

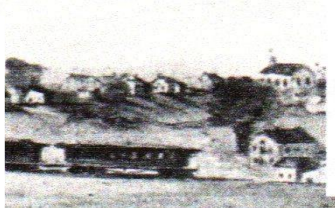
Madison Historical Society

Madison, N.J

September 2020

Newsletter

1st edition 2020-2021



The Madison Historical Society Presents Via Zoom



Ray Williams “To Counterfeit is Death”

September 15 7:00 pm



Dr. Robert Butts “The History of the Baroque Orchestra of New Jersey”

October 20 7:00 pm

If you are interested in participating in either or both of these presentations, please contact the Madison Historical Society at historicalsociety@rosenet.org or Box 148, Madison, N.J. 07940. We will need your email address to send you an appropriate link to join the Zoom presentation.

Historical Society Officers

President

Susan Simon

Vice President

David Luber

Corresponding Secretary

Herman Huber

Recording Secretary

Virginia Laughlin

Treasurer

Jim Malcolm

Custodian

Kate Malcolm

Historian

Nikolina Uzicainin

Trustees

Nancy Adamczyk

Linda Connors

Howard Craig

Rebecca Fields

Johanna Glazewski

Laurie Hagerich

Anne Meyer

Noreen McManus

Doug Simon,

Dorothy Pietrowski,

Emeritus

Newsletter

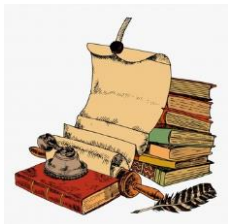
Doug Simon



Message From President Susan Simon

As noted several places in this newsletter, the Board of the Madison Historical Society has been working from home during the last six months while staying safe from Covid-19. The following are some of the things we have been working on:

- The historic plaque program committee chair Ginnie Laughlin, recently ordered 14 more plaques which have arrived and are being given out. Plaque orders have now exceeded one hundred;
- The Historical Society Scholarship was awarded to a graduating senior, Erin Colligan who is planning on majoring in history at Drexel University;
- Vice President Dave Luber has set up programs for the fall: On September 15th with Ray Williams speaking on “To Counterfeit is Death” and on October 20th, Dr. Robert Butts will present “The History of the Baroque Orchestra of New Jersey”;
- The website has been updated with a new page “What is New”. A coloring book of historic buildings in Madison for children can be downloaded and run-off on your printer for coloring;
- The Board has been using Zoom for meetings. The fall programs will be run using Zoom. If you have a computer, iPad, or smart phone you will be able to see the presentations from your home. Download an ‘app’ for Zoom (free) on your device. Then contact the Society through either the website’s contact page or email. Madisonjhsociety.org or historicalsociety@rosenet.org. You need to give us your name and email and we will send you the link to the program;
- We now are able to work in the office but no visitors. We only have a skeleton crew in the office the rest will be working from home.



From the Office

The Madison Historical Society During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The covid-19 pandemic has not completely shut down the historical society’s activities, but has limited the extent to which it can fully accomplish all its regular tasks. Initially, events like our programs scheduled for March and April of 2020, as well as our annual dinner set for May, had to be cancelled. Our two Fall 2020 general meetings with guest speakers will be held virtually on Zoom. All of our monthly board meetings have been held on Zoom as well as the work of the joint historical society/library steering committee working on the new edition of Madison’s history, *The Madison Heritage Trail*.

The closing of the library meant that the MHS office was completely closed for roughly four months and only now is open with limited access. This meant that we had no access to our filing cabinets that contain thousands of pages of historical archive material. We were able to remotely gain access to some of our computer files but could not make edits or other changes. The society did respond to outside research requests, but was limited to what could be accessed at home. Most of the society’s archival projects basically came to a halt. Some clipping of local news sources continued, but copies on archive paper could not be made.

For the staff that regularly works in the society’s office, it has been a real test of their ingenuity and resolve and we should all be thankful for their efforts at keeping the organization’s activities going under trying circumstances.

About the Speakers

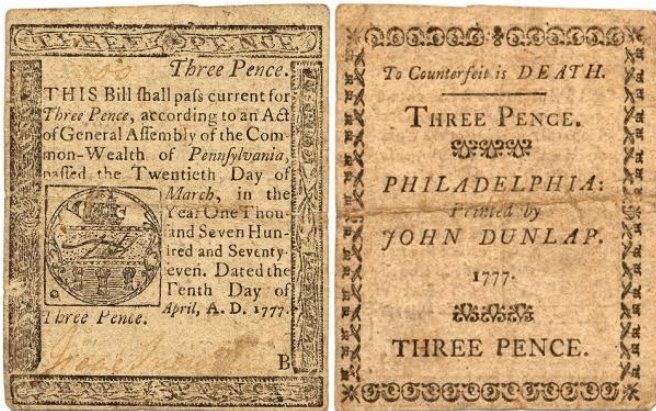
Ray Williams

Ray Williams is a life-long numismatist who started specializing in US Colonial era coins, medals and paper money in 1988. He is co-author of a book entitled *Grading Guide For Early American Copper Coins* and has written numerous articles and columns for the Colonial Coin Collectors Club Newsletter, Penny Wise (the Newsletter of the Early American Coppers organization), The Numismatist (Journal of the American Numismatic Association), and other publications, clubs and Numismatic organizations. Mr. Williams has served as President of the Colonial Coin Collectors Club, the New Jersey Numismatic Society, the Trenton Numismatic Club and Vice President of the Garden State Numismatic Association. He is a fellow of the



American Numismatic Society and the Rittenhouse Society.

In his talk, Mr. Williams will be describing the economic climate that made paper money necessary, the counterfeiting of bills and the anti-counterfeiting measures taken, the famous colonists involved with paper money, and interesting stories involving some of the money being exhibited. Examples of Continental Currency and 1776 issues of New Jersey bills will be available at the meeting for attendees to see.



Dr. Robert Butts

Dr. Robert W. Butts has shared his passion, enthusiasm and knowledge of music through his work as a conductor, composer, educator, writer, and lecturer. He has conducted major orchestra and opera performances throughout New Jersey and the United States as well as guest appearances in Europe including Romania, the Czech Republic, Russia, Italy and England. Maestro Butts received his MA in Musicology from the University of Iowa with a specialty in 17th and 18th century music. He studied conducting at Julliard with Maestro Vincent La Selva; received a DMA in conducting from the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago; attended master classes in Toronto, Canada, and Berlin. He currently teaches in the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies at Drew University and at Montclair State University. He lectures regularly for the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. His formidable list of awards and honors includes the 2019 Artist of the Year Award by the New York Classical Music Society; the 2019 Exemplary Leader Award from the Morris County Chamber of Commerce, the 2016 Tourism Award from the Morris County Tourism Bureau, the 2015 Comcast Newsmaker Award from Comcast, and the 2015 Honored Artist Award,





Madison During the Times of Spanish Influenza

- Dave Luber

Note: This article first appeared in the July 2020 issue of *Madison Living*. It also is the product of research for the forthcoming revised and updated history of Madison, *The Madison Heritage Trail*.

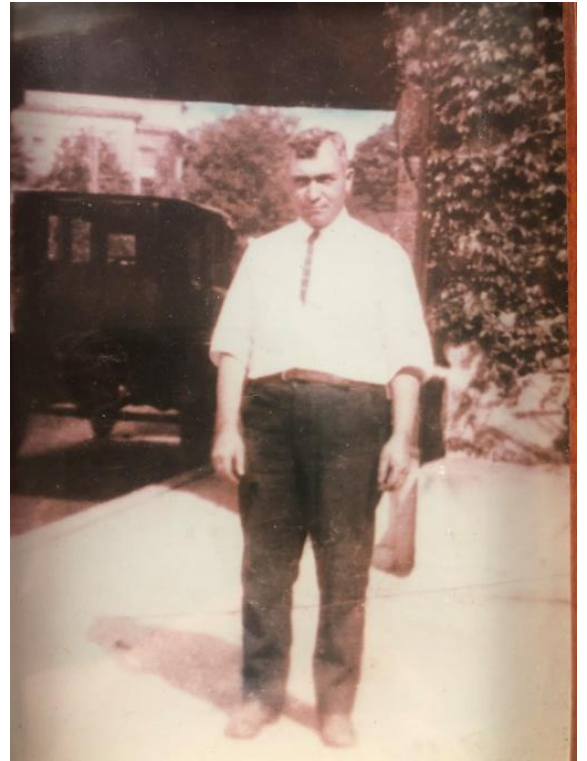
The so-called “Spanish Flu” influenza pandemic of 1918-1919¹ was one of the deadliest in recorded history, killing an estimated 50 million² souls worldwide in a short twelve months. Unlike the 2020 Covid-19 contagion, where the most vulnerable patients have been those 65 and older, most of the fatalities from the Spanish Flu were young adults. The pandemic swept across the world in three relatively distinct waves: one in the early summer of 1918, a second one in the October-November timeframe, and a third in the early months of 1919. The second wave was the most lethal in most countries, and it was this wave that had the greatest impact on Madison.

This second wave of Spanish Flu slammed into Madison like a tsunami just as the Great War was coming to a close. The October 4 issue of the *Madison Eagle* reported that “only a few cases have developed here, and none of the victims has been seriously ill.” A week later the *Eagle* reported that 167 cases had been reported with 7 of those being fatal. On October 7 the Madison Board of Health “ordered the closing of all schools, public and private, churches of all denominations, public library, Y.M.C.A., moving picture theatre, and all places of amusement, hotel barrooms, liquor saloons, lodges, pool rooms and public meetings of any kind.”

A week later, The *Madison Eagle* reported the number of reported cases in the borough had risen to 300, and whole families were devastated. The baggage master at Madison’s Lackawanna station, John Forte, reported to the board of health that seven members of his family were all sick with the influenza. Only he and his wife had been spared. Among the seven were Mr. Forte’s brother, special police officer Daniel Forte as well as all of his children. On November 1, the *Madison Eagle* reported that Daniel had died at All Souls’ Hospital.

By October 18, [Morristown] Memorial Hospital had announced that it could accept no more new cases. In response to this lack of capacity in Morristown and at Overlook Hospital in Summit, the board of directors of the Madison Y.M.C.A. turned its by then closed building on Main Street over to the local chapter of the Red Cross to be used as an emergency hospital for patients of the pandemic. The *Madison Eagle* reported that by Monday, October 22, “Madison has a well-equipped emergency hospital for the adequate treatment of influenza cases.” And “seven patients were[immediately] conveyed by the borough ambulance to the new quarters.”

The crisis ended almost as quickly as it began, and by November 1, the *Eagle* reported that the borough’s emergency bans were lifted as “the epidemic [seemed] to be dying out.” But that was certainly small comfort for all the families that had been devastated by the disease. As of November 15, there had been 540 cases of the influenza and 60 related cases of pneumonia³ in Madison – then a town of about 5,500 – since the first of October. These resulted in 34 deaths and 25 Madison children left either fatherless or motherless.



John Forte, the baggage master at Madison’s Lackawanna station. Photo courtesy of Mr. Forte’s great grandson, John J. Forte.



The old Madison YMCA building

Much like the experience the New York metropolitan area has had with the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, the medical community had little rest during the peak of the contagion and were not immune to infection. Dr. Aldo Bliss Coultas was reported ill and at home as was Dr. F. I. Krauss of Chatham during the second week of October. The *Madison Eagle* reported that week that “Every physician in the county was working day and night and all of them appear to be pluckily standing a greater strain than should be put upon them.” The *Eagle* also reported that Borough Health Inspector S. Fred Burnet was “laid up a couple of days” during the following week.

Dr. Coultas recovered from his infection, but his wife Ella Pearl Bardon Coultas did not, and she would succumb to the disease on Sunday, October 20. His daughter Mary Dorothy Coultas would also fall victim to the disease.

The pandemic reappeared in Madison in early February. By the 21st of the month there were approximately 200 new cases of influenza or “grippe” with one fatality reported. Although approximately an eighth of all Madison school students were reported absent due to sickness by mid-February, most reported cases in this third wave were relatively mild. They were nothing like what the town had had to deal with the previous October. Thankfully.

¹ According to Wikipedia, the pandemic got its name from the fact the warring nations withheld information about the spreading contagion from the general population for morale purposes. So the only reports of the disease came from neutral Spain, and so it became known as the “Spanish Flu.” Some researchers have hypothesized that the strain actually originated in the U.S.

² Estimates of the pandemic mortality extend over a wide range due to poor counting in a number of countries, particularly in China and India. According to references cited in Wikipedia, estimates range from as low as 17 million to as high as 100 million. Most sources put the total in the 40 to 50 million range.

³ Physicians who have since studied the pandemic believe that there was insufficient time for a separate infection of pneumonia to develop and that death should be attributed directly to the original influenza infection.

Sources

1. Overview of Spanish Flu pandemic: Wikipedia
2. Severity of pandemic: “Visualizing the History of Pandemic,” Visual Capitalist, March 14, 2020
3. August 1st storm: *Madison Eagle* – August 5, 1971
4. Only a few cases: *Madison Eagle* – October 4, 1918
5. Pandemic hits Madison and measures taken: *Madison Eagle* – October 11, 1918
6. Drs Coultas and Krauss infected: *Madison Eagle* – October 11, 1918
7. Morristown Memorial asks for no more patients: *Madison Eagle* – October 18, 1918
8. YMCA becomes an emergency hospital: *Madison Eagle* – October 25, 1918
9. Mrs. Coultas dies: *Madison Eagle* – October 25, 1918
10. Mary Dorothy Coultas dies: discussion with Cathie Coultas
11. Flu dying out: *Madison Eagle*, November 1, 1918
12. Flu recap: *Madison Eagle* – November 15, 1918
13. Comment on pneumonia: Stephen R. Luber, MD
14. Flu reappears in Madison: *Madison Eagle* – February 21, 1919



Spotlight on History

Madison's Oldest Living Resident

- Herman Huber

Note: This article is the product of research for the forthcoming revised and updated history of Madison, *The Madison Heritage Trail*.

French-born Jeanne Calment, who died at age 122 (though controversy remains)¹, was reputed to have been the oldest person in history. Imagine then that a resident of Madison has managed to live at least 250 years and possibly more than 400^{2, 3}, and knock on wood, shows no signs of leaving us anytime soon – and along the way had relatives who were instrumental to the game of baseball. This is the story of that hard-headed Madisonian.

Sometime between when Charles I, King of England, Scotland, and Ireland ascended the throne in 1625 and the Boston Massacre in 1770, a White Ash tree began to grow in Madison, NJ, across from what became the Luke Miller homestead. It has never stopped growing and is now 115 feet tall, has a circumference of 255 inches, and a crown spread of 111 feet. Named the *National Champion White Ash* tree by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and the New Jersey Forest Service, it has the distinction of being the largest *Fraxinus Americana* tree in the entire country⁴.

Like a majestic guardian, the tree stands at the Victorian home of Carl and Margaret Weisgerber, which was built in 1887 at 100 Ridgedale Ave. They are only the 4th owners. In 1953 when they moved in, their new next-door neighbor made a special point of ensuring the Weisgerbers understood the giant tree was the Weisgerbers' responsibility, **not** hers. Through major weather disasters such as Superstorm Sandy in 2012, and the EF-1 tornado in 2019, the tree has stood steadfast and intact, despite occasionally dropping branches on the family car.⁵



The old Ash tree towering above the Weisgerber house.



Margaret Weisgerber in front of the old Ash tree.

With fame and notoriety come onlookers, and it is not unusual for people to stop and take photos and chat. During Superstorm Sandy, local and out-of-state storm workers, busy cleaning up debris in Madison, heard of the tree and went out of their way to come by and admire it.

Major League Baseball and the White Ash species had a nearly monogamous 80-year love-affair, with the light-weight, flexible, and durable wood proving just what hitters needed for increased bat speed and power. Its ring-porous structure and prominent grain, give it strength and beauty, making it less likely to break into 2 pieces. Babe Ruth loved his. However, different woods and materials have since come into play, though White Ash is still popular.⁶ In fact, a prior owner of the Weisgerber property once contacted a major baseball bat manufacturer and offered the famed tree to them, but they declined. It could certainly have produced a huge truckload of bats.

Alas, endless longevity is never assured, and even this venerable tree is facing new and enormous challenges. Major League Baseball is not happy either. First detected in 2002, the Emerald Ash Borer beetle, a native of Asia, is relentlessly invading from Michigan eastward, to nearly every state east of

the Mississippi. By 2016, it had killed 50 million White Ash trees. The first case in New Jersey appeared in 2014. It is believed that if no remedy is found, eventually it will likely kill every White Ash in the country. The beetle is already within 50 miles of the forests in northern Pennsylvania used to make the famed Louisville Slugger.⁷ Morris County has decided to cut down 10,000 White Ash trees. It has infected many White Ash trees in Madison, now being removed to prevent beetle spread and the danger from the brittle dying trees crashing down: including along Burnet Rd., St. Vincent Martyr Cemetery, and soon the Luke Miller property.⁸

All may not be lost, however, for the Weisgerber champion tree. A series of preemptive high-tech treatments every 2 years, drilling 28 holes into the base and pumping in an insecticide, has thus far prevented infestation and who knows, may yet protect King Charles I's soul mate for another few hundred years.⁹

SOURCES

1. Collins, Lauren. *New Yorker Magazine*, Feb 17 & 24, 2020. "Was Jeanne Calment the oldest person who ever lived – or a fraud?"
2. *Madison Eagle*. Champion tree grows in Madison. May 19, 2020.
3. The formula for calculating approx. tree age is: circumference in inches at 4.5 feet above ground level/3.14 x growth factor (5 or 6 depending on expert opinion). Some experts suggest this formula yields an age that should be divided by 2. (<https://Journeynorth.org/tm/leaf/howold.html>).
4. "Largest tree" designation is based on a formula of multiple indices/measures, and is not the same as "tallest tree."
5. Interview with Margaret Weisgerber, June 27, 2020.
6. <https://americanbatSmith.com/pages/wood-facts>. Accessed June 25, 2020.
7. Daley, Jason. "An insect could make ash baseball bats a thing of the past." *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 5, 2016.
8. Phone interview with Brian Monaghan of the Madison Shade Tree Management Board, June 30, 2020.
9. *NorthJersey.com*/story/news/environment/2019/05/21/emerald-ash-borer-can-americas-/largest-ash-tree-saved/1258571001/.

2020 College Scholarship Award for History

The Madison Historical Society recently presented its annual History Scholarship to Erin Colligan. Erin, daughter of Jerry and Beth Colligan, was a 2020 graduate of Madison High School where the history teachers selected her as the scholarship recipient. Music is another one of her interests as shown by her membership in the band, choir, jazz choir and participation in the musicals. Erin will be attending Drexel University in Philadelphia majoring in history. She particularly enjoys European history and aspires to museum work in the future.

