

# DM | DANBURY MUSEUM



## Hello, Friends,

Happy season of all things pumpkin and cozy! After we welcome all the costumed trick-or-treaters on Monday, we turn our thoughts toward the last weeks of the year, and the word that comes most to mind is thank you. Thank you for your support of the Danbury Museum and our mission and vision for the last 80 years; thank you for your love of Danbury stories and your generosity of spirit when it comes to the donation of time, talent, and artifacts.

Don't forget that thanks to a grant from the Danbury Cultural Commission, we're able to offer FREE tours on Fridays and Saturdays at both the Ives Birthplace Museum and our 43 Main Street Campus. [Book your tours here](#), through Saturday, December 17th.

We're also thankful to have our regular essayists with us again. Dr. Thomas

MacGregor writes about *Halloween Phobias* and our (mostly) friendly New England spiders, and John O'Donnell reminds us of *An Unsung Hero* of WWII, Chester W. Nimitz. Thank you to both Tom and John for sharing their talents with us each month.

We'll see you again in late November, but until then, we wish you Happy Halloween and a fabulous Thanksgiving filled with family, food, and festivities.

Brigid Guertin (*Executive Director, City Historian*)

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

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

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Thank you to everyone from Woman's Club of Danbury/New Fairfield and the Danbury Garden Club for coming out on October 17 and not letting the rainy weather dampen any spirits!

The two trees (a Black Tupelo and a Hawthorn) were generously donated by the Woman's Club and then planted by the Danbury Garden Club Civic Committee and volunteers. The museum is the very fortunate beneficiary of this donation of trees, time, and talent.

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# Halloween Phobias

by Thomas MacGregor

Walking around the neighborhoods of Danbury at Halloween time can be a frightening experience, especially for young children. The pumpkins lighting up front door stoops are carefully carved to exhibit mean faces with missing teeth. Many elaborate yard displays can bring out your most deep-rooted fears. These are the same fears Celtic peoples had over 2000 years ago, phasmophobia (fear of ghosts), wiccaphobia (witches), arachnophobia (spiders), and politicophobia (politicians). OK, maybe I embellished that last fear for this election year.

The Celts celebrated the end of the harvest season on October 31 and the beginning of the new year on November 1. They believed that during this 24-hour period the spirits from the underworld were free to roam the highlands of Ireland and Scotland. The living wore masks and costumes to hide their identity from these evil spirits. It's ironic that one of the more popular costumes of today is that of a ghost.

When Halloween became a European Christian celebration as the evening (e'en) before All Saints (Hallows) Day, witches were perceived as evil spirits in human form sent by the devil. In the middle of the night supernatural events were reported to occur during the "witching hour" (3 to 4 a.m.) – probably "seen" by individuals who had too much harvest grog. Of note, in the pre-Middle Age era, after the harvest was collected, young women would meet with fortune tellers to learn their prospects for a husband in the new year. Over the centuries, this tradition morphed into the occult arts and was condemned as unholy.

So, how did spiders get mixed up in Halloween folklore? Spiders were believed to be evil companions of witches. It was thought that any witch who ate a black spider between two slices of buttered bread would have greater power in casting spells. (Seems like a lot of carbohydrates and very little protein!) Maybe spiders were loathed because October is the spider mating season and there seems to be so many of them at this time of the year.

Spiders are actually a desired member of our ecosystem because of their voracious appetites for various insects. Spider webs collect flies, moths, mosquitos, and bugs that feast on our crops. These webs are biochemically spun to produce a pure protein silk that has a high tensile strength. Scientists are studying spiders' spinning methods to try to emulate the strong silk properties to produce lighter, tougher, and more elastic Kevlar protective vests.

There are more than 20 species of spiders in Connecticut and though not all of them produce webs, most do. They can be found in barns, basements, and outdoors under rocks, on bushes, and within hedges. Colorful pictures of spiders can be found on [www.spiderid.com](http://www.spiderid.com). Only two Connecticut species of spiders (brown recluse and

female black widow) are cause for concern and bite only when provoked. According to a May 2021 Hartford Hospital press release, their bites rarely break the skin, but some people are allergic to spiders. In most bite cases, spiders are wrongfully accused when a flea or bed bug was the guilty party. The cellar spider (daddy longlegs) actually will hunt down and kill venomous spiders. If you see the spider and are sure you have been bitten, it's recommended to wash the area with soap and water and apply an ice pack for ten minutes or so.

There are many designs of spider webs, but the classic webs, found in children's drawings and front-yard Halloween displays, are of an orb design. The barn spider (*Araneus cavaticus*) is one of the orb-weaver spiders native to the Northeast. These spiders are nocturnal so their webs are found in the morning dew, but their yellow and brown bodies with striped legs are rarely seen. Interestingly, the first web they make in their lifetime is perfectly created, but the subsequent orbs have flaws. Practice does not make perfect in the spider world.

The most famous barn spider is Charlotte A. Cavatica, who saved Wilbur the pig from slaughter after the county fair. E. B. White's heartwarming story, *Charlotte's Web*, illustrates the short life-cycle of a barn spider and the multitude of offspring (514 in the story) that one can produce. One of the three spiders that stayed with Wilbur the year following the fair was Charlotte's daughter, the appropriately named "Aranea."

I hope this essay has dispelled some of your Halloween fears, especially arachnophobia. So, enjoy the decorations of ghosts, witches, and black widow spiders caught up in orb webs during your trick-or-treating haunts. I still have an irrational fear of political signs, but those will be gone by mid-November.

Happy Halloween!

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

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# Free Tours!

Thanks to a generous grant from the Danbury Cultural Commission, we are able to offer FREE tours of the Danbury Museum's historic buildings at 43 Main Street and the Charles Ives Birthplace.

Tours are Fridays & Saturdays, from September 10 through December 17, 2022.

Advance registration is required, please book via Eventbrite or DanburyMuseum.org



*Free Tours All This Autumn!*



*Admiral Chester W Nimitz*

**An Unsung Hero**

By John O'Donnell

With the approach of Veteran's Day it behooves us to look at the achievements of one of the unsung heroes of World War Two. While reading the diary of Edward A. Tomasiewicz, noted Danbury artist and World War Two veteran, I came across the following passage. Tomasiewicz was stationed for a lengthy period on the island of Bermuda. One of his colleagues invited him to visit the observation post atop Castle Harbor Hotel. He looked to the east with the aid of a high-powered telescope a huge convoy and called this "the greatest single visual experience of my life." High praise from a man who made his living by creating and observing multiple visual experiences.

Another man whom I am sure would have echoed this sentiment was Chester W. Nimitz, Senior. He was the great driving force behind the success of the United States Navy in the Pacific Ocean in World War Two. Sadly, when the great commanders of World War Two are enumerated, the usual names included are Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley, and MacArthur. Nimitz's name is hardly ever included. This is doing Nimitz a great disservice and his name should be included in this group.

Chester Nimitz was born on February 24, 1885, in Fredericksburg, Texas. He was significantly influenced by his German-born paternal grandfather, Charles Henry Nimitz, a former sailor in the German Merchant Marine who taught him "the sea--like life itself--is a stern taskmaster, the best way to get along with it is to learn all you can, then do your best and don't worry especially about things over which you have no control." His grandfather had also been a Texas Ranger and his grandson certainly heeded his advice throughout his career. Chester Nimitz graduated from the United States Naval Academy in the class of 1905 and ranked seventh in a group of one hundred and fifteen midshipmen. He had a very varied career in World War One and in the interwar years. He became the leading authority on submarines. He oversaw the conversion of the submarine fleet from gas to diesel power. He was also responsible for the development of underway refueling techniques. These experiences would be crucial to his success in the Pacific theater in World War Two.

Nimitz became the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation on June 15, 1939. After the debacle at Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt appointed Chester Nimitz as Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet and Commander in Chief Pacific Ocean Areas on December 17, 1941. He landed at Pearl Harbor on Christmas Eve 1941. A spell of despair, dejection, and defeat hung over our most important Pacific base. But Nimitz would have none of that defeatism. He was given a tour of the shattered base on Christmas Day. As his boat was returning to dock the helmsman asked Nimitz what he thought after seeing all the destruction. His reply shocked the helmsman and everyone who was within earshot. Nimitz said that the Japanese made three of the biggest mistakes an attacking force could ever make, or God was taking care of America. Nimitz asked the helmsman which he thought was the explanation. The helmsman asked Nimitz to explain what he meant. Nimitz noted the

first mistake as attacking on a Sunday morning. Nine out of ten crew members were ashore on leave. If the ships in port had been lured out to sea and sunk we would have lost 38,000 men instead of 3,800. Mistake number two was the Japanese focus on bombing battleship row so that they neglected to bomb the dry-docks nearby. If these had been destroyed, we would have had to tow every one of those ships to the United States mainland for repair. The damaged ships are in shallow water and can be raised and repaired (eventually six of the eight battleships were indeed raised and repaired and took part in action in the war). Mistake number three was that the Japanese did not attack the fuel storage tanks in Pearl Harbor which would have destroyed our entire fuel supply. They did not do this and the three carriers that were at sea and our undamaged ships had a plentiful supply of fuel and were able to, as we shall see, quickly undertake operations against the Japanese. I am sure that what Nimitz said went around the base like wildfire and raised the morale of the men who were reeling from the destruction around them. Admiral Nimitz was able to see an unseen benefit in a terrible situation where everyone else failed to see this, Roosevelt had made the correct choice for the Pacific Fleet command.

And Nimitz quickly put together several operations that demonstrated the striking power of the United States Navy and Nimitz's determination to recover the initiative from the Japanese. The Doolittle Raid on April 18, 1942, was an attack on Tokyo by sixteen B-25 bombers launched from the attack carrier USS Hornet. Although the damage to Tokyo was slight, the raid provided a much-needed boost to both civilian and military morale in demonstrating that we could strike back against the Japanese effectively and quickly.

Nimitz followed this up quickly with the Battle of the Coral Sea from May 4 to 8, 1942. This was the first naval battle in history in which the opposing fleets neither sighted nor fired upon one another, attacking over the horizon with aircraft from carriers instead. This was a strategic victory for the United States Navy and was the first instance of a Japanese advance being turned back and preventing an invasion of Australia by the Japanese. Nimitz had seized the initiative from the Japanese and followed up the Coral Sea with an even more decisive victory at the Battle of Midway from June 4 to 7, 1942. This was the turning point in the naval war in the Pacific. The United States Navy sank four Japanese carriers against the loss of one United States carrier. The Japanese also lost their most experienced pilots in this engagement and never recovered from this defeat.

Nimitz proved to be relentless in his attacks against the Japanese Imperial Navy and kept them on the defensive for the rest of the war. He also used the submarine arm to completely dominate and sink the Japanese merchant fleet. This submarine victory was so decisive that by the end of 1944 the United States submarines had run out of targets! We need to include Admiral Nimitz in the ranks of the great commanders of World War Two. In my estimation he has earned this honor.

**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!

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Take a chance on this cozy and charming throw quilt! The Friends of the Danbury Museum are selling \$10 raffle tickets on this tea themed quilt, created and machine quilted by Joretta Kilcourse. Tickets are available at the museum and will be on sale through Saturday, December 17, with the winner being drawn on Monday, December 19. This would be a lovely holiday surprise for you or the tea enthusiast in your life!

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# DM | DANBURY MUSEUM



Friday, March 10, 2023  
@ The Amber Room Colonnade

Save the date—we're excited to be together once again!

*Laissez les bon temps rouler!*



Through Saturday, December 17!



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