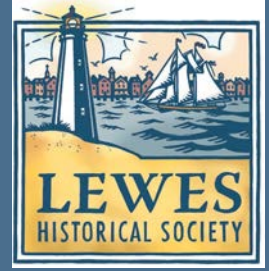


2023 Annual Report of The Lewes Historical Society



As the Lewes Historical Society reflects on the past year, we recognize 2023 as a year of strong progress for the organization. Over the course of the year, a conscious effort was made to ensure that the society's mission and vision were at the forefront of each of our offerings. Additionally, we have been working to ensure the long-term sustainability of this organization, as we addressed difficult business decisions and continued to execute our strategic. The Lewes Historical Society continued to support our fellow non-profits in Lewes through renewed partnerships, and welcomed the community through innovative events and programs, all while fulfilling our mission.



The Vision of the Lewes Historical Society:

To preserve and share the diverse history and heritage of the greater Lewes region.

The Mission of the Lewes Historical Society:

Promotes and advocates for the preservation, Interpretation, and cultural enrichment of The Lewes region, through museum exhibits, Educational programs, historical research, and publications.

Preservation

Throughout 2023 Preservation remained a key tenant of our mission, with the society's efforts concentrating on a number of our diverse historical sites.

The preservation efforts at the Ryves Holt House were completed in April as the museum reopened to the public, now as the Ryves Holt House Museum and Mercantile Exchange. With our exterior restoration efforts complete thanks to guidance from the Historic American Builds Survey, the interior shop space was also renovated to now feature an 18th-century inspired shop.

Our 110 Shipcarpenter Street Historic Campus also received considerable preservation attention with work focusing on both the Blacksmith Shop and the Thompson Country Store. The late 18th c. structure known as the Black Smith Shop was given a new purpose as it was reimaged into the Lewistown Coffeehouse, opening its doors to the public in October. This project was made possible thanks to a multi-year partnership and generous funding from the Mars Heritage Chocolate Society. The Lewistown Coffeehouse draws its inspiration from a historic 1770's Lewes-merchant shop owned by Mary Hugg; on whose ledger the recreation was based. Over the course of three months the Coffeehouse has already welcomed 7,000 visitors to enjoy delicious heritage chocolate blends in a charmingly historical setting.

Additionally, work has started on the Thompson Country Store. While this space historically featured a recreated country store, preservation efforts are working towards preparing this space to be the new home of our Antique Shop, offering guests the opportunity to take in both history and antiques through an innovative use of a nineteenth century space.

Interpretation & Cultural Enrichment

Rooted in the tremendous progress of the past two years, the Interpretation Department at the Lewes Historical Society saw another broad expansion in 2023. In addition to the hiring of a new Director of Interpretation, the year saw major additions to the event calendar as well as the opening of new, immersive historical spaces for guests to explore.

Returning from 2022, the monthly *First Friday* program at Historic Shipcarpenter Street Campus had a banner year, welcoming well over 6,000 visitors. *Hearty in the Cause* also returned in April as an annual event to whisk guests back to the days just before American Independence in 1776. The reproduction ship's cutter put to the local waterways with a volunteer crew five times, including a prodigious row in the sweltering heat of the Lewes Boat Parade on the 4th of July.

Joining these annual staples were two new living history events in October and November. The first, *Harvest of Discontent*, launched a key part of the Society's tribute to the American Revolution 250 years later by exploring life in Lewes in 1773 during the Tea Act Crisis. The second, *Fires of Revolution*, recreated the revolutionary protest against the Tea Act of 1773. Fall events like these will bring the past

to life year-by-year through the commemorative cycle, driven by the incredible efforts of our in-house team, the generosity of dozens of guest interpreters from all across the east coast, and partnership with the State of Delaware's Semiquincentennial Commission.

The success of 2023 has put the Lewes Historical Society on firm foundations to grow in 2024 and in a leading, enviable position to mark the ongoing 250th anniversary of American nationhood.



Education

In 2023, the Education department saw an increase in visitation through innovative programs, tours, and outreach with a 15% increase in visitation. The Children's Wing, located within the Lewes History Museum, was re-designed introducing new interactive opportunities for visitors. This space reopened in March as the Family Learning Center, and was well received by the community. Additionally, a new activity guide was introduced with the Family Learning Center, encouraging a renewed emphasis on cooperative learning.

Continuing our partnership with the African American Heritage Commission of Lewes, the society released a documentary in June, "In Their Voices: African American History and Legacy in Lewes," premiering at the Cinema Arts Theatre. This documentary, an extension of the 2022 walking tour *Finding Their Voices*, was made possible thanks to the generous support of Jessie Ball duPont Fund.

The ever-popular Tavern Talks entered its seventh year with a new script, "Faber Su Fortuna"- A Self-Made Man," providing a review of the 1793 Yellow Fever Pandemic. Performances encouraged guests to reflect on current events while making connections with those who lived throughout the past.

The Student Boat Build also returned to the shores of the Lewes-Rehoboth Canal in June. Two Bevins Skiffs were constructed with the Lewes Historical Society's Wooden Boat Build Crew working alongside fifteen students from Sussex Tech. and Cape Henlopen High School ensuring that the once prominent maritime trades of Lewes are passed down to future generations.

Museum Exhibits

In an effort to encourage greater visitation while engaging new audiences, considerable curatorial efforts were placed on the Lewes History Museum. In March the Family Learning Center reopened again welcoming guests of all ages to our flagship museum.

On National Maritime Day, *With A Splendid Breeze: Maritime Art Ashore & Afloat* opened in the rotating exhibition gallery at the Lewes History Museum, connecting guests to our vibrant maritime heritage through thirty-eight unique works of art. This exhibition features rarely seen views of the Delaware Bay, the Lewes Rehoboth Canal, and the Atlantic Ocean through the artistic lens of both mariners and the seaside citizenry of Delaware's first town.

Also coinciding with National Maritime Day was the grand opening of an exhibition celebrating the 50th Anniversary of The Lightship Overfalls (LV118). Working with our partners at the Lightship Overfalls, this temporary exhibition at the Cannonball House Maritime Museum celebrated the joint efforts of the Lewes Historical Society and Lightship Overfalls Foundation in bringing this storied lightship to Lewes and continuing to share her rich history.



Historical Research

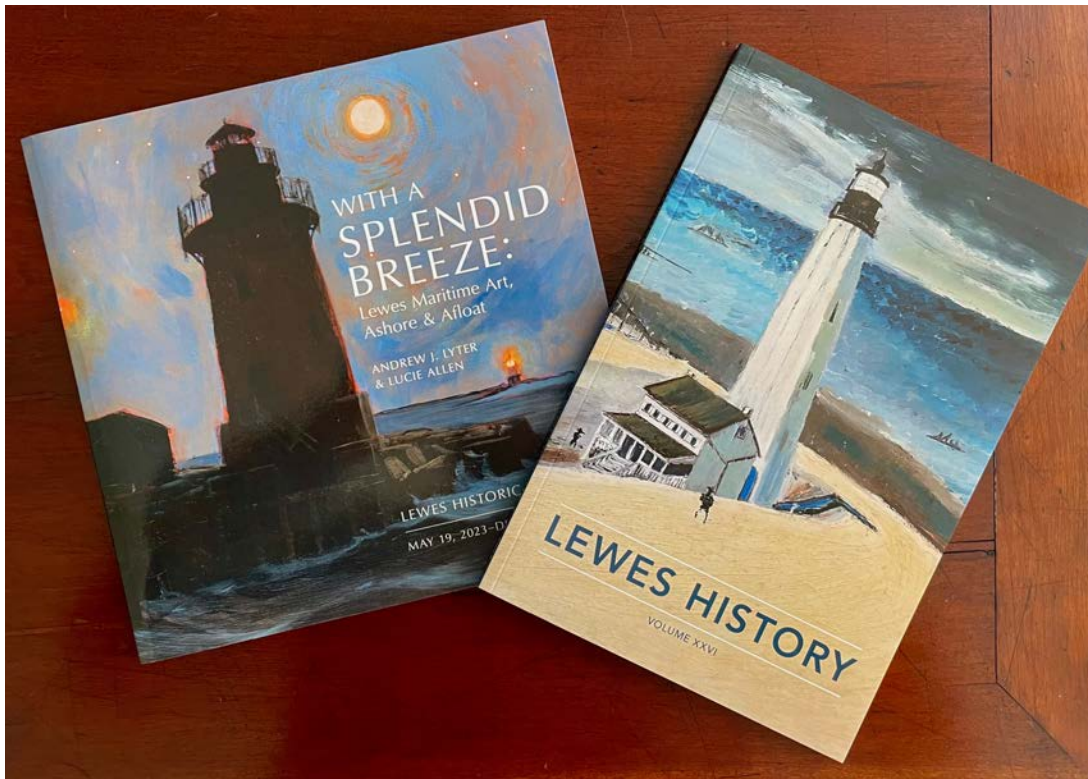
Through our public archive and research library, the society continued to provide researchers and the community with access to primary sources as they investigated a wide range of subjects. These robust resources were also relied upon as the society's curators conducted new research on each of our historic properties throughout the town of Lewes. This research has been incorporated into a new series of text panels that will be installed at each of our buildings in early 2024, sharing the history of

these unique sites in both Spanish and English ensuring greater accessibility for our visitors. The creation and installation of these panels was made possible thanks to the support of the Delaware Community Foundation and Americana Corner.

In August the Lewes Historical Society again partnered with the Historic American Building Survey to again conduct a thorough survey and analysis of one of our historic structures, now focusing on the Cannonball House. This survey, now nearing completion, will drive our preservation and restoration efforts at this site throughout the new year.

Historical Research serves as the foundation in all that the Lewes Historical Society does to fulfill its mission. In addition to sharing our research with the greater Lewes community, archival research is regularly integrated into our publications, exhibitions, interpretation, preservation, and educational initiatives.

Publications



As the Lewes Historical Society works towards continuing to professionalize and evolve, our scholarly focus remains a key tenant of our organization. Coinciding with the opening of *With a Splendid Breeze: Lewes Maritime Art Ashore & Afloat*, an exhibition catalogue was published, and authored by our curatorial team. Working towards providing a more thorough analysis on the works featured in this exhibition, this catalogue will ensure that the work that went into curating this exhibition will be accessible for years to come. Remaining true to the purpose of our rotating exhibition gallery, all future exhibitions in this space will each have a catalogue released with their opening.

The 2023 edition of *Lewes History: Journal of the Lewes Historical Society* was published in November, with a new format, now including peer-reviewed features, as well as Articles, Briefs, Q & A, Book Reviews, and Portraits of the Past.

While not an official publication of the Lewes Historical Society, our Executive Director's research on enslaved maritime pilots in Lewes was included in Helion & Company's publication, *SAILORS, SHIPS AND SEA FIGHTS*. His chapter, "Discovered Going to the 74 in a Small Boat': Black Pilots and Maritime Opportunity Aboard HMS *Poictiers*, 1812-1813," explores the careers of black pilots, long forgotten by history, and how they leveraged their vital knowledge to carve out identities as free maritime professionals.

2024 . . .

As we enter the early months of 2024, the Lewes Historical Society will continue to adhere to our strategic plan, while working towards fulfilling our mission by ensuring a sustainable future. With the introduction of new colleagues, renewed community partnerships, and a redoubled focus on mission fulfillment, the Lewes Historical Society enters 2024 with great momentum and plans towards continuing to preserve and share the diverse history and heritage of the greater Lewes region.

Preservation: After we receive the completed Historic American Building Survey of the Cannonball House, restoration and preservation efforts will be well underway. We recognize that the exterior of the Cannonball House needs dire attention and will continue to focus our fundraising and grant writing on ensuring that this site receives the support that its condition demands.

In addition to the Cannonball House, our other preservation efforts will be maritime-focused with preservation work at the c. 1884 United States Life Saving Service (USLSS) Boat House. Utilizing extant grants, we plan to complete the preservation work on the boat house itself, with our Wooden Boat Build Crew restoring the original surfboat housed at this location. Once complete, our goal is to open this site up to the public with regular hours in April.

Interpretation: With the establishment of sound foundations in 2022 and 2023, the society's interpretation efforts in the coming year will be focused on refinement, evaluation, and measured growth.

Internally, the site's living history collection of reproduction clothes and objects are growing to reflect the rising reputation of the Society as a place where Sussex County history comes alive, while volunteers and staff alike will have opportunities to expand their knowledge through trainings and workshops. For the public, 2024 will see the launch of a mix of updated and new thematic, walking tours; the establishment of monthly Third Saturdays with enhanced living history offerings; and the

further development of our living history events, *Hearty in the Cause* to feature 1776 in the spring, and the fall installment, this year entitled *Last Year of Peace*, to reflect 1774 in Lewes 250 years later.

Cultural Enrichment: As we work towards raising awareness and support for the preservation and restoration of the Cannonball House Maritime Museum, the society will be hosting two events throughout 2024 highlighting Lewes' role in the War of 1812. In September the society will host a symposium conference focusing on New Perspectives on the War of 1812 at Sea, welcoming international scholars to our historic town.

Additionally, the society will be installing new text panels at each of our properties sharing Lewes' history in both English and Spanish and through an audio narration ensuring that we expand our reach to a broader demographic.

Exhibitions: The Lewes Historical Society has a robust slate of new exhibitions coming in 2024, beginning with *Voices Heard: The History and Legacy of the Black Community in Lewes* on Friday April 19 in the Lewes History Museum's rotating gallery space. This exhibition will run for the duration of the year and feature regular showings of the documentary, along with local photographic images ranging in date from the 1880s through the 1960s.

Coinciding with National Maritime Day will be the grand opening of a new exhibition in the Cannonball House, *The Wireless: Lewes and the Dawn of the Electronic Age, 1906*. This permanent exhibition will recreate the 1906 wireless station and engage visitors of all ages through STEM focused learning.

Finally, the Lewes Historical Society has sought out grant funding to support a new exhibition in the Burton Ingram House, focusing on revolutionary war veteran and Lewes merchant, Colonel Henry Neil. This exhibition, *Revolution to Republic: Colonel Henry Neil, a Life in Lewes* is targeted to open in October 2024.

Education: In 2024, new educational outreach initiatives will include a traveling sailor's bags, creating hands on opportunities for classroom learning while encouraging increased field trip visitation.

The Lewes History Museum will continue to serve as a center for education, especially with the rebranded Speaker Series, now held on Thursday evenings monthly.

The "In Their Voices" documentary will be incorporated into our rotating exhibition space with our efforts working towards ensuring that this documentary is shared with the community of Lewes and beyond.

Publications : Three new publications are planned for 2024, beginning with an exhibition catalog accompanying with *Voices Heard: The History and Legacy of the Black Community in Lewes*. Our annual edition of *Lewes History: Journal of the Lewes Historical Society* will return for its twenty-seventh edition in Fall 2024. Additionally, our Executive Director's forthcoming book, *Going Among the English Sailors:*

American Tars & The HMS Belvidera, 1809-1814, will be released in September, coinciding with our 2024 Symposium.

Closing: As the Lewes Historical Society enters 2024, we anticipate a successful and monumental year. Following the guidance of our Feasibility Study the Lewes Historical Society will be focusing on the long-term health of the organization while continuing to fulfill and further our strategic plan.

As the stewards of Lewes' history, we have a moral obligation to ensure the sustainability of the organization for generations to come and look forward to continuing to share this community's history and heritage.

As we recognize the successes of 2023 and prepare for an ambitious 2024, we recognize that the Lewes Historical Society would not be in existence without the dedicated support of the community, our membership, donors, and our remarkable team of volunteers. Only with the steadfast support and advocacy of these groups can the Lewes Historical Society *preserve and share the diverse history and heritage of the greater Lewes region*