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The pollinators LOVE our museum gardens that are so carefully looked after by the Danbury Garden Club.

Hello Friends!

Happy Friday! We're glad to be with you again.

July has been another busy month at the Danbury Museum. The first half of the "Fair That John Built" outdoor exhibit is up along the museum's back fence line—and Patrick and Michele have mastered the *Art of Exhibit Installation With Zip Ties and Eye Screws*. We have 5 more panels to install and we think it's looking great--you'll be able to see the images driving by on Main Street and of course, you're welcome to pull into the parking lot and have a closer look. (We do request that outdoor visitors practice social distancing while enjoying our exhibits and gardens.) A sincere thank you to Elaine Lagarto for choosing these special images for us. These panels give visitors a glimpse of the BIG exhibit in Huntington Hall that we hope to share with you all again one day.

Our plan is to install the remaining 5 Fair panels, as well as the 1918 Pandemic exhibit panels, in early August.

We will be moving forward with Cursive Camp, but in a much different way. Brigid and Patrick will be recording a series of cursive lessons that'll be perfect for both beginners and as a refresher course. There's no doubt we'll all miss seeing our campers, but this is the safe way and we wanted to continue the #CursiveConversation. The lessons will be available on YouTube and the cost for the 5 sessions is \$50 and it includes membership in the Friends of the Danbury Museum. We'll send out another email invite to everyone that contains all the details for getting connected and joining us for virtual Cursive Camp.

Once again, our newsletter is fortunate to feature essays from our great returning writers. Bob Young writes about "Why Danbury?" in his continuing series on Danbury's role in the Revolutionary War; Dr. Thomas McGregor has written a most interesting piece on Connecticut's *Notable Trees*; and John O'Donnell not only brings us another great reading recommendation, but he also introduces us to a fascinating Danbury denizen with a surprising connection to author Charles Dickens.

New this month, Brigid, Patrick, and Michele are sharing a few of their favorite recent books, TV shows, movies, and even podcasts and music.

Thanks for following along with us and we'll be sure to keep you informed as we continue to make progress on a number of fronts at the Danbury Museum; we're most fortunate to be able to keep on doing the work we love, preserving and sharing Danbury history. We'll see you back here (virtually) in late August!

Keep well,

Brigid Guertin (Executive Director, City Historian, Fearless Leader)

Patrick Wells (Research Specialist, Social Media Manager, Membership Maestro)

Michele Lee Amundsen (Collections Manager, Newsletter Nudge)



Our first Virtual Intern, Jenn Browne!



The Rider House dining room with a fresh coat of paint.

In other exciting news, we are so happy to introduce you all to Jenn Browne, the museum's first virtual intern. Jenn is working remotely on creating a searchable database of Danbury's 1980 Historic Resources Inventory. She's making great progress and she's modeling some of our Danbury merch, too! (We've got great t-shirts, hats, mugs, masks, AND MORE on our [TeePublic site](#), the museum gets a cut of every sale, so go check out Patrick's clever designs!)

We have also been working on interior painting projects in the John & Mary Rider House. Julia Siergiej has been giving a coat of white paint to the interior walls and it's looking completely refreshed. There's plenty more painting to do!

#HiddenHistory & #MuseumFromHome Puzzles

Danbury Street Name Word Search (pdf)

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Bailey's History Cryptogram (pdf)

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Hatting Terms Word Search (pdf)

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Parks, Ponds & Waterways Word Search (pdf)

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Sybil Ludington Cryptogram (pdf)

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A Tale of Two Cities Cryptogram (pdf)

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Danbury Schools Word Search (pdf)

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Are you experiencing a bit of late summer ennui? Maybe August August blahs? Stimulate your brain and check out our [#museumfromhome](#) page for lots of great puzzles, activities, and PDFs of exclusively Danbury content. There are trail maps for Museum in the Streets and the Ives Trail, word searches, cryptograms and more. We've even uploaded some of the fun and interesting Danbury Tricentennial pamphlets for your summer walks and wanders around Danbury.

There's also an entire page dedicated to you jigsaw puzzle fans over at [Jigsaw Planet](#).



Mezzotint of General Sir William Howe.



General George Washington by Charles Wilson Peale.

Why Did the British Choose Danbury?

By Robert Young

It is a well-known fact that the British burned the storehouses in Danbury (and then were involved in a skirmish with the Colonials in Ridgefield) in 1777. What is seldom mentioned is why the British chose to attack Danbury in the first place.

To understand this attack better, we need to look at the events that directly led up to the decision to raid Danbury. In 1776, the British were forced to evacuate Boston after the Continental Army surprised the British by occupying the heights in Dorchester that overlooked Boston. In this occupation the Continental Army placed numerous cannon on the heights, aimed directly at the British.

British General Howe decided to evacuate Boston and take his ships and troops to Halifax so that they could “regroup” and determine their next move.

The strongest opposition to the British was in New England and New York. General Howe and his staff believed that the best course of action was for the British to seize the Hudson River valley, thus cutting off New England from the other colonies.

The British sailed into New York harbor in late August 1776, and began a series of battles in and around present day New York City. The Continental Army suffered defeat after defeat as the British pushed their way north and west from Brooklyn. By the end of October, the Continental Army under George Washington had been soundly beaten and forced to retreat across the Hudson River and then south into the Delaware River valley.

Morale among the Continental Army was at its lowest. Because the army consisted mostly of volunteers in state militia units, little could be done to control a significant rate of desertion. The British settled comfortably in Manhattan and felt that with a major offensive in the spring of 1777 that they would be able to crush the rebellion. General Howe and his staff began to plan the campaign that would result in the British under General Clinton heading north from New York and General Burgoyne heading south from Montréal. The two forces would meet in the area around

Albany and would effectively cut New England off from the rest of the colonies.

With the occupation of New York, General Washington faced yet another dilemma. Massive amounts of supplies for his troops came from New England. Before the set back, supplies would follow the old Post Road, through either Manhattan or Peekskill. At this point, any route supply south of Peekskill was effectively severed.

The winter of 1776-77 was surprisingly mild at the onset, with little snowfall before mid-January. American spies reported back to Washington that Trenton, New Jersey, was being occupied by German troops (called Hessians) and that they were not well disciplined. On Christmas Eve of 1776, Washington crossed the Delaware River and began a surprise attack on the Hessians. By morning, the Continental Army occupied Trenton. Before the British in New York could mount an effective move, Washington headed north and occupied Princeton on January 3. The British were on the run, and Washington had effectively severed the British supply lines between New York and Philadelphia. Washington then made his winter quarters in Morristown, New Jersey.

Oddly, the British made no effort to break through the encircling ring of Continental forces that consisted mostly of raw recruits and poorly trained militia. It proved to be a struggle for Washington's troops to keep the British bottled up in New York.

General Howe, while making plans for his spring campaign, got word from his Tory spy network that Washington was receiving large quantities of supplies from New England. There was no knowledge of just how this was happening, but it was not long before the spy network found that some of the supplies were passing through Peekskill.

By March 1777, the British were occupying Newport in preparation for the final blow to the New England colonies after seizing the Hudson River. However, before Howe can meet Washington in battle, he must find the source of Washington's supply lines and sever it.

On March 23, 1777, the British sailed up the Hudson and raided Peekskill. A fair amount of supplies were found and destroyed before the Continental Army chased the British back to New York. To General Howe, it was obvious that Peekskill was neither the main crossing point nor the main supply depot. To find them, he would need to travel further to the north.

In early April, Howe planned to sail up the Hudson and raid Fishkill, which had been identified as the most likely site of a major supply depot. However, the Continental forces had begun to install booms and chains across the Hudson River just to the north of West Point; any raid north of Peekskill was put on hold.

Soon, though, the Tory spy network confirmed to Generals Howe and Clinton that most of the supplies bound for Fishkill were being collected in Danbury. In order to cut Washington's supply lines, plans had to be made to strike inland in Connecticut and to raid Danbury.

The rest, as might be said, is history.

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. He's been working on his family's genealogy since he was 18.



The Pinchot Sycamore, Simsbury, CT.

A Notable Tree

By Thomas MacGregor, Ph.D.
UConn Advanced Master Gardener

In her seminal work, *Founding Gardeners*, historian Andrea Wulf describes an English garden tour south of Wales, taken by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams in April, 1786, while trying to negotiate a trade treaty with England. They delighted in the observation that proper English gardens weren't always totally English. Bushes and trees from America grew throughout the gardens due to the English obsession of seed swapping which started in 1730 with John Bartram, an American farmer. One tree that reminded Jefferson and Adams of home was the American sycamore.

The American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) is one of the tallest native species of eastern North America and can reach a height of more than 100 feet. An excellent example of such a large, old American sycamore is the tree at the intersection of routes 53 and 302 in Bethel, near the appropriately named Sycamore Drive-In. On the Connecticut College list of notable Connecticut trees, this sycamore is the second largest in the state after the champion sycamore in Simsbury. A measurement of the Bethel sycamore at breast height (4.5 feet above ground) reveals that the tree has a circumference of 24 feet, or 288 inches. This measurement is called a circumference breast height or CBH. The tree's diameter is calculated by dividing the circumference by pi (3.14159) to get the diameter breast height (DBH) of 91.7 inches. The International Society of Arboriculture has a listing of tree species growth factors including one which helps estimate the age of a tree in relation to the DBH; for the American sycamore this number is 4. Using 91.7 inches (the DBH of the Bethel sycamore) and multiplying by 4 gives 367 years; therefore, this American sycamore at the corner of routes 53 and 302 sprouted up in the mid-1600s.

Many people have studied their personal genealogy or the history of long-time Danbury residents, but have they ever investigated the history of the land and flora in Danbury? The notable tree list (www.oak.conncoll.edu) shows that Danbury has 12 notable trees including one state champion,

a purple-leaved cherry (*Prunus cerasifera* 'Atropurpurea'). One place to begin researching your own property is to review the mortgage deed from when you purchased the land and house. The deed usually gives a detailed history of your property and your neighbors' properties on each side. Next identify the trees of interest. If you are stumped as to the species of tree you can contact the Fairfield Co. Extension Office (fairfieldmastergardeners@gmail.com) for help. Measure your trees' circumferences by using a tape measure at 4.5 feet in height from the base of each tree. Calculate their ages (goodcalculators.com/tree-age-calculator) to determine whether the trees were already there when the house was built or were planted later. Want to find some older trees? Look for them in cemeteries, parks, and on an oasis in the midst of farmland. If you find an especially large and elderly tree, check the Connecticut College notable tree list to see if it is or should be included.

After 33 years at Boehringer Ingelheim, **Dr. Tom** (UConn '85) retired to his garden and piano.

REAR ADMIRAL DICKENS DEAD

**Distinguished Naval Officer, of
Danbury, Expires at Age
of Sixty-six**

Washington, Sept. 16—Rear Admiral Francis W. Dickins, who during the Spanish-American war had much to do with planning the successful naval campaigns in his capacity as assistant chief of the bureau of navigation, died in New York yesterday. Admiral Dickins was born in Beekmanville, N. Y., November 2, 1844, and entered the naval service as an acting midshipman Sept. 20, 1861. After graduation in 1864 he served on the U. S. S. Colorado during the remainder of the Civil War. His last sea command was as the head of the coast squadron of the North Atlantic fleet in 1905, and he retired from active service November 2, 1906.

Danbury, Sept. 16—Word was received here of the death of Rear Admiral Francis William Dickins, U. S. N., retired, from anemia in a private hospital in New York city. Admiral Dickins since his retirement had made his home winters in Washington, spending his summers at his home here, the Moorings. Although born in Beekmanville, N. Y., he had always considered Danbury his home, having entered Annapolis from this city in 1861, and maintained a summer residence here for many years. He was 66 years old and leaves a widow and one sister, Mrs. Helen Benedict, of this city.

Admiral Dickins

By John O'Donnell

My recent reading has included *The War Lovers: Roosevelt, Lodge, and the Rush to Empire 1898* by Evan Thomas. This is a very enjoyable read on the lead up to and events of The Spanish American War. This war has not received much attention from historians because it is sandwiched between two mammoth wars: the Civil War (1861-1865) and World War one (American participation 1917-1918). These wars have received the lion's share of historical attention, but Evan Thomas makes a great case for devoting more attention to the Spanish-American War. What most of us know about this war is the charge of Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders up San Juan Hill. This event brought notoriety to Roosevelt—so much so, that he was catapulted into a political career as Governor of New York, Vice-President, and then President when McKinley was assassinated in 1901. There are few instances in United States history of so meteoric a rise to multiple powerful posts in such a short time. I am happy to report to you that there is Danbury connection to this war that I know you will find very interesting.

When the battleship USS *Maine* blew up in Havana Harbor on February 15, 1898, (under suspicious circumstances) this provided the catalyst for the United States to declare war on Spain and take its place in the first rank of the great powers of the world at that time. The man who brought the news to President McKinley at the White House was Commander Francis W. Dickins, USN, and he was a Danburian!

Dickins was born in Beekmanville, New York, on 2 November, 1844. He came to Danbury in 1852 and was henceforth extremely proud of his association with it. Dickins attended Jackson's Academy on Main Street in Danbury and was an excellent student. As many young men did at this time, he also worked as a newsboy and through his job he came to the attention of Frederick S. Wildman, President of the Savings Bank of Danbury. Mr. Wildman took a liking to the boy and wanted to help him further his education and find a suitable career for him. He assisted Francis Dickins with additional studies and was able to help him get an appointment to the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, where he pursued a career as a naval officer. Dickins graduated in 1864, and served aboard a gunboat in the Civil War, but did not see action.

He remained in the navy after the Civil War and was able to rise through the ranks because of his remarkable abilities. An officer who was distinguished for his scholarly and intellectual abilities, he also taught mathematics at Annapolis and his forte was complex naval planning and problem solving. When he brought the *Maine* news to President McKinley, he was serving as Assistant to the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation in the Navy Department in Washington, DC. He was also a very skilled diplomat. In 1892, he was chosen to accompany the Spanish Duke of Veragua (a descendant of Christopher Columbus) on a visit to the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. He did an excellent job and he and the Duke became fast friends. The King of Spain, Alfonso XIII, awarded Dickins a medal for guiding the Duke on his visit to America.

Commander Dickins was a key figure during the Spanish-American War, and did extensive planning for the naval campaigns during the war which included Admiral Dewey's spectacular victory over the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay in the Philippines. The navy fared measurably better than the army during the war. and Dickins received a great deal of praise for this post-war. He rose steadily through the ranks until he became a Rear-Admiral, with his last sea command being the head of the coast squadron of the North Atlantic fleet in 1905. While in that capacity, he was a major influence on the career of Raymond A. Spruance who would become one of the major naval figures in World War Two in the Pacific. Spruance was instrumental in the key victories at

Midway and the Philippine Sea. Dickins retired from active service on 2 November, 1906.

Admiral Dickins had a residence in Washington, DC, and when he died on 15 September, 1910, he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. However, his ties to Danbury remained very powerful until the last. His legal residence was in Danbury. The city was very proud of the achievements of its own Admiral. He came to Danbury as much as possible during his career and owned what was reputed to be the oldest house in Danbury (1690) on Wooster Heights. (The house is still there.) He was a relative of Charles Dickens (in spite of the difference and lack of consensus in the spelling of his last name). I am trying to determine if the Admiral and the writer ever met, but so far have not found evidence of a meeting. The Danbury Museum has a great trove of information about Danbury's participation in the Spanish-American War.

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!

Brigid, Patrick, & Michele Recommend

We've heard you musing to yourselves, what do Brigid, Patrick, and Michele do and watch when they are not AT the museum? (We understand the concept of us not being at the museum is difficult to grapple with--it is for us, too.) With this in mind, we're sharing a few of our favorite music, movies, TV shows, podcasts, and books.

Brigid:

TV Show/Series: The boys and I have started watching *Eureka*. It's a fun, family sci-fi series that is 5 seasons long and has a well thought out conclusion. Gary and I are psyched to start the new *Perry Mason* on HBO...we'll let you know what we think!

Books: I've gone almost exclusively digital this summer and I'm binge re-reading Jim Butcher's Harry Dresden series. I'm saving the new release in the series for a special weekend treat.

Music: Broadway musicals! I keep mixing it up amongst some of the most popular long running shows, you know, the ones that I can sing along to, loudly and off key, in my garden with just a plant audience. (Ha!) Dreaming of the day we can all enjoy a great Broadway show in person!

Patrick:

Movie: *The King* (a Netflix adaptation of Henry V)

TV Show/Series: *Merlin* (also on Netflix)

Book/Series: *The Kane Chronicles* by Rick Riordan (the author of Percy Jackson, this series is about Egyptian Mythology)

Music: *Soldier, Poet, King* by The Oh Hellos

Michele:

Movie: *F for Fake* (Orson Welles, 1973)

TV Show/Series: *Perry Mason* (The new adaptation on HBO.)

Book: *Defiant Spirits: The Modernist Revolution of the Group of Seven* by Ross King (A group biography of Canada's storied "Group of Seven" artists.)

Music: *Silver Tears* (2016) Aaron Lee Tasjan ("Tasjan's lyrics are soaked in spilled whiskey, misunderstood tears, and dusty memories.")

Podcast: *Waldy & Bendy's Adventures in Art* (A cheeky Art History podcast with *Times* art critic Waldemar Januszczak and art historian Bendor Grosvenor.)

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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.](#)



Summer Fun!

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 in August.



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