

James Merrill

JAMES MERRILL HOUSE NEWSLETTER

Fall 2018

Annual Merrill Lecture with Poet Jorie Graham

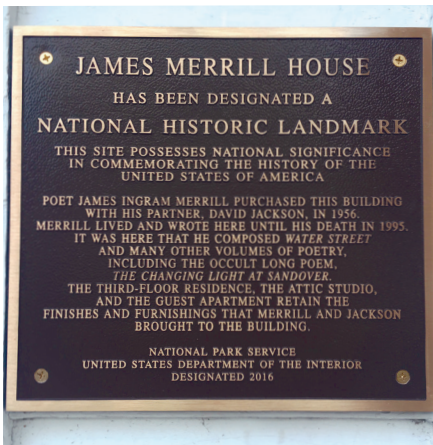
ON FRIDAY EVENING, September 28, Jorie Graham emerged from a major traffic snarl on I-95 in time to deliver the 13th Annual Merrill Lecture to a full house at the La Grua Center. Willard Spiegelman, author and literary critic, introduced Graham noting that, “Like Vladimir Nabokov, Jorie Graham had a perfectly ordinary, tri-lingual childhood: her French and Italian, she has said, were stronger than her English.”

Recipient of a MacArthur “genius” grant, Graham is the first woman to hold a chair at Harvard that goes back to John Quincy Adams. Graham’s poems are challenging, Spiegelman said, for their swirling syntax and dense metaphors, and tackle “big” subjects—like ecology, warfare, global warming, World War II, and the history and fate of America. Before reading from her latest collection, *Fast*,

Graham shared some of the thinking behind her current poems, many of which attempt to enter “nonhuman” points of view (the natural world, bots, artificial intelligence, drones). “Thinking about and giving voice to all these forces we’ve invited into our life, and the consequences—some of them devastating given what we’ve chosen to invite—seems to me increasingly urgent.” Attendees of the lecture will not be surprised to learn Graham has been named this year’s winner of the Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry for *Fast*—a prize also bestowed on James Merrill, for his 1988 collection *The Inner Room*, as well as last year’s speaker Claudia Rankine, for her book-length poem *Citizen*. As Willard Spiegelman observed, “There is no mistaking a poem by Jorie Graham for one by anyone else.”



Jorie Graham with Willard Spiegelman



Cast in Bronze

THE OFFICIAL PLAQUE from the U.S. Department of the Interior informing passersby that James Merrill House is “a National Historic Landmark and possesses national significance in commemorating the history of the United States of America” has been installed on the façade of 107 Water Street. Come see it! And bring a friend to visit at our Open House next June.

Forging Ahead: New Strategic Plan for Merrill House

IN ITS 20-PLUS YEARS of existence, the all-volunteer James Merrill House Committee has succeeded in preserving and promoting James Merrill’s legacy. During that time, the committee has undertaken two strategic plans, resulting in significant growth in the literary programs, important renovation, conservation, and preservation initiatives, and increased the organization’s presence in the wider literary and historic preservation communities.

Led by JMHC co-chairs Cynthia Elliott and Ruth Saunders, a sub-committee was formed early in the summer to work on drafting a new (third) strategic plan that will advance the James Merrill House’s mission to maintain a literary landmark and further

the repute of one of America’s great poets. The new goals will be informed, in part, by the findings and recommendations of the

recent Collections Assessment Preservation Program (CAP) survey, under the auspices of the Foundation of the American Institute of Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works and the Institute for Library and Museum Services.



Since 1995, 107 Water Street has been home to the James Merrill House Writer-in-Residence Program

To stabilize and perpetuate the literary programs and collections, the committee has already identified several significant initiatives to be undertaken that will ensure the continued success of our literary program while mitigating the uncertainties of audience outreach, preservation, and a competitive fundraising environment. The final plan is expected to be published by mid-2019.

Shelf Life: Preserving Merrill's Library

TARA KENNEDY, Preservation Services Librarian at Yale University Library, has undertaken the project of evaluating the book collections at the James Merrill House and developing a plan for their curation.

Kennedy's project is informed by her insight that the books serve as a living collection, one that continues to be used to inspire and inform other writers who come to stay in the house. "The books are not meant to be a museum; they are meant to be read and reviewed by other writers in residence." Kennedy also perceives that the origin and function of the James Merrill Apartment and Jackson Apartment book collections differ and merit different approaches for each.



Book conservator Tara Kennedy

continued on page 4

James Merrill House Committee

Co-Chairs

Cynthia Elliott
Ruth Saunders

Dee Aldrich
Randy Bean
Diana Beck
Kathryn Burchenal
Tony Crane
Sarah Dove
Penny Duckham
Jack Fix
Charlie Hatton
Pam Leeming
Susan Lindberg
Geoffrey Little
Sibby Lynch
Laura Mathews
Geoffrey Phillips
Kate Rushin
Willard Spiegelman

Immediate Past Chairs

Bill Middleton
Sally Wood

Merrill House Advisor

Lynn Callahan

James Merrill House Advisory Committee

Larry Berger
Rachel Carley
Nicholas Delbanco
Deborah Garrison
Daniel Hall
Langdon Hammer
David Leeming
Joseph Loewenstein
Robin Magowan
Paul Merrill
Paul Miller
Lorrie Moore
Ivy Pochoda
Bruce Snider
Stephen Yenser

107 Water Street, Stonington, CT 06378
www.JamesMerrillHouse.org
A program of the SVIA

Building and Conservation Matters

THE FINDINGS of the 2017 Collections Assessment Preservation (CAP) Program report identified several key repairs that would help to preserve 107 Water Street and the James Merrill Apartment, enabling future writers in residence to experience the same free access and rich sense of James Merrill's presence as their predecessors. Here are the projects we expect to be underway in coming months:

Air Conditioning

HVAC is key to keeping humidity and temperatures consistent in the Merrill apartment and the Jackson apartment, where writers live while in residence. Such a system will help to keep the collections in good condition. However, devising an intelligent plan for weaving the ductwork and other components into an antique building is a protracted business. The Committee is evaluating quotes for the overall scope of work (including whether the commercial spaces should be included) and associated expenses for all electrical, structural, and carpentry work. Given the close quarters within which the Merrill Building resides, it is a challenge to figure out acceptable placement for some of the exterior components of the system. In this endeavor, we're lucky to have architect Tony Crane, of French & Crane Architects, as our new Building Committee chair, and the support of SVIA vice-president and structural engineer Bill Rutherford. We plan for the installation to take place in Spring 2019, funded by the Hellen Ingram Plummer Foundation grant.

James Merrill (standing) and friends lounging on checkerboard floor

Major Window Renovation

Many of the windows, primarily in the Merrill apartment, Jackson apartment, and apartment 2N are in need of major repair or replacement and UV protection, for the sake of the building's historic contents as well as our tenants' comfort. This work will take place in Fall 2019, again funded by the Hellen Ingram Plummer Foundation, and we have scheduled a four-month period without writers in residence to facilitate

this. Wherever possible, for reasons of historic preservation and esthetics, we are opting for new storm and screen sash, plus glass that will limit solar damage, rather than replace wholesale with new windows that would be out of keeping with the building's history. Many windows do not require uniform rehabilitation, thanks to variable weathering and prior renovations. Vinyl windows in the Jackson apartment and 2N, installed while James Merrill was in residence, are in good shape and don't need much work, and are of a piece with their era. The Building and Conservation Committee is reviewing quotations for this important project. We shall make every effort to work closely with our tenants to minimize inconvenience to them. As a vital adjunct to the window project, during the first quarter of 2019 the Committee will disburse around \$4,000 to install solar

blinds in all the Merrill and Jackson Apartment windows to protect against sun damage.

Floor Replacement

The studio's striking black and white checkerboard vinyl tile floor is showing signs of dilapidation after enduring the pounding feet of decades of well-attended parties. The Building and Conservation Committee is securing prices for replacing the floor with replicas of the existing 9 x 9 inch tiles. Since this size is no longer retailed, the replacement will entail cutting 12 x 12 inch tiles down to the historic size. A small point, but one that illustrates the many challenges of caring for a historic building.

Roof Repairs and Exterior Painting

The Merrill House has been painted several different colors in its time. As the late Sandy McClatchy noted dryly of 107 Water Street in his 1982 *Paris Review* interview with James Merrill, when Merrill bought the house, "for years the outside was a dull aubergine, but it had just been repainted a shade of leg make-up." We are unlikely to be this imaginative in repainting the siding of the building next year when the window work takes place. Some repairs and renovation of the flat roof will take place at the same time.

Update on Conservation:

Grace Hartigan's Artful Homage to Merrill

JAMES MERRILL was not only a major American poet. He was also a distinguished, although fairly quiet and un-flamboyant American philanthropist, a genuine patron of the arts. He was a part of the art scene, especially in New York, even when he was living in Stonington, or abroad in Greece, or traveling through the world. Through the Ingram-Merrill Foundation, Merrill gave benefactions to countless writers, scholars and artists during his lifetime. The Foundation's board included the poet John Hollander, Merrill's longtime literary editor Harry Ford, the important Dante scholar Irma Brandeis and, for more than twenty years, the New York gallery owner John Bernard Myers. All were friends of the poet and understood his aesthetic preferences. Through Myers and Tibor de Nagy, Merrill became acquainted with many of the important artists and poets of the 1950s and 1960s, especially those associated with the so-called New York School that included fellow poets John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara. Merrill called Myers's parties the "best" he'd ever attended, even though he also had some skepticism about the contemporary avant-garde art scene. Still, he generously bought or commissioned work from Larry Rivers and Nell Blaine, among others, and he also helped painters to find homes for their work in museums and other collections. One such piece, *Grand Street Brides* by Grace Hartigan—who Merrill had met at the parties and gallery openings of Myers and de Nagy—he bought in 1955 and donated to the Whitney Museum.

Another work by Hartigan is soon to undergo restoration under the supervision of local paper conservator and Merrill House board member Sarah Dove. Measuring 22 inches by 28.5, and dated 1/14/59, it is a colorful semi-abstract work on which, when looked at for more than a few seconds, the viewer finds the words "It's a Farewell." According to Langdon Hammer, Merrill's biographer, the collage was a thank-you gift, offered to Merrill and his partner David Jackson as they set sail for eight months in Europe (Germany, Greece, and then Egypt) at the start of that year. Those were the days when people made trans-Atlantic crossings and, if they could afford it, stayed abroad for long stretches of time. Merrill had the time and the money. But he also put his money to other uses, such as helping the lives and work of people who weren't born to wealth, and who stayed at home in the States to do their work.

The renovation will address the inevitable fading of a sixty-year-old piece of paper, while dealing with the flattening of what

was originally undulation in the collage. A reframing will allow the piece to breathe again. Once restored, this charming, casual artist's homage and gift will be returned to the Merrill apartment at 107 Water Street. One might say that it is coming home to roost. Because of its fragility, and its sensitivity to light, it will appear on a rotating basis with other works on paper.



"It's a Farewell" by Grace Hartigan (1959)

Hartigan (1922-2008) is one of the distinguished American painters discussed by Mary Gabriel in *Ninth Street Women*, her recent book about the female artists—Helen Frankenthaler, Joan Mitchell, Elaine De Kooning, and Lee Krasner are the others in the quintet—who lived sometimes in the shadow of their more ostentatious and aggressive male contemporaries (in some cases their husbands or lovers), like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. Her work combines

elements of abstraction and realism. With a bravado more typical of her male colleagues, she once observed "I didn't choose painting. It chose me. I didn't have any talent. I just had genius." Meyer Schapiro and Clement Greenberg included her in a 1950 exhibition of "New Talents." It's amazing to think, sixty years after the fact, that in 1957 *Life* magazine called Hartigan one of the best young female American painters. What was meant as praise now sounds like condescension. Merrill's friend Elizabeth Bishop bristled at being labeled America's "best female poet" because, as she said, no one ever called her other friend Robert Lowell America's "best male poet." Yesterday's labels don't work today.

Hartigan was both a second-generation Abstract Expressionist painter and a woman who was influenced by comic books. She disliked categorization, saying "perhaps the subject of my art is like the definition of humor—emotional pain recollected in tranquility."

Her collage for Merrill exudes sweetness, not pain. It fits nicely into the assortment of objects at 107 Water Street. Merrill's house, like anyone's, gives evidence of its owner's tastes. It is also a repository of works of art that gave pleasure to its owner and his friends over the years of his residency in Stonington. And it is a testimony to its owner's place in the American culture of which he was a part and which he helped to foster. Hartigan's "thank you" reminds us that acts of generosity may easily promote other such acts. —Willard Spiegelman



"Grace Hartigan was justifiably proud of making it on her own. She had the biggest career of any woman in the fifties, despite the disapproval of Clement Greenberg, who found her move toward recognizable imagery—she was soon painting street scenes and still-lives—markedly retrograde. The only man who could outweigh Greenberg in such matters was the utterly unswayable Alfred Barr, the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, a soft-spoken rebel who loved to tweak the status quo, including the pious doctrine of abstraction that he had helped establish. Clearly, to his eye, Hartigan's dynamically brushed images, which applied the lessons of abstraction to figurative ends, were not a retreat but

a new way forward. And, to the amazement even of the artist, he began to acquire them for the museum, beginning with 'The Persian Jacket,' a totemlike portrait of an enormous blank-faced woman wearing a bright-orange thrift-shop jacket. It was the first work by anyone of her generation, male or female, to enter the collection. (The art world was then so small that the poet Frank O'Hara, who had a job selling postcards at MoMA's front desk, telephoned Hartigan to say that he had just seen Barr himself trying to wrestle the painting through the museum's revolving door.) There was some jealous sniping as her fame grew, and resentment at her refusal to acknowledge the difficulties that other women artists faced. But, as she saw it, all they needed was fortitude. Only 'inferior talents' had a problem."

—Claudia Roth Pierpont, reviewing *Ninth Street Women* for *The New Yorker* (10/8/2018 issue)

Poetry on the Porch with Yale Younger Poet Winner Duy Doan

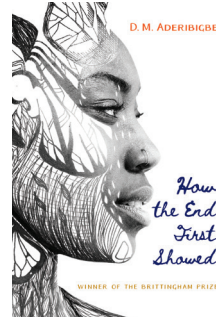
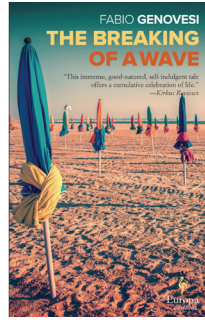
IN JUNE, the Merrill House welcomed Duy Doan, recipient of the 2017 Yale Younger Poets Prize and the fifth winner to participate in the annual Poetry on the Porch since the partnership with Yale was established. Merrill House Committee member and Program Chair Randy Bean and his wife Beth Black hosted this event on the grassy terrace of their home with views of the water.

Doan read from his debut collection *We Play a Game*—which the poet Carl Phillips praised for its “verbal enactment of a self refusing to be narrowly defined. We are more than our race alone, Doan suggests, as we are also more than, in isolation, our family history, our gender, our sexuality, or what sports we follow.”



A born and bred Texan from the Dallas-Forth-Worth area, where his parents moved after separately emigrating from Vietnam, Doan began writing poems in 8th grade, was encouraged by his professors at UT-Austin, and received an MFA in Poetry from Boston University, where he studied with former U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky. He then spent five years as executive director of the “Favorite Poem Project” before returning to Texas, where he currently resides.

An avid soccer fan since boyhood, Doan often drops references to the sport into his work, prompting JMHC member Geoffrey Little to marvel, in his welcoming speech, that “Even the animals in his poems move like great players!” For his part, Doan expressed gratitude for having access to Merrill’s book collection during his month-long residency: “I feel bad if I’m not writing; I feel worse if I’m not reading.” And, thanks to the Wi-Fi service installed since Merrill’s time, he was also able to check in on his favorite World Cup team during the finals.



What's New?

Catching Up with Past Merrill Fellows

DAMILOLA ADERIBIGBE (October 2017): “My first book, *How the End First Showed* (University of Wisconsin Press), was released this November.”

GERI DORAN (December 2015 – January 2016): “My best news: the book I was working on during my Merrill House residency, called *Epistle, Osprey*, will be published by Tupelo Press.”

LYDIA CONKLIN (September 2012): “I received a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writer’s Award for 2018 and a Creative Writing Fulbright to Poland for 2018-2019.”

ADAM GIANNELLI (Spring 2017): “My poem ‘On a Line by Proust’ was published in the *New York Times Magazine* in September.”

AMY GLYNN (October 2012): “My second book, *Romance Language*, is in production with Measure Press. I’ve finished a new novel, currently seeking a home, and was appointed the inaugural poet laureate for the cities of Lafayette and Orinda, CA.”

NATE KLUG (September 2016): “My poem, ‘Aconite,’ just came out in *The Best American Poetry 2018*, edited by Dana Gioia.”

MAXIM LOSKUTOFF (November 2017): “I published my first piece of nonfiction in *The New York Times*. I’m spending this fall at

Joshua Tree finishing my novel *Spirits*.”

DAN O'BRIEN (June 2013): “My play-inverse *The House in Scarsdale* was shortlisted for a LA Drama Critics Circle Award, and won the PEN America Literary Award for Drama.”

CATHERINE POND (October 2016): “I was a finalist for the Poetry Society of America chapbook contest in 2018. My poem ‘This Rain’ was selected for *The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2018*.”

SUZANNE RIVECCA (Spring 2018): “My essay ‘Ugly and Bitter and Strong’ was published in the Summer 2018 issue of *Zyzzyva*. I have artists’ residencies coming up at the North Street Collective and the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation.”

WILL SCHUTT (Fall 2011): “My news: My translation of *The Breaking of a Wave* (Europa Editions, 2017), a novel by Fabio Genovesi, is shortlisted for the Italian Prose Translation Award from the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA).”

NOAH WARREN (June 2016): “I’ve started a Ph.D. in English at Berkeley, and am working at *The Threepenny Review*. I’ll be eager to see Merrill House folks’ work—nonfiction, fiction, and poetry—when submissions open in January.”

Shelf Life

continued from page 2

Kennedy’s priority is to have Merrill House catalog its book holdings by adopting TinyCat, a subsidiary of the crowd-sharing online catalog LibraryThing devised for small libraries that hold 20,000 items or fewer. Start up and operating expenses are minimal and the work can be completed by anyone once properly trained on how to enter the information.

Kennedy deems it essential to establish baseline environmental data for the collections spaces before renovations such as HVAC take place. Adding window coverings to block out harmful UV and visible light was a top recommendation by the conservator who completed the Merrill House CAP assessment in 2017. Blackout roller shades can be found for the rooftop room that are like

the ones already present, keeping with the original style Merrill intended. Kennedy recommends that these should be used when no one is present in the space to prevent fading and discoloration of collections. Kennedy is also enlisting experts in library cleaning with extensive experience at Yale who are equipped for such work.

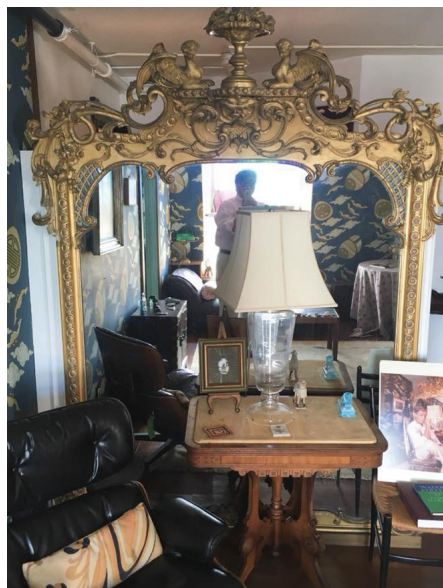
Because the collections need to be accessible yet protected, without losing the feel of being in a writer’s library, Kennedy recommends adopting the Colibri Book Covering System because it holds broken pieces of bindings together, consolidates fragile book jackets, and protects book jackets and bindings from dust and dirt.

This project is funded by the Hellen Ingram Plummer Foundation grant, and it is hoped will be undertaken in the first quarter of 2019.

Open House Guestbook:

University of the Ozarks Professor David Strain Makes a Long-Anticipated Trip to Water Street

I HEARD MERRILL READ from *The Changing Light at Sandover* at Harvard, when I was a doctoral student there back in the late 80s. David Perkins had assigned it in the graduate section of his Modern Poetry course, and I'd overheard a couple of my friends talking about it. One of them convinced me to go to the reading. Although I knew only what I'd learned from my friends, I was bowled over by the excerpts Merrill read and bought a copy of the poem the next day. I've been reading it ever since—not straight through (although I've done that three times, I think) but generally here a bit, there a bit. The friendships depicted in the poem and the way the charming casualness of living gets mixed in with Ephraim and the bats and the archangels and all the rest makes “here a bit, there a bit” quite a delightful way to make one's way though.



A selfie framed by Merrill's beloved Venetian mirror (courtesy David Strain, Ph.D.)

Needless to say I've spent a lot of time over the years in the Water Street of the mind. So when I was planning a vacation to New England for last summer, I decided that spending some time in the Water Street of Water Street might be a happy idea. By a bit of luck, the summer Open House fell only a few days after I had planned to leave New England. So I extended a stay with a friend, booked a few nights in New York, and managed to get back to Stonington to see the inside of the house.

It was quite something, of course, to see the many things mentioned in the poem—the celebrated carpet and wallpaper, the Victorian mirror, the milk-glass table in the dining room, the “witty” shade of red, the room and deck

upstairs. Those things aside, a particular treat was Merrill's study, which plays no part (that I can recall) in the poem and which is cut off from the parts that do by that clever, curious door/bookcase. All in all, I was surprised that the home is so quirky, so unpretentious (in the main), so comfortable, and, well, so spartan. It's simply not what one expects of a man of Merrill's means. But, then, I suppose that, if you can have anything you want, you don't spend a lot of time being impressed by what other people want and,

instead, genuinely make your own choices.

The afternoon I visited, I probably spent all of thirty minutes puttering about (taking pictures, of course, to refresh my memory in years to come). I left feeling vaguely golden—charmed, surprised, happy, graced. I am deeply grateful that I got to visit. (I can only imagine the gratitude that visiting fellows must feel for the chance to be at home there for a time.) In the end, the most glorious thing about Merrill House is that it's neither a museum nor a shrine but, still, a place to live.

Jorie Graham, Peter Sacks and Jonathan Post Visit the Merrill Apartment

THE MORNING of Jorie Graham's Merrill Lecture at La Grua Center, JMHC member Sarah Dove arranged a visit to Merrill Apartment for Graham and her husband, poet, artist, and scholar Peter Sacks, together with literary scholar and Stonington resident, Jonathan Post.

Graham arrived first. Sacks and Post would arrive later after embarking on a swim off the dock in front of Water Street, commemorating where James Merrill and David Jackson would regularly swim, and where, years ago as a young man and Merrill's guest, Sacks—a competitive swimmer in his youth—once swam with them in Stonington Harbor.

As Graham proceeded through the Merrill Apartment's dining room with its myriad displays of tiny objects perched on tiny shelves, she was fascinated not only by the significance of the objects but also by the significance to James Merrill of their placement. Graham explained that when Merrill placed the objects, or friends did, the important governing purpose to him was not a decorative overall design, but the force field of the invisible spirit world linking beings. A tiny object given by a friend would be left just where it was placed when the gift was made and would not be subsequently rearranged for a prettified effect.

Graham's insight left the JMHC committee

members present stunned with worry at the amount of cavalier shifting around of talismanic objects in the apartment that may have taken place inadvertently during re-painting and other maintenance of its rooms. But at that juncture Sacks and Post appeared, hoisting their wet swimming suits, hearty from their swim.

The group made their way to Merrill's study where Sacks explored its far corner where Merrill's manual typewriter squats on a shelf, and soon discovered, talismanically perched atop it, a tiny pillbox bearing

a portrait of Proust's head on its lid. Sacks explained that Proust was even more important than Dante to Merrill “not least because he is the genius not only of what but of how we remember” (a judgment with which Merrill, whose senior college thesis was on *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, himself concurred in a late interview), and recalled Merrill's poem “For Proust” from *Water Street*.

“Recite it to us!”

Graham entreated. And

eventually Sacks complied, reciting the poem in its entirety from memory as the late summer sun streamed in through the window behind him, rendering the dark recesses of the study incandescent:

*“You make for one dim room without contour
And station yourself there, beyond the pale
Of cough or of gardenia, erect, pale.
What happened is becoming literature.”*



Proust's likeness on a pillbox discovered in Merrill's study

James Merrill

HOUSE & WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

James Merrill House
107 Water Street
Stonington, CT 06378

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
US POSTAGE
PAID
Permit #33
New London, CT

For more information about our programs, visit us
at jamesmerrillhouse.org and follow us on Facebook
and Instagram.

Calendar of Events

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8

Jordon Jacks, November-December
Merrill Fellow, reads from his work,
Stonington Free Library, 5 pm

SATURDAY, JANUARY 12

Sigrid Nunez, December-January
Merrill Fellow, reads from her work,
La Grua Center, 5 pm

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2

Rachel Carley, Architectural
Historian, presents a talk about the
Merrill Apartment, La Grua Center, 5 pm

SATURDAY, APRIL 14

**James Longenbach & Joanna
Scott**, Winter-Spring Merrill
Fellows, read from their work,
Stonington Free Library, 5 pm

Flower Power at Annual Deck Party

THE PERENNIALY POPULAR James Merrill House Annual Deck Party, held this year on August 4, possibly outdid itself thanks to the inventiveness of JMH committee members Sibby Lynch and Sarah Dove. According to Sibby, Flower Power was chosen as the theme “because Merrill was so sixties.” And since the concept was to have each partier hold a flower, paper blossoms were created by a team of volunteers deploying waxed paper in vivid hues to enfold the stems of the wine glasses. Provided name tags evoking sixties “happenings” and personas ranging from Ban the Bomb to Merry Prankster to Andy Warhol and Frank Zappa, more than a hundred guests rustled through bead curtains up the steep stairs to the deck where Kevin Wilde of Cask’n Keg ensured that flower-power (hemp) beer and other libations kept flowing at bars brightly adorned with Mexican flowered tablecloths and freighted with retro canapés. Guitarist Sam Slater and drummer Jordan Auber, both from Mystic, delivered inspiring sixties sounds. Poet and former Merrill fellow (2006) Michael Snediker, now Associate Professor at the University of Houston, was the perfect choice for this year’s reader, the organizers decided, because “Michael is the most Summer of Love person living.” Before reading James Merrill’s “Entrance from Sleep” Snediker observed that while the poem did not date from the era of Flower Power, Merrill wrote it when he was just 21, “archetypal age for the hopeful vim we associate with the late 60s.” Snediker noted that “flower power” was coined by fellow queer poet Allen Ginsberg in opposition to the Vietnam War. And though Merrill is not remembered for his activism per se, “what he gave to us in his poems surely constitutes a kind of flower power of its own right: his unfailing belief in intelligence at its most convivial—its flashy quicksilver the orchid-antidote to our present culture’s widespread allergy to thoughtfulness as both public and private virtue.”



Top: Volunteer flower creators, Silvia Solima and Beatrice Palmer
Bottom: Poet Michael Snediker with Sibby Lynch