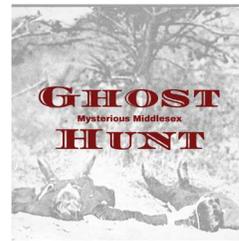


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**THINKERY & VERSE and THE NEW BRUNSWICK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Proudly Present the Second Season of...

"An immersively tapestry...its voice, full of humour, poetry and humanity, distinctively different from that of many Western dramas exploring the same subject." about *Bride of the Gulf* by [The Scotsman](#)

"Meyer carefully crafts refreshing female leads at three very different points in womanhood... the arcs of the women are heart-wrenching and realistic." about *The Priceless Slave* by [The Daily Texan](#)

"The inevitable breach between performance and reality is exactly what this play is all about - and exactly what makes it so unsettling." about *American Volunteers* by [The Austinist](#)

# Ghost Hunt

## *Mysterious Middlesex*

**Season two of a geocache and audio storytelling adventure that re-imagines the Hall-Mills Murders of 1922 and other Middlesex County oddities from the 1920s!**

Created by **Thinkery & Verse** and **The New Brunswick Historical Society**

**FREE**

**STARTING SEPTEMBER 16TH**

ON GEOCACHE SITES AND [THINKERYANDVERSE.ORG](http://THINKERYANDVERSE.ORG)

September 16, 2021 - New Brunswick, NJ: **THINKERY & VERSE**, Karen Alvarado, Dr. J.M. Meyer, co-artistic directors, and Dr. Robert Belvin, Elizabeth Ciccone, lead historians at **The New Brunswick Historical Society**, are pleased to announce their collaboration in the second season of **GHOST HUNT: Mysterious Middlesex**, partially based on their more traditional Hall-Mills Double Homicides stage-play, *THOU SHALT NOT*, which is set to reprise its run in New Brunswick, NJ September of 2022, which marks the Centennial Anniversary of the 1922 tragedies. **GHOST HUNT** is part audio play and part treasure hunt. This unique experience is entirely Covid safe and uses a free gaming app called 'GeoCaching', in which audiences will track, hunt, and discover hidden curated caches at locations tied to Hall-Mills murders and 1920s mysteries in Middlesex County, NJ. **GHOST HUNT** is a geo-cached audio adventure that invites participants to experience the story of a tragic

double homicide at the sites where the murders occurred, and justice was lost. “This is an innovative, experimental, and experiential audio adventure,” says season one collaborator **Ania Upstill** of **Butch Mermaid Productions**. Let the games begin **September 16**.

**Season Two GHOST HUNT: Mysterious Middlesex** was made possible thanks to grant funding provided by the **Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners** through a grant award from the **Middlesex County Cultural and Arts Trust Fund**.

*What are the Hall-Mills Murders?*

In 1922, a young woman found her life destroyed when her mother, a choir singer at a small New Brunswick, New Jersey church, was discovered murdered alongside the church’s rector in a ruthless double homicide: Reverend Edward Hall had been shot in the skull, while the woman next to him, Eleanor Mills, suffered three gunshots to the face and a slit throat. Someone eerily posed the bodies and scattered their love letters at their feet. The case has never been solved.

*How did GHOST HUNT begin?*

In **Season One**, Thinkery & Verse and Butch Mermaid Productions collaborated with the Church of Saint John the Evangelist, the home parish of the slain minister and the choir singer, to present **GHOST HUNT: the Hall-Mills Double Homicide**, an asynchronous, multi-platform theatrical resurrection of an infamous unsolved crime. Season One investigated the wide-sprawling, full breadth of a terrifying injustice, which enveloped a small-town society in a ruthless big-city circus. In the new **Season Two GHOST HUNT: Mysterious Middlesex**, Thinkery & Verse in collaboration with The New Brunswick Historical Society, zeros in specifically on the role of Middlesex County; how the community at large dealt with the Hall-Mills case as well as other odd and perhaps mysterious 1920s sensationalism. Season Two delivers ten additional locations in Middlesex County (complete with curated caches and audio stories) that are sure to enlighten, intrigue and perhaps disturb geocachers, theater audiences, history buffs or anyone interested in a creepy journey into the past.

*How can I play GHOST HUNT?*

Once logged into the GeoCaching application, each “cache” or “location” contains relics related to the failed investigation of the crime and a QR code that invokes a digital audio journey into the heart of the case: the haunted back-alley home of the murdered Eleanor Mills, the mansion of the doomed Edward Hall, the site of the murders on DeRussey’s Lane, and more.

While much of the experience takes place in New Brunswick, New Jersey (15 hidden caches and audio stories in **Middlesex County** specifically) there are opportunities to explore additional caches in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Venice, Italy, Virginia, and Texas. Although the tangible experience is only available in said locations, one can still explore and listen from the comfort of their own homes as [the audio material is also available on the website](#).

*Tell me more!*

According to lead writer **Dr. J.M. Meyer**, "Our **GHOST HUNT** often uses vaudevillian wordplay to attack the social complacency that surrounded the murders in 1922. But we also use language that closely observes the flow of traumatic memory. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, being published in 1922, is one of our sign posts for how to use language, and enables us to counter the bizarre anemoia that Americans tend to have when thinking about the 1920s."

For years, the male-dominated vestry did not allow the Church of Saint John the Evangelist to discuss the murders. Now the vestry is mostly women, and so they do not just talk about it, they sponsored this play--Women do not cover up violence against women. **Martha Godfrey**, who is a member of the vestry at Saint John's reflects on the tragedy, "The Hall-Mills case is something that we've had hanging over our heads for a long time. It used to be, people would get mad at you for talking about it. I think, as a congregation, we need to get out in front of it. The play is a way of doing that." The organist, **Dr. Susan Huslage** agrees, adding, "Why wouldn't we be allowed to talk about it? It's how the community views us, though it was a long time ago—certainly before any of us were around. But growing up here, we knew the people involved. It's not a good thing to have in your past."

The producers of **Ghost Hunt** are committed to inclusionary practices which include an ensemble that includes approximately 50% BIPOC and LGBTQ persons--the added bonus in this production is that it is polar opposite to St. John's historical exclusions.

To complete this ambitious project, Thinkery & Verse and The New Brunswick Historical Society also collaborated with local historian and geocacher **Brian Smith** as well as amateur but enthusiastic genealogists **Nayla and Steve Caruso**, to find the facts and finesse the text. The rest of the team included ten voice actors, award-winning **Ashley Basile** as props master/cache creator, **Jackie Mercer** as lead web designer, and **Karen Alvarado** as audio engineer/sound designer.

**GHOST HUNT (Season 1 & 2)** audio stories star **Karen Alvarado** (*August Osage County*, Resident Ensemble Players; *The Odyssey*, Brooklyn Academy of Music), **Ashley Bufkin** (*Bayano: My Odisea*, National Black Theatre; *A Doll's House Part Two*, Barrington Stage Co; *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's Globe), **Frank Dolce** (TV: *Sons of Tucson*, FOX; *One Life to Live*, ABC; Bdwy: *Billy Elliot*), **James Edward Becton** (*Our Trojan War*, Brooklyn Academy of Music), and **Erin Bogert, Celine Dirkes, Kaitlin Omerod Huston, Johnny Kavanagh, Johnny Meyer, Nelly Saviñon, Rebecca Servon, Lazarus Simmons, Joey Sponseller, Reagan Tankersley, and Ania Upstill.**

***FREE Starting September 16 on the GeoCache App and Thinkery & Verse website***

Running Time: Via online portal: 90 minutes.  
Via in-person site visits: indefinite.

Website: [thinkeryandverse.org](http://thinkeryandverse.org)

Twitter: [thinkery\\_verse](https://twitter.com/thinkery_verse) Instagram: [thinkery\\_and\\_verse](https://www.instagram.com/thinkery_and_verse) Facebook: [thinkeryandverse](https://www.facebook.com/thinkeryandverse)

Marketing Photos available upon request.

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

**Dr. J.M. MEYER** (*Lead Writer*) is an artist and scholar from the University of Texas at Austin (Ph.D., 2020). He earned a three year graduate research fellowship from the National Science Foundation for his research on organized violence. The larger themes of John's work include ethical and unethical behavior during war, risk-taking in combat, and competition within military units.

Dr. J. M. Meyer works as a playwright-performer in Austin and New York. He performed at the Obama White House thanks to Aquila Theatre's outreach program, "Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives." In 2016 he performed off-Broadway in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* with Aquila Theatre, and returned to the company in 2017 to perform at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and in the U.S. national tour of *Our Trojan War*. His plays have received support from The Great Plains Theatre Conference, the Cohen New Works Festival, Lawrence University, University Co-Op, and Frontera Fest. In 2015 he performed with the Veteran Artist Project at the Lincoln Center Home Show. In the spring of 2016 he began a six-month fellowship with BEDLAM theatre thanks to the Mission Continues project. His work as a playwright and an actor has been featured in the Austin Chronicle, The Austin American-Statesman, KUT radio, the BBC online, The Scotsman, and The List. His stage play *American Volunteers* won the 2010 Mitchell Award at the University of Texas, and subsequently made the long-list for the Dylan Thomas Prize in the United Kingdom. Alongside Karen Alvarado he is the co-artistic director of Thinkery & Verse, where he directed and performed in a four-performer *Much Ado About Nothing*, toured Manhattan living rooms with *The Priceless Slave*, and created *Bride of the Gulf*, a transnational collaboration with artists from Basra, Iraq that toured to the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

**KAREN ALVARADO** (*Producing Director*) is a Latinx actor, director and producer born in Corpus Christi, Texas. She grew up touring bilingual history plays in Texas and Northern Mexico. After getting a Theatre BA from Texas A&M University, she enjoyed a professional acting career in Austin, Texas. While in Austin she served as the Founding Artistic Director for The Last Act Theatre Company for four years before moving to New Jersey to complete an MFA in Acting at Rutgers University Mason Gross Conservatory, and received classical training from Shakespeare's Globe in London. She is currently the Founding Co-Artistic Director of Thinkery & Verse, and works as a teaching artist. Karen most recently appeared in *August Osage County* with the Resident Ensemble Players in Delaware. Before that she played Penelope in Emily Wilson's translation of *The Odyssey* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Recent acting credits include Claudio, Hero and Don Jon in a 4-person version of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the lead character in *Bride of the Gulf* at the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Karen also directed *Bride of the Gulf* and the play received critical acclaim from The Scotsman and The List. 2019 was packed with co-direction on the world premieres of *Thou Shalt Not* in New Jersey, *Dionysus in America* in Austin, Texas and finally both direction as well as curation on *AFTERSHOCK / La Réplica*, a new play commissioned by The Austin Veteran Arts Festival in Austin, Texas.

**Thinkery & Verse** (Co-Artistic Directors Dr. J.M. Meyer and Karen Alvarado) was founded in 2017 to create and produce *The Priceless Slave*, a searing indictment of America's 19th century slavocracy. The team created the play while closely studying Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, a play that provides a rich understanding of complicity and entitlement. Though set in the South in the 1850s, they performed *Priceless* in Manhattan living rooms, and in modern dress. They built the play, which is based on a true story, in part by interviewing descendants of the title character. For each project, Alvarado and Meyer set specific goals for inclusivity. They often work with international ensembles, military veterans, or immigrants and refugees, in this case, the majority of the cast was BIPOC.

In 2018, Thinkery & Verse created and performed *Bride of the Gulf* for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. *Bride of the Gulf* told the story of an Iraqi woman and her mother-in-law in the moment when the British withdrew from Basra, Iraq in 2007, and the hardships that radical militias subsequently inflicted upon the civilian

population. The creation of the play required a transnational collaboration between a military veteran playwright, an international cast, and artists in Basra, Iraq. **Bride** received four-star reviews and critical acclaim from The Scotsman and The List.

In addition, the team was commissioned to produce the world-premiere of their four-actor version of William Shakespeare's **Much Ado About Nothing**. In the spring of 2019, Thinkery & Verse worked with a collective of refugee and immigrant women and artists to create a new adaptation of Aeschylus' **The Suppliants**, adapted and directed a shortened version of **A Midsummer Night's Dream** for an arts school in New Jersey, and produced a workshop run of a new New Jersey musical, **Rita the Cleaning Lady** (inspired by Brecht's *Three Penny Opera*).

In September of 2019 Thinkery & Verse premiered **Thou Shalt Not** in New Brunswick, New Jersey, at the church most closely associated with the Hall-Mills murders. In September of 2022 they will revive the play to mark the centenary of the tragedy.

In the fall of 2019 the team traveled to Austin, Texas, to collaborate with Art Spark Texas, Canopy Theatricals, The VORTEX, and Teatro Vivo to debut two new plays, **Dionysus in America** and **AFTERSHOCK / La Réplica**. After COVID-19 cancelled the New York debut of *Thou Shalt Not*, they spent the summer of 2020 creating new types of art. The 2020 health and social crisis provoked the teams artistry to pivot, with a new emphasis on film production, geocache audio adventures (**Ghost Hunt**, Seasons One & Two), historical and literary podcast production (**Decameron 2020 Podcast**, **That's How the Story Goes: the Hall-Mills Murders Podcast**, and **AFTERSHOCK / La Réplica Podcast** 2021). The team stays active in the veteran arts community with co-facilitation of creative writing groups for veterans and family members/caregivers of veterans (Poetic Theatre Productions' Veteran Voices Programs and Women Veterans Empowered & Thriving), as well as hosting racial equity and justice discussion groups. 2021 has brought along exciting new partnerships with The New Brunswick Historical Society, for which Thinkery & Verse produced **The Kilmer House Project**, with promise of many more history-based theatrical projects to come!

### Listings Information:

**Who: THINKERY AND VERSE and The New Brunswick Historical Society**

**What: GHOST HUNT: Mysterious Middlesex**

**Where: Virtual and live in Middlesex County, NJ and beyond (Manhattan; Brooklyn; Texas; Virginia; Italy)**

**When: Starts September 16**

**Cost: FREE**

**How: At thinkeryandverse.org and on the Geocache App**



Grant funding has been provided by the Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners through a grant award from the Middlesex County Cultural and Arts Trust Fund.