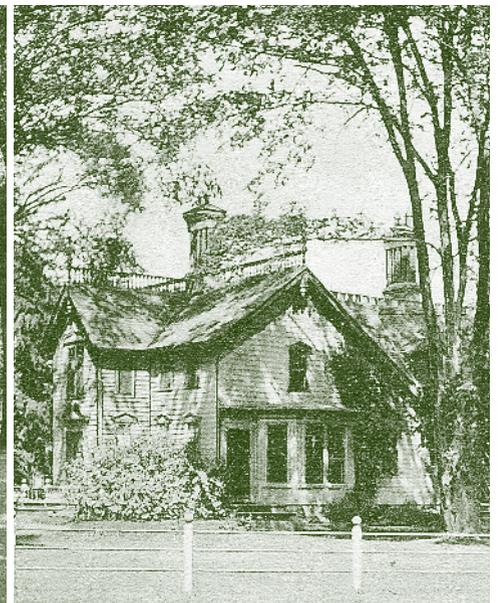
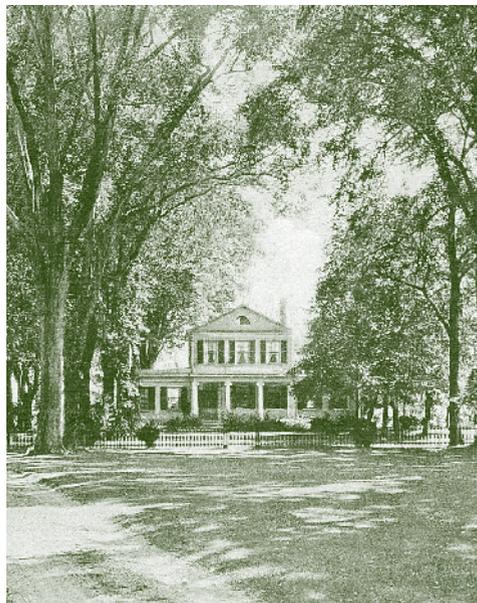
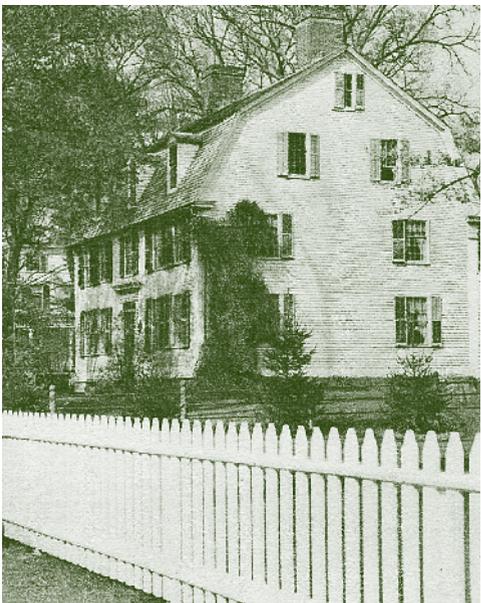


Old Lyme, Connecticut

HISTORIC DISTRICT *Handbook*



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ON THE COVER: Postcards from the collection
of Jennifer G. Hillhouse.



Foreword

This Handbook is intended for the guidance of property owners, prospective property owners, tenants, architects, builders, attorneys, realtors and others with an interest in Old Lyme's Historic District.

One copy is available free of charge to all persons owning or renting property in the Historic District. Additional copies at \$10.00 (including mailing) may be purchased at the Selectman's Office, or by writing to the Old Lyme Historic District Commission, 52 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT 06371.

The HDC may also be reached by calling the Town Hall at (860) 434-1605 (Ext. 234) or visiting the Town's Web site at www.oldlyme-ct.gov/Pages/OldLymeCT-BComm/historic/historic.



Why Historic Districts?

Perhaps nothing so unites the residents of Old Lyme as the shared desire to insure, as their community grows, that it retains as many as possible of those qualities that led them or their ancestors to select it as a place to live. The Town supports an active Planning Commission as well as comprehensive zoning regulations administered by an elected board. To further protect the character of the nucleus of the village, many of the commercial enterprises moved during the 1950s to a newly created business district on Halls Road. In 1971 property owners on Lyme Street voted to make the Street a Historic District, administered by an appointed commission functioning under specific provisions of the Connecticut Statutes.

A historic district confers important advantages even though it involves some inconveniences for those affected by its restrictions. To judge from past experience, threats to the integrity of historic districts are likely to come, not so much from commercial interests whose inappropriate proposals can be readily identified and promptly disapproved, as from caring citizens whose worthwhile projects are simply being addressed in the wrong way.

Most applications that the Historic District Commission (HDC) receives may be reduced to a single question: "Is a given action likely to enhance - or at least preserve - the qualities that identify Old Lyme and that set it apart from other Connecticut towns"? If, in the opinion of the majority of the HDC, the answer appears to be "No," then the HDC has no choice but to reject the application as inappropriate (whatever its other merits - which in many cases may be substantial).

The distinctive character of a village like Old Lyme is usually a product of numerous small elements, seemingly unimportant separately. When taken together, however, they contribute to what is often referred to as "a sense of place". Difficult to verbalize or quantify, this sense of place is a fragile possession that belongs to all who make their home in the village or who delight to visit it. It is, in short, an important part of our patrimony, and to destroy or compromise it would leave everyone poorer.



a sense of place

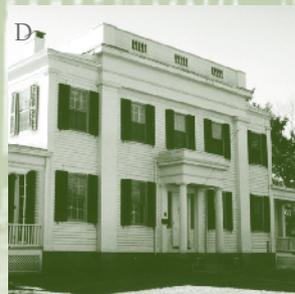


Photo courtesy of Old Lyme Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library

- A The Florence Griswold house at 96 Lyme Street designed by Samuel Belcher (the architect of The First Congregational Church and the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts) was erected in 1817 on the site of a house that had been built for Samuel Peck circa 1700 and later moved to 32 Lyme Street. Miss Florence turned her home into a boarding house for painters in 1900. The Griswold family owned it from 1840 to 1937.
- B Although the Tinker-McCurdy house at 1 Lyme Street may have been begun circa 1700, it has been extensively altered and enlarged. The handsome broken-pediment doorway dates from the middle of the 18th century and is one of the few Connecticut doorways of this type that survive in place.



 *historic character*



- C The Noyes-Beckwith house at 32 Lyme Street was built shortly after 1700 on the site now occupied by the Florence Griswold House. Characteristic of its early date is the simple doorway with a rectangular transom used to light the entry and stair. Although exterior shutters may have been used in 18th century American cities, they were not common in small New England towns until later. The earliest shutters were normally inside the windows. Morrison Remick Waite occupied the house when he was chief justice of the United States Supreme Court from 1874–1888.
- D Like The Marvin Family house at 1 McCurdy Road, the Daniel Chadwick house at 31 Lyme Street illustrates the use of Greek forms popular in the 1830s and 40s. It was the Greek Revival that ushered in the practice of painting buildings white (not widely used in New England before that time).



The Historic District in Old Lyme

BOUNDARIES

The Historic District runs from 1 McCurdy Road at the Town Green on the south end of Lyme Street for approximately 1.5 miles to the Town Green at the north end, forking left to 2 Sill Lane and right to 1 Rose Lane off Route One (Boston Post Road).

The east and west boundaries of the Historic District are the east and west boundary of each property contiguous to, or fronting on, Lyme Street or a line three hundred feet east or west from the center line of Lyme Street, whichever is closer to the center line. Buildings that are only partially within the Historic District are considered to be entirely within the Historic District. The map of the Historic District on the inside back cover of this Handbook is provided for the convenience of the reader and for illustrative purposes only; where it does not conform to the statutory description of the Historic District, the latter is controlling.

CHARACTER

The Historic District, in the center of Old Lyme, is today a pleasant mix of traditional and modern houses, churches, schools, the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts, the Lyme Art Association, art galleries, two inns, the OLPGN Library, the Town Hall, a firehouse, the Florence Griswold Museum and business establishments. Of its eighty-plus properties, approximately fifty have buildings dating before 1900 and eight prior to 1800. During the 1950s, when the Town established planning and zoning ordinances, a new commercial zone was developed on Halls Road (outside of the Historic District). The dozen or so shops that remained after many of the nonresidential enterprises moved to Halls Road help give Lyme Street the ambiance that many find attractive.

BENEFITS

The Historic District provides a stable environment for the village center in general and for the residents of Lyme Street in particular. In 1972 the Old Lyme Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places affording a measure of protection against federally funded projects (such as highways or bridges) that might infringe on the Historic District.

The Historic District Commission

AUTHORITY

All regulations and policies concerning the Historic District are formulated and administered by the HDC in accordance with the Town Enabling Ordinance of 1971 and the provisions of Section 7-147 of the Connecticut General Statutes as amended from time to time. Should there be any ambiguities, conflicts or omissions in this Handbook, the pertinent Town ordinance and state statutes take precedence.

COMPOSITION

The HDC is composed of 8 residents of Old Lyme appointed by the Town's Board of Selectmen:

- 5 regular members who serve for terms of 5 years (so arranged that the term of at least one member expires each year).
- 3 alternate members who serve for terms of 3 years.
- At least 1 regular member and 1 alternate member must reside within the Historic District.
- All members and alternates serve without compensation and hold no salaried municipal office.

OPERATIONS

The HDC meets at 9:00am on the first Monday of each month in the Old Lyme Memorial Town Hall, 52 Lyme Street. Normally, there is no meeting in August. When a legal holiday falls on the first Monday of the month, the meeting is scheduled for the following Monday. Meetings are open to the public. Those interested in historic preservation and the Historic District are urged to attend. For further information please contact Town Hall.

DUTIES

No building within the Historic District may be erected, significantly altered, removed or demolished until a Certificate of Appropriateness (C of A) has been granted by the HDC. The C of A is necessary whether or not a building permit is required. The HDC also provides: advice about all historic properties in the Historic District, suggests pertinent legislation, initiates planning and zoning proposals, cooperates with other regulatory and civic groups interested in historic preservation and comments on all applications for zoning variances that may affect the Historic District. The Old Lyme HDC reports to the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism in Hartford.

VARIATIONS

Occasionally the HDC may permit variations from established practice because of topographical conditions or unusual circumstances. The HDC members seek to hold such variations to a minimum. In granting any variation, the HDC may impose special stipulations and conditions intended to preserve the character of the Historic District. Such variations should not be considered a precedent.

REQUIREMENTS

In considering an application for a CofA, the HDC has no requirements as to specific architectural form or style and it has no mandate to favor the past over the present. The HDC recognizes that change is inevitable, and in many cases desirable, and asks only that new structures or artifacts introduced into the Historic District and all changes to structures already existing: be appropriate, be competently designed and show respect both for their immediate neighbors and for the Historic District as a whole.



- E The Justin Smith house at 54 Lyme Street dates to the early 1700s and has frequently been altered and enlarged. The present owners rebuilt the interior and discovered in doing so that the gambrel roof was preceded by a gable roof. Although they replaced many of the materials in the exterior of the house, the house today looks as it did throughout the 1900s.
- F Built in 1844, Dr. John Bartlett's "cottage" at 75 Lyme Street was based on a design by Andrew Jackson Downing, then the leading arbiter of American taste in matters pertaining to house and garden. Alexander J. Davis, one of the leading architects of the mid-19th century, did the architectural drawings. The house originally had vertical siding and a balcony on the right side.
- G Its central pediment, crossed pilasters and Venetian (Palladian) window mark the Judge William Noyes house at 100 Lyme Street as a good example of the Middle Georgian style of the second half of the 18th century. The semicircular portico and end porches are modern, as is the adaptation of the house to serve as the Bee & Thistle Inn.

This is the fifth Congregational Meeting House in Old Lyme and the second to be built on this site. Constructed in 1910, it is almost a duplicate of the fourth Meeting House built in 1817 and burned to the ground in 1907.

preservation



Engraving by Thomas Nason

- H Boxwood at 9 Lyme Street was built in 1842. It was a two-story house with a large porch above a high basement. In 1890, when the building became a boarding school for young women, the third story was added. Later the building was turned into a hotel, then into apartments. Through all these changes, the original cupola was retained but the clapboards on the third story were replaced by bricks.
- I The Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts at 84 Lyme Street is located in the John Sill house designed by Samuel Belcher in 1817. Among its features are a curving cantilevered stairway in the center hall and the Palladian window with its louvered fanlight.

Certificates of Appropriateness



FORMS

Prior to submitting formal requests, applicants are encouraged to discuss projects on a preliminary basis at a regular HDC meeting. Forms on which to apply for a C of A may be obtained online at www.oldlyme-ct.gov/Pages/OldLymeCT-BComm/historic/historic or from the Building Department at Town Hall. The application fee of \$50.00 may be reduced or waived by the HDC under certain circumstances. In most cases, the HDC is reluctant to consider an application from anyone who is not in compliance with a prior directive of the HDC or who has yet to fulfill satisfactorily the provisions of a C of A granted previously

SUPPORTING DATA

Applications must be accompanied by:

- Dimensioned scale drawings
- Specifications
- Photographs of the existing site
- Samples of materials
- Site plan
- Sale model (recommended for larger projects)

PROCEDURES

Upon receiving a formal application, the HDC will schedule a public hearing and publish a legal notice of the hearing in a local newspaper. By law, the notice must appear not more than 15 days or less than 5 days before the hearing date. To permit time for publication, all applications requiring public hearings must be received 3 weeks in advance of the hear in date. The HDC has 65 days from the date that the formal application is received in which to render its decision.

TRANSFERS

A C of A issued to one property owner can not be transferred to a subsequent owner without approval by the HDC.



Definitions, Requirements & Examples

Connecticut law defines a “building” as any combination of materials forming a shelter for persons, animals, or property. “Structure” is defined as any combination of materials (other than a building) affixed to, or resting on, the land including - but not limited to - swimming pools, parking areas, driveways, roads, signs, fences, walls, sidewalks, sculpture, lights and lamp posts.

By CT statute, both “buildings” and “structures” require a CofA and a public hearing in historic districts. Specifically:

- Erection of a new building (dwelling, barn, garage, shed, shop, pool house, garden structure, etc.)
- Significant exterior alteration to an existing building
- Demolition of a building
- Use of land for nonresidential parking
- Signage (permanent)
- Fences and stone walls
- Driveways and walkways (if paving over dirt or stone)
- Benches and planters (if affixed to the ground)
- Exterior lighting
- Siding replacement of any type
- Roof replacements (if there is a change in materials)
- Window replacements
- Sculpture (if affixed to the ground - including by gravity)
- Swimming pools
- Oil and propane tanks, solar heating panels, handicap access ramps, air conditioners, ventilating fans, skylights, TV dishes, utility boxes and meters

DRIVEWAYS, ROADS, PARKING AREAS AND WALKS

The HDC discourages the use of blacktop for driveways and entrances. In situations where the need to snowplow or where other considerations require a hard surface, gravel or crushed stone can be rolled into a bituminous binder to provide an attractive, serviceable surface. When using concrete, in any situation, care must be taken to see that it conforms in color and texture to similar installations near it.

LIGHTS

Whether attached to a building or mounted on a post, lighting fixtures contribute greatly to the general character of an area. Most exterior lanterns offered for sale today are too small for the building they are intended to accompany. Property owners are asked to be mindful of the period and scale of their structures when choosing lanterns. (Light “color” should be non-commercial “white.”)

SIGNAGE

The Historic District Sign Policy is built upon the following principles:

- Insure the village’s special character.
- Insure that all institutions and businesses have proper identification signs and their promotional requirements are recognized.
- Insure that nonprofit institutional signs provide an additional unifying theme within the Historic District while avoiding a museum feeling.
- Insure that the public safety and federal and state legal requirements are met.
- Strive to minimize the number of signs and/or reduce the invasiveness of those that are required.



Style Recommendation

The post and arm style of detached identification sign (e.g., a shingle hanging off a wood or metal arm attached to a single post) with black lettering on a white or cream background is encouraged for the following reasons:

- Provides a subtle unifying theme within the Historic District and reduces the clutter of many contrasting styles of signs.
- Fits neatly within Lyme Street's juxtaposition of many styles of architecture.
- Increases the utility of Lyme Street signs for new residents and tourists.
- Builds upon 13 successful examples:
 - Christ the King Church
 - The First Congregational Church
 - The Village Stores
 - Law Office (Gregory Carnese)
 - Old Lyme-Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library
 - Center School (oval sign)
 - Old Lyme Children's Learning Center
 - Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts
(*Administration Building & Sill House*)
 - Lyme Art Association
 - Florence Griswold Museum
(*coordinated sign program*)
 - Old Lyme Inn
 - Bee and Thistle Inn
 - Wyckford Lane

Institutions and businesses presently not meeting this requirement should install post and arm style signs whenever a new or modified sign is required.



PERMANENT SIGNS

The erection of any permanent sign within the Historic District requires a CofA. All such signs must also conform to the Old Lyme Zoning Regulations. Sign permits must be obtained from the Zoning Office in the Town Hall.

All permanent signs must be professionally lettered and the color and shape of the sign must be appropriate to the building. Signs painted directly on the wall or roof of any building are not permitted by Old Lyme zoning regulations.

Premises occupied by a single business establishment, professional office, association or society, and the premises of any other entity that the public may enter, may have only one permanent sign identifying the facility or use. This may be attached or detached. Such premises may not have both an attached and a detached sign. When two or more occupants of the same building are each entitled to one sign, such signs must be compatible.

The owner of any structure in the Historic District is responsible for seeing that a sign identifying a business that has moved or closed is removed within 30 days after it has ceased to serve the purpose for which approved. Whenever a hanging sign is removed the post or support must also be removed.



HISTORIC PROPERTY PLAQUES

The HDC began a plaque program in early 2007 to acknowledge historic, pre-1939 buildings in the Historic District. The 16"x13" white oval plaques are made of a lightweight durable synthetic with black lettering. The plaques contain the name of the original owner or the structure's purpose (Masonic Hall, etc.) and the approximate date of construction. Application forms are available online, or interested persons can call the Town Hall.





SCULPTURE

During the second half of 2007, the HDC addressed a policy for outdoor sculpture in the Historic District. The HDC led a discussion on how sculpture might fit within both the character of Old Lyme and the special characteristics of the Historic District. This discussion took into account Old Lyme's distinct role in American Impressionism (both a century ago and today) and the many museums, art galleries, businesses, and residents that are associated with the Old Lyme Art Colony and this rich body of American art.

The HDC sought input from representatives of the Florence Griswold Museum, Lyme Academy College of Fine Art, Cooley Gallery, a resident sculptor, and Lyme Street property owners. After careful consideration, the Historic District Commission decided on the following policies:

Residences and Businesses:

Sculptures are permitted behind the main house or an ancillary building if they are not visible from Lyme Street.

Art Galleries:

Established art galleries (at least 1 year-old) may hold outdoor sculpture exhibits for as long as 6 weeks if permission is obtained from the HDC.

Nonprofit Organizations:

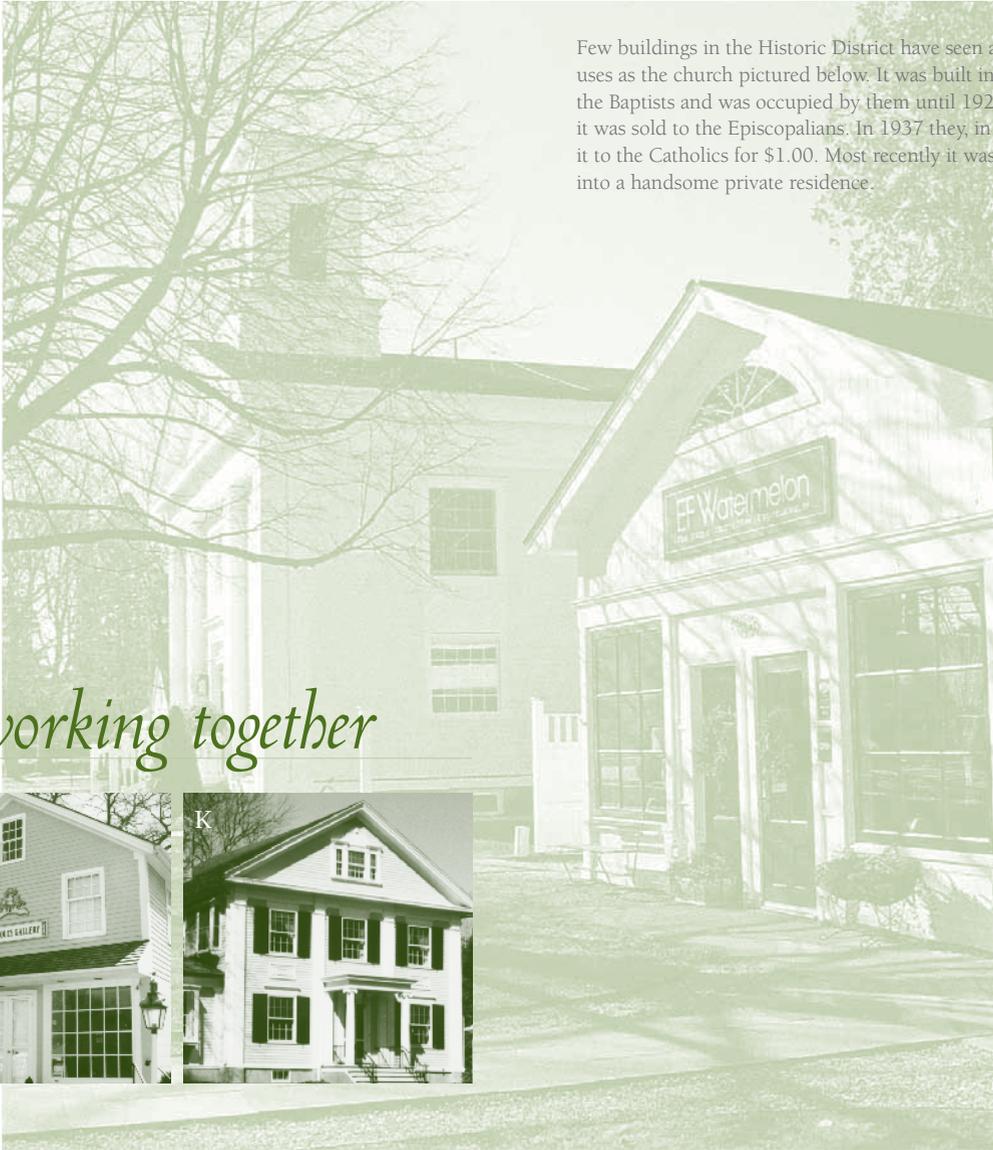
With the HDC's approval, nonprofit organizations may set up a temporary exhibit for up to 6 weeks. A permanent sculpture garden or exhibit must be screened from Lyme Street by either landscaping or a change in elevation. Such screening must be consistent with the HDC's criteria for judging (on a case by case basis) the appropriateness of certain structures and landscaping. The screening must also be reviewed by the Old Lyme Tree Commission.

In each of these cases, anyone installing sculpture(s) should respect the views of his or her neighbors.

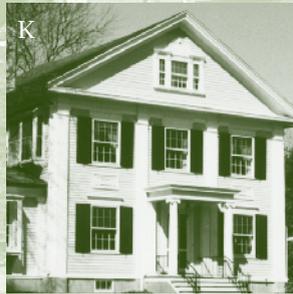


Residents of Lyme Street have long favored the picket fence made with square rather than flat pales, or pickets. It is more graceful, formal and elaborate than the ordinary picket fence sold in sections by lumberyards. If the length of the picket is varied, this type of fence can be made to assume a number of distinctive and attractive forms. The heavy rails to which the pickets are nailed should be on the inside of the fence (facing the house), but they are sometimes echoed on the outside by a simple molding.

Few buildings in the Historic District have seen as many uses as the church pictured below. It was built in 1843 by the Baptists and was occupied by them until 1923, when it was sold to the Episcopalians. In 1937 they, in turn, sold it to the Catholics for \$1.00. Most recently it was converted into a handsome private residence.



working together



- J The art gallery at 23 Lyme Street was originally Rowland's Store and was once known as the Lyme Street Shopping Center. The picture framing shop behind the front building was formerly an antique shop.
- K The northernmost house in the Historic District at 2 Sill Lane has been brought out from the small forest that hid it for many years. Now of the Greek Revival style, it originally had a fl at roof and there was a wing on the left side. It is about the same age as the Ely-Noyes house (circa 1858) next door at 110 Lyme Street.



Enforcement & Appeals

FINES

Enforcement of the regulations and decisions of the HDC is the responsibility of the Town's Zoning Enforcement Officer. When a violation of its regulations is believed to have occurred, the HDC may institute action in Superior Court in New London. Should a violation be found to exist, those responsible may be fined not less than \$10 or more than \$100 for each day the violation continues. If the offense is willful, the offender(s) may be fined not less than \$100, or more than \$250, for each day the violation continues.

Although Connecticut law permits a historic district commission to ask for substantial fines for those who willfully disregard its requests, the procedure is apt to be slow, costly and often self-defeating because of the ill will it creates. In the last analysis, the authority of the HDC rests on the support it receives from: those who initially created it, those who reside or do business in the Historic District, and from those in the larger community who value the advantages it provides.

APPEALS

Any person aggrieved by any decision of the HDC may appeal to the Superior Court within 15 days of receiving written notification of the decision.

Exceptions

HDC review and approval are not required for:

REPAIR OR REPLACEMENT

Repair or replacement of previously existing features when the new is identical to the old with respect to form, size, material, and (in the case of signs) lettering.

PAINT COLORS

Although the Commission may properly consider the texture and color of materials, Connecticut statutes give historic district commissions no jurisdiction over paint colors. It is expected, however, that persons residing or doing business on Lyme Street will select colors that conform to the general character of the Historic District. The HDC is glad to assist with the selection of appropriate colors.

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ABBREVIATIONS

OL = Old Lyme

HDC = Historic District Commission

C of A = Certificate of Appropriateness

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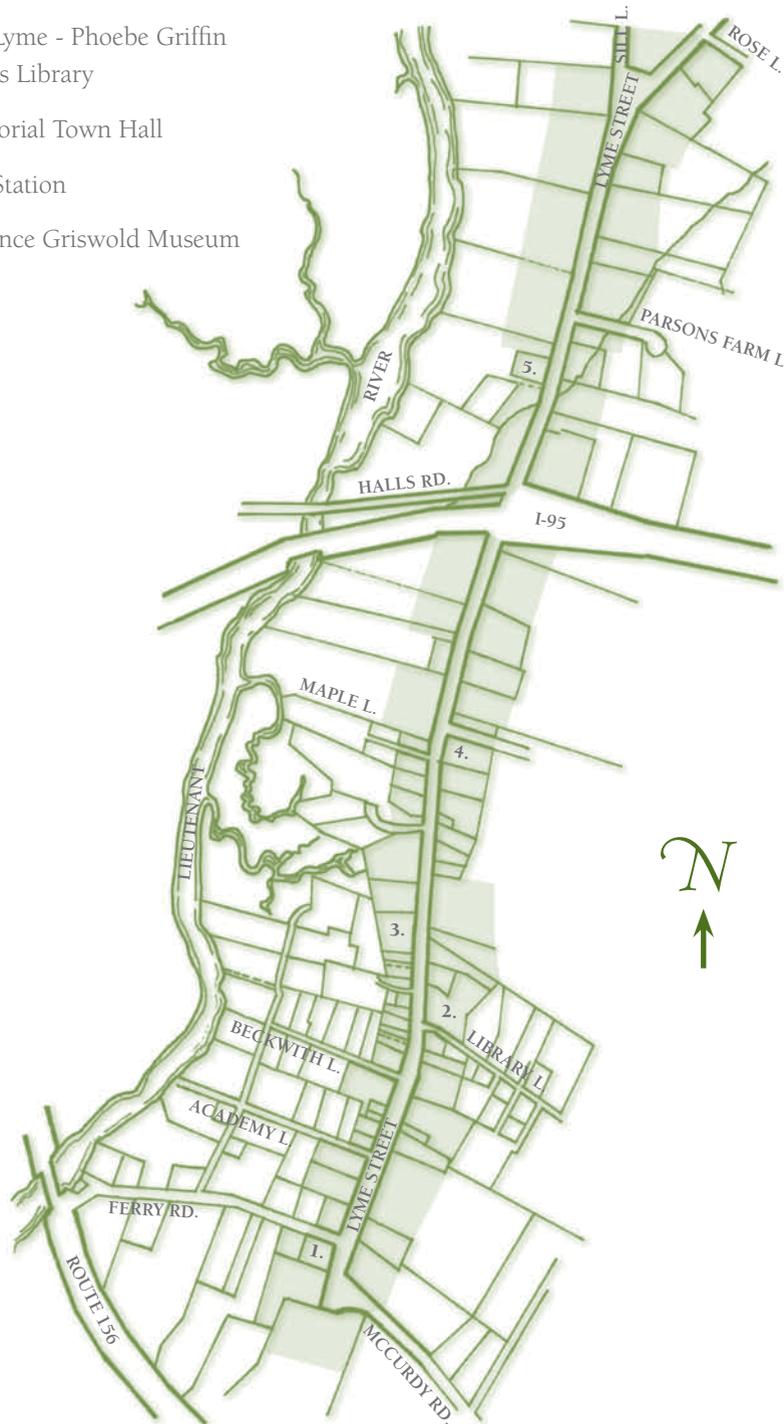
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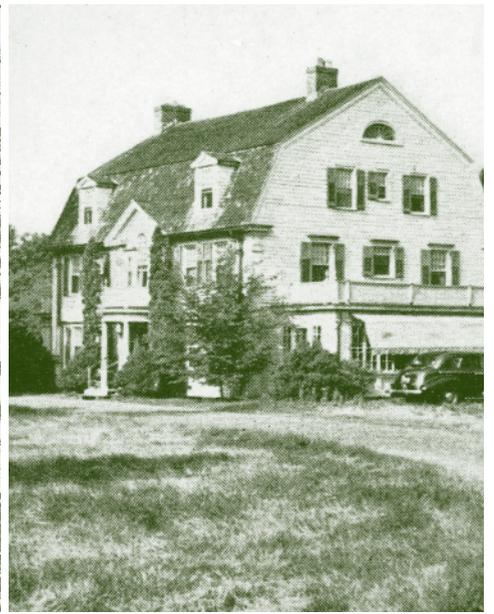
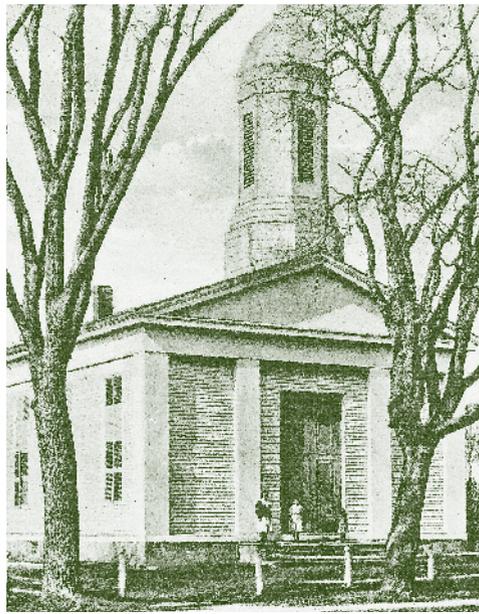
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Old Lyme Historic District

1. The First Congregational Church
2. Old Lyme - Phoebe Griffin
Noyes Library
3. Memorial Town Hall
4. Fire Station
5. Florence Griswold Museum







Old Lyme Historic
District Commission

52 Lyme Street
Old Lyme, CT 06371

