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Azaleas in the Danbury Museum Garden, May 2023

Hello Friends!

Although it hardly seems possible, we are nearly halfway through 2023 as June approaches!

We've had an eventful late spring and we will head into summer with a full schedule of events.

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the American Icons

concert at the Ives Birthplace on May 13—it was a marvelous day. And a very special thank you to the Danbury Music Centre and Danbury Music Centre Community Band for their help in getting the word out and for all of the wonderful music. Here's to this being the first of many collaborations!

Speaking of music, we have the tent up on the 43 Main Street campus and we're ready for our monthly summer concerts! We have a full slate of outdoor concerts this year (Fridays June 30, July 28, and August 25) and we'll be announcing bands and timing soon, so mark your calendars and plan to join us for some alfresco music and then head out to your favorite Danbury eatery for dinner.

With summer, of course, comes camp. Our very popular Cursive Camp is back again this summer, July 17-21, and all of the [registration materials are up on our website](#). The ability to read and write in cursive is a valuable skill set—whether for reading old family letters and recipes or simply mastering the mechanics—and our weeklong camp this summer is the perfect place to start. If you are not able to write in cursive, reading it is much more difficult.

The very exciting news is that thanks to your generous donations during Giving Day in November and an additional donation by a private family foundation, **we are able to offer 30 students FREE spots at Cursive Camp**. It is first come, first served, and you will still need to fill out all of the required forms on our website. Please email completed forms to [Executive Director Brigid Guertin](#) to reserve your child's (or grandchild's) free spot. This offer is limited to the first 30 students.

We're happy to announce that we have a new exhibit opening

on Wednesday, June 21. The exhibit is titled *Of a Place and Time: The Art of Danbury Photographers* and we'll be focusing on the truly special images of Danbury's photographers, professional and amateur. Members of the museum are welcome to attend a special preview on Friday, June 16 from 4-6:00 pm. Not a member? [Why not join us?](#)

We have heard you--we know that having more tour times available for visitors is important to everyone. To that end, we'll be opening up our tour schedule to match our research schedule for this summer, so we'll be offering tours Wednesday through Friday from June 21 through September 2. This is only possible thanks to some hearty interns and students who will be helping out with our tours this summer as we are unable to extend the hours of paid staff. All tours must still be booked in advance via [Eventbrite](#), but they are free and open to all.

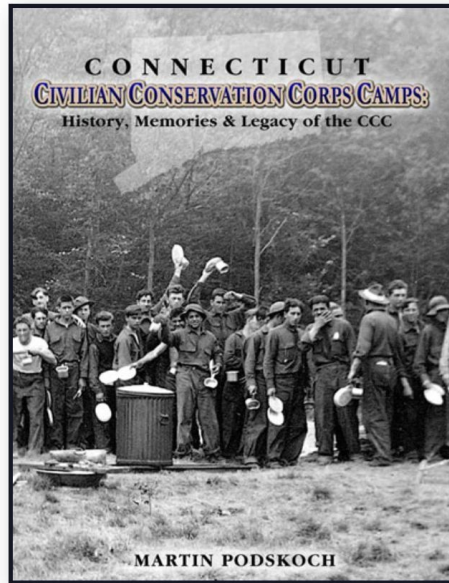
And once again we are pleased to have both Dr Thomas MacGregor and John O'Donnell writing thoughtful and interesting essays this month. We're always most grateful for their contributions!

There's so much good stuff coming this summer--stay tuned for all of it and we'll look forward to seeing you next month!

[Brigid Guertin](#)

[Patrick Wells](#)

[Michele Lee Amundsen](#)



Saturday, June 3, @ 2pm



Oh, How We Danced!

Join us at 2pm on
June 10, 2023, as Frances
Hendrickson presents
a charming program on
dance in the 18th century.

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203.743.5200

Saturday, June 10 @ 2pm

Join us for two free programs on Saturdays June 3 and 10 in the museum's Huntington Hall. On Saturday, June 3, Martin Podskoch will present a program commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Civilian Conservation Corps in Connecticut; and on Saturday, June 10, Frances Hendrickson will present a program on 18th century dance. Both of these programs are open to all, and they begin at 2pm.



By His Excellency Ned Lamont, Governor: an
Official Statement

WHEREAS, native plants are indigenous species that have evolved alongside native wildlife and occur naturally in a particular geographic region, ecosystem, and habitat; and

WHEREAS, native plants are essential for healthy, diverse, and sustainable ecosystems and are critical for cleaning air, filtering water, and stabilizing soils; and

WHEREAS, native plants are well-adapted to Connecticut's soils, temperatures, precipitation, and environmental conditions, making them the best option for conserving and protecting our environment, and adapting to its changes; and

WHEREAS, native plants provide food including nectar, pollen, seeds, and foliage for native birds, caterpillars, butterflies, bees, and other wildlife in ways that non-native plants cannot; and

WHEREAS, Connecticut is home to more than 2,427 native plant species which include large shade trees, shrubs, perennials, vines, grasses, and wildflowers; and

WHEREAS, some of Connecticut's rarest plants are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973; and many native plants are protected under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act of 1989, including American Bittersweet, Yellow Lady's Slipper, Showy Arter, Creeping Snowberry, Goldenseal, White Milkweed, Prairie Goldenrod, and Eastern Prickly Pear; and

WHEREAS, it is important to encourage public awareness about the benefits of Connecticut's native plants to pollinators and other wildlife, to the economy, and to the health and sustainability of Connecticut's fragile ecosystems; now

THEREFORE, I, Ned Lamont, Governor of the State of Connecticut – in recognition of the importance of native plants to Connecticut's rich biological heritage, and as a source of food for pollinators and native wildlife – do hereby officially proclaim the month of April 2023, to be

CONNECTICUT NATIVE PLANT MONTH

in the State of Connecticut.



Ned Lamont
GOVERNOR

Native Plants

by Thomas MacGregor

At the end of our driveway is a silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*). This tree is over 150-years old and was originally part of a farm. In the late 1940s, the houses in our neighborhood were built on the farmland; sewers were laid, telephone lines were strung, and the street was paved around this tree. Because silver maples grow tall, impacting telephone lines, and should be planted away from roads and sewer lines, this was a mistake.

The silver maple is a native tree that was widely planted for landscaping projects because it grew quickly and was easily transplanted from seedlings. It has fallen out of favor among homeowners and gardeners because its limbs easily break and its surface-oriented root system buckles sidewalks, driveways, and streets. Also, silver maples can clog sewer lines as they seek out water. At this time of the year, gardeners dislike the silver maple tree because it drops large-winged seeds, called samaras. This seed assembly is the largest among maple species. The paired-wing samara seeds fall like helicopters from the tree, clogging gutters, downspouts, and street drains and causing backup of late-spring rain water. As you can imagine, our old silver maple tree keeps us busy in the springtime!

Silver-maple leaves are dark green with silvery backs, creating an attractive display when the wind blows exposing the undersides. The bark on the trunk of the tree is grayish with shaggy, vertical strips. The leaves are yellow-orange in the fall and blend in well with other maples to produce that quintessential New England color palette found on postcards. A few years back, a car careened off the road and slammed head-on into our tree. The crash shook the ground, bark was stripped off, dirt went everywhere, but the 150-year-old tree was fine; the car, however, was not.

The silver maple is one of the nine “native” maple tree species in North America. With the demise of the American chestnut, maples have a significant role in forest and urban ecosystems. They are homes to beneficial insects, supply seeds and nesting sites for birds and squirrels, and provide a shade canopy on hot summer days. Last month, Governor Ned Lamont proclaimed April to be “Connecticut Native Plant

Month.” By definition, a native plant is an indigenous species that occurs in a geographical area. Trees and plants that originated in Europe or Asia are considered to be alien, i.e., non-native. Animals and insects can discern the difference. Some of our beneficial pollinators, such as, butterflies, bees, and birds only drink pollen and eat seeds from native plants. By favoring native plants over aliens in the suburban landscape, gardeners can help sustain eco-biodiversity. A gardener’s mantra should be, “A plant that has fed nothing, has not done its job.” Alien plants from Europe or Asia can only feed European or Asian insects from their native ecosystems. As we learned in grade school, insects eat leaves; birds and amphibians eat insects; and larger animals eat smaller animals. If the insects don’t like the alien plants, there is an ecological disruption.

Therefore, one should consider contributing to Connecticut’s ecosystem this summer by planting sustainable native flowers, trees, grasses, and shrubs. A good book on native New England plants that I recommend is Douglas Tallamy’s book, *Bringing Nature Home*. However, think carefully about where you place your native plants, especially in the case of a silver maple tree!

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



Michael Silverblatt

The Bookworm

By John O'Donnell

What is a bookworm? The dictionary has two main definitions. The first is very destructive: a bookworm is the larva of an insect that causes damage to books. We will not be dealing with this destructive definition in this essay. The second definition is a person unusually devoted to reading and study. We will be looking at the life and work of a man named Michael Silverblatt who precisely fits the second definition of bookworm.

Let me tell you how I became aware of the extraordinary career of Michael Silverblatt and his contributions to the literary world. I am a great admirer of the work of Max Sebald who was a German novelist of immense talent. He was an academic at the University of East Anglia in Great Britain. He began his writing career when he was well into his academic one, and proved more adept at this second career than he did at his first. His talents were immediately recognized by Susan

Sontag (a great novelist in her own right) who set about trying to make people aware of the series of powerful books that Sebald had written. She was able to convince Sebald to appear on a radio show that was hosted by none other than Michael Silverblatt. The nationally syndicated radio program, the nation's premier literary radio show was appropriately called *Bookworm*. Let us look more closely at the life of Michael Silverblatt.

Michael Silverblatt was born in Queens, New York on August 6, 1952. He became a voracious reader at a very early age. In a talk that he gave at Cornell University ten years ago, he said that when relatives and friends came to visit he had to be pried away from whatever book he was reading to talk to people ([the video is online here](#) and is worthwhile watching for insight into his devotion to reading and literature). He was educated at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Unsurprisingly he majored in English and was very fortunate to be there. The English Department was full of incredibly talented people. John Barth was the star of that faculty and became not only a teacher of Silverblatt but a mentor and a friend as well. He was also heavily influenced by Donald Barthelme. After his graduation, he began graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University but ultimately dropped out. He moved to Los Angeles and worked in motion picture public relations and script development. Fortuitously for us, he met the general manager of radio station KCRW at a dinner party and had a long discussion with her about Russian poetry. As a result of this conversation, he was offered his own radio show which was appropriately called *Bookworm*.

The show was a smashing success. It was on KCRW from 1989 until 2022. Michael Silverblatt (who was unpaid for the

first five years of the show) was a host who was able to converse on an equal plane with writers of fiction and poetry. Unlike many other hosts of literary shows, Silverblatt reads a guest's entire body of work before an interview with a sharp eye for insights into what was really vital, alive and different in their work. He calls these endeavors literary conversations and does not have any preset questions or agenda. His interviews encompass the voice of someone who loves to read and wishes to keep up with both established and new authors to keep the public aware of and appreciative of the great writing that is being done. He has described being the host as enabling him to appreciate a much wider range of writing-making him he hopes, "a person of ferocious compassion instead of ferocious intellect."

This approach to the show endeared him to both guests and fans of the show. Authors enjoyed this approach so much that they opened up to Silverblatt because they knew he had worked very hard beforehand to understand their work and to have an insightful literary conversation. To give an example of the trust and understanding that Silverblatt engenders in his guests, here is a note that W. S. Merwin left for Michael after a 2011 conversation: "I must tell you I have been interviewed to something like excess, but an interview with you is unique. It is an original and you never ask any of the over and over questions that have been so often asked and answered. They make these conversations with you an unfailing and singular pleasure."

As a result of Silverblatt's incredible talent for literary conversations writers became his close friends outside of the show and he said that they taught him not only how to read their works but also how to live. David Foster Wallace, whom Silverblatt interviewed several times, famously told Michael in

their very first interview: “I feel like I wanna ask you to adopt me.” Silverblatt was able to interview Max Sebald on December 6, 2001, on *Bookworm*. I have listened and watched several other interviews with Sebald prior to this one. When I first listened to the interview, I was astonished by Silverblatt’s ability to elicit great answers from Sebald which had not been the case in prior interviews. ([This interview is now available in print as well.](#)) Silverblatt skillfully was able to make Sebald relax and immediately understand that his interviewer was very familiar with what Sebald was trying to do in his works. One of the things that really impressed Sebald was that Silverblatt was asking about his prose style. Sebald happily pointed out that it was primarily influenced by 19th-century German prose style which no one had stressed before. This is what Silverblatt said in the final exchange: “I think that your radical contribution to prose is to bring the sensibility of tininess, miniaturization, to the enormity of the post-concentration camp world. So that a completely or newly forgotten prose tone is being brought into the postmodern century, and the extraordinary echo, the almost immediate abyss that opens between the prose and the subject, is what results.” The interview displays literary genius on the part of both men. Sadly, on December 14, 2001, Max Sebald died in a car crash and the literary world, particularly Michael Silverblatt, was devastated.

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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