

# BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPRING NEWSLETTER

Vol. 8, Issue 1 – March, 2023 – May, 2023

## *From the President's Desk*



[www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org)  
P.O. Box 1393 / 98 Summer Street  
Bristol, CT. 06011-1393/860-583-6309

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This year, the Historical Society has launched “In Retrospect: Day by Day,” an email and online feature that presents a snippet of Bristol history corresponding to each day’s date. Already we’ve recalled epic snowstorms, famous—and less famous, but quite interesting—citizens, organizations, past trolley lines, and wrestled with the fact that North Main Street of today is very different from the North Main Street in the first half of the 20th century. I am immensely grateful to all who have put this project together. I thank Bob Adamczyk especially for doing an amazing amount of research to ensure that a broad range of topics is represented (and for patiently explaining the old North Main Street thing to me once again with visual aids...)

We hope to bring a little bit of Bristol history to members and friends, but through this experience, we have learned things here at the Society as well. We’ve learned more about so many of these topics as we’ve dug into them. Most of all, though, we have reaffirmed something that we already knew: Bristol is a city that cares about its history! We have appreciated the feedback, the questions, and the response the feature has received. We love knowing that these snapshots of the past are making their way to people who no longer live in Bristol and that people are enjoying them. It isn’t really a surprise, though. We have known that Bristol residents care about their history from talking to the over the years. As Bristol moves forward, especially in the downtown area, we hope that this strong affinity for the city’s past informs its future.

It should be no surprise that a city this invested in its history has long had a city historian. We are lucky to have had members in that role all along. I want to take a moment to express our gratitude to Bob Montgomery who served Bristol in this role for over two decades. I am especially grateful as I rely on his articles over the years to fill in the (vast) gaps in my knowledge. I also want to take a moment to congratulate Tom Dickau who stepped into the role at the end of last year. Tom is a past BHS president and one of the most knowledgeable and dedicated historians I know. I look forward to seeing what he brings to role! His article about the role and his initial thoughts appears here as well.

Best wishes for an early spring,

*Maya Bringe, President*

## ***SAVE THE DATE!!***

The annual tag sale is scheduled for Friday, May 26, 2023, from 9am to 1pm and Saturday, May 27 from 9am to 12pm. The Society is now accepting any donations of items from members and others. Please deliver items during our open hours on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10am to 2pm. We will be calling our volunteers to work on the Tag Sale to help with set-up and pricing items. We will be working on pricing and set-up from May 22nd to May 25th in the mornings and/or afternoons. You can set your own hours.

## ***ANNUAL CAMPAIGN***

The 2022–2023 Annual Campaign is well underway! If you have not already, please consider donating this year. Annual Campaign funds allow us to bring programs and events to the public throughout the year, to preserve artifacts in our collection of the city's history, and to maintain the largest artifact in our collection: 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 at [www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org) and are tax deductible.

## ***ANNUAL MEETING UPDATE***

The Annual Meeting for the Society will be held at 6 pm, **Wednesday, May 24, 2023**. Voting will take place for the following offices:

Second Vice President  
Secretary  
Treasurer  
Director of the Board (multiple openings)

Members can make nominations for these positions during the nomination period which begins on Friday, April 7, 2023, and closes Monday, April 24, 2023. Nomination forms will be available by email, in the office during open office hours. or on our website ([www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org)). Candidates must be members in good standing and must have been members for a year to be considered. At the close of the nomination period, the Committee will confirm with nominees that they are willing to serve and publish member nominations and its own slate of candidates by May 2, 2023.

If you have any questions about the election process, please contact Steve Vastola ([veeeman@sbcglobal.net](mailto:veeeman@sbcglobal.net)). The full set of bylaws with the latest amendments is available at [www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org) and in the office at the Society at 98 Summer Street.

## **MARCH PROGRAM HONORS BRISTOL WOMEN AND THEIR "FIRSTS"**

The March 16th Third Thursday program will mark "Women's History Month" by celebrating the accomplishments and firsts of Bristol women over the last 200 years.

Presented by BHS member Ellen Zoppo-Sassu who was the "first female" to be elected Mayor, the program is sponsored in part by a grant from the Women & Girls Fund at the Main Street Community Fund. The goal of the grant is to invite Girl Scout troops to listen, take a tour, do an activity to earn a badge, and meet some of the inspiring women in our community.

"From Silpah, a slave belonging to local farmer William Jerome to Philena Skinner Peck and Erma Funk, Bristol has many interesting women who made history," said Zoppo-Sassu. Or should we say "*herstory*?" Doors will open at 6:30. Seating is limited to the first hundred that enter. Admission is free for BHS members and Girl Scouts and their parents/guardians; a \$5 donation is requested for non-members. Parking is available behind the building. Refreshments will be served.



## **SCHOLARSHIP PASTA SUPPER**

Our annual scholarship pasta supper was held at Parkside Café on Thursday, February 16th from 5–7pm. Our gracious hosts Leanne and J.R. Rusgrove provided a delicious buffet of salad, pasta, chicken, meatballs and sausage. Guests were allowed to bring their own wine or partake of the complimentary wine or beer that was offered in addition to the traditional beverages of soda and coffee that was served. Noreen Zurell once again treated us to her delicious variety of cupcakes for dessert. Congratulations to Janet Mellon, our fifty-fifty winner. Thank you to all who attended and to those who made a donation.

The recipient of this year's scholarship winner will be awarded at our annual dinner scheduled for August 9th at the Bristol Historical Society. More details on the annual dinner will be covered in the June, July, August newsletter.

Donations to the Scholarship Fund are accepted throughout the year. Our hours are Wednesdays 10am–2pm pm and Saturdays 10am–2 pm. Our mailing address is BHS, P.O. Box 1393, Bristol, CT. 06011-1393.

*Eleanor Wilson, Program Chair.*

## **APRIL THIRD THURSDAY EVENT**

### *When the Bells Told: Bristol and the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918*

On Saturday, Sept. 21, 1918, in the quiet of his office on Prospect Street, Bristol's Health Officer, 54-year-old Dr. H.D. Brennan, is hard at work.

Dr. Brennan, Bristol's first health officer, has just received documentation from the State Board of Health notifying Bristol of its first two Spanish influenza cases.

Within 48 hours, both will die, and in 40 days, over 100 Bristol residents will perish due to the Spanish flu, while more than 2,000 become ill.

Why did it happen?

How did Bristol react?

What were the symptoms?

Who were the victims?

Find out on Thursday, April 20 at 7 PM, at the Bristol Historical Society on Summer Street as BHS Board Member Rit Carter presents: *When the Bells Told: Bristol and the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918*. Doors open at 6:30. Seating is limited to the first hundred that enter. Admission is free for BHS members a \$5 donation is requested for non-members. Parking is available behind the building. Refreshments will be served.

## **SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION**

Do you know a college-bound Bristol senior interested in history with an interest in history? The Historical Society gives a scholarship each year of \$1500 to a Bristol resident heading to a two- or four-year college/university. Applicants in one of the local high schools can find the application in their guidance offices and those who do not attend a local high school can find the application online at our website ([bristolhistoricalsociety.org](http://bristolhistoricalsociety.org)).

Applicants are not required to have an interest in pursuing history in the future, but must have a minimum of a 3.0 average for 7 semesters. Applicants will be asked to write an essay based on a historical topic featured in one of the Society's annual ornaments. Ornaments can be viewed at the Society during our open hours Wednesday and Saturday from 10am to 2pm or call 860-583-6309 to arrange a time to see the ornament collection. Applications are due April 7.



## **MAY THIRD THURSDAY PROGRAM MAY 18, 2023, 7PM**

The Bristol Historical Society and the Memorial Military Museum are co-sponsoring a program on the history of the Purple Heart, a silent reminder of heroic deeds and CT's role in those events. All three honorees were from CT when George Washington presented the Badge of Military Merit (now known as the Purple Heart) in May 1783 in Newburgh, New York. Two dogs, Chips & Sgt. Stubby, each received Purple Hearts for wounds received in World War II. During the Korean War, a horse named Sergeant Reckless was awarded 2 Purple Hearts. Service animals can no longer receive the same medals earned by human service members.

The presenter of this program will be Gerard Monaghan, a retired Army Reserve Lt. Colonel, who served with the 76th (Training) Public Affairs Office during the Purple Heart Bicentennial. You might have read his article which appeared in the Connecticut Magazine, May 2022.

We have reached out to several sources, but as far as we can tell, there is no complete list of Purple Heart recipients in the country or in Bristol. **SO we would like your help** in compiling a list of Bristol recipients, male and female. To date we have extracted names from the list of deceased in the "*Bristol, CT. in World War II*" book. We would like to have a list compiled in observance of Purple Heart Day, which is August 7th. If you know of a family member, relative or friend please call Ellie Wilson @ 860-582-4792 or leave a message with recipient's name, what war or conflict was served when the honor was bestowed and a telephone number if further information is needed.

Seating for this program is restricted to 100, so RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED. Please call the Bristol Historical Society @ 860-583-6309 to register. The program is free, but a free will offering will be accepted. Refreshments will be served.

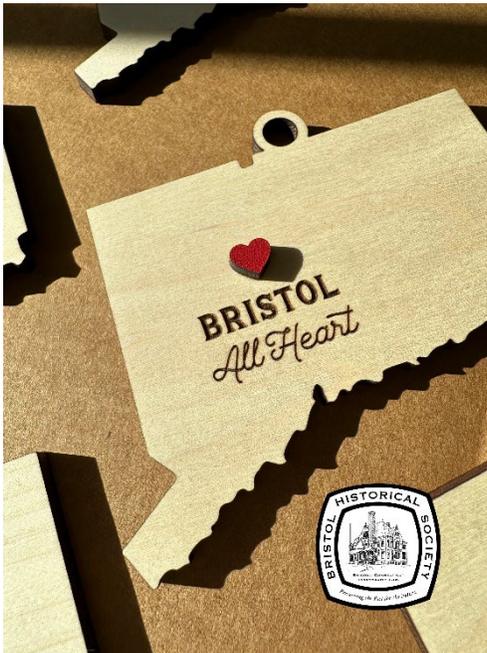
*Eleanor Wilson, Program Chair.*

## **2023 BHS ANNUAL DINNER**

Mark your Calendar! The date will be Wednesday, August 9<sup>th</sup>. The place will be the Great Room at the Bristol Historical Society. Stay tuned for more to come.

## **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL INFORMATION**

Membership renewal starts June 1st and runs thru June 30th. The past few years we have included the renewal form when we mailed out the nomination ballots. This has worked very well with 95% of our annual members renewing. However, because of high postage rates we cannot mail back your membership cards unless you send us a stamp when you send back your membership renewal should you want your card right away. Otherwise, we will include your card in the Annual Appeal mailing which is made in the fall.



## **A NEW GIFT SHOP ITEM**

ALL HEART BRISTOL is a new limited edition keepsake ornament now available for sale at the Bristol Historical Society for \$15. This design, by our own member Paula O'Keefe, is made of lightweight wood shaped like the State of Connecticut, with a red heart designating Bristol, and the wording All Heart Bristol. This would make a perfect hostess gift, or a gift for your neighbor, friends, and relatives or perhaps as a souvenir for your visiting guests. They are available during open hours on Wednesday 10am–2pm or on Saturday 10am–2pm. More information about ordering these ornaments online will be available soon.

*Eleanor Wilson*

## **BRISTOL BSA SCOUTERS' REUNION**

On June 10, 2023, in conjunction with Connecticut Open House Day, the Bristol Historical Society will be hosting a Bristol BSA Scouters' Reunion. Bristol has always been a scouting-enthusiastic city. For many years scouting was so big in Bristol that Bristol had its own council. As an example, the 1960 Annual Scouters' Day dinner program in the Bristol Historical Society collection lists 45 units; Cub packs, Boy Scout troops, Adventure posts, and even a Sea Scout ship! Plan to come to the Bristol Historical Society to view a display of Bristol-related scout memorabilia from 10am to 2pm. Then attend the afternoon program of reminiscing as people share stories of their scouting experiences. Afterward stay for the "Cracker Barrel" reception and catch up with old friends. More details to come. We are doing a census of who in our membership were in Scouts. If you were in Scouts, please email your unit number, your meeting place, and anything else you might like to share. If you have any memorabilia, you could lend the Society for our display, if you would like to share a story of yours, or if you would just like to be kept abreast of the details as we get closer, please let us know. The email address is [activities@bristolhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:activities@bristolhistoricalsociety.org) or call Steve Vastola at 860-944-6567

## **BRISTOL SPORTS HALL OF FAME NEWS**

The Bristol Sports Hall of Fame welcomes Aaron Weber as a new director of their board. Aaron is the East Region Little League director located on Mix Street in Bristol. Welcome Aaron.

The annual BSHOF Jack Hines/Scholar Athlete awards dinner will be held on Sunday, March 26 at the DoubleTree in Bristol. Over 100 student athletes will be honored and 6-\$1500 scholarships will be awarded to local high school students. In addition, The Joe McGinn Award will also be awarded. More information on this will be provided in the next newsletter.

The BSHOF annual scholarship golf tournament will be held on Monday, July 24 at Chippanee Country Club. Prior to tee time, a closet-to-pin contest will be held. Balls can be purchased for \$50. The winning ball holder will receive \$1000 in cash. Second place will receive \$100 cash and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> places will receive golf packages for four at area golf courses. For more information on the golf tournament please contact Don Soucy at 860-384-0256 or at [drs.1947@yahoo.com](mailto:drs.1947@yahoo.com).

The hall of fame is seeking more information on events held at the Bristol Polish Club Arena for a new scrapbook page prior to becoming a soccer venue. Basketball, roller skating, and wrestling pictures info are needed. Please contact Bob Kalat at [rkalat@aol.com](mailto:rkalat@aol.com) or at 860-877-0403.

More information on hall of fame events as well as past inductee speeches, scrapbook pages, and much more info can be viewed on our website at [bshof.org](http://bshof.org).

## ***DID YOU KNOW ABOUT OUR EVENT ROOM RENTALS?***

*The perfect location for your next social or business function!*

- **Business & Civic Functions:** Meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops, lectures
- **Clubs & Groups:** Monthly meetings, collectors' shows, rehearsals, fundraisers
- **Funeral Gatherings:** Luncheons and/or receptions
- **Social Events:** Receptions, showers or reunions as well as graduation, birthday, anniversary & retirement parties

Complimentary use of our kitchen, Wi-Fi, piano, microphone & A/V equipment and pull-down screen can be arranged.

**Contact BHS for more information and rental pricing  
(special discount to members!):**

[rentals@BristolHistoricalSociety.org](mailto:rentals@BristolHistoricalSociety.org) or 860-583-6309.

## ***THE BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL ORNAMENT***

The Bristol Historical Society is proud to dedicate our 2023 annual ornament to honor two community service agencies that protect and secure our safety: The Bristol Police and Bristol Fire Departments.

The two-sided pewter ornament will picture the Bristol Police and Bristol Fire Department badges on opposite sides. The inscription Bristol Historical Society and 2023 will be located on both sides. A brief history of each department will be included with each ornament. More information will be published on the BHS website, Facebook and in future newsletters.



## ***SAVE THE DATE: CEMETERY COMMISSION PROGRAM MARCH 11***

Did you know that the Historical Society has maps of a variety of places: rivers, ponds, rails, canals, and that these include older and newer graveyards and cemeteries? The six old graveyards in the Bristol area are truly outdoor museums and contain a wealth of knowledge. The Bristol Cemetery Commission invites you to learn more about these at a program on March 11th with a variety of speakers at the Main Branch of Bristol Public Library from 10:00am to 3:00pm. This is a free event, and more information will be available shortly in the Bristol Press and by email.

Mike Saman, *Chair of the Bristol Cemetery Commission*

## ***BRISTOL CITY HISTORIAN***

The Bristol Historical Society should be proud that the first three official City of Bristol Historians have been selected from our organization.

Dorothy Manchester, the first city historian, created great interest within her Bristol Press column describing what happened, one hundred, seventy-five, fifty and twenty-five years ago. She also served diligently on activities and projects within BHS and the community.

Bob Montgomery, who served in this capacity for twenty-two years, continued this column, as well as expanding his writing at the Bristol Press into other historic areas. People read his columns not only because of the quality of his writing but also for the constant recognition he gives to local residents. Bob's contributions to BHS, the Bristol Sports Hall of Fame, and other organizations within the community are certainly unparalleled and appreciated.

It is a great honor that I was nominated by Mayor Jeffrey Caggiano and approved by the city council as the third Bristol City Historian. This is a two-year appointed position.

After researching the duties of the position, I found that there has never been a formal job description. The drafting of a description will be one of my first tasks. It will be presented to the appropriate personnel for input and final approval. This document will enable all successors to understand the duties and significance of this position.

Tom Dickau, *City Historian*

### ***In Retrospect: Day by Day, An Excerpt***

February 29 - An American's Century

1904—Harry Jackson, a former runaway slave and Bristol resident, dies in his home on Matthews Street at over 100 years old. Born into slavery in Patterson, NJ, Jackson did not know his exact age. Before his death, “Old Jack,” as he was known, said he was no younger than 102 and no older than 107. In the late 1840s he escaped to upstate New York, where northern abolitionists protected him. Around 1850 he became a farmhand on the farm of Elijah Finkle, whose daughter Mariette and son-in-law, Aaron Dresser, lived in the household. He would remain with the family for over half a century. When the Dresser family moved to Bristol in the late 1870s, Old Jack joined them and continued to farm. He was well liked around town and known for greeting everyone with a hearty and friendly hello.

In Jackson's lifetime, he witnessed America go from 17 states to 45. He was alive during the terms of 25 presidents, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and the Spanish-American War, yet would not be a full citizen of this country until close to modern retirement age.

Harry Jackson is buried in West Cemetery.

The topic for February's “bonus” post is from a long-format article in The Bristol Edition by Board member Rit Carter. The full article about Jackson can be found here

(<https://www.bristoledition.org/blog/2021/02/21/bristols-runaway-slaves-part-1-harry-jackson/>)