

Lyme Public Hall Newsletter



The Lyme Public Hall Association, Inc.

Vol.3, No. 1

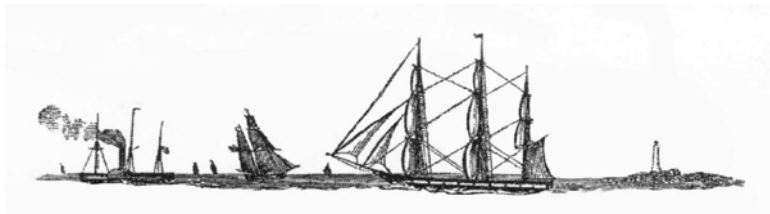
Spring 2004

President's Message

The past year has been busy for everyone associated with the Lyme Public Hall. Looking back at the programs that were offered, it appears we focused on an integral part of this community – the Connecticut River. The walk along Ferry Road in Hadlyme began at the famous Hadlyme/Chester Ferry landing, then took us past lovely Whalebone Cove. A presentation by David Wordell told us of commercial granite quarrying on Selden Island. Our July 4th exhibit featured *Lyme Life at River's Edge*. A cruise aboard the *River Quest* in the fall with narrator Warner Lord introduced many to Hamburg Cove, Selden Creek and the river itself from a different perspective – the water. And finally, one of our new sets of cards depicts the schooner trade on the river. We hope to have a program on shad fishing in the near future to continue this theme.

All these wonderful events could not have been accomplished, however, if it weren't for the dedication of our Board members. Their tireless contribution in preserving Lyme's heritage through historical programs can be appreciated by all. We welcome suggestions and hope you might consider volunteering your time in future programs.

Parker H. Lord
President



Historical Exhibit

LYME LIFE AT RIVER'S EDGE

Over two hundred visitors came to enjoy *Lyme Life at River's Edge*, an historical exhibit held at the Lyme Public Hall over the 2003 July 4th weekend. The exhibit illustrated how, a century ago and earlier, life in Lyme depended on the resources and opportunities offered by the Connecticut River, its coves, marshes and tributaries.

The farmer and his family, the storekeepers, and local trades and industry were connected with the outside world by ferry, sloop, schooner and steamboat. Their livelihoods depended on river transport for receiving supplies and sending goods to market. Shad, locally milled lumber, quarried rock and farm produce were all transported on the river. Building the sloops and schooners in Lyme shipyards provided employment for some. Others found their livelihoods as schooner owners or investors, mariners or masters, steamship hands or freight clerks, ferry owners and operators, or river channel light keepers.

Stories and views of all of these aspects of Lyme life were told through old and unusual photographs, river maps, schooner masters' day books and cargo manifests, store and lumber business ledgers, steamship records, newspaper clippings, personal correspondence and diaries, and the tools of shad fishing and navigation.

The colorful painting by Lyme artist Margaret Cooper depicting the old big barn and shad boats at Lord's Dock (now Cove Landing Marina) caught one's eye, along with a collection of large mounted photographs of the Ely's Ferry area. This collection included the steamboat dock, the ferry operator's house and family, and oxen traffic en route to Ely's Meadows.

The oldest exhibit, protected under glass and from light, was the recently acquired handwritten journal for the period 1748-1831, that recorded the establishment and development of self-governance of the *Common Field* in Lyme at Ely's Meadows and Six Mile Island.

Evidence of the dependence of Lyme families on the Connecticut River, the Eight Mile River and Hamburg Cove was abundant and convincing!

The Year in Review



The rains came down, but didn't dampen spirits — much!

Historical River Tour into Lyme's Past

On September 28, 2003, the Hall presented two historical river cruises onboard the RiverQuest, a 54-foot excursion boat.

The cruises began in Hamburg Cove and traveled up the Connecticut River past Brockway's Ferry, through the untouched natural beauty of Selden Creek, and back into the river and further north to Hadlyme. Warner Lord narrated with fascinating stories and facts about the river's role in Lyme's history. Refreshments of wine, beverages and hors d'oeuvres were served.

Despite torrential rains, enthusiastic participants showed up for both excursions held that afternoon. Everyone stayed relatively dry while enjoying the views through the large windows in the spacious enclosed cabin. Many braved the rain and drizzle to stand outside on the open deck to experience the beautiful and historic views without obstruction.

The Quarries of Selden Neck

A near capacity crowd turned out in March 2003 for David Wordell's 94th showing of his multi-media presentation about the granite quarries of Selden Neck. A lengthy question and answer period followed further indicating a high degree of interest in this nearby but remote location.

Tag Sale



Familiar faces were on hand to greet bargain hunters.



Jim Leatherbee highlighting Hadlyme points of interest

Hadlyme Historical Walk

The morning of April 27th dawned sunny and bright, a welcomed change to what had otherwise been a wet and chilly start to our spring season. Early in the afternoon, a group of 35 people gathered at the picnic area adjacent to the Chester/Hadlyme Ferry to embark on a walking tour of historical Hadlyme.

Beginning with information about the Alice Hamilton home adjacent to the ferry slip, life-long Hadlyme native, Jim Leatherbee, provided enlightening and entertaining narration as the walkers made their way along Ferry Road, learning more about this historic area. At the Cove Cemetery, Jim related the story of William Gillette and his menservants who are buried there. Near Whalebone Cove, Donald Millerbernd, Ferry Road resident, showed samples of the wild rice that grows there and explained how it's harvested. The sun sparkled on this lovely Connecticut River inlet and it was a treat to be there.

The walk ended at historic Hadlyme Hall where folks gathered for refreshments and more conversation. It had been an enjoyable few hours and everyone agreed that this program jointly sponsored by the Lyme Public Hall and Hadlyme Hall deserved thanks for a job well done.

Chowder Supper

One of the seasonal delights for many of us in Lyme is the annual Chowder Supper held at the Public Hall. Each fall, loyal and hungry townfolk leave their cozy kitchens on a Friday night to have steaming bowls of clam or corn chowder, breads from Vanderbrooke's Bakery, cheese, salad, and dessert with their neighbors. Although we get rave reviews for both chowders, when people come up for seconds they often ask "Who made the corn chowder?"

Until last year our answer was always "Francis Rand." Francis grew up in Lyme and was an active member of the Public Hall for years, serving on the board and lending his talents in many areas. He was invaluable in the kitchen, and when he moved to New Jersey last year we didn't know how we could handle the corn chowder operation without him.

The task fell to Melodee Leonardo, vice president, social director, and inheritor of *The Recipe*. She anguished for months before the event and suffered many a sleepless night with visions of disappointed diners. However, on the night of November 21st, the corn chowder had been made according to Francis's directions and at the end of the evening there wasn't one bowl left. Melodee proved herself a capable successor and one that we hope, for many reasons, will never leave Lyme!



A hungry crowd "chowdering" down

Troubadours in Concert

Two former Connecticut State Troubadours, Mike Kachuba and Jeff McQuillan combined musical talents for a delightful concert at the Lyme Public Hall on the evening of Friday, October 24. It was a return engagement for Mike Kachuba; his March 2002 concert *Connecticut History in Song* had been well received.

On this evening, Jeff McQuillan joined Mike to play selections from their new CD *The Fisher Boy*. The CD includes songs written by Mike Kachuba based on American Impressionist paintings—many by local Lyme artists—in the collection of the Florence Griswold Museum. Images of the paintings were projected as the songs were performed.

Mike performed using hammered and mountain dulcimers, guitar, concertina and voice. Jeff sang and played African/Brazilian percussion and bass.

Annual Meeting

Following a superb potluck dinner at our annual meeting in June, guest speaker Dr. John Pfeiffer presented a slide program exploring the earliest settlements of the lower Connecticut River Valley by the Dutch and English — plus history of Hartman park.

4th of July Exhibit



There was much to discover about Lyme Life at River's Edge.

NOW HEAR THIS! The Hall has recently acquired a sound system for use at meetings and programs. No more struggling to hear our program speakers!



Work is progressing and nearing completion on our new main level handicapped accessible restroom. *Heads up* for some sort of *Potty Party* at which we'll be able to celebrate with an *Inaugural Flush!*



Brockway's Ferry: A History and Memoir by Elizabeth Putnam, revised and edited by Wendy Hill and published by the Hall in late 2002 was very well received and has almost sold out its 250 copy printing. A few copies are still available at Reynold's Store, Hamburg.



The Lyme Public Hall Association was pleased to receive \$479—64 votes—last year from *Essex Savings Bank's* Community Investment Program. Thanks to those of you who cast your ballots for us. Please think of us in this year's balloting.

Notes from the Archives

In this, the seventh year since the dedication of the Archives in the spring of 1997, it is very satisfying to see that the interest of individuals to contribute materials and time to the project has not waned. The collections continue to grow which increases the Archives' usefulness and value to the community. In 2003, the archives had eighty-four accessions ranging from an individual photograph or document to collections of many diverse items. Also in this past year, over 500 hours were contributed by individuals who assisted with various tasks involved in processing the materials: Suzie Brown, David Brubaker, Mary Catherwood, Gwen Cooper, Judy Friday, Doad Jewett, Mary Ann Kistner, Eleanor O'Connell, Hilde Reichenbach, Julia Smith, and Carolyn Bacdayan. This hands-on contribution is very much appreciated and important for getting the work done in this all-volunteer effort.

Historical Images of Lyme

The Lyme Public Hall continues to develop interesting note cards as an integral part of the Hall's mission to generate appreciation and awareness of Lyme's history. As much as possible the cards feature materials from the Archives own collections. Historical notes for the featured images are printed on the card backs.

The newest series, "*Wintering in Lyme*," featuring old photographs of winter scenes from Bill Hill, Joshuatown, Hamburg Cove and Ely's Ferry was well received and produced over \$600 in sales.

A new series, "*A Lyme Connection to the Schooner Trade*" was printed last summer in conjunction with the *Lyme Life at River's Edge* exhibit. The cards feature etchings of maritime subjects reproduced from the shipping manifests of specific trading voyages of Captain John Heber Ely, Lyme native and master of three schooners based in Lyme during the mid 1800's — *Black Hawk*, *New World* and *Sterling*. The originals of the shipping manifests on which the cards are based are from the Archives' Lord Collection.

The cards are available at Reynold's Store, The Lymes' General Store, Connecticut River Museum and the Florence Griswold. Selections may vary by store. Information and all previous series are available directly from the Lyme Public Hall by calling 434-9292 or by inquiry to: lymepublichall@adelphia.net.

Recent Accessions of Special Interest

"The History of the North Lyme Baptist Church," a manuscript printed in 1895, includes details about the process of establishing the congregation, the local families involved, and the construction of two church buildings on Route 156 near Macintosh Road. The church was also known as the Pleasant Valley Church or just the Valley Church. The congregation disbanded in 1929 and sold the building to the town in 1932, after which it became the Lyme Town Hall. — *Photocopy donated by Trudy Emerson.*



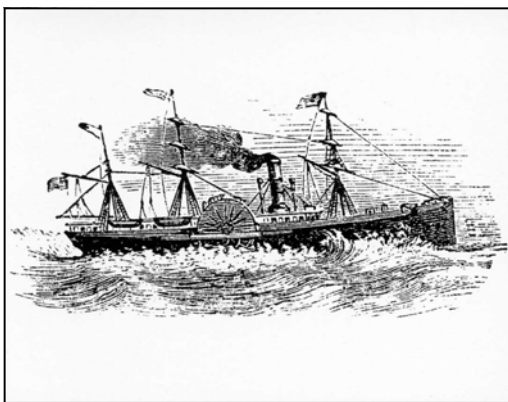
Pierson Family papers containing: photographs, documents, correspondence and journals reflecting farming, fishing, lumbering and family life in the Bill Hill/Burr Road area, principally 19th and early 20th centuries. — *Donated by Charles Carlson.*



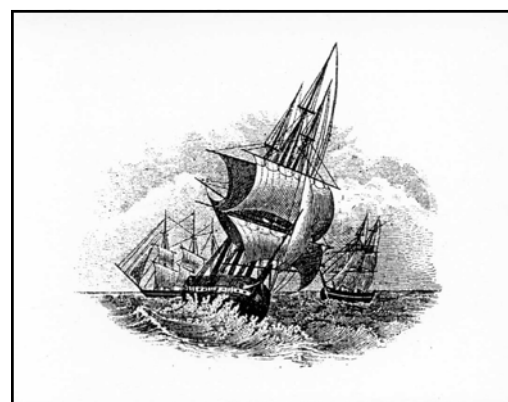
Taped interviews with Carol Sankow about the Sankow Farm and with Marion Jewett about the operator controlled party-line telephone system in Lyme-Old Lyme in the 1920's and 1930's. Marion was the operator during the 1938 hurricane. — *Interviews by Eleanor O'Connell.*



19th and early 20th century photographs of the Hadlyme area and Lee Brockway family were added to the growing digital image collection. — *Donated by William Hawthorne.*



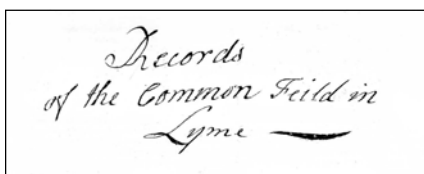
Detail from the shipping manifest of the schooner *Sterling*. Historical Images of Lyme—Series IV



Detail from the shipping manifest of the schooner *Black Hawk*. Historical Images of Lyme—Series IV

Thanks

The *Lyme Life at River's Edge* exhibit was curated by Carolyn Bacdayan with assistance from Wendy Hill and Eleanor O'Connell. The exhibits were primarily from the archives of the Lyme Public Hall. Some items were loaned by Ethel Feltham, Frances Lagel, George Lynn, Elizabeth Putnam and Richard Sutton. Special assistance in arrangements was provided by Angie Falstrom, Arthur Reichenbach, Sally Bill and Mabel Matschulat. Many thanks to all.



*Handwritten title of recent accession **Records of the Common Field in Lyme.** This journal, dated 1748-1831, recorded meetings of the farmers and landowners wherein they apportioned land in the common field for harvest of salt hay and grazing. The common field was an area of over 300 acres known as Six Mile Island Farm or Ely's Meadows which extended nearly two miles along the Connecticut River south of Ely's Ferry Road.*

MISSION: To collect, preserve, document and make available the historical heritage of Lyme.

The Archives depends on donations of items of historical significance, cash, supplies and equipment as well as the help of our many volunteers.

Please think of the Archives before disposing of materials with a connection to Lyme.

The Archives are open by appointment. For information about using the Archives, making a financial contribution donating materials or volunteering, please contact Carolyn Bacdayan, Archivist (860) 434-9292.

A Tale of Two Headstones

Tucked away in Hadlyme Cove Cemetery is an unexpected sight—two headstones inscribed with Japanese characters.

These are the graves of two of the house staff of famed actor William Gillette whose eccentric castle-like home is perched on the Hadlyme hilltop overlooking the river.

The first of the Japanese gentlemen died in 1924. Gillette provided the burial plot and the second gentleman, Yuktaka Osaki inscribed the headstone.

Mr. Osaki served in Gillette's household for many years and his relationship to his employer deepened from that of mere valet to traveling companion, friend and confidante. When Gillette died in 1937, Mr. Osaki was left life use of the cottage that was then serving as his home.

Quaint and liked about the town, Mr. Osaki became part of the Hadlyme community. He was often seen riding his little donkey to the store and post office.

When Mr. Osaki died in September 1942, the townsfolk chose to honor him by erecting a proper stone upon his grave. Lacking knowledge of Japanese and with no other Japanese people in town with whom to consult—it was after all, a mere nine months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor—the engraver did the best he could.

Presuming that the characters on the first grave were an appropriate epitaph, he carefully copied them onto Mr. Osaki's stone. It was some years later before the error of this presumption was discovered—the characters represented the first man's name!

And that explains how it happens that two graves bearing the same name in Japanese characters, stand side by side in a little out of the way New England cemetery.

Upcoming Events

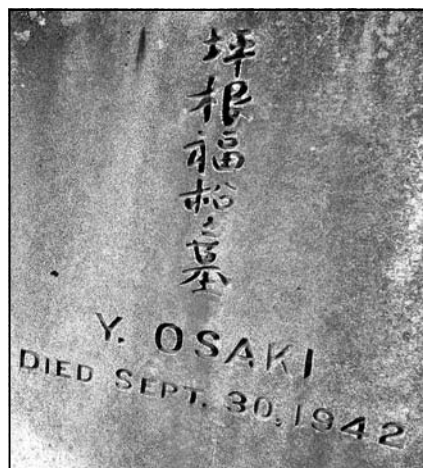
Shad Fishing — It's a sign of spring when the shad are running in the Connecticut River. A presentation of shad fishing facts is *in the works* for March or April.



Visit to Selden Island — Aboard the RiverQuest excursion boat, we'll travel through Selden Creek and around to the Connecticut River side of Selden Island. A historian guided walk will take us to view evidence of the extensive quarrying operation where granite paving stones were once produced for paving New York City streets. The ninety minute walk will take us over moderately rugged terrain to the highest point on the island. Sturdy shoes will be a must. Those folks who attended the David Wordell *Quarries of Selden Neck* program at the Hall last March will especially enjoy seeing the ancient ruins of the quarries that he discussed. This trip is being planned for April or May.



4th of July Exhibit — We're looking forward to including a special display of the intricately embroidered *needle paintings* of Lyme native Sylvia Daniels Harding whose work has been widely recognized for its uniqueness and high quality.



*Detail of Osaki headstone.
Hadlyme Cove Cemetery*

Disappearing Stone Walls

By Art Reichenbach

In "Mending Walls" the poet Robert Frost wrote:

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast . . .*

We in Lyme are blessed with an astounding network of old stone walls, or stone fences as they were known, which lace our fields and forests. These walls tell a silent story of our predecessors, struggling farmers who attempted to eke sustenance from an inhospitable geological topography. They are monuments to human effort and a testament to Lyme's agricultural past.

Today, the future of our stone wall heritage is threatened. We are facing increasing destruction of these walls, not by the *frozen-ground-swell* but by poachers who back trucks up to a wall on a country lane and select those stones that most readily can be used in a new wall, leaving a gap in the old wall or an area of strewn unwanted stones. It is a slow erosion of our agricultural history.

No restriction or current law prohibits a landowner from selling his walls. Newspaper advertisements and mailbox flyers often feature solicitations from firms offering ready cash for old walls. Our walls, once removed and crated, end up gracing new *McMansions* in Connecticut or more often than not in other states, even as distant as California. The walls bordering Route 156, now designated a *scenic route*, are protected; however, other walls are salable at the behest of the property owner.

Historically, stone walls were not built just to demark property lines. In order to keep foraging cattle out of the

farmyard, walls were constructed to protect the kitchen garden and small domesticated animals. Walls surrounding houses also protected against marauding dogs, which would kill poultry or dig up fish carcasses used for kitchen garden fertilizer. These walls were constructed with some attention to detail, usually about four feet high and gated. Many still remain in our area.

With the indiscriminate deforestation of land in the 18th Century and the demise of domestic and foreign markets for local timber, residents were left with barren fields and the end of the heyday of income derived from selling timber. As landowners saw the need to diversify in order to survive, crop and hay farming became the logical use of the deforested lands. Early *walls* were constructed of the stumps of trees that were removed to make land arable. Torn out of the ground by oxen, these were then stacked as boundaries to tilled fields. However, stump fences stuffed with brush or brambles were oftentimes not adequate to keep out foraging animals. They eventually rotted away, leaving no historic remnants of this stage of Lyme's agricultural heritage.

In the 18th Century, rudimentary stone walls began to appear as landowners turned to agricultural pursuits. Small sections of land were laboriously cleared to allow increased production off the spare soil, but also to prevent a scythe or plow blade from being damaged by contact with the existing stones. The strenuous work of *pickin' stone* was not a seasonal activity; any free time among the adults and older children in the household was devoted to clearing land. It was said that two men could build ten feet of wall in a working day.

Picking of stone was accomplished in two steps: an open space was cleared with two rows of parallel stone said to be the distance a man could throw a 10-pound rock—six to eight feet. Then a sledge (sled) pulled by oxen was brought into the center for the loading and hauling of the stone to the wall-building site. (Horses were not used be-



Detail from Angie Falstrom watercolor, "The Fence," 1999

cause they would tend to bolt, causing the stone to fly off the sledge.) At the wall site the stones often were piled in a helter-skelter pattern until they reached a height of about three feet. These are the same walls we see today as we tramp through overgrown forest and wonder at the purpose for these snaking walls in untilled parcels.

The walls alone could not deter the invasion of cattle; rather they ended up as a base for rail fencing which would top the constructed 3-foot wall to a height of 4 ½ to 5 feet. This could keep out most cattle and pigs. Today those wooden fences have long rotted away and their stone underpinnings are all that remain. (The north pasture at Tiffany Farms, on Route 156, still shows the concept of the stone/wood construction, as well as the later addition of the use of barbed wire (1860) for pastureland.)

The building of walls out of *field stone* went into decline after 1850. The start of the industrial revolution, the Civil War and the subsequent economic growth in manufacturing and services drew young men away from their agrarian way of life. At the same time, the fertile and flat lands of Ohio, Indiana, and Missouri could more cheaply and economically produce foodstuffs for the growing metropolitan areas. New England's small farming patches were no competition and market or grain farming gave way to production of dairy, poultry and sheep for close by markets.

A new period of stone wall building arose late in the 19th century. These were the *cut stone* or quarried stone walls that were designed with proper footing and professional stone setting. Influenced by the stone masons who immigrated from Italy and Ireland to build the large buildings and infrastructure of New York City and its environs, these were *designer walls*, carefully fitted on site by professional masons.

New Yorkers brought these low-paid masons to construct suitable walls in front of old farm houses, now being restored as weekend retreats. The construction of cut stone walls continued well into the 20th century as a result of the so-called Colonial Revival, in which new houses were built using earlier colonial designs and featuring a stone wall facing the street. (The wall in front of the Cooley Estate on Route 156 is a fine example of cut-stone construction.) Today stone walls are still constructed using this technique, promulgating the charm and tradition of those practical walls built by our predecessors.

In Lyme, the pilfering of rocks from old walls is a growing problem that is robbing our heritage. Those who snag a few flat stones for their gardens from tumbled walls do not realize they are taking away pieces of history. Openings in walls, like missing teeth, attest to these losses becoming more prevalent as a lack of legal controls allows this pilferage to continue. For us residents, old walls should still be *Sermons in Stone*, and remain as monuments to our hard-working settlers to be glorified as the subjects of paintings and poetry.



Limited parking at your residence? Don't want customers traipsing through your petunias? Then for a donation of \$35, rent the basement of the Lyme Public Hall for your own tag sale. Friday afternoon set-up;

Saturday sale. Tables available. Have your friends and neighbors join you for a bodacious day of fun and profit.

Having something special—a party, exhibit, program or gathering? Need a bigger space? The Lyme Public Hall can accommodate a variety of activities and may be just the place for your event. To inquire about dates and fees, please call Eleanor O'Connell at 434-7715.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Lyme Public Hall Association is open to anyone with an interest in the Lyme community. At present, over 400 families and individuals contribute their support through membership fees. These tax-deductible contributions account for approximately 60% of the Association's annual income. The membership year runs from May 1-April 30. If you're not a member, but would like to join, please make your check payable to Lyme Public Hall Association, Inc., and remit to P.O. Box 1056, Lyme, CT 06371.

Individual	\$ 5.00
Family	10.00
Subscribing	25.00
Contributing	50.00
Sustaining	100.00

Additional donations of cash, appreciated securities, or future bequests are also welcome. Thank you for your continued support.

If you're not already on our email list and would like to receive notice and reminders of upcoming Public Hall events, send us a note at:

lymepublichall@adelphia.net

Who to contact:

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Bequests & Donations: Jack Leonardo, 434-5715, lymack@aol.com

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THE LYME PUBLIC HALL
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*The Lyme Public Hall Association
 is dedicated to the appreciation
 of Lyme's history, culture, and
 community through the
 preservation and use of the
 historic hall, its archives, and
 historical programs.*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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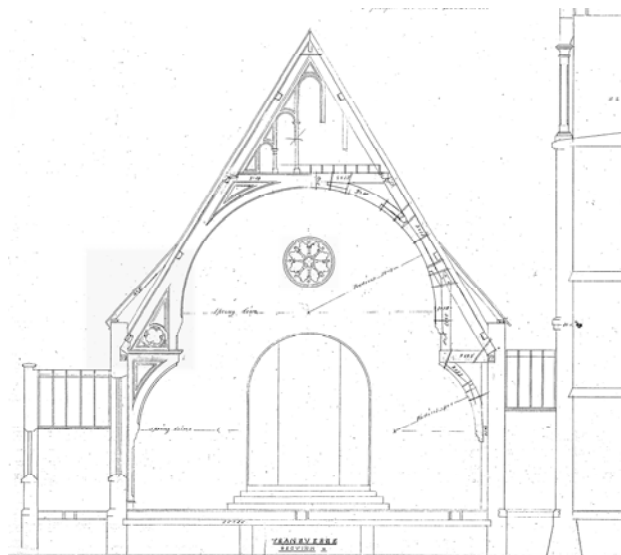
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What Might Have Been

But for the twists of fate – or more precisely the financial panic of 1873 – a lovely Gothic style church complete with towering belfry might today be standing in place of the familiar white clapboard First Congregational Church of Lyme. The Archives was pleased in this past year to acquire detail drawings for the intended structure. The story is told below in the words of the late Judge William Marvoin extracted from his 1926 address made on the occasion of the church's bicentennial celebration. Judge Marvoin (1873-1949) was a highly respected Lyme citizen, long-standing town clerk, judge of probate, and superintendent of the Lyme Congregational Sunday School.

Following the close of the [Civil] war a former resident of Lyme who had amassed a considerable fortune in New York proposed to pay all other expenses of erecting an elaborate stone church provided the people would furnish the rough stone. The plans called for a building 45x90 of the Gothic type of architecture with a spire rising nearly one hundred feet. There was much enthusiasm for the project and work was begun in 1873. Financial reverses compelled the donor to withdraw his support long before the work was completed and the generous efforts of the members and friends of the church were insufficient to finish the work. For a long time sentiment and the hope that sometime the building might be resumed prevented the removal of the unfinished walls but in 1915, the stone was sold and . . . [has] since been used for other construction work and the ground graded. [The cut stone was sold to Don Reynolds and used in construction of Reynolds' Garage in the 1920's.]



C. C. Buck, architect, Middletown.