



THE NEWSLETTER *of* LYME PUBLIC HALL & LOCAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

FALL 2021

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— 2021 —

CHOWDER DINNER

Saturday, November 6, 5-7 pm

For the first time, members of the Lyme Public Hall and other volunteers have grown the potatoes and onions for the chowders to be served at the annual LPH Chowder Dinner.

See pages 4-5.

2021 PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I delayed writing this letter until the future had a brighter outlook. I can now state that the Public hall is coming back. We have a compact, slightly abbreviated 2021 schedule starting with the "George House" Tag Sale on September 18. As a precursor to the fall programs, we held a concert on July 10th at the fairgrounds in collaboration with the Lyme Grange featuring local artists Dan Stevens, Steven Dedman and the talented New Fusion Band. The event was well attended and received.

Although the Hall has been closed these past months, the organization was not. We took the opportunity to upgrade our nine year old website. Using in-house expertise of board member George Fowler and a website developer, the new website was created and activated January 1st, and has exceeded expectations.

With the previously announced retirement of our longtime archivist Carolyn Bacdayan, we were fortunate to find new archivist Julie Hughes. With a PhD in history, experience in state of the art archival software, and a zest for Lyme's history, Julie is the perfect fit for the Lyme Local History Archives.

At the same time, the board considered how to honor Carolyn's years of dedicated service and decided to name the archives in her honor. This November, the Archives will become the "Carolyn Bacdayan Local History Archives".

We also want to recognize the contributions that Jerry Ehlen has made to our organization. After fifteen years on the board, three as president and almost ten as treasurer, Jerry is leaving the board this fall. From peeling potatoes, to juggling accounts, Jerry has always been ready to pitch in and our organization is the better for it. Thanks also go to departing board member Kathy Tisdale who ably handled Hall rentals for the past ten years.

Last, I would like to thank our membership who've stood with us during this trying period and also those new members who've recently joined. Thank-you!

Bill Denow

PS If you haven't yet, get the shot...join the herd!

CAROLYN BACDAYAN, *Archivist Emeritus* BY ROLF WOLFSWINKEL

Anyone who visits the Lyme Local History Archives today, situated inside the Lyme Public Library, will be impressed by its tidiness and its sense of tranquillity. That is mainly due to the work of the departing archivist of many years, Carolyn Bacdayan. This article, based on my interview with Ms. Bacdayan, highlights some of that work and her accomplishments.

Before 1995 there were no archives. That year an exploratory committee, consisting of Carolyn, Hiram Maxim, Jean Lee, Elizabeth Putnam and Eleanor O'Connell, acted on an initial proposal by Carolyn to become serious about a part of the 1985 Charter for Lyme Public Hall "to memorialize the history of Lyme."

But where to start? Who to ask for advice? What about the costs? The committee began by consulting and visiting historical archives in the region. It soon found that space was needed for a dedicated, climate-controlled room. The archives room at the Lyme Public Hall was created with the pro bono advice and labor of Lyme contractors: David Tiffany and Jim Beers for the carpentry, Jerry Beers for the plumbing, and Roger Dill for the electricity. Patricia Stark, a former archivist at Yale University and Eastern Connecticut State University, offered to be an advisor for all the necessary planning issues: budget, policies, the layout of the facility, office equipment, furnishings, supplies and to mentor to Carolyn Bacdayan. The project further benefited from two bequests to the Hall, from the estates of Verne Hall and Esmond Ely. They were used for startup expenses.

On June 14, 1998, Mark Jones, Connecticut State Archivist, was the guest speaker during a ceremony at the Public Hall that officially opened the Lyme Public Hall Archives. An exhibition about all the former one room schools (there were seven!) accompanied the opening. It spurred a flurry of public interest and a steady stream of donated documents, photographs and other materials, all related to the history and culture of Lyme.

A digitized database program was also set up to accommodate all the different areas of the archive: historical manuscripts, genealogical studies, house histories, documentation of old cemeteries and their gravestones, a selection of history-related town records. Praise and recognition soon followed. In 2014, the Connecticut League of Historical Organizations presented its "Award of Merit" to Carolyn Bacdayan and the Lyme Public Hall Association for the development of the Lyme Local History Archives.

Carolyn credits much of the success to a devoted cadre of donors, collaborators and volunteers. Among them: Elizabeth Putnam, Elizebeth Plimpton, William Beebe, Hiram Maxim, Betsy Buch, Diana Boehning, Suzanne Brown, Ann Brubaker, Mary Catherwood, Sarah Denow, Jerry Ehlen,

Susan Fontanella, Wendy Hill, Lynn Hosley, Parker Lord, Warner Lord, Doad Jewett, Carol Jones, Mary Paonessa.

Looking back on her 23 years as archivist, Carolyn mentions the overwhelming sense of gratitude for what she has been able to do, adding, "I would have liked to do so much more." She also mentions the satisfaction it gave her to help people from Georgia or Minnesota, and "to see the thrill with which they left" after they had found what they were looking for. Another highlight was the work on the exhibitions, which the Archives developed regularly. The first one that came to her mind was 2019's "Vanishing and Enduring Lyme." It featured documents and photographs illustrating how the mills, the farms, the one-room schoolhouses, the rural post-offices have changed, but endured.

Carolyn pays tribute to her mother, Mary Sterling Bakke, who, in a sense, started it all. She had been the driving force in a deal with the town to set up the Lyme Public Hall, where the archives initially were housed. "Without her none of this would be here," she says. It is a fitting reminder of how we all rely on the work of those who came before us. ❖



Carolyn Bacdayan (left) and Julie Hughes

The LPH&LHA welcomes Julie Hughes, our new volunteer archivist. We are incredibly fortunate that Julie found us when she was hunting for another archives challenge. An historian and researcher, Julie is archivist at the Wilton History Room and assistant archivist for the Dave Brubeck Collection at the Wilton Library. She started in Lyme this January and has undertaken the herculean task of moving our archives database into ArchivesSpace, an archives management system made available through Connecticut's Archives Online, a project of Western Connecticut State University. Being a member of CAO will mean free access to ArchivesSpace and having our collections more widely known to researchers and the general public.

Archives Hours: Tuesday 2pm – 5pm
Thursday 11am – 3pm

Contact: Julie Hughes, lymepublichall1887@gmail.com
or 860 598-9760

CROSSING OVER BY JACQUELINE JAFFE

I began this article after I read about a celebration that was to take place on the opening day of the Hadlyme-Chester ferry. I always take the ferry when it is running but what is a choice now was a necessity in the 19th Century for many Lyme inhabitants who wanted or needed to get to the other side.

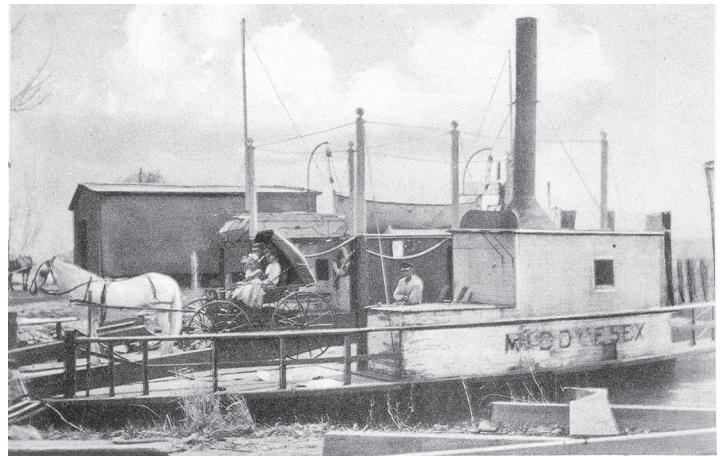
The town of Lyme has a long history with river crossing, because Lyme was and still is a smaller place with few amenities, while Essex and Chester were larger, more populous places. People from Lyme crossed the river to the hardware store, an inn, for a visit to a tavern, to hear music, for an evening of cards or games, or to visit friends and family. In the mid-1800s ferries began to claim the passage for goods and people over the river.

As early as 1767 the Warner family of Chester operated a public ferry called Warner's Ferry which linked Chester and Hadlyme. In 1877 the towns of Chester and Lyme decided to jointly own and run their own single ferry. It was called the Hadlyme-Chester ferry or if you lived in Chester the Chester-Hadlyme ferry.

However, the ferry service was expensive. A passenger paid 6 cents, a passenger with a horse 8 cents, an ox was 4 cents while pigs, sheep and goats were priced accordingly. The alternative to paying a fare was to do what people had been doing for years: you rowed or sailed your own boat.

This was not entirely a safe passage as the river was very busy. Steamships, barges on regular services between Old Saybrook and Hartford, sailing cruises--some going as far as New York--and all kinds of goods and services were being taken up or down the river all the time. A small rowboat or sailboat had to be careful. But as there were few houses on the banks of the river, you could pull your boat up anywhere you fancied, tie it to a tree or not at all and nobody would bother it. I asked Parker Lord, who remembers his family doing this, if it was safe to leave the boats unattended. "Well," he said, "Every family who lived on the river had boats. And in the bottom there was always a big can for bailing. Those boats always leaked, but they were never stolen or interfered with in any way."

Family-owned boats and the ferry were great for summer. But winter was a different story. The ferry stopped running and the question of when the river froze was of particular interest for people who had to get across. One of them was Elizabeth Alice Ely. The Lyme Local History Archives has a journal written by her, so we have her record of the years 1855-1860. She was a young woman who lived in Hadlyme and taught school in Essex. Her salary was \$50 for 4 months, counting 24 days in the month. Her contract included board while she was in Essex during the week. It appears she was in a different house every week or so, which may be how the school board defrayed expenses.



1900. The Middlesex ferry at Hadlyme. Ferries were then the principal means of conveyance for goods and people on the Connecticut River between Middletown and the Sound, and the Hadlyme-Chester ferry among the many plying those waters.

On December 5, 1855 she wrote, "The river froze over last night," adding on December 9, "In the morning I started for home. I crossed the river on the ice." Her winter entries show her walking across the ice pretty much every week, often with other people. As spring approached this could be tricky. Elizabeth recounts how she was in a sleigh with Henry Lord (her spouse-to-be) in late March of 1856 when the ice broke and the horses fell into the water. The horses scrambled out but they refused to go back into the sleigh harness. Henry and Elizabeth had to walk the horses and drag the sleigh home. She doesn't appear to think this was unusual. "The days had been warmer," she writes. "And the ice was not trustworthy". By April 5 the ice had broken up sufficiently, so "I crossed the river in a boat," a practice she continued for the rest of the term.

Now that the Hadlyme-Chester ferry is operating again, we can cross the river while remembering the people who, for hundreds of years, made the same voyage, but under totally different circumstances. We can also come back on the same ferry and take joy that we live in a place where that ferry still operates. And be grateful that even in winter we don't have to walk back over the ice.

I am grateful for the help of Carolyn Bacdayan of the Lyme Local History Archives, and the generosity of Parker Lord who shared with me the letters and journal of his great-grandmother Elizabeth Alice Ely. ❖

SEED TO SOUP

The English writer Douglas Jerrold put it this way: "If you tickle the earth with a hoe, she laughs with a harvest." So it is this summer of 2021 for Board members of the Lyme Public Hall and other volunteers who—under the direction of Jos Konst—have planted and harvested crucial ingredients of the soups to be dished up at November 6 at the annual Chowder Dinner. The effort is a tip of the hat to both Lyme's agricultural past and to the resurgence and appreciation of farming in the area. Herewith Skip Hine's photographic record of the hard work required to take Jos' idea from seed to soup.



From small beginnings . . . Jos planted onion seed in his greenhouse. It took weeks for these tiny tendrils to rise from the soil.



April soil prep. Bill Denow digs rocks out of the ground while Jos plows additional furrows with his tractor.



Hong Wan and Deb Hine plant Yukon Gold seed potatoes.



Jos, Chris McCawley and Bill hill the potatoes so they won't turn green and bitter.



July. Deb Hine, Hong Wan, Bill Denow and Jos dig for buried treasure.



It takes a village—under the direction of Farmer Jos.



Bill Denow, proud onion puller, with his trophy.



July. Hong Wan, Jos, Lisa McCarthy, Deb and Bill with the fruits of their labors.



Bill and Jerry Ehlen, in the kitchen at the Lyme Public Hall, shuck corn for this year's Chowder Dinner. 50 pounds of onions, 50 pounds of potatoes, 120 ears of corn will go into making chowder. Please join us Saturday, November 6 to taste the results.

LYME'S ROADS: PART 4

by Bill Denow

This article is a continuation of my research on Lyme's early roads and covers the years 1889 to 1928. Previous articles—published in the 2018, 2019 and 2020 newsletters—can be found at lymepublichall.org. The source material is the official Town Meeting Minutes.

In the 1890s Lyme had two ferry crossings of the Connecticut River—Ely's Ferry—Essex and Hadlyme—Chester. The service was provided by contractors who paid annual fees to the Town. Dock facilities at the crossings were Town owned but the contractor was expected to maintain them in good order. However the revenue generated didn't allow for adequate upkeep particularly when it came to ice flow damage during severe winters. Special Town meetings were called in 1889 and 1893 to have the Selectmen address the issue of maintenance. The results: the Town provided for the upkeep of the ferry facilities in order to maintain their commercial viability to the Town.

In 1897 we see the earliest attempt by the State to have some impact on the improvement of roads at the local level. The State offered to match whatever the Town allotted for grading of road surfaces. Of course this was not "free" money; it had strings attached, namely specifications for grading road surfaces and contractor qualifications. The Town's voters—then only men—saw the proposal as a pact with the devil and voted that the proposal "be indefinitely postponed."

At the 1903 Town meeting, a request was made to discontinue both the portion of Keeney Road that is now the Nehantic State Forest Road and the road from Sterling City to Brown's Hill. This reflects the decline in population and agriculture along these roads that was typical at the time in all of the New England states. The discontinuance of a town road meant that the Town no longer had responsibility for upkeep; usage became "travel at your own risk".

In the same 1903 meeting, the State Highway Commissioner addressed partnering of the Town with the State Highway Commission. Apparently he was quite convincing because the Town voted to spend \$1,000 in a joint program. But this was short lived because two months later at a special meeting the citizens voted once again to postpone all road issues. It seems to have been typical in the past for Lyme that innovation, new ideas—or anything that would disturb the status quo—took three

to five years to be accepted. By 1907 the voters must have come through their concerns because they committed to a \$20,000 program, in annual installments of \$2,500 for highway improvements with work certified by the State Highway Department.

The years 1907-1908 saw the continued abandonment of Tiffany Road, which ran from Brush Hill to Route 82, intersecting Route 82 near where Clark Road intersects Route 82. The upper portion of Tinker Lane that intersects with Hamburg Road was also abandoned.

In the second decade of the 20th Century we start to see the influence of the use of the automobile and the need to improve road surfaces and provide proper maintenance. Contractors were required to cart away all loose stone on sections of road that they maintained—loose stone and car tires don't get along. Contractors were limited to no more than two miles of highway and all the work was reviewed by two appointed commissioners who were required to reside in the Town but have no connection to the road maintenance.

Abandonment of roads continued in 1915 with Prince Road, which ran from Old Salem Road to Baker Lane. For the purpose of straightening roads, the Selectman were authorized to negotiate with adjacent property owners for deeded highway rights of way.

In 1917 the Town relinquished the Hadlyme-Chester ferry to the State. The labor rate was fixed by the Town at \$3.50 per man/horse team per day. By 1924 the Town purchased a road scraper for \$250.00 and the annual budget was \$3,500 for roads and \$300 for bridges.

By 1928, the state road known then as 150, now 156, was in its present alignment and the Selectmen were authorized to make adjustments of Town road intersections with the new highway by either abandonment or acquiring new access.

This forty-year span of Lyme's reluctance to work with the State Highway Commission was about to change with onset of the Great Depression.

The concluding entry in this series will appear in a future LPH Newsletter and carry the story from the 1930s to modern times. ❖

UPCOMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS 2021

Lyme Public Hall & Local History Archives, Inc.

Saturday, September 18, 9 am–1 pm
George House Tag Sale

Donate items you no longer need (September 13-16) or find treasures to take home at our annual fundraising event. Masks required.

Tuesday, October 5, 7 pm
Lecture. Joseph Caples and the Land of Steady Habits

George Willauer, Retired Professor of American Studies at Connecticut College. A profile of Joseph Caples, a descendant of slaves and Lyme resident whose diaries, in the Archives, offer unique historical perspectives.

Tuesdays, October 12, 19 and 26, 6-8 pm
Writing Your Story

Instructor Joan Motyka, writing coach and former *New York Times* editor. Three-session class in memoir writing, for a maximum of 12 participants to help you explore how to tell the stories only you can tell. LPH members: \$30. Non-members: \$50. Register in advance at info@lymepublichall.org

Sunday, October 24, 2 pm
Lecture. 'Stunde Null' (Zero Hour)

Rolf Wolfswinkel, Retired Professor of Modern European History at NYU. Third and final lecture in the series, Germany, 1919-1946.

Saturday, November 6, 5-7 pm
Chowder Dinner

Enjoy homemade chowders, coleslaw and baked goods with your friends and neighbors to benefit Lyme Public Hall & Local History Archives. Adults: \$15 Children 7-12: \$10 Children under 6: Free

Wednesday, November 10, 7 pm
LPH & LHA Annual Meeting

On Zoom. Members invited. For a Zoom invitation, email info@lymepublichall.org

Friday, November 12, 5-7:30pm
Saturday, November 13, 10am-4 pm
Sale of Works by Lyme Artists

Showcasing original works of art and craft.

Saturday, December 4, 1-4 pm
Wreath-Making Workshop

Prep for the holidays with the Lyme Public Hall and Lyme Garden Club. Materials and greens provided. Bring your own trimmings to customize your creation. No charge, but pre-registration is required. Call Bill Denow at (860) 574-4143.

Sunday, January 1, 2022, 4-7 pm
New Year's Day Reception

Lyme Public Hall House Band

All events are open to the public and take place at the Lyme Public Hall, 249 Hamburg Road, Lyme CT.
For more information, go to lymepublichall.org.

WHO TO CONTACT

Local History Archives: Julie Hughes, 860-598-9760, lymepublichall1887@gmail.com

Programs: Jos Konst, info@lymepublichall.org

Membership: George Fowler, info@lymepublichall.org

Rentals: Richard Jones, 860 919-2416, info@lymepublichall.org

Newsletter editor: Janet Roach, info@lymepublichall.org

Writers for this Issue: Ann Brubaker, Bill Denow, Jacqueline Jaffe, Janet Roach, Rolf Wolfswinkel

Newsletter design & layout: Lisa Reneson

Questions? Comments? Email Lyme Public Hall & Local History Archives at info@lymepublichall.org.

For the latest information on events, check our website: lymepublichall.org.

Lyme Public Hall



& Local History Archives, Inc.

249 Hamburg Road, P.O. Box 1056

Lyme, CT 06371

lymepublichall.org

Lyme Public Hall & Local History Archives, Inc. 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 2020-21

Bill Denow, *President*

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George Fowler, *Secretary*

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Special thanks to the following for their help and support of Lyme Public Hall & Local History Archives, Inc., in 2020-2021:

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Gerry Beers

Ann Brubaker

Roger Dill

Brett Enman

Andrea and Fred Fenton

Wendolyn Hill

Skip and Deb Hine

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Emily Lewis

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Lyme Public Hall & Local History Archives is supported through tax deductible membership fees, donations and fund raisers. We receive no town funding. Membership runs from May 1 – April 30. Select the support level that works for you. Payment may be made by sending a check made payable to Lyme Public Hall & Local History Archives, PO Box 1056, Lyme, CT 06371. Or use PayPal. For information on how to use PayPal, please see our website: lymepublichall.org.

Supporting \$15

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Subscribing \$25

Benefactor \$200

Contributing \$50

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

To join our e-mail list for notice of upcoming events, send a request to: info@lymepublichall.org.