



# River & Sound

OLHSI.org

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

Issue 21 🌱 Spring 2016

## Proposed High Speed Railroad Cuts Through Old Lyme Historical District

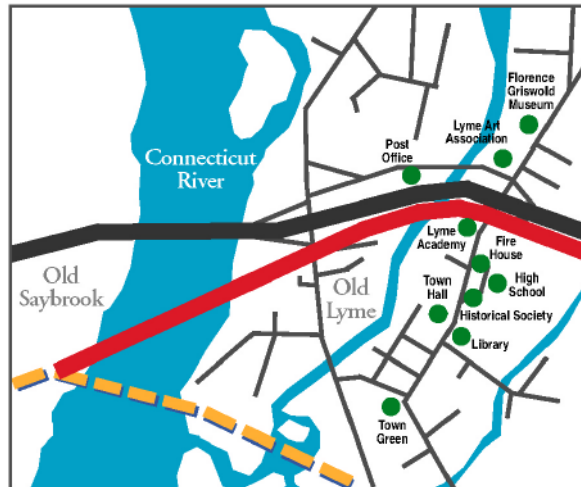
Old Lyme, then called Lyme, first heard of the railroad coming to town in 1841. Florence Griswold's mother, Helen, noticed surveyors looking at possible rail routes, either behind her family's barn or in front of their house. She wrote of it to her seagoing husband, Captain Robert Griswold, in a letter dated Aug 13, 1841: "...the Commissioners for the Rail Road have been surveying the route for a day or two past and it is now thought it will go back of our Barns, how will you approve of that dear, I should think it more desirable than to have it in front, I suppose however our thoughts upon the subject are immaterial."

By the late 1840s, the New Haven & New London Railroad had been chartered and construction begun. The tracks reached both banks of the Connecticut River in 1851. Riverside stations were built in both Old Saybrook and Lyme, and trains were transported across the river by a steam ferry. Eventually, several other stations were built in Old Lyme: Black Hall, near Bailey Road; Sound View at Cross Lane and South Lyme by the entrance to today's Point O' Woods. Following the construction of a railroad bridge in the 1870s, the riverside station, called Lyme Station, was moved to a spot near the McCurdy Road underpass and the Black Hall station was closed. By 1907, the current railroad bridge across the Connecticut River was built, which allowed the railroad to be double-tracked all along the Shoreline. This created a controversy when the Town was asked to approve a bridge on Buttonball Road, then called Back Road, across the tracks, due to increased rail traffic. The alignment of that road relative to the tracks explains the somewhat awkward approach to today's overpass, the second one on that site. As automobile traffic became more popular, Old Lyme's train stations were gradually phased out, with Lyme Station being the last one in operation, until the 1930s. More recently, the electrification of the route from New Haven to Boston stirred up a hornet's nest as many people protested the ugly catenary needed to support the wires.

These historic concerns presage the current controversy regarding Alternative 1 presented by the Federal Railroad Administration

(FRA), which has proposed several routes to improve train service on the Northeast Corridor from Boston to Washington D.C.

Alternative 1 calls for a new railroad bridge across the Connecticut River, which would then place tracks alongside I-95 (which would likely destroy the Lyme Academy) before crossing Lyme Street and then I-95 before moving on to New London. This project would require an impact zone running roughly from the southern end of Sill Lane to Library Lane, thereby affecting much of Old Lyme's Historic District.



Interstate 95 Existing Railroad Proposed Railroad



Lyme Station, circa 1900. Leroy Roberts collection.



Sound View Station, circa 1925. Jim Lampos collection.

On February 13, a meeting was held at Town Hall which brought together organizations with a direct interest in the proposed rail route, such as the Florence Griswold Museum, Lyme Art Association, Lyme Academy, Historic District Commission, Old Lyme Historical Society, Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, etc. As a result of this meeting a letter to the FRA was drawn up to be signed by a representative of each group. On February 10, a press conference was held at the Florence Griswold Museum with about 60 people attending. Speakers included Old Lyme First Selectwoman Bonnie Reemsnyder; Jeff Andersen, Director of the Florence Griswold Museum; Samuel Gold, head of the River Council of Governments; Representative Devin Carney and Senator Paul Formica. They each expressed their concern over the proposed Alternative 1 and the effect it would have on the environment, the historic and cultural heritage of Old Lyme, the ambiance of Lyme Street and the town's economy.

Individual residents were also urged to submit comments on this project. Most Old Lyme residents have made it clear that they are in favor of advances in public transportation, but not at the expense of the town's rich historic and cultural resources. It was generally agreed at the meeting and in subsequent press releases that refurbishing and improving the current tracks and service should be encouraged and Alternative 1 must be taken out of consideration.

— Mark Lander & Michaele Pearson  
Map Graphic: James Meehan Art & Design



*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 its residents and visitors.*

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A special thank you to Jeff Andersen, Director of the Florence Griswold Museum, for supplying the Helen Griswold letter, and also his eloquent remarks regarding the proposed railroad rerouting.

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## Lyme Street - Now & Then

Photo: James Meehan

If you pick up your mail at the Old Lyme Post Office, you may have noticed a handsome new display mounted by the Old Lyme Historical Society. The Society was grateful to the Post Office for allowing them to refurbish an existing dusty cabinet in order to present continuing exhibits about Old Lyme history. To launch this endeavor, Edie Twining, longtime Old Lyme resident, and multi-talented art designer, has executed a diorama of a section of Lyme Street commerce as it is today as contrasted with the street in the 1920s. Legend sheets on the counter give short descriptions of each structure. The intent is to follow up this exhibit with similar ones highlighting other parts of the village. Next time you go to mail a package, take a moment to go across the lobby and have a look.

## From the Co-Chairs

To the public, Winter 2016 has been a quiet time for the OLHSI. Board member Bob DiNapoli, assisted by Board member Jennifer Hillhouse, successfully conducted Saturday book sales during December. The project of which we are the most proud is the on-going work to create an archives storage room in our building at 55 Lyme Street. Our Tuesday morning work crew, whom you have met previously, continues to forge ahead. The room is entirely framed, all the sheet rock is up, taped and sanded and the interior is painted. Wiring is in place, and light fixtures will soon go in, as will the floor tile. A climate control system is partially installed, waiting only for the completion of the finish work. Work has begun on framing a work area outside the archives room.

Elsewhere, the dropped ceiling in the main hall has been removed, exposing the beautiful original 19th century beadboard ceiling which will soon see period lighting fixtures with modern bulbs installed. An alarm system covering all likely emergencies will soon go in. One other improvement of which we are very proud is the replacement of the lights in our office thanks to a fund established in memory of Board member Alison Mitchell's husband John and generously supported by the community.

Future activities will include our annual dinner lecture, date TBD, one or two possible book talks, a tag sale on April 30, an open house on Memorial Day, another during the Midsummer Festival and a Town Band concert sponsored by the Society on July 17.

As always, we are looking for volunteers to help us maintain or improve our building, to aid in staffing the office and helping with other activities. If you are interested, please contact Co-Chair Mark Lander at 860 388 3869. We hope to soon have scheduled office hours. Until then, if you see that the building is open, that there are people in and out, that the flags are flying, please stop in and see what your Historical Society is up to.

*Timothy Griswold & Mark Lander*

*Chairs, Board of Trustees, Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.*

## *Old Lyme Profile*

### Platt Hubbard (1889-1946)



The Historical Society Archive was recently given a unique steel engraving of Old Lyme by the family of the late Cynthia Twining. It is the work of noted etcher, landscape artist, and printmaker, Platt Hubbard. The engraving depicts a whimsical view of the town as imagined by Hubbard, circa 1945.

Mr. Hubbard was born in 1889 in Columbus, Ohio. He showed an early interest in studying art and met George Bellow, an early influence. In his late teens, he moved to New York to study with noted American painter Robert Henri. Hubbard continued his studies in Paris where he maintained a studio from 1911-1932. Between his periodic stays in Paris, he painted and traveled throughout France, Italy and as far as the Orient.

He moved to Old Lyme around the time of World War I and it became his primary residence. Rural scenes of Old Lyme and Lyme were the most frequent subjects of his etchings. He was a lifelong member of the Lyme Art Association. His work has appeared in various exhibits over the years including the Johnson Museum at Cornell University, and the Florence Griswold Museum, which has a collection of his etchings, oils, pastels, and wood block prints given to the museum by a relative of Walter Magee, a lifelong friend of Platt Hubbard. His work is also in many private collections throughout New England. It is interesting to note that Platt Hubbard's mother, Susan Platt Hubbard, was an outspoken opponent of women's suffrage as was Florence Griswold. Katharine Ludington crossed swords with them over this issue. Platt Hubbard died prematurely in 1946 in Old Lyme.

The Historical Society is planning a mini exhibit of his work in the summer of 2016.

— Alison Mitchell

## *From the Archives*

### Recent Additions to the Archives

*Complete History of Connecticut, Vol. I  
Civil and Ecclesiastic Emigration of its First Planters  
from England from 1730 to 1758*

Author: Benjamin Trumbull, DD, 1797  
Published by Hudson & Goodwin  
Flyleaf stating this is the property of John J. Wells 1799.  
Some water damage. Leather in poor condition

*Complete History of Connecticut, Vol. II  
Civil and Ecclesiastic Emigration of its First Planters  
from England from 1630 to 1764 and to the close of the Indian Wars.*

Author: Benjamin Trumbull, DD, 1818  
Published by Maltby Goldsmith & Co. Samuel Wadsworth  
Water Damage, foxing, slightly pulling away from the binding.  
Bound together by burgundy tape

*History of Connecticut, Volume I: First Settlement of the Colony  
to the Adoption of the Present Constitution*

Author: G.H. Hollister, 1855  
Published by Durrie & Peck, New Haven Connecticut  
Fairly good Condition

*History of Connecticut, Volume II: First Settlement of the Colony  
to the Adoption of the Present Constitution*

Author: G.H. Hollister, 1855  
Published by Durrie & Peck, New Haven Connecticut  
Some Water Damage, Foxing

*History of New England, Volumes I, II & III: During the Stuart  
Dynasty (3 Separate Volumes) Only 100 Copies of Each*

Author: John Gorham Palfrey, 1865  
Published by Little, Brown, Boston  
Fair, Foxing, Watermarks.

### *Upcoming Events*

## **Old Lyme Town Band Concert** *Sponsored by Old Lyme Historical Society*



Photo: James Meehan

**Sunday July 17, 2016**  
**4 p.m. on the Town Green**

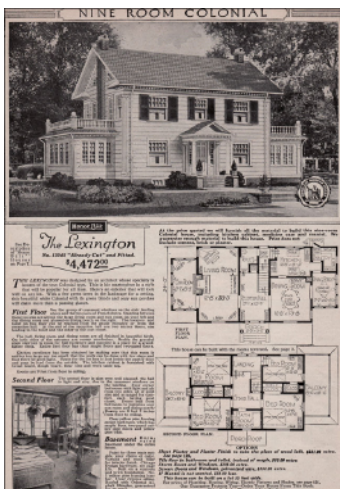
## Sears Catalogue Homes in Old Lyme

In one of those delightful chance encounters at the Post Office, a friend suggested that the Historical Society survey the town to unearth examples of “Sears Modern Homes”. After a bit of online research, we were delighted to uncover [www.searsarchives.com](http://www.searsarchives.com), which contains a wealth of information about these home designs.

If you are 50 years old or younger, you may be surprised to learn that Sears started out as the endeavor of two gentlemen: Richard W. Sears and Alvah Curtis Roebuck. Early on, Roebuck sold out his shares in the company but remained as a repairman, and the name stuck.

The Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalogues, starting in 1887 were, for many families across the country, eagerly awaited and well-thumbed. In 1908, the hefty tome included listings for mail-order kit houses. The first specialty catalog, *Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans*, featured 44 styles ranging in price from \$360-\$2,890. There were three different lines of homes, aimed at customers’ differing financial means: *Honor Built*, the most expensive and finest quality; *Standard Built*, recommended for warmer climates; and *Simplex*, houses of two rooms, ideal for summer cottages. The *Simplex* line did not include indoor bathrooms, but Outhouses could be ordered separately. For the other lines, Sears, Roebuck helped to make popular the latest technology to modern homebuyers in the early part of the 20th Century. Such innovations as central heating, indoor plumbing, and electricity led the way not only to creative interior design particularly in kitchens and bathrooms, but also safer and better-insulated houses. The key element of the *Modern Homes* program was that it opened up the possibility of home ownership to a whole

new market of modest-income prospective customers by lowering production costs due to mass production of the materials such as drywall and asphalt shingles which made the purchase affordable. Shipped by railroad boxcar, and then usually trucked to a home site, the average *Sears Modern Home* kit had approximately 25 tons of materials, with over 30,000 parts. (Imagine having to check those orders pre-computer!) Sears also offered financing plans as early as 1912. Early mortgage loans were typically for 5-15 years at 6-7% interest. Sales peaked in 1929, just before the Great Depression. By then, the least expensive model was under \$1,000; the highest priced was under \$4,400. In 2016 dollars, the range would be \$13,672 - \$60,157 respectively.



Plan for Sears kit House.  
The Lexington model, 1928.

Colorful names were given to the 370 models offered over the 32 years that Sears marketed *Sears Modern Homes*, among them Alhambra, Argyle, Barrington, Hathaway, Starlight, and Winona. We know that the nine-room house built in 1928 by Woodward Griswold, next to his grocery store, and now owned by Dan and Barbara Oconnell was a *Lexington* model selling for \$4,472.00. It was featured on the cover of

that year’s catalog and advertised as “true colonial in type”. The Historical Society hopes that this short description of these pre-fab houses has stirred your curiosity. We would like to know if you think you have a *Sears Modern Home* keeping in mind that many houses have been added and/or altered over the years. There are some distinguishing features to these houses. Please let us know. Our Tuesday Morning work crew would enjoy a day off on a field trip to help with a bit of historic sleuthing. Call us at 860 434 0684 .

— Alison Mitchell

## Old Lyme’s Midsummer Festival Celebrates 30 Years. July 29 & 30, 2016

This summer Old Lyme will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Midsummer Festival scheduled Friday evening, July 29, and Saturday, July 30th, 2016. Originally, the event was coordinated by the Florence Griswold Museum, the Lyme Art Association, Lyme Academy of Fine Arts (now the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts), the Old Lyme Inn, and the Bee & Thistle Inn, with activities concentrated in the northern part of town. Now there is a panoply of activities from the Bee & Thistle to the Village Shops along Lyme Street. The lineup is impressive. The Festival starts with a popular and extremely well-attended concert Friday night on the banks of the Lieutenant River at the Florence Griswold Museum. Saturday will present visitors with activities for children and adults; arts and handcrafts exhibits with many items for sale; music for all ages with many different beats; and many different food temptations available all day long. For Old Lyme residents there will be the traditional

fireworks display that night. The Festival has turned into a delightful and eagerly-awaited street fair. The Historical Society is delighted to be a partner in this endeavor, and is planning some special events of its own. We are delighted that Area 4 (Eastern and Southeastern Connecticut) of the Handweavers Guild of Connecticut will be at 55 Lyme Street. The Guild was founded in 1948 to bring handweavers, spinners, and other fiber artists together to share knowledge, exchange ideas, and educate the public in this traditional craft. There will be an exhibit of items made by the Old Lyme Handweavers circa 1961 including bolts of woven fabric, articles of clothing and handwoven rugs. There will also be weavers demonstrating on three or four different types of looms. Come and be inspired by the magic of weaving. There will also be tours of the completed state-of-the-art Archives in the lower level of the building.



Midsummer Festival Photographs: James Meehan, 2015.