At Home with Hadlyme Country Market

By CHARMAGNE ECKERT

It’s a crisp morning in early winter; and though there is no snow, frost coats the gourds lending a frosty air. The small porch that runs along the front of the Hadlyme Country Market of Hadlyme, Connecticut is bathed in sunlight, making it a tempting spot to sit, even in the frigid temperatures. The door swings open with a welcoming jingle and music and laughter spill out along with the fragrance of baked goods and freshly brewed coffee.

Lisa Bokoleski and Susan Rachel Birch purchased the Hadlyme Country Market in 2012 as a labor of love. Bokoleski and Birch met a number of years ago while working together for a clothing designer and soon became fast friends. Though they didn’t know how it would come about, they were certain that one day they would have a business partnership together. Bokoleski, who grew up in Old Lyme, eventually settled in Hadlyme; moving first into the apartment situated above the market and finally purchasing the house next door. Appropriately, it was the house that had been built for Cora Bell Hanchorne, daughter of the Hadlyme market’s original owner, Lee Luther Brockway who established a country store in the present building in the early 1900’s. Birch, although originally from

Susan Rachel Birch and Lisa Bokoleski
New York, has been in the area for over thirty years and considers it to be her true home. When the possibility of purchasing the store came up, neither Bakedale nor Birch hesitated.

When Bakedale and Birch took over the venture their intention was to recover the authentic ambiance that they felt was unique to this historic business. Beginning with the more prosaic tasks such as bringing the wiring up to code to support the necessary modern refrigeration units, they set about restoring the interior to what it might have looked like circa 1915. They had planned to utilize existing materials wherever possible, but unfortunately it became evident that much of the original flooring, ceiling, and cabinetry were too damaged to be salvaged. To handle the renovations, Bakedale and Birch hired local builder, Erik Block. Block grew up on Forty Road, walking distance from the market, and like Bakedale and Birch, has a passion for natural wood and historical authenticity. He also brought the nuance of a personal connection with fond childhood memories of summers spent sitting on the porch of the establishment eating sweets. He located a wooden counter from an old apothecary shop in upstate New York and installed it to run nearly the entire length of the market where it serves as the coffee bar. A smaller piece designed to accommodate the cash register area that extends above the candy display was then built to match, further enhancing the historical feel. To complete the effort, bead board was used on the ceiling, reclaimed oak planks on the floor, and light fixtures reminiscent of those that might have been found in an early industrial era shop were installed. The coolers where beverages and dairy products are kept have been rendered less modern with hand built framing, and Birch hunted till she found handsome display cases with carved glass fronts to feature pastries and prepared food items. The attention to detail has paid off. Stepping across the threshold of the classic wooden storefront is like being transported back to the beginning of the 20th century.

Hadlyme Country Market is a place where memories are forged and resurrected. A high table installed in the front window provides a place to perch on a sturdy stool with a cup of Ashlawn Farms coffee and chat with friends or browse one of the many books displayed there.
Bakelides and Birch are particularly proud to offer fresh local eggs (which they also use in their products), and in the summer, Sansky Farm in Colchester sends a pickup truck loaded with crisp vegetables to supply their Hadlyme neighbors.

These up at 5:30 AM will be greeted by Bakelides as she slides post-baked pastries and hard rolls for breakfast sandwiches from the oven. A blueberry and cheese Danish or fried egg on a fresh roll makes a finishes companion to a cup of hot, fragrant coffee or tea. By lunchtime, homemade soups are available, and the rolls are now employed to contain fillings assembled to the customer’s specifications, or to make up one of the signature sandwiches. The Galletti features rare roast beef accented with D-Team mayo, the 4-Corner is roasted turkey breast dressed in caramelized onion relish, and the Selden Hill (chicken breast with pesto and asparagus cheese) is one of the popular new Pastries that are now available.

Along with prepared foods, Hadlyme Country Market offers a wide selection of specialty foods, many of which are produced in nearby Connecticut communities. A large basket of glowing red apples rests on a bi-fold table amid packets of gluten-free spice cookies, and a cast-iron hometoile among bags of cranberry granola. Maple syrup from East Hampton, the best honey ever from East Lyme, Maple Kettle Corn and Cauah’s Salads—both from neighboring Old Lyme—Big Nancy’s Biscuits out of Guilford, and Deep River potato chips from across the river are all prominently displayed. For the decadent sweet tooth, the market has recently begun carrying the buttery rich desserts from Dagmar’s Desserts of Old Saybrook and, though closed to the public in the winter months, Salem Valley Farms provides its velvety ice cream to the market year-round. To add the perfect balancer based link to a recipe, D-Team’s award winning hot sauce from Westbrook is displayed front and center. You can then cool the heat with a soda from Fossen Park of East Haven.

While Hadlyme Country Market is popular for its local delicacies and as a convenient place to pick up fresh eggs or a bottle of milk, it is the credibility of its proprietor that forms the real attraction for customers. Both Bakelides and Birch are familiar with their patrons, and Bakelides greets nearly everyone by name. Neighborhood chat and share photos of grandchildren and pets, town politics are sampled, and children investigate the candy section. This is a local destination with an open invitation to visitors—a relaxed setting where the comfortable warmth of Hadlyme can be enjoyed along with a great sandwich, homemade soup, or indulgent pastry—whether one lives around the corner or is exploring this picturesque historic area for the first time.

Hadlyme Country Market is located at 1 Ferry Road, Hadlyme, CT 06439 Phone: (860) 326-5388 Hours: Monday-Saturday 5:30 AM to 6:00 PM, Sunday 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM

For additional information: http://hadlymecountrymarket.com