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Danbury Museum garden, spring 2020

"The pain of parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again."

If it's Friday, it must be the #MuseumFromHome update. We're so happy to virtually meet up with all of you again. The satellite offices of Guertin, Wells & Amundsen, Ltd., were beehives of activity again this week. There were multiple webinars hosted by @Cuseum staff that we listened to (they are fascinating--we encourage you to join in and see what the museum community is discussing), and we checked in daily to decide on new content and began discussions about what the coming months might look like for the Danbury Museum.

This week's newsletter has a decidedly Dickensian feel to it--in the most uplifting ways. In his essay this week, John O'Donnell writes eloquently on Charles Dickens and how reading and books helped to stave off despair during dark periods in Dickens' life. We've included a link to the virtual tour of the Dickens Museum in London in our **Museums From Your Couch** segment, too, so you can virtually travel to London and immerse yourself in "Dickens the Inimitable."

Bob Young finishes up his most insightful series on the 1918 Influenza Pandemic in his column this week. Bob's well-researched exploration of the 1918 Pandemic provides us a fascinating comparison to our own situation.

We are most grateful to have John and Bob contributing their time and talents to our little weekly publication.

Puzzler in Chief Patrick Wells has crafted a Dickens-themed cryptogram that we've added to the #MuseumFromHome section of our website and we've added the first volume of the Tricentennial Committee's book series entitled *Danbury: 300 Years of Change & Growth* as well.

Patrick has also designed a bunch of great Danbury Museum themed t-shirts. If you shop the [Danbury Museum store](#) at TEEPUBLIC, the museum gets a portion of every sale--and you can rep Danbury and the museum in your favorite style and color of shirt, cap, sticker, hoodie, etc. Even though you can't stop in the gift shop right now, you can still support the museum and show off your Danbury pride! You'll want to check the store now and then as there will be more fun designs to come.

Executive Director Brigid Guertin has some exciting news about virtual internship opportunities at the Danbury Museum for this summer.

We're having a really excellent time putting together this weekly newsletter and we hope you find it a little diverting as well. If you like what you're reading, please share with friends! (And don't forget, if you get the *three little dots* or *view entire message* prompt, click on it so you don't miss anything!)

Keep well,

Brigid Guertin (Executive Director, City Historian, Fearless Leader, Headmistress of The Guertin School, Purveyor of Positivity)

Patrick Wells (Research Specialist, Social Media Manager, Founder and Benefactor of "Danbury Museum," Animal Crossing Edition)

Michele Lee Amundsen (Collections Manager, #TeamTwitter, Lost/wandering in the National Gallery, London)



Danbury Museum garden, spring 2019

Virtual Internship Opportunities @ The Danbury Museum

One of the key aspects of museum work is teaching and inspiring the next generation of museum colleagues. Mentoring students through internships is rewarding for all of us and offers a level of engagement for professional development that I know we can continue this summer, despite the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Interns will work directly with the Executive Director, Curator, or Research Specialist on multiple ongoing projects in collections management, processing of archival collections, and preservation. Please visit the [#MuseumFromHome](#) page for a more extensive explanation of the internship opportunities available.

To apply, please submit a letter of interest and your resume or personal impact statement to: Brigid Guertin, Executive Director, b.guertin@danbury-ct.gov

Thanks, Brigid



Demonstration at the Red Cross Emergency Ambulance Station in Washington, DC, during the Influenza Pandemic of 1918. (Courtesy Library of Congress)

THE 1918 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC - PART 3

By Bob Young

By October 1918, the influenza pandemic was ravaging the cities and towns of Connecticut. Danbury was initially spared, but as of October 7, there were 340 new cases in one day.

On October 9, the State Health Department reported that there had been more than 30,000 cases of influenza in the state, primarily since the beginning of the month.

The State Adjutant General established new guidelines for military funerals. With so many soldiers dying from influenza and being returned to Connecticut for burial, any military person attending to a funeral was advised to keep "safe distance" from family members.

On October 10, the State Health Department said that all doctors and nurses should be wearing face masks when around patients. It was clear that influenza could spread from close contact as well as from coughing or sneezing.

The outbreak of influenza began to peak by October 15. On that day, Danbury's Public Health Director noted that there had been 124 new cases over the previous weekend and that the current total in the city was 1,274 cases. New York City was reporting more than 650 deaths each day. In Danbury, the monthly total stood at 33 influenza deaths.

October 16 saw the first appeals from Danbury Hospital. They were near capacity and in need of more nurses to assist in the care of the patients. Although there were fewer new cases reported in the previous 24 hours (60 cases), the overall effect on the city remained serious. The total cases

exceeded 1,300. Influenza was at epidemic proportions throughout the country.

By Friday, October 18, the hospital was averaging a census of 60-70 inpatients with 8-10 new admissions each day. The hospital had 32 beds in the men's wing and 36 beds in the women's wing—all of them occupied. In addition to the call for more nurses, the hospital was seeking additional help in all departments. Men and women were especially needed for kitchen, housekeeping, and maintenance duties. The monthly death toll from influenza in Danbury stood at 41.

On Monday, October 21, the *Danbury News* cited a statewide shortage of doctors and nurses. Several conventions in Connecticut had been canceled and the schools and theaters remained shuttered. October's death count had grown to 56; 113 additional cases of influenza reported in Danbury brought the total to more than 1,400.

The needs of the US Army, coupled with the spread of influenza among farm workers, meant a significant food shortage in the stores along with 25-30% price increases for food. With WWI continuing it was pointed out that higher food prices would probably persist.

The Governor decreed that all retail stores must close no later than 9 PM until January 2. There was another canned food drive for the hospital with 1,500 cans being collected. It was also reported that a student nurse at the hospital had died from influenza.

The supply of coal was also down due to the epidemic affecting a large number of miners, especially in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

As influenza began to reach its peak in Danbury, plans were developed to convert the Children's Home on Town Hill into an emergency hospital.

On October 23, the newly developed emergency hospital admitted its first patients. The daily total of new cases continued at about 120 per day. To date there had been 63 reported deaths in Danbury due to influenza. By Saturday, October 26, the epidemic seemed to have plateaued; there were fewer than 50 new cases reported daily. The total cases stood at 2,087 for October. This represented about 10% of the population of Danbury at that time.

The Town Clerk reported that the city had surpassed its previous high number of deaths in a month. There had been 103 deaths up to 10/25, 73 of them due to influenza. In an average month in Danbury there would be fewer than 15 deaths reported for all causes.

The weekly update from the City Health Department on Monday, October 28, showed about 40 new cases per day. The monthly death total stood at 121, with 95 due to influenza. The final number for October ended up at 132 deaths, 105 due to influenza.

For the month of October, Wooster Cemetery recorded 55 burials with 6 burials taking place on one day. This was a record number. (The previous record was 33 burials in one month in 1916 due to an outbreak of polio.)

In October there were 54 ambulance calls. (This is remarkable in that there was only one ambulance in the city at that time.)

Schools and theaters reopened on Monday, November 11. Children under the age of 16 were not permitted in theaters. Schools had been closed for a total of 5 weeks.

Influenza continued to flare up in the region for 3 more months. Deaths due to influenza were 22 in November, 26 in December, and 22 in January 1919.

There would eventually be another flare-up of influenza in the winter of 1919-20. In February and March of 1920 there were a total of 47 influenza deaths.

The State Health Department reported around 8,450 deaths from influenza in 1918, with more than 45% of the deaths occurring in young adults, aged 25 to 39. There were more than 108,000 cases reported during 1918.

Bob Young has been a history buff all of his life. He was fortunate to grow up just outside of Boston, near Salem, and spent many hours exploring. Bob has been working on his family's genealogy since he was 18.



Dickens's Dream

Charles Dickens

By John O'Donnell

Last year I asked a trusted colleague who had been his favorite author when he was young. His reply was that he had loved reading Charles Dickens when he was younger. I myself had read (and enjoyed) *Great Expectations* in high school and *Hard Times* in graduate school. Even though I liked reading both novels, I did not continue to read Dickens. Upon getting the recommendation from my colleague I returned to Dickens and for a little over a year, I have been reading him profitably on a daily basis. This has been a wonderful experience.

At the Charles Dickens Museum (see links below) there is a blog for you to explore. Please make sure you look at the blog entry for January 25, 2018. The entry is titled *Dickens's Dream* (by Dr. Leon Litvack). It discusses the painting of the same name by Robert W. Busse from 1875. It is part of the museum's collection and depicts Charles Dickens in his study, surrounded by the wealth of characters that he created throughout his lifetime. It is a tribute to the protean creative energy of this man. The painting was unfortunately not completed by the artist so some characters are in color while others are only sketched in. We all are aware of the vivid imagination that this artist was blessed with. What many of us do not know are the obstacles that Dickens faced on his journey to becoming a master novelist. How was he able to accomplish this?

I think that the answer to this question lies in his difficult early life. He for a time had a typical Victorian upbringing (Dickens was born in 1812), until his father fell into debt and was imprisoned in the Marshalsea Prison in London. His father lived beyond his means (which his son scrupulously avoided doing throughout his life) but was able to acquire a decent library which

Charles took full advantage of. He read voraciously (and multiple times) Tobias Smollett, Henry Fielding, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gil Blas*, and the *Arabian Nights* among others. Charles was entranced by these works and the worlds that were created that he could escape into. While his father was imprisoned, Charles had to live on his own even though he was only twelve years old. He had to leave school and found employment working ten-hour days in Warren's Blacking Warehouse pasting labels on cans of boot blacking.

This experience had a profound effect on Charles Dickens. He never forgot the shame and trauma of having to do this at such a young age. In his novel *David Copperfield* (which was his own favorite of his works in addition to being autobiographical) he wrote about this period: "I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support of any kind from anyone that I can call to mind, as I hope to go to heaven." What saved him during this difficult period of his life (he later said about this period that he easily could have been lost and taken up a life of crime) was reading the books again that he had salvaged from his father's library. He largely lived in this imaginative world and this essentially saved him from the despair that might have overtaken him. Literature became the defining feature of his life and propelled him into creating his own imaginative world which astonished--and continues to astonish--the world. One of his nicknames was "Dickens the Inimitable" (which means so good or unusual as to be impossible to copy). This was truly earned and merited.

John O'Donnell first became a history devotee while in elementary school. He was raised in Brooklyn and frequently went to Prospect Park which has a Revolutionary War monument. He was hooked!



Charles Dickens Museum, London, UK

Museums From Your Couch

Pajamas, a potent potable, and your favorite cozy chair or comfy couch are among the benefits of virtual museum tours. And as we all know, **Museums From Your Couch** snacking is a calorie-free zone.

We thought we'd take a literary tack for our virtual travels this week, starting with a couple of museums that Dickens himself would have known. While [The National Gallery](#) doesn't have a virtual tour per se, you can explore their amazing collection from the comfort of your home.

[Charles Dickens Museum in London](#) that John O'Donnell mentions above has a beautiful virtual tour and an informative blog for you to enjoy. If you only remember Dickens from high school,

here's a great opportunity to be re-introduced to a literary giant.

Not terribly far afield from Doughty Street and the Dickens Museum is the [National Portrait Gallery in London](#). We're suggesting starting in the Victorian Galleries after you've spent some time with Mr Dickens, but there are many galleries for you to explore.

Closer to home is [Steepletop](#), poet Edna St Vincent Millay's home in Austerlitz, NY. Take a virtual tour or join the Millay Poetry Challenge.

If you've watched the recent release of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, you'll enjoy a virtual tour of [Orchard House](#). There are several digital options, and for a nominal fee you can take a virtual tour now and get a bonus FREE tour when they re-open.

And no mention of literary greats and their homes/museums would be complete without Connecticut's own [Mark Twain House and Museum](#) that offers a truly immersive virtual tour.

If you do some virtual touring this weekend, take a screenshot or selfie and share it with us on social media--we'd love to see where you "travel" to.

Danbury Museum Social Media



Danbury Museum
@DanburyMuseum



We've loved sharing and seeing everyone's posts for [#Archive30](#). Today's theme is [#WhyArchives](#) and for us, it's the stories. How [#Danbury's](#) community story informs and enriches the bigger narrative; how we've grown, changed, and overcome; how we are all connected. [#MuseumFromHome](#)



Like last year, we had a truly incredible month sharing [#Archive30](#) images across our social

media. We were able to reach more than 70,000 people on Twitter, making it officially our best month ever on the platform.

The final day's prompt for #Archive30 was "Why Archives?" And really, it all comes down to story and community. We have the great privilege of sharing more than 300 years of stories from our community and holding them in trust for future Danburians. And by connecting with these local narratives, we enrich and enhance our collective understanding of the world.

At the heart of all of this is our community. We'd like to acknowledge the Woman's Club of Danbury/New Fairfield for their generous grant to the Danbury Museum for archival boxes. We are most grateful to community partners like WCDNF for their support.





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danburymuseum Our @danburymuseum crew ca 2018 with our #denimday jeans in support of @thewomenscenterdanbury. #DenimDay is encourages people to wear jeans (denim) to raise awareness of rape and sexual assault. #MuseumFromHome #Danbury #SAAM2020

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We Need You DANBURY!



Documenting COVID-19

At the Danbury Museum, we've been collecting and archiving items that document our city's past for **more than 75 years**. Our collection includes several buildings worth of archival materials as well artifacts that tell the tale(s) of our collective past, that inspire and inform the present and that we will be preserving for future scholars, researchers, students and Danburians.

We are currently living through a momentous, somber moment in our collective history. We need your help to document what is going on in your homes, at your jobs, and in communities across Connecticut. We want to hear your story. We want to know how you and your family are experiencing the current pandemic and "new normal."

Below are examples of what we're looking for:

Writings - letters, notes, emails, postcards, poems

Signage - images of window signs, directions, posted community information

Photos - of you, your family, your neighborhood, your street, YOUR Danbury!

Drawings, paintings, and other forms of art you're creating and documenting

Short videos (limited to 500MB file size) for larger files please email to Patrick Wells, Research Specialist, at p.wells@danbury-ct.gov.

Please stay safe when documenting these historic times. Do not put yourself in danger when capturing photographs or videos.

Why is this Important?

The Danbury Museum collects material that documents the full range of our lives in Danbury, CT because...you INSPIRE us, you INSPIRE the future. Documenting our community response to COVID-19 is a way to preserve the daily struggles of our stay at home community, our work from home community, our students, our critical care and healthcare workers, our first responders and our essential workers. From every perspective, what you are doing right now matters, to us right now, and to future Danburians.

So, when you email Collections Manager, Michele Lee Amundsen at m.amundsen@danbury-ct.gov or mail us your submissions to 43 Main Street, Danbury, CT 06810, please include any or all of the following information:

What else should we know about this object? Please explain who is in the photo, why you created this piece...basically all the information YOU would want to see to give context to a museum exhibition item or an archival file.

Please know that:

By providing my material to the Danbury Museum & Historical Society Authority (DMHSA) I hereby give the DMHSA a royalty-free, non-exclusive, worldwide, perpetual, irrevocable, and fully sub-licensable license to copy, digitize, reproduce, edit, translate, create derivative works, distribute, and publicly display and perform certain materials described below. I agree that the DMHSA may add the material to the collection according to the DMHSA Collection Management Policy and to make it available to researchers in a manner consistent with the practices of the DMHSA. I agree that the DMHSA may utilize any medium or media now existing or that will exist in the future to achieve the above-described purposes.

Thank YOU for entrusting the Danbury Museum with your memories, your stories, your art, your images. We take this responsibility seriously and will maintain your gift for future generations so they too may understand what it was like to be here, in Danbury, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 health crisis has had a strong impact on the Danbury Museum, not unlike other public service organizations. To help us continue doing the work we love--from home and from behind the scenes over the next few months--please consider making a donation. Your gift, regardless of size, is important to us as we regroup and continue to work toward eventually reopening to the public.

[Donate here.](#)

[Become a member here.](#)



We'll keep in touch, and we hope you will, too. Be well, take care of yourselves, and we'll look forward to meeting here again next week.



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