New walking tour to hit the streets soon

In 2009-2010 the OLHSI’s first intern, Connecticut College senior Jessica Bender, researched the historic houses along Lyme Street and conducted archival and Internet research at the PGN Library. She also interviewed local homeowners and town officials.

The result of her work is an updated, two-part self-guided walking tour that classifies the 31 buildings by architectural style and considers them collectively. In addition, the tour features descriptions of the Lieutenant River, Duck River Cemetery, and the town greens at each end of Lyme Street. Also included are a brief history of the town and biographical information about architect Samuel Belcher, who designed two of the residences, as well as an icon of Lyme Street: the Fourth Meetinghouse of the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme.

A short edition of the tour will be produced as a pamphlet for distribution in May during the Memorial Day parade. An audio version will be available later this year.

The life and times of the Old Lyme A&P

The A&P on Lyme Street, mid-1930s. From left: William Noyes; unknown man; Walter Howarth (butcher); store manager; Willard Huntley.

Last September the A&P chain sold its branch in the Old Lyme Marketplace to Big Y, a Springfield, Mass.-based supermarket chain, which opened in November. In December A&P filed for bankruptcy.

A&P first appeared in the 1800s as a New York tea and spice shop. Subsequently, as “the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company,” it began opening supermarkets, and in the mid-1930s it became the United States’ first national supermarket chain. A&P was this country’s dominant food retailer until the mid-1970s.

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A Message from the Co-Chairs

The little engine that could, aka the Old Lyme Historical Society, has had another banner year. Last spring the challenge of finding a new chairman to stoke the furnace (or in some instances to tamp it down) of the Board of Trustees was resolved by creating co-chair positions. This was a terrific solution, one that we endorse for other all-volunteer organizations in search of committed leadership. The two of us have different organizational skill sets, and we’ve enjoyed each other’s company immensely.

As we write this, Old Lyme’s winter, along with that of neighboring towns, has been appallingly for the Connecticut coastline, and some meteorological pundits are convinced that this weather has assumed historic significance. This is of special interest to us at the Historical Society as we read approximately 300 letters recently donated to us. Written over a 35-year period (1870-1905), they are mainly from Old Lyme resident and corrosion salesman Charles Chadwick to his loving interest, and then wife, Alice. He mentions the “usual inclement” weather for January and wishes her an especially safe journey to visit her family in Ohio. Please bear with us as we decipher all the letters; we look forward to learning what Charles meant by “usual inclement” weather.

Letters like Mr. Chadwick’s are welcome, as are gifts of photographs, newspaper articles, manuscripts, and other items that may be gathering dust in your attic (or in boxes in your basement referred to as “old stuff” — the label on one such gift). Please call us at 860-434-0684 before you throw away any “old stuff.” We will be happy to take a look. In future issues of this newsletter, we plan to publish a description of all the Society’s holdings or, as archivists call them, a finding aid. Archive Committee members Jim Noyes, Mark Lander, and Ellis Jewett recently donned acid-free gloves to tackle the job of properly labeling and preserving these materials. Initially thinking that what was needed was a simple weeding out of material, they soon got hooked on local history gleaned from property ledgers dating back to 1701.

The major highlight of 2010 was the publication of our fifth book, <i>Rum Runners, Governors, Beachcombers & Socialists</i>, written by Board member Michelle Pierson and her husband, Jim Lampson. The launch of this intriguing glimpse into life and adventure at Old Lyme’s beaches was accompanied by an exhibit designed by Tom Schellen and executed by an unflappable crew. The event was held at the Sound View Community Center the weekend of August 20. The Society is immensely grateful to Frank Pappalardo and his committee for their gracious hosting at this wonderful center. We recommend it to other groups looking for space in which to hold an event. We’re delighted to report that <i>Rum Runners</i> really did fly off the shelves: the first edition sold out and has been reprinted. For those of you who have already bought a copy, don’t lose it. First editions always increase in value as they get older.

Last year we continued conducting oral history interviews with residents of Old Lyme, including a memorable session dedicated to conversations with local veterans of World War II. More interviews are planned soon. Our Oral History project, headed by Board member Sussan Arafah and now including three Old Lyme high school students, is identifying ways to make these interviews accessible to the public. If you know someone who might enjoy sharing Old Lyme memories, please get in touch with Sussan (sousant@researchimages.com).

The revised Old Lyme village walking tour created last year by our Connecticut College intern has been reviewed by Julie Lyman, who led similar tours for the Florence Griswold Museum a few years ago. She has made some excellent recommendations, which we’re incorporating into the text. We expect to have a finished product ready by this summer, including a version that can be downloaded on your mobile phone or MP3 player.

A reminder: Membership in the Society runs from January to December. Dyanne Rafal, chair of the Membership Committee, has organized a team of Board members to encourage renewals for 2011. Please be gentle with the person who writes or calls you—these volunteers simply want to share their enthusiasm for the Historical Society. If the spirit moves you, please consider upgrading your membership level this year. Another book, on Old Lyme in the 1920s, is in the wings, and more funds are needed for the Old Lyme Historical Society Scholarship, awarded to a high school senior planning to major in history in college. If you’d like your membership dues to be designated for either of these projects, please indicate that on your check. You can also renew online through our new and improved website. Our able webmistress, Martha Hansen, is constantly refining and enhancing it. Take a look at <a>www.oldlymehistorical.org</a>; your comments about the site are always welcome.

Perhaps by the time you receive this message, the snow will be gone and crocuses will be pushing up to welcome more clement weather. Thank you again for your support. We hope to see you at our coming events, which will include a booth at Old Lyme’s Midsummer Festival at the end of July.

Alison C. Mitchell
Patsy McCook
Chairs, Board of Trustees
Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.
OLHSI engages young people through volunteer opportunities, scholarship program

With the expansion of the OLHSI's activities as we approach our sixth anniversary, we are identifying additional ways to involve local young people—as volunteers and as beneficiaries.

Several students are contributing to the Society's Oral History project. In addition to drawing up lists of interviewees, Julie Maynard has participated in the events themselves and has worked with project leader Susan Arafeh to edit the resulting videotapes. Greg Garrison and Scott Winters have also assisted us at these events and are being trained as interviewers. Lyme-Old Lyme High School's school-to-career liaison, Dr. Joanne Hedwall, has been extraordinarily helpful.

(Of these interview sessions—see photo—took place last September, at the time of the 50th reunion of Old Lyme's class of 1960.)

Our scholarship program, launched in 2009, aims to help defray the high cost of a college education for local students who plan to major in history. Students living in Old Lyme, including those who attend schools elsewhere, are eligible to apply. Beyond considering applicants' financial needs, the scholarship committee assesses their grades and a written summary of their history-related goals.

Our 2009 recipient was Laurel Carman, now at Syracuse University. At the time of her graduation from LOL High School, she was contemplating several possible careers, including curator, museum director, or town historian. Receiving the scholarship in 2010 was Michael McLean, whose passion for history was instilled by LOL High School freshman class World Civilizations teacher Dr. John Pfeiffer. As he prepared to enroll at Trinity College, Michael noted that history not only was crucial to his professional ambitions but also would be “essential in understanding and solving the crises that plague the world today.”

OLHSI treasurer Carol Winters heads the scholarship program. If you'd like to make a special donation to support the fund, or if you know a student who might be interested in applying, please contact Carol at MEME69@amol.com or call 860-434-5132.

Old Lyme A&P

Continued from page 1

According to Jim Noyes, the A&P came to Old Lyme in 1922, when it opened in the former Corner Store, a small grocery at the intersection of Lyme Street and Ferry Road. In 1935 it moved to Lyme Street, opposite the PGN library (see photo on page 1). The A&P package store, originally a garage, was attached to the store, sharing space with Shalett's Cleaners and the Chatterbox restaurant.

Jim recalls that the store was very small, with just one check-out stand and no conveyor belt. He worked there in 1941 after school and on weekends; his brother Gill was manager. The store had no butcher, but Jim had learned to “dress” chickens, so he was sent to the Old Saybrook A&P to learn butchering. He became the Old Lyme store’s first official butcher at age 17. An A&P supervisor visited one Saturday and was so impressed with Jim’s display case that he raised his pay from 20 cents to 22 cents an hour.

In 1959, when the store moved from Lyme Street to the new shopping center—now the Old Lyme Marketplace—on Halls Road, Jim was given the job of tearing down the A&P building in return for the use of the lumber in his contracting business. He said that with the usable remains and labor he almost broke even, just under $150. He recalls with appreciation that Dr. Matt Griswold and others who built the shopping center reimbursed him for his out-of-pocket expense.

The new store was “a quantum leap forward,” says Mark Lander, who notes that its features included an opening in the front window through which customers’ orders could be passed outside in large boxes onto a roller setup from where a store employee could load the groceries into the customers’ cars. Doug Maynard was among the first high school students to work there part time.
Thank you ...

To Charlie Delinks, for donating an upgraded computer to the OLHSI office and for setting up all our new office equipment.

To these OLHSI volunteers, who, along with several Board members, keep the Genealogy Room staffed during our office hours:

- Burnham Carter
- Louise Ferrebee
- Christine Inglebrink
- Sidney Mattoon
- Muffy Whitley
- Richard Dillenbeck
- Lee Howard
- Gunilla James
- Jane Spangler
- Adela Wilmerding

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

Are you interested in volunteering with the OLHSI? If so, what areas are of interest to you?

Please make your check payable to the Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc. You may also use PayPal, on our website. Thanks for your generosity!

Name ________________________________

Mailing Address ________________________________

Phone ________________________________ Email ________________________________

___ Individual $15  ___ Family $30  ___ Patron $100

___ Business/Corporate $100  ___ Benefactor $250

Please ask your company about a Matching Gift program.

My check for $___________ is enclosed. 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.

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 PCN 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
- Training in conducting oral history interview, and the chance to become part of our Oral History project
- The realization that your tax-deductible contribution is supporting a vital cultural resource.
Old Lyme profile
Sylvia Marsh

Born in Scotland and raised in England, Sylvia Davis Marsh has lived for more than 70 years in Old Lyme, where she enjoys a reputation as a quietly brilliant writer, teacher, and artist.

After several years at boarding school—like many English children in her generation, Sylvia started at age eight—she attended art school and then worked as a manuscript secretary for a journal in London. On her first visit to Old Lyme, shortly after the 1938 hurricane, she met Austin Beardsley. (The Beardsleys had previously come to England, where the mother met Sylvia's mother, decided Sylvia was a suitable match for one of her sons, and later extended the invitation to come to Old Lyme, which ultimately resulted in the marriage.) They were wed in 1939—and divorced ten years later—and lived for a while in New Jersey, where Sylvia gave birth to two sons.

In 1950 Sylvia married Lea Marsh, an Old Lyme lawyer, gentleman farmer, and state legislator. Their twin daughters, Elizabeth and Jane—a home health aide and a lawyer in private practice, respectively—live with Sylvia in her rambling house in Black Hall, where she produces dinner for them each evening. Sylvia's sister Jane Ashworth (age 93 and also spry) is often at the house, and together the four ladies accomplish a great deal in the kitchen.

Lea Marsh, who in the 1940s had been Republican majority leader and speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives, chaired the commission responsible for building the first Baldwin Bridge. It was completed ahead of schedule and under budget. He also raised, bred, and exhibited Jersey cattle and bantam chickens.

A widow since 1996, Sylvia has remained immersed in painting, not only producing landscapes—and being elected a resident artist at the Lyme Art Association at age 90—but also teaching watercolor classes. As a result of several strokes in 2009, her right side has lost some responsiveness, and her right hand is less precise than it was. But she still puts her artistic talents to good use. Every Christmas she bakes batches of cookies and, using food coloring, paints them with holiday-themed (and sometimes humorous) designs. In this endeavor, which has continued nonstop for 40 years, she is joined by daughter Jane and more recently a granddaughter. Friends frequently drop by to participate.

Household members also include the deer, turkeys, squirrels, birds, foxes, skunks, raccoon, and possums that Sylvia feeds at the back door. She is typically engaged in taming a feral cat. The current one, dubbed "Stranger," appears to be pregnant. Sylvia has sometimes taken years to get a cat inside, but she never gives up.

Although the strokes left her unable to speak, at age 98 she remains independent and determined not to slow down. Only this year did she acquire her first pair of prescription glasses. A walker gathers dust in a closet—although Sylvia has now decided that it's good for transporting things.

Several local residents know, and love, Sylvia as a participant in and now the leader of a class in creative writing that was founded in the 1960s. For the past several decades, three or so students ranging in age from their mid-40s to their early 80s have been meeting Friday mornings at her house. The evening before each class, Sylvia bakes bread, cake, muffins, and cookies and sets out everything for the group—"a veritable feast," says former Old Lyme resident Margie Noyes, who now commutes to the class from Westerly, R.I. Despite Sylvia's aphasia, her mind "sparkles," says Margie. "She makes it fun."

The students may have fun, but they also are serious about their writing. At each meeting they are asked to write a short story or poem on a given topic. At the next class they read their finished product and Sylvia comments, on paper or on her makeshift blackboard, the "Boogie Board," a gift from her students. According to longtime group member John Friday, Sylvia has read and written so much that she knows exactly what constitutes good writing. "Her assignments are excellent discipline."

In an environment where Sylvia always has a positive point to make, it is natural for group members to be highly supportive of each other. "Each of us has a tremendous appreciation for what she brings to the table—in all respects," says Margie Noyes. "She is perceptive, gracious, forgiving, and clear but gentle in her criticisms. She is a jewel: a true Renaissance person. Her class is the highlight of our week."

—Patsy McCook
Now & Then...

Old Lyme-PGN Library, 2011

Old Lyme-PGN Library, 1940s