

River & Sound

OLHSI.org

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

Issue 38 🦋 Autumn 2021

OLHSI Launches the 10th Annual *Then & Now* Community Calendar

Ten years ago, the idea of producing a *Then & Now* Community Calendar was presented to the Board of Trustees, which gave a tentative yes to the project with the proviso that if the calendar didn't generate any sponsors, the Society would cover the costs and move on to other ways of promoting Old Lyme's past. Fortunately, Lady Luck smiled on us and 12 sponsors were found in three weeks. Now ten years later, with over 36 local businesses and organizations generously sponsoring the publication over the years, the Society is very pleased to announce the tenth annual 2022 *Then & Now* Old Lyme Community Calendar.

The new 2022 *Then & Now* Calendar will be available at the Calendar Launch event on Thursday, November 18th from 4-6pm at the Old Lyme Historical Society, 55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme.

The *Then & Now* Calendar will also be available at the OLHSI holiday book sales outside the Halls Road Post Office on Saturday, December 4th, 11th, and 18th from 9am till 12pm (weather permitting), as well as for sale at local venues including the Florence Griswold Museum, the Chocolate Shell, The Bowerbird, and the Society Shop website at www.OLHSI.org.

The calendar makes a great gift for friends and family who spend part of the year away from Old Lyme, a reminder of this, their other home. Calendars are still \$12 each, and proceeds support the Old Lyme Historical Society. We extend a special "thank you" to the OLHSI Calendar development team: James Meehan, Alison Mitchell,

Michaëlle Pearson, John Pote, Nick Westbrook, Mary Dangremond and Cynthia Taylor.

OLHSI would like to thank this year's sponsors for their participation: the Town of Old Lyme, the Old Lyme Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library, Appleby Plumbing Company, the Old Lyme Historic District Commission, the Old Lyme Fire Department, Florence Griswold Museum, Essex Savings Bank, The Bowerbird and the Ladies Benevolent Society of the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme.



**Available
at the Calendar Launch**
Thursday, November 18, 2021 from 4-6 pm.
Old Lyme Historical Society at 55 Lyme Street

We thank our sponsors and vendors for their support of the Society and the Old Lyme community. We hope you will support them, too!

—The OLHSI Calendar Committee



Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.
55 Lyme Street, P.O. Box 352, Old Lyme, CT 06371
OLHSI.org



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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Photograph by James Meehan

2020-2021 OLHSI Board of Trustees

Back row: John Pote, Mark Terwilliger, Ned Farman, Sandra Joncus, Mary Dangremond, Alison Mitchell, Nick Westbrook, Steve Joncus, Skip Beebe. *Middle row:* Michaelle Pearson, Edie Twining, Ann Marie Jewett, Katie Balocca, Dawn McCarthy. *Front row:* Matt LaConti, Mary Ellen Jewett, Nancy Mol, Jill Todd, Steve MacAusland, James Meehan. *(Not shown in photo)* Ross W. Higgins, Jill Pilgrim, Elaine Stiles, Cindi Taylor.



From the Chairman

Dear Members,

As we transition to these autumn days that often find us outdoors enjoying the reprieve in the weather before winter, the Old Lyme Historical Society has an opportunity to reflect on the months since our last *River & Sound* newsletter. As in any household, it all boils down to things accomplished and things left to do.

A few of the accomplishments are welcome returns of traditional activities. The performance of the Old Lyme Town Band on the town green with an ice cream “pick-me-up” added to the festivities was a case in point. It was supported by local organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce, the Florence Griswold Museum, the Historic District Commission, Old Lyme-Phoebe Griffin Noyses Library, and, serving up the ice cream, your own Historical Society. Kudos to Edie Twining, who, with supportive research from Jill Todd, utilized her masterful creative skills to install a fine and thoughtful exhibit at the Halls Road Post Office featuring the Witness Stones along Lyme Street. This effort deserves everyone’s viewing attention, so if you have the opportunity, please check it out.

Our yearly Plant Sale offered a variety of show-stopping annuals and perennials. Thanks to the dependable and gracious help and donations of Judge’s Farm, we raised \$1,150 toward our scholarship fund. A co-sponsored virtual presentation with the Old Lyme Library of the James Family Letters by Elisabeth Petry on October 13 was also well received by a very interested and attentive audience.

(Continued on page 3)

Turnpikes in the 1790s - 1850s

The old roads were wretched. The towns did a poor job of maintaining their own roads, and did little or nothing to serve through traffic.

The Revolution didn't change that, but it did change attitudes toward roads. First, it showed tens of thousands of young men there was a world beyond their own town—a new revelation. Second, the war showed that long-distance roads were necessary for the country's survival. The oldest settlements all faced the sea or a navigable river. Water was the preferred mode of transport, but the Royal Navy could close that route at will, and often did. Roads were the only reliable way to move troops and supplies.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the roads were heavily worn, especially in Connecticut—a major supplier and supply route to the Continental Army around New York. The newly-independent republic of Connecticut was more interested in restoring its own economy than in connecting to the competing sovereign states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, or New York.

Trade did revive, however, and the new Federal Constitution adopted in 1789 ushered in an era of nationalist optimism and expansion. The back-country farmer wanted a piece of the expanding trade. Good roads connecting them to ports and water routes were required to secure that.

The towns were still nearly useless in maintaining roads, much less improving or creating them. Their only available method was to levy a tax in labor on their citizens, declaring a few days between spring planting and June haying season for roadwork. The tax was widely resented, and these “work crews” typically did little more than fill ruts and pot-holes with loose earth and call it a day's taxes paid. In those cases where they did have the will, farmers and tradesmen typically lacked the skills, tools, and available time to do much more than the barest top-dressing of rutted tracks.

The new Federal government had just assumed the war debts of the states. Even so, the financial chaos of the war years left the states leery of incurring new debts. With the towns unable and the states unwilling, the US turned instead to turnpikes: corporations dedicated to improving a particular stretch of road in exchange for the right to charge tolls for its use. Improvements would be paid for by those who benefited most, and investors would find a return for their money.

In practice, very few of these turnpike companies ever realized a profit. And yet, in the 1790s (and for several decades after in Connecticut) new turnpike companies continued to be formed, continued to sell their shares, and most important, continued to improve vital roads.

Especially in Connecticut, most of the turnpikes followed what had originally been public roads. In fact, when a road needed to be straightened the state would often take possession of the road, seize the acreage required for the new route, set the compensation (and order the town to pay it), then give the road back to the turnpike corporation—all in one motion.

(Continued on page 4)

From the Chairman

(Continued from page 2)



Additionally, as this newsletter goes to press, there were even more events to anticipate: The Lymes' Youth Service Bureau Unplugged Weekend; and the town's Halloween celebration. Once again, our front porch is being readied for a frightening display of tricks or treats.

While the above are the more community facing activities, the dedicated work of our Archives volunteer staff and our Tuesday Morning Work Crew was quietly (well, not too quietly) ongoing and highly productive. The break room and research room are now completed, and the accessioning in the Archives is always moving forward. Check out the article on page 4 regarding the the completed “painting of 55”.

And, items still on our to do list? Look for our annual *Then & Now* Calendar Launch on November 18th. This year, we're trying something a little different: A walk-through of our home at 55 Lyme Street while you admire the new calendar and hopefully purchase one (or two, or ---). All the while, we will be there to greet you. Of course, the ubiquitous necessary precautions will be in place. Our annual holiday book and merchandise sale at the Halls Road Post Office will take place on three consecutive Saturdays: December 4th, 11th, and 18th from 9am to 1 pm. Please stop by for that special gift or you can also visit our website for quick and easy ordering.

Always remember, the Society welcomes volunteers, new members, ideas and collaborations. Please check us out at OLHSI.org and on Facebook.

John Pote, Chairman,
Old Lyme Historical Society

Turnpikes in the 1790s - 1850s

(Continued from page 3)

Those who lived along the turnpike considered it an outrage to be asked to pay tolls, and the list of exemptions was often long and complex. These were not limited access highways, and many through travelers contrived to evade the toll houses by going a few miles out of their way on connecting public roads, which came to be called “shunpikes.” Several Connecticut roads still bear this name. The practice continued into the 20th century on toll roads using toll barrels rather than ramp toll gates.

Despite the slim chances of making a good profit from tolls, scores of turnpikes were established and operated in Connecticut. Their investors were often wealthy farmers and merchants whose benefits from a particular good road outweighed their modest investment in it. There was also a sense of doing something to change the nation for the better, and that motive should not be discounted.

The first turnpike in America was chartered in 1792. The 62-mile hard-surfaced road of the *Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike* took two years to build and cost nearly half a million (1795) dollars. Stage coaches on the new road could average 6-7 mph—a huge improvement over the pace along the rutted track it replaced.

In 1792, the old *Mohegan Road* between Norwich and New London became the nation’s second turnpike. Though still notorious for its steep grades and sharp curves, the improved road made it practical, for the first time, for a carriage to make a round trip between the two towns in a single day.

The *New London and Lyme Turnpike* was chartered in 1807, connecting that city with the Connecticut River at the foot of Ferry Road in [Old] Lyme. It followed the route of today’s US 1. A granite mile marker from that turnpike still graces the triangular town green at the intersection of the Post Road and Sill Lane.

By 1830 canals were the great new investment craze, and railroads followed soon after. In Connecticut, turnpikes remained an important part of the transportation network into the 1850s. The last private toll road was the *Derby Turnpike* (1795), connecting New Haven with the Housatonic River—roughly today’s CT Rte. 34. It collected tolls until 1895, and the company was dissolved in 1897.

—Mark Terwilliger



Painting 55 Lyme Street

Aside from membership dues, proceeds from books and tea towels, calendars, stationary, etc., we depend entirely on donations from our events, usually our lectures and presentations, for most of our ongoing expenses. Even the “labor” that is expended for any program, activity or service is voluntary and primarily that of the Board of Trustees and other devoted members of the Old Lyme community and the OLHSI itself. So when we send out a general membership appeal for a specific reason, as we have done with our effort to cover the cost of painting our building, it is judiciously considered and very rarely done. That makes the overwhelmingly positive response to that appeal so important and inspirational to all of us here at the Old Lyme Historical Society. So far we have raised a total of \$26,750 dollars which has allowed us to have the painting of the building completed before winter’s harsh assault commences. The expert job provided by our painters, Dean Montgomery and Mike Agnew, included some extra touches to enhance the appearance of their work and the building. It is certainly most appreciated.

The extra monies over and above the cost of the painting will be applied to other exterior work that is desperately needed on an older building such as ours. To all of you in our membership who answered the call and donated, your generosity is humbling. A sincere “thank you” seems woefully inadequate, but our gratitude is sincere and profound.

