



# GSMT NEWS

Winter 2023

## The Newsletter of The General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen

Founded in 1785, The General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen is dedicated to improving the educational and cultural opportunities for people in the City of New York

### Meet Our New GSMT President



Jim Holohan

Past President Dan Holohan was delighted to induct his brother, Jim Holohan, as the 2023 General Society President at our December General Membership meeting. Past President Holohan had served as President since January 2019 and the General Society

is greatly indebted to him for his devoted service and magnificent leadership over this time period.

"I've always looked up to my younger brother," Past President Holohan said. "His leadership and problem-solving skills are outstanding. I'm so honored to have him succeed me as President of GSMT." Jim Holohan has served on the Board of Governors of the General Society for the past four years.

Jim climbed the ranks of the NYPD, concluding his 20-year career in 2001 as Commanding Officer of Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau's Detective Squad. Prior to that, he led the Queens and Brooklyn South Narcotics District, as well as the JFK International Airport Narcotics Smuggling Unit Task Force.

After retiring from the NYPD, Jim joined a Manhattan law firm where he founded, led, and managed an affiliated private investigations and business consultancy.

Jim is currently the Managing Principal of Brown Rudnick's Investigative Team. Founded in the 1940s, Brown Rudnick is an international law firm that works on high-profile cases.

"Jim brings a world of experience to GSMT," Past President Holohan said. "He's a great listener and he sees things most other people miss. He's a problem-solver, and he also has some pretty amazing stories to tell. I know we're in very good hands."

### 2023 GSMT Lecture Series Begins

The 2023 General Society Lecture Series began on Thursday, January 19th, with a celebration and examination of the work of a revered American artist and his ties to New York. In *Edward Hopper in New York City*, art historian Rena Tobey revisited Hopper's art, coinciding with the current Whitney Museum exhibit.



New York Movie by Edward Hopper

This will be followed on Tuesday, February 21st with *Irving Berlin: From Penniless Immigrant to America's Songwriter*. In this program writer Paul Kaplan will trace the history of this beloved songwriter and explore his continued influence. Many more lectures are planned, please visit [www.gensociety.org](http://www.gensociety.org) for more information on the upcoming Winter/Spring 2023 series of lectures.

### Summer & Fall 2022 Recap of GSMT Lectures

The summer lectures began on June 28th, when Sara Cedar Miller, historian emerita of the Central Park Conservancy, discussed her new book, *Before Central Park*, the authoritative account of the place that would become Central Park. On July 12th, Jacqueline Ottman described *The History of the Meatpacking District and Its Pioneers*. Ms. Ottman presented a richly illustrated part-history, part-memoir of her family's role as meat purveyors in the District. This was followed on July 19th with *Travelers: Journeys on the Railroads from the Early Surveys to Modern Vacations* with Barriger Railroad Library Curator...

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## The Lovely Marianne

It is with great sadness that we tell of the sudden passing of Marianne Holohan, Past President Dan Holohan's wife of 50 years. Dan's daughter, General Society Member Erin Haskell, had written these words about her mother, the woman Dan always called "The Lovely Marianne," a few years ago. Erin read them at our November General Membership meeting and we have entered them into the General Society Minutes to remember this remarkable woman:

*The photographer asked her not to smile, which gave us even more incentive to try to make Mom laugh. It was a hazy afternoon in Cape May, NJ. My three sisters and I huddled together amongst the taffeta and lace in the old-timey Victorian photography studio. Our skin, slightly sunburned and our hair still damp from swimming. Not much could have pulled us away from summer fun, but this (and the promise of ice cream after) made it well worth our while.*

*When Dad had asked Mom if she'd pose for the photo on the dedication page of his first book, "The Lost Art of Steam Heating," she thought he was kidding. He told her how perfectly it would fit with the theme of the book. And then she agreed because she thought about how far they'd come and how they were almost there.*

*I imagine the uncertainty must have been hard for her the day Dad left his job at the manufacturer's representative to build a better life for all of us and work on his first book. She never said anything to us girls. We were much too young. What I do remember was the two of them working harder than I've ever seen anyone work. Dad would spend long days in the field consulting on heating jobs and come home to write. And amidst the frenzy of feelings that surround four young girls, there was Mom, taking multitasking to a whole new level.*

*On weekends, we'd wander dusty aisles of old bookstores with Dad, his fingertips dancing along the spines on shelves, searching for lost treasures. Later...*

*...at home, we'd watch him examine their yellowed pages, his brow furrowing in concentration, only to rise in an occasional aha moment. And then he'd write and edit and write some more until, years later, it was finally finished.*

*And so Mom humored Dad and gave the photographer her best Mona Lisa for the sake of authenticity. People didn't smile in old photos because cameras had much longer exposure times and they had to keep their faces as still as possible. And so their expressions were frozen, forever sullen, while they were probably anything but. After all, they had the wonders of steam heating, right?*

*Mom's stifling taffeta gown had a collar covering her entire neck in a nod to Victorian modesty. A heavy hat covered in flowers kept sliding jauntily to the side of her head, testing her petite frame. We giggled at her from the corner while she laughed with us in between camera flashes.*



Marianne Holohan

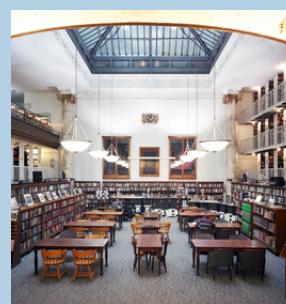
*When the first copy of "The Lost Art of Steam Heating" arrived in our home, we opened it and saw the photo of Mom. The caption read, "For 'The Lovely Marianne,'" Dad's love note to her, a dedication for all of her dedication. Dad may have written the pages, but Mom was the glue that kept us all together, through the struggles, the silliness, and everything in between. Here's to you, Mom.*

## Please Help the General Society Support Our Programs

The historic GSMT building has space to rent for programs and special events including:

- Our grand, three-story library
- Balcony/Museum
- Conference Rooms for smaller meetings
- Classrooms available for regular daytime use or evening lectures, classes, receptions and more

For more information, call The General Society office, (212) 840-1840 ext. 2, or visit our website [www.gensociety.org](http://www.gensociety.org) and click Rent Space.



## A Visit from GSMT Descendants!

Our home at 20 West 44th Street is filled with American history and numerous memories. The past echoes here. Each step you take follows the steps of so many others taken. Touch a doorknob and know that Andrew Carnegie probably once touched that same doorknob, as did so many others.

In our Assembly Room hangs the portrait of General Society Member Thomas Royce Mercein, a man who cared deeply about education. He was a master baker and became a member of GSMT in 1803. He moved up the ranks and became our president in 1827. Along the way, he was instrumental in establishing a free day school and Apprentices' Library for the children of General Society members, which, in 1858, became The Mechanics Institute, our tuition-free program for men and women in the building trades.

Brother Mercein's portrait watches over us as we hold our monthly meetings. He is a constant reminder of our purpose - to make New York City better through education. He reminds us that everyone matters. *Everyone.*

And so it was with absolute delight that we recently received this letter:

*Dear Ms. Dengel and Ms. Taylor,*

*I am a direct descendant of Thomas Royce Mercein, whose portrait hangs in your building. I am currently writing a solo play called "Two Elizas" about Thomas' daughter, Eliza Mercein Barry, who was part of a significant 1847 U.S. Supreme Court case involving womens' right and child custody (Barry v. Mercein).*

*I will be in Manhattan on Friday of this week, doing research for the piece. I would love to stop by and pay a quick visit to Thomas' portrait, if that is possible. Eliza had a deep connection to her father, and he was unfailingly supportive of his child. It would be incredibly meaningful to me if I could see the portrait. Please let me know if that is possible.*

*Warmly,  
Jenny Mercein*

Ms. Mercein paid a summer visit to see the Thomas Mercein portrait and here is a photo of her with her illustrious ancestor.



*Jennie Mercein with her Ancestor Thomas Mercein*

This turned out to be only the beginning of connections with the Mercein family. A few months later, Christie Kathleen (Kate) Dimon and her husband, David, wrote to ask if they could also see the portrait of Brother Mercein, who was Kate's great-great-great grandfather. We welcomed them as family.



*Kate and David Dimon*

After their visit, Kate wrote, *"Thank you for the tour, and the opportunity to find Thomas R. Mercein. It has filled part of the void of answering questions my Grandmother and great-grandfather had. It was such an honor."*

Kate's last name, Dimon, also has a place in New York City history as well as GSMT history. Jonathan Dimon was a partner with Stephen Smith in Smith and Dimon Shipyards, once located on the East River between East 4th and 5th Streets. The shipyard became famous for its work in the 1840s, and both men had been members of The General Society since August 2, 1826.

After visiting Thomas Mercein's portrait, Kate and David decided to donate to GSMT portraits of Jonathan Dimon and his brother Charles Dimon, a Director of the company, that had been in the family for generations. We're delighted that our Brothers Mercein and Dimon will live on in memory on the walls of our beautiful Assembly Room for centuries to come. We thank Kate and David for their generosity. And we welcome them *all* home.

## GSMT Receives Excelsior Award

Late last Spring, Executive Director Victoria Dengel and Past President Gerard Drohan, Jr. accepted the Excelsior Award from the NYS Troopers. The Award was presented for our unwavering support for the men and women of the New York State Police.



*Gerard Drohan, Jr., Victoria A. Dengel and Major Brian P. Webster*

## Inspiring Words from Mechanics Institute Student



Erion Kulla

Erion Kulla successfully applied to the Construction Project Management course and was admitted for Fall 2022. His heartfelt application essay appears below. Erion, who immigrated here in 2014 from Albania, was profiled in an earlier *GSMT News* article.

*My name is Erion Kulla and, I am applying to be admitted to "The General Society of Mechanics & Tradesman" to be part of the "Construction Project Management Program" because "The General Society of Mechanics & Tradesman" is the place where the future takes colors and the place where the dreams come true.*

*I believe and say so because I was part of the students that attended the Plumbing program about two years ago. I saw the desire of learning in the student's eyes, I witnessed the passion of teaching in my teacher's eyes, I felt the love given by the management's eyes and nothing can keep me from coming back to be part of this amazing adventure once again.*

*I have fallen in love with this place since the first time I came here in person. In this place I met my future and I found myself again. Based on the knowledge I receive here, my future seems to be bright.*

*Back in my country, I graduated as a mechanical engineer but when I came here in the US I started as a helper in a plumbing company as many other emigrants do! I was working day and night to make my living, but nothing was easy and there when I was just ready to give up, I heard about "The General Society of Mechanics & Tradesman" Here, I learned so much about the plumbing systems and the place felt like home so with the knowledge taken here and the experience gained in the field, I am today a foreman in a big plumbing company. Now, I love what I am doing, and I am willing to expand my knowledge furthermore so the "Construction Project Management Program" will be an excellent opportunity for me to achieve my goal. I am a hard worker and an excellent learner and combining these qualities I will be a successful man in the United States of America.*

*I am grateful to The General Society of Mechanics & Tradesman for opening the door to my future.*

*Respectfully,  
Erion Kulla*

## Library Skylight Restoration Begins

Last November, The General Society began a major restoration of its historic Library Skylight which sits above the Main Reading Room. The restoration, which will return the Skylight back to its original glory, will include addressing the architectural features and original structural elements, with decorative pressed-metal ornamentation, new laminated glass and copper skylight enclosure. The work will also address the adjacent flat roof and drainage components, as well as restore the interior lighting below the skylight.

Historic-preservation experts, Easton Architects have prepared the restoration approach and will be overseeing the work in construction. Nova Restoration will be performing the work. They recently completed a major restoration of the Society's landmarked façade and ornamental fire escapes, as well as the restoration of the main-roof copper balustrade.

This project is funded in part by the New York State Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation and we are very grateful for their support.

Although the Library will be closed during the daytime for the work, the space will remain open for evening public lecture programs and events. The project is projected to be completed in late Summer 2023.

## A Construction Project Management Tradition

Mechanics Institute instructor Ralph Carmosino takes his Construction Project Management students on a field trip to Times Square every year.



Mr. Carmosino says, "Bringing the real world into the classroom keeps the material fresh and relevant. At the end of the Construction Methods and Materials course, we reverse that and bring the classroom

into the real world. There is no greater learning tool than seeing (and physically touching) construction materials that the students have studied during the semester. We end the tour at the fascinating TKTS Booth in Times Square, which is the first building in New York City with a structural system made entirely of glass! What a learning experience!"

## On a Rainy Day...

On a rainy day in years gone by, Society members would arrive for a meeting in our Assembly Room, which is on the first-floor balcony at 20 West 44th Street.

So as to not drip water onto the floor of that very special place, each member would deposit their umbrella in a rack just outside the old door. That rack was not just an ordinary umbrella stand. No, this was the product of the Backus Novelty Company of Smethport, PA, a small town about 100 miles east of Lake Erie.



Backus has a wonderful history. They began in 1906 as a manufacturer of hat-, coat-, and umbrella locks for commercial buildings, as well as locks to protect items left inside automobiles, and the automobile itself. In 1916, they invented the automatic bowling pinsetter, which they licensed to AMF in the 1920s.

Over the years they continued to manufacture many precision-machined products, including lighter components, pocket knives, survival tools, money clips, golf- and fly-fishing tools, aerospace industry components, and under the name, Chef Specialties, which they use today, they introduced to America the salt- and pepper-grinding mechanism.

So on a rainy day, our members would place their umbrella into the Backus machine, following the instructions on the sign that you can see when you visit.



Since most umbrellas were similar in those days, this was a nice service to have, and the metal check also acted as a key to ensure your umbrella was not mistakenly taken by another member.

When you come to visit, try it yourself. It still works. And they sure don't make them like they used to!

## The Horological Society of New York expands its Library

Founded in 1866, the Horological Society of New York (HSNY) is one of the oldest continuously operating horological associations in the world. Members are a diverse mix of watchmakers, clockmakers, executives, journalists, auctioneers, historians, salespeople and collectors, reflecting the rich nature of horology in New York City and around the world.



On Friday evening, October 21, HSNY officially opened its doors to the Jost Bürgi Research Library on the fifth floor of The General Society Building.

Jost Bürgi was a 16th-Century mathematician. He served as court watchmaker to Duke Wilhelm IV of Hesse-Kassel from 1579 to 1592 and worked in the royal observatory at Kassel, where he developed geometrical and astronomical instruments. Bürgi later journeyed to Prague to take up the post of imperial clockmaker. He also became assistant to the German astronomer, Johannes Kepler.

GSMT Executive Director, Victoria Dengel, attending the reception, reported that it was wonderful to witness the 21st-Century acknowledgment of the impact of Jost Bürgi on the art and science of horology. She went on to explain that the HSNY Library underwent a major three-year expansion, with the donation of the private collection of Fortunat Mueller-Maerki. A longtime bibliophile, Mueller-Maerki owned one of the largest horological libraries in private hands. He spent 30 years traveling the world and purchasing horological material including books, periodicals, audiovisual materials, rare ephemera and more.

This massive horological library is now among the largest in the world, containing nearly 25,000 items on all aspects of horology. It boasts an extensive collection, including a number of rare and important texts in the field of horology. This beautiful space on the fifth floor of 20 West 44th Street is a resource for watchmaking students and aficionados alike. Visitors are welcome between 10 am and 5 pm, Monday through Friday. Appointments are encouraged for research. Learn more here: [www.hs-ny.org/library](http://www.hs-ny.org/library).

## Two Friends from the Old Neighborhood

Alex Weiss teaches in the Plumbing and Heating Systems Program at the Mechanics Institute. He had been teaching online for the past few years due to the pandemic, but decided to return to his classroom on West 44th Street last September. The subway wasn't running well that day and it took Alex three hours to get to Manhattan to his first class from his home in Brooklyn. It was not the best of days for him.

But then upon arrival he met Yuriy Mayboroda, a new student in his class. Yuriy recognized Alex's accent and asked him if he was from Ukraine. Alex smiled and nodded.

"What city?" Yuriy asked.

"Uzhgorod," Alex said, and this is where our tale gets delightful. Yuriy is from the same city as Alex, which happens to be 1,120 years old, and is also the geographic center of all of Europe.

"Where in the city did you live?" Alex asked. Yuriy told him and Alex looked surprised. They had grown up on the same mile-long street, but at different times. How's that for a delightful coincidence?

Yuriy was telling us his story in English. We asked how many languages he spoke. He shrugged and said, "Six or eight? My English is not so good yet." It was good enough to make his story remarkable. Here is a man who lost everything he had worked so hard for. He shrugged, laughed, and began anew. "I should be three times dead," he said, patting his chest. "I'm not, so we move on, yes?"

He then told us he had won the Green Card Lottery on his birthday, and that allowed him to come to the U.S. When he arrived, he took a job with a mechanical contractor, working on high-rise buildings. He apologized for his red face at our 5:15 pm Zoom interview, telling us that he had come straight from work where he had been installing riser pipes on the 25th floor of a building that didn't have its windows installed yet. "It's very cold and windy today!" he laughed.

"Why did you choose that job?" we asked.

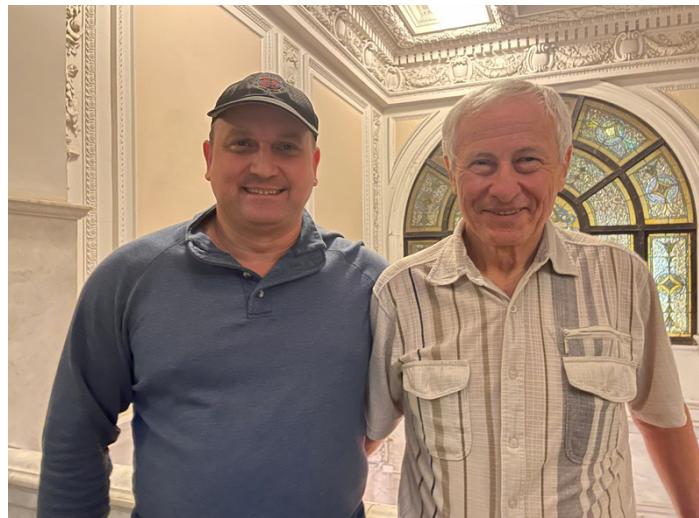
"Because it is something I have never done before," Yuriy said. "I will learn many new things by doing this job."

And that is why he is taking Alex's Plumbing Code course at the Mechanics Institute. We asked him what led him to M.I. and again he laughed. "God led me!" he said. "Remember, I'm supposed to be three times dead, but I am taking this course instead. God's will!"

Yuriy is forever seeking knowledge and interesting people. "I want to solve problems and change the world," he said. "But I know I can only change the world around myself. This is why I want to wrap myself in good people. I felt like a child in kindergarten when I came to this school. I felt energy and joy, and the power of this beautiful building."

Imagine losing everything and still having the wonder and excitement of a child in kindergarten. Anything is possible today. Anything.

Yuriy and Alex are good friends from an old neighborhood now, both making a difference in America. "He is a person of extraordinary character, who handles his troubles very well," Alex said of Yuriy. We feel the same about Alex Weiss. Each is a gift to our City and to our country. We are blessed to have them both here.



*Yuriy Mayboroda and Alex Weiss*

Yuriy helped Alex, his new friend and teacher, get home that night.

Yuriy bubbles with laughter, enthusiasm, and joy. We learned that he is an inventor, specializing in high-precision metalworking. He had an amazing career, managing factories throughout Europe and Asia, but he lost it all to the tragedy of the many battles that have taken place in Ukraine, even before the Russian invasion. "The weekly wars," he called it.

## A Passion to Learn and Teach for Three Generations

Matthew Gitli teaches at Mechanics Institute, a place where he was once a student. His father Randy was also once a M.I. student, as was Randy's father, Jerry, back in the '60s.

Dan Holohan, our Past President, knows all three men through his writing in the heating industry. "Dan gave me a passion for reading old books," Randy told us. "He gave me a love for old-book stores, filled with the answers to the many questions I had coming up in the business."

"Yes, me too," Matthew added. "My dad would take me to Dan's heating seminars when I was just a kid. I wanted to be a thoracic surgeon back then. I used to volunteer at the local hospital, just to be around doctors. But then Dad would take me to those heating classes. It was the family business and it was always there. It was Dan's books that bit me. I saved enough to buy a copy of *The Lost Art of Steam Heating*, Dan's first book. I bought it from his wife, Marianne, who sat at a long table in the back of the seminar room, selling books. She was so nice to me. I was just a kid. I think she got a kick out of me wanting to read that big book."

Matthew's grandfather, Jerry, was a Union plumber and a New York City plumbing inspector. He learned much of his trade at the Mechanics Institute. During Mayor John Lindsay's administration, Jerry got a pink slip and decided to go into business for himself. That business became Aladdin Plumbing which grew and even showcased their skills on the PBS show, *This Old House*.

"My dad used to say that he wished they made glass sheetrock so everyone could see our plumbing work behind the walls," Randy said. "He loved the beauty of it all. We're that good because we read everything. We insist that our employees read the instructions for every product before installing it. That's unusual in the trades these days, but we see reading as being fundamental. If you learn, you can teach others; and that leads to success."

"I'm learning from my students," Matthew said. "It's not just me teaching them. I have a student who was an engineer in his old country. I gave a test and he worked out all the problems in Metric and then converted it all to the English factors for his final answers. That's not easy to do. As a result, I in turn, learned from that skilled student."



*Matt Gitli*

Randy's brother, Eric, also works at Aladdin Plumbing, but Eric chose to get a business degree at Hofstra rather than attend the Mechanics Institute. "It was a good choice for him," Randy said. "The business end of things is every bit as important as turning wrenches."

Their sister, Megan, is a teacher, but she also has Aladdin blood in her veins. "Dad used to take us to work when we were little kids," Randy laughed. "There were no car seats in the truck, so he would strap Megan into a milk crate on the seat between us. We both thought our dad was a superhero. We'd get to the house and the people would be panic-stricken. Dad would calm them down and then solve the problem, no matter what it was. He taught us well."

We asked Matthew how it feels to now be teaching at M.I.

"I feel lucky," he said.

We feel the same. The Gitli family is intertwined with The General Society and we are so lucky to have them with us and to have a third generation Gitli as an instructor for the Mechanics Institute.



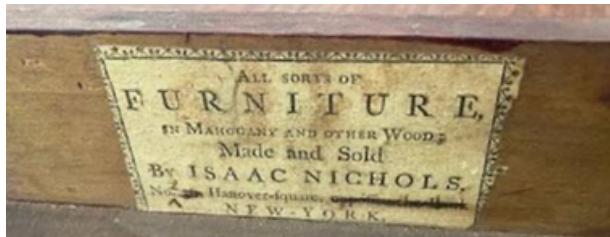
*Matt and Randy Gitli*

## A Historic Table Leads to a Wonderful Story!



The email began: *Good afternoon, Victoria and Angelo. My name is Wes Davis and I am reaching out to see if the Society might be able to provide any information on the maker of an early-1800's Pembroke drop-leaf table that has been in our family since perhaps that time.*

*There is an original label in the drawer that indicates it was manufactured by Isaac Nichols "at 36 Hanover Square, opposite the bank in New York." On the label, the 36 has been crossed out and replaced with a handwritten 2 and the phrase "opposite the bank" had been crossed out.*



*When I was researching this woodworker, I saw a reference in Wikipedia under the cabinet maker, Duncan Phyfe (1768 – 1854), who was a member of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen. The reference read "The society was sponsored by Seabury Champlin and Isaac Nichols," so there is a possibility that one of them was Phyfe's teacher.*

*Would you have anything in your archives that might give me some sense of when Isaac Nichols was making such items, or at what dates his shop/retail store was located at either 2 or 36 Hanover Square? Or did he in fact teach Duncan Phyfe?*

*My mother left a hand-written note in the table's drawer that suggests family folklore believes the table dates circa-1800. My mother's forefathers lived in the New York City area since the late-1700s, so the table could have been acquired in the early 1800s by my family.*

*Any assistance or background on Isaac Nichols would be greatly appreciated.*

A mere 19 hours later, Angelo Vigorito, our brilliant archivist, replied:

*Hello Mr. Davis,*

*Thank you for your inquiry regarding General Society member Isaac Nichols. According to the first volume of the Minutes of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York (GSMT), on...*

*...Wednesday, October 3rd, 1792, Duncan Fife (sic) was proposed as a candidate for membership by Isaac Nichols (Member #142), and seconded by Seabury Champlin (Member #110, and President of the General Society in 1797). Fife (he later changed the spelling of his last name) was initiated on Wednesday, December 5th, 1792, as the 391st member registered by the GSMT.*

*Regarding a possible relationship between Nichols, Phyfe and Champlin, a genealogical source strongly implies that while Phyfe apprenticed in Albany for approximately seven years, in 1791 he was indeed employed and further instructed in the trade in New York City by these men, and quite possibly also by another cabinet maker, Lewis Nichols. Mr. Nichols could also have been related to Isaac, who was possibly 20 years older than Phyfe (see: Torrey, F.C. (1917). *The Ancestors and Descendants of Humphrey Nichols of Newark, New Jersey, and of His Brothers and Sisters. Lakehurst, N.J.*)*

*I have been able to locate digital versions of the New York City Directories via the New York Public Library at: [New York City Directories - NYPL Digital Collections](#). Attached are snippets showing Isaac Nichols at 36 Hanover Square in 1791, moving to 2 Hanover Square in 1792, and then to 22 Maiden Lane in 1793. This would put your piece squarely in 1792 if the label is accurate.*

*It is wonderful to see photos of your Isaac Nichols table still in use 230 years after its creation, and just seven years after the founding of the General Society itself! Your family has lovingly cared for this exquisite example of Early American craftsmanship for many generations.*

Dan Holohan, our Past President, wrote to Mr. Davis, saying: *"I would love to share this wonderful story with our newsletter readers." He added: "Thanks so much for giving us a magical moment!"*

Mr. Davis immediately gave his permission, and added, *"Your email comment about a 'magical moment' cannot even begin to describe the impact Angelo's information had on me! Regards and best wishes to the continued success of the General Society."*

This was just one of many magical moments Angelo Vigorito has brought to GSMT over the years. There doesn't seem to be an historical question he can't answer, and we are so blessed to have him with us.

## Interview with GSMT Facilities Staff Member

### Jimmy Frrokaj

If you stopped by The General Society building in December you will have noticed the striking holiday decorations that graced our lobby and flowed up our marble staircase and across the first-floor balcony railing. The tiny lights were shining and holiday music filled the air.

And all of that creativity and holiday spirit was the work of Jimmy Frrokaj, a valued member of the GSMT Facilities Staff. His talents extended outside the building as he also decorated and added holiday cheer to our display windows on West 44th Street. We often think that Jimmy could have an additional career as an interior decorator, such is his flair for design and decorating.



*Jimmy Frrokaj*

"Then I met Victoria and asked if I could work at The General Society before my 3 pm shift at the Mansfield and she gave me a job," he said.

Jimmy lives in Norwalk, CT. He raised two sons and two daughters, and now also has three grandchildren. Jimmy told us that he loves to work, and he wasn't kidding. He's working three jobs right now. He spends his days at The General Society, and his evenings at his second job, and he also has a landscaping job on weekends. Gardening is another one of his talents. He often brings flower arrangements from his own garden and adorns the Lobby and Library.

"It's not easy getting back and forth to Norwalk, but I don't mind," he told us.

We asked (almost tongue in cheek) what he does in his spare time and he said he spends it all with his family. "I love my family as much as I love to work. And I love people. I love to help them and do for them."

We are very fortunate to have Jimmy on our team and we are so very grateful for his positive spirit.

## Summer & Fall 2022 Recap of GSMT Lectures

(continued from page 1)

Nicholas Fry. In this lecture, Mr. Fry provided a fascinating overview of the history and development of the U. S. Railway system.

On September 15th, Bertolini Architectural Works presented *The Restoration of Tudor City*. The team from BAW shared their expertise on different aspects of the renovation of this iconic residential landmark. The next talk was *Tracks of the NYC Subway* with subway expert Pete Dougherty on September 22nd; the talk explored parts of the New York City subway system--all 750+ miles of track and 472 stations of it. On September 29th, Professor Richard Haw in *Engineering America: The Life and Times of John A. Roebling* told the story of this American genius, one of the 19th Century's most ingenious inventors, and complex personalities.

The Fall lecture series opened on October 18th with *The Women Who Changed Architecture*; an all-female panel discussed the triumphs, challenges and impact of over 100 women architects and reflected on their own careers. This was followed on October 25th by *New York Art Deco: Birds, Beasts & Blooms*, with writer Eric P. Nash and photographer Andrew Garn, who explored Art Deco from the smallest of details to the grandest of buildings in NYC.

On November 1st, in *Prop Man: From John Wick to Silver Linings Playbook from Boardwalk Empire to Parks and Recreation*, Ross McDonald and Steven Heller took a behind-the-scenes look at the art and design of graphic props for popular films and TV shows. In this talk on November 30th, *THE DELMONICO WAY: Sublime Entertaining & Legendary Recipes from the Restaurant that Made New York!*, Max Tucci, grandson of Oscar Tucci, one of the owners of Delmonico's, discussed the riveting history of this New York institution, integrated with personal reminiscences. The final Fall 2022 lecture took place on December 6th, *A Block in Time: A New York History at the Corner of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-Third Street* with author Christiane Bird, who recounted the history of the city by way of a microcosmic block.

*Video recordings of many of these lectures can be found on the General Society YouTube channel.*

## Radiators and Research

At GSMT, we love our old radiators. They've been keeping us warm for nearly 130 years and they're whisper-quiet as they serve in Victorian splendor beneath our large windows (which are also original to our landmarked building).

Last summer three colleagues, Nick Baylis, Katie King, and Robbie Merchant, visited from their company, Castrads (castrads.com). Castrads is a family business, founded in 2006. They began as a small team, assembling and painting radiators on a farm in rural Cheshire, UK. Today, they are working in four countries. Their manufacturing base and headquarters is in Greater Manchester, but they also have a showroom in Manhattan's New York Design Center (200 Lexington Ave, Suite #417A), and a warehouse/showroom in the Brooklyn Army Terminal. They make new radiators that look like they've been around for a century. They also restore old radiators to look like they were fresh from the factory. If you love old radiators, you'll enjoy their passion for the topic.



*Nick Baylis, Robbie Merchant and Katie King*

Nick, Katie, and Robbie were putting together a Heating History Timeline, and that was why they were visiting. They heard that GSMT has an extensive library of antique heating books, mostly donated by our Brother, Larry Weingarten, a Master Plumber who is an expert in water-heating history. Larry had also donated nearly his entire collection of antique water heaters, which now play a large role in the education of our Mechanics Institutes students.

The Castrads team published their Timeline recently. It is beautiful to the eye (so many illustrations!) and so well-written. Check it out here: <https://www.castrads.com/us/inspiration/how-to-heat/heating-history/>

## "Voice for Veterans" Labor Reception

On November 21 the New York City Department of Veterans Affairs, the NYC Mayor's Office of Labor Relations, the United War Veterans Council and U.S. Military Veterans who are also leaders in the Building Trades Unions gathered at The General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen to discuss working together to encourage Veterans to take advantage of benefits and employment opportunities available to them through the NYC Department of Veterans Services. The evening began with a Presentation of the Colors, a Marine Chaplain's Invocation and Michelle Della Fave who spectacularly sang the National Anthem.



*DVS Commissioner James Hendon, OLR Commissioner Renee Campion and Victoria A. Dengel*



*U.S. Marine Corps Color Guard*

Executive Director Victoria A. Dengel was asked to speak and in her remarks welcomed an audience of over 100 to The General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen and spoke about the Society's history and mission as well as their unwavering support for U.S. Veterans and Active U.S. Military, as well as first responders. James Hendon, Commissioner, NYC Department of Veterans' Services and Renee Campion, Commissioner NYC Office of Labor Relations, then enthusiastically delivered remarks. This first-ever event "Voice for Veterans" Labor Reception was deemed a success by all in attendance. May the associations formed that evening bear significant fruit.

Thank you to our Veterans--we are grateful for your service and sacrifice in defense of our great Nation!

# Hammering On...

## Why Save an Old Heating System?

Our landmarked building at 20 West 44th Street has 103 radiators that take their steam from ConEd's district system, the largest steam system in the world. It's been doing this for several decades. Before that, two boilers that once fired coal served those radiators. The boilers remain in our basement because they're made of steel and brick and each occupies 2,000 cubic feet of space. It makes no sense to move them.

Past President Dan Holohan made his living as a writer and lecturer in the field of steam- and hot-water heating. Thirty years ago, he wrote *The Lost Art of Steam Heating*, which told readers how they could make steam heating systems quiet, efficient, fast, and green. That's how those systems were at the start. It's only neglect that led to the problems we see today.

Some years ago, we asked Dan to look at our heating system. We had been getting advice from engineers who, as it turned out, really didn't understand this 19th Century heating system. It was all in Dan's book, but they hadn't read that book, so they were proposing "fixes" that would have been expensive and would not have worked.

Dan came to The Society and gave a lecture. We invited him to become a member and when he did, he put together a member-based Steam Team and they went to work.

The goal was to undo many of the piping changes that had happened when ConEd got involved. We were going to put the system back to the way it was in 1890. Most of these changes were low- or no-cost. The result was a significant reduction in steam usage. The system is now fast, efficient, balanced and silent.

And that makes us wonder. New York City has a new initiative "Leading the Charge" — a \$4 billion plan to combat climate change and is now moving to electrify all heating systems. They want to rip out the steam and replace it with heat pumps. This is basically a done deal at this point but it makes us wonder. Our radiators are works of art and our system is green. It works on gravity, and gravity is free and forever available. Our system has very few moving parts. Not much can break. There's relatively no maintenance because ConEd owns the boiler. It's located on the East River.

The improved system has been running beautifully for several winters. Past President Holohan got in touch with some of the people at the City associated with this new initiative who were making the decisions about doing away with all the steam heat. He invited them to stop by and see what the Steam Team had accomplished with very little investment in time or material. All they had to do was read his book. It's all in there.

The City decided not to visit and explained that they felt steam heating was outdated and can no longer be made to work efficiently. That's simply not true, but it's what they believe.

We are not convinced that the days of steam heat are over and for the immediate future will continue to rely on our 103 steam heat radiators which have served us well since 1890.

**The General Society  
of Mechanics & Tradesmen of  
the City of New York**

*"By Hammer & Hand  
All Arts Do Stand"*

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The General Society Newsletter  
Winter 2023

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For GSMT Event Calendar, visit the  
General Society website at  
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### The Delmonico Connection



1910 Souvenir Plate

Delmonico's Restaurant, founded in lower Manhattan by family members in 1837, eventually became known as the most famous restaurant in New York City. Its reputation for fine dining and luxurious atmosphere helped it grow in prominence both nationally and internationally. Throughout its history, the restaurant had multiple New York locations in operation. For its Centennial Celebration in 1885, The General Society held its first event at the Delmonico's Fifth Avenue and 26th St. location, not far from the Society's then-home at 18 East 16th St. The second event took place for the 110th Anniversary in 1895.

When the General Society moved to its present location in 1899, it was not long before Delmonico's on Fifth Avenue conveniently moved uptown from 26th St. to the northeast corner of 44th St. just steps away from our home. This was the site for three more galas celebrating the 120th, 125th, and 130th Anniversaries.

Our mezzanine Museum contains a photograph of the November 17, 1910 event, as well as the classic 10 inch-Souvenir Plate shown here, that was presented to the 260 guests on that memorable occasion. This beautiful antique cobalt blue transfer plate was produced by Wright Tyndale and Van Roden of Philadelphia, a very high end store which specialized in selling porcelain during the approximate period from 1880 until 1930.



1903 Delmonico's at 44 th St.

In December, we had an opportunity to pay tribute to the wonderful Delmonico's restaurant when Max Tucci, whose family had run Delmonico's since the 1920's, celebrated its history in a lecture and award-winning book, called *The Delmonico Way: Sublime Entertaining & Legendary Recipes from the Restaurant that Made New York!*