



The Acorn

NEWSLETTER OF THE LEDYARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Time Travel at the Nathan Lester House

For a month this spring, passers-by were greeted with a flashing sign at the entrance to the Nathan Lester House and Great Oak Park: **Closed from April 17th to May 17th.** Would-be visitors, hikers and dog-walkers alike were excluded from the property. What was going on, they wondered? At last it can be told: A movie production company was shooting a feature film, "Fog of War," to be released early in 2024.

Set in a fictional coastal New England farmhouse during World War II, it features John Cusack, Mira Sorvino, Jake Abel, and Brianna Hildebrand as loyalties are questioned, suspicion grows, and information critical to the war effort is imperiled. The spy film used sites across Ledyard and New London County, with the Lester House as the heart of the action.

With generous donations of props from the film, and continued loans of artifacts from Ledyard residents, the Ledyard Historic District Commission and Ledyard Historic Society have retained the house and barns as staged for the film. The Town of Ledyard welcomes the public back to its park and museum house in thanks for all your patience in allowing this film to be made. Proceeds from the production company rental will go directly to the continuing restoration of the historic house.

The Connecticut shoreline is no stranger to the cinema industry. Scenes from the 1961 film "Parrish," with Claudette Colbert and Troy Donahue, were shot in Old Saybrook, and all of greater Mystic was atwitter in 1988 for "Mystic Pizza," starring Annabeth Gish and Julia Roberts. It's only fitting that Ledyard gets a turn on the wide screen.

The Lester House opened for the season on Memorial Day, May 29th. The "Fog of War" exhibit will remain in place until July 4th, open to the public during regular weekend hours, **Saturday and Sunday, 1:00 - 4:30 PM** or by appointment. **153 Vinegar Hill Rd. Gales Ferry, CT 06335**



Radio in an 18th century house? Essential in a World War II scenario.



The Nathan Lester House kitchen, staged in World War II fashion.

Annual Meeting June 11th: A Garden Party and Pot Luck Program on Connecticut in WWII

Members and friends are invited to explore the Lester House and barns, as staged for the film, on June 11th, prior to our annual meeting, which begins with a pot luck supper at 5:00 PM.

Following the meal, Dr. Jared Day will speak on Connecticut's experiences during the war. Dr. Day taught American, European and World history at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh for 16 years. Recently, he has taught a course on the History of Connecticut at Three Rivers Community College. He specializes in U.S. political, urban, and cultural history, as well as Connecticut, Pittsburgh, African American, and world history from the 15th century to the present.

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MIGHTY OAKS FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW

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Society Receives Humanities Grant

We are pleased to announce that the Ledyard Historical Society has received a \$5,100 Operating Support Grant from the Connecticut Cultural Fund, administered by Connecticut Humanities. Operating Support Grants assist organizations as they recover from the pandemic and maintain and grow their ability to serve their community and the public.

The Society is one of 723 organizations in Connecticut receiving Operating Support Grants. Totaling more than \$8.5 million, these grants are part of a two-year, \$30.7 million investment in arts, humanities, and cultural nonprofits by the Connecticut General Assembly and approved by Governor Ned Lamont.

The grant has enabled the Society to continue ongoing work in the digitization of important historic documents, facilitating access by researchers and creating backup versions of the original documents.

Founded in 1974, Connecticut Humanities (CTH) is an independent, non-profit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. CTH connects people to the humanities through grants, partnerships, and collaborative programs. CTH projects, administration, and program development are supported by state and federal matching funds, community foundations, and gifts from private sources.



And a telephone, ubiquitous by the 1940s.

Regattafest Returns

Regattafest, our town's celebration of our country's longest-running intercollegiate athletic event returns Saturday, June 10th, for its second year. Formally known as the Harvard-Yale Regatta, it has been rowed on the Thames River between New London and Gales Ferry since 1878. On an unusual four-mile course, it drew some 25,000 spectators at the inaugural event.

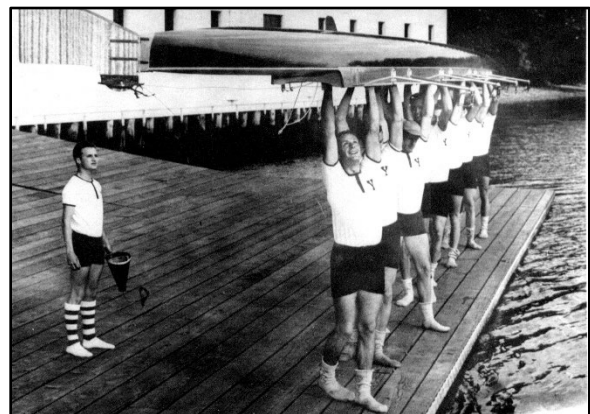
In the beginning, Yale crews boarded at the home of Latham Brown, near the ferry landing. Charles Stoddard hosted the Harvard varsity at his Italianate farmhouse by Long Cove, while the freshmen stayed with Capt. Molthrop at what is now Erickson Park. Yale later acquired Latham Brown's property, while Harvard constructed Red Top Cottage and a boat house on the shore, before purchasing the Brown farm at Brown's Crossing in 1930.

Regattafest, sponsored by Ledyard's Economic Development Commission, Ledyard Parks and Recreation, The Gales Ferry District, Ledyard Rotary Club and Sweet Hill Farm, turns the afternoon races into an all-day affair, with a trade fair, food trucks, yard games, a car cruise, and emergency service equipment, beginning at 11:00 AM. Park at Job Lot on Route 12 and take the shuttle to **Sweet Hill Farm at 39 Military Highway**. Bring a picnic if you like.

For 145 years, the Thames has been *the* place to be for collegiate rowing. Cornell, Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania all raced here, but only Harvard and Yale remain. President Theodore Roosevelt attended the 50th anniversary regatta in 1902, and 1911 saw the first appearance of an airplane over the course, piloted by noted aviator H. W. Atwood, who had set a record flight from New York to Boston in two hours and 12

minutes, an eon in today's terms. By 1925, the spectator crowd had grown to some 100,000 people, a 500-yacht spectator fleet lay at anchor and observation trains followed the crews, one on each side of the river.

The year 1934 again hosted a presidential visit, as Franklin Roosevelt, a Harvard alum, watched his son, Franklin, Jr., row with his alma mater's varsity crew. Alas, Yale swept all the races. The regatta was suspended during World War II, and the 1946 race was held on the Charles River in Boston. The crews returned to the Thames in 1947, when the new Gold Star Bridge, completed during the war, became the southern starting or finishing line. (The direction of the race varies, depending on the tides and current at race time.) Suspended again during COVID, the Harvard-Yale Regatta resumed in 2022. In the fortnight leading up to this year's race, Gales Ferry village will again be alive with rowers in daily practice on the water. Over the years, the Harvard Crimson crews have significantly out-rowed the Yale Bulldogs, 95-58 for varsity races, 77-40 for second varsity and 75-39 for freshmen (the 2016 varsity race was declared to have "no result"). The victors always leave their mark: at race's end a rock on the opposite shore is painted in the victor's colors, red for Harvard, blue for Yale.



Coxswain waits as Yale crew of 1941 lifts their shell into the water.



THE LEDYARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Box 411
Ledyard, Connecticut 06339

Please help rejuvenate your Society!

Our membership year runs nominally from Annual Meeting to Annual Meeting. **Dues for 2023-2024 are now due and payable.** Please help us to resume our important work with your dues, your inspiration and your talents.

Ledyard Historical Society Membership Year 2023-2024

Name _____	_____ Student \$5.00
Address _____	_____ Senior \$10.00
Town State Zip _____	_____ Senior Couple \$15.00
_____	_____ Individual \$15.00
Telephone _____	_____ Family \$20.00
E-mail address _____	_____ Patron \$50.00
Special interests or comments _____	_____ Life \$250.00
_____	_____ Life Couple \$300.00

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