

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ASBURY PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MEMBERSHIP!**
See Page 4 for Details!

*Where the Past
Meets the Future*

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A Tribute to Tom Chesek

This 2023/24 winter edition of the Asbury Park Historical Society newsletter is dedicated to Board Member/Trustee, Program Director, and A.P.H.S. Newsletter Editor Tom Chesek.

Tom will be missed not just by the Historical Society, but by those who followed him, whether online, in the *Coaster Newspaper* Entertainment section or in the Asbury Park community at-large.

There's an old saying, "When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground." Our good friend, artist, and Writer-in-Residence, Tom Chesek, was not an old man by any measure, but when we lost Tom on that fateful, cruel July 4th, we felt as if several libraries, museums, encyclopedias, and Sunday *New York Times* editions went with him.



*Tom Chesek,
February 13, 1959 - July 4, 2023*

Former Asbury Park Historical Society board member, Frank D'Alessandro, who'd owned the house from 2001 - 2016, always said that Tom was the best and most talented writer that he ever knew. "Back in the 1970's, Tom was a student in one of my (Frank's) Math classes, sat in the back, paid no attention to the Math lessons (because he didn't have to), and spent his time drawing humorous, imaginative sketches!"

For the past decade, Tom and his lovely wife Diana occupied the little apartment on the second floor of the Crane House, sharing it with their beloved feline, Dottie B. For twelve years, Tom was always there when visitors from far and wide arrived at the house. He would give them a tour of the place and talk about Stephen Crane, the Crane Family, the historic house itself and its importance in the history of Asbury Park. Tom would welcome classes and reading clubs and wow them with his knowledge of all things Crane.

How ironic that such a brilliant, gifted writer with a one-of-a-kind style, should pass away in the childhood home of the innovative, influential, internationally renowned writer, Stephen Crane!

As an A.P.H.S. board member, Tom created and scheduled the vast array of programs held at the Stephen Crane House that showcased musicians, artists, actors, writers, and intellectuals.

In 2015, Tom published a landmark history book, *Legendary Locals of Asbury Park*, which captured a parade of personalities, from shopkeepers to the famous, visionaries to historians, all of whom contributed to the unique lore of this famed resort city.

Tom also conceived and created two history-laden calendars which he designed as a fundraiser for the Historical Society – *Asbury Park, Celebrating Our City's 150th Anniversary 1871 – 2021*; and *Soundings From Asbury Park, 2023*. These two editions are more than calendars, they are historical references to be treasured for years to come.

Tom was also on the board of the nascent and emerging Asbury Park Museum, and was very passionate about its development with Kay Harris as its president. Kay states, "Tom has indeed left his mark on our community and in our hearts. He is greatly missed."

As per Frank D'Alessandro, "We know that in many ways, the Stephen Crane House was made viable and accessible through the hard work and dedication of Tom Chesek. Rest in Peace; Tom, that baton you passed is mighty heavy, but your fans and myriad friends, including an old Math teacher, will always remember and admire you."

Halloween: A Salute to Tom Chesek *Frank D'Alessandro Honors His Friend*

Tom Chesek had been planning the Stephen Crane House's annual Halloween event. Little did anyone imagine that it would be dedicated to his memory.

Ever since Tom and Regina Hayes saved the S.C.H. from the wrecking ball in 1995 and created a community cultural center in 1996, the S.C.H. has held yearly **readings from Edgar Allan Poe's writings**.

The evening included **readings** from "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843); "Annabel Lee" (1849); and his most famous poem, "The Raven" (1845).

There also was a screening of the **film**, "The Premature Burial," based on one of Poe's stories.

A capacity crowd gathered.



*Frank D'Alessandro
delivers dramatic
readings from Edgar
Allan Poe's writings.*

North To Shore Arts & Cultural Festival 2023

Readings from Asbury Park: Voices From Our City, Then and Now

by Tom Chesek



It was the kind of event that represented The Stephen Crane House at its best...as a place of living, reathing history; as a community resource in the here and now; as a House of Ideas that bridges the centuries and touches every aspect of local life on the rollercoaster timeline of this dazzlingly diverse-but-divided seaside city...

On the evening of June 14, a sold-out to capacity (and THEN some) audience made its way to the doorstep of this circa-1878 cottage that's welcomed people from all walks of life and figurative corners of the earth. The occasion was **READINGS FROM ASBURY PARK: VOICES FROM OUR CITY, THEN & NOW**...a program in which an amazing group of authors, poets, journalists and community activists shone a light on the storytellers, scribes and social crusaders of Asbury Park's yesteryears...wordsmiths that included Pulitzer-winning poet Margaret Widdemer, influential VOGUE editor Edna Woolman Chase, broadcasting legend Lowell Thomas, social

justice advocate Rev. J.F. Robinson, pop songwriter May Singhi Breen, and of course our own Stevie Crane.

Made possible by a generous grant from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, this unique entry within Asbury Park's slate of events in the inaugural NORTH 2 SHORE ARTS & CULTURAL FESTIVAL found the participants pictured here (along with Claire Garland and Kerry Margaret Butch) captivating a crowd that included former Crane House owner and co-rescuer Frank D'Alessandro plus Crane House friends longtime and first-time...with an intimately scaled/ expansively visioned offering that illuminated the (sometimes overlooked) literary legacy of this place that comes fully alive this weekend with music, visual art, comedy, dance, and so many more creative pursuits!

Thanks to NJPAC for honoring the Asbury Park Historical Society among its 2023 grant awardees...to our fellow APHS board members Kay Harris, Andy Skokos, Susan Rosenberg and Jennifer Stine for helping to realize this one-of-a-kind happening...to Antonio and Muriam of Asbury Park TV for creating a video record of the program...and to our neighbors at Cathedral Assembly by the Shore, for allowing us to arrange much-needed parking for our many guests!

Commemoration of the S.S. Morro Castle Ship Disaster



Andy Skokos & Kay Harris place a wreath in remembrance of the S.S. Morro Castle disaster

In honor of the 89th anniversary of the SS Morrow Castle shipwreck off Asbury Park's shore on September 8, 1934, the Asbury Park Historical Society placed a memorial wreath at the monument outside the Paramount Theatre.

In September 2024, the Asbury Park Historical Society and Asbury Park Museum will present memorial events honoring the 90th anniversary of the monumental, historical ship disaster, including films, speakers, an exhibit and more.

The Church of the Holy Spirit Asbury Park Presentation



A capacity crowd enjoys learning the history of the Holy Spirit Church of Asbury Park

On **November 2**, author John P. King, Brick Township, presented to a packed audience at the Jersey Shore Arts Center, the research in his recently-published book, *The Church of the Holy Spirit in Asbury Park, N.J.; a History*.

King revealed, first, the role that Asbury Park founder James A. Bradley played in foreseeing the need for houses of worship for a growing population of vacationers and laborers whose religious faiths and denominations were wide-ranging. Bradley gave parcels of land to the city for this purpose.

King then covered the history of the 1909 church that served its Catholic congregants for 114 years and each of its twelve priests from Rev. James A. Walsh and Rev. Michael Glennon, 1979, to Rev. Miguel Virella who served from 2011 - 2021. King's book goes further by covering the changes in the parish organization beginning in 1912 and the Holy Spirit Church deconsecration on June 14, 2021.

Books can be acquired through the A.P. Historical Society.

First People(s) at the Jersey Shore



Head Archaeologist and Adjunct Professor Sean McHugh (right) wows the audience with his discoveries.



On November 30, Sean McHugh, Senior Archaeologist and Adjunct Professor at Monmouth University, spoke about the history-altering archaeological study that was done at the corner of Deal Rd./Rte. 35 between 2019 - 2020.

Much was revealed about the prehistory culture and activities of the Native Americans in our larger local area. Professor McHugh elaborated on the hunting/gathering prehistory practices and seasonal migration patterns particular to coastal Monmouth County. He also educated the audience about how the early European settlers evolved the civilization and established vast land "sales."

The one grand homestead, the focus of the dig, came to be known as the "Eden Woolley Farm/Native American Site."

A permanent exhibit of the artifacts, actual Native American spoken language and the history of Ocean Township/Monmouth County is on view at the Township of Ocean Historical Museum: 703 Deal Road; Ocean, 07712; (732) 531-2136.

Meet Peggy Dellinger

For the first time in the museum's history, a new exhibit, "**Beginnings: Ocean Township's First People**" has been permanently installed in the Richmond Gallery of the Township of Ocean Historical Museum, as of September 10, 2023.

Here's what Peggy has to say:

Based on the artifacts found, along with findings and reports, it was mind boggling to learn that a transient Native American [Lenape] campsite lay adjacent to the Woolley property, dating back to 6,500 B.C.

[Note: the original Woolley House [1697] had been on the corner of Rte. 35 /Deal Road. In 2005, it was physically rolled, eastward, down the property, 1,110 feet, and placed in front of the Township of Ocean Library, thus becoming the new headquarters of the Township of Ocean Historical Museum.]

The artifacts that the archaeologists unearthed enriched our understanding of the Native American culture in our area. Their research on the findings gave us the opportunity, with the help of the New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, to tell a fuller and more respectful story of our First People.



Peggy Dellinger co-founded the Township of Ocean Historical Museum in 1984 and continues to serve as a trustee, Exhibit Director and Newsletter Editor.

The second surprise was that a cellar of a building was discovered nearby, indicating that another Woolley house [circa 1705] had been on the property, too. We had no idea that it existed.

How archaeology works, based on fragments, along with marriage and death records, enables a narrative to be pieced together. And so, we now have a rich story of what happened in this location, a well-informed hypothesis. I am awestruck at what they were able to piece together.

Editor's Note: Asbury Park was originally incorporated as a borough by an act of the New Jersey Legislature on March 26, 1874, from portions of Ocean Township.

The permanent exhibit at the **Township of Ocean Historical Museum** is located at 703 Deal Road, Ocean. Hours: Sun. 1 - 4; Thurs. 7 - 9 P.M and by appointment 732-531-2136; OceanMuseum@yahoo.com.

Mysterious Trunk Found in Old Bank Building

by Don Stine

Where are Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys when you need them? The Asbury Park Historical Society has been trying to unravel a 100-year-old mystery and could use their help!

In April, the A.P.H.S. received a letter from the company cleaning out the old Sovereign Bank on Main Street in Asbury Park, which had recently closed. The bank is more than 100 years old and valuables from the famous Morro Castle shipwreck by Convention Hall in 1934 were temporarily stored there. It is a very old, very large, and very secure facility.



Kay Harris reveals clothing discovered in a mysterious found in an old bank building that stored possessions from the S.S. Morro Castle shipwreck.

The letter said that the company was cleaning out the bank, stating that they found an old trunk containing clothing, lace, other textiles, along with some paperwork and old 1918 newspapers. So, the A.P.H.S. was invited down to the bank to look at the trunk, which we did. It was a home-made truck, with panels nailed together and then reinforced along the edges and base with metal sheets or trim. Quite a heavy trunk for just storing fabric.

The first thing out of the trunk was some fabric with dark stains on it, which I said looked like blood. Other fabrics had similar spattered stains.

Fabrics included old period clothing, including a dress and an undergarment (for a petite woman or a teenage girl). There were lace pieces that had light stains on them, as if someone had tried to wash them out. There were also many large heavy-cloth sheets, perhaps from a doctor's office or hospital? The large sheets also had stains on them, but some appeared to be dark-brown paint.

Also, in the locker were an old mourning obituary card for "Mrs. Michael McFadden, 90 Bayard Street." The only Bayard Street in New Jersey is

in New Brunswick. There was also an old photograph (greatly faded) and a partially handwritten letter from a teenage girl at an all-girls Catholic school (location unknown). “[In part]: This morning sister Pauline gave the Academy girls a very severe lecture about smuggling out letters, reading novels, going to skating rinks unchaperoned, and about off grounds. In the meantime, during the course of the lecture, various nuns were pillaging in the girl’s rooms, gather[ing?] novels, magazines and the like, also taking away letters. They happened to have read them and destroyed them. The girls, of course, are furious and the whole affair has created no end of excitement in the lower regions.”

Police will not test fabric for blood unless the samples are related to an actual crime or part of a cold case file. So, the A.P.H.S. will have to get the fabrics tested on its own.

But the real question here is why a homemade truck like this was stored in the lower basement of a large, secure bank for more than 100 years? For what purpose? What do the clothing and other fabrics have to do with each other- and to the obituary card, letter and other clues. Is there actually blood on some of the fabric? The mystery remains!

Docent Tours

On Sundays, anyone and everyone who is interested in Stephen Crane, Mary Helen Peck Crane, the Crane family, the 1878 house, Methodism, and early Asbury Park history is welcome to the Stephen Crane House, headquarters of the Asbury Park Historical Society.

Docents Susan Rosenberg and/or Frank D’Alessandro will greet you and show you around the house, imparting historical and literary history and responding to your interests.

Scheduled hours are Sundays, between 12 - 2, and later as necessary..

Visits also can be made by appointment.

Call the A.P.H.S. number: (732) 361-0189, and please leave a message



Susan Rosenberg, docent, greets international, national and local visitors who want to see the Stephen Crane House, headquarters of the Asbury Park Historical Society.

Upcoming Annual Membership Meeting

All are welcome to the A.P. Historical Society’s annual meeting, January 18, 6:30 P.M., Asbury Park Public Library. The featured program will be, “The Electric Trolley in Asbury Park - A First,” to be presented by Gary Edelson and Susan Rosenberg. Light refreshments will be served.

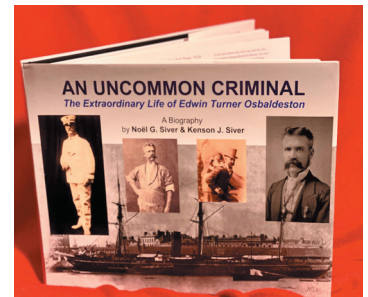
All are encouraged to renew their membership and to get involved in an area of interest and expertise.

Members may vote on the re-election of these trustees:

- Kay Harris
- Susan Rosenberg
- Andy Skokos
- Susan Skokos

An Uncommon Criminal; the Extraordinary Life of Edwin Turner Osbaldeston, A Biography by Noel G. Silver & Henson J. River (Osbaldeston’s great grandchildren)

On June 19, 2023, the authors’s sisters donated a copy of this book to the A.P.H.S.. Their great grandfather, an Asbury Park resident for a time, was described as “quite the character; a fixture of the community...who led parades, taught children to garden and was known for his attention-getting antics,” an ‘uncommon criminal’ according to police.



The book is available through Amazon.

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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