

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ASBURY PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**JOIN UP OR
RENEW YOUR
MEMBERSHIP!**

See Page 4 for Details!

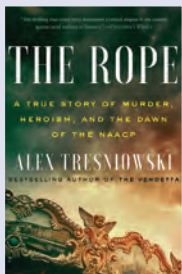
*Where the Past
Meets the Future*

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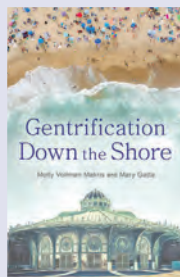
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Read all about it...and be a part of it!

*Celebrate Asbury Park in words,
and IN PERSON on April 21!*



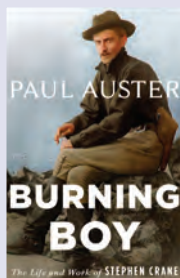
Is there another town of the same small size as Asbury Park that continues to inspire so many written words? The past couple of years have seen the publication of numerous books on topics related to the city and some of its most famous personalities — from studies of 19th century true crime, Jim Crow, and African American activism (*The Rope*, Alex Tresniowski) and 21st century social trends (*Gentrification Down the Shore*, Molly Vollman Makris and Mary Elizabeth Gatta), to big-picture perspectives on the tides of change in this seaside city (Helen Pike's *A Century of Change*; Daniel Wolf's expanded *Fourth of July Asbury Park*).



There are memoirs by musical movers and shakers (Stevie Van Zandt's *Unrequited Infatuations*; Norman Seldin's *You Don't Know Me*); biographical studies of Stephen Crane (*Burning Boy* by Paul Auster; a new edition of *Badge of Courage* by Linda H. Davis) plus more forthcoming additions to the ever-growing library of Asbury-centric works — and on Thursday evening, April 21, 2022, the trustees of the Asbury Park Historical Society will be joined by members of the **Asbury Book Cooperative** as your guides for a Book Tour through some of the most outstanding volumes of recent seasons.

Originally announced as a virtual offering in January of this year, the presentation is now a public-invited, free-admission, *in person* event at the **Asbury Park Public Library**, First and Grand Avenues. Scheduled for 7:00 p.m., it's a chance to meet APHS officers and local writers, and find out more about our organization as we formally welcome new members to the fold. Trustees will be on premises with books and materials of local interest, as well as membership applications — and attendees will have the opportunity to find out more about the Asbury Book Co-Op (now on the move to a more spacious storefront on Cookman Avenue) and the programs of their city's public library, now under the direction of **Kathleen Melgar**.

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Seeking ideas, energy, and volunteer spirit, as we move forward!

"How can I help?" It's a question that many of you have answered by expressing a willingness to assist with the set-up of special presentations and community events. Others have volunteered their expertise and experience in areas such as fundraising, social media, and interior decorating. Still others have ideas on how to form alliances dedicated to preserving our city's oldest structures and iconic landmarks. The Asbury Park Historical Society has heard your voices — and on April 21, we welcome one and all to an evening designed for "Getting to Know You and Us."

Following a too-long interval of virtual Zoom meetings and cautiously closed conferences, the APHS is once more opening the door to our friends and supporters — and at our **Annual Members Meeting** on Thursday, April 21, 2022, the Society will provide opportunities for our members to become actively involved in the Historical Society once again.

Over the past few years, new and repeat members have shared in writing their ideas, and specified areas in which they would like to lend a helping hand. Come to our 7:00 p.m. event at the **Asbury Park Public Library** at First and Grand Avenues, and you will have the chance to meet each of our committee chairs, and begin preparations for putting those ideas and plans into action.

During the evening, which will also feature a special "Book Tour" presentation (described in detail on this page), current members in attendance will be asked to cast their votes for the three board members who are up for reelection this year.

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Visit us online at aphistoricalociety.org

Buried treasures, opening doors, and traveling history...



On a chilly December 19, 2021, The Stephen Crane House served as setting for a special ceremony marking the burial of an official **Asbury Park Sesquicentennial Time Capsule**. Scheduled to be opened in the year 2071 (the bicentennial of the city's founding), the carefully curated cache of materials representing all aspects of local life was assembled for the occasion by a committee chaired by **Susan Rosenberg**, and boasted the input of numerous city officials, residents, business owners, journalists and students. Attendees enjoyed birthday cake courtesy of **Celia Morrisette's** Sesquicentennial Committee, plus a champagne toast, and hot chocolate inside and outside the house...and News 12 NJ cameras rolled as Asbury Park Mayor **John Moor** (pictured with shovel, with former APHS president **Don Stine** holding plaque) gave a special dedication speech, while **Kay Harris** offered these words on behalf of the Asbury Park Historical Society and Asbury Park Museum:

“‘Where the Past Meets the Future’...those words are more than just our Historical Society motto. On this day they stand as a mission statement; a

dedication and a commitment to building a bridge across the seas of time and the tides of change. It's a bridge built of education and outreach; of a call to tell our stories. Those stories, and the voices they represent, are all part of the music here in this place that's long been defined by its diverse soundtrack. Whether stored in a large metal box, or simply shared from one generation to the next, they are our most cherished record of real life in a small but significant city.

“As we close out the 150th anniversary year of Asbury Park's founding, we extend this greeting to all those who will be part of this community in its bicentennial year of 2071...the people who make their homes in its neighborhoods, who teach and learn in its schools, who conduct their business in a place that has always welcomed the bold new idea. We thank the stewards of our history, and all those who engage with their neighbors through their city government, their houses of worship, their clubs and organizations, and the many ways in which we work together to forge solutions, find our collective voice, and face toward a future that works to the benefit of everyone.”



Avon Calling: On February 18, some 15 members of the **Woman's Club of Avon By the Sea** played a significant part in the recent history of the Stephen Crane House, when they became the first group of that size to visit our historic home since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Board members **Kay Harris**, **Susan Rosenberg** and **Tom Cheseck** hosted the guests for a get-acquainted discussion and house tour...while the ladies were also the very first audience to view a new video on Crane's life and times entitled “*Sir, I Exist!*” Created expressly for the purpose of screening for school groups and other organizations, the 30-minute documentary is based on the in-person lectures delivered to generations of visitors by **Frank D'Alessandro**. The former Crane House owner appears on camera in the video, which was written and narrated by Tom Cheseck and produced by **Nate McAllister** of **Asbury Park TV**. The program is available to screen for students, historical societies and other clubs or organizations with an interest in visiting Crane's home, and group tours can once again be arranged by calling 732-361-0189.

On March 16, the **Grammy Museum Experience** at Newark's **Prudential Center** hosted a special closing reception for **Bruce Springsteen Live!**, a limited-time installation detailing how The Boss became one of the greatest live performers in music history — a story that intersects in great part with Bruce's adopted spiritual homeland of Asbury Park. Such longtime Springsteen colleagues and chroniclers as **Jon Landau**, **Dave Marsh**, and **Garry Tallent** were among the attendees at the exhibit curated by **Eileen Chapman** — APHS trustee, Asbury Park city councilwoman, and director of the **Bruce Springsteen Archive and Center for American Music** at **Monmouth University**. The installation travels to the Grammy Museum in L.A. in Fall 2022, with the materials eventually housed at the new **My Hometown** exhibition space, dedicated to Bruce (and co-curated by Chapman) with a scheduled 2024 opening in Freehold Borough. In the meantime, she is among the music-scene movers and shakers at work on an expanded edition of the AP Museum's **One Voice** pop-up exhibit, continuing on display inside the lobby of the historic **Berkeley Oceanfront Hotel**.

In Memoriam: Mary Damato, 1927 - 2022



(Left) Mary Damato places a commemorative wreath at the Historical Society's monument to the victims of the SS Morro Castle tragedy, in a 2018 ceremony. (Right) Mary and fellow APHS "sailor girls" display their First Place Float trophy, won for the APHS entry in the city's 2007 4th of July Parade.

On February 10, the Asbury Park Historical Society bade farewell to a great friend, a longtime supporter, and our longest serving board member, with the passing of **Mary T. Damato** at age 94.

As the organization's treasurer for more than 15 years, Mary played a major role in helping the Society transition from a "homeless" group of local history buffs, to an active and engaged presence in the Asbury Park community. Moving here from West Orange in 1984, the native of Newark became a resident of Asbury Park during a time when many people had begun to write off our city's future. But like so many others, Mary saw a way forward through the appreciation of the rich and colorful history of her new home...and when the call went out for volunteers in the newly revived Historical Society, Mary brought her years of experience in the banking industry to the service of the fledgling organization.

Prior to her retirement, Mary spent decades as an officer of Howard Savings Bank, for whom she managed the Sea Girt, NJ location and oversaw other branches around the state. During this time, the working mother of two also acquired her first experience as an organization treasurer, for an alliance of New Jersey women banking professionals that worked to foster career opportunities for their fellow female co-workers.

Upon joining the APHS (as well as the Asbury Park Garden Club, another of her passions), Mary quickly became a popular presence whenever the Society took part in colorful parades and parties. She was also a crucial

contributor to such APHS projects as the restoration of the TenBroeck Fountain at Library Square Park, the establishment of the Morro Castle monument outside the Paramount Theatre, and the move to a permanent home at the Stephen Crane House. Even serious injury in a 2015 car accident couldn't keep Mary from addressing her duties with the dedication and attention to detail that all who knew her came to expect and appreciate.



Speaking from her home in Florida, Mary's niece Carol Noe remembered her as "a wonderful aunt, a very hard working and cultured woman, who would take us to places like Broadway shows and the World's Fair to expand our horizons; teach us that same love of life."

"She was an adventurous person who loved to travel," Ms. Noe added. "She visited many different places; sailed on the QE2, rode the rapids, went skiing, and went hot-air ballooning over France."

"And she loved animals...especially her ducks, who lived in the lake behind her home!"

At a 2016 anniversary dinner for which Mary was the evening's guest of honor, the APHS noted that "Mary's warm smile and affinity for local life have continued to illuminate many a community event, and we are humbled and happy to call her a colleague and a friend."

Mary Damato is survived by her daughter Michelle Priest (son Jay predeceased her a few years ago), and was interred on February 15 at Saint Catharine Cemetery, West Chicago Boulevard in Sea Girt.



(Left) Mary was among the volunteers who took an active role in the 2004 cleanup and restoration of the long-neglected Library Square Park. (Center) Mary is pictured with former APHS board member Frank D'Alessandro, and (Right) with Werner Baumgartner at a 2016 APHS event honoring her years of service.

Public Programs from the Historical Society

• **MAY 15, 2022:** Originally announced as a companion to January's schedule of events in the Light of Day Winterfest — but cancelled when the entire LoD slate was pushed rock, stock and barrel to March of this year — an intimate "Songwriters at the Crane House" afternoon of acoustic music will now be presented on Sunday, May 15, as a stand-alone event showcasing some of the area's most talented songsmiths in the setting of our recently renovated Lecture Room performance space.

Produced in partnership with the nonprofit **Musicians on a Mission** organization, the 3:00 p.m. event welcomes back MoaM co-founder **Brenda Wirth** and her husband, singer-songwriter **George Wirth** (pictured), for a music matinee that will help raise funds for our Historical Society operations. The house concert from the creators of the acclaimed "Rosie's Cafe" series will feature George in performance with fellow artists **Regina Goldy** and **Jonathan Tea**...with complimentary refreshments served, and proceeds benefitting the ongoing renovations and programs at the Crane House. Seating is limited, with Covid-related safety policies observed and admission (\$20) reserved via rosies-cafe@comcast.net.



• **EVERYTHING "OLDE" IS NEW AGAIN:** Returning after a two-year hiatus, the **Weekend in Old Monmouth** series of self-guided historic tours invites all members of the public to visit many of the area's oldest and most unique homes and meeting places. The Historical Society's **Stephen Crane House** headquarters at 508 Fourth Avenue will once again be the sole stop in Asbury Park on the weekend of Saturday, April 30 (10 am - 5 pm) and Sunday, May 1 (12-5 pm), during the event coordinated by the **Monmouth County Historical Commission**. Attendees are invited to view the most recent improvements to the property, take in an informative slideshow on the colorful history of the site (known variously as Arbutus Cottage, The Florence, and the Crane House), and speak in person to our docents. Check in at visitmonmouth.com for full details on the tour routes and participating sites.

• Also in the works: the return of **Asbury Park's Annual Art on the Boardwalk** event, dedicated in memory of founder **Ray Sternesky** and slated for Sunday, August 21 (with a rain date of August 28). Watch for a Call For Artists announcement in advance of the summertime staple, coordinated by **Teddy Chomko** and recently re-branded in honor of the beloved local artist and longtime APHS supporter who passed in 2021.

Book Tour event *From page 1*



Complimentary refreshments will be available at the 7:00 program, the centerpiece of which finds our organization's board members and supporters discussing their favorite published works on subjects that are close to the heart of anyone with a passion for all things Asbury Park. It's a great introduction for interested readers...and, in a potentially exciting development, a possible first step toward the establishment of a regularly scheduled **Asbury Park Historical Book Club**.

Stay tuned for other announcements of great interest to the public — check our official website (aphistoricalociety.org), social media, and email blasts for updates on the April 21 Book Tour event — and feel free to share your own thoughts and recommendations on the printed legacy of "little but loud" Asbury Park!

Annual Member Meeting *From page 1*

The Historical Society board, which normally numbers eleven officers and trustees, presently has a vacancy created by the recent passing of longtime board member **Mary Damato** (see page 3). While the seat will remain open for the time being, an announcement will be made at a future date regarding the process of filling that vacancy.

Having just marked the 150th anniversary of its 1871 founding by James A. Bradley, the seaside city of Asbury Park stands on the brink of another new chapter in its "roller-coaster" history — a moment in which question marks hover over the future of many of its landmark public venues, commercial buildings, and houses of worship; even as the APHS and other nonprofit entities are working harder than ever before to share the stories of this unique place with generations of the general public.

This is the point where the past meets the future — and this is your chance to be part of it all. In the words of APHS president **Kay Harris**, "We look forward to seeing you on April 21st. Please feel free to bring along a friend!"

The Asbury Park Historical Society

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Join up or renew your membership today!

Contact **SUSAN SKOKOS**, membership chair, at skokose@aol.com

Donations accepted via PayPal at aphistoricalociety.org

Call the Stephen Crane House at **732-361-0189**

to schedule a tour...and address correspondence to:

Asbury Park Historical Society, 508 Fourth Ave., Asbury Park, NJ 07712

