

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ASBURY PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Where the Past
Meets the Future*

©R. Sternesky

**JOIN UP OR
RENEW YOUR
MEMBERSHIP!**
See Page 4 for Details!

© 2023 Asbury Park Historical Society **Spring-Summer 2023**

To Protect, Promote and Preserve Our History

*A long-awaited project begins to materialize:
a Historic Preservation Commission for AP*



“So, what are you people *doing* about it?”

It’s a question that the board members of the Historical Society have been asked many times, in many different forms, for as long as our organization has been established. Here in Asbury Park — a city whose relatively brief but brilliant architectural legacy has often been challenged by the forces of the unforgiving elements, the ever-changing economic climate, and the ambitious visions of oceanfront redevelopment — the ongoing battle to protect and preserve our local landmarks remains headline news, to a degree far beyond that found in most other Garden State municipalities.

Whether you’re a lifelong Asbury Parker — or simply among the many generations for whom the City by the Sea has been the source of memories that have lasted a lifetime — the Asbury Park Historical Society understands that each of us shares a proprietary passion for this one-of-a-kind place. The boardwalk and its grand centers of amusement; the hotels, restaurants and clubs; the stores and theatres of the downtown business blocks; the schools and houses of worship; the historic public structures, parks, picturesque gardens, and private homes — all of them have

had a place in the story of our lives. All of them deserve a chorus of voices raised in their support — and here in 2023, a coalition of diverse voices is “doing something about it,” with the first steps toward the formation of the city’s first-ever **Historic Preservation Commission**.

While the Historical Society has long played the role of advocate for the recognition and preservation of our architectural treasures, our status as a grass-roots, all-volunteer nonprofit (with no officially granted powers to enforce our own strongly held recommendations) has seen us function as a committed agency for such advocacy, rather than an entity with legal and regulatory “teeth.”

The Society has played a part in such success stories as the refurbishment of **Library Square Park**, the restoration and public display of vintage signage, the campaign to keep the **Stone Pony** at its lifelong location, and our ongoing stewardship of **The Stephen Crane House**, a textbook Asbury Park “rescue” story initiated by previous private owners **Thomas Hayes** and **Frank D’Alessandro**. But of course, there have been the *unsuccessful* efforts to avert the outright demolition of the **Elks Club/ Charms Building**,

the **Baronet Theatre**, the **Metropolitan Hotel**, and what is perhaps the most-missed signifier of Asbury Park’s public-profile smile, **Palace Amusements**.

At a time when the current status and ultimate fate of the boardwalk’s most iconic features (the **Convention Hall/ Paramount** complex; the **Carousel House**; the **Steam Plant** building and the remaining sections of the **Casino**) are the “hot button” subject of conflict between the city government and private owners **Madison Marquette** — and the news of the Archdiocese of Trenton’s recent sale of the **Church of the Holy Spirit** to a home builder/developer has stirred significant public outcry and layers of litigation — it appears that the long-overdue idea of a Historic Preservation Commission is one whose time has truly come. Recently, the city asked Director of Planning **Michele Alonso** to advise or chair an exploratory committee whose members have been drawn from the ranks of local activism, public service, and professional practice. Meeting separately from (and serving in an advisory capacity to) that committee, a group of APHS officers (**Kay Harris**, **Jim Henry**, **Eileen Chapman**, former president **Don Stine**) and Society members (**Johna Karpinsky**, **Celia Morrisette**) have lent their expertise and energies to discussions of how and when a Commission can take shape — what it could have the legal authority to do, and how it could benefit city-based owners of homes and businesses.

While the various committee members appear to be largely in agreement that such an agency be *regulatory* in nature (as opposed to simply *advisory*), there remain questions from the public that bear addressing. For example, properties that are locally designated as “historic” would need to abide by basic standards of preservation — and relief would need to be sought by property owners, for work that alters a historically designated structure.

As Kay Harris explains, “having an official commission would allow control over what happens to the few iconic structures that have succeeded in escaping the wrecking ball.”

Continued on page 4

Visit us online at aphistoricalociety.org

Kicking off a “Landmark” year for 2023...



Photos by Jen Stine

Every third Thursday in January, the Asbury Park Historical Society has invited the public to its first and biggest monthly meeting of the year, hosted at the city's **Public Library** — a special event that's featured guest speakers, presentations, book signings, and complimentary refreshments. The disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic found the APHS meeting the challenges of an uncertain time by “going virtual” for a Zoom-based event in 2021, a public forum in which members got a first look at a special video (produced by **WeStar Productions**) on the ongoing improvements at The Stephen Crane House. The year 2022 saw a return to live events — albeit delayed to April of that year — with a “Read All About It” tour through a variety of recently published books on local historical topics, and on the evening of the 19th day of 2023, the annual membership meeting returned to its traditional January berth for the first time in three years. The meeting was keyed to the exhibit *Trailblazing Women of Asbury Park*; an installation (then on display inside the library's Bradley Room) created and curated by our “sister” organization, **The Asbury Park Museum**. Actor-director **Lindy Regan** narrated a special slideshow presentation spotlighting those exceptional women who stood as pioneers in the fields of social activ-

ism, business, medicine, arts and letters — and whose groundbreaking work continues to touch every aspect of contemporary life in our greater Asbury Park community.

Another highlight of the evening was the presentation of a special recognition to retired Historical Society president **Don Stine**, a lifelong Asbury Park resident whose work as a local business owner, historian, and founding president of the Downtown Merchants Guild also continues to make its mark upon the greater community. Current APHS president **Kay Harris** and VP **Jim Henry** personally presented Don — who presided over a period of real advancement for the APHS, highlighted by the acquisition and refurbishment of its permanent headquarters at The Crane House, and the establishment of a permanent memorial monument to the **SS Morro Castle** disaster on the boardwalk — with a custom-inscribed wall clock, an award made possible by the thoughtfulness and graciousness of our organization's secretary, **Susan Rosenberg**. “The Asbury Park Historical Society commemorates your years of extraordinary dedication, leadership and vision,” read the inscription to Stine, who remains an active and involved supporter of the organization.



On the grimly festive afternoon of December 11, 2022, the professional players of the **Traveling Literary Theatre** troupe delivered a proper parlor performance of the Charles Dickens chestnut *A Christmas Carol* at our circa-1878 home. A trio of veteran Shore area actors (**Bill King**, **Sandra McLaughlin**, **Charles Deitz**) took on all of the many roles *plus* narration duties in this intimate adaptation...the same version, in fact, that the author himself performed on his famous American tour. The performers donated their time and considerable talents during the matinee event, which raised donations in turn for a worthy local cause: the Holiday Toy Drive coordinated by the all-new, revived and re-energized **Kiwanis Club of Asbury Park**.



On the afternoon of January 8, our in-house theatre at the Stephen Crane House resonated with songs and stories, as master entertainer and globe-trotting raconteur **James Dalton** graced our stage area with the US premiere of his solo stage vehicle, *Asbury Park & Me*. A rollicking entertainment drawn from its creator's experiences as a longtime participant on the Jersey Shore live music scene, the program (which premiered at the UK's Brighton Fringe Festival in 2022) was an early entry on the local slate of events keyed to **Light of Day Winterfest 2023**...selling out our modestly scaled space, and garnering donations for the **Light of Day Foundation** and its ongoing mission of supporting awareness of, and research into, Parkinson's and other neuromuscular diseases.

Follow the Asbury Park Historical Society and The Stephen Crane House on Facebook

...in style, and with customary classic stuff!



February 26 was another Sunday afternoon, and another Stephen Crane houseful of enthusiastic audience members, from familiar friendly faces to welcome “strangers” like Mister **Al Holmes**, who performed for the first time in a “house concert” solo setting...a songs-and-stories format that the veteran West Side musician mastered like he’d been doing it his whole life. The Black History Month event raised funds for the **Asbury Park African-American Music Project (AP-AMP)** and its mission to re-roof and rehabilitate the Springwood Avenue landmark **Turf Club**, the landmark nightspot that Holmes gigged at regularly “back in the day”... and to which he returned when AP-AMP brought live music and positive vibes back to the landmark site at Springwood and Atkins Aves. The program also featured screenings of three documentary videos produced by AP-AMP, on the “History of the Turf Club,” the signature “Stories of Springwood Avenue,” and a special tribute to Dolores Holland, Al Griffin, and **Cliff Johnson** (the legendary local sax man who passed away just days prior to the show).



On March 24, a video class from the **SCAN (Senior Citizens Activities Network) NJ** organization, headed by award-winning filmmaker **Robin Kampf** (the locally lensed, PBS-screened documentary *Love Wins*), visited our headquarters to shoot scenes for a brief doc on the Stephen Crane House. The course instructor (at front in yellow jacket) was behind the camera for the project from senior student **Vincent Bagarozza** (at right) — an entry in a series of presentations on sites of local/ historic interest. Teacher and student conducted an interview with Historical Society trustee **Tom Chesek**, got a close-up look at many of the recent improvements made by the APHS, and reviewed photographs and other materials related to the house once known as Arbutus Cottage. When completed, the documentary short will be available for viewing on SCAN’s YouTube channel, so stay tuned — and in the meantime check the official website (scannj.org), to learn more about the Shore area’s “premier organization... focused on improving the quality of life for people age 55+.”



An entire afternoon spent exploring the life, literary legacy, and legendary localism of the often overlooked fiction writer, poet and memoirist **Margaret Widdemer**? Well, *Why Not?*, as the title of her “best-sold” book boldly asked. On March 26, the daughter of old Asbury Park got a long-overdue Women’s History Month tribute, as Monmouth University Professor **Stanley Blair** was joined by several of his students (plus Crane House friends old ‘n new) for an illuminating presentation on the impact that the author’s early hometown had upon her popular novels and stories. Dr. Blair also screened clips from *The Dream Lady*, a 1918 silent film adaptation of *Why Not?* by female filmmaker Elsie Jane Wilson...and the program was rounded out by **Sandra McLaughlin**, who brought Widdemer’s award winning poems (and passages from her memoirs) to vivid life. All in all, a delightful start to what we hope will be a long-running collaboration between the Historical Society/ Crane House and the English Department at Monmouth!



Another stormy night; another great reason to come in from the rain to the Crane, as the Classically Unread Book Club of the **Asbury Book Co-Op** convened on March 27 for a special session of their monthly discussion group. The topic of discussion was Stephen Crane’s signature work *The Red Badge of Courage* — and the club coordinator **Jordan Hayes** (foreground) led a lively forum in which readers of diverse ages shared their insights into the milestone American novel, here at the very house where the teenaged Crane resided as he began his professional writing career. The group — a project of the nonprofit collective that’s partnered with the APHS on such events as the “Read All About It” Book Tour of Asbury Park at the Public Library (April 2022), and the Crane House visit by celebrated novelist **Paul Auster** (November 2022) — meets on the last Monday of each month, at the Co-Op’s Cookman Avenue store. Contact jordan@asburybookcoop.org to find out more about Classically Unread, as well as the many other groups hosted by our friends at the ABC.

The APHS and friends SPRING into action!



APRIL: The latest in a series of mobile exhibits curated and created by Kay Harris and her **Asbury Park Museum** team opened on April 1st, as **The Berkeley Oceanfront Hotel** hosts *Be Our Guest: The Golden Era of Asbury Park Hotels*. On display through 2023 in the 98 year old hotel's spacious lobby, the multi-media installation offers a centuries-spanning tour (in words, pictures and screened images) on the rise, fall, and rebirth of our resort city's hospitality industry. Watch for details on an official opening reception — and visit the Berkeley to learn about the truly grand lodgings of the Gilded Age; the many ethnic hotels, boarding houses and cottages of old Asbury, and the parade of famous names (including **Lou Gehrig**, pictured above at the Berkeley-Carteret in 1927) who signed the guest books.



In April 2023, the folks at New Jersey PBS train their camera eye on Asbury Park for a pair of programs to be aired on PBS stations within the NY/NJ metro region. Set to drop by our Crane House HQ on April 6 is traveling TV host **Darley Newman**, who will include 508 Fourth on her itinerary for an upcoming episode of her series of specials entitled *Look Up with Darley*. The series, which focuses on themes related to Architecture and History — kicked off in October 2022 with a two-part episode on Newark, and will find plenty to explore among the uniquely iconic structures of Asbury Park. Later in the month, the complex history of the waterfront's famous landmarks will be the theme for **Steve Rogers** and his series *Here's the Story* — so be sure to monitor the NJ PBS schedule in the months ahead, for air times of these Asbury-centric programs!



On **MAY 5 and 6**, 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, May 5 (10 am - 5 pm) and Sunday, May 6 (12-5 pm), during the event coordinated by the **Monmouth County Historical Commission**. Attendees are welcome to view the most recent improvements to the property, take in an informative slideshow on the colorful history of the site, and speak in person to our docents. Check in at visitmonmouth.com for full details on the tour routes and participating sites.

Historic Preservation from page 1

As Harris continues, “the intention of the Historical Society is to support the city in its efforts to establish a working Commission that serves to advance the cause of preservation — as well as to listen to the thoughts and ideas of our membership and the public at large.”

To that end, the APHS president plans an announcement of an “educational presentation to the public;” one that addresses such concerns as homeowners’ objections to “being forced into a Historic Preservation zone, and being told what color they could paint their house.”

“I believe that presenting the pros and cons of having a Preservation Commission in a neutral and objective manner would help provide a

better understanding of the information,” says Harris. “By detailing the ‘Facts’ and ‘Myths’ behind historic preservation — for example, participation in a historic zone would *not* impact the interior of a home, and may actually increase the value of one’s home — residents who might not be initially supportive of the idea may change their opinions.”

Watch for updates on the proposed Commission from the APHS, in addition to following coverage of the topic in local media outlets like *The Coaster* weekly. Follow our social media forums for details on a public-welcome informational presentation — and know that when it comes to preserving, protecting and promoting the best of our city’s unique public face, in a setting where the past, the present and the future work harmoniously together, your Historical Society is on the case!

The Asbury Park Historical Society

Kay Harris *President* kayharrismck@msn.com

James Henry *Vice President* jimhenry100@hotmail.com • **Susan Rosenberg** *Secretary* susanrosenberg10@gmail.com

Andy Skokos *Treasurer* skokose@aol.com • **Eileen Chapman** *Special Events* echapman@monmouth.edu

Tom Chesek *Programming/ Newsletter* tchesek@optimum.net • **Teddy Chomko** *Special Events* ChomkoT@Aetna.com

Susan Skokos *Membership* skokose@aol.com • **Dolly Sternesky** *Preservation* dsternesky@verizon.net

Jennifer Rae Stine *Web/Media* jennifer@fortunewebmarketing.com

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

