

River & Sound

OLHSI.org

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

4th Quarter 2022
Autumn Issue #41

Prelude to the Pequot War

When the English landed at the mouth of the Connecticut River in 1635 they quickly found themselves embroiled in a major war. The Pequot War would set fatal precedents for Indian relations ever after. This is the story of the lead-up to it.

The Pequot had originally lived in the upper Hudson watershed. They moved to the Connecticut shoreline after about 1500, displacing other tribes and splitting the Nehantic into eastern and western groups. The eastern in Wekapaug (Westerley) were allied with the Narragansett. The western (in Old Lyme, Niantic and Oswegatchie) were tributary allies of the Pequot. All spoke the same "Y-dialect" of Algonquian and had much the same woodland culture.

Even in New England, "contact" had begun half a century before English settlement. Fishermen and whalers had been visiting the northern Atlantic Coast of America since about the time of Columbus' first voyage. By the 1560s several hundred European ships visited the Newfoundland fishing and whaling grounds each year. A few always ventured south along the coast looking for fresh water, provisions, gold, slaves, and whatever opportunity for theft or trade might present itself. Whether their intentions were honorable or not, they all brought new diseases. The men and the rats alike were carriers of new pathogens that soon took root in virgin soil and began to decimate Native populations. The weakening or demise of whole peoples altered the political map and caused disruptions beyond the reach of the new diseases themselves.

Kidnappings caused many coastal peoples to treat "white [sail] people" with suspicion or open hostility. Those who hadn't experienced such things (and even some who had) found the prospect of trade irresistible, particularly if iron and steel weapons were on offer. Steel-edged weapons, and later, firearms, gave warlike nations an immense advantage over their adversaries.

The French were the first to open a regular fur trade. The Dutch soon followed near Albany on the upper Hudson. The European rivalry was immediately seized upon by Native peoples, who used it to gain more and more of the weapons that helped them control access to the sources of furs, particularly beaver pelts. Nations near the traders tried to control and tax the trade of all those who were further away.

In 1622 the Dutch opened a trading post near today's Hartford. They intended to trade equally with all comers, but the Pequot demanded to be the sole intermediary. They attacked some of the local Mattabesic to make their point. The Dutch responded by attacking the Pequot and taking one of their Sachems hostage, demanding a large ransom in beaver pelts. The Pequot had few beaver, having trapped out most of their own, and so they sent a large amount of wampum (shell beads produced on Long Island) as ransom instead. The Dutch captain had no idea what wampum was. Thinking he was being mocked, he took the wampum, killed the sachem and gave the Pequot the body. Raids and reprisals ensued, but the trade was too important to both sides for them to allow one incident to stop it. The Dutch let the Pequot tyrannize their neighbors, and began to recognize wampum as a trade currency.

The Pequot had a more centralized political system than most of their neighbors. A grand Sachem and a Grand Council ruled them. Compared to their neighbors, the Pequot were on a permanent war footing. When the Grand Sachem died in 1631 his son Sassacus was chosen to lead. Sassacus' son-in-law, Uncas, had expected to be chosen, and never fully accepted the outcome. Uncas favored the English over the Dutch. Those who agreed or who were restive at Pequot control of an exclusively Dutch trade rallied to Uncas, who eventually left the Pequot and formed a new group call the Mohegan (after Uncas' wolf clan). Uncas settled his followers around what is now Hadlyme.

That same year (1631) a Sachem of the Podunk (one of the many Mattabesic peoples along the river) went to ask the English in Massachusetts to come settle in his people's land near the Dutch fort. By 1633 English settlers had planted themselves at today's Windsor, a few miles upriver from the Dutch fort. Pequot and Mohegan began harassing and sometimes killing traders from the "wrong" group.

In 1634 an English trader named John Stone was banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony "on pain of death" for his "lewd behavior" there. Stone was a trader and/or pirate, depending on the needs and opportunities of the moment. He was also related to the Governor of Maryland, which may have influenced the General Court's sentence.

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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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From the Chair

Dear Members,

Old Lyme has had a lovely summer, even if the long string of perfect beach days stressed our gardens. It's been warm enough to make cool weather welcome. The Ice Cream Social & Town Band Concert was a great success, as were our lectures on the Beach Communities and Watch Rock.

Behind the scenes, the Board and fellow volunteers have been working hard to improve our Archives and our Oral History Program, both of which are making good progress. An exercise in strategic planning is helping the Board to focus on improving our methods in other areas as well. After a long pandemic hiatus, it's good to be working together again!

OLHSI events and presentations continue into the fall and Holiday Season with scheduled upcoming events as noted in this issue. Please check our web site for further new lectures and events as they are scheduled.

- Mark Terwilliger, Chair,
Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.



Photograph by James Meehan

2022-23 OLHSI Board of Trustees

Standing: John Pote, Matt Ward, Mary Dangremond, Cindi Taylor, Stephen Joncus, Ross W. Higgins, Ned Farman and James Meehan. Seated: Sandra Joncus, Alison Mitchell, Mary Ann Jewett, Jill Pilgrim, Nancy Mol, Ann Marie Jewett, Katie Balocca, Edie Twining, Dawn McCarthy, Mark Terwilliger and Skip Beebe. Not shown in photo: Matthew LaConti, Steve MacAusland, Elaine Stiles, Jill Todd and Nicholas Westbrook.



Exhibit Design by Edie Twining

Photographs by James Meehan

John Noyes Family artifacts displayed in Main Hall at OLHSI

John and Barbara Noyes returned to Old Lyme a number of years ago after a career move to the west coast. After all, John is a descendant of Moses Noyes, the minister who founded the colony of Lyme, when the Loving Parting between Saybrook and the Lyme colony occurred in 1665. The town of Old Lyme has a strong attraction for the Noyes family and they immediately made some renovations to a lovely old Noyes house located on Route #1 just short of the turn off onto Sill Lane. One day a call was received by the Old Lyme Historical Society from John asking if we might be interested in some artifacts stored in the large barn behind the house. Without hesitation we made a date to come take a look. The Tuesday Morning Work Crew as well as Archives volunteers were delighted with what we saw and plans were made to transport the many treasures to 55 Lyme Street delayed by the COVID pandemic. The crew was also impressed with the beautiful property and several out buildings.

With the help of Edie Twining, Board member and display designer par excellence, a permanent display has been created in the main hall of the Society which consists of hand hewn farm tools including three scythes (one with cradle), sheep shears, fish spears on wooden pole, wooden planes, wooden mallets. The Society also has some early American kitchen utensils, among them a ricer, potato masher, canning jars, spatter ware pie plates, pottery jug marked scotch whisky, and a food scale. On the stage is a Victorian upholstered couch (which came with a bolt of floral fabric), two side chairs with upholstered seats, and a handsome Victorian cabinet with oval mirrors. The Society also were given two infant christening dresses with lace overlays, a child's brush and comb, a miniature set of playing cards, and a box of glass and porcelain door knobs. This is just a partial list of the largesse gratefully received by OLHSI. Old Lyme is fortunate to have John and Barbara as residents as they are involved in historic preservation on a town level. The Historical Society is very lucky to be a recipient of their generosity and pledge that the artifacts now accessioned will be safely stored in the Archives.

– Alison Mitchell



Photograph by James Meehan

History of Watch Rock

The "History of Watch Rock" was held on September 7th at Watch Rock Preserve in Old Lyme. The Old Lyme Historical Society talked about the preserve's early history and how the Old Lyme Land Trust came to acquire it. This is one of Old Lyme's most beautiful preserves, with views along the rocky shoreline of the Duck River near the mouth of the Connecticut River. During the lecture, presented by Mark Terwilliger, attendees hiked along the same waterfront once frequented by the earliest inhabitants.



Photograph by Elaine Stiles

Oral History Project

The Old Lyme Historical Society began its "Oral History Project" interviews on September 14th starring the society's very own friend and colleague Alison Mitchell. The OLHSI Oral History Project sessions are scheduled to continue through the Autumn on Saturdays, September 24th, October 15th, and November 5th, 2022.

Support for the Oral History Project has been provided to the Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc. from CT Humanities (CTH), with funding provided by the Connecticut State Department of Economic and Community Development/Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) from the CT State Legislature.

Prelude to the Pequot War

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On his way south from Boston he looked in at the mouth of the Connecticut to pick up a few slaves. The western Nehantic at Old Lyme took exception to the kidnapping. They confronted Stone, who responded with a drunken rant. When he passed out, the Nehantic killed him.

Rather than accept this as “good riddance,” the Bay Colony clergy called for divine punishment of the heathen murderers. Sassacus was summoned to Boston where he was ordered to deliver Stone’s killers for execution. He presented his case, promised to keep the peace, and left in a rage. The Grand Council would not give up the Nehantics, and both sides seethed.

Meanwhile, more English were moving to the Hartford area. More important, in 1635 Lion Gardner and a crew of workmen arrived at the mouth of the Connecticut to build a fort for the Saybrook colony. This sealed the fate of Dutch trade at Hartford, though it lingered for a decade.

The next year the western Nehantic on Block Island killed an English trader named John Oldham. This was the last straw for Massachusetts Bay. They mounted a large expedition to exterminate the Indians on Block Island. John Endicott’s men killed a dozen Indians or so, burned their village and shot all their dogs, but the majority of the Nehantic escaped. Then the raiding party went to Fort Saybrook to recruit more men.

Lion Gardner, a soldier of long experience, was livid that he was neither consulted nor considered in this rash act of war. His half-finished fort, with all its potential provisions still standing in the fields far from the fort’s guns, was now the nearest object of retaliation in a war he’d never heard of. Grudgingly, and in a desperate bid for survival, he sent a handful of his men with the raiders, instructing them to bring back corn at all costs.

The raiders sailed to the main Pequot village. Endicott went ashore to make his demands. The Pequot were in shock, but managed to keep Endicott talking while their people quietly decamped. Endicott’s chastisement fell on an empty village. At least the Saybrook men got some corn to help withstand a siege. They would need it, as it soon became more than one’s life was worth to venture far from Saybrook Fort.

In the end, the many people the Pequot had attacked in their rise to power turned on them. The Dutch were no longer a factor in the Connecticut valley. The Pequot and western Nehantic were without allies. Both were effectively wiped out. Of those who managed to surrender, many were sold into slavery in the West Indies or New England. A few small bands were “awarded” to the allies to do with as they pleased. A few more may have managed to escape to other tribes where they would add to that tribe’s power, not to that of the now officially non-existent Pequot, or to that of their pro-English successors: Uncas’ Mohegan.

—Mark Terwilliger



AUTUMN of 2022 *Series* OF EVENTS

OLHSI Plant Sale

Saturday, October 8, 2022

9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Sunday, October 9, 2022

9 12 noon – 2 p.m.

@ 55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme

An Autumn Ramble through the Duck River Cemetery

Presented by Jim Lampos & Michelle Pearson

Saturday, October 22, 2022

2 p.m.

@ Duck River Cemetery, Old Lyme

(Rain Date: October 29, 2022)

Free Admission

Event is limited to 20 attendees

Registration required – info@oldlymehistorical.org

2023 *Then & Now* Community Calendar Launch

Thursday, November 17, 2022

4 p.m. – 6 p.m.

@ 55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme

Old Lyme Historical Society Holiday Book Sales

in front of the Old Lyme Post Office

Saturday, December 3, 2022

Saturday, December 10, 2022

Saturday, December 17, 2022

9 a.m. – 12 noon

(weather permitting)

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