

3309 Bainbridge Avenue  
The Bronx, NY 10467  
718-881-8900

The Bronx County Historical Society, founded in 1955, is a non-profit educational and cultural institution chartered by the New York State Board of Regents. The Society is dedicated to the collection, preservation, and interpretation of the history and heritage of The Bronx.

The Society disseminates information by utilizing its collections in exhibitions, historical research, publications and documentaries, educational and cultural programming, the operation of our Research Library, The Bronx County Archives, and two national landmark historic house museums: the c. 1812 Edgar Allan Poe Cottage and the c. 1758 fieldstone farmhouse Valentine-Varian House, home of the Museum of Bronx History.

The Bronx County Historical Society is partially supported through funds and services provided by the NYC Departments of Cultural Affairs and Parks and Recreation, the Historic House Trust of New York City, The Bronx City Council Delegation, the Office of The Bronx Borough President, The Bronx Delegations of the NYS Assembly and the NYS Senate, the H.W. Wilson Foundation, the Astor Fund, The New York Times Foundation, the New York State Library, Susan Tane, the New York Community Trust, the New Yankee Stadium Community Benefits Fund, the New York Public Library, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

# THE BRONX HISTORIAN

NEWSLETTER OF THE BRONX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## SOCIETY UPDATES

The Bronx County Historical Society Dinner Fundraiser, held at Zero Otto Nove Restaurant on Arthur Avenue on January 24, 2024 was sold out, with over 80 people in attendance. The Society thanks our CAO Teresa Brown and the committee members who organized the event, Chef Roberto and the restaurant staff, and the attendees who made the evening possible.

## PAUL ROBESON COMES TO THE BRONX

Prior to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. becoming a national icon of the Civil Rights Movement during the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–1956, one of the most well-known figures of African-American freedom struggles was Paul Robeson (1898–1976). Robeson was born in Princeton, New Jersey. His mother died in a house fire when he was six, and his father was a minister and manual laborer. In 1915, Robeson became the third African American to enroll at Rutgers University. He made the football team, playing end, and was involved in the debate club as well as singing on and off campus. As he writes in his memoir *Here I Stand* (1958), Robeson encountered discrimination on and off the football field. Nevertheless, he earned four oratorical awards, varsity letters in several sports, was selected as first-team All-American in his junior and senior football seasons, and was elected valedictorian of his graduating class in 1919.

Robeson went on to attend law school, first at NYU and then at Columbia. During these years, he was recruited by the NFL's Akron Pros, began to sing at major public events like the dedication of the Harlem YMCA, met and married Eslanda Goode, and had his theatrical debut. After graduating from law school in 1923, Robeson worked briefly as a lawyer but his theatrical and musical career soon became his primary focus. The multi-faceted cultural movement of African-American creativity we know as the Harlem Renaissance was blossoming at this time, and the Robesons were very much a part of it. In 1925, thanks to Eslanda's

*Continued on inside left.*



Paul Robeson with campers at Camp Wo-Chi-Ca, showing resident of the Allerton Coops Judy Lawlor in headband, 1940s. Part of "The Allerton Coops: In Living Color" exhibit at the Museum of Bronx History.

# Thanks!

## to our donors

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Gil Walton

\* This is a partial list.

## New Members

Oyiza Adaba  
Anne Barbano  
Robert Grimes, S. J.  
Thomas Hansen  
Sam Hightower  
Barbara Kirk  
Angelo Marino  
Jason Mendez  
Dennis Milton  
Charles Niessner  
Steven Parker  
Pasqual Pelosi  
Ida Torres  
Emilio Vazquez

\* This is a partial list.

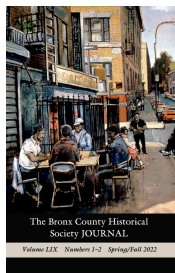
urging, Robeson auditioned for and appeared in his first film, Oscar Micheaux's *Body and Soul*, shot in The Bronx. Amid touring, filming, and travels—domestic and international—Paul Robeson, Jr. was born in 1927.

In 1930, the Robesons made the decision to relocate permanently to London, staying there until 1940. While in the U.K., Robeson had become increasingly politicized, befriending exiled leaders of African liberation struggles and becoming involved in the Spanish Republicans' struggle against General Franco's fascist forces during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). When he returned to the U.S. in 1940, Robeson became immediately involved in African-American freedom struggles, leading the charge to break Jim Crow in baseball and raising awareness of anti-colonial liberation movements in Africa as chairman of the Council on African Affairs.

It was after his return to the U.S. that Robeson started to come around the Allerton Coops in The Bronx, a complex that housed notable African-American activists, artists, actors, and other creatives. In oral histories in the collections of The Bronx County Historical Society, residents of the Coops remember Robeson being a regular presence at parties and other social functions throughout the 1940s and 1950s. As World War II came to an end and McCarthyism became ascendant, Robeson and other civil rights leaders were accused of being Communists. As a result, Robeson was barred from performing publicly in most venues in the U.S. The Coops was a rare social and cultural haven for Robeson—constant F.B.I. surveillance aside—during this difficult period in his life.

The Bronx County Historical Society celebrates Black History Month this year by highlighting the life and legacy of Paul Robeson in “Paul Robeson, A Song of Freedom,” a one-person dramatic reading by Charles Turner, a former resident of the Coops (See “Upcoming Events”). The wider history of the Allerton Coops can still be viewed on exhibit at the Museum of Bronx History.

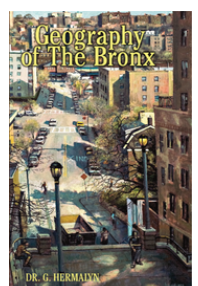
## SUBMISSIONS TO OUR JOURNAL



Since 1964, *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal* has been one of the premier historical journals in the tri-state region. The *Journal's* articles are of interest to all who enjoy scholarly studies and personal accounts of individuals, events, cultures, struggles, and triumphs in The Bronx. Submit article manuscripts as email attachments to [spayne@bronxhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:spayne@bronxhistoricalsociety.org) in Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx) along with 2 images at 300dpi, if relevant. The manuscript should be in 12-pt. Times New Roman font and double-spaced. Be sure to include your full name, contact information, and short biography in the body of your email. Publication of submissions is not guaranteed.

## NEW PUBLICATION

Pick up a copy of the newest publication of The Bronx County Historical Society, *Geography of The Bronx*, authored by CEO Dr. G. Hermalyn. This colorful guidebook on select geographical features of The Bronx, supplemented with more than 100 photographs, maps, and other illustrations, will be of interest to educators, students, and the general public.



\$25.00

# UPCOMING EVENTS

**Voodoo Macbeth and the Allerton Coops Book Talk**  
**Monday, February 12, 2024, 3pm**  
**Virtual Event**

The Allerton Coops in The Bronx, currently highlighted in an exhibit at the Museum of Bronx History, was home to a number of African-American artists, singers, actors, activists, and other accomplished individuals in the 1930s-1960s. Two residents were in the pivotal Federal Theater Project's 1936 all-Black production of *Macbeth* (popularly known as "Voodoo Macbeth"), directed by a young Orson Welles. Join Norris Burroughs, son of Eric Burroughs (a resident of the Coops who played Hecate), for a virtual discussion through Zoom of his graphic novel *Voodoo Macbeth* (2006), which explores the famous production and his father's role in it. Visit <https://bronxhistoricalsociety.org/voodoo-macbeth> to register.

**"Paul Robeson, A Song of Freedom," A One-Person Dramatic Reading**  
**Sunday, February 25, 2024, 3pm**  
**Andrew Freedman Home, Library, 1125 Grand Concourse**

Join veteran Broadway actor and former resident of the Allerton Coops Charles Turner for a one-person dramatic reading of his new "Paul Robeson, A Song of Freedom" in celebration of Black History Month. Turner's piece explores the life and significance of singer, athlete, polymath, and human rights and peace activist Paul Robeson, who visited the Allerton Coops on a regular basis during the 1940s and 1950s. Visit <https://bronxhistoricalsociety.org/paul-robeson> to reserve a free ticket.

**The Allerton Coops and Black Women's Liberation, Roundtable Discussion**  
**Wednesday, March 6, 2024, 7:30pm**  
**Virtual Event**

Among the residents of the Allerton Coops were human rights activists Audley Moore (honored as "Queen Mother Moore" by the Ashanti people) and Dr. Angie Dickerson. In honor of Women's History Month, join The Bronx County Historical Society for a roundtable discussion on the life and legacy of these women and their roles in the wider history of Black women's liberation movements in the U.S. Visit <https://bronxhistoricalsociety.org/womens-history-month> to register.

**Exhibit Opening: The Surrealist Art of Margarita Deida Pietri**  
**Friday, April 12, 2024, 6-8pm**  
**Edgar Allan Poe Cottage, 2640 Grand Concourse**

Join The Bronx County Historical Society in the upper room of Poe Cottage for the opening of a new exhibit of the surrealist visual art of Margarita Deida Pietri, widow of leading Nuyorican poet Rev. Pedro Pietri (1944-2004). Margarita will be exhibiting her visual art in conjunction with selections from Pedro's poetry, paying homage to her late partner's great admiration for Edgar Allan Poe.



## EDGAR ALLAN POE COTTAGE AT POE PARK

*Grand Concourse & E. Kingsbridge Rd.*  
Owned by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, Poe Cottage is operated by The Society. The national landmark house is a member of the Historic House Trust. Public support provided through the New York City Departments of Cultural Affairs and Parks and Recreation.



## MUSEUM OF BRONX HISTORY

*3266 Bainbridge Ave. & E. 208th St.*  
Owned by The Bronx County Historical Society, the Museum of Bronx History at the national landmark Valentine-Varian House is a member of the Historic House Trust. Public support provided through the New York City Departments of Cultural Affairs and Parks and Recreation.



## BEQUESTS

You can support The Society's work by means of a bequest. The following paragraph is suggested for your convenience, for insertion in your will: "I give and devise and bequeath to The Bronx County Historical Society, located at 3309 Bainbridge Avenue, The Bronx, New York 10467, incorporated with the New York State Board of Regents, [insert the amount of money or describe the personal property or real estate] to be used for the general purposes of The Society."

## THE BRONX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### FACILITIES:

#### Research Library & The Bronx County Archives

3309 Bainbridge Avenue

The Bronx, NY 10467

By Appointment:

M-F: 9am-5pm

[librarian@bronxhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:librarian@bronxhistoricalsociety.org).

#### Museum of Bronx History at the Valentine-Varian House

3266 Bainbridge Avenue

The Bronx, NY 10467

S: 10am-4pm

Su: 1-5pm

#### Edgar Allan Poe Cottage

2640 Grand Concourse

The Bronx, NY 10458

Group and individual tours by appointment:

[education@bronxhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:education@bronxhistoricalsociety.org).

## UPCOMING EVENTS, CONT.

### The Bronx's Little Italy Walking Tour

Saturday, April 20, 2024, 12pm

Meet at 2399 Arthur Avenue

\$20 members; \$25 non-members

Join The Bronx County Historical Society for a walking tour of The Bronx's Little Italy. The tour will explore Arthur Avenue and the rich Italian-American history of The Bronx's Belmont neighborhood. Email [education@bronxhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:education@bronxhistoricalsociety.org) to sign up for the tour.

## COLLECTION DONATIONS

The Society's various collections provide invaluable insight into the history of The Bronx. Below is a partial list of those who have recently made donations of material and thus helped preserve our borough's history:

Jason Mendez (October 2023): 1 aerial photograph of the old Yankee Stadium.

Pierce V. Brennan (November 2023): original real estate flyers for the large-scale subdivisions of the former Butler, Ewan, Hayden, and Godwin estates and assorted atlases and maps of The Bronx from the 1920s.

John Collazzi (December 2023): 36 bound volumes of *The Bronx Times Reporter* (1981-2002), which donor founded; various volumes relevant to the history of development in The Bronx; and approximately 1.5 linear feet of additional historical documents, publications, and photographs.

Mike Trotano (December 2023): 1936, 1937, and 1938 issues of "The Wakefield Record" from P.S. 16 in The Bronx.

Glenn Hart (December 2023): 5 issues of the Edgewater Park Volunteer Hose Company Number 1's "The Alarm" from 1958, 1962, 1967, 1978, and 1982.

Lenny Bednarz (December 2023): recordings on CD and assorted memorabilia from Bronx hardcore bands Fahrenheit 451 and Crazy Eddie.

J.D. Valladares (December 2023): recordings on cassette tape and assorted memorabilia from Bronx heavy metal band Hellbound.

Alice Sardell (January 2024): 7 volumes of her grandfather Rabbi Abraham N. Gallant's printed sermons in Hebrew, originally delivered and published in The Bronx during the first half of the twentieth century.

Dave Mitchell (January 2024): recordings on CD and assorted memorabilia from Bronx hardcore bands 4 In The Chamber and Xtinguish The Code.

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