

River & Sound

OLHSI.org

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

Issue 33 🐦 Spring 2020

Society Launches Oral History Project



Photograph by James Mechan

*Oral History Project Co-Chairs
Elaine Stiles and Marie McKeon*

Your editor wishes he had a nickel for every time someone in an American family said something like: "I wish we'd written down some of those stories Gran used to tell. They were a window into another world." Too few of us act on such ideas before it's too late. A first-hand, eye-witness account of every-day life in times past (a

foreign country to all who come after) slips away, forever. Some of our readers have heard eye-witness accounts of life in the nineteenth century. What would we not give to have a recording of those accounts, or to have them available to future scholars? And yet, to the people who told us those stories, it was just "everyday life."

Since 2009, the OLHSI Oral History Project has worked to capture personal accounts of Old Lyme and its people for future generations. You can see some of the video interviews on our website at: www.OLHSI.org.

The Oral History Project is looking for Old Lyme people who have an interesting story to tell about their experience of life in our town, and beyond. OLHSI interviewers are trained in the methods of the Smithsonian Institution, and our archives are professionally organized. That means the knowledge imparted can readily be used by future researchers. If you know someone who would be a good candidate for an oral history interview, please encourage them to contact us.



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



Caring for your Treasures: The Art and Science of Furniture Conservation

Guest lecturer and nationally recognized wood conservator Tad D. Fallon will speak on the care and preservation of historic furniture and wooden artifacts.

Topics include how furniture conservators examine objects, what they look for, and how they formulate intervention strategies. Tips on surface examination techniques, deciphering patina, and identifying past interventions will be discussed.

Small museum and personal collections upkeep, along with the dos and don'ts of furniture care will be outlined. This talk is filled with practical knowledge that will interest anyone with family heirlooms, wood furnishings or detailing in their home they want to preserve for future generations.

Immediately following the talk, there will be an informal question-and-answer session. Participants are welcome to bring a small object or photos for discussion.

Mark your calendars!

Join Tad D. Fallon

Thursday, July 30, 2020 at 7 p.m.

Old Lyme Historical Society

55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT

Free Admission,

Donations to the OLHSI Scholarship Fund are welcome



The mission of the Old Lyme Historical Society, Incorporated, is to collect, preserve, interpret and promote the rich history of Old Lyme, Connecticut and its environs for the benefit of residents and visitors.

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Congratulations to the members of the OLHSI "Tuesday Morning Work Crew"



Congratulations to the dedicated members of the Old Lyme Historical Society's "Tuesday Morning Work Crew" on being named Old Lyme's 2019 Citizens of the Year! "TMWC" members Ellis Jewett, Ted Freeman, Stephen Joncus, Kevin Cole, and Skip Beebe have provided endless hours of volunteer service to the Historical Society. Their work to renovate and restore the Old Grange Hall over the past several years is evident in the beautiful design of the front office, downstairs archive and rear entrance, as well as the lovely original details they have worked so hard to reveal and preserve. Thanks to the Board of Selectmen for recognizing the TMWC's achievements and service to their community!

From the Co-Chairs

Dear Members,

A key element of the Old Lyme Historical Society's strategic plan is to interact more fully with our neighbors in the community, and to make our space available to other nonprofits when needed. In December, Edie Twining, Bob DiNapoli, and Pam DiNapoli decorated 55 Lyme Street for the holidays, and invited children from the Old Lyme Children's Learning Center to decorate cookies and perform their annual concert. In January, the Old Lyme-Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library Board held their meeting in our hall, as they were unable to meet at the Library due to construction. The Library board members were given a tour of our building, and apprised of the ongoing renovation and restoration process. The Men's Club of Christ the King RC Church will also hold one of their meetings at 55 Lyme in the near future.

The Events Committee has been very active under the leadership of Katie Balocca and Ann Marie Jewett. They have planned an ambitious schedule, with a talk on furniture conservation by Tad Fallon in July, guided walking tours of Lyme Street at the "Spring Fling" in May, and participation in the Memorial Day Parade. In June, the Society will participate in "Make Music Day" and also co-sponsor a concert by the Old Lyme Town Band at the Old Lyme-Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library.

Speaking of community, The Oral History Committee has started meeting, chaired by Elaine Stiles and Marie McKeon, and plans for collection of oral histories are underway. If you know of someone who should be included added to the Society's list of interviewees, please let us know.

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Duck River Garden Club

Founded in 1970, the Duck River Garden Club (DRGC) will celebrate its 50th Anniversary this year with a year-long series of commemorative events. The founder, Priscilla Bayreuther Swanson, "has put her trowel and pruning shears away in the garden shed." Nevertheless, as one of her many admirers remarked, "She is still the spark-plug driving the organization." Ms. Swanson was responsible for ensuring the club's membership in the Federation of Garden Clubs of Connecticut, Inc. in 1971. DRGC has also presented flower shows over the years according to the rules of the National Council of State Garden Clubs.

Since 1973, the hard-working club members have created many permanent landscape plantings throughout the town of Old Lyme. Every time you come to the Post Office, you walk past their handiwork. Other enhanced locations include: the Town Hall, our fire stations, the PGN Library, Lymes Senior Center, and plantings at the intersections of Mile Creek Road w/ Browns Lane, and of McCurdy Road w/ Route 156. In 1976, DRGC members teamed up with the Lyme Garden Club to commemorate Old Lyme's Bicentennial by designing and installing an herb garden at the Florence Griswold Museum. This was maintained by both clubs until 1993, when the Museum decided the space was needed for other uses.

In early December each year, members gather and create large holiday wreaths for all the public buildings in town. The Old Lyme Historical Society is honored to display two of these handsome wreaths at 55 Lyme Street. DRGC also shops for Thanksgiving- and Christmas-baskets for families in need (as identified by the town's social services department).

Every spring the Duck River Garden Club holds its eagerly-awaited plant sale on Halls Road. There are beautiful plants to refresh the home garden, and hanging baskets to place at strategic points on one's property. The sale is an important fundraiser supporting the club's goal of beautifying Old Lyme. It also underwrites an annual scholarship for a graduating high school student who plans to further study horticulture in any of its many forms.

The organization has worked diligently with the District 18 Board of Education to provide programs and activities for young children, in order to stimulate interest and understanding of growing plants and the environment. The club's efforts have also included: creating holiday arrangements for home-bound seniors, planting bulbs in the fall, and even building and tending a worm farm in the classroom. In addition, DRGC donates books on gardening and the environment to the PGN Library and school libraries.

Club meetings are held in the evenings. They feature programs covering a wide range of interests, such as: horticulture, landscaping, and the protection and conservation of natural resources, including bird and animal habitats.

Those interested in joining and/or supporting this jewel of an Old Lyme volunteer organization should contact: Eleanor Hufford (860) 876-7303; or Suzy Bolduc (203) 535-4513.

—Alison Mitchell

From the Co-Chairs

(Continued from page 2)

The Society's "Tuesday Morning Work Crew" (Ellis Jewett, Skip Beebe, Ted Freeman, Kevin Cole, Stephen Joncus) were honored with the Town of Old Lyme's "Citizen of the Year" award at the Annual Town meeting in January. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition of their years of service to our mission and the Old Lyme community.

New members and volunteers are always welcome! Please let us know your interests and how you would like to be involved.

*Michaëlle Pearson & John Pote
Co-Chairs, Old Lyme Historical Society*

Upcoming Events

Saturday, May 2nd

(Rain date Sunday, May 3)

SPRING FLING

sponsored by

the Old Lyme Arts District

Guided walking tours: one morning,
one afternoon. Details to follow!

Monday, May 25th

Memorial Day Parade

We'll be on Lyme St. with our fellow townfolk to honor those who've given their all. We hope to see you there!

Sunday, June 21st @ 5:00 p.m.

World Make Music Day - Come hear live music all along Lyme Street for FREE! Our Hall will be open for visits and book sales. Details to follow!

Tuesday afternoon, June 23rd

PGN Old Lyme Library Founders Day
Old Lyme Town Band
& Ice Cream Social

Join us in front of the library for this free, family-friendly event.

Thursday, July 2nd @ 6:00 p.m.

Patriotic Music Celebration, featuring young, local talent, in cooperation with the Music Now Foundation.

Thursday, July 30th

Antique Furniture Workshop
with Tad Fallon
Caring for your Antiques.

A Summary of the Incident Involving the Whaleship *Globe* and its (Somewhat Tenuous) Connection to Old Lyme

In the mid 1820s a Nantucket whaleship named *Globe* was cruising the whaling grounds south of Hawai'i. Among the 21 man crew was a boatsteerer named Samuel Comstock, with a rather erratic past and a bloody future. He enlisted the aid of three crewmen, who probably joined the crew in Honolulu after several of the original crew deserted and thus were not of the highest merit as they themselves had probably deserted another ship. Comstock despised authority and, ironically, whaling. His plan involved killing the captain, Thomas Worth, and the three mates, assuming command of the ship and finding a remote, populated island where he would eventually establish himself as king. He did not say that he also planned on burning the ship and finally killing all his crewmates. One night the four mutineers killed the four officers, and later hanged another crew member who they believed was plotting against them. Comstock forced the other crew members to sign an oath whereby they would support Comstock on pain of death. The four mutineers had all the ship's guns. They found their way to an island in the Mili archipelago, part of the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. Here they found reasonably friendly natives. Quickly, Comstock arranged for the ship to be unloaded but within a few days one of the other mutineers, Payne, perhaps realizing what Comstock's long-term plans were, shot and killed Comstock. Ironically, the crew gave Comstock a quasi-military funeral, complete with American flag. Recognizing that the natives were a bit sticky-fingered, Payne arranged for six crew members to spend their nights aboard the ship. As it was impossible for six men to sail a full-rigged ship, he did not consider putting one of his fellow mutineers on the ship. The six men, during the day, plotted with the other non-mutineers to escape. The plan was that, one night, at a signal from the ship, the six men on the beach would swim to the ship, cut the anchor cable, raise the sails and leave. At this point there still remained on the ship most of the sails and a good supply of food and water. Something went wrong and the men on the beach were unable to get to the ship. Those on board realized that their plan had been compromised and so cut the cable, raised the sails and left. The next day the natives realized what had happened; Payne's explanation that the ship had broken its cable and was blown out to sea worked only for a while. Then the natives, seeing that they had lost everything that they hoped to eventually get off the ship and that there was dissent among the remaining men, killed everyone but the two youngest who were individually "adopted" by older couples and enslaved, fairly benignly.



Against all odds the six men on the ship, actually five as one of them regularly refused to work, managed to sail the ship 7000 miles to the coast of Chile. Hawai'i would have been much

closer but they lacked the navigational skills to sail north, whereas sailing east would guarantee that they would eventually "bump into" land by following the direction from which the sun rose. They arrived in Valparaiso where they contacted the American consul, Hogan. It was determined that the nine men on the island had to be rescued and the mutineers arrested but Hogan had no authority and no means to do so. So he sent a message to Washington—one month in transit. Washington, predictably, dithered for a while and then

replied—another month in transit—instructing Hogan to send a ship, when one should be available, to Mili Atoll to carry out the mission. Eventually, the three ships of the Navy's Pacific Squadron put into Valparaiso and, after provisioning, the sloop *USS Dolphin*, commanded by "Mad Jack" Percival left for Mili. The rescuers had trouble locating the two survivors as their "captors" did not want to lose them and, in addition, the two Americans now looked like the natives: long hair, deep tans, native clothing, and had even learned to speak the language. By this time 21 months had passed since the mutiny. Finally

the two men were located and the natives were convinced, and bribed, to release them. Amazingly, there were actually tears on their departure.

By this time, *Globe*, with the six survivors and a new crew, had returned to Nantucket so the story was in circulation although no one knew the fate of the nine men left on Mili. Eventually, the two others were returned to Nantucket, the matter was investigated and a judge determined that no action was necessary against those who had survived. Most of them returned to whaling, as did *Globe*.

As an aside with local implications: upon leaving Mili, "Mad Jack" stopped in Honolulu where he was asked to resolve some issues between the locals and the crews of American whaleships. Some of these issues revolved around prostitution, a major concern of the chief American missionary, Hiram Bingham. These issues were not resolved to Bingham's satisfaction.

The greater connection to Old Lyme lies in the fact that one of the "enslaved" crew members, William Lay, had signed on to *Globe* as being from Saybrook, CT. In the narrative that he later wrote about his experiences, he mentions being from East Saybrook, the former name of what is today Old Lyme. A contact with members of the Lay family in New Jersey has not yet produced any further information. In addition to Lay's narrative about this affair, two other books exist: *Mutiny on the Globe*, by Thomas F. Heffernan and *Demon of the Waters*, by Gregory Gibson.

—Mark Lander