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# Archives in the Landscape: Visiting Isabella Stewart Gardner

**Meg Winslow** 00:00

So, I'm holding the tomb key, and I think that this door is going to be easier to open. [Sound of key turning and opening the lock in the door] I got it. I gave it a good push.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 00:18

[Intro music fades in] This is Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai.

**Cassie Cloutier** 00:26

This is Cassie Cloutier, and this is The Object of History, the podcast of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Since 1791, the MHS has sought to collect, preserve and communicate the building blocks of history. Each episode examines an object, document or set of items from the society's millions of manuscript pieces and artifacts. We take you on a behind the scenes tour of our stacks to explore the incredible stories held within our collections.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 00:58

On this episode, we continue our visit to Mount Auburn Cemetery. Joined by biographer Natalie Dykstra, we visit the tomb of Isabella Stewart Gardner. Before visiting the tomb, we sat down with Professor Dykstra to learn more about the notable art collector, but first we sit down with Chief Historian Peter Drummey to understand the Gardner family's relationship to the history of Boston.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 01:28

We are here with Peter Drummey, and we have just in the last episode, talked about R. C. Winthrop and the Winthrop family, a name that is long known in Massachusetts history, going back to colonial days. But we're here to talk about a name that's even longer associated with the colony and then the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

**Peter Drummey** 01:52

Well, this is close that Governor John Winthrop is associated with the arrival of the so-called 'Winthrop Fleet.' Puritans coming here from England in 1630 and they come to Salem as their place to land and reassemble and then move further south. But in Salem already is a sort of expedition sent out in advance,

the sort of called Cape Ann for its the general neighborhood. But there's already a vestige of Massachusetts Bay government there. People making claims for a landscape already. But among the first settlers in 1626 is Thomas Gardner and Thomas Gardner is the kind of original immigrant, going back, the pioneer, so to speak. By the time we're talking about Gardeners of the 19th century, they have these north of Boston, Salem antecedents, and then they're by then, the eighth or ninth or tenth generation descendants of the first Gardeners here. So, to say this is a long-settled family in Massachusetts is an understatement, and they're an interesting outfit because distinguished in their own right but then intermarried into first families of Massachusetts. So, the Gardeners are a kind of dynastic family, and so we'll be talking about the and direct ancestors of John Lowell Gardner, who is John Lowell Gardner Jr. because his father is of the same name is a descendant of Samuel Pickering Gardner and John Lowell Gardner is someone born in 1804. The John Lowell Gardner, who's the father of John Lowell Gardner Jr, and the father-in-law of Isabella Stewart Gardner is successful, inherits a substantial fortune from his ancestors. But at the same time, the people who have the greatest success are people who move with the changes in commerce. So many of the people who are successful in the early 19th century have been people in overseas trades, trading with elsewhere in the world, who have moved capital into the new textile mills in Massachusetts and New England. John Lowell Gardner isn't so much involved in that enterprise. In fact, he stays in the overseas trade longer, has investments in voyages, including business in the Dutch East Indies and Sumatra and the pepper trade spices. So, he continues on with that, but he gets involved in other things as well, in the railroads as they come into being in the 19th century, and into a very substantial amount of real estate investment and ancillary business too. He's not tied to a single business, and is again transferring the central focus of his investments to the railroads as the United States moves west, and he is in business with at different times, three of his sons, Joseph, George and John Jr, and they form an interesting series of partnerships with their father and each other to carry a kind of range of business forward, but are always working together relatively closely. And John Lowell Gardner has a long and interesting career, increasingly interested in things outside of his business career, but also in real estate investments. And some of these real estate investments are commercial enterprises in the Back Bay of Boston as it filled in. Other ones are picking out beauty spots in land, island off the coast of Maine, land outside of Boston, out of town, which is in Brookline. It's not far out of town, but before the Back Bay is filled in Brookline is a longer way around to get to. It doesn't develop nearly as quickly as the immediate area around Boston. So, there's green spaces there of substantial size. And the Gardner home in Brookline is out of town home is Green Hill, which is aptly named, but a beautiful place that John Gardner devotes time to, gardening, decorative gardening, improving the landscape of this property, and that what brings him, I think, in close connection with his interesting daughter-in-law.

Isabella Stewart Gardner has an appreciation for this landscape that brings a father-in-law and daughter-in-law, perhaps in closer connection, and later on, the father-in-law gives his son, John Lowell Gardner Jr, and daughter-in-law, this property Green Hill, which is a place that before Fenway Court Isabel Stuart Gardner has the opportunity to have essentially an outdoor museum in Brookline. And their in-town residence is long Beacon Street again, property that their father, father-in-law, provides for them the place they live in town and then this out-of-town property [he] leaves to them.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 08:19

Ahead of our trip to Mount Auburn Cemetery, Professor Natalie Dykstra joined us at the MHS to discuss her recent biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner and the process of writing about notable figures.

**Cassie Cloutier** 08:31

I am here with Natalie Dykstra, who is a Professor Emerita at Hope College, but also an Honorary Fellow at the MHS. And not only that, she's also the author of Chasing Beauty: The Life of Isabella Stewart Gardner. So first and foremost, as a biographer, I'm wondering, how do you choose a subject?

**Natalie Dykstra** 08:52

So, this subject, it took me a while to decide to do it. The first book I wrote was on Clover Adams, the wife of Henry Adams, and she was a very gifted photographer. Clover was most known for the way she died by suicide and by the fame of her husband and her husband's family. And her story started off very brightly and with great promise, and then it became darker and darker and sadder and sadder. And she died at 42 and I was very grateful to tell that story. I was very moved by her story, because she was such a gifted photographer, and I was very interested in how her photographs could be understood biographically and could be read for biographical evidence. So, I was very interested in visual evidence in its relation to biography, but I was also interested in telling a different kind of story about a woman who was known not through her husband's fame, but through her own life and efforts. And I was very, very drawn to the beauty of the museum, her eponymous museum, here on the Fenway in Boston. And one day, as I was collecting materials to write about Clover's death, I needed some cheering up, and I walked from the MHS here, also on the Fenway, over to the museum, and sat in the extraordinary interior courtyard of Isabel Stuart Gardner Museum. And I remember that day so vividly because I thought, oh, what would it be like to write about Isabella, a woman of the same generation and same social world as Clover, but so different in the shape of her life. So, I published Clover with Houghton Mifflin [Harcourt] in 2012 and then I was having a

conversation with a good friend of mine who asked me, ‘Have you ever thought about writing about Mrs. Gardner?’ And as soon as she said it, my heart sort of skipped, because both out of interest and the sense of possibility and remembering that moment in the courtyard that I’d had quite a few years before, and fear because the scale of her life, of Isabella’s life is so much greater than Clover’s. She lives twice as long. Clover dies at 42 and Isabella lives to 84 years old, and of course, she created this extraordinary museum. She’s an iconic figure in Boston, and her museum is known around the world. So that is a very different kind of decision to make in terms of a biography. It seemed like there was an opportunity to tell a new story about her that had something of the tone and rhythm and feeling that the museum conveys when to a visitor, when a visitor is in one of its galleries, it just seemed like there hadn’t yet been a very big story told about her that had something of the power of the museum itself. And I started to see that the museum was a human document. It was a kind of biographical evidence that was available to be read and interpreted biographically. So, it took me about 18 months of working in the archives at the museum. I worked with an extraordinary head archivist there, and I felt I had enough new material and could find more material that I could tell a sort of cradle to grave story of her.

**Cassie Cloutier** 13:08

I was going to ask how long you work with a subject, but it seems like this scale is so different between your subjects. So, does that affect the time?

**Natalie Dykstra** 13:18

Absolutely. I was teaching full time when I was writing Cover, so that slowed me down a little bit. And for this one, I was teaching just in the fall, and then I retired from Hope College during the pandemic so I could work on it full time. So, the date of my very first email to the archivist was March of 2014. So, 10 years really from that first email to publication in March of 2024. She lives a very long life. She’s born in New York in 1840. Dies in Boston in 1924. So, she’s 84 years old when the average lifespan is 60, mid-60s. Her husband dies, Jack Gardner dies in 1898 at the age of 61 so that’s a very big life, and it coincides with America striding onto the global stage and explosion of wealth and industry after the Civil War that we come to know as the Gilded Age. And she’s the oldest of four. Her father trades in Irish and Scottish linen. She lives near Washington Park, goes to Grace Church and a nearby school, and then is educated in Paris for three years, and that is through friends there, she meets her husband, Jack Gardner. They marry in 1860, and they suffer terrible tragedies. She has a stillborn birth five months after her wedding, and little Jackie is born in 1863 and dies in 1865. She’s pregnant one more time and loses that pregnancy and is told by her

doctor she can have no more children. So, by 26 years old, she and Jack are living on Beacon Street here in Boston, and she has to find a path. She has to find a way and it's really through travel that she begins to recover, first to Europe, but then on a long trip in Egypt and the holy lands, and then back to Europe. Then in the 1880s has an 18-month trip all through Asia, Japan, China, Cambodia. And it's really on these travels that she begins to train her eye, and her extraordinary curiosity and drive really have a place to flourish. It's really her education. These trips are her education, and she and Jack filled their home in on Beacon Street and later in Brookline, nearby Brookline, with artwork. But it's really in the 1890s that she starts to collect old masters at a pace. So, she buys her [Johannes] Vermeer in 1892 in Paris with her inheritance after her father's death the previous year. And it's also in this time that her art dealer, Bernard Berenson, comes back into her world. They had known each other earlier, when he was at Harvard as a student, but he comes back, and he becomes her art connoisseur and dealer, and it's through him that she's able to purchase these extraordinary masterpieces by [Tiziano Vecellio] Titian and [Sandro] Botticelli and Fra Angelico and Rembrandts and a whole range of painters of the Italian Renaissance, but also [Diego] Velazquez and 18th century French painters as well. Jack dies in 1898 she buys land on the Fenway and builds Fenway Court [Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum], and it opens in 1903 and then she has 21 more years, and it's in those years, and I found those some of the most moving chapters to write that she becomes this friend to young artists and writers and musicians, and where she fills Fenway Court with theatrical performances and with artists in residence and with friends, and she has this really interesting last 20 years of her life. She has this very active, vivid life after she opens the museum. There's so much more story to tell after its opening, because she has to learn how to run a museum. She has to learn she gets in trouble with taxes. She makes all these extraordinary friendships. She's a patron of artists and musicians, and Fenway Court is filled not only with paintings on the wall and furniture and manuscripts, but music, live music, performed music and parties and theatrical performances.

**Cassie Cloutier** 18:54

So, for this project, I know that you spent some time at the MHS going through sources. Can you tell us about the sources you used.

**Natalie Dykstra** 19:02

I had the chance to write this book from beginning to end and also research it from beginning to end. I wanted to stay in time, in chronological time, and I wanted to sort of grow with her. So, I had a hunch that I would find materials at the Massachusetts Historical Society, and that is, in fact, what happened, especially

for her early life. And there were two key collections. The first is the Gardner family papers are here. And Jack was, as I said, the third son in the Gardner family. His father was John Lowell Gardner, Sr and his mother was Catherine Peabody Gardner, of the Peabody family in Salem. And so, his oldest brother was Joseph Gardner. The next brother was George Augustus Gardner. And then it was Jack, and Julia was his younger sister. And then he had another sister, Eliza, and especially the father, brother, the parents, the Gardener parent's papers are here, and then letters from his older brothers, Joseph and Joe they called him and George Augustus, and they called him 'Gag', or they referred to him as 'Gag' and so there were key papers here from the late 1850s all the way through the 1870s and the decade I was the most interested in was the decade when there was so many deaths in the Gardner family. So, Jackie dies in the spring of 1865 then in that summer, George Augustus Gardner and his wife lose two of their children in an epidemic in Europe. They're in Paris at the time, and they flee to Switzerland. It's cholera epidemic, and they lose two of their children, little Katie and Sam, and then Joe, the oldest brother, Joe's wife gives birth, and the baby lives. But a month later, Harriet, his wife dies, Joseph's. So, within very short amount of time, three children and spouse die within that immediate family, and because they're separated, they're writing to each other. So, there's these extraordinary letters that they send, and I just so vividly remember those days when I was transcribing those letters here at the tables in the research room, because it's those moments that your characters really suddenly have their own voice and you can hear them. I think what was so moving to me about it was they were only in their 20s when all this was happening, and yet they were talking about ultimate things. I can read just a little bit from chapter four, most of chapter four in the book called, 'Remaining Dear Ones' which is a quote from one of Jack's beautiful letters. That chapter is really based on the Gardner family papers. Just going to read a little bit from that, so you can hear some of those voices in those letters that are here at the Mass Historical. During the fall of 1864 Jackie had been sick on and off. Jackie is Isabella and Jack's little boy. She and Jack had had a siege with the baby, as she described it to her mother-in-law. First, they thought he had measles, then whooping cough, so they felt enormous relief when it turned out to be a bad cold, exacerbated by four new teeth coming in. Though not yet two he was already saying, quote, any quantity of words, very distinctly, Bell told Jack's mother proudly. She mentioned too that she'd been quite busy and was feeling better though she was still quite thin. The next month, in early December, Jack wrote to his 10-year-old nephew, Georgie, who was being educated at a Paris pension [scolaire], a vivid description of their contentment. Quote, Auntie Bell is very well this winter, he crowed, adding that little Jackie has grown a great deal since you saw him. He is beginning to walk alone and say a great many words and some short sentences. March began with pouring rain and biting wind. Isabella and Jack found themselves beset with worry. Little Jackie, who would celebrate his second birthday in three

months, had come down with another terrible cough. This time, the cough turned to lung fever, then pneumonia. On March five, Jack's mother reported to his brother, George, who was in Paris at the time with his family that the toddler had been very sick the previous day and the fever hadn't yet broken. Quote, the time for a change has not arrived, she wrote, and we can only hope and pray that when the change comes, it may be favorable. For days and days, Bell and Jack sat by Jackie's bedside, suspended in agony as their little boy got neither better nor worse. Then the weather turned. Wednesday, March 15 was warmer more like spring, half cloudy and half sunshiny, reported Anna Cabot Lowell, one of Jack's cousins, in her diary. That same warm day, Jackie died. Bell would not leave her child. She insisted on washing his body and combing his blonde locks one last time. Three days later, on March 18, his funeral was held at Emmanuel Church. The next day, his obituary in *The New York Times* read simply, 'Gardner in Boston on Wednesday, March, 15 John L. Gardner, third, only child of John L. Jr and Isabella Stewart Gardner, aged 21 months.' Bell didn't keep the condolence letters that must have poured in from family and friends in Boston and further away in New York. Her mother-in-law kept a note sent to the elder Gardeners who were with George and his family in Paris at the time of Jackie's death. Catherine Gardner's friend who lived in Florence wrote, 'I felt very sorry to hear of your son's loss, of his little child, observing that it does seem sometimes as if the finest and loveliest children are taken away.' That whole passage is based on sources that are handwritten, sources that are here at the Mass Historical. That and more in this chapter, it seemed one of the most important chapters to write because it was such a catastrophe, and I remember telling myself that I needed to have the chapter be very, very quiet, so that the emotion is less here on the page and more in the reader. I remember reading this chapter drafts and drafts of it aloud to make sure that I had the rhythm of it exactly the way I wanted it.

#### **Cassie Cloutier 26:33**

We're preparing to visit Mount Auburn soon, and so I'm wondering what you expect to find when we open the door.

#### **Natalie Dykstra 26:42**

Well, you know the Gardner family mausoleum, it will be where Isabella is buried, and little Jackie and Jack and his brothers, and also his brother's children who died. There's a statue of little Katie that I want to see. I've seen a photograph of that statue of that bust of little Katie who died in 1865, but I haven't seen that bust up close, and that's positioned in the mausoleum. It always takes you by surprise your reaction to being proximate to the burial place of your figures. It's not that they become more real to you because they're very



real to you to one after all those years. And of course, the museum is such a monument to her and a memory of her and her, it's kind of a you know museum as memoir, in one way of interpreting it, but just the fact of her being buried with the Gardner family, I find extraordinarily moving because it's very clear to me from the sources and from everything I learned about the Gardner family, that they gave her such ballast and courage, and I feel like that's how she belonged to them, you know, how she belonged to that family? I feel like that's represented in that in that mausoleum. So, you know, I did a lot of work early, early on to try to understand the dates and understand, especially Jackie's death, and just to try to understand anything you can about genealogy and any documentation that Mount Auburn had, and they were extraordinarily generous with their archival materials, which was very, very helpful, but I look very much forward to being there.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 28:50**

On October 30, 2024, after opening the Winthrop tomb, a subject we covered in the previous episode of this podcast, we walked further into Mount Auburn Cemetery to view the Gardner family tomb with Professor Dykstra. Meg Winslow, the Senior Curator of Historical Collections and Archives at Mount Auburn Cemetery guided us along the way.

**Meg Winslow 29:17**

So, the most important thing to know about the Gardner tomb, in addition to the fact that it's beloved and timeless and very actively visited by people who come to Mount Auburn, is that it was not designed by Isabella Stewart Gardner. That's really important to know. This tomb was erected by her father-in-law, John L. Gardner, and he bought the lot in 1859 and built this tomb that very same year, out of Concord granite. It's so picturesque here, isn't it? There are beautiful birding down here among these trees. Mount Auburn has more than 5000 trees, and it's an arboretum as well as an important birding area designated by the Audubon. This is a much larger tomb than the Winthrop tomb. There are 25 people who are entombed here, including Isabella Stewart Gardner, her husband and her son. And I will pass this off to you, Natalie, if you need any more information, I have it here.

**Natalie Dykstra 30:33**

So, this is a picture from family, private family collection of little Katie Gardner, George Augusta Gardener's daughter, and there's a bust in her memory, a marble bust in her memory there.

**Meg Winslow** 30:47

So, she isn't buried in the tomb. She's remembered in the tomb with this work of art by Jules-Clément [Chaplain] a French sculptor who also did her little brother, Samuel.

**Natalie Dykstra** 30:58

Yes, and in a terrible twist George Augustus and Eliza lost little Katie and Sam, but John L. Gardner, Sr and Catherine Gardner also lost a Katie and a Sam. So, a generation before, there's a very powerful letter by John L. Gardner, Sr, to George Augustus Gardner on the loss of little Katie, saying, I know so deeply of your loss. I understand it so deeply. And those papers are, of course, at the Massachusetts Historical Society of the Gardner family.

**Meg Winslow** 31:40

That's a very moving story.

**Natalie Dykstra** 31:41

Isn't that a very moving story? And she was fluent in French by the time she died, and in one of the remembrances of her, they talked about how she spoke in perfect French.

**Meg Winslow** 31:54

And I think she was eight.

**Natalie Dykstra** 31:55

She's always eight years old. Eight years old. She was only eight years old.

**Meg Winslow** 31:58

And there's a beautiful inscription under her shoulder by Jules-Clément that says, 'To the memory of good little Katie, your old friend Jules-Clément.' Isn't that beautiful?

**Natalie Dykstra** 32:10

That is beautiful. That is beautiful.

**Meg Winslow** 32:13

And then there's this plaque below of little Sam. And then there's a bronze label that they put on the wall of the tomb to say....

**Natalie Dykstra** 32:22

Because they're buried in Switzerland, right?

**Meg Winslow** 32:25

Yeah, the children of George Augustus Gardner and Eliza Endicott Peabody Gardner. And they died in the cholera epidemic, and they escaped the city for Switzerland. But the two children are buried in a cemetery in Lucerne, Switzerland, and remembered here in the Gardner tomb.

**Natalie Dykstra** 32:43

Absolutely and this is only months after little Jackie Gardner, Isabella and Jack's son, Jackie died the previous March. So, these brothers have buried their children, and they're writing these extraordinary letters in their 20s. They're only in their 20s, reaching out to each other across the Atlantic. Georgia and Eliza are in Europe. Jack and Isabella are in Boston. And they're these letters go back and forth about this, the loss of these children, and how to move forward. And of course, it's the end of the Civil War. So, all of Boston is draped in black in grief and mourning. So, they wrestle with, how do we move forward from here?

**Meg Winslow** 33:34

Art helps with it. Here we are at Mount Auburn, with nature all around us and beauty and this, this very classical Greek key design on the tomb, symbolizing affinity and life goes on. The flow of life, the eternal life, is very appropriate as symbolism for that. Well, shall we go inside?

**Natalie Dykstra** 33:56

I think I have my nerve.

**Meg Winslow** 33:57

I have the key. [Sound of keys rattling] Let's bring our present. We had a wonderful gift a few years ago for the planting that was a bequest to preserve the tomb and then plant in celebration of Isabella Stewart Gardner as well. So, I'm holding the tomb key, and I think that this door is going to be easier to open. [Sound of key turning and opening the lock in the door] I got it. I gave it a good push.

**Meg Winslow** 34:41

Now we're walking into this beautiful, large, vaulted, rectangular space, and there are rows of marble niche panels that are inscribed with the names of the family members who are buried on the shelving and we can look straight ahead at the two works of art by Jules-Clément and the beautiful space where Isabella Stewart Gardner is buried next to her husband. It's really moving to be in here and to see their names. There is something very real and tangible. Yeah. It's your first time in here?

**Natalie Dykstra** 35:32

Yes, it is. Makes my knees go weak and makes me cry because I had them in my imagination, for so many years. To be this close.

**Meg Winslow** 35:49

Would you like to come over and just put your hand on them?

**Natalie Dykstra** 35:51

I don't know if I am allowed.

**Meg Winslow** 35:53

You absolutely are. That tangible form of memory can be so powerful.

**Natalie Dykstra** 36:00

He was such a good man. Jack Gardner, her husband, born in November 26, 1837, and died December 10, 1898 and Henry [Lee] Higginson, his great good friend and the founder of the BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra], wrote to Isabella after his death, and said he was my close childhood friend. I always knew where to find him, and what an extraordinary thing to say about somebody.

**Meg Winslow** 36:36

The marble's in beautiful condition. The names are carved like with a knee cut into the marble panels and they're not really crushed. They're clean. We can read them so easily.

**Natalie Dykstra** 36:50

To have to see her between Jack and little Jackie, like that. There's a through line from these panels to Fenway Court. There's a letter at the museum's archives of Morse Carter, the first director of the museum, and, of course, the first biographer, where he's writing to Endicott. It's explaining the 1840 year that they had found on a genealogy, large genealogy, that she had filled out of the Gardner family and the Stewart family, and she had put in that date 1840. So, they went with that date. But there are some records here and elsewhere that suggests a year earlier that she was born a year earlier. And I explained that in a long endnote in the book, exactly. I went, I went out with what was on the tomb and then told the back story.

**Meg Winslow** 38:00

And their child, their son, John Gardner, was first buried first in Greenwood Cemetery in New York, and then moved up here to Mount Auburn, to be placed in the tomb.

**Natalie Dykstra** 38:16

Yes, and the records show that there's a stillborn baby buried with him, their first child who died September 10, 1860. You helped me find that and confirm that. So, it's really two children that are here.

**Meg Winslow** 38:36

So, the archives in our institutions are so valuable to you as a writer, like to all of us, in terms of understanding the stories. You know, in the tomb on the grounds as well, in the records.

**Natalie Dykstra** 38:51

It's the only way you want to get as close as you can to the past in biography, right? You need and the only way you can really go is through those documents and through evidence and through letters and through what's collected in your extraordinary archives and archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society and of course, the museum archives, because it's when you see their handwriting and when you see little pieces of scrap paper that they save. One little sketch that Jack gave to Isabel that she kept her whole life, little tiny sketch. She just never threw it away. She kept it as a recording that just told me that conveys so much of a lived life, right?

**Meg Winslow** 39:40

In a way, what we're looking at today is a kind of tangible form of archives in the landscape.

**Natalie Dykstra** 39:47

Absolutely, that's a beautiful way to say that. That is a beautiful way to say that.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 39:51

[Outro music fades in] To look at the items discussed in today's episode, visit our show website at [www.masshist.org/podcast](http://www.masshist.org/podcast). The Object of History was produced by the research department at the Massachusetts Historical Society. We would like to thank Natalie Dykstra, author and Emerita Professor of English at Hope College, Meg Winslow, Senior Curator of Historical Collections and Archives at Mount Auburn cemetery, Peter Drummey, Chief Historian at the MHS and Sam Hurwitz, Podcast Producer at the MHS. Music in this episode is by Ketsa Music and Chad Crouch. See our show notes for details. Thank you for listening and please rate, review and subscribe to both the MHS produced shows wherever you listen to podcasts.