

River & Sound

Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

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

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Railroads and Old Lyme

Britain led the first industrial revolution (~1760-1840). They built the first public steam railroad in 1825. Americans were avid followers of British innovations and travelled there to study the latest methods in textiles, metallurgy, ceramics, steam power, and by the 1820s, railroads.

Putting a cart on rails to carry heavy loads was nothing new. Using a self-powered vehicle to pull that cart (or string of carts) was new. The route of the Boston and Providence Railroad (B&P, chartered 1830) was originally surveyed as a horse-drawn tramway between the two cities.

The first steam railway completed in New England (May, 1835) was the Boston & Lowell (B&L) following the route of the Middlesex Canal, which it soon bankrupted. The 26-mile line was promoted and heavily financed by the textile interests in Lowell. With their needs in mind, the route actively avoided intervening towns. Engine, track, and road design were imported from England. With four-foot sections of cast-iron "fish belly" track atop granite piers the track was so rigid it shook the engine and rolling stock severely, requiring constant repairs. A second track was made of wood clad in straps of wrought-iron, and the old track replaced to match.

The B&P was completed as a steam railway in July, 1835. The main object was to connect with steamboats to New York, sparing passengers the rough and dangerous trip out around Cape Cod. New York bound steamboats from Providence still had to clear Point Judith before reaching the protected waters of Long Island Sound, and in 1832 a short line with a long name was chartered to extend the rails to Stonington. The New York, Providence & Boston (NYP&B) linked Stonington to South Providence in 1837 with a car ferry connecting across the harbor to the B&P at India Point. By 1848 both lines met the new Providence and Worcester (P&W) line at Union Station in Providence.

In 1833 New Haven investors chartered a road to Hartford, joining the state's twin capitols, hoping to divert river traffic to New Haven. Alexander Catlin Twining¹ surveyed alternate routes for the H&NH in 1835. His report not only detailed the routes, but estimated construction and maintenance costs and potential revenues. He noted that the real money was to be made by continuing the line north, where it could connect with the lines being built between Boston and the Hudson River. The Boston-Hudson route would open in 1841, linking New England with the Erie Canal and new railroads leading west. The H&NH was completed in 1839 and extended to Springfield, MA in 1844.

The New York and New Haven (NY&NH) was chartered in 1844 and completed in 1849 from New Haven to the Bronx, where it continued over trackage rights of the New York & Harlem to Manhattan.



"Fish belly" rail, ca. 1831
Robert Powell

The Farmington Canal between New Haven and Northampton, MA was the largest canal project ever attempted in

Connecticut. Begun in 1825, it ran 86 miles north from New Haven and reached Northampton in 1835. Wealthy cotton broker Joseph Earl Sheffield became a major investor in the canal, and also in the NY&NH, which was originally conceived as an extension of the H&NH to New York. Sheffield gained control of the canal, and successfully petitioned the state to have its charter altered to allow it to become a railroad. Soon after the first 27-mile stretch of railroad was built, the canal was officially closed, and the rest of its right-of-way cannibalized for trackage.

For the next 40 years, the New Haven and Northampton railroad (NH&N) would be a cat's paw in the struggles among the various railroads, its board now dominated by one faction, now by another; its completion northward now pushed, now delayed. It was never more than a pawn in the game to secure a through route between Boston and New York. The railroad business had already changed from an experiment to a scramble for strategic advantage.

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*The mission of the
Old Lyme Historical Society
is to collect, preserve, interpret
and promote the rich history
of Old Lyme and its environs
for the benefit of residents and visitors.*

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River & Sound
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From the Co-Chairs



Founded in 2005, the Old Lyme Historical Society celebrated its 20th Anniversary at this year's Annual Meeting at 55 Lyme Street on Monday, June 9, 2025. Photograph by Jaymie Nickerson-Buckmaster

Dear Members,

At the annual meeting in June, we welcomed new Trustees Priya Mattam and Paula Melillo, and look forward to working with them. Stepping down this past season were Gary and Mark Comstock, Cindi Taylor, and Matt Ward. We thank them for their help with the mission of the Historical Society.

Old Lyme lost a remarkable presence this summer. Jennifer Hillhouse (1933-2025) was a founding member and supporter of the Old Lyme Historical Society, and of the New London Maritime Society and Custom House Museum. She pursued multiple efforts in health, environment, and conservation; all with her customary zeal. Jenn was a force of nature. Old Lyme is a better place today because of her work and dedication.

Among our upcoming events, Markham Starr's presentation on Native American stonework is particularly interesting. His lecture at 55 Lyme St. at noon on Saturday, November 22 will be followed immediately by a guided walk through the Old Lyme Land Trust's Griswold Preserve, where he will point out examples of rock assemblages created by Native peoples long before Europeans arrived on this continent. Once you see a few of these, you may begin to recognize similar constructions elsewhere in our woods. A fascinating subject and an expert guide.

Our Oral History Project is gearing up to begin interviews this Fall. If you would like to help, or have a candidate you think we should interview, please let us know.

As always, please see our website for details of these and other Old Lyme Historical Society events. Thank you for your support!

– Michaëlle Pearson & Mark Terwilliger, Co-Chairs
Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.



Photographs by James Meehan

Carol Noyes Winters Scholarship

The Old Lyme Historical Society Inc. is pleased to announce the 2025 recipients of the Carol Noyes Winters Scholarship which is awarded to outstanding Lyme-Old Lyme students intending to study history in college. Scholarships this year were presented to seniors Chloe Datum and Simon Karpinski. The scholarship committee was impressed with the sincere enthusiasm for history of both students as well as their individual accomplishments in school and our community. Both students were involved with the extremely challenging National Mock Trial competition in which they were major players in the Lyme-Old Lyme High School team's two state championships.

Chloe Datum is the daughter of Jennifer and Michael Datum. She hopes that her study of history will guide her in her pursuit of a future career in political science - especially in the area of policy and law. This fall Chloe will attend George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Simon Karpinski is the son of Sarah and Ben Karpinski. Simon hopes that his study of history will help him to attend law school and eventually practice law. He hopes to one day serve in public office. This fall Simon will attend Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Old Lyme Historical Society offers both Chloe and Simon congratulations and best wishes for a successful school year!

– Kevin Cole

James Brewster Noyes Award



At this year's annual Meeting, the James Brewster Noyes Award was presented to Cindi Taylor who has served on the OLHSI Board of Trustees as *Corresponding Secretary* since 2016.

The award honors a Society member who goes "above and beyond" in time and effort to support the Old Lyme Historical Society. Cindi's dedication and service to the Society is greatly appreciated.

Upcoming Events



Fall Plant Sale

Saturday, October 4th
(9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.)

Sunday, October 5th
(9:00 a.m. – noon)

Amazing deals on fall plants.

Visit us in the front yard
at 55 Lyme Street.

Halloween on Lyme Street

Friday, October 31st
(4:00 – 7:00 p.m.)

2026 *Then & Now* Calendar Launch

Thursday, November 13th
(4:00 – 6:00 p.m.)

- Meet & Greet
- Light Refreshments
- Wine, Beer & Soft Drinks
- Raffle
- 2026 *Then & Now* Calendars will be available for purchase

Native Stonework *with Markham Starr*

Saturday, November 22nd
(12 noon)

Lecture at 55 Lyme Street at 12 noon,
with a guided walk through
the OLLT Griswold Preserve
to follow immediately after.

This is a joint effort
of Old Lyme Land Trust
and Old Lyme Historical Society.

Railroads and Old Lyme

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Rail lines followed coastal plains and rivers, skirting obstacles wherever possible. In Connecticut, the rivers and ridges run north-south, and the major cities to the east and west were magnets for commerce. Its rail map in 1850 looked something like curtains swept back at the bottom to reveal an empty space that widened along the shoreline either side of the Connecticut's mouth.

In 1848 the New Haven and New London (NH&NL) was chartered to fill this gap, and was completed in 1852, though a car ferry served at the crossing between Old Saybrook and Lyme. That same year, the New London and Stonington line was chartered to fill the last gap along the shoreline. It merged with the NH&NL in 1857 to form the NHNL&S, and was completed from Groton to Stonington in 1858 with a car ferry shifting cars from New London to Groton. The next year the NHNL&S was leased to the Stonington Line (NYP&B).

In 1864 the Stonington Line bought the portion west of Groton. The NY&NH leased the remainder in 1870 and built a wooden truss bridge across the Connecticut River with a swing gate for river traffic near the site of the current railroad bridge. It was replaced in 1885 by an iron truss bridge of the same basic design using the original stone piers. In 1889 a bridge was constructed from New London to Groton, and the all-rail shoreline route from New York to Boston was finally complete.

In 1872 the NY&NH merged with the H&NH to form the NYNH&H. Over the next 30 years it sought through purchase, leasing, and obstruction to monopolize all traffic from New York to southern New England. It very nearly succeeded. Consolidation led to monopoly practices throughout the country. Though railroads were still a modern wonder, many were increasingly seen as a malevolent "octopus" squeezing customers at their mercy and wielding immense political power. When recent generations marvel at how much public support was given to automobiles and trucks after WWII, and how little to railroads, they forget this aspect of the railroads' legacy.

Old Lyme had three stations in the beginning: Lyme, Black Hall, and South Lyme. Lyme Station was originally at the ferry landing, but on completion of the bridge in 1871 it was moved inland to a spot east and south of the Bacon House (the core of what would become the Ferry Tavern). Black Hall Station appears to have been near the point at which Mile Creek Road now crosses the rail line. In 1895 a new South Lyme Station was built at approximately the location of the current South Lyme Post Office. The original 1852 depot had been a bit to the east, and that building may

have been moved and used as a freight shed. When the current bascule (draw) bridge was built in 1907, the tracks were again realigned and the railroad consolidated the Lyme and Black Hall Stations in a new station just to the north and east of where McCurdy Road crosses under the tracks.

In 1902, a flag stop was established at Sound View. Agitation for a proper station (to replace the simple "bus shelter")

was intense, and by 1910 the railroad did build a small, proper station on the north side of the tracks just west of today's Cross Lane. It was one of many seasonal stations on the Shoreline, generally closed after Labor Day. The Depression (and perhaps repeal of Prohibition...) severely reduced traffic to this stop, and the railroad closed Sound View Station by 1932. They may have sold the building, but it no longer stands. South Lyme Station was also rented by 1932, and by 1935 Lyme Station had no more daily train service, though the building itself was listed in 1938 as "retained for railroad use." The abandoned Black Hall Station was eventually moved to Hawks Nest Beach as one of the Garvin cottages, about 1939.

— Mark Terwilliger

1) A.C. Twining (1801-1884) studied theology for a year after Yale, then moved to West Point where he studied civil engineering, without enrolling as a cadet. In 1830, the USMA was the only engineering school in America. A consulting engineer for many railroads in New England and elsewhere, he was the chief surveyor of the H&NH, NY&NH, NH&N, and the NH&NL. His great-grandson Kinsley "Bud" Twining summered in Old Lyme as a boy and moved here full time in retirement. Bud's son, Alex, is A.C.T.'s namesake and great-great grandson. He also summered in Old Lyme, and now lives here full time.

