

The Society Pages:

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

From the Executive Director, Raney Bench

It feels like 2022 came ripping out of the gates and is already traveling full speed ahead! There are so many fun, exciting things to report I don't think we can get them all into one newsletter; stay tuned so you don't miss anything.

First, I want to welcome two new members to the Historical Society family, baby Lara Lucey and Jenna Jandreau! While Leah Lucey was on maternity leave, Jenna stepped in to help, and now that Leah is back (yeah!), we find we can't live without Jenna. She is our new Communications and Engagement Manager, allowing the Society to focus on programs, outreach, and community engagement.

Thanks to Jenna's help, we are re-launching our popular Chebacco Chats series, planning a new history-focused book club, and hosting a series of public programs over the summer where people can learn about how climate change is impacting island traditions and the natural environment.

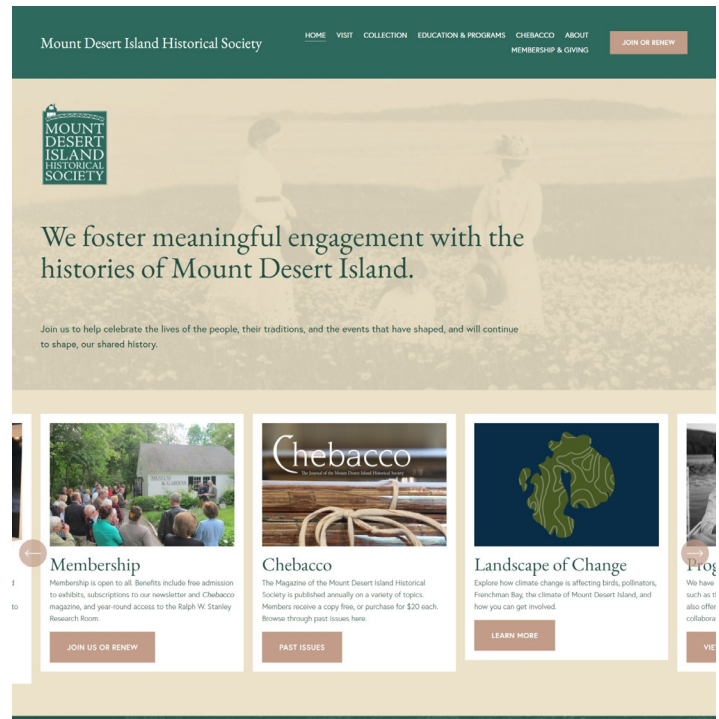
Head over to our new website

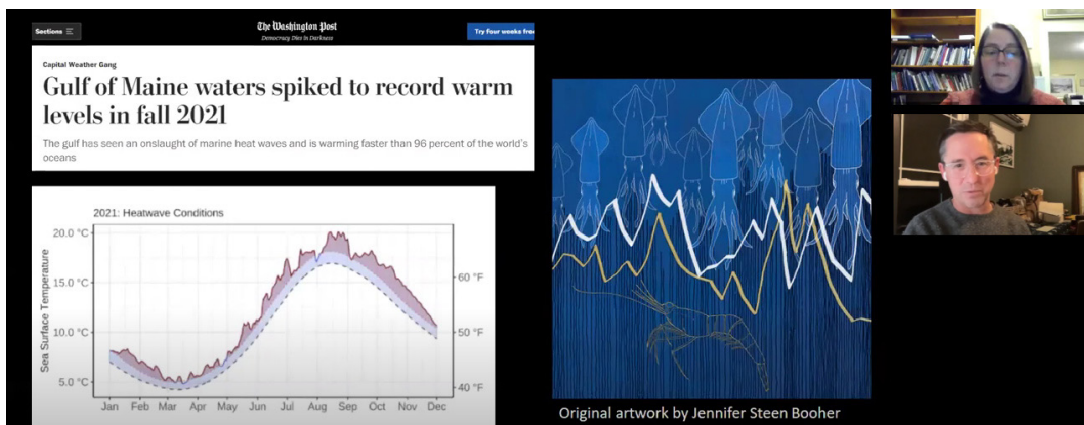
Visited our website lately? You'll notice mdihistory.org has undergone a beautiful redesign, thanks to Z Studio in Bar Harbor! We love how this new site looks, and that it's easier to find some of our most popular pages, like Research, and Chebacco. We've also made it simpler to renew your membership or join the Society.

If you used resources from our former site for your research, you may confront some challenges during this transition. We have yet to upload some of the materials, like Cultural History Project documents and images, and History Harvest collections. However, *Chebacco* articles are available, along with a link to the Friends of Island History newspaper archives. If you find yourself with a broken link, or have research questions, please contact us via email at info@mdihistory.org. We look forward to improving in this great new space, and building out the website according to our community's needs.

The Society is in the midst of developing a new strategic plan that we will share with you this summer. This has been fun and interesting work for the board and staff as we envision new ways to serve our community as leaders in history. Once our priorities have been finalized and our plans for the near future articulated, we will be sure to share. It's remarkable to reflect on how far we've come since we were established in 1931, when our all-volunteer operation was housed in the tiny Selectmen Building.

The next edition of *Chebacco* is due to arrive in mailboxes in early May, with thirteen new articles that will challenge your notions about the people and events that shaped our region. "Imagining what if..." encourages readers to picture an alternate MDI based on failed plans, abandoned dreams, and thoughtful, but sometimes surprising, choices. If you're not already a member, join now to make sure you receive *Chebacco: Imagining What If...*





History Matters - “The Fate of Winter: A Conversation with Porter Fox”

The Historical Society recognizes that we have a role to play in climate change conversations, as educators, interpreters, and community members. We have identified two ways in which we can support education and understanding of climate change on MDI; first, by using data from our historic resources to enhance and expand datasets, specifically related to historic accounts of land use and weather. Second, our expertise as interpreters and educators can distill and communicate information from a variety of sources for people, who like us, are trying to make sense of it all.

We offered this year’s annual Baked Bean Supper (virtual) as part of a larger series of programs in support of the [Landscape of Change](#) project, by hosting “The Fate of Winter: A Conversation with Porter Fox” on January 27 on Zoom. You can learn more about upcoming public programs and other Landscape of Change updates on our [Facebook page](#), or at #landscapeofchange.

Society president Bill Horner, MD, panned his laptop camera up from his steaming plate of baked beans and welcomed viewers to the 11th Annual Baked Bean Supper, kicking off the event with maximum community spirit. He introduced Porter Fox, a man near and dear to Bill’s heart, who grew up and skied with Bill’s children on MDI, and whom he still refers to as “kid,” though Fox is now an award-winning travel writer, journalist, and author of newly released *The Last Winter: The Scientists, Adventurers,*

Journeymen, and Mavericks Trying to Save the World.

Executive Director Raney Bench had questions gathered from the community and prepared in advance; as Raney spoke with Porter, we learned that during his travels skiing all over the world, he noticed changes to winter due to a warming climate, which inspired him to research and write about climate change and its impacts on winter and the people and cultures that depend on it. Viewers shared with Fox changes they noticed on MDI, and asked whether he was personally optimistic about reaching a tipping point in our global will to act.

Fox talked about his own anecdotal experience of winter changes, and stressed the importance of data collection to support and validate experience, as memory can prove faulty, and records can be crucial to future generations of scientists.

The Society understands how important this is, too - the [Champlain Society](#) records in our collection underpin the Landscape of Change project, serving as foundational data to which professional and citizen scientists alike can compare current observational data. To learn more about the logbooks, check out the [2021 edition of Chebacco](#).

To watch a recording of “The Fate of Winter: A Conversation with Porter Fox,” visit: www.mdihistory.org/2022-bean-supper.

We switched to community solar!

The Society is pleased to switch our electric to community solar, and we’ve selected Ampion as our provider. Ampion has offered us an opportunity to save on our annual electricity costs, plus they are working to mitigate the

effects of climate change by empowering communities to go solar. If you are interested in community solar, you can use our referral link and the Society will receive a \$200 donation from Ampion - www.ampion.net/mdihistsoc.

Chebacco Chats are back!

Thanks to the support of our members, and at your vigorous suggestion, we are able to bring back our popular Chebacco Chats, a weekly web series featuring 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 Three of Chebacco Chats will kick off on Thursday, March 3 at 4:30 with new Communications and Engagement Manager Jenna Jandreau interviewing Raney Bench, Executive Director, about the theme of this year's Chebacco, "Imagining What If....?"

This season welcomes back Betsy Hewlett, Sean Cox, Bill Horner and more, to talk about their new articles focusing on "what could have been," and also includes a special commemoration for local boat builder and historian Ralph Stanley, in partnership with Southwest Harbor Public Library.

[Chebacco Chats](#) are online and hosted on Zoom. We record the Chats and make them available after the program as YouTube videos on our website.

New episodes on Thursdays at 4:30, starting on March 3.

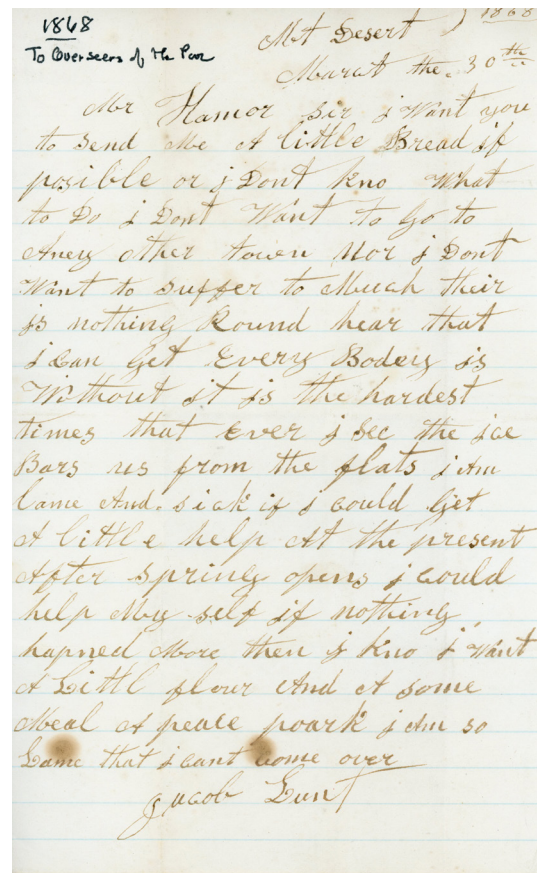
History in Unusual Places by Patrick Callaway, Collections Coordinator

It has been an interesting time working with the collections, as we enjoy this winter season. One of the recurring themes over the past few months has been finding history in unusual places. Sometimes historians find exactly what they are looking for, but find it in places that they do not expect to. Other times, they find a more complex story than they expected to find in a relatively simple document.

In the last newsletter we put out a call looking for a specific map of the island from 1762 for this year's Chebacco. After a long search in our archives, the Maine and Massachusetts historical societies, the Osher Map Library, and even Harvard University, we found nothing. However, Rick Savage happened to have a framed copy of the map! Thank you to Rick for letting us photograph it. This is a good lesson for all of us who love history - sometimes the very thing we are looking for is in a place we did not think to look and all we have to do is ask.

The other interesting source from our collections is a March 31, 1868 letter from Jacob Lunt to the Mount Desert Town Overseers of the Poor seeking bread because of the hard winter season. The letter is already a rich source for us at first glance- in a page, we see the outline of mid19th century ideas of social welfare, economy, and community.

But hidden within this letter is an interesting passage about the weather and ice conditions: "It is the hardest times that ever I see the ice bars us from the flats..." The "flats" refers to the ocean shore. During this time, it was common for folks to supplement their diet with clamming, lobstering, and harvesting other natural resources for subsistence. From Lunt's letter we learn that the shore ice in the spring



of 1868 was too thick, suggesting an unusually cold and wet winter that drove him to near starvation.

As we think of the Landscapes of Change project, and climate change on the island more broadly, sources like Jacob Lunt's letter are important. Although it was not intended as a record of weather or climate, we find valuable clues about the climate in unusual places scattered throughout our archives.

Book Club launch

The Society is excited to launch our new Book Club, an online community gathering to discuss books by MDI authors or with local settings, using literature as an entrypoint to regional history. We will provide MDI-specific historical context to bring the novels to life, such as sharing relevant artifacts from the collection, sound bites from oral histories, and photographs or slides of the book's people and places.

Book Club will also include traditional discussions around themes, characters, and plot, and readers are encouraged to share their reactions and ask questions of the groups' collective knowledge.

Book Club in March features Mary Roberts Rinehart (1876-1958) and her murder mystery novel, *The Wall*, set in Bar Harbor and published in 1938. This book can be found at local libraries, can be purchased at Sherman's, and is available on Kindle. Rinehart, coined by some "the American Agatha Christie" and "the great dame of American crime fiction," began summering in Bar Harbor in the 1930s, until her death in 1958. Jenna Jandreau, Communications and Engagement Manager, said "*The Wall* is a fun read for winter, an intriguing page-turner," and she particularly loves the local references to place,



Mary Roberts Rinehart, 1927.
Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-npcc-16535]

both those still recognizable and those left only to history or imagination. Jenna's research into Rinehart has proved even more fascinating - of all things, Rinehart was nearly murdered by her own chef!

Book Club in May features a book by novelist Eleanor Mayo (1920-1981), who also happened to be the first female selectperson elected to Tremont, shortly after buying property in Bass Harbor in 1946 and building a home out of found lumber and driftwood with partner and fellow author Ruth Moore.

We will send more info to your inbox soon - for now, get your copy of *The Wall* and start reading!

A peek into *Chebacco XXIII*: excerpt from the introduction by Raney Bench

Asking "what if..." can be more than a mental exercise when it leads to something concrete; a new business enterprise, a new adventure, a new community...

The process of asking questions and dreaming of new possibilities creates a cause-and-effect relationship between the past and the present. Understanding, appreciating, and critiquing the world around us now requires knowledge about the decisions that were made in the past, and under what conditions. Sometimes, as with Acadia National Park, asking "what if..." leads to tangible results. Other times, as we will explore in this edition, these possibilities of the past are no longer part of our communities.

As we learn about some of the ideas and plans from our shared past, we can also play "what if...?" Patrick Callaway, [Collections Coordinator,] points out that "The idea of alternative pasts is strange for historians. The profession is designed to explain what did happen in the past, and what the consequences of that past are. Re-imagining

history as a series of "what if" propositions is an unnatural professional act..." But, in this edition we have done just that, researching the past with an imaginative perspective, encouraging readers to consider what the island would be like if...

[*Chebacco XXIII* articles] allow us to evaluate and judge for ourselves whether our communities would be better with, or without, these ventures missing from our current landscape. After reading Betsy Hewlett's article about the missing teahouse on the north end of Eagle Lake, where the parking area and carriage roads converge now, I will never drive down McFarland Hill without picturing the huge lodge that was planned there, blocking the iconic view of the Bubbles...

If you want to read more, make sure you're a member of the Society today, and you will receive the newest edition of *Chebacco* in May. Visit our [Membership page](#) to join or renew.