

# River & Sound

OLHSI.org

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

Issue 28 🐦 Summer 2018

## Herb Garden Takes Root at 55 Lyme

With the help of Nicoll Brinley, we've planted an herb garden this year around our sign at 55 Lyme St. Some are modern cultivars and others have been a part of western herb gardens for millennia. Today herbs are raised primarily for the kitchen or for their pleasant scent or appearance. In former times they were valued equally if not more so for their reputed healing properties and for use in a variety of household tasks now served by commercial products.

Among early European settlers a garden plot dedicated to herbs would have been a rare sight. It was far more common to plant herbs in the vegetable garden, tucking them into a small space here or there. This allowed more intensive use of the cultivated area and gave food crops the benefit of those herbs that repel insects.

By the nineteenth century a vegetable garden was no longer an essential tool of survival for most Connecticut residents. A typical home in a shoreline town might have a flower garden in front and a mixture of herbs and vegetables in the kitchen garden out back. Herbs remained an important element in home remedies and general housekeeping throughout the nineteenth century. Commercial scale production of botanicals (regulated by new pure food and drug acts after 1900) meant that equivalents of most of the old home-brewed remedies, cleaning supplies, etc. could be

bought at the local pharmacy. Twentieth-century advances in medicine and industrial chemistry created products that were far more effective, but the culinary uses of fresh herbs, to say nothing of their aesthetic appeal, remain to this day.

The English and Dutch brought the herbs they knew: sage, parsley, chives, marjoram, mint, dill, mustard, rosemary, and thyme, to name but a few. Many of these herbs originated in the Mediterranean and had been carried north in Roman times and later cultivated in monastic gardens. The term *officinalis* in a botanical name indicates the herb's place in the typical monastic dispensary or *opificina*. Garden sage, for example, is *salvia* ("healer") *officinalis*, and rosemary is *rosmarinus* ("moisture or dew of the sea") *officinalis*.

Not all of the familiar mediterranean herbs made the journey to New

England in colonial times, however. Tarragon and lavender were rare. Most varieties do not grow well in our hot, wet summers and cold winters. Oregano and basil were practically unheard of before the arrival of Italian and Greek immigrants in the nineteenth century. Of the native American herbs, tobacco had by far the greatest commercial impact, but other New World herbs found their way into New England gardens, including several species of nasturtium and echinacea.

— Mark Terwilliger



Photograph by James Meehan



Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

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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 residents and visitors.*

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## From the Co-Chairs



Photograph by James Meehan

Summer has arrived at last! After a stormy winter and a dismal, chilly spring, Old Lyme is finally in full bloom. The Old Lyme Historical Society has been working diligently, moving forward with building and grounds improvements, including the handicap lift; accessioning hundreds of items in the archives, and assessing our organization with an eye toward the future.

As mentioned in the Spring newsletter, the Board of Trustees has been working with a consultant to craft a Strategic Plan to ensure that the Society continues meeting the needs of our members and the community.

The Trustees filled out surveys, met in small groups, and held an all-day retreat session in March. The Strategic Plan was approved in May, setting forth a blueprint for growth and preservation for years to come.

The Society held its Annual Meeting on June 11th, and announced the winners of the Carol Noyes Winters Scholarship and James B. Noyes Award. See article on page 4 for details. You may have noticed that the Co-chair photo has changed once more. Founding member Alison Mitchell has stepped down as interim Co-Chair, but will continue as a Trustee and in the Archives. Michaëlle Pearson will continue as Co-Chair, joined by John Pote.

Look for us at the Old Lyme Midsummer Festival. This year, the Historical Society will have two locations: the Lyme Art Academy, with a selection of our popular publications, prints, tote bags, tea towels, etc. for sale. The Society will also have a second table in the "Hands On, Minds On" area at the Florence Griswold Museum, featuring old-time games and craft activities for younger history buffs.

The Board is excited to announce a new lecture series at 55 Lyme featuring historical topics of local interest, starting on July 30th at 7pm with a lecture on *Sound View: America's Oldest Public Beach*. Future topics include *The CT River Estuary*, *Connecticut Ferries*, and more!

Don't miss the OLHSI's "mini exhibits": a series of small, seasonal displays created by Edie Twining in cases at the Post Office, Town Hall and at 55 Lyme Street. See you around town!

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

## Upcoming July Events

**Sunday, July 15, 4pm - FREE!**

*Old Lyme Town Band concert and Ice Cream Social!  
Old Lyme South Green (where Lyme St. and McCurdy Rd. meet)*

**Saturday, July 28, 9am-3pm - Old Lyme Midsummer Festival**  
*OLHSI hosts book sales, kids' crafts, and more!*

**Monday, July 30, 7pm - Summer Lecture Series**

*Jim Lampos & Michaëlle Pearson  
"Sound View, America's Oldest Public Beach."  
Old Lyme Historical Society, 55 Lyme St., Old Lyme*

## Rogers Lake West Shores

Not long after the construction of the present Rogers Lake dam (just overhauled after 90 some years) and the building of a new bridge nearby on the Essex Turnpike (Town Woods Rd) in 1922, the Old Lyme Realty Company began advertising property for sale at Rogers Lake for literally pennies. Prospective buyers discovered that this land was in the cranberry bogs behind the lake and was underwater for several months of the year.

They were then shown property at or near the lake shore for sale for a few hundred dollars a lot. Even then, they discovered that they had to buy two lots totalling about 5000 sq ft to have enough to build even a cottage on. Rogers Lake Shores, as the west side of the lake was then called, began to grow. Roads were built, rights of way to the water were provided and, to create a sense of community, the realty company established the Rogers Lake Tennis Club, built a log cabin clubhouse and a tennis court and assessed property owners \$2/yr in dues. However, only die-hard tennis buffs paid their dues and by the mid 30s the tennis club was struggling and Rogers Lake Shores needed a different approach.

Property owners asked the General Assembly to create a chartered association with the right to levy taxes for the public good. So, in 1937, the Rogers Lake West Shores Association was formed, officers elected (first president, Edwin Alden), by-laws drawn up, committees formed. The roads were improved, street signs were erected, even a dump was provided. By the end of WWII, there were a few families living year-round in the southern part of the Association at which point the town took over part of Rogers Lake Trail as a school bus had to get into the community - about one half mile in, as far as the clubhouse. By 1948, there was one family living year-round in the northern part (beyond the clubhouse) Around this time, the deteriorated club house was demolished. By the mid-fifties, there were more families living year-round, about ten beyond the clubhouse site. Most of these families had children. In 1954, the school bus route was extended to the Lyme town line and shortly thereafter, the Town of Old Lyme (and later, the Town of Lyme) began to assume control of many of the roads, widen, level and oil them. The roads were now regularly plowed, trash collection was provided and mail delivery was extended to the northern limits of the Association.

Today, two-thirds of the streets are town-owned, with the rest, mostly gravel, still belonging to the Association which also maintains a number of rights of way to the water and the present clubhouse built in 1959. The majority of the houses are occupied year-round, although a number of summer places still create the atmosphere of a vacation area.

One funny story which surfaced during my research: In the early 30s, a property owner wrote to the realty company complaining that people were stealing gravel from a pit provided for road maintenance. The company replied that it did not have the resources to provide security for a gravel pit but that a nearby property owner had offered to keep an eye on the gravel. It appears that he took his job so seriously that he was taking the gravel home with him to better watch it!

— Mark Lander

*Thanks to David Evers, President of the RLWSA for allowing me access to their archives,*



Road to Rogers Lake, circa 1909.  
Old Lyme Historical Society Archives.



Camping at Rogers Lake, circa 1919.  
Jennifer Hillhouse Collection.



Jane's Waffle Shop, Rogers Lake, circa 1929.  
Old Lyme Historical Society Archives.



### OLHSI 13th Annual Meeting

On Monday, June 11, 2018 the Old Lyme Historical Society held its 13th annual meeting, at 55 Lyme St. The annual meeting is open to all members. The meeting thanked retiring board members, elected new board members for three-year terms, and elected officers for the coming year.

Retiring OLHSI Trustees: Roger Breunig, Mary Crist, Sandra Downing, Mark Lander, and Adela Wilmerding. New (or returning) Trustees: Katie Balocca, Tim Griswold, Todd Machnik, Jill Pilgrim, and Sydney Williams. Among the officers, Alison Mitchell finished her stand-in role as Co-chair. John Pote will serve a regular term as Co-chair, along with Michaelle Pearson who also served for part of last year. Anne Marie Jewett will serve another term as Treasurer. Andi Williams stepped down as Secretary, with a new Secretary to be chosen at the next regular board meeting, on July 9.

Kevin Cole, Chairman of the OLHSI Scholarship & Youth Outreach Committee, presented the 2018 *Carol Noyes Winters Scholarship Award*, given to an outstanding Lyme/Old Lyme student intending to study history in college. This year, there were two recipients: Jonathan Balocca and Sarah Kwon. Congratulations to you both!



Joseph Kwon (father), Sarah Kwon recipient,  
Jonathan Balocca recipient,  
Katie Balocca (mother) & Emily Balocca (sister)



### Handweavers' Guild of CT, Area 4 – Demonstrating the Fine Art of Hand Weaving

In June 2016, Susan Morrison, a former Board member, introduced Alison Mitchell to Stephanie Morton, an experienced hand weaver, who was looking for a venue in which to house her 9 foot wide Clement Loom, and conduct community weaving sessions. As it turned out, the practice of Grange Halls having large looms in which members of the community came together to weave coverlets, or catalognes, as they are called, was common throughout the northeast and Quebec Province. The Historical Society Board of Trustees embraced the idea of reviving the practice particularly since the Society now owns the former Grange #162. Stephanie and other members of Area 4, Connecticut Handweavers' Guild moved in. The Tuesday Morning Work Crew was pressed into service to perform the tricky job of not only transporting the Clement Loom to its new location, but also assembling it. Thus the Community Loom Project was born.

The first goal was to warp up the loom in time for it to be woven on for the Midsummer Festival held at the end of July each year. It takes four people to work the Clement loom, two to treadle, and two more to throw the shuttle. This makes for a fun way to not only manage the weaving of rag coverlets, but also catch up on the news of the day or reports on family activities. It was a perfect project for the Festival. The Historical Society saw a steady stream of people: teenagers, men, women, young and white-haired ladies, trying their hand at the loom all day long. Jody Brewer volunteered for the first coverlet. This meant she got to pick out the cotton materials which are cut into thin strips and then woven into amazing multi-stripped coverlets, and one wonders what happened to those rag strips to transform them into useful and diverse works of cloth art. It took three months for the first coverlet to be completed. The weavers held open sessions on Tuesday mornings during which they developed a routine. The next coverlet was by Susan Morrison. Subsequent coverlet designers included Maureen Connaughton and Stephanie herself. Like all projects, this one had its end with Stephanie moving to her new home in Schenectady, New York. Before that, Area 4 weavers completed a 6th coverlet which they presented to the Historical Society as an expression of their appreciation for allowing them to be guests at 55 Lyme Street. The Board reciprocated with a reception for the weavers on May 14, 2018 and gave them each a poster of photos depicting scenes from the various weaving sessions held over the two years. It was a wonderful partnership, and we will miss their cheery presence and marvelous handiwork.

— Alison Mitchell



Photographs by James Meehan