Summer 2022

Madison Historical Society

Historical Happenings

Summer Festival of Arts & Antiques

The Madison Historical Society will host a Summer Festival of Arts and Antiques on Saturday, August 27 from 9 AM to 4 PM. By creating a festival atmosphere with a variety of engaging summertime activities, the MHS hopes to offer something of interest for everyone.

This end-of-summer celebration of art, antiques, and family fun will feature vendors of fine antiques and collectibles from across the region, selling ceramics, furniture, glass, jewelry, kitchenware, linens, memorabilia, pottery, toys, vintage accessories, and more.

Additionally, an art exhibition and sale will be mounted by members of the Madison Art Society. This showcase of original works by local artists will feature a variety of media, including oils, watercolors, acrylics, pastels, drawings, and sculpture. Plein-air painting demonstrations will also be offered by select artists during the event.

Live demonstrations of such traditional crafts as bobbin lace weaving and spinning, doll making, bookbinding, pottery molding, and pottery decoration will also be featured. Crafters will sell their wares and offer instruction on these pre-industrial trades.

A classic car show of antique vehicles will be another highlight of the day. Among other vehicles, visitors will be able to see a Stanley Steamer dating from the early 1900s, a Triumph TR6 in mint condition, and a beautifully restored 1940 Ford pickup truck.

Family-friendly activities designed to appeal to a younger audience will include colonial games, a dunk tank, life-size Jenga and Connect Four games, face painting, henna tattoos, Silly Putty making, and other fun. Live musical performances and a delicious menu of fair foods and sweet treats will round out the offerings.

Raffle tickets will be on sale throughout the day. Tickets are $10 each or three for $25. Raffle items range from a ride along the shoreline in a Stanley Steamer, an original commissioned watercolor portrait of your home by a local artist, gift certificates to Dine-Around Madison, beauty and spa packages, gift baskets, and more.

For nearly fifty years the Society hosted an antiques fair on the green. Changing attitudes towards antiques caused the MHS to reimagine its annual summer fundraising event. The Summer Festival expands the offerings of the traditional fair to include something of appeal to everyone. Please contact the MHS office at 203.245.4567 if you wish to participate as a vendor, artisan, or crafter.

Calling All Members!

The MHS is looking for a few good men...and women. Putting on our annual event on the green is an enormous task, and thankfully our membership has stepped up and volunteered their time to help make it happen.

Give us a couple of hours of your time and not only will you actually have a good time, but you will earn our gratitude and appreciation. Call the MHS office at 203.245.4567 to sign up.

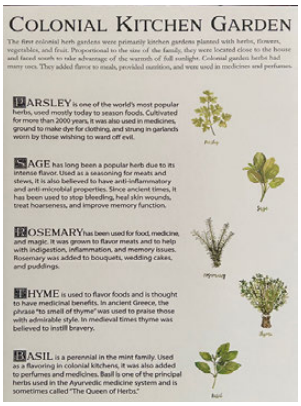
Witness Stone Installation Honors Theophilus Niger

The Country School and the Witness Stones Project recently installed Madison's third Witness Stones marker. It lies near Horse Pond on Wildcat Road. The students researched Theophilus Niger, who was enslaved by Thomas and Abigail Hodgkins, the people who built the home that still rests across the street from the pond. Married to Penelope Tantipen, an Indigenous woman, Theophilus managed to gain his freedom and to amass significant property, which he was able to pass on to their children.

The family's next generations went on to even larger achievements. A grandson, Alfred Niger, led a successful Black voting rights movement in Rhode Island. As a barber, he was also a small business owner and worked as an agent for William Lloyd Garrison's The Liberator. His son, Alexander Petion Niger (named for Alexandre Sabès Pétion, the first president of Haiti), became Providence's first Black printer. He too was a business owner and a printers' union member. When he died, he left an extensive estate in Providence and Nantucket.

Country School students have created a booklet about this third stone; the booklet contains both scholarly information and poetic interpretations of the life of this citizen. Laconia Therrio, a professional storyteller, worked with the students as they researched and created their poems about Niger. Witness Stones board chair Pat Wilson Pheanious and Madison's first selectwoman Peggy Lyons both spoke at the installation ceremony, underscoring the importance of the students' work. The MHS congratulates the students and their teachers on their research, their creativity, and their dedication to this important project.

Tea Time at CT Open House


Colonial Kitchen Garden

The first colonial herb gardens were primarily kitchen gardens planted with herbs, flowers, vegetables, and fruit. Proportional to the size of the family, they were located close to the house and faced south to take advantage of the warmth of full sunlight. Colonial garden herbs had many uses. They added flavor to meals, provided nutrition, and were used in medicines and perfumes.

PARSLEY is one of the world's most popular herbs, used mostly today to season foods. Cultivated for more than 2000 years, it was also used in medicines, ground to make dye for clothing, and strung in garlands worn by those wishing to ward off evil.

SAGE has long been a popular herb due to its intense flavor. Used as a seasoning for meats and stews, it is also believed to have anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial properties. Since ancient times, it has been used to stop bleeding, heal skin wounds, treat hoarseness, and improve memory function.

ROSEMARY has been used for food, medicine, and magic. It was grown to flavor meats and to help with indigestion, inflammation, and memory issues. Rosemary was added to bouquets, wedding cakes, and puddings.

THYME is used to flavor foods and is thought to have medicinal benefits. In ancient Greece, the phrase "to smell of thyme" was used to praise those with admirable style. In medieval times thyme was believed to instill bravery.

BASIL is a perennial in the mint family. Used as a flavoring in colonial kitchens, it was also added to perfumes and medicines. Basil is one of the principal herbs used in the Ayurvedic medicine system and is sometimes called "The Queen of Herbs."

On Saturday, June 11, the MHS opened the Allis-Bushnell House to visitors as part of the eighteenth annual Connecticut Open House Day, sponsored by CT Office of Tourism. Youth Education chair Maryanne Harmuth organized a tea-themed event that included an herb planting activity and a tasting of colonial and post-Revolutionary War teas. Visitors flocked to the house to taste such teas as the colonial-era bohea (pronounced Boo-hee), which was a Chinese tea that blends orange pekoe, pekoe, and souchong. Of the 342 chests of tea imported by the British East India Company and dumped into Boston Harbor on December 16, 1773, 242 of them were bohea. This tea blend was so popular that the word bohea became a slang term for tea.

Visitors were also able to sample Young Hyson, another Chinese tea that was popular in colonial times. Taxed higher than other teas because it was so highly prized by the colonizers, seventy chests of this bold-flavored green tea were dumped into Boston Harbor. Hibiscus tea was also offered to provide visitors with a sample of a post-colonial tea. The blossoms of this tropical flower are steeped in hot water to brew an herbal tea with a tart flavor similar to that of cranberries. Our deepest thanks to Maryanne for developing this fun day for visitors and to Marissa Petruzzelli for mounting exhibits that complimented the tea-themed day.

Job Openings at MHS

The MHS is seeking two part-time employees to help with public engagement and maintenance of our collections.

The public engagement manager will be responsible for developing, promoting, and implementing programs and events that have broad community appeal. Public programming includes lectures, exhibits, school tours, and signature events.

The research associate will work with the collections chair to examine and describe artifacts to determine their appropriateness for inclusion in the MHS collection. This position is ideal for someone interested in learning the basics of running a small museum. Responsibilities will include research, the preservation and archival storage of objects, and assisting board trustees with exhibition-related needs.

The complete job descriptions and qualification requirements for both positions can be found online by visiting our website. We encourage all who are interested to contact the MHS Director at director@madisonhistory.org to learn more about these exciting opportunities.

Sincerest Thanks to Our 2021 Annual Appeal Donors

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In Memoriam

George Noewatne

With deepest condolences to George's beloved family, the MHS wishes to acknowledge the passing of our member and friend, George D. Noewatne. A lifelong resident of Madison, George was owner and president of Madison Builders, responsible for creating many homes on the shoreline, including Madison's Kensington Acres neighborhood. He served his country as a young infantryman during the Korean War and was awarded a Purple Heart and the Korean Service Medal with three Bronze Stars, among other honors. A motorcycle enthusiast, he was also an avid bicyclist—pursuits that reflected his lively spirit. A board member of the Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives and a member of the Madison Historical Society, he was an invaluable resource for local lore and an advocate of the study of history. He will be deeply missed. Donations in his memory may be made to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2096 Madison or to the Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives.

Wendy Gifford

With appreciation for her generosity, the MHS wishes to acknowledge the passing of our member, donor, and volunteer Wendy Gifford. Born in New York City, Wendy attended Smith College and, at age 55, proudly graduated with honors from Quinnipiac University. She and Dick Gifford were joyfully married forty years and raised five children. Later, Wendy wed Gerald Degenhardt, who exuberantly embraced her great love of life. Throughout many decades, Wendy supported her community through service and entertained her companions with her renowned wit and wisdom. A gifted and published writer who also owned her own needlepoint shop and stencil business, Wendy served as Volunteer Coordinator at Yale-New Haven Hospital, where she excelled at developing patient-care programs and coordinating the efforts of more than 1,000 volunteers. Among her passions was the creation of miniature room replicas, one of which was a remarkable model of a room in the Society's Allis-Bushnell House Museum. It was a joy to know her, and she will be greatly missed. Donations in her memory may be sent to E. C. Scranton Memorial Library.

Madison's Early Industries

Did you know that one of the first patents for inline roller skates was held by a Madison inventor named Reuben Shaler? This clever man also devised an in-ground platform scale used to weigh such marketable goods as coal and hay. In her book *A Brief History of Madison*" author Katherine Ryerson describes several of the town's early industries.

Among these are several trades that have mostly been lost to the progression of time and the advancements of science. The Hammonasset River once supported two active mills, for instance. A gristmill there ground rye and wheat to make flour, and a sawmill cut planks that were floated downstream to be loaded on coastal schooners for sale elsewhere.

Colonel Jonathan Wilcox and his brother Curtis operated a tannery behind their homes, which still face our town green. According to former town historian Mary Evarts, the leather was tanned in large vats, and tree bark was used to dye the leather. The liquid waste and other by-products were then carted to the green and dumped there, in an effort to fill its swampy pockets of uneven earth.

Before the invention of the refrigerator, people used ice to cool their cold closets or ice boxes. In Madison, ice was cut from the local ponds and stored in salt marsh hay for use in the summer months. Insulation not being what it is today, one can only imagine the rush to deliver the ice before it melted.

Madison early 1900s north side of the Boston Post Road. Icehouse stood on the present-day site of Ciao Bella. Photo credit: Charlotte L Evarts Memorial Archives

Shipping and shipbuilding industries dominated many aspects of life in Madison in the 1800s. The town's two wharves were hives of activity with workers engaged in the construction of new boats as well as the loading and unloading of cargo. Farmers carted their produce using oxen and delivered it to the wharves to move the goods to ports along the coast. The cargo was often loaded onto nimble shipping vessels called coasters, which could handle as much as 1000 bushels of food. East Wharf was the more active of the two shipyards. Between 1830 and 1856, about seventy-five vessels were built there. Among them were sloops, brigs, schooners, and barques.

Of the many early industries, oystering has survived as a thriving endeavor in Madison. According to Ryerson, there were thriving oyster grounds in the Neck and East Rivers. In 1828, a dam was built roughly a mile from the mouth of the Neck River to divert fresh water and allow the salt water to flow upstream. Oyster beds were seeded the following year, and they remain in the waters off Madison to this day.

SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The Madison Historical Society is pleased to offer internships throughout the year. We welcome high school students as well as college and university juniors and seniors, graduate students, and recent graduates whose areas of concentration have included museum studies, history, American studies, and art history, for example. Our staff and trustees tailor each internship to match each candidate's goals to our needs, and we offer a flexible term of commitment, from several weeks to several months. Their participation provides an invaluable contribution to the preservation of our collection and to our development of new and ongoing programs and exhibits.

The MHS is pleased to welcome three new summer interns who are working on distinct projects to further our mission.

Alex Gerrish, a rising senior studying history at Western New England University, began his summer internship at the AB House, where he catalogued books under the direction of rare books dealer and MHS volunteer Annie Rowlenson. He is now working with exhibition chair Tricia Royston to develop a mini exhibition on the many uses of Lee's Academy since its establishment two hundred years ago and the current effort to preserve the building for future generations.

Federico Barrera, a rising senior at Daniel Hand High School, has been engaged in digitizing and archiving the paper files stored at Lee's Academy. These include files on key Madison people, places, and events. Financial support for his efforts was provided by MHS benefactor Michael Schroeder, who especially hopes that, in the course of his work, Federico may unearth documents related to Madison-born painter Gilbert Munger.

Grace Barrett, a rising senior at Daniel Hand High School, is describing, cataloguing, and uploading data on a collection of primary source materials to our digital archive. These artifacts are mostly deeds, property lists, and accounts dating from the eighteenth century. Local names like Crittenden, Scranton, Hand all appear in these files. Grace's love for history grew from her passion for historical fiction. She hopes to pursue a double major in chemistry and history when she begins her college career in 2023.

Sean Burke, a rising sophomore pursuing an international dual BA at Columbia University and Trinity College Dublin, joined the summer internship team in mid-June. He is working with collections chair Bob Gundersen to inspect, describe, clean, and store objects in the collection. In addition, Sean will soon begin to identify and correctly label our collection of Native American artifacts, which are housed in the Annex on the AB House property.

Clare Barnett, who began volunteering last summer, continued at the MHS throughout the school year and has expanded her hours this summer. She continues to focus her efforts on organizing our collection of textiles and clothing and assisting in their preservation. A talented artist, Clare has also agreed to paint a life-sized cut-out photo board featuring an old-time Madison beach scene for our upcoming summer festival.

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 Lucy Van Liew. (ljstewartvanliew@gmail.com)

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

AUGUST
The Doctors Blackwell: How Two Pioneering Sisters Brought Medicine to Women and Women to Medicine
Janice P. Nimura

SEPTEMBER
I Invented the Modern Age: The Rise of Henry Ford
Richard Snow

OCTOBER
The Price of Peace: Money, Democracy, and the Life of John Maynard Keynes
Zachary D. Carter

NOVEMBER
The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left
Yuval Levin

DECEMBER
The Zealot and the Emancipator: John Brown, Abe Lincoln and the Struggle for American Freedom
H. W. Brands

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 required to wear a mask until further notice.

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

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