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# DM | DANBURY MUSEUM



**Hello, Friends,**

We hope you are making the most of these lazy, hazy, crazy summer days!

Summer has, as usual, sped by at an alarming rate, but there's still fun to be had and plenty of time to enjoy free tours at both the Ives Birthplace and the historic buildings on our 43 Main Street Campus. Check out [our website](#), or visit our [Eventbrite](#) page for all the details and to book a tour. We're so grateful to CT Humanities and Connecticut Office of the Arts for making the FREE tours possible all summer; and we thank, once again, the Danbury Cultural Commission for a grant that allows us to keep the free tours going through December!

Our regular essayists John O'Donnell and Dr Thomas MacGregor join us again this month, and we're so pleased to have their always interesting contributions. John writes about a rediscovered historian ("found" while John was volunteering in the museum's archives) and Tom shares a tale of rabbit woes not unlike a certain Farmer McGregor.

And a reminder, the final concert of the summer is next Friday, August 5, from 4-5 pm. Bring your lawn chairs and some snacks and enjoy music in the museum's beautiful garden.

Stay cool and be well,

Brigid Guertin (*Executive Director, City Historian*)

Patrick Wells (*Research Specialist, Social Media Manager*)

Michele Lee Amundsen (*Collections Manager, Newsletter Editor*)

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*Music in the  
Museum Gardens*

Join us on Fridays  
July 1 & August 5  
from 4pm - 5pm  
featuring  
Smokin' Joe West &  
the Creative  
Force Band.

BYO snacks and lawn chairs and  
enjoy music amidst our beautiful gardens!

DanburyMuseum.org 43 Main Street

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MUSEUM



**Be An "Orbivore!"**

We're participating in the Merwinsville Hotel Orb/Sphere Scavenger Hunt again this year. This is a great way to get out and visit not only your hometown museum, but a number of our neighboring museums and attractions. Our orbs are hidden within the museum's gardens, so we ask that you **please take care** as you hunt so as not to damage any plants.

If you spot one of these orbs in the garden, it's YOURS! And then you can go register at [MerwinsvilleHotel.org](http://MerwinsvilleHotel.org) and register your find! There are both clear and colorful orbs hidden within the museum's garden.

Enjoy, and happy hunting!

**ORB Hunt** in the hills of Western Connecticut

Find a unique glass-blown orb hidden at participating places - it's yours to keep! Join the treasure hunt!

*What is an Orb Hunt?*

The Merwinsville Hotel Restoration group is very excited to continue the Glass Sphere/Orb Hunt that was kicked off in 2021 to celebrate the Hotel's 50th anniversary of the restoration project. There are artisan created glass orbs that are hidden at historic sites and non-profits in the Litchfield and Fairfield County area. Along with the clear glass orbs, we have 22 colored ones (for 2022). The rules are simple...If you find one, you get to keep it! Just be sure to register it online at [www.merwinsvillehotel.org](http://www.merwinsvillehotel.org).

*Participating Businesses and Organizations*

**Brookfield**  
B1. Brookfield Craft Center

**Danbury**  
D1. Danbury Museum and Historical Society  
D2. Danbury Railway Museum

**Gaylordsville**  
G1. Merwinsville Hotel Restoration, Inc.  
G2. Browns Forge  
G3. Little Red Schoolhouse  
G4. Washington Oak Park (DAR)  
G5. Gaylordsville Volunteer Fire Department

**Kent**  
K1. Eric Sbare Museum  
K2. Kent Historical Society  
K3. Connecticut Antique Machinery Association

**Litchfield**  
L1. Litchfield Historical Society

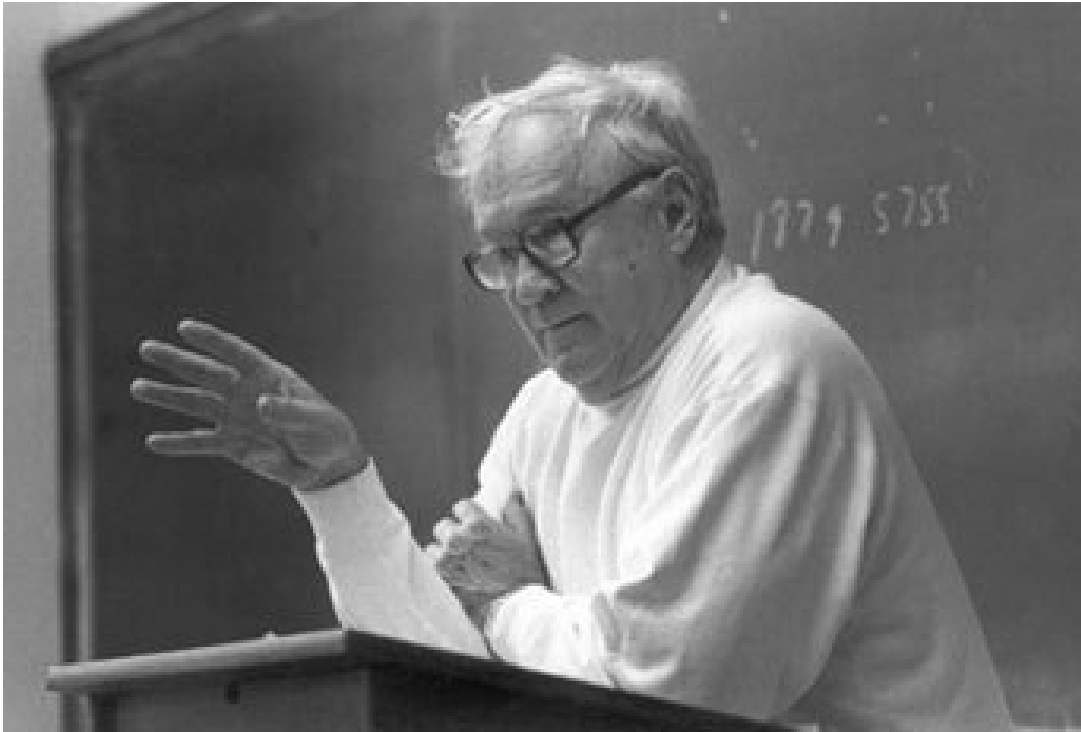
**New Fairfield**  
NF1. New Fairfield Historical Society/Little Red Schoolhouse  
NF2. Preserve New Fairfield

**New Milford**  
NM1. Gallery 25 and Creative Arts Studio  
NM2. Fairbrooks Park  
NM3. Merryall Center for the Arts  
NM4. New Milford Trust for Historic Preservation  
NM5. Village Center for the Arts  
NM6. The Silo  
NM7. New Milford Historical Society

**Washington**  
W1. Gunn Historical Museum

*It's free and fun to be an Orbivore!*

Sponsored by the Merwinsville Hotel and the New Milford Commission on the Arts



*John Patrick Shenton*

## **A Rediscovered Historian**

By John O'Donnell

In a previous essay I wrote about reading the journals of Edward A. Tomasiewicz, a noted Danbury artist and World War II veteran. I am still reading and enjoying the journals. We have multiple volumes in our Museum collection. Edward A. Tomasiewicz was a man of very wide and varied interests who reinforced these interests with reading to broaden his understanding in these areas. His interests range over, but are not limited to, Danbury history, current events, military history especially World War II, the island of Bermuda where he had served during the war, horse racing (especially at Saratoga Race Course), the traditional hunt, photography, and of course art and art history.

The journals frequently include very skilled sketches of animal anatomy especially horses, the hunt, details of great artists of the past, showing their particular techniques, how to achieve

mastery of these techniques, and the importance of lighting in doing great artistic work. Tomaszewicz was a very serious man about his interests but also had a good sense of humor which shows in articles and features that he clipped for the journals. We all know the importance of using journals as a critical tool for both biography and history. One gets to know a person very well by using their journals. I feel that I know a great deal Edward A. Tomaszewicz and his likes, dislikes, foibles, and interests from reading his journals. Another benefit of reading his journals for me was the discovery of an historian whom I had somehow missed during my education in history. I am very grateful that Tomaszewicz led me to this historian.

The historian's name was James Patrick Shenton (1925-2003). In an entry in the journal in 1963 he writes about watching a television broadcast lecture on New York City's Channel Thirteen given by Professor Shenton on United States history. Shenton was discussing the career of Al Smith who ran (and lost) to Herbert Hoover in the 1928 presidential election. Smith was a Democrat and a four-time governor of New York state. He came from Tammany Hall but he was untarnished by the corruption that clung to many politicians who were associated with it. In Shenton's analysis of Smith he notes that up to 1932 politics was dominated by the Republican Party which represented big business, the wealthy, and native born American Protestants. Al Smith gave voice to the foreign-born politicians who were mostly Irish. He was the first presidential candidate who was Roman Catholic. He was one of the first presidential candidates to speak to the people during the campaign about the workings of government. This was unprecedented. Shenton asserted that Smith's loss to Hoover was not because of his Catholicism (which was the standard historical interpretation) which he

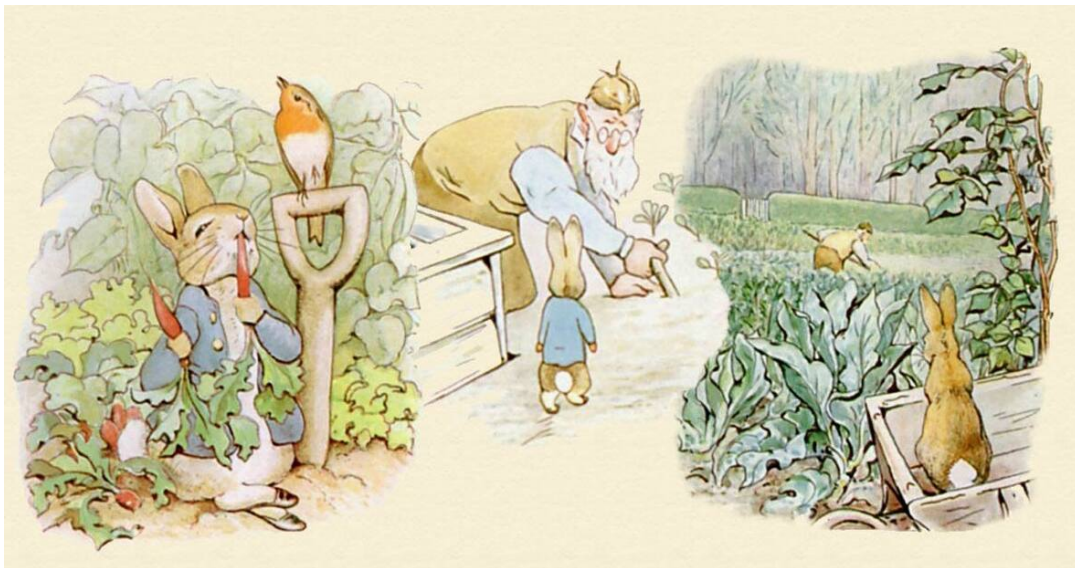
deemed a minor issue but because of the prosperity of the country under the Republicans since 1922. This entry piqued my interest in Shenton and I decided to look at him more closely.

James Patrick Shenton was born on Saint Patrick's Day in 1925 in New Jersey. Like Tomasiewicz he served in World War II as a medic and witnessed much of the most deadly fighting during the war, including Utah Beach on D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, and Buchenwald. He also saw his best friend killed in combat and that weighed heavily on him for the rest of his life. Postwar he went to Columbia University on the GI Bill (as Tomasiewicz had also done at Pratt University) beginning in 1946 and never left its hallowed halls. He commuted from New Jersey and finished his undergraduate degree in three years. He then attained his M. A. and Ph. D degrees there and started teaching history and left an indelible mark as an historian.

He taught at Columbia from 1951 until 1996 and was one of the most sought-after professors. His lectures, without notes, entranced several generations of students. He gave courses on the Civil War, World War II and the history of immigration and ethnicity in the United States. These courses attracted thousands of students who were spellbound by his breadth of knowledge. Many of his students, inspired by his example, went on to become outstanding historians in their own right. These include Eric Foner, Sean Wilentz, and Thomas Sugrue. Many students left with a lifelong love of history as well as an enduring affection for Shenton. He, as Tomasiewicz noted, was a pioneer in bringing history to television in the 76-hour survey course on public television called *The Rise of the American Nation*.

Shenton himself summed up his career in the best way possible: “I suppose what I like most is the knowledge that—without knowing precisely how—I am having an impact on people. I found in teaching the challenge of interesting students in what interests me. I also learned that as I instructed, I was being instructed. God knows, I can’t think of much else that could have given me greater pleasure than teaching, For me, at least, teaching is in some ways an act of love.”

**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!**



## **Rabbits in Farmer MacGregor's Garden**

by Thomas MacGregor

This summer a family of rabbits with voracious appetites is visiting our garden. In the evening at dusk, they come into the yard to nibble on green bean leaves, Swiss chard, and



parsley. Yelling or clapping hands does not seem to frighten them. Maybe they think we are the dinner hour's entertainment. Currently, the little bunnies are cute with their long ears and short, fluffy tails that resemble cotton balls; however, they are eating their way to adulthood one square meter of garden at a time.

According to the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), there are two types of cottontail rabbits in Connecticut: the native New England cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*) and the Eastern cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), introduced in the early 1900s. The two types are nearly identical, having large hind feet, long ears, a cotton-ball tail, and reddish- to grayish-brown coats with white undersides. Some Eastern cottontails, but not all, have a white, star-like shape on their foreheads. Without this white star, it is almost impossible to distinguish which variety is marauding the garden without taking a DNA sample. Since rabbits can produce up to six litters per year, DNA analysis would easily crash the Ancestry.com computer system.

To prevent rabbits from foraging in your family garden you need to erect a two-foot-high wire fence around vulnerable plants. The fence should be buried a few inches below ground level and have a mesh size of no more than an inch (chicken wire is commonly used). Alternatively, you can go out every night and yell at the rabbits and try to chase them away. They can hop away at speeds up to 18 miles-per-hour, so you can get your interval-speed running in, as well.

Ever since my grandmother read Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* to me as a young child, I've always been interested in cottontail rabbits (full disclosure: I always rooted for Farmer McGregor). Written in 1901, Beatrix Potter (1866 –

1943) wrote the story of Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail, and Peter for Noel Moore, a sick and delicate child of her former governess, Annie Carter. She sent the story to him as a series of letters starting in 1893, doing all her own illustrations with meticulous drawings of her two pet rabbits, Benjamin and Peter, as models. While at first, though just letters, they were highly prized by Noel, and when Potter decided to publish the story as a book in 1901, he was able to produce all the letters without difficulty.

Throughout the letters (and book), the mischievous Peter is cleverly contrasted with his sisters “who were good little bunnies.” Eventually he barely escapes capture by the farmer (his father wasn’t as lucky), but loses his new coat. His over indulgence of eating in Farmer McGregor’s garden and the loss of his new coat result in him going to bed ill following a dose of chamomile tea. Meanwhile, his good sisters have a supper of bread, milk, and blackberries. Eventually, in the storybook *Benjamin Bunny*, Peter and his cousin Benjamin again go to Farmer McGregor’s garden to rescue his coat which now adorns a scarecrow. They collect the coat, but are prevented from escaping by a cat until Benjamin’s father comes to their rescue. Perhaps we need to erect a scare crow in our garden, or we could get a cat.

For those with an interest, a detailed biography of Beatrix Potter with her illustrations can be found in the book *Beatrix Potter: The Artist and Her World* by Judy Taylor, Joyce Irene Whalley, Anne Stevenson Hobbs, and Elizabeth M. Batrix; F. Warne & Co. 1987.

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



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*FREE Visits All Summer!*



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