



BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL NEWSLETTER

Vol. 11, Issue 1 – January, 2026 – March, 2026

From the President's Desk

Happy New Year!

www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org
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Newsletter Editor:

Noreen Zurell

As we start a new year with new expectations, we can't help but look back at all the accomplishments we made. Our building, which is over 130 years old, has had repointing completed on 2 sides, has had trees removed, and weeding, raking, and mulching completed by Scout Troop 29. Our Event Room has been busy hosting a number of different groups including a monthly gaming club. Saturdays are busy at the Historical Society!

We participated in outside venues – the Farmers Market, the Rockwell Park Festival and the Mum Festival, all with great feedback. We've added some extra events such as our Federal Hill Walking Tour and the Cemetery Tours – both are very popular. But the one project we have that has the most interesting comments is our daily In Retrospect feature. While this year's subject, Birthdays, is coming to an end, January 1st will start a whole new theme for 2026! It will bring back many memories for many of us!

The Holiday Craft Fair and White Elephant Christmas Bazaar were a great success this year. We had a number of trees which we decorated and sold. I think they were the hit for those who bought them because they didn't need to do anything except take them home. I understand that all the crafters who participated had a great day as well. Although we didn't sell everything from the Bazaar, we did make quite a dent in what we had, which is really great.

2026 for us will start with the month of January being 'closed for renovations.' The ceiling in the main hallway is being scraped, treated, and repainted. We should be ready to reopen to the public on February 1st. We have moved the scholarship pasta supper from February to April 16th. Hopefully there will be better weather so more can attend. See the registration form at the end of this newsletter.

Programming for 2026 will bring a number of exciting, historical, and interesting subjects and we hope many of you will join us. While we schedule our programs on the Third Thursday of each month, there may be a few that will be on a Saturday afternoon. Stay tuned...you won't want to miss any this year!

We welcome 2026 and wish all of our members a very happy and healthy new year as we celebrate our country's 250th Anniversary!

Thank you,
Noreen Zurell, President

BHS ANNUAL HOLIDAY RECAP

Thank you to everyone who made the 19th Annual Holiday Fair a success! The community's enthusiastic response is testament to the collective effort of numerous BHS members who helped with general set up, decorating, Boutique merchandising and sales, kitchen assistance, and vendor/crafter hospitality.

Special Recognition goes Noreen Zurell for chairing the Bake Sale; Bob Adamczyk for set up and ongoing support in all facets of the fair; Lisa Bell for chairing Boutique sales on multiple dates; Andrea Kapchensky for Tea Cup Raffle, signage, and bookkeeping; Jay Messier for set up, providing food for crafters and porter services; Ty and Janet Mellon for their generous contributions to the Boutique inventory, kitchen help and providing food for crafters; Laura Pinette and Lynn Laskowski for tireless hours in Boutique set up; Jane & Al Goodwin for set up, kitchen duties, and providing soup for crafters; Maya Bringe for overall support, Boutique assistance, and publicity; Marilyn Simmons for publicity; Andrew Collins for Boutique assistance and Boy Scout Troop 29 for their help in moving items to/from the first floor before and after the fair. Thank you also to those whose assistance was valuable before and during the fair: Lynda Russell, Catherine Schilling, Sue Casey, Maureen Sonstrom, Carolyn Lewis, Ruth Ann Graime, Pearl O'Rourke, Pam Messier, Pam Wilson, Beverly Redman, Becky Runk, Ellie Wilson, Robert Houle and Jackie Vigue.

The Bristol Historical Society truly appreciates those who patronized our fair, donated Boutique items and baked for the Bake Sale. Best Wishes for a Happy & Healthy New Year!

*Mary Houle
Holiday Fair Chair*

CLOSED FOR RENOVATIONS

Thanks to the generosity of the Broadview Fund of the Main Street Community Foundation, we are addressing the peeling ceiling in our entryway. We are also taking that opportunity to make one or two additional repairs in the building. Because of all of this - **we will be closed for the month of January**. We will be back in February, looking better than ever, with our usual open hours on Wednesdays and Saturdays!

2025 ANNUAL APPEAL

The 2025-2026 Annual Campaign has been mailed and should have appeared in your mailbox. Please consider donating this year. Annual Campaign funds allow us to bring programs and events to the public throughout the year, to add artifacts to our collection of the city's history, and to maintain Bristol's first public high school, which remains the oldest municipal building in the city still open to the public. With your support, we can continue to preserve the past for current and future residents of Bristol. Donations can be made online at our website as well, at <https://www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org/support>.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

NEW MEMBERS

Leo & Margaret Bonola, Phil Cracco, Matthew & Donna Crowley, Elizabeth Higdon, Richard Mulcunry, Sr., Donna Shackett

RECENT PASSINGS

Nancy Denehy, Elain Sportelli

PROGRAMMING RECAP OF SUMMER PROGRAMS

The September 18 Third Thursday program featured a most interesting presentation given by Adam Paul Heller who creates handcrafted gravestones throughout the world.

Steve Vastola's October 16th program focused on the cancelled postage stamps that appeared on the Peck letters. The Peck Family were prolific letter writers of the nineteenth century. In addition, Steve's topics also touched upon Lincoln's candidacy, the Civil War, international treaties, the 1860s mail movement and the Pre-Empire Germany.

The Fall Federal Hill Walking Tour originally scheduled for October 19th was rescheduled to Sunday, October 26th due to weather predictions. These tours have been proven to be quite successful each time they are held.

The last Third Thursday programs of 2025 was on November 20. It was a history of Bristol's Copper Mine presented by former Bristol resident Matthew Crowley. In 1850 the copper mine was the first industry in Bristol to have recruited 100 Irish workers and their presence prompted the first Catholic religious observance in 1847. These Irish Americans represented the beginning of an ethnically diverse community here in Bristol. Stop at our gift shop and purchase a copy of Matthew's book for \$15.

INTO THE RIVER

On February 6, 1896, a railroad bridge over the Pequabuck River collapsed in Bristol, killing six and altering the lives of dozens more. As the 130th anniversary nears, a new historical initiative is bringing renewed attention to this forgotten tragedy through short videos and archival storytelling on Facebook on a page called *Into the River: the story of Bristol's 1896 Railroad Bridge disaster*. A comprehensive article will be published on **Friday, February 6, 2026**, in The Bristol Edition, followed by a live presentation featuring voice narration, video, and interactive media that explore the disaster and its victims.

FALL THIRD THURSDAY PROGRAMS

Our 2026 programming begins in February and not January, usually due to unpredictable weather during the month.

We have scheduled a special program on Friday, February 13th at 7 pm. Doors open at 6:30 pm. This special presentation by Maya Bringe and Bob Adamczyk will focus on stories about "Love Gone Wrong!" PLEASE NOTE: This program will be the only one scheduled for the month of February.

The Third Thursday program on March 19th will feature the Dirty Blue Shirts' presentation of "The Web They Wore, Women and their Wardrobe during New England's Revolution." The show date is March 26th. The program is 90 minutes in length, so we will begin at 6:30pm. Doors will open at 6pm. Additional parking is available behind the building. These programs are free to BHS members with a suggested \$5 donation for non-members. Refreshments will be served.

The April Third Thursday program has a new twist this year. To avoid winter weather, we have decided to hold our annual Pasta Dinner Scholarship fundraiser on Thursday, April 16 at Parkside Restaurant from 5-7pm. Mark the date on your calendar now! The reservation form appears on the last page of the newsletter.

SAVE THE DATE

The Historical Society is venturing into the wild world of Bingo once again with a St. Patrick's Day-themed Bingo at the Bristol Polish Club on **Sunday, March 15, 12-4pm**. The festivities will feature a silent auction, raffle, and a bake sale alongside the usual Bingo fun! Mark your calendars and watch for details!

COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE

BHS has been lucky to receive two paintings recently. The first is of the Old Leatherman by a Bristol painter. The second is a beautiful portrait of Almira Andrews Barnes (1805-1840), wife of Alphonso Barnes and mother of the Wallace Barnes, founder of the Wallace Barnes Company. The portrait was donated by a member of the Barnes family and we are delighted to have another woman from Bristol's history represented.

John Schissler has also donated a copy of his recent book about the Pequabuck River. He has been research and writing this comprehensive work for some time and we are thrilled to see the finished work!

BHS GAMING CLUB NEWS

Spring Forth **March 21** with a day of tabletop gaming at The Bristol Historical Society!

Presented by the BHS Gaming Club & Ribhian Games!

Two gaming slots:

9am-1pm

2pm-6pm

\$10 Admission, free for current members of the club.

Snacks, coffee, soft & adult beverages available.

Contact Jay Messier for more info:

seventhwarlord@yahoo.com or 860.841.1141

Spring Forth! Gaming Convention



Also, a reminder for 1/17 club members and the public:

The Bristol Historical Society Gaming Club will be meeting **January 17** at The New Cambridge Project from 10am-2pm. Our usual digs are being painted, and the guys at NCP are helping out our community by giving us a place to play for the day!

D&D, Enclave, Burn 2d6, Ribhian Games – and your own table if your home group would like to join the awesomeness. Free to all ages.

BRISTOL'S AMERICA250 COMMITTEE

For over a year, Bristol's America250 has been meeting to plan Bristol's celebration of the nation's 250th anniversary since the Declaration of independence. Now that 2026 has officially arrived, here are some events and places to keep up on them:

- On January 15, 5:30-7:30 there will be a 250 Kickoff Event at the Carousel Museum. Enjoy music, drinks, and hearty hors d'oeuvres. Tickets are \$50 and can be purchased from the link on the bristolallheart.com/america250 page
- On April 25, 1-3pm, the Historical Society will be hosting a self-guided tour of the Lewis Street (Old South) Cemetery with a booklet for participants.
- On June 14, there will be a celebration on Federal Hill from 1-4pm including an Revolutionary War encampment, tours, and activities related to the 250th.
- Various organizations (including the Historical Society and Bristol Public Library) have events that are Semiquincentennial-themed (i.e., 250-themed). You can find a list of these, which is updated often, here: bristolallheart.com/america250
- Follow the committee and its events on Facebook, here: [America250-Bristol, CT](https://www.facebook.com/America250-Bristol)

We hope you join us for some or all of these fun events and follow the website for more events.

BRISTOL SPORTS HALL OF FAME

The DoubleTree in Bristol was the setting for the BSHOF's annual Induction program held on Friday, Nov. 21, 2025. Before a capacity crowd of 360 guests, including friends and relatives, local sports legends Brian Archibald, Gretchen Chiasson, Tom Dickau, Andy Freimuth, John Greenleaf, David Hernandez, and Bryant Lishness were inducted for their roles in maintaining the tradition and glory of Bristol sports. Their class photo and acceptance speeches, as well as all past inductees are available on our website at bshog.org. Special thanks to the Nutmeg State Financial Credit Union for their sponsorship of the VIP reception held prior to the induction program.

Scholar athletes from Bristol's three high schools worked with BSHOF Directors Dave Mills and Mark Ziogas to create the inaugural Team Bristol 5K, a fundraiser which supports Team Impact, a national organization founded by former Bristol Eastern and Tufts football captain and BSHOF inductee Jay Calnan. Started a little over a decade ago, Team Impact matches children with life-threatening or debilitating illnesses with college athletic teams, providing them with the social and emotional benefits of sports. In its first year, Team Bristol raised \$4311 for Team Impact's mission through their 5K event hosted at Bristol Eastern High School on Oct. 19, 2025.

The BSHOF is sad to report the passing of the following past inductees since December of 2024: Joe Lowrey, Mike Morin, Rick Schmaltz, Bob Zysk, and Harry Dudzinski. Also, past director and inductee Bernie O'Keefe and BSHOF co-founder, and inductee Bob Montgomery. In addition, The BSHOF mourns the passing of past director and long time Channel 30 political correspondent Tom Monahan.



2025 LANTERN TOUR

The lantern tour returned to West Cemetery in 2025 with actors Bob Adamczyk, Ty Mellon, Jason Messier, Nicki LaPorte, Joe Pinette, James Donovan, Lisa Doyle-Bell, Jackie McCauley, Chris Ravlin, and Mel Bee, portraying some of Bristol's colorful characters. The event was co-sponsored with the Bristol Cemetery Commission. Many thanks are due to Mike Saman, Deborah Spooner, and Noreen Zurell for manning the check-in table with grace and good humor, and to Maya Bringe for managing the event. We would also like to thank the West Cemetery Association and the staff at the cemetery for allowing us to hold the event. As always, we also want to thank Bristol's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) for keeping us out of trouble, sending volunteers on tours, and generally helping us bring people the best - and safest - experience possible.

MEMORIAL MILITARY MUSEUM

This past year, the Memorial Military Museum undertook a project that filled a long-standing void in Bristol's military narrative. For the first time, our community came together to recognize, research, and elevate the stories of Bristol's women who served during World War II. What began as a focused effort to uncover their contributions quickly became a transformative year of discovery, celebration, and remembrance. Our mission was clear: to ensure that Bristol's women who stepped forward during WWII were no longer absent from Bristol's story of service. Through a series of 5 programs, we honored these women in ways never done before: their names recorded, their stories written, their voices filmed, their photographs displayed, and their service shared with the public. And, for the first time, female WWII veterans from Bristol were honored with banners on Veterans Memorial Boulevard, standing proudly among the men who served.

One such program featured the story of Mickey Masterbone, one of Bristol's WWII female veterans who was still living and preparing to celebrate her 101st birthday. Determined to preserve her story while we still could, members of our museum traveled across the country to Walla Walla, Washington, to interview, film, and spend time with her. The resulting video became the centerpiece of our first major event, A Day of Honor, Remembrance & Community. Mickey's story captured the hearts of everyone who attended. Her interview can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IG6NVibnbMA>

Our year of programming concluded on November 9 with a Christmas luncheon, held in honor of Bristol's WWII women and their families. Descendants gathered around tables reminiscent of wartime holiday gatherings and shared in a homestyle dinner. Families who had never met one another found connection in shared history, and many learned details about their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts they had never known.

Through this past year, we accomplished a lot of firsts. We uncovered and documented dozens of Bristol women who served across all branches, preserved stories otherwise lost, highlighted their stories in our gallery, created Honor & Remembrance Medallions to honor all branches of service, and partnered with Veterans Strong to feature our female WWII Veterans on Banners along the Boulevard. What began as a commemorative project has become a foundational part of our mission. The Memorial Military Museum is proud to be the first organization to recognize the absence of Bristol's female veterans in our military history, to correct that oversight, and to honor them publicly. Their stories are now preserved—not just in archives, but in the hearts of our community. And this is only the beginning.





**BRISTOL
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

**SCHOLARSHIP FUNDRAISER
PASTA SUPPER RESERVATION FORM**

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2026

5-7PM

**PARKSIDE RESTAURANT
224 N MAIN ST, BRISTOL, CT**

PRE-PAID RESERVATIONS REQUIRED BY APRIL 13. ABSOLUTELY NO WALK-INS!!

ADULTS - \$30.00

CHILDREN (UNDER AGE 10) - \$20.00

MENU: Pasta, sausage, meatballs, chicken, salad, bread and dessert

**Please cut off below and send to Bristol Historical Society, PO Box 1393, Bristol, CT. 06011-1393
with your check to reserve your reservation. (860-583-6309)**

RESERVATION FORM

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
PHONE NO. _____

Option #1. Indoor Seating: # _____ **persons @ \$30.00 ea.** **= Total** _____
_____ **children under 10 @ \$20.00 ea. =Total** _____
Gluten Free: Yes _____ **No** _____

Option #2. Take-out orders: # _____ **persons @ \$30.00 ea.** **= Total** _____
_____ **children under 10 @ \$20.00 ea. = Total** _____
Gluten Free: Yes _____ **No** _____

PLEASE INDICATE TIME FOR PICK-UP: (5:30PM or 6:00PM) _____

If you cannot attend, please consider making a donation. \$ _____

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY, PO BOX 1393; BRISTOL, CT 06011-1393 (860-583-6309)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!