

Federalists and 'The Constitution State'

Connecticut was deeply attached to its approach to self-government, rooted in the Fundamental Orders of 1639. The Charter of 1662 incorporated the same form. The Revolution brought a flurry of constitution making in other states, but Connecticut simply declared itself free of the British Crown, and continued under the old Charter. Connecticut politicians were important contributors to the new US Constitution of 1787, but showed no interest in altering their own fundamental law, which by then was over 150 years old.

Elections were held frequently for all offices, but Connecticut towns had a way of returning the same men, from the same families, over and over again. Sons often succeeded fathers in office. The leading families dominated both the pulpit and the state house, and became "the Standing Order" of Connecticut. John Adams said (admirably) that the Standing Order had a more complete control over public life in Connecticut than the Aristocracy had in any country of Europe. By the 1790s, the Standing Order was staunchly Federalist (supporters of the new Federal Constitution).

Though the Constitution won ratification, many Americans still opposed a strong central government and were suspicious of any limits on direct democracy. These "anti-Federalists" began to coalesce into a political party led by Jefferson and Madison. They called themselves "Republicans," evoking both the Roman Republic and the new, revolutionary France. As events in France moved from hope to The Terror and war broke out in Europe, the Federalist/Republican split in America became more severe. Each accused the other of seeking to destroy the country with mad and selfish schemes. Federalists like Adams and Hamilton favored trade and economic growth, and therefore peace and good relations with Britain. They accused Republicans of trying to foment a Jacobin mob-ocracy. Republicans favored farmers and planters, who were chronically in debt to traders (whom they considered parasites). They sympathized strongly with revolutionary France and accused the Federalists of being envious tools

of Britain trying to make themselves America's new aristocracy. To make matters worse, questions of shame and honor made every conflict more brittle and apt to flare into murderous rage.

A case in point is the first brawl in the House of Representatives. Roger Griswold was the son of Governor Mathew Griswold of Lyme, and would himself later become Lieutenant Governor and Governor of Connecticut. In 1798 he was a member of the House (F-CT), as was Matthew Lyon (R-VT). When Lyon loudly described Connecticut voters as dupes, Griswold alluded to a (possibly false) rumor that Lyon had been disciplined for cowardice during the Revolution. When Griswold repeated this, Lyon spat tobacco juice in his face. Outraged, the House spent two weeks failing to reach a 2/3 vote to expel Lyon. Days after the final vote failed, Griswold, still furious,



Congress Hall, in Philadelphia. February 15, 1798.

found Lyon in the House chamber and beat him repeatedly with a hickory stick. Lyon defended himself with a pair of fire tongs, then the men grappled and wrestled across the floor of the House chamber. Onlookers were aghast or amused, but eventually they managed to separate the two. Now both were up for expulsion, but this measure also failed a 2/3 vote, and the House returned to other business. Perhaps not coincidentally, eight months later Lyon was the first to be tried and convicted under the Alien and Sedition Acts, for calling President Adams "stupid." He is still the only member ever elected to the House while actually in jail.

The Republicans gained office in 1801. They mistrusted Britain but did not want war. In response to British bullying, they passed trade restrictions, the burden of which fell heavily on northern (Federalist) states. Legitimate trade was stifled and smuggling became endemic. Congress finally declared war in June 1812. A British blockade, trade slump, and inconclusive fighting followed. Peace in Europe in 1814 freed massive British resources for use in America.

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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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River & Sound
NEWSLETTER

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From the Chair ...



Dear Members,

The Tuesday Morning Work Crew has completed work on a new replacement shed covering the basement steps at the rear of our building at 55 Lyme Street. Sadly, the design and drawings for this project will be the last pieces of work done for the Society by our long-time friend, architect Steve Joncus, who is remembered in this issue.

We are expanding our Archives staff and looking for volunteers, as noted below. The Archives are at the heart of our mission to collect and preserve the history of Old Lyme. If you have an interest in the fascinating bits and pieces that are the primary sources for local history, come join our crew!

The Old Lyme Fire Department has been the main, all-volunteer protective service for our town since 1923. They are hosting a block party to celebrate their first 100 years this summer, on July 15 at the firehouse on Lyme Street. It should be quite an event.

The Society's Annual Meeting will be held at 55 Lyme Street on Monday, June 12 at 6:00pm. A brief business meeting and a 'meet and greet' will be followed at 7:00pm by a presentation on the historic architecture of Lyme Street by Damien Cregeau, one of our favorite presenters. As always, the Annual Meeting is open to the public. We hope to see you there!

We have a full schedule of events this spring and summer, as noted in this issue. Please see our website for details and new additions.

– Mark Terwilliger, *Chair,*
Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

Join our Team of Archivists!

The Old Lyme Historical Society Archives team is looking for new volunteers.

Mondays 9am-1pm and/or Thursdays 10am-2pm

Share your expertise, and learn new skills!

Activities include: material intake, categorization, accession in *Past Perfect*, filing, retrieval, and answering queries.

Join our dedicated and friendly bunch!

For further information and details
call **Michaëlle Pearson** or **Mary Ellen Jewett**
at **(860) 434-0684**



Stephen Joseph Joncus (1932–2023)

Steve Joncus was a long-time supporter of the Old Lyme Historical Society, both on and off the Board. We count ourselves lucky to have known him. Skip Beebe remembers:

I have known Steve Joncus for a long time. Working with him over the years on a number of projects was always a pleasure. Not only was Steve a professional in the field of architecture, he was a kind, generous person of character and a good friend.

About 8 years ago Ellis Jewett asked me to serve on the Board of Trustees at the Old Lyme Historical Society. Soon after he asked me if I would be interested in a crew to remodel the Old Lyme Grange building to be useable for the Old Lyme Historical Society. I joined Ellis, Kevin Cole, Ted Freeman and Steve to form the volunteer “Tuesday Morning Work Crew.”

During the course of the last 8 years, Steve worked with us as part of the crew, where he designed expanded working spaces for the Old Lyme Historical Society, which included an archive-grade document storage room, a handicapped access lift, a new exit and stairway to the rear, an office, and a kitchenette. In 2016, the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation recognized the “Tuesday Morning Work Crew” with an Award of Merit for their work in the restoration and preservation of the Old Lyme Historical Society at 55 Lyme.

Also, most recently, our group was made Citizens of the Year. Steve’s design work and close collaboration made our work possible. Yes, the four of us built it, but it couldn't have been done without Steve’s architectural work.

Along the road we worked with Steve every Tuesday. He always showed up to check on us. During this time of working together, the four of us got to know Steve, and found out what a wonderful man he was. He was so easy to work with. It would be great if there were more people like Steve in the world – as this would be a much better world. Steve will always be remembered because he touched us in such a special way. His friendship will never be forgotten.

– Skip Beebe

Next event ...



World War I Memorials of Connecticut

*Presented by
Richard Franklin Donohue*

As the First World War ended, American communities hurried to memorialize the great efforts of their sons and daughters. Government leaders, artists, historians, and the monument industry itself promoted ideas from simple tablets to monoliths rivaling those of Egypt and Rome. The result is a stunning collection of monuments ranging from simple, elegant tablets to elaborate works of art - full of allegory and majesty. The 235 memorials in Connecticut exemplify this entire range of monumental styles.

The Old Lyme Town Hall as a dedicated World War I memorial will be especially featured along with those of the surrounding area.

**Thursday,
May 25th, 2023, 7pm
55 Lyme Street,
Old Lyme**

Free Admission.

*Donations for the
Carol Noyes Winters Scholarship
are welcomed.*

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(Continued from page 1)

By December 1814, New England Federalists met in Hartford to consider the rapidly deteriorating situation. The meeting was closed and no notes were taken, but several attendees were vocal in calling for secession from the Union as the only way to escape disastrous anti-Federalist policies. The moderates prevailed at the Convention, and the only public output was a long list of grievances against the Madison administration. Still, people knew the Federalists had contemplated secession. News of the Peace of Ghent and Jackson’s great victory at New Orleans arrived almost simultaneously a few weeks later. Federalist opposition now looked distinctly unpatriotic, if not treasonous. The Federalist Party never recovered.

In Connecticut, Republican support had grown steadily (partly under Jefferson’s and Madison’s executive patronage), but was still in the minority. Two issues came together in 1816 to form a new alliance called the Toleration Party, joining Republicans with Episcopalians and other minority Protestant sects. The Republicans wanted an expansion of the franchise. The Episcopalians felt snubbed by the established (state-funded) Congregational church. So did many Baptists, Methodists, and others; but the Episcopalians represented a wealthy and well-connected part of society that had long supported the Federalists.

In 1817 the new Toleration Party won a majority in the Assembly and narrowly won the administration, with Oliver Wolcott, Jr. as Governor and Jonathan Ingersoll as Lieutenant Governor. The next year they increased their margin in the Assembly and won control of the Assistants (upper house). They had the votes to call a Constitutional Convention, with room to spare. The more difficult question was how the proposed document would be ratified. They could not hope to raise a 2/3 majority of the electorate for such a radical change.

Each year since 1639 the General Assembly had opened with an “Anniversary Sermon.” In May of 1818 Wolcott asked Harry Crosswell, a former fire-brand of the Federalists turned Episcopal priest, to do the honors. He was the first non-Congregationalist minister to do so in 178 years. Crosswell took as his text “Render, therefore, unto Caesar what be Caesar’s; and unto God what be God’s.” Remarkably brief, moving, and to the point, it made an impassioned case for the clean separation of church and state. The Republican-dominated Assembly had four editions of the sermon printed and distributed. More important: they voted to allow a simple majority of the voters to ratify any new Constitution.

The people did ratify the new Constitution by a slim margin, and the Congregational Church no longer had a claim on anyone other than its own adherents, nor did it have special privileges of any kind. The suffrage was also broadened to include, effectively, all white adult male citizens of the state. It also included an enumeration of the rights of citizens modeled on the Federal Bill of Rights, but with a few more particulars.

The Standing Order had long held the leading positions in state, church, and society. This had created an interlocking system of social control that persisted even when Congregationalists became a minority in the state. Oliver Wolcott Jr.’s father and grandfather had been Governor, and his mother was Roger Griswold’s sister. Though he was a part of the Standing Order, he had a different idea of the future of Connecticut—one that was (for want of a better word) more *Democratic*, as the party under Jackson would soon be known.

– Mark Terwilliger

2023 OLHSI Series OF EVENTS

Old Lyme Historical Society 18th Annual Meeting Monday, June 12th, 2023

All members are welcome

6:00–6:30pm

Business Meeting

James Brewster Noyes Award and
Carol Noyes Winters Scholarship.

6:30–7:00pm

Mix & Mingle

Light Refreshments, Wine,
Beer & Soft Drinks.

7:00–8:00pm

“The Historic Architecture
of Lyme Street”

Presented by Damien Cregeau
55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT

Hydrangeas Galore! Plant Sale

Donated by Mark Comstock Nursery
Saturday, June 24, 9am–2pm
Sunday, June 25, 10am–12pm
55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT

The Ludingtons and Old Lyme

A conversation with Jane Ludington
and Michaëlle Pearson
Thursday, June 29, 7pm
55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT

Town Band & Ice Cream Social Sunday, July 30, 4pm

(Rain date Sunday, August 6th)
Town Green, Old Lyme, CT

The Life and Times of Pfc. William Webb

An African-American Civil War Soldier
from Connecticut,
enacted in character by Kevin Johnson
Thursday, Sept. 22, 7–8pm
55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT