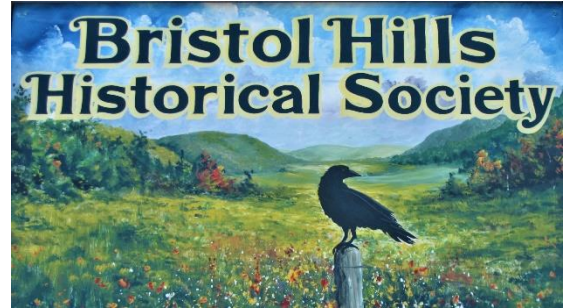


NEWS RELEASE
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A COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER IN UNIQUE PICTUREBOOK VENTURE

When a small-town historical society publishes a book on local history, the template is pretty well set: lots of grainy, black-and-white photos, descriptions of famous citizens and noteworthy buildings, and maybe a version of the town's origin story that overlooks the thousands of years of human history before white settlers arrived.

The Bristol Hills Historical Society took a different route into book publishing. For nearly three years, shortly after the group merged the two separate historical societies for the Ontario County towns of Bristol and South Bristol, its volunteers have enlisted dozens of local residents and businesses to sponsor original watercolor paintings to be published with the stories they depict.

Those stories, a mix of historical fact and folklore, tell the towns' history from ancient native American times and post-Revolutionary War settlement to contemporary events and locations that are history in the making.

"We wanted the community to tell the stories that they want remembered about our special place in the hills," said the project's organizer and lead editor, John Holtz. "I started thinking about this as a children's book, but it grew into something more: a keepsake that we hope is handed down to future generations."

That keepsake, *History and Mystery: The Folklore and Legends of the Bristol Hills*, with 30 paintings by local illustrator Anna Overmoyer, will be published in May and celebrated publicly May 20 at an event featuring a display of original art from the book and a presentation by Haudenosaunee storyteller Perry Ground.

Holtz, a longtime historical society board member, professional outdoors educator, and owner of a South Bristol tree farm, met Overmoyer at an arts festival where she was selling her three-dimensional figures and watercolor paintings.

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Overmoyer's work typically features fairies and other whimsical characters. That caught Holtz's fancy, and he commissioned a painting by her of "The Green Man of the Sugar Bush," telling the story of maple sugaring by what the book now calls "a forest dweller who moves at the border between the worlds of men and plants."

That painting sparked an idea for an entire book of similar works telling other stories, all in a painting style that Overmoyer said was inspired by a rural upbringing in woods and fields "where there was little to do but draw and imagine." After graduating from art school, Overmoyer honed her imagination during a gap year in Ireland. "I drew portraits, listened to songs and stories, and soaked up the magic of the Irish countryside," she said.

After Holtz got the historical society's approval to compile a book, he and other volunteers put out a call for art patrons with stories to tell. Some came from residents wanting to memorialize a favorite private hideaway or a legend passed down from earlier generations. Others, including businesses like Bristol Mountain Ski Resort, sought to support the non-profit organization with a painting and story important to them – in Bristol Mountain's case, it's the mountain as Father Winter's head sporting luxurious white ski slopes as hair.

Other stories include the legend of a cannon lost by General John Sullivan's destructive campaign against the area's Seneca people, Bristol's famed Burning Springs, and "Lonely Lucy," said to be the ghost of a woman who lived in an early settlement that is now on the grounds of the Rochester Museum and Science Center's Cumming Nature Center, another book patron.

The book-publication celebration will take place on Saturday, May 20, at the Bristol Volunteer Fire Department, 4350 State Route 64, Canandaigua. After a private reception for the book's art patrons, the event is open to the public starting at 1 p.m. with the featured presentation by renowned storyteller Perry Ground, a Turtle Clan member of the Onondaga Nation, who will focus on the legend of Bare Hill and other native stories, and continuing with music by the Lakeside Drifters and a beer-and-wine reception featuring Raymor Estate Cellars and Noble Shepherd Brewery.

Copies of the book can be reserved for \$37 at the historical society's website, at bristolhillshistory.org. People who have made advance purchases can receive their copies at the May 20 event or at subsequent events on the society's events calendar. Additional copies of the book will be available for purchase at the events.

The Bristol Hills Historical Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that was formed in 2020 through the merger of the historical societies of Bristol and South Bristol, N.Y. It cares for two of the region's most distinctive historic buildings, the 1923 Grange Hall in Bristol Springs and the 1846 Methodist Episcopal Church in Bristol Center, both of which are on the National Register of Historic Places. The society's website at bristolhillshistory.org and Facebook page at facebook.com/bhhistorical provide calendars of upcoming history presentations and other events, articles on local history, and historic photos. The website also provides information on the Finger Lakes Barn Quilt Trail's driving tour map and Facebook group, which are hosted by the Historical Society.

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Overmoyer, a native of East Bloomfield, is a freelance illustrator and sculptor in Rochester. She teaches illustration at Rochester Institute of Technology and exhibits her work at art festivals and galleries around New York state. Her website is at anna-overmoyer.square.site.

The Historical Society is volunteer-run and members-supported. Annual donor levels starting at \$15 for individuals and \$30 for families can be purchased on the society's website or at any of the society's free events.

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ATTACHED: Book cover, other select paintings from the book, photos of Overmoyer and Holtz

For more information:

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