



The Society Pages:

News about the people and projects of
the Mount Desert Island Historical Society

From the Executive Director, Raney Bench

The MDI Historical Society tells island-wide stories that connect the past to the people, places, and issues on the island today, making history relevant. This past summer we were able to do that like never before, through a new series of free in-person programs featuring guest speakers and extensive partnerships with peer organizations.

As you know, Covid required organizations to reach their communities in new ways, and the Society rose to that challenge by creating [Chebacco Chats](#), short conversations with authors and historians available online live or on demand. We launched a new [book club](#) featuring books about MDI or by MDI authors, discussing them through the lens of local history. Favorites like the Baked Bean Supper went virtual, although not permanently.

Landscape of Change

Our on-going partnership using historic resources to document the scope, scale, and speed of climate change on MDI continued this year, focused on sea level rise. Since 1950, the waters surrounding MDI have risen 8 inches. And, king tides (astronomical tides that are higher than average tides) give us a sense for how rising tides will impact our coastal zones, from marshlands to bridges.

Working with Catherine Schmitt from the Schoodic Institute, the team at the Oceanarium, and artist Jennifer Steen Booher, a series of markers have been installed documenting the storm surge of December 23, 2022, and projecting high tide levels in 2050 and 2100. Current predictions estimate that our average high tide in 2100 will be three feet higher than our current high tides. The December 2022 storm surge was three feet, so it is a good indicator of vulnerable places on the island. During that event waves washed over the roads at Seawall, Manset, Hulls Cove, Little Long Pond, and Otter Creek. Sea water infiltrated buildings in Somesville, Manset, and

Now we're moving into uncharted territory, adding new in-person programming while continuing to offer on-line favorites. Lisa Taplin Murray, Assistant Director, is always on the lookout for interesting topics and speakers who will explore and strengthen your connection to the history of MDI. Our goal is to offer free public programs in every community on the island throughout the year. Let us know if you have a recommendation for a speaker.

This fall, keep an eye on our event [calendar](#) for a variety of in-person programs offered at partner organizations, as well as on-line series like Chebacco Chats, book club, and lectures. Whether you're on MDI this fall, or elsewhere, the MDI Historical Society supports your connection to the island and our history.



Bar Harbor. And causeways and bridges were vulnerable. Watching, documenting, and learning from our history are important as we prepare for the future.

To see these installations, visitors can walk the sea level rise trail in the marsh at the Oceanarium (pictured above) or visit the fish ladder on the mill pond in Somesville. Later in October we will be working with Maine Coast Heritage Trust on a new installation at the Kelley Farm Preserve. If you have pictures of extreme high tides or the storm of December 2022, please let us know.

From the Collections - by Patrick Callaway, Collections Coordinator



The return of September and cooler weather brings to mind the yearly transition from summer vacation to the school year. This change provokes a number of responses ranging from the unconcealed glee of parents to the open dread of many students. The start of school brings with it a deeper question: what is school for? This answer varies widely from person to person, and through time.

For this edition of the *Society Pages*, we look at a sample from a school textbook from the late 19th century. On the surface, *Pollard's Synthetic English Lesson Book* is a primer like any number of others focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. The back cover of the book, however, presents a deeper philosophical statement of the purpose for this education: "Next to our flag, protect our mother tongue."

The context for the primer is the immigration patterns of the era which saw vast numbers of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Calling for the protection of the English language suggested not only assimilation of these immigrants, but also advocated for the use of school curriculum as part of this assimilation process. The debate over language in schools is also a contemporary conversation, as the recent efforts to mandate English only instruction in places like Arizona suggests.

News from the Somesville Museums & Gardens

On September 1, we closed out another successful summer at the Somesville campus. After a thorough structural assessment and facelift in May, the iconic Mill Pond Bridge was back open to the public and the repaired and repainted Museum buildings revamped by our opening day. Many thanks to Roy Miller, one of the original builders of the bridge, for his generous work assessing the integrity of the nearly 30-year-old structure, the Town of Mount Desert for their funding support, carpenter Andrew Smith for his work repairing rotted museum benches and window sills, and Welch Painting for their expert painting job on all structures.

The gardens looked spectacular this year thanks to our gardener Joy Lyons and her crew, and will continue to delight visitors far into the fall season. Our docent, Abigail Thornton welcomed nearly 1,300 visitors into the Museum and Selectman's building, to enjoy the final year of the *Summer of Science & Wonder* and *Landscape of Change* exhibits.

This summer, we welcomed 12 new members to the historical society, and welcomed back 25 renewing members. As of this writing, the MDI Historical Society has 515 active members, of which 46 are members of our [Voyager Circle](#), a dedicated giving community committed to the stewardship and appreciation of the history of Mount Desert Island.



A Return to Public Programming- by Lisa Murray, Assistant Director

Summer 2023 marked the Historical Society's return to in-person public programming, offering more than ever before. In collaboration with the Great Harbor Maritime Museum and the Northeast Harbor Library, the Society encouraged our community to more deeply explore the events and people that impacted MDI's residents and culture.

We kicked off the season with our annual Vintage Classroom (funded this year by the Witham Family Foundation,) an experiential immersion for island 3rd graders recreating a day in the life of schoolchildren at the Sound Schoolhouse, learning and playing as students did in the 1890s. With help from the Barn Arts Collective, the students were taught lessons by Mrs. Haynes, the very strict schoolmarm, had a run-in with the upstanding yet dogmatic superintendent Mr. Somes, learned the song "Buffalo Gals" in music class, met some adventurous local fishermen and learned about our granite industry from some enthusiastic quarrymen.



Summer programming brought us Maine State Historian Earle Shettleworth and Maine author Jefferson Navicky exploring painter Harrison Bird Brown's legacy and influence in fact and fiction; MDI Historical Society's Collections Manager Patrick Callaway looking at the War of 1812 through a British lens; Osher Map Library Executive Director Libby Bischof sharing the stories and photographs of Lucy McMullen Dodge; former MDI Historical Society Directors Jaylene Roths and Tim Garrity leading a conversation about the Berwind mutiny, one of the worst cases of mutiny; Steve Haynes of the MDI Granite Museum, sharing stories of the granite industry and quarrymen on Mount Desert Island; and author and Town Hill native Audrey Ryan discussing the



modern aspects of Maine's smuggling history, exploring the outlaws and criminals involved in marijuana and hashish smuggling in the 70s and 80s.

We held our members-only History Happy Hour at the Rusticator Lounge and our Annual Meeting at Northeast Harbor's Neighborhood House, where both masters of local history and novice know-it-alls competed in trivia games for winner's bragging rights.

Free public programs will continue at island libraries throughout the coming months and will be announced on our [website](#), [Facebook](#) and email list. Many of our programs are [archived on our website](#) to view at your convenience.

Are you interested in speaking for one of our public programs? Have an idea for a program you'd like to see us present? Please contact Lisa Taplin Murray at lisa.murray@mdihistory.org.



Willie Granston Honored with the Ann Benson Award



Each year the Society recognizes excellence in volunteer service through the Ann Benson Award. The award was launched in 2016 in honor of Ann Benson, who spent countless hours working with volunteers to catalog, house, and organize the archival and objects collections.

This year the Society recognized Willie Granston, Chair of the Board for the Great Harbor Maritime Museum, and volunteer co-editor of the 2023 maritime edition of *Chebacco*. By collaborating with the Great Harbor Maritime Museum, we were able to identify rarely heard stories and new authors that brought together diverse perspectives about our maritime history. Willie dedicated hours over the course of a year recruiting authors, suggesting topics, editing articles, and seeking images. This edition would not have been possible without his keen understanding of history and connections with the island's maritime culture.

A native of Northeast Harbor, Willie is a PhD candidate in the History of Art and Architecture Department at Boston University. His studies focus primarily on American architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and his dissertation focuses on the relationship between New England resort architecture and period environmental awareness. Willie has written articles on maritime transportation along the Maine coast, as well as architectural topics in both Maine and Connecticut. He has been involved in many cultural history projects, podcasts, and publications throughout the northeast. He is currently Fleet Historian for the Northeast Harbor Fleet and chair of the board of the directors of the Great Harbor Maritime Museum in Northeast Harbor. Recent roles have also included Vice Chair of the History Trust and the board of the New England Society of Architectural Historians.

Chebacco Chats Season Four Resumes

Chebacco Chats, our weekly web series, features authors, historians, and others who study and celebrate history, the great place that is Mount Desert Island, and the way the island impacts the wider world. Season Four of Chebacco Chats resumes at 4:30 pm on Thursday, October 19 with Penobscot Marine Museum Curator Cipperly Good talking about master craftsman Ralph Stanley. On Thursday, October 26 Maine State Historian Earle Shettleworth will speak about his Chebacco article on artist Harrison Bird Brown. Other winter guests on Chebacco Chats include USM Professor of History and the Osher Map Library Executive Director Libby Bischof talking about the photographs of Lucy McMullen Dodge, Somesville Museums & Gardens' Joy Lyons, and James Reeverts, author of *Jordans of the Pond: A History of the Family from the Jordan Pond House*. All episodes are recorded and can be viewed from our website.

[You can view the Spring slate of recorded chats, or see an updated schedule on our website.](#)

Upcoming Programs -Save the Date

Tuesday, October 3 at 5:30pm: [“Wicked Pissah! Storms Survival and Sea Level Rise” with Raney Bench](#)

Wednesday, October 18 at 5:50pm: [History Happy Hour with Lisa Taplin Murray and Raney Bench](#)

Thursday, October 19 at 4:30pm : [Chebacco Chats with Cipperly Good](#)

Monday October 16 at 6:00pm: [Book Club- discussing Windswept by Mary Ellen Chase with Raney Bench](#)

Thursday, October 26 at 4:30pm: [Chebacco Chats with Earle G. Shettleworth](#)

Thursday, November 2 at 4:30pm: [Chebacco Chats with Joy Lyons](#)

Tuesday, November 28 at 5:30 pm: [“The Mills of MDI” with Terese Miller](#)

Wednesday, December 20 at 5:30pm: [History Happy Hour with Lisa Taplin Murray and Raney Bench](#)

Monday, January 15 at 6:00pm: [13th Annual Community Bean Supper](#)

Call for Volunteers

The best part of working in a museum is “the stuff”, those wonderful letters, old pictures, and scrapbooks from our collective past that are preserved for future generations. The MDI Historical Society is looking for volunteers to help with three new cataloging projects, and if you have time, we will train you! The work is not difficult, but it does require consistency, commitment, and attention to detail.

Cataloging volunteers will come to the Sound Schoolhouse and work with historic documents to summarize the content of an item, document its condition, and store it to protect it for the future. We also need volunteers who would like to scan documents so they are available online.

If you're interested in learning more, contact Raney Bench at raney@mdihistory.org to arrange an appointment.



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Kathie Pratt-Tremont Historical Society, Ella Kosten-Chebacco author, Patrick Callaway-MDIHS, and Lisa Murray-MDIHS (not pictured,) spent a foggy June day on Great Gott Island, walking in Ruth Moore's footsteps.

