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# Old Lyme Historical Society, Old Lyme CT

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The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

Jessica Bender 2010  
Fall 2009 internship

A history-oriented  
internship with the  
Old Lyme Historical  
Society, uncovering  
the architectural  
and social history  
of the town & its  
historic buildings

*Working Together*



## Brief History of Old Lyme

Founded in 1665, the town of Old Lyme retains much of its original landscape and architecture. The affluence of Old Lyme was greatly shaped by the florescence of maritime activity during the latter half of the seventeenth century.

Old Lyme is distinguished from its neighboring towns largely by its well-preserved charm, affluent community, and artistic achievements. During the early twentieth century, Old Lyme was the center of the Lyme Art Colony, which was one of most influential colonies in the history of American Art. Artists from all over gravitated to the area to paint the region's wealth of subject matter from its beautiful landscape to grand buildings.



## Why I Chose To Explore The Architecture of an Historic Town

Exposure to the renovation of a historic Italianate house in my hometown through my summer internship at Thomas DiGiorgio Architecture allowed me to gain insight into the field of historic preservation and discover the building's historical significance. My fascination with the building's history, architecture and preservation drove me to investigate the history of well-preserved buildings and residences in Old Lyme, Connecticut.

## Mission of the Old Lyme Historical Society



The mission of the Old Lyme Historical Society, Incorporated, is to collect, preserve, and interpret the rich history of Lyme, Connecticut, and its environs, for the benefit of its residents and visitors. Cultural, economic, social, and architectural aspects of life in Old Lyme and its environs, from the earliest settlements to the present, will be shared with the public through the Internet, exhibits, walking tours, and original publications.

## My Role As An Intern

For the fall of 2009, Alison Mitchell of The Old Lyme Historical Society and I created a history-oriented internship which gave me the opportunity to research architecture and an architect whose life and contributions were not well recognized.

I concentrated primarily on the residential buildings in Old Lyme's historic district, which jibed nicely with experiences I have had thus far as an Architectural Studies major and former architect intern.

## My Assignment

My assignment was to research and revise a 1995 walking tour of the historic district in Old Lyme, Connecticut (approximately 1 mile long).

The end product was a self-guided walking tour script, complete with my own sketches of the residences, as well as an audiotape and an mp3 file downloadable for phones which provide visitors with an interesting and informative view of Old Lyme.

## Independent Tasks

I familiarized myself with the architectural styles most often used in Old Lyme. I then verified and corrected existing descriptions of each building in the historic district.

I studied and sketched each residence. My sketches served not only to help people easily identify the house, but also to highlight its original architectural features.





Below: *View of the Griswold House* (1908), by Harry Hoffman. Courtesy Florence Griswold Museum



## The Florence Griswold Museum

Many Lyme Art Colony artists boarded in the home of Miss Florence Griswold, built in 1817 by architect Samuel Belcher.

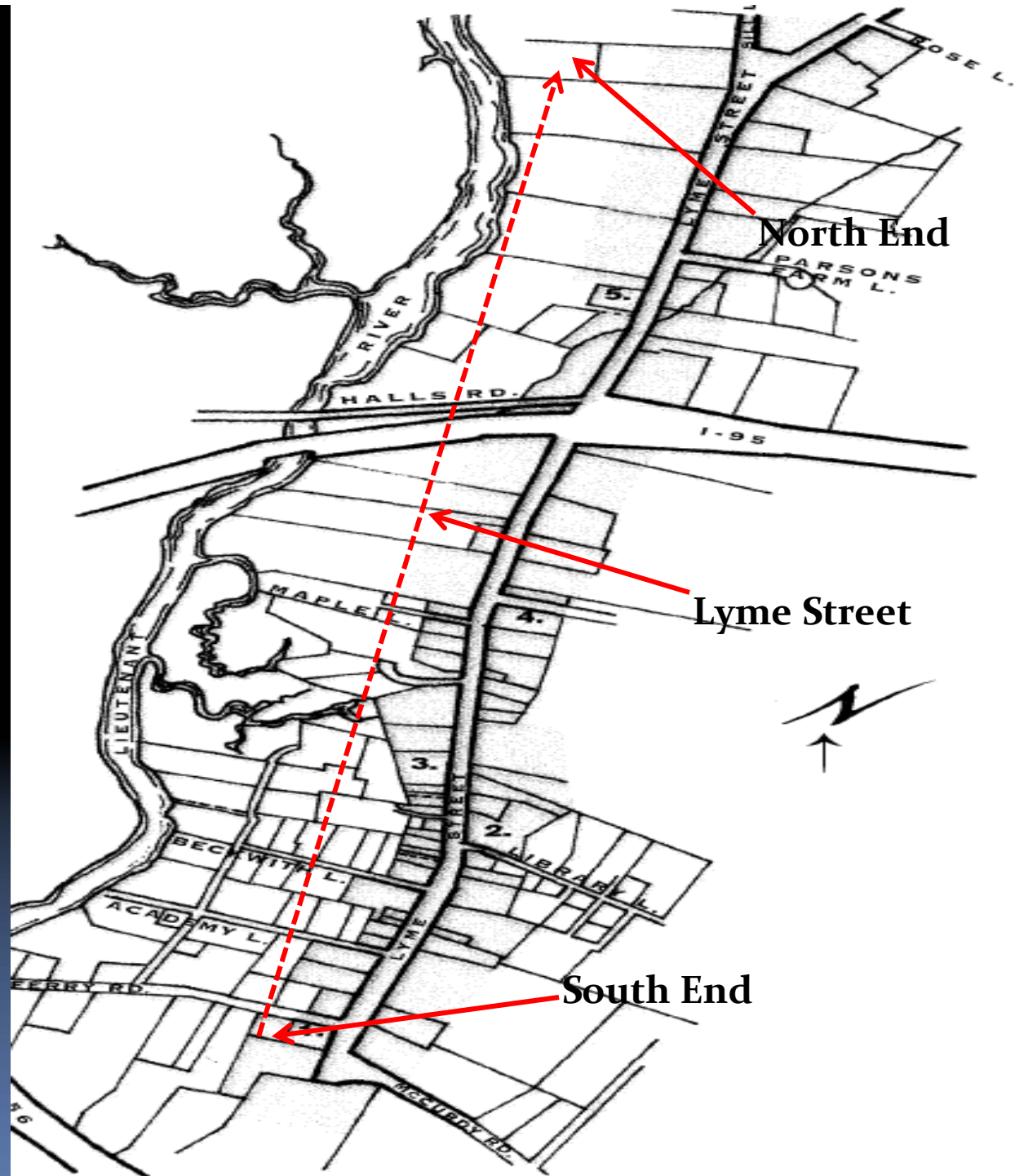
Located on Lyme Street, the building is now Old Lyme's most noted art museum as well as the headquarters of the Lyme Historical Society.



Above: a period photograph of artists on the steps of the house. Courtesy Florence Griswold Museum.

## The Historic District

Old Lyme's Historic District runs from McCurdy Road at the Town Green on the south end of Lyme Street for approximately a mile and a half to the town green at the north end, forking left to Sill Lane and right to Rose Lane off Boston Post Road.



## Old Lyme's Historic District

Lyme Street is comprised of traditional houses, churches, schools, the Town Hall, the Academy of Fine Arts, art galleries, two inns, a fire station, library, museum and small business establishments, all of which greatly contribute to the town's quaint ambiance.



The two  
inns on  
Lyme St.



## The Significance of Establishing a Historic District

Old Lyme, marked by a long-standing commitment to the arts, is a historic town whose integrity and charm have been well preserved by the historical society and Historic District Commission. Since 1971 when the citizens of Old Lyme voted to make Lyme Street a historic district, the Historic District Commission has prohibited any alteration of a building or structure within the district without approval.

Although arguably a considerable inconvenience, these restrictions are embraced by the home owners within the district, as they insure that as the community grows, its character, value and appeal are retained.

## An Interesting Discovery

It was interesting to discover the many alterations made to various buildings and find that most of these alterations or additions were later removed in order to preserve the original style.

## Hours

I spent about 8-10 hours a week researching and sketching between Friday and Saturday, and Sunday, when needed.

I spent over long hours applying my research and editing the entire pre-existing 1995 walking tour at the end of my internship.

I engaged in field work occasionally on Fridays and completed research on Saturdays and Sundays.

## Independent Research

I conducted archival and internet research at the Old Lyme Public Library, Connecticut State Library and Connecticut College Library.

## This Internship Was Very Rewarding

Old Lyme was the perfect town to study historic architecture as its grand buildings greatly vary in style. Through this internship my knowledge of architectural history was put to the test, making the work both challenging and fun.

Because of this internship, I am more knowledgeable of the various architectural styles and have a newfound appreciation for each style.

I can now effortlessly determine the architectural style of any building and I have a better understanding of how to incorporate different architectural styles into buildings that I design in the future.



## My Future

After completing this internship I have an even greater desire to study historic preservation in graduate school, so I can one day preserve the integrity and architecture of old buildings, like those in Old Lyme.

This internship experience has cemented my career choice and has shaped the direction I would like to pursue for my future.

I would recommend the Old Lyme Historical Society to any future intern looking to explore a field related to architecture.

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