Spring 2021

Madison Historical Society

Historical Happenings

UPCOMING EVENTS

THE great Give®
MAY 5-6, 2020
A 36-hour, online-giving event to support local nonprofits

THE GREAT GIVE
AN ONLINE GIVING EVENT
8 AM May 4 to
8 PM May 5

ANNUAL MEETING:
A CELEBRATION OF MHS YOUTH EDUCATION
May 17
7 PM

ANTIQUES FAIR
Saturday, August 21
9 AM - 4 PM

MHS Pandemic Documentary Wins Merit Award

More than a year ago, the novel coronavirus began to spread around the world, and life as we knew it came to a screeching halt. Nonessential businesses were closed, and Connecticut residents were told to shelter in place. In the face of this new reality, the MHS began developing virtual programs to take the place of in-person events.

We started a YouTube channel, launched a social media guessing game featuring unique objects from our collection, and established an online archive where people could upload pandemic stories, images, and voice memos. The archive is still available on the MHS website, and all are encouraged to continue to contribute.

During this unprecedented time of fear and uncertainty, the MHS began filming interviews with local business owners, frontline workers, elected officials, students, and others to have a record of what was happening in our town. What started as an effort to capture the raw emotions of a community turned into a short documentary film that has now been recognized with an award of merit from the Connecticut League of History Organizations(CLHO). *Turning the Tide: Madison and COVID-19,* recorded entirely during the statewide shutdown, serves as a time capsule of the earliest days of pandemic.

A collaboration with local filmmakers Garrett Samodel and Connor Wilke of Ciné Verité Productions, the film captures the stress of retailers whose businesses were shuttered, the anxiety of high school seniors approaching graduation, and the commitment of medical professionals. It documents the gratitude of a COVID-19 survivor and the resolve of a school administrator creating virtual learning opportunities under difficult circumstances. It reveals the determination of elected officials and religious leaders to provide guidance and support to a community facing unimaginable health and economic challenges in a COVID world.

At the award ceremony on April 20, the MHS was among a group of state history organizations recognized for their efforts to create engaging programming that enhances and furthers the understanding of Connecticut history. The award shines a light on the creativity and professionalism of historical societies across the state and aims to inspire future projects.

An acknowledgement letter from the CLHO director Amrys Williams stated, "The committee was impressed with the society's efforts to take documenting the pandemic beyond a straightforward collecting effort and into professional filmmaking. The resulting documentary stands as an important record of one town's efforts to face this historic moment, and a model to other organizations."

The MHS is honored to receive this award and appreciates the recognition from our colleagues. To view the documentary, visit our website: www.madisonhistory.org.

Arnold Gorlick of Madison Art Cinemas in a still from the film Turning the Tide: Madison and COVID-19, *courtesy of Ciné Verité Productions.*

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HELP FUND A SEASONAL MHS INTERNSHIP

In June 2020, DHHS senior Erin Reilly emailed to ask if we were accepting applications for our summer internship program. Hoping to gain work experience before heading off to the University of Notre Dame in the fall, she was interested in learning more about running a small museum. She hoped that the opportunity to work at the MHS was not another COVID casualty.

During a successful Zoom interview, Erin revealed herself to be personable and passionate—and eager to help us preserve and protect artifacts from Madison's past. Once on the job, she mastered our museum cataloging software in short order. Over the course of the month she spent with us, she inspected, described, recorded, and organized dozens of artifacts that were then accessioned to our permanent collection. The collaboration was so successful that Erin continued her work during her holiday break in December.

The MHS has successfully mentored many such students through our summer internship program. Recently, two more capable young people have applied for positions at the MHS. Raising funds to support the program is the MHS's focus in the upcoming Great Give campaign, sponsored by the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven. If you believe in creating opportunities for students to gain professional experience, please consider a gift to help fund a summer intern. The campaign begins at 8 AM on May 4 and ends at 8 PM on May 5. Visit GreatGive.org to contribute.

Erin Reilly (right) pictured with Terry Donati of the Shoreline Quilters Guild.

PROTECTING THE ALLIS-BUSHNELL HOUSE

The Allis-Bushnell House, named for the first and last occupants of this iconic town structure, was added to the National Register of Historic Places on February 25, 1982. The Madison Historical Society acquired the property in 1921 and uses it to house its collection of artifacts that tell the story of Madison's past. Protecting the house and its contents for future generations is one of our organization's highest priorities.

The greatest threat to the building and to the volunteers who work there is the risk of fire. To ensure the longevity of the house and to protect staff, volunteers, members, and friends from loss of life, the MHS has requested grant funding from the Bauer Charitable Foundation. Our proposed project seeks to upgrade three critical systems: security, fire prevention, and electrical. This threefold approach will ensure that the AB House—our most valuable asset and the heart of our operations as a history organization—remains an educational resource for future historians.

The proposed implementation plan designed by an accredited fire prevention consultant includes updates to the fire alarm panel, installation of new smoke and heat detectors, creation of an emergency lighting system, establishment of a plan for inspection, testing, and maintenance, and replacement of the existing wire infrastructure.

The grant request was submitted in March. In June, we hope to learn that the project has been viewed favorably by the grant committee. If you would like to contribute to the AB House fire prevention fund, please contact the office via email or make a donation online by visiting www.madisonhistory.org/donate.

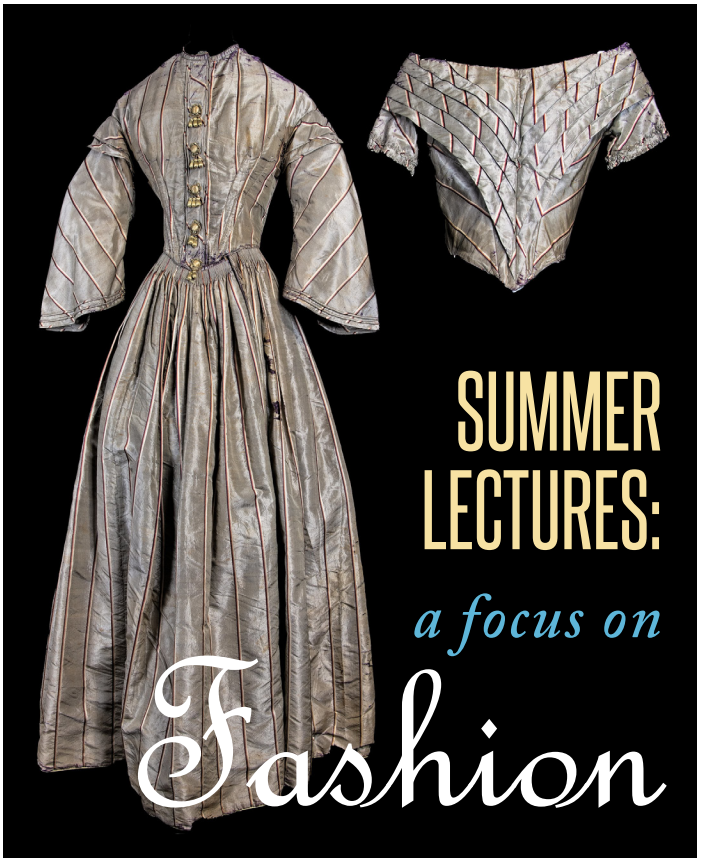
SAVE THE DATE: ANNUAL MEETING

Mark your calendars! The annual meeting of the Madison Historical Society takes place on Monday, May 17, at 7 PM. After a challenging year that brought a fundamental shift in how we engage with the public and how we further our mission through virtual programming, we are pleased to invite you to join us—on Zoom, of course—for the members' meeting.

Following the election of the slate of officers and a review of the annual budget, MHS youth education chair Maryanne Harmuth will highlight some of the interesting projects she has worked on to foster a love of history in young learners.

To demonstrate how the MHS adapted to the changing needs of our schools, Maryanne will show clips from two educational videos she produced in collaboration with volunteers, students, and local filmmakers. When students can't come to us, we can bring Madison history to them.

Don't miss this opportunity to learn about the exciting innovations at the MHS.



If you've read earlier issues of this newsletter, you know that the MHS has been recently lucky to work with volunteer Tori Timmins, a talented young woman who is pursuing a Masters Degree in Costume Studies at NYU, beginning in Fall 2021.

Before she leaves the MHS, Timmins will offer MHS members three lectures, beginning in May. Entitled "Madison and the Evolution of Style," the lectures will explore the ways that social and cultural issues influenced clothing choices. Each presentation will focus on a particular century and will feature garments, jewelry, and accessories from the period.

New England colonists, being frugal and pragmatic, made fashion choices based upon the weather. The harsh winters of Connecticut demanded warm clothing made of strong materials. Women wore practical gowns over homemade petticoats covered by an apron. Longer dresses made of finer materials were donned for more formal occasions.

By the nineteenth century, American fashion trends were increasingly influenced by international styles. French, English, Indian, and Chinese influences became more prominent, even in New England. Women's clothing of the early part of the century was reflective of a return to neoclassical styles whereas men wore more traditional waistcoats and fitted trousers. The Industrial Revolution, the invention of the sewing machine, and the advent of department stores brought fashion to the masses in the second half of the century.

By the early 1900s, women wore gowns that became more complex and that were heavily ornamented. Fashion, especially for women, was soon heavily influenced by WWI and the fact that women joined the workforce in greater numbers.

The three presentations will take place in the Allis-Bushnell House. Timmins plans to show several examples of fashion trends from each century, highlighting fragile garments from our vast textile collection. Because these pieces deteriorate with time, despite our special archival care, Timmins's efforts to sketch and create patterns will provide future designers the chance to replicate these garments.

The dates of the lectures are still to be determined. We will announce the registration details in the coming weeks. Look for information on our website and in our e-blasts.

These three lectures are part of the MHS's Conversations with the Curator program, an occasional special benefit for members only. New members are welcome to join on the afternoon of any of the three lectures.

Left: *A two-piece transformation taffeta dress circa 1860.*
Below: *An ostrich feather fan, circa 1920, and a pair of white satin pumps with beaded bow decoration.*

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 www.madisonhistory.org. Walk-ins are always welcome!

Meetings occur every third Tuesday at 7:00 PM via Zoom, and are led by Lyle Cubberly, Ph.D. (1lachawk@att.net) The May-August meetings will be held outdoors in the garden at the Allis-Bushnell House, weather permitting.

For more information about the books, please go to the Adult Education page at www.madisonhistory.org/mhs-history-book-group/

MAY 18

Countdown 1945: The Extraordinary Story of the Atomic Bomb and the 116 Days That Changed the World
Chris Wallace

JUNE 15

Iron Dawn: The Monitor, the Merrimack, and the Civil War Sea Battle that Changed History
Richard Snow

JULY 20

Simon Winchester's Calcutta
Simon Winchester

AUGUST 17

The Aztecs: The Rise and Fall of an Empire
Serge Gruinski

Madison Historical Society Summer Lectures
Exploring Social and Cultural Impacts on Fashion

MADISON & THE EVOLUTION OF STYLE

An Exploration of Fashion in the 18th, 19th, & 20th Centuries

Three Lectures beginning in May
Sundays @ 4 pm, dates TBA

Presented by Tori Timmins

Featuring period clothing, jewelry, and accessories from the MHS collection

Register at madisonhistory.org

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.

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

The MHS newsletter is published quarterly.

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