

BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUMMER NEWSLETTER

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From the President's Desk



www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org

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As I write this, the weather is finally warm, the pandemic is finally receding, and everyone at the Society has been walking around in a pretty good mood. It's our 50th anniversary year and through June we will be open by appointment during regular hours. We are excited to see everyone! Because of the pandemic, we have not yet had a chance to have visitors in our revamped Builders of Bristol room, which now includes a Sports Center desk. ESPN donated the piece at the beginning of the pandemic and ensured that it would fit in and look spectacular by creating and installing a backdrop custom made for the space. We are very grateful to the team at ESPN and look forward to visitors being able to see and sit at the desk.

For the past couple of weeks, the outside of the Society has gotten some attention as well. The United Day of Caring was May 14th, and volunteers from Webster Bank outdid themselves, weeding, raking, and demolishing an overgrown bush by the Center Street entrance. Volunteers have picked up where they left off by mulching and filling in with plants.

One other big project that is underway won't be staying in the building. The statue of Minerva that was created for the school on Memorial Boulevard is getting a facelift as we speak. We are grateful to John Canning and Company for their thoughtful renovation work and especially grateful to the members of our community that that already donated to the Minerva fund. She will likely spend some time back in our building until her spot is ready in Intradistrict Arts Magnet School.

Of course, if you head over to the Society right now, what you will see is a hard-working group of volunteers preparing for our outdoor Tag Sale (June 5th, 10-3 rain date: June 6th) and all of the chaos that entails. We all look forward to coming out into the sun.

Please come down for the tag sale and please come visit as the summer moves forward!

Happy summer!

Maya Bringe, President

BHS ANNUAL TAG SALE – DON'T MISS IT!

The BHS annual fundraising Tag Sale is back! This Saturday, JUNE 5th, 10 to 3 with a rain date of Sunday, JUNE 6th, 10 to 3. Not having it last year means twice as many items for this year! Look for us in the outside parking lot located on Center Street. We have something for everyone – young and old!



BHS SCHOLARSHIP WINNER ANNOUNCED!

The Bristol Historical Society is pleased to announce the name of the \$1500 winner of its 2021 Annual scholarship. This award is based on academic performance, school and community involvement, job experience, and a research topic of a person, place, organization or event in the history of Bristol.

Caitlin Elizabeth Hildebrand, a senior at Bristol Central High School, will receive the award. She is the daughter of Michele and Kyle Hildebrand and plans on attending the University of Saint Joseph in the fall majoring in nursing.

BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY ESSAY by CAITLIN HILDEBRAND

The Lake Compounce amusement park was built in 1846. The Lake began as a “Picnic Park” with just a path and some picnic tables. However, the park quickly became a popular crowd pleaser when they added a hand-powered revolving swing and Connecticut's first ten-pin bowling alley with adjoining pool tables. Lake Compounce didn't stop though, it kept adding new attractions and it's first permanent building was placed in 1895. Unfortunately, throughout the next century Lake Compounce experienced major financial issues and as many other small parks throughout the New England area began closing, the future seemed bleak. But in 1996 the park was bought by the Kennywood Entertainment Company. Within the first year of Kennywood owning the park, over \$24 million was spent on new attractions. The Kennywood Company had to make some changes to the park for it to stay open. Building newer, state-of-the-art coasters and thrill rides to appease the park goers expecting newer attractions. The Company knew that one of Lake Compounce's biggest attractions was the fact that it is historical, they wanted to keep some of the original attractions. The vintage 1927 roller coaster, the 1911 carousel, and an antique trolley were all kept in order to maintain the originality of the park.

The Park is a huge part of Bristol's history, celebrating 175 years of history. Lake Compounce is the oldest continuously run amusement park in the country. Though the park only opened for Labor Day weekend throughout some of the tougher years, it gave the people of Bristol a way to escape. Lake Compounce may not bring visitors from all over the world, but most locals hold fond memories of summers in the park. Lake Compounce even stayed open throughout the Great Depression, and most recently, it opened in possibly the most vulnerable days of our country in years-the Covid-19 pandemic. The Lake was open from July 4th to Labor Day and did as much as they could to keep everything safe. I would know first-hand because I worked in the retail department throughout the 2020 summer. This past summer, Bristol needed a distraction from what was going on throughout not only the country but the world, and Lake Compounce delivered. The Park made sure everything was Covid safe, from cleaning crews to cutting the park capacity in half, because even though the small amusement park has become much larger, it still cares about the Bristol community.

BHS ANNUAL MEETING DATE

The Annual Meeting for the Society will be **Wednesday, June 23, 2021.**

Voting results will be announced for the following offices:

Second Vice President

Secretary

Treasurer

Multiple Director openings

We are extending mail-in voting in for Board positions this year. Watch your mailboxes for ballots for each voting member in a household. The ballot will include the slate that the governance committee puts forth and additional nominations that were sent in by members during the nomination period. All member nominees have been contacted to see if they were willing to serve and those who agreed appear on the ballot. When you receive your ballot, you will also receive a small envelope to return it in. Please put ballots in the small envelope without anything to identify the voters (return address, etc.) The ballots will be anonymous and will be counted without the counters knowing whose they are.

The full set of bylaws with the latest amendments is available at www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org and in the office at the Society at 98 Summer Street. If you have questions about the open positions or the election procedure, please contact Steve Vastola, veeeman@sbcglobal.net, chair of the Governance Committee.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

2021-2022 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

This year we chose to do something different. Earlier in May we mailed membership forms to all our annual members with the nomination forms. Our Membership renewal drive runs June 1st to June 30th. New annual membership takes effect July 1st. The form is green this year. To date, 73 of you have renewed! Great response!! If you have misplaced your form, you can download one from our website or stop by BHS Wednesday or Saturday between 10am and 12 noon to get another one. Since this is our 50th Anniversary year, we anticipate a 'soft opening' with numerous events popping up during the remainder of the year for your enjoyment and you won't want to miss any! We look forward to seeing you all soon!

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL STAMP COLLECTING MONTH

In celebration the Society will be setting up a postal history display. You may ask "What is postal history?" It is not only the stamps but what they were used to deliver, most frequently envelopes. Right now, we are looking for items to add to the display. If you come across any items that were mailed in Bristol over the past 200 years, please consider letting us take a look for the possibility of borrowing them. Please don't assume they are boring. Cancellations that say "Forestville," "The Mum Festival," "Buy Savings Bonds," "Pray for Peace," etc. can be the basis of an interesting display. We would also like business items if they were clearly mailed in Bristol such as advertising pieces, catalogs, and business correspondence with Bristol return addresses. Some items coming into Bristol such as war letters would also be of interest. Lastly any items related to Bristol's post offices would be of interest. If you find anything that you think might fit what we are looking for please contact me, Steve Vastola at 860-944-6567 by text or phone.

A LOOK AHEAD – DATES TO REMEMBER!

Present and Ongoing---

“Meet Me at Minerva” restoration project.

Sale of the 100th Anniversary of the Memorial Boulevard ornament.

June

5 or 6 *BHS Annual Spring Tag Sale, 10AM – 3PM*

23 *BHS Annual Meeting/Voting, – 6:30PM*

To Be Announced---

Picturing Bristol, a public art exhibit, co-sponsored with the City Arts and Culture Commission.

Memorial Tree Planting to honor those who died from COVID.

August

19 *BHS Annual Dinner and 50th Anniversary at Chippanee Country Club*

September

24 – 26 *Bristol Mum Festival – Profiles of Courage*

October

1 – 31 *National Stamp Collecting Month –BHS Historical Postal Display*

16 or 17 *Centennial Celebration – Memorial Boulevard*

23 *BHS Evening on the Hill – Auction*

December

5 *BHS Annual Christmas Fair and Christmas Market*

25 – *12 Days of Christmas -*

Jan 6, 2022 *Scavenger Hunt*

January 2022

9 *Mistletoe Martini Fundraiser to conclude the 12 Days of Christmas*

BHS ANNUAL DINNER and 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Invitations are in the mail to all our members. We want to make sure each and every one of you receives an invitation! They are being mailed on June 2nd along with the BHS voting ballots. If you don't receive one, please call the BHS office and leave a message so we can mail one out to you. A special program is being planned by Tom Dickau and the 50th Anniversary Committee. You won't want to miss it! What a wonderful evening it will be to be able to visit with your friends, have a lovely dinner and be part of such a momentous occasion! Won't you join us?

BHS EVENING ON THE HILL AUCTION

The Evening on the Hill Auction will return on October 23, 2021! This lively event was cancelled last year due to the pandemic but will return this year featuring a silent auction that begins at 5:30pm while guests enjoy wine, soft drinks, and finger foods. At this time, bidders can also preview a group of live auction items that often includes collectibles, art, furniture, antiques, and the occasional fun and eclectic items. Bidding for the live auction begins at 7pm. Professional auctioneer, Paul Stansel, keeps the bidding lively and entertaining.

If you have any last-minute items that you would like to donate – for this auction or next year’s – please call Steve (860-944-6567) or Maya (860-986-4894) or email auktion@bristolhistoricalsociety.com and we can arrange to pick up appropriate items.

Please plan on attending this event – it’s always a tremendous amount of fun and an important fundraiser for our organization. Tickets will be available at the Society starting in September and are \$12 in advance and \$15 at the door. For more information call the office at 860-583-6309.

THE HOLIDAY CRAFT FAIR IS BACK!

We are delighted to announce that the B.H.S. Holiday Craft Fair will return once again this year. It is slated for Saturday, December 4th, from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.

This year we have an exciting addition - the European Christmas Market is scheduled to run in conjunction with the Craft Fair. It will be staged in our front parking lot and will feature an array of themed baskets for gift-giving or your own enjoyment. More details about this portion of the Holiday Fair will be coming soon.

Mark your calendar and plan to take part in our festivities as we usher in the holiday season on December 4th.

Our Craft Fair and Christmas Market Committees are in need of gently used Christmas items and decorations. If you find yourself cleaning closets or storage areas this summer, consider donating to The Bristol Historical Society. We will recycle your items and put them to good use. Here is a list of items to look for: baskets – all sizes; gently used Christmas ornaments (no lights please); dog & cat items; craft items; children’s & infant’s items & books; repurposed gifts & puzzles; caps, hats, gloves & scarves; board games or cards.

Donations can be dropped off at B.H.S. between now and Thanksgiving, on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 to 12 noon.

Lastly, if you or a friend are interested in becoming a vendor at our Craft Fair, please contact Mary Houle at (860) 582-7784 to make arrangements.

We always welcome volunteers to help with our events.

“Meet Me at Minerva.”

For almost 100 years, this statue of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, was a constant in the lives of some of Bristol’s high school students. She was installed in Bristol High School when it opened, standing proudly in the main hallway and many students and teachers agreed to “meet at Minerva” as they made afternoon plans or touched the goddess for luck before exams.

When the building on Memorial Boulevard was converted to a middle school, Minerva was moved to Bristol Central High School. For the last two decades, she had presided over Latin classes in Kelly Monahan-Dinoia’s classroom. Unfortunately, because of the Covid precautions that required more social-distancing space in classrooms, Minerva lost her spot in the Latin class. When she needed a place to stay to await her next move, we at the Bristol Historical Society gladly took her in. For the last several months, our members and volunteers have enjoyed trading sharing their memories of Minerva.

As the renovations for the Arts Magnet school on Memorial Boulevard took shape, it became clear that Minerva would once again have a place in the main hallway—a bridge from past generations of Bristol students to future ones in an historic school building.

Since Minerva is a plaster statue of almost a century’s age, she needs a facelift before retaking her place in the new school. Given her history and our interest in historic preservation, it seemed like a natural thing for us to oversee her renovation and its fundraising. We are committed to raising the funds for her renovation and any funds over that total will be donated to the non-profit organization that is being created for long-term needs at the Memorial Boulevard Intra-district Magnet School for any future work she may need.

If you would like to contribute to the restoration, please send checks made out to BHS with ‘Minerva Fund’ in the memo line to The Bristol Historical Society, P.O. Box 1393, Bristol CT 06010.



REMINESENCING ABOUT 150 MAIN STREET

By Howard T Schmelder

Bristol has been privileged to have a magnificent Greek Revival building as part of its Downtown for many decades. It has been a symbol of strength, character and resilience which epitomizes what Bristol is. I would like to highlight aspects of this building as I was an employee of Bristol Savings Bank then Webster Bank for over 47 years, spending a good part of my career at this location.

When the building was erected in 1908 it was termed “the embodiment of substantiality and practical service as well as architectural strength and beauty. Its stalwart and symmetrical columns, relieved by beautiful carvings, classic in every line, impart stateliness and dignity to its appearance,” as noted in a Bristol Press article.

I remember clearly my first day of work as I entered the building using the Main Street entrance. The outside entrance was so appealing. The landscaping and gorgeous blue spruce (the original has since been replaced) were meticulously maintained.

The huge bronze doors that led you into the double door vestibule and then you entered the stunning interior of this historic building. Much of the interior today was not like it was that day in June of 1960 when I started. The teller line was on the opposite side of its current location and extended in a full U shape. Opposite the teller side was the loan officer and mortgage area. There was the President's office on the right front side of the building and the left was the office occupied by the Corporate Secretary. The floor of the lobby was marble which has since been covered and replaced with carpeting and later tiled. The original ornate customer writing tables still remain.

It is interesting to note that the Secretary's office still has the original fireplace. Engraved on the fireplace mantel are the letters BTC, as the building was originally occupied by the Bristol Trust Company. Upon that bank's demise, it was then purchased by Bristol Savings Bank.

Directly in your view as you entered the lobby was the huge vault doors, so perfectly balanced that you could close them with one hand (I know, because I closed and opened them many times!) The dome where the murals are located was an open dome which was later fitted with lighting to highlight the stunning murals that depict Bristol.

The murals were painted in 1908 by Vesper L. George and are themed. The first is Finance (which depicts the Bristol Savings Bank building); Agriculture (farming within Bristol and Chippens Hill); Industry (depicting what I believe is the Sessions Foundry); and the last mural depicts Commerce. I recall back in the early 1970s when an artist was engaged to re-touch them. He laid on scaffolding for days and the result was spectacular upon its completion.

During the 1960s, the building was designated as a Civil Defense Shelter and the basement was loaded with containers of water, food, and medical supplies. They were there for many years and when the shelter was disbanded, some of the crackers in the metal containers were still fresh! The 1960s also saw the major addition to the complex with the opening of the lower-level area where the Lending departments and the Executive Offices moved. Fuller Barnes was engaged to create two metal sculptures that were located in this new lower level. One was outside in an atrium and the other graced the fishpond in the center of the lower lobby. The upper level of the new addition contained the area for the bank's newest computer (which was huge and today more computing power can be found in a cell phone than was available on our computer!). A new cafeteria was also included which contained a full kitchen and employee lounge area. Further renovations were done in the 1970s. The walkup teller, automated teller machine and drive-up facility was created, and more office space was added to the main banking floor.

The 150 Main Street building is an enduring facility which has withstood fire (when the former Muzzy then Genung building burned), the flood of 1955 and the demolition of the Downtown area as part of the redevelopment program. Needless to say, this historic building is, and will always be, an integral part of Downtown Bristol. Whatever its future use, it will continue to grace the corner of Main and Riverside for years to come, remaining a cornerstone as the revitalization of Downtown Bristol progresses.



The Jack Denehy Gallery

Founder Of
The Memorial Military Museum

Veteran, Teacher,
Historian, Friend

Dedicated 2015



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MEMORIAL MILITARY MUSEUM

Welcome Aboard!

The door to The Jack Denehy Gallery is about to reopen to the public! New exhibits feature “Those Who Gave All” during WWII, Korean and Vietnam eras, a “Call to Arms” weapons display, Iwo Jima display, Civil War exhibit, the beginnings of “Women in the Military and 21st Century conflicts. Permanent display honors Brigadier General Edward F. Wozenski, Bristol’s most decorated WWII veteran.

Save The 2021 Dates!

Memorial Day Weekend through October; Bristol Museums Collaborative Committee’s “Art and Seek” event.

Saturday, September 25, 11am; Brig. Gen. Edward F. Wozenski monument dedication and program on Memorial Boulevard.

Saturday, October 16, 1-5pm; Centennial Celebration on Memorial Boulevard, an afternoon of activities, living history, music and more.

BRISTOL SPORTS HALL OF FAME

The Bristol Sports Hall of Fame is pleased to announce that 6 - \$1500 scholarships were awarded to local high school students during a virtual award ceremony on April 18th. The winners are as follows:

Bristol Eastern: *Christopher Calnan Memorial Scholarships:* Amber Champagne and Tyler Martin

Bristol Central: *Alfred Greenleaf Memorial Scholarship:* Christopher Osuch

Leary Family Memorial Scholarship: Jenna Lowe

St. Paul: *Brian Farrell Sr. Memorial Scholarship:* Nina Zwolinsdki

Roberge Family Scholarship: Sophia Gerst

In addition, 119 students were recognized as Scholar Athletes and Brandon Bianca and Kyle Santos received the Joe McGinn Award.

THE BSHOF ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP GOLF TOURNAMENT

The Tournament will be held this year on Monday, July 26th at Chipannee Golf Club. There will also be a special ‘closest to pin’ ball contest conducted just prior to tee off. 1st prize is \$1,000 cash with 2nd – 4th place prizes consisting of a round of golf for four with carts at area golf courses.

For more information on the golf tourney or to purchase a ball, please contact golf tourney co-chair Don Soucy at drs.1947@yahoo.com or at 860-384-0256. Cost of golf ball is \$100, and the winner need not be present.