congregationalists—underlie the separation of the town of Lyme into several segments, the most recent of which was the 1855 creation of the towns of Lyme and Old Lyme. The story will be told in OLHSI’s first publication. It is being written by David Bikerman and researched by Mimi Obstler and Rosemary Van Slyck. ◊

### Zemba to construct children’s walking tour

Emily Zemba, a senior at Lyme-Old Lyme High School and a candidate for the Gold Award of the Girl Scouts of America, has chosen Lyme Street for her award project.

A “Kids’ Walking Tour of the Old Lyme Historical District” will draw on previous historical information and newly gathered stories and archival data to make a book with “fun activities an information for kids and their families” who stroll the district. She plans to make it available in the Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library, the Town Hall, the Florence Griswold Museum, and other sites when it is completed.

The Gold Award is the highest award in Girl Scouting. ◊

## Postcards tell story of an idyllic Old Lyme

They are the IMs of the past, the “instant messaging” system of the gaslight era. Taken together, they provide images of golden days, of picturesque cottages, of imposing vistas, of nostalgic, or waggishly cute, sentiments of a century ago.

They are postcards. At the first

exhibition produced by the OLHSI—from July 8 to August 23, 2005, in the Old Lyme Grange No. 162—hundreds of visitors got a glimpse of the town as it looked in the first decades of the 1900s. At that time long-distance telephones were expensive, broadcast radio and the Internet were nonexistent, and postcards were a booming business.

The show was drawn from the



Fishing nets dry adjacent to the ferry landing in Old Lyme about a century ago. In 2006, the ferry pier is still there!

collections of Jennifer Hillhouse, John Lehr, Bud and Betsy Rice, and the Old Lyme–Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library.

Like cell phone or e-mail messages, postcards were often just a quick “Hi!” to keep in touch with family or chums far away—or, just across town, the way you’d wave at friends in their yards as you drove by.

It was clearly an effective system. The exhibition cites U.S. Post Office records that count 677,777,798 postcards mailed during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1908. With the United States population then at 88.7 million, this came to roughly 70 postcards per person if evenly distributed among all residents of the nation. △



## 2006 OLHSI events

**Pix of the past...** The postcard exhibition was such a success that a new, expanded edition was presented this winter at the Sill House of The Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts.

**Confessions of a deltiologist...** Museum curator and postcard collector Dorothy Globus will be giving a presentation at the Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library on Thursday, April 27. Time: 5:30 p.m.

**Beach party...** The history of Old Lyme’s beaches is an intriguing part of the evolution of leisure time in the emerging industrial 20th century. We are considering a 2006 summer exhibition that will gather images, artifacts, and anecdotes from the early days of the beach colonies.

**Lakeside fun...** Rogers Lake has a proud history as a source of power for industry and pleasure for residents. There is a lot to be gathered and learned, and we are planning a foray into the collective memories of townspeople for an exhibition this spring.

## Society sponsors Zinsser's talk on Chadwick letters

A 19th-century Old Lyme marriage that endured the stresses of frequent separations has been illuminated in a collection of letters and commentary. The book is *Dear and Affectionate Wife: The letters of Charles and Mary Chadwick of Lyme, Connecticut, 1828-1851*, published in 2005 by Caroline Fraser Zinsser. In September, at an event sponsored by the OLHSI, Zinsser spoke to a full house at the Marshfields building of the Florence Griswold Museum about her preparation of the book.

Like many entrepreneurial mariners of the era, Charles Chadwick had to embark on prolonged sea voyages, primarily across the Atlantic on the then-new "packet" ship trade, but also extending as far as Canton, China. He left the management of household and farm on what is now the Old Lyme-East Lyme border to his wife, Mary, who mastered complex business and domestic skills.

The letters offer an intimate look at day-to-day life when America was taking a larger role in international commerce, a westward movement had begun in earnest, and New England traditions were being tested by personal mobility and an expanding economy. ▢

## Join us in appreciating Old Lyme's colorful history and sharing it with others!

*The OLHSI gratefully accepts contributions or loans of town and family memorabilia. Membership fees and other donations are fully tax-deductible. Please make your check out to the Old Lyme Historical Society and mail it to us at P.O. Box 352, Old Lyme, CT 06371. Thank you for your generosity!*

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