

TOWN OF



OLD LYME

Proclamation

WHEREAS, David Ruggles, a native son of our town, is an American hero deserving of recognition and honor for his work advancing the cause of Liberty and Civil Rights.

WHEREAS, David Ruggles was born on March 15, 1810 to free black parents in Lyme, at a time when Lyme and Old Lyme were one town.

WHEREAS, David Ruggles was educated in Norwich, then moved to New York City where he became a successful merchant known for carrying “fair trade” products such as coffee and sugar not manufactured by slave labor.

WHEREAS, David Ruggles was one of our Nation’s early abolitionists and a celebrated author who wrote and published pamphlets and the Mirror of Liberty magazine in opposition to slavery.


WHEREAS, David Ruggles served as a conductor on the underground railroad who personally helped 600 enslaved people, including Frederick Douglass, make their way to freedom.

WHEREAS, Frederick Douglass wrote of David Ruggles in his autobiography, stating, “Mr. Ruggles sought me out and very kindly took me to his boarding house” where he was “attending to a number of other fugitive slaves, devising means for their successful escape, and though watched and hemmed in on almost every side, he seemed more than a match for his enemies.”

WHEREAS, David Ruggles was a founder of the tactic of non-violent civil disobedience in the 1840s who deliberately violated “Jim Crow” laws by sitting in the “Whites Only” section of passenger trains, highlighting the injustice of segregation by stoically suffering the consequences of his resistance to it, thereby setting the foundation for the work of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. over a century later.

WHEREAS, the Board of Selectmen of Old Lyme remembers David Ruggles, and in accordance with the upcoming celebration of America’s 250th year of Independence, we take this opportunity to express our gratitude for his work and the honor of counting him as one of our local heroes.

THEREFORE, I, on behalf of the Board of Selectmen hereby declare March 15th 2025 as “David Ruggles Day” in Old Lyme.


Martha H. Shoemaker
First Selectwoman