



The Acorn

NEWSLETTER OF THE LEDYARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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December 2011

Tis the Season



Yule Celebration December 4th at Nathan Lester House

The Society's eighth annual Yuletide Celebration will be held on **Sunday, December 4th** at the Nathan Lester House from **1:00 to 4:00 PM**. As in past years, the house will be decorated for holiday cheer and there will be a cozy fire, great refreshments, carolers and good cheer and company. New this year will be evergreen boxwood bunches for purchase and as ever, our books and maps are available for holiday gifts.

This will be a time to enjoy fellowship with members and friends, before the hustle and bustle of the season become too intense. Come, bring a friend and enjoy the afternoon.

The **Nathan Lester House** is located at the intersection of Long Cove and Vinegar Hill Roads in Gales Ferry.

Cookies, cookies, dozens of cookies! December meeting to host cookie exchange

Does your family get tired of the same old holiday cookies, year after year? Desire something different? Then come to the Ledyard Historical Society Cookie Exchange, at our December membership meeting.

It's simple: bake about four dozen cookies (one or two batches, depending on the size of the cookies). Bring them to our meeting, and also a large empty container. All the cookies are placed around the outside of a table. Participants take their empty container and work their way around the table taking two from each jar until all the cookies have been distributed. Each participant will have at least four dozens cookies to take home. The trick is to get them home without eating them.

Ellen Bothamly-Fossum will give a demonstration on making a holiday boxwood tree, a candle centerpiece and other easy and simple arrangements. Bunches of greens may be available for purchase. Come get inspired to be creative!

It's also been hinted that a classic film may be shown. So come and enjoy holiday preparations with friends. The meeting will be **Tuesday, December 13th**, at the **Bill Library**, beginning at **7:00 PM**. The Ledyard Bill Library is located at **718 Colonel Ledyard Highway** in Ledyard Center.

“I’m Connecticut” to be presented by Connecticut Rep

Connecticut Repertory Theater, part of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Connecticut, will be presenting the world premiere of “I’m Connecticut,” a new play about what it means to be a Nutmegger, in December. Written by Connecticut native Mike Riess, a head writer for “The Simpsons,” the play is a satirical love story about a young man who grew up in Simsbury and is now living in New York City and searching for love. Amid the anxieties of dating he begins to ask himself what a Nutmegger really is. If you’ve ever wondered about the identity of The Land of Steady Habits, be prepared for a hysterical surprise.

“I’m Connecticut runs” from December 1st to 4th and 7th to 10th at the Harriet Jorgensen Theater on the UConn Storrs campus. Consult <http://crt.uconn.edu> for show times and ticket information.

REMEMBER, the Nathan Lester House is available for use by small groups of up to 35 people. Contact caretakers Scott and Andrea Buka at 464-8540, or email nathanlesterhouse@yahoo.com for more information or for tours out of season.

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MIGHTY OAKS FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW

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Kit Foster, editor, telephone 860-464-6466, email acorn@kitfoster.com.
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Mark Your Calendar

Sunday, December 4, 2011: Annual Yule Celebration at the Nathan Lester House, 1:00 to 4:00 PM.

Tuesday, December 13, 2011: Membership meeting, cookie exchange and holiday workshop, Ledyard Bill Library, 7:00 PM.

Tuesday, January 10, 2012: Executive Board Meeting, Bill Library, 7:00 PM.

Tuesday, February 14, 2014: Membership meeting, Ledyard’s Up-Down and other Saw Mills, Bill Library, 7:00 PM.

Tuesday, April 10, 2012: Membership meeting, **Tales Out of School**. Join fellow Ledyard residents, many of whom attended Ledyard’s one- (or two-) room schools. Town Historian Kit Foster will give a short photo tour of the town’s former one-room schools, some of which survive. After the presentation, memories of those school days will be shared.

Thank You, Ledyard Fair Volunteers!

Thank you to the Ledyard Up-Down Sawmill Committee (especially Warren Dolphin and Alan Ganong) for creating and manning our Ledyard Fair display in September.

More folks now know about Ledyard’s historic and still operating sawmill. Check out their outstanding website:

<http://sites.google.com/site/ledyardsawmill/>

Many thanks also to the Society members who volunteered at the display and at the one room schoolhouse (111 visitors).

Fort Griswold Day 230th Anniversary of Groton Battle a Huge Success

Fort Griswold Day, the September 3rd event honoring and celebrating the 230th anniversary of the Battle of Groton Heights, was packed with activities, music, colonial re-enactors and many dignitaries, bringing history alive for the residents of Southeastern Connecticut.

Society secretary Lee Moore was on the planning committee of the Friends of Fort Griswold for this event, and reports that many hundreds of people came to learn and experience colonial life, and share in the remembrances of that fateful day, September 6, 1781.

The Battle of Groton Heights holds the distinction of being the only major battle of the American Revolution to take place on Connecticut soil, and was the last significant battle in New England in our war for independence from Great Britain. In 1781, as battles raged in the southern states, Britain's military dominance was losing its advantage over the American forces. The British Major General Lord Cornwallis found his forces retreating and becoming more isolated near the Virginia coast, with no reinforcements coming to their aid. General George Washington began his march from New England to make a decisive attack and hopefully end the war, which they did, at Yorktown, Virginia on October 19, 1781.

The Battle of Groton Heights occurred just six weeks before the British surrender at Yorktown, and historians believe this attack on New London and Groton was an attempt by the British Commander of all forces, General Sir Henry Clinton, to draw Washington's forces to the New London harbor area, thereby diverting his attention from attacking Cornwallis.

To accomplish this, Clinton sent a fleet of 32 ships with a force of more than

1,600 men to attack the two forts guarding each side of the Thames River: Fort Trumbull in New London and Fort Griswold in Groton. To lead this force was the infamous American traitor, Benedict Arnold.

Arnold was well-aware of the forts, the topography, and the people here, since he was a native of Norwich, just a few miles up the river. Biographers of Arnold may differ on theories about his treason, but it's difficult to understand his actions of this day, which resulted in the burning of much of New London, and the massacre that occurred at Fort Griswold, so close to his native home.

The Friends of Fort Griswold planned this day of honor and remembrance as a peek into Colonial life, with re-enactors, crafters, fife and drum corps, artillery and battle skirmishes, and informative portrayals of survivors of the battle. The "play" was titled *In our own Words*, and was compiled from the actual first-hand accounts written by many of those who survived that terrible day. One of those heroic patriots was Sergeant Rufus Avery. He was one of the few who saw the events of the day unravel from the very beginning to the aftermath and was requested by the Governor to write an official narrative of his experience. Rufus Avery had charge of the garrison at Fort Griswold the night before the attack, so was first to see the British fleet in the harbor and to spread the alarm.

Moore, as a 13th generation Avery descendant, was very proud to take on the role of Sergeant Avery. Other portrayals included David Rose as Stephen Hempsted, Robert Lecce as Ensign Charles Eldredge, Ralph Whitney as Dr. Avery Downer, Anthony Lecce as 17 year-old Peter Avery, Diana Dunlap as Anna Warner (later known as Mother Bailey), and Jennifer Emerson as Eunice Latham. Lee said the play was so well received, they're thinking of "taking it on the road."

The evening included a “Libation Ceremony,” a tradition of honoring the dead by passing a cup of Madera, which lore says began with Phillip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, and was used by Napoleon and General George Washington with his troops.

Closing the evening was a luminary candle service of the reading of the names of those valiant patriots, 88 in number, who died that day in our struggle for freedom. Participants in these ceremonies included the Connecticut Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, the 2nd Regiment Light Dragoons, His Majesty’s 54th Regiment of Foote, Groton City Mayor Marian Galbraith, and the Rev. Dwight Dutton of the Groton Congregational

Church. Beautiful music was also provided by the Groton Congregational Church Choir, and Connecticut’s first official Troubadour, Tom Callinan.

2011 also marked the centennial year of the iron gates to the fort, with its bronze plaque listing the defenders of the fort. Many dignitaries shared in a re-dedication ceremony, including U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, State Senator Andy Maynard, Mayor Galbraith, and Connecticut DEEP Park Supervisor Jonathan Lincoln.

A 30-minute video has been made of the highlights, which will be airing on Comcast Channel 12 at various times. This will also be shown at an upcoming membership meeting of the Historical Society, so stay tuned for further updates.



In their own words: Left to right, Society secretary Lee Moore as Sgt. Rufus Avery; Sen. Richard Blumenthal; Jennifer Emerson, playwright & historical interpreter, playing Eunice Latham; Ralph Whitney of Groton as Dr. Avery Downer; and Robert Lecce of Old Mystic as Ensign Charles Eldredge at the gates to Fort Griswold.



Priced at \$18.50, tax included, the Lester House Meows are **available at both libraries, at the Nathan Lester House.** They make great holiday gifts!

It’s the Cat’s Meow

Our edition in the Ledyard series of “Cat’s Meow” collectibles is available. A faithful likeness of the Nathan Lester House joins earlier landmarks in the set, the Bill Library, Gales Ferry Library and Ledyard Congregational Church.

Would You Like to Receive the Acorn via Email?

Printing and mailing *The Acorn* is one of the Society’s largest annual expenses. Delivery of the newsletter via email would cut down on these substantially. A number of members have signed up for email delivery, which comes as a pdf file in advance of the regular mailing. To change from postal to email delivery just email a request to the editor at acorn@kitfoster.com. Be sure to include the email address to which you want the issues sent.

Pay your dues, recruit a member?

Our membership year runs nominally from Annual Meeting to Annual Meeting. **Dues for 2011-2012 are now due and payable.** If your dues are paid through 2012 (check your mailing label), please use this form to recruit a new member.

**Ledyard Historical Society
Membership Year 2011-2012**

Name _____	_____ Senior \$5.00
Address _____	_____ Senior Couple \$8.00
_____	_____ Individual \$10.00
Telephone _____	_____ Family \$15.00
E-mail address _____	_____ Patron \$25.00
Special interests or comments _____	_____ Life \$150.00
_____	_____ Life Couple \$200.00

Mail to: Ledyard Historical Society
P.O. Box 411
Ledyard, CT 06339-0411



THE LEDYARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Box 411
Ledyard, Connecticut 06339

Who's Who at Ledyard Historical Society 2011-2012

President: Kit Foster	464-6466	Second District Schoolhouse:	
Vice President:		Bill Fossum	464-2575
Ellen Bothamly Fossum	464-2575	Hospitality:	
Secretary: Lee Moore	572-7084	Information Technology:	
Treasurer: Nancy P. Avery	464-9574	Scott Buka	464-8540
Membership: Kit Foster	464-6466	Publications: Rusty Godino	464-6314
Historian: Jan Bell	464-2061	Board Members at Large	
Newsletter: Kit Foster	464-6466	Vin Godino	
Publicity: Barbara Duncan	464-2200	Andrea Buka	
Curator: Bill Fossum	464-2575	Jeanne Allyn	