

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

History Happy Hours Return to the Allis-Bushnell House

Fall has arrived and that means the return of our wonderfully successful series—the History Happy Hours at the Allis-Bushnell House. One Friday each month at 6pm, we open the house to visitors and invite them to sip a glass of wine, enjoy a savory from the charcuterie board, and learn history tidbits from engaging speakers.

On November 17, we will welcome national folk art expert Allan Katz to the History Happy Hour stage. Recognizable from his regular appearances on PBS's Antiques Road

Show, Allan, together with his wife Penny, is considered among the foremost dealers and collectors of American folk art in the country. They opened their Madison home to



visitors last June for the 2023 Tour of Remarkable Homes—and they moved a notable collection of art to Madison's Scranton Library for the whole community to enjoy. We are grateful for the Katz's love of community, generosity of spirit, and willingness to share their adventures in the antiques world.

At the upcoming happy hour, Allan will speak candidly about how a tragic tale of

loss, grief, and remembrance led him to become the victim of fraud in one of the most notorious antiques forgeries in US history. The Bingham family of East Haddam had two sons, John and Wells, who served in the 16th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry Regiment in the Union Army. Shortly after their enlistment, the Bingham brothers found themselves at Antietam, one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. John Bingham was shot and killed. Wells survived, but, years later, unable to bear the loss of his beloved brother, he took his own life. The family purportedly commissioned an impressive memorial secretary to honor the memory of their sons.

Allan will share the fascinating tale of how he came to own this now-infamous piece of furniture, its sale to a reputable museum, and the ultimate discovery of the fraud. You won't want to miss this dramatic tale! **Space is limited.** We will accept walk-ins at the door until we reach capacity.

Launched in March 2022, the History Happy Hours have attracted new friends

as well as longtime supporters. The casual atmosphere, light refreshments, and interesting libations have encouraged many locals to learn about our organization for the first time. Here they discover that history matters-- and can be fun. Every member and every visitor ensures that our artifacts and the stories and lessons of the past are preserved for future generations.

The series will take a break in December but will resume in January 2024. Events are also planned for March 22, April 26, and May 26. Each program will feature a brief presentation, followed by a chance to socialize and enjoy the historic atmosphere of the Allis-Bushnell House.



The MHS is delighted to partner with the Wine Thief of Madison, which provides adult and alcohol-free libations for this popular series. To register in advance (\$10 for adults and \$5 for MHS members), visit www.madisonhistory.org. Admission at the door is cash only.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS

History Happy Hour November 17
Members' Holiday Party December 2
Holiday Lantern Tour December 17
History Happy Hour January 17
Valentine's Day Party February 14
History Happy Hour March 22

2024 Frederick Lee Lectures "Madison Then and Now"

The General's Residence January 14
Coastal Madison: Changes to its Beaches, Buildings, and Habitats February 11
Madison's Oystering Industry March 10

THE ANNUAL APPEAL BECOMES OUR MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

You may have missed this subtle change in our end-of-year plea for funding. Most nonprofit organizations send annual appeal letters at this time of year—and then have membership drives in the spring. The MHS development committee decided to innovate by reducing the number of requests we send to our supporters. Therefore, the letter that will soon arrive in your mailbox is the only annual funding request you will receive from us.

If you are reading this newsletter, you are most likely already a supporter. You understand the importance of making a financial gift in support of our mission. You probably know that the MHS receives no town funding and is entirely supported by donor contributions and grant



awards. You may, however, not realize that grant funds are always for specific projects and don't offset the salaries of our staff or our general operating expenses.

We recognize that many nonprofit organizations are vying for your support. Contributions of any size are welcome and appreciated! Donor contributions are essential to ensuring our ability to maintain our historic properties, preserve our collections, and continue to provide the high-quality programming that we offer throughout the year.

Onward & Upward, Dear Friends



If you visited the MHS administrative office on the upper level of Lee's Academy at any point in the last five years, you were likely greeted by the friendly face of Barb Lessard. She served as our part-time office manager following her retirement from MBI, a Norwalk-based direct marketing company. In July, Barb became a grandmother to Parker Robert Lessard. This pure bundle of joy and the demands of caring for an elderly parent have prompted Barb to leave her position at the MHS. She will be deeply missed.

Likewise, long-time MHS bookkeeper Astrid Bernard has resigned her position with us. As Astrid raised her two sons, she worked full-time at the Creative Arts Workshop and part-time at the MHS, while caring for her mother, who will soon celebrate her 95th birthday. Astrid was recently appointed Deputy Director at CAW and has decided to focus her energy there and on the care of her mom. We thank her for her many contributions to our endeavors, and we wish her well.



Finally, the MHS says farewell to MHS trustee Denny Van Liew and his lovely wife, Lucy. Denny serves as our Preservation Chair, a position he will relinquish at the end of his term in May. Lucy is a past trustee, a recipient of our Jane T. Kuhl Award for Historic Preservation, and the current moderator of the MHS History Book Group. Later this year, Lucy will pass that baton to another worthy leader, Mary Berlin, as she and Denny spend six months of the year in London to be closer to family members. We look forward to seeing them in Madison during the summer months—and we thank them for their service to our cause.

Mark Your Calendars... 2024 Frederick Lee Lectures

The theme for the 17th Annual Frederick Lee Lectures is "Madison, Then and Now." The series of three programs, beginning in January 2024, will focus on the ways our iconic structures, our environment, and our industries have changed with the passage of time.



Architectural historian Rachel Carley will open the series on January 14 with her presentation on the history of the General's Residence. Demolished in 2021, the circa 1805 homestead was owned by an intriguing succession of mariners, farmers, and shopkeepers who adapted the old building to new uses throughout its long life.



On February 11 Dr. Juliana Barrett from the UCONN Connecticut Sea Grant program, will explore the impact of climate change on our coastline. Her presentation will explore the impact of flooding and coastal erosion from hurricanes and superstorms.



Lifelong Madison resident Meig Walz-Newcomb will wrap up the series on March 10 with a talk on oystering. A traditional food source that predates colonial times by several thousand years, oysters were a diet staple of the region's Native Americans and its later European settlers. Meig will trace the history of local oystering from the 1800s to modern times.

Visit the 1940s on Our Annual Holiday Lantern Tour

Step back in time with our annual Holiday Lantern Tour to be held on Sunday, December 17. As in past years, the scripts, characters, and themes will all be new. The 2023 Holiday Lantern Tour will take visitors on a journey to Madison in the 1940s. Tours will leave every half hour from Lee's Academy, beginning at 4:30 PM. The last tour will depart at 7 PM.

The 1940s was a tumultuous decade defined by war, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, and the beginning of the Cold War. At the start of the decade, Americans were slowly recovering from the Great Depression and, in New England, from a devastating hurricane. Despite these challenges, life along Madison's bucolic shores



progressed much as it had in previous decades. The townspeople made an honest living farming, catering to summer tourists, and providing essential services. All of that changed in 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked and the US entered the war that had engulfed Europe.

Student reenactors will portray Madison men and women to tell stories of the 1940s from their unique perspectives. Visitors will learn about A. Victor Knight, a British immigrant who owned a local automobile service station and who was one of the first Madison men to sign up for the newly formed Coast Guard volunteer reserve force. They'll hear about Helen Foster Snow, an American journalist who reported from China throughout the 1930s and later settled in Madison. Stories of food and fuel rationing, women in the workforce, and the German-American societies will all be explored.

A tradition since 2018, the Holiday Lantern Tour is a festive storytelling event that brings history to life. The 60-minute, fully outdoor program features local student reenactors, musicians, and MHS volunteers. Visitors learn about the town's rich history through a series of dramatic presentations along a half-mile route that begins at Lee's Academy and ends at the Allis-Bushnell House.

Tour guides will lead small groups from stop to stop while providing interesting anecdotes. At the end of the tour, guests are invited to warm themselves by the hearth and enjoy apple cider, popcorn, and cookies.

Tickets are \$20 for adults (\$15 for MHS members) and \$8 for children ages 5 -17. They can be purchased online at www.madisonhistory.org or by calling 203.245.4567. Space is limited. Please register early to secure your spot.



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 Mary Berlin (mmberlin@comcast.net)

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

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

JANUARY

Atlantic: Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic Storms and a Vast Ocean of a Million Stories
Simon Winchester

FEBRUARY

The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World
Andrea Wulf

MARCH

A History of the World in 6 Glasses
Tom Standage

SUMMER FESTIVAL...THE END OF AN ERA

The MHS staged its second annual Summer Festival of Arts and Antiques on August 26 on the town green. More than 1200 visitors passed through the gates to peruse the wares of antiques dealers, crafters, and local artists. Others came to enjoy the live music, the family-friendly activities, and the festival foods provided by the North Madison Congregational Church.

The MHS has staged a fair on the green for more than fifty years, but the marketing and management efforts have ultimately outweighed its revenues. This once-profitable fundraiser has run its course, and we will not offer it next year. We actively welcome new ideas for other fundraisers that will help us fulfill our mission



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 Allis-Bushnell House,
the MHS c. 1785 National Historic
Register property, call
203-245-4567.*

The MHS newsletter is published quarterly.



Holiday

LANTERN TOUR

December 17 ❄️ 4:30 - 7 PM

Return to the 1940s

ON THIS STROLL THROUGH MADISON HISTORY.

Tours begin at Lee's Academy. Refreshments will be served at the Allis-Bushnell House.

\$20 Adults / \$15 Members / \$8 Students 5-17

For tickets, visit madisonhistory.org or call 203-245-4567.

Tours leave every 30 minutes. Space is limited. Reserve early!

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