

River & Sound

Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.
"The history of Old Lyme – the people of Old Lyme"

1st Quarter 2026 • Issue #53

Colonial Post

The first regularly scheduled inter-colonial mail service in North America was established between Boston and New York in 1674. War with the Dutch, then with the Wampanoag, interrupted the service for decades, but by the late 17th century post riders once again made the two-week trip on a regular schedule.

Despite its name, the "post road" was not a particular road. It was an itinerary of stopping points or *stages* between the two cities, and many miles of the way were trails nearly impassable for a wagon, and sometimes hard going for a man on horseback. By 1700 there were three Boston Post Roads (or routes): Upper, Middle, and Lower. The more northerly upper road went west to Worcester and Springfield, MA, then south to Hartford and New Haven, CT and into New York. The lower road went south to Providence,

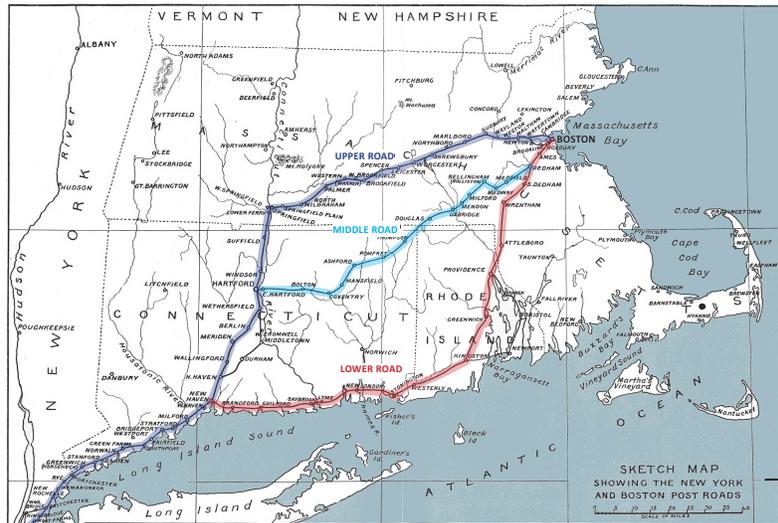
Kingston, and Westerly, RI then hugged the shoreline to New Haven and New York. The middle road was the last established and the most direct, going southwest through Medfield and Uxbridge, MA then Pomfret and Bolton, CT to Hartford, where it joined the upper road.

The first post riders in 1674 had made the whole round trip from New York to Boston and back. This took two weeks each way, longer in winter. By the mid-18th century riders would leave from both ends on the same day and meet in the middle: in Hartford for the Upper or Middle Post Road, at Saybrook for the Lower Post Road. Riders were dispatched on the Upper Road one week, and on the Lower Road the next.

The post riders supplemented their meager allowance by carrying valuables (not allowed in the mail), delivering par-

cels and even livestock from point to point along their route. Postal officials fumed, but if the rider kept his schedule, they had little recourse.

Ben Franklin, as a Deputy Postmaster General for the North America Colonies, surveyed many of the main postal routes and offices in New England and the middle colonies in 1753-57. He measured the routes in order to set postal rates, which were based on the distance a letter traveled.



Boston Post Roads, ca. 1775
Map from *The Old Boston Post Road*, by Stephen Jenkins, 1914

Postage was calculated by distance and the number of sheets of paper in the letter, four sheets being considered the equivalent of an ounce. For overland transit, a single sheet cost 4d (pence) within 60 miles, 6d within 100 miles, and 8d within 200 miles. Four sheets paid four times that. If sent by sea, between any two American ports the rate was 4d per sheet,

and between London and any American port was 1s per sheet (12d).

There is no direct evidence Franklin erected or commissioned milestones. Soon after his survey, however, the Connecticut General Assembly ordered all towns through which a post road ran to place milestones on it showing the distance to the County seat. The milestone on Old Lyme's Johnny Cake Hill Road showing mileage to New London is probably from this era.

The routes changed over time to serve growing settlements, or to use a better pathway. In Lyme, the Lower Post Road always crossed at the ferry landing, but its route eastward changed significantly.

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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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From the Co-Chairs



Dear Members,

Welcome to 2026! We are excited to help celebrate 250 years of American independence, and have a full slate of lectures and events planned. (*see page 4*) We are also seeking donation or loan of artifacts or commemorative items from 1776, 1876, and 1976 for an exhibit at 55 Lyme Street. (*see page 3*)

The Old Lyme Historical Society had a busy few months leading up to the end of 2025. We held our Fall Plant Sale on October 4th, and on Hallowe'en, our front lawn featured decorative gravestones memorializing some of Old Lyme's famous souls. Our board members had fun handing out piles of candy to swarms of trick-or-treaters. Our annual *Then & Now* Calendar Launch party and raffle took place on November 20, which also marked the transformation of our front office into the new Society Gift Shop.

On November 22nd, we partnered with the Old Lyme Land Trust to host a talk by author Markham Starr on Native American Stonework. The lecture was followed by his guided tour of Native American sites and artifacts at the Old Lyme Open Space Champlain North Preserve.

At the end of November, the Old Lyme Historical Society Archives received a donation of several binders filled with postcards of Old Lyme that had been collected by the late Jennifer Griswold Hillhouse. Jennifer was a dedicated member of the Society's Board of Trustees for many years, and we are truly grateful to her family for this generous gift which will help us to tell the story of Old Lyme.

In December, we held book sales outside the Halls Road Post Office on Saturday mornings, decked our halls, and hosted an expanded Holiday Market at 55 Lyme Street on December 6th, with handmade crafts by the Lyme Artisans Guild and holiday decor items by the Duck River Garden Club.

We wish you a pleasant start to the New Year, and look forward to seeing you at 55 Lyme Street in the coming months!

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

In Memoriam



Alison C. Mitchell
1932–2026

The Old Lyme Historical Society mourns the loss of Alison C. Mitchell, a founding member who served as our Chair for many years, and also as Chief Archivist until 2023. Many of the Society's early gatherings were held at her home on Meetinghouse Hill, which also stored our archives materials before the construction of our climate-controlled facility at 55 Lyme Street, named in her honor.

Alison and the other founding members had an ambitious vision, acquiring the former Grange Hall in 2014 for the Society, which previously met at the Library. Alison helped establish an Oral History program and a publishing program to produce original books about the history of Old Lyme. In recent years, Alison teamed up with her friend (and board member) Edie Twining on two children's books: *Letters to Papa*, and *Townsend: The Positive Dog of Mystic Senior Living*. Alison will be truly missed and always remembered at 55 Lyme Street.

Colonial Post

(Continued from page 1)

Before 1700, there was little settlement in the northern part of the town, and the Post Road ran near the shoreline from Ferry Road, past the meeting house on Johnny Cake Hill to Mile Creek Road, and on to the rope ferry at Niantic. Today this route would be: Ferry Road, Lyme Street, McCurdy Road, Johnny Cake Hill Road (to about #10), Ben Franklin Road, Mile Creek Road, CT Route 156 to New London. Today, Ben Franklin Road is a short dead-end off Mile Creek Road. In the 18th century it continued up and over the south shoulder of Johnny Cake Hill. When it got the "Ben Franklin" name is not clear.

By the end of the Revolution, the Lower Post Road in Lyme had shifted inland to its final path: roughly today's US Route 1 (Ferry Rd to Lyme St. toward Laysville, etc.). By then, the postal routes had better roads to travel. With peace and increasing population, coaches soon replaced post riders in carrying the mail.

– Mark Terwilliger

Exhibits



Exhibit by Edie Twining Design

Some Early-to-Mid-20th Century Old Lyme Farms

Halls Road Post Office
Winter 2026

Our latest exhibit is based on the memories of farm locations, mostly from Jim Noyes, as recorded by John Stratton in a conversation with Jim, Jennifer Hillhouse, and Carolyn Wakeman. Our exhibit includes a map of these locations, artifacts from Jim Noyes' collection, hand-colored photos from the archives and a farm diorama. The article is available on our website at oldlymehistorical.org

America 250 - Items Needed for Exhibit!

Please search your attics, basements and cupboards! The Old Lyme Historical Society is seeking donation (or loan) of items from 1776, 1876, and 1976 for use in an exhibit at 55 Lyme Street. (These items do not have to be from Old Lyme).

We are also seeking photos and commemorative items specifically from the 1976 Bicentennial Celebrations in Old Lyme.

Email: info@oldlymehistorical.org, or call (860) 434-0684 and leave a message.

All events will be held at the Old Lyme Historical Society, 55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT



April 23rd, 7pm

*Lyme, Connecticut:
From Founding to Independence*
50th Anniversary Edition
by **Bruce P. Stark**

Signed copies will be available for sale.



May 14th, 7pm

History of the Stars & Stripes
by **James Meehan**

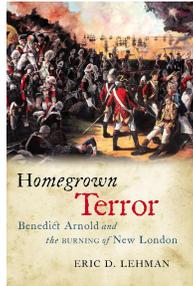
Artist and antiquarian James Meehan presents examples of some of America's earliest flags and the symbolism and history behind these designs. The presentation timeline begins on June 14, 1777 and features the flag's role in historical events through the 21st century, as well its application to American painting, photography and commercial arts.

**May 25th
Memorial Day
10am - 1pm**

Open House at the Old Lyme Historical Society, 55 Lyme Street, featuring exhibits of memorabilia and commemorative items.

**June 21st
Make Music Day
5pm - 7pm**

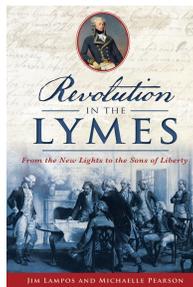
Join us at 55 Lyme Street for hands-on musical fun and kids' activities!



June 6th, 7pm

*Homegrown Terror: Benedict Arnold
and the Burning of New London*
by **Eric D. Lehman**

On September 6, 1781, Connecticut native Benedict Arnold and a force of 1,700 British soldiers and loyalists took Fort Griswold and burnt New London to the ground. The brutality of the invasion galvanized the new nation, and "Remember New London!" would become a rallying cry for troops under General Lafayette. In *Homegrown Terror*, Eric D. Lehman chronicles the events leading up to the attack and highlights this key transformation in Arnold—the point where he went from betraying his comrades to massacring his neighbors and destroying their homes.



June 29th, 7pm

*Revolution in the Lymes - From the
New Lights to the Sons of Liberty*
by **Jim Lampos & Michaëlle Pearson**

The Revolutionary War in the Lymes started as a rebellion of ideas. From its origins in the Cromwellian Saybrook Colony, Lyme (today's Lyme, Old Lyme, East Lyme and Salem) prospered under the free hand of self-governance and spurned King George III's efforts to rein in the wayward colonies. In 1765, Reverend Stephen Johnson wrote incendiary missives against the Stamp Act. A few years later, the town hosted its own Tea Party, burning one hundred pounds of British tea near the town green. When the alarm came from Lexington in 1775, Lyme's citizens were among the first to answer.

July 2nd, 7pm

*What a Glorious Crash They Made:
Musick of Connecticut's Revolution*
by **Richard Franklin Donohue**

What a Glorious Crash They Made features "New Songs" and Hymns published in Connecticut during the American Revolution. From the time of the Stamp Act through the British surrender at Yorktown, Connecticut colonists used these works to foment rebellion, commemorate victory, and give thanks for preservation. Richard Franklin Donohue (Tenor, Harpsichord), will explore this fiery repertoire that in the words of John Adams "cultivated the sensations of Freedom."



October 22nd, 6³⁰pm

*Kevin Johnson
as Jordan Freeman of Lyme*

Jordan Freeman was an actual person, and although he did not enlist himself, he witnessed key events of the war for independence while with Col. Ledyard. Historians estimate the number of Black soldiers in this war to have been about 5,000, serving in militias, seagoing services, and support activities, including nearly 500 from Connecticut. Some enlisted because they felt it was their duty; others because they were offered their freedom in return for satisfactory completion of a set period of service. This presentation is based on extensive research in the collections of the Connecticut State Library and the Museum of Connecticut History.

December 3rd, 6pm

Nine Centuries of Christmas music
by **Richard Franklin Donohue**

Gregorian chant from the 10th century to music from the height of the Victorian era. Mr. Donohue accompanies himself with several musical instruments including a medieval hand drum, baroque recorders, and a spinet harpsichord.