

River & Sound

OLHSI.org

Old Lyme Historical Society
“The history of Old Lyme – the people of Old Lyme”

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The Charter -1662

“The Charter” of 1662 has been an object of veneration for much of Connecticut history. It took the place of a state Constitution until 1818. This is the background and story of its granting.

Many of the first English settlers of New England were radicals strongly opposed to the policies of the Crown. When war broke out between Charles I and Parliament in 1641, nearly ten percent of the early settlers of military age returned to England to fight against the king. Some held high office in the Parliamentary Army, the State, or the newly-reformed Church. Lord Saye and Sele and Lord Brooke (namesakes of the Saybrook Colony) were early leaders of the Parliamentary cause. As the civil war dragged on, the Royalists lost ground while the Parliamentarians became more radical with an ever-narrower base of support. The execution of Charles I in 1649 led to the establishment of a republican Commonwealth or Protectorate, but it quickly descended into military dictatorship. When the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, died of natural causes in 1658, factional strife threatened to reignite civil war. A weary nation longed for the return of the familiar and traditional.

Charles II had spent his whole adult life in exile, a king of shifting factions rather than the settled kingdoms his father had inherited. As the Cromwellian edifice crumbled, Charles II offered an easy peace to those who would acknowledge him as rightful king. There would be no retribution for “crimes” of the past (except as voted by Parliament), and all details of any restitution of property would be handled by Parliament as well. He declared a policy of religious toleration (again, subject to Parliament). It was enough. The remnants of the radicals were swept from power.

The collapse of their Puritan allies in Britain left New England in a dangerous position. Connecticut’s settlers had created their own forms of government and patterns of land holding. These were based on English precedents, but also on their own radical political beliefs and the freedoms and constraints of frontier conditions. The lands

they had distributed, the laws they had passed, the society they had created—everything had been done without asking or getting royal sanction. Because they were remote and relatively insignificant, they had been able to do all this without attracting undue attention.

With the king back in power, all that would change. The legality of their arrangements would be challenged. By English law, all land ownership, even in America, began with

ownership by the Crown. If they could not show a valid legal chain of ownership starting from the king, their titles would be void. Neither their property nor their governments would be their own. Massachusetts had a Royal Charter, but Connecticut had none. The Saybrook Patent only covered a small portion of the settlements and had other weaknesses as well. Clearly, something had to be done to protect the settlements in Connecticut, and quickly.

Luckily, Connecticut had John Winthrop, Jr. (1606-1676) as Governor. His father had been a leader of the 1630s Great Migration of some 20,000 Puritans to New England and had served as Governor or Lieutenant Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for 18 of its first 20 years. The son was not as doctrinaire as his father, and his interests were more varied. He was devoted to the material prosperity and spiritual enlightenment of the Puritan experiment. He was one of Western Europe’s leading alchemists, at a time when chemistry was just beginning to emerge from that older spiritual/magical study. Alchemy and chemistry were closely linked with prospecting for metals, and Winthrop was a tireless promoter of the search for, and refinement of, metals in New England. His chemical/spiritual researches brought him in contact with many of the leading lights of natural science in Western Europe, among whom he was treated as an equal. He was the first colonial to be admitted to the Royal Society. Winthrop’s researches also extended to medicines, and his medical help was sought and admired throughout New England. He used his extensive scientific connections to gain access to Charles II.

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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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Photographs by James Meehan

From the Co-Chairs

Dear Members,

As this issue of *River & Sound* reaches you, much has changed since the Spring newsletter. We now find ourselves in the midst of very uncertain times, and like our forebears, continue to adjust and move ahead, albeit through the ubiquitous virtual media, and with adherence to the required health and safety protocols. Like many other Old Lyme organizations, the Historical Society's community events

have been postponed, modified, or cancelled, and the indoor events we host in our building have suffered the same fate. The good news is that we have a dedicated group of volunteers and a Board of Trustees who work tirelessly to fulfill our organization's mission as we look forward to what comes next.

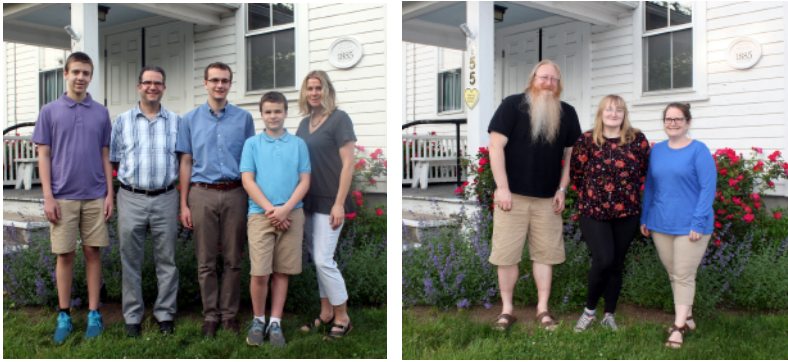
For now, 55 Lyme Street must remain closed while we consider the necessary steps to reopen. We recently participated in a virtual meeting through the Connecticut League of History Organizations concerning the guidelines for reopening businesses, which are technically the same for any indoor gatherings, small or large. With proper social distancing, outdoor events reportedly present less danger of virus transmission. The Historical Society co-sponsored the Old Lyme-Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library's "Founders' Day Ice Cream Social" on Tuesday, June 23rd, which became a drive-through event. Tad Fallon's "Caring for Antique Furniture" presentation will take place on Thursday, July 30th, using the free Zoom online meeting platform for computers or cell phones. For more information about this and other Historical Society events, please see our website, or follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

The Society held its fifteenth Annual Meeting on Monday, June 8th, via Zoom conference. It was reported that 2019-2020 started on a very active note, but due to COVID-19 protocols, obvious restrictions played out starting in March 2020. The "Tuesday Morning Work Crew" continued their expert work on the interior area next to the Archives. The volunteers in the Archives, under the leadership of Alison Mitchell and Sandra Downing, were also very active, as many members of the Old Lyme community generously contributed materials to our growing collections. The Events Committee, spearheaded by Katie Balocca and Ann Marie Jewett, and the Oral History Project, under the leadership of Elaine Stiles and Marie McKeon, have continued to forge ahead with their respective committee work via online meetings and emails.

Four Trustees have elected to retire this year: Kevin Cole, Bob DiNapoli, Tim Griswold, and Todd Machnik. We will miss the contributions of each and every one of them and know they will still be there for us as we move forward. In the same sense, we welcome aboard a new Trustee, Nancy Mol.

As always, the Society welcomes new members, volunteers, and ideas that help us in continuing to fulfill our mission.

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



Photographs by James Meehan

Carol Noyes Winters Scholarship

At the 15th Annual Meeting on June 8th, Kevin Cole, Chairman of the OLHSI Scholarship & Youth Outreach Committee, presented the 2020 Carol Noyes Winters Scholarship Award which is given to an outstanding Lyme–Old Lyme student intending to study history in college. Once again this year, there were two exemplary recipients: Conner Wyman (shown in photograph with his parents Erin and Rick Wyman, and his two brothers, Avery and Oliver), and Audrey Berry (shown with her parents Mandy Campbell Berry and Rob Berry). Congratulations to both of them!

Call for Pandemic Memorabilia

The Historical Society is looking for memorabilia characteristic of the current pandemic. Whatever its final outcomes, future generations will want evidence of what we all *thought* was happening at such a time, and of the various ways in which we responded. If you have some item you think is particularly representative of the COVID-19 Pandemic, please save it. Consider donating it to the Historical Society for the benefit of future local historians. Thanks!

19th Amendment (Women’s Suffrage)

A woman’s right to vote seems so obvious and natural to us that it can be hard to understand why it took so long to establish it in law throughout the country. But it did take time: nearly four generations of increasingly well-organized agitation. Connecticut women, and those of Old Lyme, were active on both sides of the controversy. In our next issue we celebrate the centennial of Connecticut’s vote (September 14, 1920) to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution:

XIX: The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Zoom Event: Caring for Antique Furniture

Nationally recognized wood conservator Tad Fallon will give a presentation on the care of historic furniture and wooden artifacts. His talk is filled with practical knowledge of how best to preserve and protect family heirlooms, wood furnishings, or antique detailing in your home. An informal Q&A will follow. The talk will take place online using the **Zoom** platform at **7:00 pm, Thursday, July 30**. This event is free, but advance registration is required (so we can send you the log-in information). Please see the Events section of our web site for details.



Adela Wilmerding

(1933-2020)

Adela Bartholomew Wilmerding had strong and deep roots in Old Lyme. However, once she married Lucius Wilmerding, she decamped to Princeton, New Jersey where she lived for over 45 years. There she was active as a docent with the Princeton Art Museum, organized and ran a highly successful museum trip program while raising three children, numerous beloved dogs, and perfected her tennis game.

When Addie and Lucius “retired” to Old Lyme, she soon became involved in a number of community organizations. In particular, the Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library appreciated her gracious role with their significant fundraising effort, she also volunteered for the Florence Griswold Museum. She joined the Historical Society Board of Trustees and helped make the 2014 Capital Campaign, which resulted in the debt free purchase of 55 Lyme Street, such a resounding success.

Addie was a quintessential volunteer. Unassuming, kind, and considerate of others, you knew that if she agreed to take on an assignment, it would get done, and done well. It was always fun to sit next to Addie at a Board meeting as her knowledge of and interest in local history was invaluable. She also enjoyed cooking with a glass of wine, a custom she adopted from her Maine summertime neighbor, Julia Child. Unfazed by being the grandmother of seven, and great grandmother of two, family remained central to her life. We shall not soon forget this energetic, capable, and generous friend to so many in Old Lyme.

–Alison C. Mitchell

With thanks to Murray Wilmerding, Muffy Whitley, and Tim Griswold.

The Charter - 1662

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An old story claims to describe the crucial moment in the negotiations between John Winthrop, Jr. and the newly-restored Charles II. In this account, Winthrop offers the King “a valuable ring” which had been presented by Charles’ father (the executed Charles I) to John’s grandfather. Accepting the ring, Charles is then supposed to have casually asked a courtier “What say you: should we give this fellow the charter he asks for?” The courtier says “yes,” and thus the deal is done. Nineteenth-century American sources claim this story was often repeated as an explanation of how a Puritan like John Winthrop Jr. came to acquire a generous Royal Charter from a King who had every reason to be an arch-enemy of the Puritan cause.

There is more to the story and its popularity. There are three main tropes in the story. First, the suggestion that Charles was willing to do nearly anything for money (or a “valuable” ring). This is among the main reasons the story was popular, as Charles II was notoriously short of funds throughout his reign. Second (and in an entirely different vein), that John Winthrop, Jr. showed that he and his family remembered and respected the honor they had been shown by Charles I. By giving the ring, John Winthrop, Jr. was acknowledging his allegiance, not just to Charles II, but to his murdered father, Charles I, and thus to the institution of Kingship. Finally, the story shows that the whole matter hinged upon the present humor of the King. This also is a folk remembrance of the character of Charles II. One of Charles’ favorite courtiers, the poet and playwright John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, epitomized him thus:

*God Bless our good and gracious King
Whose promise none relies on,
Who never said A foolish thing
Nor ever did A wise one.*

The King is said to have lightly passed off this (arguably treasonous) verse by saying: “Very true: For my words are my own, but my acts are my ministers’.” Charles II was intelligent, witty, self-indulgent, somewhat cynical in his judgment of people, and broad-minded in matters of conscience (particularly as applied to himself, of course; but also with others). John Winthrop, Jr. was 24 years older and miles below his King in social standing. Winthrop’s role as the Governor of a tiny group of (former?) enemies of the Crown, subsisting in the wilds of coastal North America, made him a small but real factor in the calculus of restoring peace to Charles’ kingdoms. Winthrop’s reputation as a respected alchemist and prospector for precious metals probably held equal weight with Charles, who was himself a student of alchemy and as hungry for gold and silver as any prince. Then there was the question of England’s rival, the United Netherlands. Connecticut had

generally good relations with their Dutch co-religionists and neighbors in *Nieuw Amsterdam*. If he pressed the New Englanders too hard, it might drive them into the arms of England’s enemies and complicate matters unnecessarily.

The old story points to Charles’ deeper motivations in granting the Charter of 1662. Charles II had spent most of his life at war with his subjects or in exile. His father had been totally committed to the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. Charles II also held this view, but his experience had taught him that men followed such ideals only to the edge of their material interests, and rarely beyond. If he gave great concessions to John Winthrop, Jr. it was because he expected valuable concessions in return. In particular, he expected Winthrop to support his efforts to bring the New England colonies under a single, royal administration. Winthrop would have been aware of this aim, as the notion had been abroad for many years under both Commonwealth and Crown. Winthrop’s response had always been (and remained with Charles II) to say “yes” with his words and “no” with his actions. Charles gambled, hoping that a fellow alchemist with tolerant views on religious matters would see the logic of a consolidated administration, and realize that he (Winthrop) was likely to hold a leading position in any such new structure. It was not Winthrop who bribed Charles II with a ring (whatever its symbolic value), but rather the King who attempted to bribe Winthrop with a generous charter for Connecticut.

The bribe did not work. Winthrop did not cooperate with the early schemes to consolidate Royal administration in New England. When England captured the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam in 1664, Charles II granted it to his brother James, Duke of York. The new charter gave to “New York” basically all that the Dutch West India Company had ever claimed (much of which had been successfully counter-claimed by Connecticut), including all of Long Island and everything west of the Connecticut River.

Ongoing wars with the Dutch delayed the full imposition of these new boundaries. The Dutch briefly re-took New Amsterdam in 1673, but ceded it again in the peace treaty of 1674. The Duke of York received a revised charter (confirming the expanded boundaries) and sent Sir Edmond Andros to be Governor. As instructed, Andros soon began to reduce all New England to the status of a single Royal colony directly subject to James, the Catholic heir-apparent.

New England was deeply shaken, but that is a story for another day.

—Mark Terwilliger