Madison Historical Society

Fall 2021

Historical Happenings

MHS Volunteers and Summer Interns Make a Huge Impact

The MHS has long sponsored a summer internship program. Each year, we receive many requests from high school and college-age students seeking museum experience. This summer we were fortunate to have six dedicated, history-loving students join the ranks of past MHS summer interns.

Three student volunteers supported our efforts at Lee's Academy. **Matthew Breier,** a student at the Hopkins School in New Haven, gave more than forty hours of his time. Most significantly, he converted our Madison Green National Historic District Tour to the Google Earth platform, and he organized, digitized, and uploaded the Cornelius Bushnell/ USS Monitor documents to our online collections database. A self-described "student fascinated by the entire field of history," Matthew helped create a digital finding aid that will be an invaluable tool for future historians and researchers.

Brian Girardi, a senior at Daniel Hand High School, gave nearly forty hours on two essential projects. He scanned two binders of data related to the Madison Historic and Architectural Survey

completed in 1980. This time-consuming effort created a digital resource of every home surveyed. Additionally, Brian devised a system to combine data from the town's grand list with the architectural survey. The database he created helped us to identify a "Top 100 Watch List" of Madison's oldest—and potentially threatened—homes. A high-honors student, Brian is also captain of the varsity fencing team and an avid chess player.

Maxwell Brunner, a Manhattan native and Madison summer resident, attends the Collegiate School. He volunteered more than fifty hours, focusing primarily on collecting photos and writing narratives of the historic homes in our plaque program. Additionally, he organized the research binders of the plaqued homes and incorporated data from the state registry of historic homes into a comprehensive database of town properties. He is a passionate historian with a particular interest in the Civil War.

Two interns have been working with Bob Gundersen at the Allis-Bushnell House since mid-June. **Marissa Petruzzelli** is a student at Drexel University, completing her master's degree in Museum Leadership. She has made considerable progress in reorganizing our storage space and building our online database of artifacts and institutional records. Marissa also posts on the MHS Instagram page to help improve our social media presence. Bob describes Marissa as "smart, proactive, hard-working, reliable, and well-qualified."

Clare Barnett, a sophomore at Branford High School, has a keen interest in historical fashion. She volunteered to work first with Tori Timmins, the costume designer who spent more than a year at the MHS. A talented artist, Clare has produced several drawings of our important dresses from the nineteenth century. Working with Bob, she has also organized and sorted the wardrobes, closets, and storage boxes that house our collection of clothing, hats, jewelry, and accessories. Both women have asked to stay on to continue their work through the fall.

Elise Hausmann joined the MHS volunteer team this summer as well. Working alongside Youth Education chair Maryanne Harmuth, the pair organized our collection of reenactor costumes. The clothing was sorted by time period and gender appropriateness. They also sorted, boxed, and labeled such accessories as hats, aprons, and scarves. A relatively new Madison resident, Elise is a history buff with a keen interest in fashion and the cultural influences that affected people's clothing in different time periods. She hopes to tackle other volunteer assignments in the coming months.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FREDERICK LEE LECTURES

MADISON'S FIRST PEOPLES

January 9 / February 13 / March 13 @ 4 PM

MHS will explore Madison's First Peoples in these annual winter lectures. Now in its fifteenth year, the three-part series will look at the history and culture of local and regional indigenous people. Please check our website and future editions of this publication for additional details on featured speakers and topics.

Registration is required to receive the Zoom link for the presentations.

NEW HISTORIC SIGNAGE

Have you noticed the beautiful new sign hanging at the Allis-Bushnell House? The effort to improve our signage for our historic house museum and for the downtown historic district was spearheaded by MHS properties chair Dennis Flynn.

The board of trustees participated in a retreat several months ago to discuss the society's preservation priorities. At this meeting, trustees discussed the need to protect the built environment, preserve streetscapes, and raise awareness of the importance of historic preservation. The protection of roads, ruins, remnants, and even trees was also identified as a long-term goal.

The trustees also decided that the society must improve any of its signage that references Madison's cultural history. The sign that hung at the AB House, for instance, had long ago deteriorated. Similarly, the Madison Green Historic District sign in front of the Guilford Savings Bank on the Boston Post Road was so weathered that it was barely legible. Dennis worked with former MHS president Rick Camp to create a sign for the house that is both attractive and informative. The newly installed historic district sign draws attention to the green's unique streetscape with its public monuments and its well-preserved homes dating from the early 1800s.

49th Annual Antiques Fair

The intensely hot and humid weather didn't dampen the spirits of the nearly forty dealers of fine antiques who set up booths on August 21. Though the size of the fair was greatly diminished from previous years, enthusiastic vendors eagerly welcomed visitors. The gates opened at 9 AM, and a steady stream of people browsed the offerings of rugs, artwork, pottery, baskets, quilts, tinware, and much more.

As in past years, local crafters dressed in period costumes and offered demonstrations of their traditional skills throughout the day. Viewers marveled at the quality, handmade goods these artists created in wood, clay, and fiber.

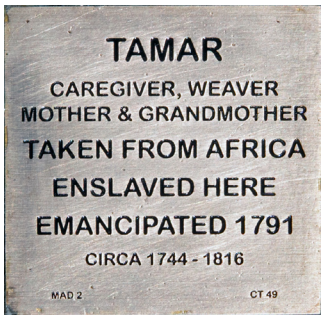
Unfortunately, the fair was cut short when the town issued a mandatory evacuation for all residents living south of Route One. Hurricane Ida was slowly making its way up the east coast, and widespread flooding and high winds were forecast.

Since its peak in 2015 with nearly ninety dealers, the MHS annual antiques fair has seen a steady decline in both vendors and visitors. The fate of antiques fairs is unknown. The MHS hopes to announce a date for its 50th fair in 2022, but it is possible that our annual event on the green will be a hybrid celebration of antiques, crafts, music, games, and food.

The MHS is thankful for all those who volunteered to help with this year's fair. We welcome all ideas for the future of the event. Please contact us at office@madisonhistory.org with your suggestions.

WITNESS STONES PROJECT HONORS TAMAR

The Country School, in conjunction with the Witness Stones Project, held an installation ceremony at the First Congregational Church on June 8 to celebrate the life of Tamar, an African woman enslaved in Madison.



The moving ceremony led by Liz Lightfoot of the Country School featured speeches, music, and poetry that told Tamar's story—a compassionate woman who was a skilled cook and weaver. In her speech, Witness Stones co-chair and former state representative Pat Wilson Pheanious stated, "It is good to find or recover that which was lost or never known."

Uncovering the past and restoring humanity to the lives of enslaved persons is at the heart of the mission of the Witness Stones Project. Through these public memorials, the group hopes to "inspire communities to recommit themselves to learning their true history, dismantling current inequities, and building a just future."

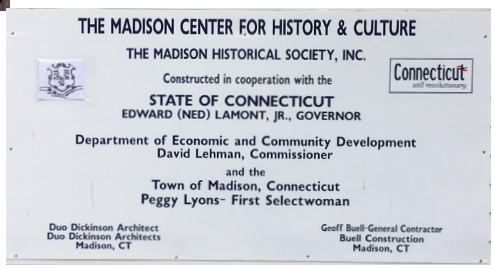
(Left) Jumoke McDuffie-Thurmond, poet, artist, and teacher who worked with Country School students on the Witness Stones Project this year, spoke at the event. (Right) Pat Wilson Pheanious, Co-Chair of the Witness Stones Project, gave the keynote address.

Madison Center for History and Culture

Work continues on the Madison Center for History and Culture at Lee's Academy despite some design and engineering hiccups that caused construction delays. These issues have been resolved, and we are now making good progress.

During the design phase we discovered that the building's floor joists had issues. It was not until the subfloor was removed that we realized just how many supports were rotted and cracked. Our contractor Geoff Buell plans to install new joists alongside the original lumber. This process, known as "sistering," will strengthen the floor and bring the building into compliance with current building codes.

New cement footings are also being poured, following revisions of the engineering design and approvals by the building inspector. This will enable us to install two steel I-beams to support the second floor and open up the lower level. Once this critical aspect of the construction is completed, the construction crew will begin work on renovations of the interior space.



Updates to the outside of the building include new lighting fixtures and an ADA-compliant ramp. We have applied for approval from the Madison Town Historic District Commission on these improvements so that work can move forward.

MEMBER GENEROSITY ABOUNDS

Once again, the MHS thanks Mary Farrell for her generous spirit. Since 2018, Mary has given the society $5,000 annually through the Howard Gilman Foundation.

HOWARD GILMAN FOUNDATION

These funds offset our general operating expenses and have been especially impactful since the beginning of the COVID crisis. When the pandemic locked down our state in March 2020, the MHS suspended all fundraising activities and events. Along with grant funding and assistance from the Payroll Protection Program, the support of members like Mary has meant that the MHS has been able to maintain its staff, develop new virtual programming, and move forward with much-needed capital improvement projects. As we approach the 2021 Annual Appeal season, we remain grateful for donors like Mary who support our mission with their financial contributions. Thank you!

In Memoriam: Cynthia Humphrey

The MHS wishes to acknowledge the passing of good friend and ardent preservationist Cynthia Earl Humphrey. "Hummy," as she was affectionately known, summered in Madison as a child and was proud of her long Madison lineage. The granddaughter of General William Wright Harts and Martha Hale Harts, Cynthia was outspoken about preserving the past and protecting the town's architectural heritage.

She moved to Madison permanently in the early 2000s and brought with her many treasures related to her family, many of which she donated to the MHS collection. Among them were quilts, dolls, uniforms, letters, and documents. Her passion for safeguarding objects that tell the story of Madison's past is an example to all who wish to follow in her footsteps.

MHS MONTHLY HISTORY BOOK GROUP

ALL ARE WELCOME!

Books are often available at the Scranton Library. Call 203-245-7365 to inquire.

To register, please call 203-245-4567 or e-mail office@madisonhistory.org. Walk-ins are always welcome!

Meetings are every third Tuesday at 7 PM via Zoom, and are led by Lyle Cubberly, Ph.D. (1lachawk@att.net)

For more information about the books, please go to the Adult Education page at www.madisonhistory.org.

OCTOBER 19

The End is Always Near
by Dan Carlin

NOVEMBER 16

Iron Empires: Robber Barons, Railroads, and the Making of Modern America
by Michael Hiltzik

DECEMBER 21

100 Mistakes that Changed History: Backfires and Blunders That Collapsed Empires, Crashed Economies, and Altered the Course of Our World
by Bill Fawcett

JANUARY 18

Marco Polo: From Venice to Xanadu
L. Bergreent

FEBRUARY 15

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents
Isabel Wilkerson

Open House
at the
Allis-Bushnell House
Saturday, Nov 27
11AM - 4PM

Enjoy cookies and cider
while learning
about Madison's past.

853 Boston Post Road

the MADISON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Madison Historical Society
Founded in 1917
P.O. Box 17
Madison, CT 06443
203-245-4567
www.madisonhistory.org

MHS offices are open in the c. 1821 Lee's Academy at 14 Meetinghouse Lane on Wednesday, Thursday & Friday from 9 AM to 1 PM. Due to COVID-19, visitors are welcome but are required to wear a mask until further notice.

For a tour of the Allis-Bushnell House, the MHS c. 1785 National Historic Register property, call, 203-245-4567.

The MHS newsletter is published quarterly.

and join us on Facebook

office@madisonhistory.org

Send us your email address:

www.madisonhistory.org

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