



# The Acorn

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NEWSLETTER OF THE LEDYARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Volume VIII Number II

[www.ledyardhistory.org](http://www.ledyardhistory.org)

October 2011

## Tales of the Leather Man October Meeting to Tell of Mysterious Figure

Residents of Connecticut and eastern New York have long heard stories of the Old Leather Man. He was a mysterious figure who appeared in 1856, wandering the country roads and sleeping in caves, huts, and lean-to shelters, dressed in an outfit he fashioned from scraps of leather. Around 1883 he began traveling in his famous clockwise circuit, a regular route of 365 miles every 34 days. He continued this pattern until his death in 1889.

Over the years of the Leather Man's travels there were hundreds of newspaper articles written about him. He allowed his photograph to be taken on some occasions and sometimes spoke, in both French and English, to the townspeople who he encountered. He would always refuse money offered by concerned residents, but would sometimes take the food and drink offered to him.

Even today the identity of the Leather Man is still unknown. For a time, some thought he was a lovelorn Parisian by the name of Jules Bourglay, and this is the name on the plaque that marks his grave. But it has since been proven that Jules Bourglay was a fictional name created by a Victorian-era writer of a romantic tale. Even with the voluminous documentation that exists, the Old Leather Man remains a

mysterious figure. We may never know who he was or where he came from.

Dan DeLuca, author of *The Old Leather Man: Historical Accounts of a Connecticut and New York Legend*, will speak about the Leather Man at our October meeting, to be held **Tuesday, October 11, 2011**, at the **Bill Library**. A genealogist, a Meriden, Connecticut, historian, and a retired teacher, he has been researching the Leather Man for twenty years and is the leading expert on the subject. The meeting will begin at **7:30 PM**. The Ledyard Bill Library is located at 718 Colonel Ledyard Highway in Ledyard Center. Please come and bring a friend.

## New Society Calendar in Full Swing Meetings now Bi-monthly By-Laws Amendments to be Voted Upon

This will be the second meeting in our new bi-monthly series. The subsequent membership meetings will be held in December, February, April and June.

The June meeting will be the annual meeting, with elections and adoption of a budget. This change requires slight revisions to the By-Laws. The Executive Board also decided that the new Information Technology Committee should be a standing committee, not an ad hoc committee. Proposed amendments can be found on page 5. They will be voted upon at the October 11 meeting.

## **Stargazing Preempted by Irene Astronomy Program to be rescheduled**

Our planned program looking at stars from the Nathan Lester House fell victim to the travails of Irene. The weather proved amenable, in the end, and the stars cooperated, but modern science often requires electricity, which was in short supply on August 30<sup>th</sup>. Jeremy Doyle, our speaker and facilitator, requires electricity for one of his telescopes, and in any case many people in the area were coping with “camping out at home” in the wake of the tropical storm. As a result the planned evening was postponed.

The evening under the stars will be rescheduled for a future date, when the stars are right, and, hopefully, no storms are in sight. You’ll read about it here, and perhaps sooner online at [www.ledyardhistory.org](http://www.ledyardhistory.org).

**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](mailto:nathanlesterhouse@yahoo.com) for more information or for tours out of season.

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## *The Acorn*

**MIGHTY OAKS FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW**

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Published bimonthly by Ledyard Historical Society, Inc.,  
P.O. Box 411, Ledyard, CT 06339

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Items for inclusion should be submitted by the first of  
July, September, November, January, March or May.  
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## **Mark Your Calendar**

**Tuesday, October 11, 2011:** Membership meeting, Dan DeLuca speaks on The Old Leather Man, **Bill Library, 7:30 PM.**

**Tuesday, November 8, 2011:** Executive Board, Bill Library, 7:00 PM.

**Sunday, December 4, 2011:** Annual Yule Celebration at the Nathan Lester House.

**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.

## **Florence Griswold Museum Eyes Walker Evans**

The Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme has recently opened a new exhibit, “The Exacting Eye of Walker Evans.” Evans (1903-1975) was a photographer whose Depression-era images captured American social, cultural and artistic history. His photographs, particularly those of Southern sharecroppers, captured the attention of the nation and essentially made his career.

This new exhibit examines Evans’ post-Depression work, tracing the thread of his themes and capturing the essence of local identity. The exhibit shows more than 150 photographs and artifacts of the 1940s to 1970s, and examines the artist’s life in Connecticut, where he taught at Yale University and lived in Lyme.

The Florence Griswold Museum is located at 96 Lyme Street in Old Lyme. The exhibit runs through January 29, 2012.

## Items of Interest from the Executive Board Meeting of July 12, 2011

Present: President Kit Foster, Vice President Ellen Fossum, Secretary Lee Moore, Treasurer Nancy Avery, Committee Chairs Barbara Duncan and Jan Bell, and Member-at-Large Vin Godino.

### Treasurer's Report

Nancy reported our assets as Dime Bank savings and checking accounts totaling \$18,529.47. Discussion followed regarding the year-ending deficit of \$5,681.46 with everyone agreeing efforts must be increased this coming year with regards to fundraising. Nancy praised our efforts with the very successful "*Old Fashioned Fourth*," pointing out that donations surpassed \$200, and we even received a new Life Couple membership during the event.

### Committee Reports:

**Programs:** Ellen updated the Board on events planned, and suggestions for others:

- ❖ Research Program is scheduled for the next meeting, August 9th led by Scott.
- ❖ Reminder to "*Star Gaze at the Lester House*" on August 30th.
- ❖ Vin has received a confirmation from Dan DeLuca to present the program on "*The Leather Man*" for the October 11th membership program. Discussion included thoughts on publicity for this, and a question if we should move the venue to the Senior Center. No decision was made.
- ❖ Wedding Gowns-October 23rd: Ellen clarified with the church's planning committee the Society's role as a co-sponsor: we will do some publicity, handing out flyers, etc. and coordinate refreshments. **This program has since been canceled.**
- ❖ Lester House Holiday Open House-December 4th is the first Sunday of the month for our traditional holiday event.
- ❖ The "*One Room Schoolhouses*" program, was tentatively scheduled for the April meeting.
- ❖ Nancy suggested a program on "*Colonial Foods & Holiday Decorations*" for December.

**Gales Ferry 2nd District Schoolhouse:** Ellen reported the July 2nd Gales Ferry Walk was well attended, and visitors really enjoyed the schoolhouse. Also, she recently attended an event at the Geer Schoolhouse, learning about their restoration efforts and still-needed funds. She suggested we think about giving a donation to them.

**By-Laws:** Vin noted that we need to amend the By-Laws if we intend to change the annual meeting from May to June. The Board reviewed the rules for amending the By-Laws and the committee will rework verbiage to "*the annual meeting will be scheduled in the last two months of the fiscal year.*" The changes will be presented to the membership on August 9th, for voting at the general membership meeting on October 11th.

### Old Business

**Battle of Groton Heights 230th:** Lee shared the progress being made: a three-part play has been written (short segments), and a casting call will be held July 22nd for re-enactors and volunteers to audition for various parts to play. Funding/donation request letters have been sent, and so far we have commitments from 75 colonial re-enactors to participate.

**Ledyard Fair:** Ellen mentioned that Warren Dolphin will have a table set up for a sawmill display with props and photos. She had sign-up sheets for volunteers, and said she'd be out of town from July 29th to Sept. 5. As a reminder, the Friday night of the fair will be "*Military Night*," Saturday will "*Celebrate Children*," with interesting displays from the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center, and Sunday will be "*What is unique about Ledyard?*"

### New Business:

Vin informed the Board that after eight years, our wonderful caretakers Andrea and Scott Buka will be leaving the Lester house for a place of their own, when their lease ends this November. He asked for suggestions on possible successor candidates.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lee Moore, Secretary

## Items of Interest from the Membership Meeting August 9th, 2011

The membership of the Ledyard Historical Society convened in the Bill Library on August 9, 2011. In attendance were: Kit Foster, President; Lee Moore, Secretary; Jan Bell, Historian; Committee Chairs Rusty Godino and Scott Buka, and Members-at-Large Vin Godino, and Andrea Buka.

President Kit Foster opened the meeting at 7:34 PM., but declared it would not be an official meeting since the quorum of 12 members for a general meeting was not achieved. Therefore, no official business could be conducted, but we continued with announcements, updates, and general discussions.

Kit referred to a letter received from the Friends of Fort Griswold asking if the society would be having a table at the upcoming "*Fort Griswold Day*" on September 3rd. Since so many of Board members would be out of town, it was obvious that we would not have a table.

In the absence of Treasurer Nancy Avery, Kit gave the report as: Total assets of the Society were \$18,368.97. This consisted of our Dime Bank savings of \$17,693.31, and checking account total of \$675.66. Activity was very light this period: \$38 from memberships, and cataloging expenses of \$200.

Kit also gave the **Membership Report** as 94 Current Members from the following categories: Family (18), Individual (11), Life (20), Life Couple (4), Patron (12), Senior (17), Senior Couple (7), Honorary (2) and Honorary Life (3). Our newsletter circulation is 108, which includes 14 complimentary newsletters sent to various historical associations.

### Committee Reports:

#### **Programs:**

Stargazing at the Nathan Lester House, August 30th, 8 PM, with Jeremy Doyle  
The Old Leather Man, October 11th  
Tales out of School-one (and two-) room schoolhouses, April 9, 2012

**Publications:** Rusty Godino reminded the Board that the income from the sales of our

books was to be used for future publications, and questioned if we indeed had a separate figure to report. She noted our biggest sellers are the *Images*, *Recipes* and *Cemetery* books, and that there should be about \$7,000 allotted to publications.

**Historian:** Jan Bell reported she has answered many inquiries about pictures, documents, and especially maps. She knows great progress has been made on the first two, and asked about the cataloging progress of maps. Andrea asked Jan if she could give her a priority list. Also, the Research Room has a beautiful new step-stool, hand-made by Vin.

### Old Business:

**Ledyard Fair:** September 9, 10, 11 needs staffing of our booth. Ellen will be calling!

### New Business:

**By-Laws Amendments:** Vin shared the changes that have been proposed, primarily concerning meetings dates, and Kit said they will be published in the next *Acorn*.

The "*meeting that was not a meeting*" was declared adjourned by Kit at 8:08 PM.

We were then treated to a very informative presentation by our webmaster and IT chair Scott Buka about our new website

"*Ledyardhistory.org*". This included searching techniques, and associated websites such as *Heritage Quest* and related search engines like *YouTube* and *Google*.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lee Moore, Secretary

## 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](mailto:acorn@kitfoster.com). Be sure to include the email address to which you want the issues sent.

## Proposed Changes to the Ledyard Historical Society By-Laws

The current By-Laws require that the annual meeting be held in the month of May. The Executive Board would like the option of a June annual meeting in order to present the most accurate and up to date estimate of expenditures as part of the budget process. The fiscal year budget is voted upon and adopted at the annual meeting. All proposed changes are needed to support this change concerning when the annual meeting can be held.

The Executive Board has created an ad hoc Information Technology (IT) Committee to oversee the development of a computer/software system which is being used to put the contents of the research room in digital form. This system will make our historic documents part of the library system and available via the internet. It is recommended that the IT committee be made a permanent standing committee since the updates and maintenance of this system will continue indefinitely.

### Proposed Changes

#### Article IV

The Program Committee shall plan programs for the ~~four~~ regular meetings of the Society.

The Membership Committee shall endeavor to increase the membership of the Society. The Membership Chair shall maintain records of individual dues status, receive dues from each member and deposit the dues with the Treasurer. The membership Chair shall send members receipts for payment of their dues; in case of applicants, this receipt and a copy of the By-Laws shall formalize their membership. The Membership Chair shall send reminders of dues-delinquent members immediately after the ~~fall meeting~~ first meeting of the fiscal year.

The Information Technology (IT) Committee shall be responsible for overseeing and maintaining the Society's computer equipment, software, digital assets and web presence.

#### Article VI

Nominations: The Executive Board shall appoint a Nominating Committee consisting of three (3) members at the Board meeting prior to the ~~March meeting~~ member meeting preceding the annual meeting. The Nominating Committee shall prepare and present a list of officers and chairs of the standing Committees and Members-at-Large to be voted on at the May annual meeting. A majority vote of the members attending the annual meeting shall be necessary for election.

#### Article VII

**Section 1.** There shall be at least four regular meetings of the Society each year ~~usually in October, December, March and May.~~ Notice of meeting shall be given in the Newsletter.

**Section 3.** The annual meeting shall be ~~the~~ ~~May meeting~~ held within the last two months of the fiscal year. At this meeting, officers and committee chairs shall present written reports of the year's work, when requested by the Executive Board.

#### Article VIII

Audits: The Executive Board shall appoint and auditor or auditing committee prior to the annual meeting. The auditor of committee shall audit the Society's books at the conclusion of the fiscal year and report to the membership. The audit report shall be published in the ~~autumn newsletter~~ first newsletter of the fiscal year.

These changes will be taken up and acted upon at the October 11, 2011 membership meeting.

**Ledyard Historical Society  
Treasurer's Report  
September 21, 2011**

Income Year to Date	
Book Sales	\$114.00
Membership	313.00
Misc. Sales	27.25
Interest	3.01
Donations	<u>223.05</u>
Total	\$680.31
Disbursements	
Dues & Fees	\$100.00
Cataloging	<u>200.00</u>
	\$300.00
Balance	
Savings Account	\$17,694.82
Checking Account	<u>849.66</u>
	\$18,544.48
Balance June 30, 2011	\$18,164.17
Gain/(Loss)	\$ 380.01

Nancy P. Avery, treasurer

**History in Small Helpings**

**Says Dow Co. Plans Multi-Million Dollar Plastics Plant at Ledyard**

Although construction of a plastics plant at Allyn's Point, Ledyard, by the Dow Chemical Co., Inc., of Midland, Mich., has been in the planning and preliminary engineering stages six months or more, company officials say its completion will depend on developments in the international picture.

This was revealed in the current issue of the New England Council's News Letter, published at Boston yesterday.

According to the News Letter, the multi-million dollar polystyrene plant will substantially increase the company's output of Styron, Dow's trade name for polystyrene used in making toys, radios, refrigerator parts and in many industrial products.

The News Letter says the location of the proposed plant will be served by the New Haven railroad, will permit ocean shipment of raw materials from Texas in the company's newly acquired tanker, Marine Chemist, and is expected to improve service to New England.

Continuing, the News Letter says: The availability of ocean transport facilities in New London plus the strategic location in relation to New England and New York markets also have been advanced as prime reason for New England's projected steel mill being located in the same area.

"The building of the Dow factory in New England is expected to increase the importance of the plastics industry in the region, which a study by the New England Council last year found to account for 30 percent of the national production of plastics materials."

*The Day, August 18, 1950*

*"Developments in the international picture" must have been favorable, because the Dow Chemical plant at Allyn's Point was soon built, and opened in 1952. It has been expanded several times since. But does anyone know about "New England's projected steel mill being located in the same area"?*  
-Editor



**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.

Priced at \$18.50, tax included, the Lester House Meows are **available at both libraries, at the Nathan Lester House.**

**Fashion Event Canceled  
Celebration of Ledyard Women  
Deferred at This Time**

The showcase of antique wedding dresses and historic fashions, originally scheduled for late October, has been canceled by its organizers. Coordinating the event, which was to assemble heirloom clothing from a number of Ledyard families, proved too complex to manage at this time.

Both the Society and the Ledyard Congregational Church, which were to jointly sponsor the exhibit, regret the cancellation. Should it prove practicable in the future, the event will be announced well in advance.

**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	<b>Board Members at Large</b>	
Newsletter: Kit Foster	464-6466	Vin Godino	
Publicity: Barbara Duncan	464-2200	Andrea Buka	
Curator: Bill Fossum	464-2575	Jeanne Allyn	