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Unearthing Kingston's past



PHOTOS BY MAURA ROSNER

Archaeologists uncover centuries of Indigenous life, colonial settlement and forgotten burial grounds

by Maura Rosner



LONG BEFORE CONCRETE footings, brick extensions, and drywall, the ground beneath Kingston was already a dense patchwork of human memory. Today, as local historians, archaeologists, and community advocates unearth the region's layered past, a clearer and often uncomfortable narrative is emerging about how early settlement, racial injustice, and historical preservation have intersected across four centuries. From ancient Indigenous settlements to forgotten 19th-century burial sites, the stories buried just inches below current street levels reveal a community continuously building directly over its own heritage.

The human story of the region stretches back roughly 14,000 years to a post-glacial epoch. Archaeological evidence recovered from Kingston Point Park, including primitive stone tools and projectile points, indicates that small nomadic bands frequented the shoreline long before European contact. In the heart of modern Kingston, at the historic Matthewis Persen House on John Street, archaeologist Dr. Joseph E. Diamond uncovered compelling evidence of an early Indigenous footprint in the form of post molds, distinct discolored soil impressions left by decaying wooden posts. These remnants reveal the outline of an ancient Native American habitation, a wigwam.

The original inhabitants, the Esopus people, were part of the broader Lenape nation. Following centuries of displacement and conflict with Dutch and English settlers, descendants of these communities are today part of three federally recognized Lenape tribes in the United States: the Delaware Nation in Anadarko, Oklahoma; the Delaware Tribe of Indians in Bartlesville, Oklahoma; and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community in Bowler, Wisconsin; as well as three recognized First Nations in Ontario, Canada: the Munsee-Delaware Nation, the Moravian of the Thames First Nation, and the

Kingston's past

Continued from Page 1

Delaware First Nation (part of the Six Nations of the Grand River).

Layered architectural footprints

Built in 1661 for Gysbert Van Imbroch, the Matthewis Persen House stands as one of Ulster County's oldest surviving structures. The home carries a complex history: Van Imbroch's wife was captured by the Esopus during the Second Esopus War before escaping; her intelligence regarding the location of the Native American fortification ultimately proved pivotal in the Dutch victory. Over subsequent generations, an English family led by George Hall, a recorded enslaver, acquired the property, expanding the original single-room structure and adding a barn extension.

Ulster County historian Edward L. Moran III said, "By the time Ulster County acquired the property in 1914 and formally adapted it in 1950, its original age had been largely forgotten. County workers added a modern brick extension, covering historical interior walls with sheetrock to host local group meetings, such as the 4-H club. Advocates secured state and county funding to stabilize the building as a walk-through ruin. Modern visitors can now view exposed, layered building materials side by side, including 20th-century drywall, 18th-century plaster, and early mortar bound with straw and horsehair. Crucially, excavations inside the building revealed that Kingston's 17th-century street level sits approximately two feet lower than today's pavement."

Systematic displacement of sacred grounds

The practice of building directly atop historical grounds was not restricted to ancient sites. According to Moran, "... mid-19th-century communities lacked modern preservation mandates and record-keeping requirements, often leading to decisions that seem unimaginable today. When churches and development expanded in the 1800s, building directly over older graveyards or moving headstones was relatively common. Across from Pine Street, where a modern medical center now stands, a former white burial ground saw several headstones uprooted and placed against the rear boundary fence behind the Old Dutch Church."

This dynamic was far more severe for Kingston's Black population. In the mid-19th century, as the rural cemetery movement swept the nation, the city of Kingston designated the newly established Mount Zion Cemetery, located in a remote peripheral location, for Black burials.

Seeking to sell off prime municipal real estate along Pine Street, city officials issued a public notice in local newspapers demanding that Black families relocate their deceased loved ones from the Pine Street African Burial Ground. The city warned that if families did not move the remains by a set deadline, municipal workers would do it for them, though city officials ultimately failed to follow through on their promise and simply sold the land to private buyers.



MAURA ROSNER

An inscription at the Persen House.

The city's historic oversight was finally proven when archaeologists Joseph Diamond and Ken Nystrom conducted exploratory digs at the site, uncovering human remains intact beneath the topsoil and proving that the city had sold the burial ground without carrying out the promised relocations. Through extensive archaeological efforts, graves were formally mapped, and remains previously uncovered on adjacent private properties were respectfully reburied within protected grounds.

Today, the Pine Street African Burial Ground is recognized as both a New York State and National Historic Landmark. While time and development erased the site's original headstones, archaeologists uncovered one original marker and several footstones during excavations. Harambee has since installed a commemorative monument to honor those interred on the sacred ground, with long-term plans to establish an educational museum on site to ensure that Kingston's complex and multilayered story is finally brought to light.

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Unearthing the material culture

Dr. Joseph E. Diamond, professor of anthropology at SUNY New Paltz and author of The Archaeology of Kingston, New York, has spent decades researching the complex archaeological landscape of the region. Joseph Diamond highlighted early contributors and mentors who shaped the field.

Examining artifact collections from Kingston Point and the broader Esopus Creek drainage, including the C.R. collection, Diamond mapped out thousands of years of pre-contact Native American activity. Pre-contact Native Americans were not staying strictly within modern municipal lines, Diamond said, noting that his research included five or six key sites just outside the city's corporate boundaries in Port Ewen, Hurley, and the town of Ulster.

Diamond detailed a chronological progression of stone tools from Kingston Point, starting with the earliest projectile points recovered from 8,000 to 7,000 B.C. Neville points from 6,300 to 5,500 B.C. represent early Archaic occupation, and Diamond noted that a fluted Paleo-Indian point found in a Kingston Point collection at the American Museum of Natural History had actually been reworked into a Neville point thousands of years later.

The progression continued through Lamoka and Sylvan Lake points from 4,500 to 3,000 B.C., concluding with a Vosburg phase around 3,000 B.C., followed by Rossville points, Orient Fishtails, and Jack's Reef Pentagonal points spanning from 1,600 B.C. to A.D. 800. From A.D. 1300 up to European contact, true arrowheads emerged, which were distinct from earlier points used on spears, javelins, or darts. Joseph Diamond noted that these were the kind of projectile points being shot at some of Hudson's sailors when they were meeting with different people down closer to New York City.

Alongside hunting weaponry were ground stone food-processing tools, such as pecked pestles used to grind corn, beans, and squash.

"Conveyor belt" stratigraphy and site discoveries

At a site situated on a terrace near the armory, excavators encountered stratigraphically intact occupation zones dating back to 3,500 B.C. The







mystery of how artifacts became deeply buried without flood deposits was solved by understanding soil biology. “What's happening here is you have what I call conveyor belt species,” Joseph Diamond said, explaining that ants and worms bring soil up to the top while artifacts move downward, keeping deposits going back to the Late Archaic stratified from top to bottom.

Down near Abeel Street, by the Armadillo Mexican Restaurant where the Forst meat-packing plant once stood, a field guide uncovered the Abeel Street Pre-Contact Site 1. Excavations yielded a Neville point dating from 5,500 to 6,300 B.C., Orient fishtail points, a smoke kiln, net sinkers, knives, and a fragment of coil-wound Middle Woodland pottery dating to roughly A.D. 700.

Pantiles, wampum, and "A house within a house"

Structural artifacts also shed light on 17th-century Dutch building techniques, particularly heavy clay pantiles imported from the Netherlands as ship ballast from Amsterdam or Antwerp that required massive timber roof frames. “These are the kind of pantiles you would see on the original Senate House, and on the original Persen House right across from Rough Draft, where the first portion had the gable facing Crown Street,” Diamond said.

A similar discovery occurred in Hurley at the Elmendorf House, where broken pantiles were uncovered in the yard. “When they switched the house from the gable facing one way to extending it along Main Street, they dumped all the pantiles in the backyard,” Diamond said.

Inside the Senate House itself, excavations conducted under the floorboards of the waiting room in 2020, just prior to COVID lockdowns, revealed centuries of structural and cultural overlap. Beneath 19th-century alterations, researchers recovered sturgeon remains, window glass, a Robert Tippet pipe, English slipware from 1683 to 1795, and Dutch Delftware.

Diamond noted that excavators found a lot of clam shell fragments that were really small and mechanically broken, suggesting that someone was making wampum around the outside of the Senate House.

At the lowest excavation level, dark soil stains in the native subsoil revealed post patterns of an eighth-century Indigenous dwelling. Dated by surrounding ceramics to approximately A.D. 700 to 800, the discovery inspired Diamond's research article, A House Within a House. “It's literally a Native American house that predated the Senate House built right on the exact same spot,” Diamond said.









Homegrown

Back Home Cannabis opens new Kingston dispensary location

by Maura Rosner



When adult-use cannabis became legal across New York State, the gold rush was immediate. Corporate multistate operators, well-capitalized investor groups and flashy marketing agencies all scrambled to secure real estate, lobby municipal boards and claim territory in the burgeoning market. Yet, tucked away in Ulster County, the team behind Back Home Cannabis took a radically different approach. Instead of rushing to build an overnight empire, they relied on something far more durable: decades of dirt-under-the-fingernails farming experience, a deep commitment to direct-to-consumer agriculture and the patient, unyielding grit required to build an operation from the ground up.

Back Home Cannabis is officially unveiling its new dispensary location in Kingston. The company is led by agricultural veterans Kira Kinney and William Leibee, along with an operational team including human resources manager Megan Andrade and Derek Hempstead from inventory. The opening marks a major milestone for craft cannabis in the Hudson Valley.

To understand the foundations of Back Home Cannabis and its new Kingston storefront, one must examine the decades of local farming history that preceded it. Kira Kinney, a fixture of the regional agricultural scene, is the founder of Evolutionary Organics on Springtown Road in New Paltz. For more than 30 years, she has supplied fresh produce to competitive New York City Greenmarkets, balancing complex harvest schedules, urban distribution and unpredictable seasonal swings. Among farming circles, Kinney is equally famous for her passionate, near-obsessive cultivation of hot peppers, maintaining a sprawling collection of roughly 140 distinct varieties.

William Leibee brought a parallel depth of expertise to the table, anchored in commercial vegetable production, soil science and farm infrastructure. When the two growers crossed paths during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, initially over a lighthearted, spirited debate regarding a heatless "habanada" pepper, they quickly recognized a shared work ethic and a common approach to plant stewardship.

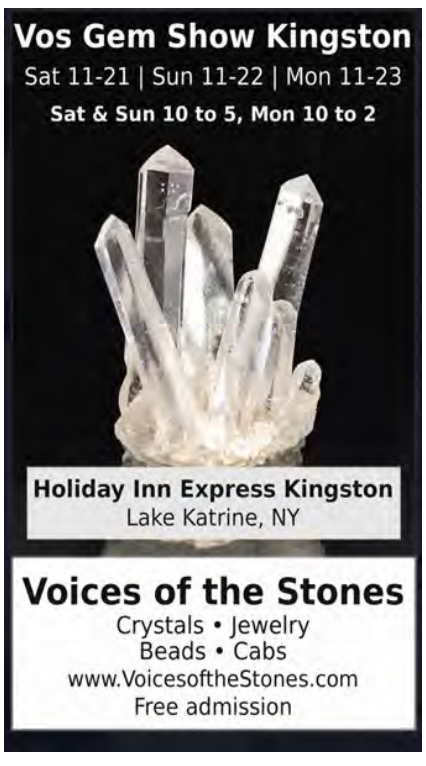
When New York State launched its legal adult-use framework, the pair saw an opportunity to apply their decades of agricultural wisdom to a new crop. Under the state's initial licensing rollout, early operators were granted conditional licenses restricted primarily to outdoor field-growing. While many businesses seesawed between shifting regulatory changes, Kinney and Leibee remained focused on the long game.

As the state opened pathways for permanent licensing, Back Home Cannabis chose to transition to a microbusiness license. In New York's cannabis ecosystem, the microbusiness model is unique because it allows small-scale operators to remain fully vertically integrated, controlling cultivation, processing, packaging and retail sales directly under one unified entity. The farm operation is a slow and deliberate

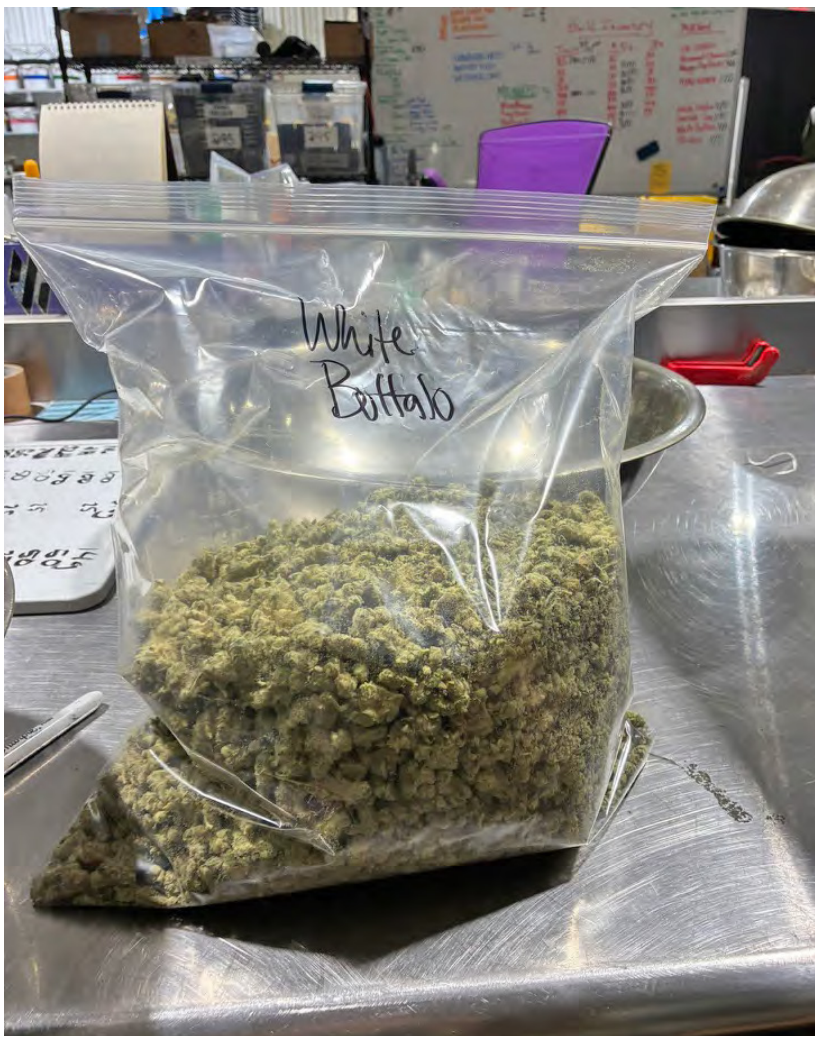




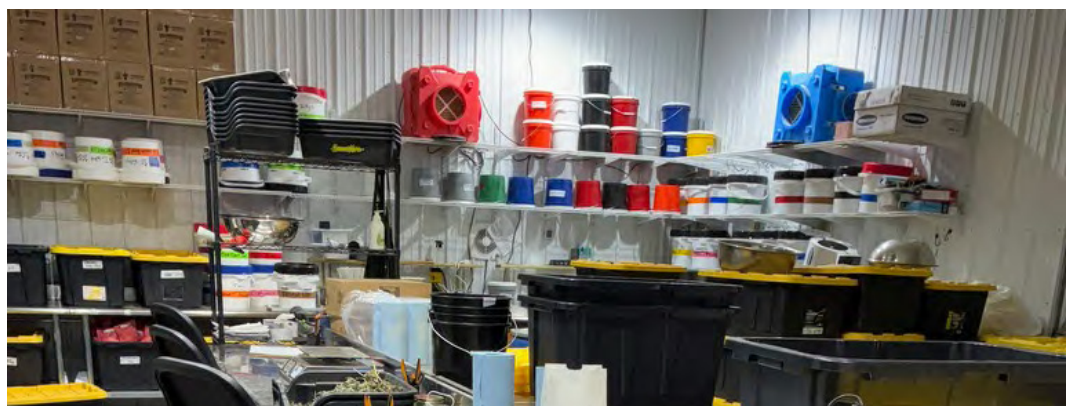












PHOTOS BY MAURA ROSNER

Views of the Back Home Cannabis farm, facilities and storefront.

Consumers visiting the Kingston store have the unique opportunity to purchase products grown and handled by the very people running the business...

build, with the team choosing the microbusiness route explicitly to preserve quality control and stay true to its vegetable-farming roots.

While cultivating the crop required agricultural skill, securing the physical footprint for their new retail dispensary location presented an entirely different set of challenges. For over a year, the Back Home Cannabis team scouted properties across Ulster County. Finding a viable site for a legal cannabis dispensary in New York is notoriously difficult due to strict municipal opt-outs, complex local zoning codes and the Office of Cannabis Management's rigid rules regarding buffer zones and location protection. Under state regulations, proximity protections and a digital pin system are utilized to prevent dispensaries from clustering too close to one another or operating within specified distances of schools, houses of worship or youth facilities. In practical terms, this created a high-stakes game of territorial chess across regional corridors like Route 9W and Route 299.

The journey to secure their storefront was marked by near misses and frustrating dead ends. One promising commercial location fell apart at the eleventh hour when a neighbor threatened litigation over a shared driveway and access easement. Refusing to compromise the integrity of their business model, Kinney and Leibee persevered through the real estate maze until securing their current location in Kingston.

The choice of Kingston was deeply meaningful. With its rich industrial heritage, vibrant artistic community, working-class roots and evolving commercial corridors, Kingston represents a dynamic hub for local commerce. Positioning their retail arm in the city allows Back Home Cannabis to connect directly with a diverse local customer base while keeping their supply chain tight, transparent and regionally rooted. Stepping into the world of Back Home Cannabis reveals a stark contrast to corporate, venture-backed dispensaries, reflecting a pragmatic, team-built ethos where farm-floor reality takes precedence over sleek, sterile fluff.

As the physical site expanded to support cultivation, processing and administrative logistics, the team continually adapted the building footprint to meet human needs. Kinney said, "Early structural modifications prioritized comfortable break rooms, proper heating, and accessible restrooms."

A central figure in maintaining organizational harmony amid rapid growth is human resources manager Megan Andrade, who operates out of a dedicated administrative hub on-site, affectionately dubbed the She Shed by the team.

With the Kingston dispensary location officially open and welcoming customers, Back Home Cannabis is rolling out a customer experience designed around authenticity and education. Following a successful soft launch, the dispensary has brought on trained budtending staff, established regular operating schedules and curated a shelf selection that highlights locally grown, meticulously processed craft products. Consumers visiting the Kingston store have the unique opportunity to purchase products grown and handled by the very people running the business. In an era where many dispensary shelves are stocked with mass-produced, white-labeled inventory, Back Home offers total traceability from seed to store shelf.

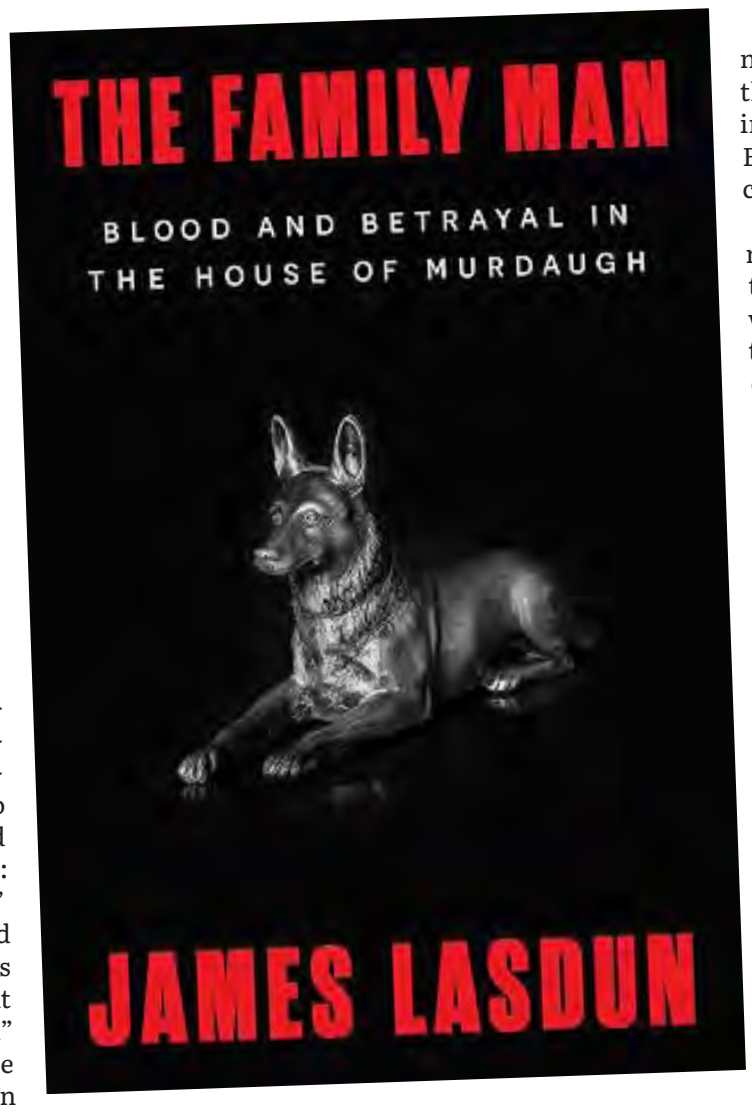
The retail layout avoids the cold, intimidating atmosphere of high-tech corporate dispensaries, opting instead for a warm, welcoming and grounded environment where customers can explore flower, edibles and concentrates while engaging in knowledgeable, pressure-free conversations with budtenders who understand the nuance of craft cultivation.

Back Home Cannabis stands out as a blueprint for sustainable, craft-focused success. By combining 30 years of vegetable-farming wisdom, enduring the arduous process of real estate acquisition and fostering a supportive, human-centered work culture, Kira Kinney, William Leibee and their crew have built a business that is truly back home in Ulster County. For local residents, medical patients and regional visitors alike, the opening of the new Kingston dispensary location is more than just another storefront; it is a celebration of Hudson Valley agriculture, legacy resilience and the enduring value of knowing exactly where your cannabis comes from.

Good Ol' Boy with a Gun

The Family Man: Blood and Betrayal in the House of Murdaugh by James Lasdun

by Sparrow



FIVE YEARS AGO I found a copy of People magazine on a Trailways bus. The cover article was about a South Carolina lawyer named James Murdaugh who was accused of murdering his wife and son. "Who cares?" I thought.

But when I saw that James Lasdun had written a book about the case, I was curious. I'd read his essays in *The London Review* of Books and *The New Yorker* – including "My Dentist's Murder Trial," about Dr. Gilberto Nunez, a Kingston dentist who was accused of killing his lover's husband. Lasdun's articles were always perceptive, engrossing, witty. So I opened *The Family Man*, and immediately liked the first line: "Are you a family annihilator?"

"Family annihilator"? I'd never heard that phrase, but it's obviously one of these recent coinages like "home invasion" that simultaneously dramatize a crime and trivialize it. Lasdun continues: "The question was posed directly to the defendant, who had unexpectedly taken the stand in his trial for the murder of his wife and son."

Already I was hooked.

It's the storyteller, not the story, that makes a book worthy. Gustave Flaubert's *Three Tales* (which I read recently, in French!) has mundane plots, but is as elevating as a Mendelssohn concerto. It's a shame to tell you anything about The Family Man. Put down this review right now, order the book from the library, then open it and let it sweep you away. When I started it, I knew almost nothing about the case. I didn't even know if there'd been a trial. Lasdun will handle all those details for you.

It happens that I am a "true crime" fan, and recently read Iphigenia in Forest Hills by Janet Malcolm, who is one of Lasdun's heroes. But Malcolm writes short philosophical books, while The Family Man is long and novelistic – closer to Crime and Punishment than to a heist story. (Towards the beginning of the book, Lasdun admits that he was in the middle of writing a novel – which he ultimately abandoned – when he received this assignment. The story of Murdaugh became a "nonfiction novel" – to use the term the Truman Capote invented for In Cold Blood, his true crime classic.)

For those of you still reading, let me explain that Alex Murdaugh was a fourth-generation lawyer who lived on the Moselle estate in Islandton, South Carolina. Lasdun describes him thus: "Red-haired, six foot four, with unusually deep-set dark eyes, he was very much the showboat among his siblings: gregarious, hospitable, charismatic, spoken of repeatedly throughout his trial as the kind of person who could charm anyone with his down-home manner and keen interest in the minutiae of everyone's life." His family law firm, Peters Murdaugh Parker Eltzroth & Detrick, has the amazing initials PMPED, to (unintentionally) suggest that the lawyers are a bunch of pimps.

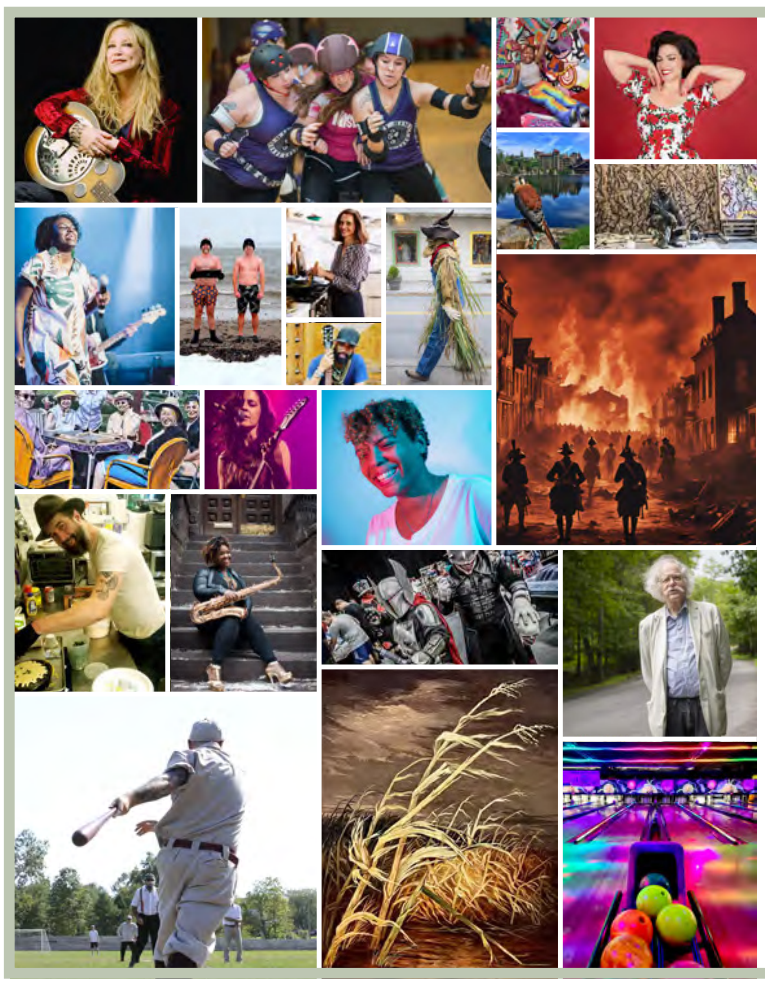
Murdaugh specialized in personal injury law, and was tremendously successful, earning millions in fees as a plaintiff's attorney – and millions more by bilking his clients.

Has the affluent, drug-addicted, sociopathic con artist become the quintessential American type, the way the guy walking around Europe with a camera around his neck used to be? The Southern version of this American hustler is perhaps the most extreme: riding through his 1770 acre estate in a $200,000 truck, shooting wild hogs with a .300 Blackout assault rifle. (The hogs are destructive to fields and crops.) If you're my age, it's impossible to read about Murtaugh without thinking of "The Beverly Hillbillies," the American sitcom (1962-1971) about a rural family from the Ozarks who strikes it rich – literally, by striking oil – and moves to Beverly Hills, where they continue practicing their homespun folkways, famously referring to their luxurious swimming pool as a "cement pond." Even on the witness stand, Murdaugh could only call his son "Pawpaw." (His own nickname was "Big Red.")

Lasdun refrains from mentioning the current occupant of the White House, but as I read his book, this singular criminal came to mind. Murdaugh was a rich, ostentatious pillar of the community who could look you in the eye, flatter you – then steal $300,000 from your bank account. But would such a man murder his wife and son? Would Trump put a bullet in Melania and Barron?

And Murdoch's guilt is by no means certain. He continues to maintain his innocence – to deny being a "family annihilator" – and many of his friends and colleagues stand by him. The evidence against him, though complex, is circumstantial. This case reminds me of O. J. Simpson, plus cell phones.

Another mystery is what happened to all the money Murdough stole. It amounted to millions of dollars, and it's never been accounted for. Yes, he had an OxyContin addiction, but that can't explain all of it. I once read that the Vikings stole vast fortunes on their raids, and buried them in the ground. They didn't need the money! They just liked raping and pillaging. Possibly Murdough had a similar philosophy. "Virtue is its own reward," quoth Cardinal Newman in the 19th century – but for sociopaths, crime is its own reward.



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