



BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING NEWSLETTER

Vol. 11, Issue 3 – July, 2026 – September, 2026

From the President's Desk

As you read this, it is the middle of summer. In fact, we are entering a heat wave! However, here at the Bristol Historical Society, it is also the end of the year. Our fiscal and Board year runs from July 1 to June 30, so we have just had elections. We welcome a new board, including newcomer Tom Ward. I am also reflecting a bit on the past year, which has been a busy one!

We spent some time out of the building this year – we continued our Federal Hill Walking Tours, added a Scavenger Hunt last summer in conjunction with the Factory Brewing Collective, and had our biggest ever Mum Festival Photo Contest. We also held a Lewis Street Cemetery Tour this spring, and the West Cemetery Lantern Tour continues to be popular. We had another “dress rehearsal” in the building for people who are not able (or willing!) to walk around West Cemetery on an October evening. We also participated in the Bristol Farmers Market and Mum Festival. In the building, we had a successful Holiday Fair, a booming Tag Sale, and our gaming club had its first convention.

As 2026 is the year America celebrates its 250th birthday, we have had a variety of programs that celebrate that milestone and that explore Bristol's history. Bob Adamczyk gave a program marking the 70th anniversary of the Flood of 1955, and we heard reminiscences from audience members who were there or who had heard about the event from family members. The Dirty Blue Shirts were our March program, an engaging look at textile history. We had a fascinating program about cemetery stone carving from an artist in the field, and the Memorial Military presented some remarkable stories they have discovered in their Women in the Military research.

In and about the building, you may have noticed a few things disappear, like trees in sorry shape, and appear, like the portrait of Almira Barnes courtesy of Whitt and Jarre Betts. D'Amato Construction has also made possible the display some of Bristol's prominent citizens by enabling us to display portraits that once hung in the Bristol Savings Bank. Outside, another side of the building has been repointed and inside, Jim Cleveland has donated a beautiful player piano with a variety of rolls of music that you may have seen in our event room.

In short, quite a year! We look forward to an exciting 2026–2027, but one thing will be true no matter the year: our success is due to our members, friends, and community partners. Thank you and have a wonderful summer!

Thank you,
Noreen Zurell, President

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President:

Noreen Zurell

First Vice President:

Lisa Doyle-Bell

Second Vice President:

Rit Carter

Recording Secretary:

Pam Wilson

Treasurer:

Jason Messier

BOARD MEMBERS:

Andrew Collins

Andrea Kapchensky

Ty Mellon

Joe Pinette

Debbie Spooner

Jackie Vigue

Tom Ward

BOARD LIAISONS:

Memorial Military Museum

Carol Denehy

Bristol Sports Hall of Fame

Eleanor Wilson

Past President:

Maya Bringe

Development:

Ellen Zoppo-Sassu

Historian:

Eleanor Wilson

Newsletter Editor:

Noreen Zurell

BHS ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting for the Society was held at 6 pm, Wednesday, May 27, 2026. Two people were reelected to the Executive Board for a second term: President Noreen Zurell and First Vice President Lisa Doyle-Bell. Former board member Don Zurell rejoins the Board and will be joined by new first-time board member Tom Ward. We would like to express our deep gratitude to departing board member, Steve Cowdell.

We are grateful for the service of all of the directors who make the Society the organization it is!

ANNUAL TAG SALE

This year's annual tag sale was a great success in no small part due to the awesome volunteers and great items we had donated this year! The tag sale was well attended by the public and even Saturday was busier than last year. We received many compliments on our presentation and variety of items this year. Hopefully, this is a sign of things to come, and our annual tag sale will continue to grow! Thank you to all who participated in making this event such a success! Anyone interested in volunteering for next year's tag sale feel free to email me with your interest at im5100@yahoo.com. Thank you all again.

Laura Pinette, Tag Sale Chair

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL INFORMATION

Annual renewals have gone out in the mail earlier this month and have started to come in. Of our 179 current members, with a couple of brand new members and 109 of who you have renewed their membership for another year. Thank you!! We did raise the membership dues this year, something we have not done since 2020. If you have not received your form, please contact the office at 860-583-6309, and we will help you rejoin!

ANNUAL DINNER

Save the date! The Bristol Historical Society Annual Dinner is Wednesday, August 5. The cocktail/social hour begins at 5pm, and dinner will start at 6pm. The invitation/reservation form has been mailed out to all our members. If you have not received one, please call the office, 860-583-6309, and we will get one for you. The committee is working to put together a unique buffet menu, as well as entertaining everyone. Enjoy a silent auction and help us congratulate our Scholarship Winner, our Volunteer of the Year, and a local community nonprofit as we honor them for the work they are doing. You won't want to miss it.

PROGRAMMING RECAP OF SPRING PROGRAMS

Our annual Pasta Supper was the Third Thursday program on April 16 at Parkside Café. For those who attended this fundraiser to raise scholarship money, we thank you. We work well with J.R. and Leanne each year to host the event. The recipient of the 2026 scholarship of \$1,500 will be presented at our annual dinner on Wednesday, August 5 at BHS. We hope you will join us to hear who receives this scholarship. Watch for the winner's essay in the Fall newsletter.

A most interesting Third Thursday program on May 21 was presented by Cat Schilling, a member of the Memorial Military Museum and also a BHS member. Her program, "Crossing Oceans," focused on the Margraten National Cemetery in the Netherlands. A chance purchase of military photos at a flea market led to a story of two men whose story stretches across time, distance, and generations.

The purchase of those pictures resulted in identifying a picture of Hedvig M. Jussila, who died in 1945, having never met his infant son. In 2025 that son saw his father's picture for the very first time, thanks to Cat! The second focus of her presentation was John Victor Quinto of Bristol. Cat's research helped the cemetery update the adopter of his grave. Another member of the MMM, Cathy Macias visited her son in the Netherlands just prior to the program. She made the effort to go to Margraten where she presented the adopter and cemetery with a plaque on behalf of the MMM and a proclamation from the City of Bristol, signed by Mayor Ellen Zoppo Sassu.

The June 18 Third Thursday program focused on the efforts of the Wallace Barnes Company and employee Lillian O'Connell to keep in touch with service men and women during World War II. Carol Denehy, vice president of the Memorial Military Museum, presented.

"Dear Boys and Girls," began the first handwritten letter that O'Connell wrote in 1943 to Wallace Barnes employees serving in the military. She continued to begin with that greeting in the next three years in the more than one hundred letters delivering news from the factory and the front. Each letter was mimeographed and sent to men and women serving all over the world.

MR. BEACH'S ODYSSEY

In 1902 Henry Lee Beach of Bristol, a fellow historian, took an 82-day trip across the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean and later a land tour across Europe. Come along with me, Bob Adamczyk, and discover one Bristol man's amusing and sometimes sardonic views of the world and what it was like to travel in 1902. This adventure is a prelude to the annual West Cemetery Lantern Tour walk on October 1-3. An adventure into Bristol's past awaits us all.

JULY - SEPTEMBER PROGRAMS

Our July program will take place on **Saturday, July 11, from 1pm to 3pm**, taking the place of our usual Third Thursday program. This program is part of our America 250 celebration.

Many people tend to not think about buttons until one falls off, but we're missing out on some unique historical objects: Buttons hold a special—and fascinating—place in textile history. They play a historical role throughout the country's history and in Connecticut's. This special program will look at the last 250 years of history from the lens of these interesting and often beautifully crafted pieces. Did you know that button collecting dates back to the time of the founding of our country? Learn about George Washington's special request to the Scoville brothers, Queen Victoria's black glass buttons, buttons made by Colt Manufacturing in the 1950s, and Avon products of the 1970s. Presenter Laurel Durso will touch on a variety of historical topics and present a display of antique buttons of various types and materials that help tell the story of America's 250 year history. Feel free to come early to enjoy the extensive display.

The February 2026 issue of Connecticut Magazine featured an article on the Waterbury Button Company. This Connecticut factory made brass buttons for the Titanic and still provides nearly all of the buttons for law enforcement in the United States, as well as every military in South America with the exception of Brazil.

On **Wednesday, August 12, 7pm**, a special program will celebrate National Vinyl Day. (Please note that this special program will take the place of our regular Third Thursday program.) National Vinyl Day was established in 2002 by music enthusiast Gary Freiberg. It is celebrated annually on August 12 to commemorate the date in 1877 when Thomas Edison invented the phonograph, which laid the foundation for recorded audio. BHS member Al Goodwin will be presenter, bringing back memories of the good old days. He will play popular songs from the 40s, 50s, and 60s. If you have a special request, please contact Al before July 15 at 860-841-7080. He might just have it! Vinyl is a growing trend in music sales, with young and old scouring record bins across Connecticut. (See articles, for instance, in the April 2023 Connecticut Magazine or in the April 17, 2026 Hartford Courant article "New Spin on Old Vinyl," featuring Redscroll Records in Wallingford, CT.)

In September, our Third Thursday program on **September 17 at 7pm**, will be Mr. Beach's Odyssey, presented by Bob Adamczyk. See the description of the program elsewhere in this newsletter issue.

These programs are free to BHS members with a suggested donation of \$5 for all others. Parking is available in the rear of the building and refreshments will be served.

WEST CEMETERY LANTERN TOUR

Save the date! The West Cemetery Lantern Tour returns this October! On October 1, we will have a "dress rehearsal" at the Bristol Historical Society at 7:30pm open to those who cannot make the trek around West Cemetery (or just prefer their historical adventures inside!). Tours will take place Friday and Saturday, October 2 & 3 at West Cemetery, beginning at 6pm each night. Watch our website, Facebook, and your email for sign up, beginning September 1. The suggested donation for the tours will be \$10.

If you haven't taken this popular tour yet, this is a great year to do it - we have some interesting characters this year!

BHS GAMING CLUB NEWS

Next BHS game day is **Saturday July 18th** and will feature 3 different games:

11am- 2pm: A new **Burn 2d6** campaign starting! The Agents of ALT 255 investigate the paranormal here in our own hometown! Will you survive the madness that lurks underneath everyday life? Be part of the expansion of the award-winning game Burn 2d6 as we create a new setting to be shared with the gaming community!

10am-2pm: 5th Edition D&D continuing campaign.

10am- 2pm: White Box – In this old school dungeon crawl, delve into a mine overrun with monsters, investigate the ancient ruins within, and get out alive-- if you can. A dungeon crawl for 4-6 players using the White Box OSR rules with premade characters. THAC0 not required.

Any questions, contact Jason Messier at 860-841-1141 or jasonmessierct@gmail.com

Play in one of our games, or bring your game and friends to our tables!

D&D, Burn 2d6, Enclave, Call of Cthulhu, Ribhian Games- we've got a table for everyone! If you need a space to host your own game – this is it!

We are always looking for more Dungeon Masters and players! Contact Jay @ 860-841-1141 or jaymess@rocketmail.com for more info, or to arrange a new game!

We also collaborate with Bristol's own Worthwhile Reads to present a gaming club. The next meeting for that club is **Monday, July 6 at 5 - 7pm at Bristol Historical Society**. Next month, we're back at Worthwhile Reads (1 Richmond Place) on **Monday, August 3, 5 - 7pm**. If you haven't checked out Worthwhile Reads, you should! They have a great selection of books and their open hours can be found on their Facebook page.

INTO THE RIVER PROJECT

Into the River is an ongoing project exploring the 1896 Pequabuck Railroad Bridge Disaster, in which six railroad workers died while replacing an old, decaying bridge during a fierce winter storm. The program uses video, archival photographs, maps, and first hand accounts to tell the story of the storm, the two near misses that occurred only hours before the collapse, and the rescue efforts that followed.

The presentation debuted in June in New Britain to a strong response and will travel to Rocky Hill and several other Connecticut communities over the coming months. The project will return home to Bristol for a full presentation on Friday, November 6, where the story will be told in the town where it happened.

BRISTOL SPORTS HALL OF FAME

The BSHOF annual scholarship golf tournament will be held on **Monday, July 20** at **Pequabuck Golf Course**. Special closet-to-pin golf balls can be purchased for \$50. First place receives \$1000 cash, second place winner receives a round of golf with carts for four, and third place receives \$100 cash. As a result of this tournament, the HOF is able to award \$12,000 in scholarships each year to local high school students and awarded \$5000 in grants to local non-profit sport organizations. More information about golf ball purchase and other tournament info can be obtained by contacting Don Soucy at 860-384-0256 or at drs.1947@yahoo.com.



MUM FESTIVAL PHOTO CONTEST

As part of the Mum Festival season of events, the Bristol Historical Society is excited to host its 5th annual photo contest. Photos will be on display for visitors' viewing pleasure in the Marquee Tent on the festival grounds. Photo judging will be done by a jury of local professional photographers. The photos will be on display during the festival hours; Friday, September 25, 5:00 – 9:00 pm, Saturday, September 26, 12:00 – 9:00pm and Sunday, September 27, 12:00 – 2:00pm. Awards will be presented to the best photos. Entrants are encouraged to collect their photos between 2 and 5pm on Sunday but may also retrieve them from the Bristol Historical Society later in the week during its open hours or by appointment.

For more details and an entrance form please see the Mum Festival Photo Contest event on our website (bristolhistoricalsociety.org) under the Events tab. There are two divisions, Youth (0 to 17) and Adult (18 and up) and seven categories to choose from. 1) Portraits (formal and informal), 2) Architecture, landscapes and seascapes, 3) Action (sports, kids at play, etc., anything with movement.), 4) Plants and Agriculture 5) Animals, 6) Photos from previous Mum Festivals, 7) Candid, 8) Miscellaneous and 9) Edited with computer software. Each year, this contest is getting more and more popular, so we are limiting the number of photos you can enter to one per category. Thank you for your understanding. For any questions, please call or text Steve Vastola at 860-944-6567 or email him at Activities@BristolHistoricalSociety.org.



IT'S TIME.

★ ★ ★

HONORING WOMEN WHO SERVED

PAST ★ PRESENT ★ FUTURE

For more than a century, women have answered our nation's call to serve. They have worn the uniform in times of war and peace, cared for the wounded, supported military operations around the world, and stood shoulder to shoulder with their fellow servicemembers in defense of our country.

Yet in Bristol's Veteran's Memorial Boulevard Park—dedicated in 1921 and home to numerous monuments honoring military service—not a single monument has been dedicated to the women who served.

Over the past two years, the Memorial Military Museum has focused its research, exhibits, and public programs on Bristol's women veterans. In uncovering their stories, one thing has become clear: it's time.

It's time to honor the women who served, the women who serve today, and the women who will serve tomorrow. The Bristol Military Women's Monument Committee has been formed and a site has been chosen. **Stay tuned for more details.**

BRISTOL MILITARY WOMEN'S MONUMENT COMMITTEE

Richard Carello ★ Carol Denehy ★ Dave Carello ★ Ellie Wilson ★ Bob Barnett
Catherine Schilling ★ Neil Supranovich ★ Tim Gamache ★ Scott Rosado ★ Heide Kapral



UPCOMING EVENTS

July

- 4 Fourth of July, Closed
- 6 BHS/Worthwhile Reads Gaming Day, 5-7pm at BHS
- 11 Third Thursday: 250 Years of Buttons, 1-3pm
- 18 BHS Gaming Club 10am-2pm
- 18 BHS @ the Farmers Market, 10am-1pm - Come see us!
- 22 Board Meeting, 6:30pm

August

- 1 BHS @ the Farmers Market, 10am-1pm - Come see us!
- 5 Annual Dinner, 5pm
- 12 National Vinyl Day program, 7pm
- 15 BHS Gaming Club 10am-2pm
- 22 BHS @ the Farmers Market, 10am-1pm - Come see us!
- 26 Board Meeting, 6:30pm

September

- 12 BHS @ the Farmers Market, 10am-1pm - Come see us!
- 17 Third Thursday: Mister Beach's Odyssey, 7pm
- 23 Board Meeting, 6:30pm
- 25 BHS @ the Mum Festival, 5-9pm - Come see us!
- 26 BHS @ the Mum Festival, 12-9pm - Come see us!
- 27 BHS @ the Mum Festival, 12-5pm - Come see us!

CHARITABLE DONATIONS WITH QUALIFIED DISTRIBUTIONS

Do you have one or more IRAs (Individual Retirement Accounts)?

Are you at the age that you are required to take an RMD (Required Minimum Distribution) each year from these IRAs? Are you aware of there is a government program that helps you support qualified charities—at NO cost to you? In most cases, the federal and state taxes you have to pay each year on your RMDs (or even the RMDs themselves) can easily be diverted to an eligible 501(c)(3) charitable organization at absolutely, positively NO charge to you! This means that the \$100 or \$500 or \$1500 (or whatever amount) of taxes you owe Connecticut and/or the IRS would, instead, be sent directly to a nonprofit (like BHS) by your IRA custodian (e.g., Fidelity, Vanguard, Schwab).

Talk to your financial advisor! You simply need to direct your IRA fund manager/custodian to send a check directly to BHS (not to you!) rather than to the IRS or CT Revenue Services!!

Every penny that would go to the government would, instead, be donated to BHS at NO charge to you! YOU still receive the full amount of your RMD but the federal and state taxes you would normally have to deduct go directly to your designated charity.