

The HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HARFORD COUNTY, Inc.

Preserving Our Past For Your Future



143 N. Main Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Society News

March / April 2026

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The Historical Society of
Harford County, Inc.,
headquarters.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Warm greetings to all Historical Society members and friends!

News flash – The Board of Trustees of your Society has voted to officially name the former Post Office building at 143 N. Main Street in Bel Air, the Harford History Center!! We think this name promotes the concept that the center will be the nucleus for Harford's historical learning and experiences. We intend it to be a "Must See" when visiting the County. It houses tens of thousands of archival documents and many hundreds of interesting artifacts, some of which are on display throughout the museum. The library is wonderful, and the resources for genealogy research are comprehensive.

I'm suspecting that you may have a little cabin fever after experiencing the throes of winter this year. The Society can help with that! Check out the website to see the interesting events scheduled at both the History Center and the Hays House Museum at 324 Kenmore Avenue in Bel Air. Go to www.harfordhistory.org. The "Plan Your Visit" section will provide you with useful information such as the History Center and Hays House hours, member benefits, and how to schedule an appointment with a historian if you want to do a specific search!

Please remember to renew your 2026 membership or consider joining the Society for the first time! And also consider a small monthly sustaining donation. It all adds up and is very much appreciated.

Hope to see many of you this spring!

Charles (Chuck) Castoro, M.D., President

NEW MEMBERS

Robert Kahoe, The Philip Crocker Family, Kenneth Davis, Merrie Standish, Paula Martin, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Ballard, Rachel Rappe



HARFORD MUTUAL
INSURANCE GROUP

The Historical Society of Harford County newsletter is funded in part through a gift from Harford Mutual Insurance Group.

MUSEUM OPENING: 400 YEARS OF HISTORY

The Harford County Historical Society (HSHC) planned the conversion of the History Center's lobby space into a gallery and museum area as a means to bring the HSHC's cache of artifacts and archival pieces out of storage and into public view-- to "unbox" the collection for the purpose of fulfilling its mission of promoting and interpreting the rich history of Harford County to educate and entertain current and future generations. As with most restoration projects in old buildings, the conversion took much longer than expected, requiring lead paint abatement, insulation, mechanical work, grate repairs, window restoration, and more. After many building restoration "surprises" and a pandemic, the Society's dream of sharing its treasures with the public in a museum space is fulfilled.



As we continue to curate our museum and develop exhibits, we have been fortunate to receive the support from Harford County-based alumni groups like Bel Air High School's class of 1960! Is your local association interested in sponsoring an exhibit or display in our museum? If so, please reach out to membership@harfordhistory.org.

We look forward to involving more community members at the Harford History Center!

Please plan to visit soon and explore the museum's many treasures.

AMERICA 250

The U.S. Semiquincentennial is here! The signing of the Declaration of Independence occurred 250 years ago on July 1, 1776, and organizations across Harford County are planning events to celebrate the themes of history, civics, and service.

Maryland 250 Fellow Program

As part of the Historical Society's America 250 program, the Society worked closely with MD 250. One of its programs allowed the Society to contract with an intern specializing in America 250 celebrations. Rylee Miller was selected as our MD 250 fellow and has been working with us since July 2025. She has been an indispensable member of our team since! She has worked closely on the curation of our museum, the Old Joppa exhibit, and on the America 250 Harford team. Rylee has great historical knowledge due to her academic background and enthusiasm for our work here at the Historical Society. She will be greatly missed, and we hope to see her around!



Washington – Rochambeau Trail Ambassador Orientation

For anyone interested in a volunteer opportunity celebrating the trail that traversed Harford County during the Revolution, the Washington–Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail is pleased to offer a **Trail Ambassador Orientation**, a weekly virtual training opportunity for volunteers, partners, tourism bureaus, and historic sites along the trail.

This **one-hour orientation** provides an overview of the trail's national significance, key themes, and practical talking points to help frontline staff and volunteers confidently share the story with visitors,

especially as we approach **America 250/Freedom 250**.



Virtual sessions will be held every Tuesday in March between 11:00 am – 12:00 pm. Each session covers the same core orientation, so participants may attend any Tuesday that fits their schedule. All participants will receive: a **special America 250 Trail pin**, and a **certificate of completion** recognizing them as a Trail Ambassador.

Please email johnny_carawan@nps.gov by Friday before each weekly session to register and receive the virtual meeting information.

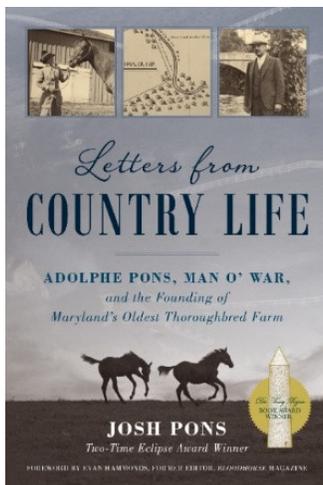
To see what additional events are being planned in our area, visit the America 250 Harford Events Calendar at <https://www.helloharford.com/calendar.aspx?CID=26>. Submitting an event to the calendar is easy – simply fill out the form at <https://www.helloharford.com/FormCenter/General-Forms-4/Submit-an-Event-49> and make sure to check "Yes" on the question "Is this an America 250 Event?"

For questions or comments, email the America 250 Harford Committee at historic@harfordcountymd.gov.

COMING EVENTS

HARFORD HISTORY CENTER EVENTS

- **America 250 Speakers Series: Equestrian Sport in Harford**
Saturday, March 21, 2026 @ 2 pm
The Historical Society of Harford County, 143 N. Main Street, Bel Air, MD 21014



Join us at the Harford History Center for a talk and book signing featuring award-winning author, Josh Pons, a third-generation horseman and owner of Country Life Farm, as he relates the stories behind his newest book, *Letters from Country Life: Adolphe Pons, Man o' War, and the Founding of Maryland's Oldest Thoroughbred Farm*.

In 2016, in the basement of his farmhouse, Josh Pons discovered thousands of letters from his grandfather's life in the Thoroughbred horse business. The son of a French cook who came to New York City in 1894, Adolphe Pons got his start working in the Fifth Avenue mansion of Gilded Age banker August Belmont II. Adolphe became his personal secretary and later played a major role in Belmont's breeding and sale of the most famous horse in history: Man o' War. During the Great Depression, Adolphe left New York and bought a

100-acre horse farm in Maryland, naming it Country Life after the Long Island Railroad station stop nearest his Garden City home.

In serial form, Josh Pons expands on the column he wrote for the leading horse publication *The BloodHorse*, inviting readers to once more step into the attic garret alongside him as he recovers long-lost voices speaking out of letters, telegrams, and photos. Upon the attic stage, Gilded Age tycoons appear, from whom the author's grandfather bought and sold horses, against the backdrop of World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. As Josh draws from the farmhouse's rich archive, he chronicles his grandfather's life and times and shares his own candid reflections. The result is a fascinating and fresh look at the Golden Age of Horse Racing and how the past influences our present.

This is a unique opportunity to explore Harford County's connection to horse breeding, Maryland's role in the sport of horse racing, and the Pons family's legacy in Maryland's equestrian history. To register for this program, visit the Society's website www.harfordhistory.org.

Note: Society Genealogist Chris Smithson will be on hand on March 21, 2026, from 9 am to 12:30 pm to assist with genealogical research in the Society's records. This is a great opportunity to access the Historical Society's extensive collection and do some Maryland and Harford County research – a fine day at the Society covering family research and possibly attending this exciting talk by a local award-winning author.

Tickets are free for members and \$10 for non-members.

- **America 250 Speakers Series: *A Taste of History***
Tuesday, April 14, 2026@ 12:30 pm
The Historical Society of Harford County, 143 N. Main Street, Bel Air, MD 21014

Join us for a journey through the history of dining in Maryland as the Society welcomes food historian and cookbook author Joyce White. Ms. White began her career performing as an 1840s kitchen maid at Rose Hill Mansion in the Finger Lakes region of New York. She served as the Education Curator at the 18th-century Square House Museum in West Chester County, New York, and often cooked on the tavern's 18th-century hearth. In 2006, she began working in Maryland as the Education Director and Foodways Consultant at the 1801 Riversdale House Museum, and she served as the consultant for the restoration of the 18th-century kitchen at Annapolis' William Paca House. She has appeared on numerous TV shows on CBS, MPT, and PBS, and is the author of *Cooking Maryland's Way: Voices of a Diverse Cuisine*.

Ms. White's presentation offers a unique opportunity to learn about Maryland's contributions to American cuisine and to pick up some cooking tips. Be part of the fun.

Register at the Historical Society's website, www.harfordhistory.org. Tickets are free for members, \$10 for non-members.



WHAT'S NEW AT THE HAYS HOUSE



*Hays House Museum,
324 Kenmore Ave., Bel Air, MD*

The nap is over, and the Hays House is reopening. We have a rich year of programming around several themes.

March 8, 2026, 1 pm – 3 pm, Daily Life in Days Gone By: 'Let's Get a Good Night's Sleep.' The museum will reopen on March 8 with the first in a series of programs on daily living in days gone by. The Hays House Museum will open with a unique historic bedding display curated by the Historical Society of Harford County Textiles Department. Antique and vintage bedding evokes both a real and imagined connection to family—whether ours or

one completely unknown to us—and a sincere appreciation and awe of the hands that created these warm coverings. Bedding is common to all of us, regardless of who we are, and bedding handed down through generations, found in shops, or made by us, acquires more meaning with each owner. Visit this year's opening exhibit to learn more about the bedding of our forefathers and view beautiful quilts and bedding from days gone by. The exhibit will remain on display until mid-April.

March 22, 2026, 1-3 pm, Revolutionary Harford: Colonial Roots of Maryland, Harford and the Bush Declaration Signers. The second program in March will feature the Revolutionary Harford theme that we began last year. This program will follow up on last year's anniversary celebration of the signing of the Bush Declaration—on the 251st anniversary of that historic signing. On March 22, 1775, 34 men signed the Bush Declaration. The town of Bush was a major colonial town and port. This presentation will focus on the men who signed the Declaration. Presenter Dr. Sandra Wallis will share excerpts from the stories of these courageous men. We will also celebrate the founding of Maryland, the third English colony in colonial America. There will be two presentation times, and interested persons are asked to sign up for a time slot to ensure adequate space.

April 12, 2026, 1-3 pm, Revolutionary Harford: Midwives to the Revolution: Maryland Women in Early American Printing Industry.

Local historian Amy Rosenkrans has been researching the two primary news sources in colonial Maryland—the Maryland Gazette, published in Annapolis, and the Maryland Banner, published in Baltimore. She has prepared a fascinating presentation on two women who took on non-traditional roles at these two publications. She will share information about Ann Catharine Hoof of Annapolis and Mary Katherine Goddard of Baltimore. Amy's presentations are always popular, and two sign-up times will be available.

April 26, 2026, 1 pm, Revolutionary Harford: Cooking on the Hearth.

This presentation is still in development, so please check our events page for updates. How could colonials cook an entire meal at one time on a hearth? This presentation will give a fascinating look at how hearth cooking works.

All Hays House presentations are free to members. Beginning this year, we will charge \$5.00 for non-members. Pre-registration at www.harfordhistory.org is suggested.

Dr. Sandra Wallis, Chair, Hays House Committee

TEXTILE DEPARTMENT NEWS

Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary

We hope you had a chance to visit Society headquarters during the holidays to see our Early Christmas Morning vignette of 1940s and '50s nightclothes for the whole family. Loosely following that theme, our next exhibit will be of bed coverings, which will open at the Hays House Museum in March. Faithful readers will recall that the Society's collection includes several intriguing quilts. In fact, we've catalogued 50 quilts, 29 other articles of bedding, 8 coverlets, and 6 blankets, and we're still backlogged. What makes bedding, especially quilts, so worthy of preserving and collecting?

We think it's partly because antique and vintage bedding evokes both a real and imagined connection to family—whether ours or one completely unknown to us—and a sincere appreciation and awe of the hands that created these warm coverings. Bedding is common to all of us, regardless of who we are, and bedding handed down through generations, found in shops, or made by us, acquires more meaning with each owner.

Carolyn Barrett, a recent addition to our volunteer team who is a quiltmaker and collector, and a "lover of old textiles," agrees wholeheartedly. In a box labeled "Linsey-Woolsey Wholecloth Quilts" are two plain, utilitarian quilts that came to us without provenance other than reference to a New England origin. Quilts made from large pieces of the same fabric, and seamed together vertically, which we call "wholecloth" to differentiate them from patchwork and applique, were a common component of bedding throughout the 18th century. Indigo-blue worsted quilts with a golden-brown wool back, and white wool wadding (batting) were common during the last quarter of the 18th century in New England. Without the right technology, we can't accurately date our quilts, but we hoped they would reveal themselves to us somewhat during a careful examination. Carolyn chose these quilts as her first complex project.

The first thing I noticed when I lifted the lid and pulled back the tissue cushioning the quilts was the vivid color. There were two quilts in the box, one deep indigo blue and the other a brilliant red.

Surprisingly, the colors were still deep and vibrant, unlike many old cotton calico patchwork quilts that fade with light, use, and washing. The fabric was a coarse wool, similar to burlap. These were unlike anything I'd ever seen!

We unfolded the first quilt, the indigo one. I was stunned to see that although the fabric is coarse, the quilting is elaborate and beautifully done, with feathers, swirls, and flourishes. The quilter was very skilled. Unfortunately, this quilt is quite damaged, with many holes, large and small. The red quilt also has very fine, detailed quilting in complex designs. The design is especially visible from the back side of the quilt, which is a natural undyed color. The red quilting thread really stands out against the cream color of the backing fabric.

The red quilt also has a good bit of damage. Some is from use, such as along a fold line, or wear along the edge where it was habitually pulled up. Some holes appear to be critter damage. Through the holes, we could see some of the raw wool batting between the layers. I was given permission to stabilize the quilts for display. My goal was to limit further fraying of the worst of the existing holes and keep the batting in where it was showing through a hole. I used archival netting, basted with plain sewing thread, to cover holes and reinforce fraying edges, attached in a way that it could be easily removed.

I couldn't help but feel a connection with the maker or makers of these quilts. It was obvious that every step had been accomplished by someone's hands –shearing, washing, carding, spinning, dying, stitching, quilting. It is likely that most of the work, if not all, was done by women. Women who are long gone, but whose creative work lives on as their legacy. Someone, some woman, made these quilts with time, skill, creativity, and love. She or someone she cared about needed them to keep warm in the long, cold New England winter, and she did all she could to make them not just warm, but beautiful. I felt privileged to see and touch them. I hope she would approve of what I did to help preserve her work so others can see it and appreciate it.

Information we found on Nebraska's International Quilt Museum website confirms the historic significance of our quilts:

*Whole cloth wool quilts are iconic products of Colonial America. Made with brilliantly dyed hard-surface worsteds (wool fabrics woven of compactly twisted yarn) and carded woolen battings, they added beauty and warmth to bedsteads in unheated rooms. Their designs typically feature bold scrolling flowers and leaves, sometimes growing from vases or baskets, bordered with feather plumes.**

We performed no miracles to turn these ordinary quilts into extraordinary works of practical art that say "I care about you," but that's what happened, anyway. We are delighted that they will soon be on display at the Hays House for everyone to enjoy.

Susan Wooden, Textile Department

*<https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/exhibition/whole-story>

IN MEMORIAM

- **George F. Harrison (1936-2026)**



Dedicated, principled, community-oriented, kind, hard-working, intelligent, respected, trustworthy, caring, personable, fair-minded, ...

By now, people interested in local news have read of George F. Harrison Jr.'s death on January 4, 2026, at age 90. And they will have encountered persons, websites, or publications using words such as those above to exemplify the man known simply to everyone as "George."

Individuals closely involved with the Historical Society of Harford County can personally testify to the sterling character of George Harrison. A longtime member, Harrison held numerous leadership positions that required integrity, as well as administrative and financial expertise. These included the Society's presidency, vice-presidency, treasurer, trustee, and Chair of the Budget and Finance Committee – jobs necessitating a person of reliability and unquestioned honesty. The last time the author saw George, he was carrying to the safe deposit box the *Minute Book of the Harford County Committee of Observation* that includes the proclamation, traditionally called the Bush Declaration, following its exhibition at Society Headquarters. Talk about being responsible for vital assignments!

Most people knew George as the talented and friendly owner of Harrison's Paint Store on North Main Street in Bel Air. At his father's death in 1968, George assumed control of the 21-year-old painting and

decorating business, where he grew skilled in advising customers on types of paint and wallpaper, and in mixing paint colors to his patrons' desires. The firm expanded its focus when his Chicago-born wife, Cora (m.1962, d.2024), started an adjacent unfinished wooden furniture and wicker store that also provided quilting fabrics, art supplies, and picture framing.

Few younger county residents knew that operating a retail business was George Harrison's second career. After his graduation from Bel Air High in 1953, the Bel Air native headed south to the University of Miami, from which he graduated in 1957, with degrees in English, Journalism, and Television Broadcasting.

George's journalistic career began at WMAR-TV in Baltimore. Here, he wrote copy and produced all news programs for two years (1957-1959), before moving to Chicago (1959-1962) to write broadcast news for United Press International, along with the Associated Press, the nation's most reliable news agency that provided news material to thousands of outlets in the United States. Promoted to the UPI office in New York, George quickly moved as a writer/editor/producer to CBS News. Harrison worked at CBS for six years. And, yes, he did write copy for Walter Cronkite, before returning to Bel Air.

Fundamentally, George Harrison was a community man - - and to him this meant Bel Air and Harford County. It meant passing up the limelight and declining personal awards; promoting small retail businesses and Main Street; keeping up with news of the area and "seeking the truth through journalism of the highest standards" (NYT); remaining loyal to the Democratic Party of his youth; serving on the County Library Board; and supporting his wife's interests and those of his children. And, of course, it meant sharing his energy, insight, talents, and resources in helping steward the collections, policies, and activities of the Historical Society of Harford County.

Thank you, Stephen and Deborah, for sharing your father with us.

Jim Chrismer

- **Nancy Webster Cassilly (1931 -2026)**

The Historical Society lost another longtime advocate on January 5, 2026, when Nancy W. Cassilly died. Mrs. Cassilly was a member of the prominent Webster family that had established itself in the late 17th century in an area that in 1773 became Harford County. Judge Walter Preston, local historian, in 1901, referred to the Websters as "one of the most honored families of Harford County...[that] furnished some of the most distinguished men in the county."

Born in 1931 in Norfolk, VA, where her parents had briefly located during the Depression, Mrs. Cassilly was the lone girl of eight children of Joseph Ignatius Webster and Anna Miriam Poole. The family returned to Harford County in 1932, and Nancy grew up in the Perryman area.

A graduate of the former St. Stephen's High School (Bradshaw) in 1948, she studied at The College of Notre Dame (Baltimore) before marrying Robert (Bob) Rogers Cassilly in 1950. The couple had twelve offspring, including County Executive Robert Cassilly, whom they raised at the Cassilly's *Retreat Farm* in Harford Furnace and on Broadway in Bel Air. Of her children, who became homemakers, educators,



health care workers, lawyers, a volunteer in the Peace Corps, Big Brothers, and members of the military, Nancy modestly affirmed, "I think they're all just interested in making the world a better place to live."

Nancy Cassilly was a welcoming, resourceful, hard-working, talented, yet humble person. She was a devout Catholic who devoted herself to St. Francis de Sales Church, Abingdon, and her adopted parish of St. Ignatius, Hickory, where she played the organ, managed the kitchen, and organized dinners.

Nancy was also a talented gardener, helping with the landscaping at St. Ignatius, and regularly planting and weeding at the Historical Society's Hays House Museum.

Fittingly, Nancy's funeral Mass was held at historic St. Ignatius (1792), a National Register property and the oldest continuously operated church in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Thank you, Nancy, for all you did for your beloved community and the Historical Society of Harford County.

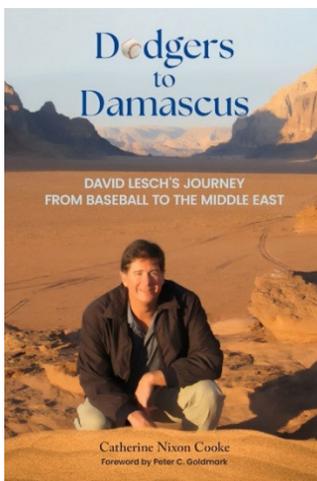
Jim Chrismer

BOOK REVIEW

Dodgers to Damascus: David Lesch's Journey from Baseball to the Middle East

Catherine Nixon Cooke

As a matter of transparency, the reviewer taught David Lesch in an 11th grade U. S. History course at John Carroll School in Bel Air, MD.



In her 250-page biography, *Dodgers to Damascus*, author Catherine Nixon Cooke "tells the story" of Harford County native David W. Lesch's fascinating mix of experiences from the world of small-town life and professional baseball to the realm of an acclaimed scholar of the Middle East. Lesch's widespread travel and research into international affairs involved him with intrigue, put him in personal danger, led to his developing into an international consultant in Middle East affairs, and becoming an advocate for international conflict resolution.

Ms. Cooke relies heavily on personal interviews, including many with her subject, to document her biography (semi- autobiography?). She speaks to Lesch's colleagues, classmates, mentors, professional and private associates, friends, relatives, and government officials. The result is a highly readable, intimate, subjective, but credible, and enjoyable account of a native Harford Countian who became one of the nation's "go to" experts on Middle East affairs.

As a youth, a neighbor contends, Lesch lived an "Ozzie and Harriet" existence. He was born in Baltimore in 1960 and lived in Bel Air, where his father had established a medical practice. His first home was a modest brick rancher in Howard Park, the growing town's original housing development.

In his pre-collegiate years, David attended Catholic Schools. He went to the nearby parochial school, St. Margaret's, riding his bike or walking to classes with older brother Bob, and being taught by a mix of nuns and lay persons. He then matriculated at Bel Air's John Carroll School, an independent college prep high school, from which he graduated in 1978.

At John Carroll, the mildly shy and somewhat rambunctious teen "did well in classes he liked," excelled in basketball and baseball, and surprised himself by dating the bright, athletic, popular captain of the cheerleading squad. An all-around athlete, David's favorite sport was baseball.

In Chapter 2, "The Road to Dodgertown," Stanford-educated Cooke describes Lesch's time, 1978-1980, at two unheralded colleges, Western Maryland (now McDaniel) in Westminster and then Central Arizona in Coolidge, AZ. The latter was a "baseball academy," where the Milwaukee Brewers tried to hide young men they believed had a future in the major leagues. The Los Angeles Dodgers, however, learned of the lightly scouted hurler whose fastball reached 95 mph, and made him their #1 selection in Baseball's January 1980 player draft.

Here, Ms. Cooke makes the transition to narrating the touted prospect's orientation to play-for-pay baseball. The raw rookie played first in the Pioneer League in America's far Northwest and then found himself invited to spring training. In Florida, at manager Tommy Lasorda's direction, he performed well in batting practice and intrasquad games, throwing to such noted players as Steve Garvey, Ron Cey, and Davy Lopes, and met his hero, Sandy Koufax. However, as often occurred in the era before Tommy John Surgery came along, a severe rotator cuff injury during his second year ruined David's pitching arm, and the pitching-rich team released him.

It was at this point in his life that Lesch begins the work that led to his being the subject of this noted new biography. The young athlete returned to Bel Air, with the Dodgers contractually obligated to pay for his future education, an unusual arrangement negotiated with the Dodgers by his insightful father. Now 20 years old, David enrolled at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), where in 1983 he finished his B.S in International Relations. More significantly, it was at UMBC that a mentor, Louis Cantori, exposed him to the study of the Middle East.

At Cantori's urging, Lesch decided to pursue a doctoral degree and chose Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies from among all of his acceptances. It was, after all, Harvard, and the Dodgers were paying! Taught by many of the nation's greatest experts in his "field," David earned an M.A. in 1986 and a PhD in 1990. His dissertation dealt with the United States and its relations with Syria.

For two years, Dr. David Lesch taught self-designed courses on the Middle East at Johns Hopkins University and at St. Mary's College in Southern Maryland. In January 1992, the rising scholar selected the invitation of Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas ("Home Base") to establish its planned Middle Eastern Studies program.

Over the course of the subsequent 30+ years at Trinity, where he remains as an author and instructor (including of a popular course in the History of Baseball), Lesch has taught 4,000 students, written or edited seventeen books, published hundreds of articles and essays in prestigious publications, and was awarded a tenured Distinguished Professor of History.

Lesch's writings vary as to their intended audience. Some are academic tomes, designed as textbooks or analyses of weighty topics. These include *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*; *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics, and Ideology*; and *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Assad and Modern Syria*.

Among those works more likely to be found on library shelves and in bookstores are *A History of the Middle East Since the Rise of Islam*; *Syria: A Modern History*; and, most recently, *History in Dispute: The Middle East Since 1945*

It is in these latter publications that Lesch reveals his great interest in the life of the Middle Eastern people and their cultural interactions with each other. Ms. Cooke takes pains in describing David's using public transportation, walking the city streets, and eating with locals in everyday restaurants.

Catherine Cooke's remarkable biography proceeds chronologically as Lesch lives his life and augments his career. It integrates the personal (romances/marriages, tragedies, family life with brother Bob and parents Warren and Marge, friends, classmates, and outside interests and lifestyle) with the professional (post-secondary education, teaching career, publications, colleagues, professional acquaintances, and outside projects). Neither section totally monopolizes the other, although Lesch's public activities necessarily take precedence, covering at least 80% of the book.

Cooke's direct and highly descriptive narrative writing style makes for easy and appealing reading. The reader encounters this immediately, as demonstrated in an excerpt from page 1: "*Dusk crept across the Arabian Desert in shades of mauve and faint tangerine... But David Lesch could not savor the soft colors of the sky or the beauty of the destination just ahead. He could barely see them. His vision blurred; his head throbbed; he felt a strange tingling in his legs and a weakness that frightened him.*" (p.1) It was 2008, and the seasoned scholar had been poisoned (one of 2 such incidents) by a member of a warring Syrian political sect, and one of the numerous times he would experience potentially lethal threats, in Syria or elsewhere, during his frequent trips to the Middle East.

A noteworthy aspect of Dr. Lesch's career is his development of a personal relationship with Bashar al-Assad, Syria's autocratic president. On several occasions, David traveled to Syria to meet Assad and his wife in Damascus. Described as quiet, timid, and reserved, the semi-reclusive Assad essentially dictated Syrian foreign and internal policy and was the key to David's insights into Syrian affairs. In December 2024, opponents of Assad's murderous rule ended the country's long civil war, overthrew his government, and forced Assad to flee to Russia for sanctuary.

This reviewer finds it difficult to synthesize Dr. Lesch's complex and varied activities outside Trinity. Suffice it to say that numerous economic and political institutions, world government agencies, and heads of international projects regularly seek his practical input and involvement. These include the United Nations, the Carter Center in Atlanta, the Harvard Law School Program on Negotiation, and the U. S. State Department, on whose behalf he has testified to congressional committees.

Dodgers to Damascus is a remarkably short but useful introduction for general readers to the modern affairs of Syria and the Middle East. By following the life and career of Bel Air's David Lesch, Catherine Cooke deftly narrates the emergence of one of the nation's "go to" scholars of the affairs of the world's greatest "hot spot." Readers seeking a readable biography of an important specialist in Middle East affairs will be highly pleased

Jim Chrismer

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Tuesday
COURT RECORDS
9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Wednesday
ARCHIVES
9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Third Wednesday
ARCHIVES & HENRY
C. PEDEN Jr. LIBRARY
5:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.

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HENRY C. PEDEN Jr.
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