

River & Sound

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

Issue Eight ☘ Summer 2010

Sound View and more: history of Old Lyme's beaches explored in new book, exhibit

This summer the Society published its fifth book—*Rum Runners, Governors, Beachcombers + Socialists: Views of the Beaches in Old Lyme*. Written by Old Lyme residents Jim Lampos and Michaelle Pearson, the 88-page book is an intricately researched, intriguing exploration of the beach communities from Griswold Point in the west to Point O' Woods in the east. Illustrations include a map of the Old Lyme shoreline, decades-old newspaper clippings and postcards, and original photographs.

Also contributing to the book were Alison Mitchell, project manager and editor; Burnham Carter, Jr., and Richard Conniff, editors; Patsy McCook, copy editor; and James Meehan, designer.

Rum Runners traces the history of ten beaches—Edge Lea, Griswold Point, Hatchett's Point, Hawk's Nest Beach, Miami Beach, Old Colony Beach, Old Lyme Shores, Point O' Woods,

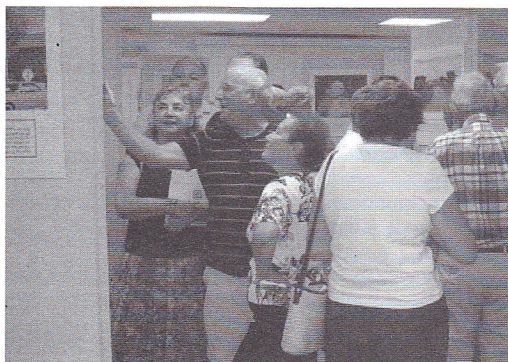
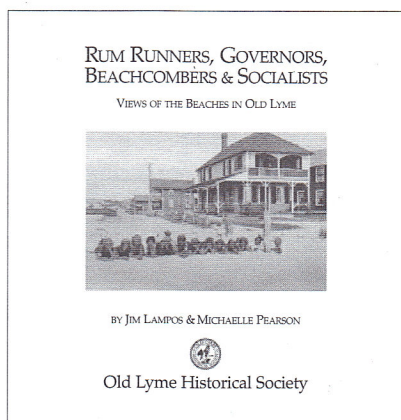


Photo: Norm Stitham

Sound View Beach, and White Sands Beach—from the Ice Age to the earliest settlements, from the founding of Old Lyme to a picture of the beaches as they are today.

The book was launched on August 20 at a reception at the Shoreline Community Center in Sound View. Fortified by hors d'oeuvres catered by Coffee's Country Market and by "Rum Runners" and other beverages, more than 150 attendees were treated to an exhibit of memorabilia about the beaches, including images from *Rum Runners*. The exhibit, designed by OLHSI trustee Tom Schellens, moves to the White Sands Community Center in September.

The Society is immensely grateful to Essex Financial Services and Essex Savings Bank for generously supporting the book, and to the Sound View Beach Association and the Shoreline Community Center for donating space for the reception and exhibit.

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Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

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www.oldlymehistorical.org

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Old Lyme's beaches: book and exhibit

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Photos: Norm Stitham



Authors Jim Lampos
and Michaëlle Pearson



Martha Hansen, Carol Winters,
and Mark Lander selling books



Dyanne Rafal and Karen Winters
serving clam chowder

Thanks also go to Jason and Eileen Conroy, owners of the Old Lyme Ice Cream Shoppe and Café, for publicizing the event by hanging a banner on the front of their store on Lyme Street and for concocting a new ice cream flavor—"Sandy Shore"—and serving it at the reception. Jason recalls that as a child in Point O' Woods, his favorite ice cream was toasted almond. His new creation was, he says, a way to incorporate some of his own history into the celebration of Old Lyme's beaches.

Finally, a note of appreciation to the Old Lyme-PGN Library for displaying *Rum Runners* and posting an announcement that it is available for purchase during our office hours at the library—Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to noon. The book may also be purchased through PayPal, on the Society's website (see below).

New website up and running!

Did you know that OLHSI secretary Martha Hansen doubles as our webmaster? After an incalculable amount of work on her part, the Society's website has been beautifully redesigned and professionally upgraded. On the site, which Martha will be updating regularly, you may:

- Use PayPal to purchase OLHSI books, historical postcards, and note cards illustrated by Catherine Christiano
- Join the OLHSI or renew your membership, also using PayPal
- Find out about coming OLHSI events
- Learn about Old Lyme's cemeteries
- Download issues of previous issues of this newsletter
- Contact us.

So many thanks from all of us at the OLHSI, Martha!

www.oldlymehistorical.org

John Pfeiffer analyzes local Indian burial practices

As part of a series of talks on local history, the OLHSI welcomed town historian John Pfeiffer to the Lymes' Senior Center on April 2 for his third annual lecture and slide presentation. The talk, which followed a dinner catered by Coffee's Country Market, dealt with Native American burial ceremonies in southeastern Connecticut.

In the 1960s Dr. Pfeiffer, a professional archaeologist as well as a historian, collected artifacts from ceremonial sites in the Connecticut River valley and along the shoreline in Old Lyme, at Crescent Beach and Niantic in East Lyme, and at Jordan Cove in Waterford. Our region's geography and topography—well-drained soils, and the neutralizing of the soil by shellfish—favor the preservation of these sites.

According to Dr. Pfeiffer, the sites offer a "huge insight" into humans' unique characteristics, including the formulation of abstract ideas. He noted that the belief in the afterlife is manifested by such burial practices as placing a body in the fetal position (to allow a return to "Mother" Earth), accompanying the body with flowers (suggesting life and rebirth) and other goods as offerings to a deity, and attempting to communicate with ancestors.

OLHSI annual meeting

Society celebrates fifth anniversary, announces awards

General members and friends joined OLHSI trustees at the Old Lyme-PGN Library on June 21 for the Society's annual meeting. Our featured speaker was the East Lyme Historical Society's Richard Waterman, who described his production of an annual hands-on "colonial history day" for fourth-graders at the Thomas Lee House in Niantic.

At the meeting we elected two new trustees, Janet Littlefield and Norman Stitham, and we noted with regret the departure of Judy Tooker and Bill Stewart from the board. In addition, members ratified a change in our by-laws, creating two co-chairs; these positions are being filled by Alison Mitchell and Patsy McCook. Earlier this year the Board elected Dick Bugbee, Ellis Jewett, and Michaelle Pearson as trustees.

The meeting also included the announcement of the second recipient of the OLHSI scholarship. Michael McLean, a 2010 graduate of Lyme-Old Lyme High School, will attend Trinity College this fall. In an essay accompanying his application, Michael attributed his appreciation for history to John Pfeiffer, his freshman-year World Civilizations teacher. Dr. Pfeiffer, he said, "revealed the

numerous connections between past events and current problems. He told us that only by understanding the past can we hope to improve the future." Donations to the OLHSI scholarship fund—the award is given annually to a local high school senior who plans to major in history in college—are much appreciated. Please contact OLHSI treasurer Carol Winters, at MEMEW6@aol.com.

No OLHSI annual meeting would be complete without the presentation of the Chairman's Award, initiated in 2006 to honor an organization or individual who has significantly helped to preserve the history of Old Lyme. In announcing this year's recipient—OLHSI trustee and former chair Tom Schellens—Alison Mitchell described him as "a fountain of ideas and decided opinions," the producer of "creative solutions to problems great and small," and "a master of light and sound. Just give him a hammer, some two-by-fours, and voila: an exhibit." Tom's present—a framed, signed print of one of Catherine Christiano's illustrations for our first monograph, *Poverty Island* (2006)—was particularly apt, as it was Tom who conceived of the idea that the Society launch a publishing program.

Caroline Zinsser discusses book about pioneering local physician

Thanks to local researcher and author Caroline Fraser Zinsser, we now know about a 19th-century local resident who was a true hero: Vine Utley, a physician who lived and practiced in the Lyme area, which includes present-day East Lyme and Waterford. On August 26 at the Florence Griswold Museum, the OLHSI and the museum co-sponsored Ms. Zinsser's discussion of *Vine Utley: The Remarkable Country Doctor of Lyme, Connecticut (1768-1836)*. The book was published this year by the East Lyme Public Library and is available for sale there. The library is at 39 Society Road, Niantic; phone: 860-739-6926.

Drawing on unpublished manuscripts from local historical societies and libraries, Ms. Zinsser describes Dr. Utley as "one of the many forgotten but remarkable Americans who helped to shape the country we live in today." He embraced and courageously crusaded for universal vaccination against smallpox, then a controversial practice in the United States. Dr. Utley kept more than 1,000 pages of case histories from 1798 to 1834, which vividly describe the period's medical treatments, notably bloodletting and the use of strong purgatives. He also interviewed his community's oldest citizens—as well as Thomas Jefferson, a septuagenarian, and Benjamin Rush, the nation's foremost physician at the time—in the attempt to understand the secrets of longevity.

World War II veterans, class of 1960 to be interviewed for oral history project

The Society's year-long oral history project is holding two more interview sessions in September. On Wednesday, September 22, individual and group interviews will focus on residents' memories of World War II, at home and on the front lines. And members of Old Lyme High School's class of 1960 will be interviewed at their 50th reunion, on Saturday, September 11.

The project has interviewed 36 people. If you have not been interviewed and would like to be, please contact the OLHSI.

OLHSI book to focus on 1920's local merchants

Plans are advancing for the Society's sixth book, tentatively titled *A Connecticut Town in the 1920's: The Changing Rhythms of Rural Life*.

The catalyst for the book was the 2005 discovery of a mural that includes advertising copy submitted by 17 local business contributors to the Old Lyme Grange during the 1920s. The mural was mounted on the reverse side of a canvas backdrop hanging on the stage at the Old Lyme Grange Hall, on Lyme Street.

The book was researched by John Stratton and OLHSI trustees Jim Noyes and Jennifer Hillhouse and written by local author and journalism professor Carolyn Huntley Wakeman.

Join us in bringing Old Lyme's past to the present!

Please become an OLHSI member or renew your membership.

The OLHSI gratefully accepts contributions
or loans of town and family memorabilia.

Membership fees and other donations are fully tax-deductible.

New member Renewing member

Please make your check payable to the Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.,
and send with this form to us at P.O. Box 352, Old Lyme, CT 06371.
(You may also use PayPal, on our new website; see page 2 of this issue.)

Thanks for your generosity!

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Please ask your company about a Matching Gift program.

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I enclose a Matching Gift form.

The OLHSI is a non-profit corporation incorporated in the State of Connecticut.
It is a registered charity with the state Department of Consumer Protection
and is recognized by the IRS for 501(c)3 status

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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NEWSLETTER

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Benefits of OLHSI membership

- A subscription to this semiannual newsletter
- Advance notice of forthcoming events
- Invitations to member-only events
- Priority status to obtain genealogical research material at the PGN Library
- A 10% discount on our books, and the opportunity to purchase them in advance
- Discounted rates for certain events
- Opportunities to learn Old Lyme's history
- Training in historical research and oral-history interviews
- The realization that your tax-deductible contribution is supporting a vital cultural resource.

Old Lyme profile

Mervin F. Roberts

Merv Roberts has lived in Old Lyme for half a century. He has spent even more years writing about and advocating for marine ecosystems—bays, estuaries, and tidemarsch waters, and the wildlife that inhabit them.

In the first volume of his autobiography, *M.F. Roberts: An Autobiographical Work in Progress* (The Widget Company, Old Lyme, 2005), Merv acknowledges that at least as far as he is concerned, “employment is a loose and poorly defined concept.” His life’s work has, instead, comprised “a number of random lines... related to estuaries, animal natural history, animal husbandry and writing.”

Merv grew up in Rockaway, a peninsula on western Long Island north of the Atlantic Ocean and south of Jamaica Bay. A World War II veteran, Merv notes in his autobiography: “I chose the Navy because I was brought up within sight of the ocean and much of my free time was spent on beaches or the marshes or afloat. To that extent, it was consistent with the concept that the beauty of life is simply to live in conformity with one’s nature and business.”

After attending Georgia Tech, the University of Illinois, and the USNR Midshipmen’s School at Columbia and receiving a degree in glass technology from Alfred University, in New York, Merv held several writing and editing jobs, none particularly satisfying. In his view, in fact, the chief significance of a 1960 offer of a technical-writing position, mostly for the Electric Boat division of General Dynamics, was that it prompted him and his wife, Edith, to move to Old Lyme. Wanting to be able to “duck hunt without having to drive a long distance,” he was told that our town offered the best hunting halfway between New York and Boston. Merv and Edith settled and raised a family on Whippoorwill Road and later moved to what is now Duck River Lane. Edith died in 2009.

An Old Lyme selectman from 1987 to 1997, Merv cites two accomplishments of which he is particularly proud: consolidating the South End and Old Lyme fire departments, and closing down the infamous bar, the Hotel Branmor in Sound View.

But it may be Merv’s “random lines”—his interests, his hobbies—that have best defined his life’s work. He has written more than 25 books about natural history (among them *The Tidemarsch Guide to Fishes* and *The Pearl Makers: The Tidemarsch Guide to Clams, Oysters, Mussels, and Scallops*) and caged pets (including iguanas, parakeets, hamsters, and turtles).

Likewise, Merv’s consulting jobs around the world have been outgrowths of his interests. Assignments included, in the 1980s, development of a tilapia-farming project in India and, in the 1960s, analysis of the feasibility of Connecticut’s two nuclear plants—Connecticut Yankee, in Haddam (now closed), and Millstone, in Niantic—and the assessment of the plants’ effects on the fish living in adjacent waterways.



The New London Day, 1986

Also emerging naturally from Merv’s “lines” are the numerous elected, appointed, and volunteer positions he has held since moving to Connecticut. He chaired the Governor’s Council for Marine Resources. And in Old Lyme he co-founded the Conservation Commission, founded the Water Pollution Control Authority, and for four decades has served as chaplain for the volunteer Fire Department. He gave a moving invocation at this year’s Memorial Day cemetery program.

Merv’s substantive interests and writing skills have often converged, perhaps no more tellingly than in the early 1990s. As chairman of the Old Lyme Shellfish Commission—a position he has held for 25 years—he fiercely contested plans by the towns of Clinton, Westbrook, and Old Saybrook to build a sewer system that would pump treated waste into the Connecticut River. His opposition was based on recent progress in cleaning up the river and the welcome return of ospreys and eagles to our area. The Shellfish Commission’s media campaign helped persuade Old Saybrook’s residents to vote down further expenditures to design the sewer system.

—Patsy McCook

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