



Haddonfield Civic Association
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HaddonfieldCivic.com

Bradshaw Literary Award 2026 Prompt

250 years ago, the New Jersey Delegates met at the Indian King Tavern in Haddonfield to officially ratify the Declaration of Independence, marking the historic transition from a colony to a sovereign State. As a vital “crossroads” of the American Revolution, Haddonfield played a pivotal role in the birth of our nation—a legacy that continues to shape its modern civic identity as we celebrate America’s 250th anniversary.

Our nation was founded on the principles of civic engagement and the spirit of self-determination. How has your life in Haddonfield been shaped by that same enduring spirit?

Benjamin Osawa **2026 Bradshaw Literary Award Recipient**

I enter our historic meeting place: a former prison cell during the Revolutionary War right across the historic Indian King Tavern. In our cozy wintry meeting, there is only me and one or two former school principals, lawyers, government officials, and businessmen. The vibe is quiet, peaceful, and slow, and the food is hearty and enjoyable. In our small circle, we begin discussing our agenda for our collective project, which is the Preserving Black Haddonfield History Project. It's a tiny group with me being the only one from my generation, but it's a community that I absolutely adore engaging with.

I had been part of our little project since my freshman year, having worked on oral histories that were compiled into anthologies for publication. You'll actually find me on the back of PRESERVE: NARRATIVES FROM HISTORIC HADDONFIELD'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY. Over the following years, I returned consistently as a

volunteer for the project's Haddonfield events and celebrations. This served as my entry into real tangible civic engagement within the community around me.

Eventually, I slowly submerged myself deeper with the little community that was this project, joining the team as their social media manager. From there, I worked closely with our project lead, Adrienne Rhodes, to create and publish social media content to grow our presence, amassing thousands of impressions. I'm thankful for the opportunity to do this work, and I've grown to appreciate all that I've learned from it. If you haven't already, follow "preserve narratives" on Facebook and Instagram.

What makes this community so meaningful to me is its patience and purpose. Our conversations unfold slowly, shaped by a lifetime of experience and deep knowledge of local history and civic engagement. It was the consistency of everyone's efforts that slowly brought progress toward our project's goal: preserving the fading but enduring spirit and narrative of Black Haddonfield. I've felt a great responsibility being in my position, especially as the youngest member of our little community. Additionally, I've been able to enjoy the stories of all my colleagues, learning a great deal about niche presidential history, High School debauchery, and professional exploits and horror stories. Most of all, this experience I have learned to appreciate so much would never have been possible without engaging with the Haddonfield community around me.

This community has taught me intergenerational collaboration and its value. I've been honored to become an Honorary Committee Member of the project. Just as the delegates at the Indian King Tavern exercised self-determination to shape a new state 250 years ago, our project exercises that same spirit to ensure every voice in Haddonfield's history is preserved. I've had the opportunity to listen, learn, and create something tangible. It is an enduring lesson in civic engagement that I intend to bring into every community I join next.



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To find out more about the HCA, contact:

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