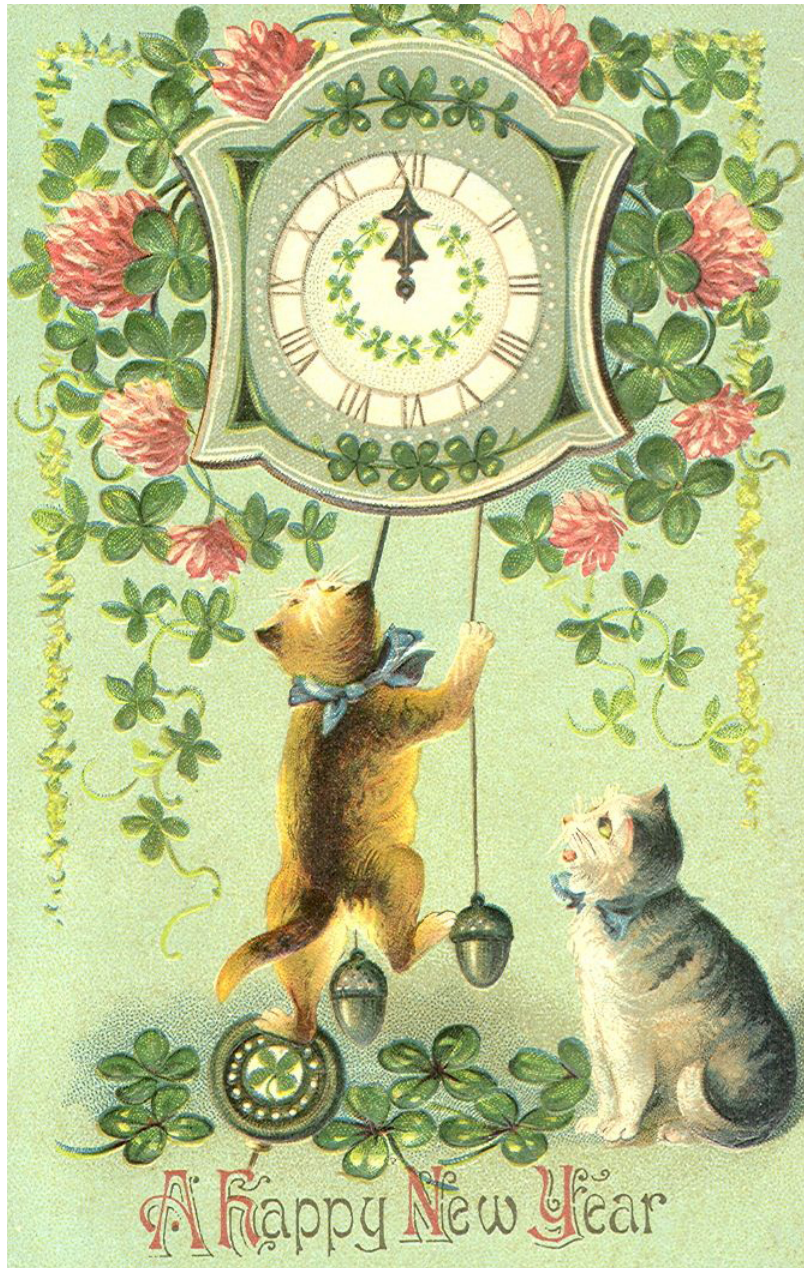


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Hello Friends!

There aren't many hours left in 2023, and we want to begin the new year with gratitude.

Thank you to all of you who have volunteered, donated, joined, or proselytized on behalf of the Danbury Museum this past year. By coming to our concerts or events, or sharing our social media posts, or telling your friends about us, you spread the word of the work we do to be a Community Good for Danbury.

We look forward to welcoming Danbury Public School students back to our campus in a big way for field trips in April, thanks to funding secured by Representative Farley Santos and our legislative team; we are thrilled that thanks to a Neighborhood Assistance Act grant, generously funded by Savings Bank of Danbury, we can offer expanded FREE tours of both the Charles Ives Birthplace and our Main Street Historic Buildings in 2024; speaking of Ives, 2024 is the 150th anniversary of the birth of Charles Ives and we have some exciting things in the works to celebrate all things Ivesian as well. We have a very special exhibit on the "Art of Quilting" going up this spring, and it just might include a special collaboration with a neighboring museum! Stay tuned, it's going to be a FULL year, and we're looking forward to seeing you all at our many programs and events.

We have so many great things coming up in 2024, kicking off with our annual [Danbury Museum Gala](#). This is the museum's signature fundraiser and it's an important cornerstone of our financial year. A special thank you to Savings Bank of Danbury, our Presenting Sponsor for this year's event. The evening's entertainment will be party band "Anchor Management," so come ready to dance!

Click on the Gala graphic below for ticket and event sponsorship info, and if you are unable to join us the night of the event, you can make a donation of any size via PayPal.

Finally, we are very glad to share an essay from John O'Donnell to help us close out the year with a little Dickensian flair. Thank you to John and also to essayist Dr. Thomas MacGregor for so many thoughtful pieces this past year. We are grateful.

The Staff and Trustees of the Danbury Museum wish you, and your family and friends, health, peace, and joy in the new year, and we thank you for

your stalwart support in 2023.

Happy New Year!

Brigid Guertin

Patrick Wells

Michele Lee Amundsen

P.S. Stay tuned, we're ordering the equipment to begin digitizing the 4x5 negatives that were part of our Giving Tuesday initiative...check our social media early in the new year to see what your donations allowed us to buy!

You're Invited!

2024 Danbury Museum Gala

Back in  Black (Tie)!

February 2, 2024
The Amber Room Colonnade

We're back in person and can't wait to celebrate with everyone! Get your Danbury Museum Gala tickets today.

Presenting Sponsor: Savings Bank of Danbury  Savings Bank of Danbury

Click here for sponsorship information and to purchase tickets!



A Christmas Carol and the Lost Portrait

by John O'Donnell

A masterpiece is defined as a work of outstanding artistry, skill or workmanship. *A Christmas Carol*, certainly meets this criteria. It was published on December 19, 1843. The first edition sold out by Christmas Eve; by the end of 1844, thirteen editions had been released. It has never been out of print. It was a smashing success for Charles Dickens. He has been called the man who invented Christmas, but I think it is more accurate to describe him as the man who revived Christmas tradition. Let us explore the circumstances that Dickens wrote his masterpiece in and how these influenced his ability to produce such a masterwork under adverse circumstances.

In the winter of 1843, Charles Dickens was in serious difficulties. He was a rising literary star who had made a huge impression on the literary world with his debut novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. This had propelled him into the forefront of novelists in the United Kingdom. He had followed up with *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge* and *American Notes* (1842). But *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* sold poorly. This was the first rough time that Dickens had encountered in his flourishing career. But he had other difficulties he was facing. His wife, Catherine, was pregnant with their fifth child. Because of the poor

performance of his most recent books his publishers were losing confidence in him, and they had only agreed to publish his new story if he paid a large amount of the costs. Dickens was also responsible for the financial needs of his mother and father and his siblings as well. He was overdrawn at his bank which was a very fearful thing for him to contemplate. His father (and most of his family although Charles had lived and worked on his own) had been jailed for debt in the Marshalsea Prison. Charles was under a staggering amount of pressures and needed to write something which would dispel them.

Dickens started to work on the novella which he titled *A Christmas Carol*. He was able to write this work in a mere six weeks. On the surface it is a joyful Christmas tale of the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge, a wealthy, despised miser, into a changed man who decides to do as much good as he can for people with the enormous resources that he has accumulated. Scrooge is led to his transformation by a visit from the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, followed by the spirits of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet to Be. These spirits show him scenes which shock him into realizing what a miserable life he has lived. He is determined after these encounters to totally change his life.

But Dickens decided to add a political message to the novella which has a very interesting subtext relating to the lost portrait of Charles Dickens. While he was writing *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens was sitting for a miniature portrait painted by Margaret Gillies who was a very talented artist as well as being an early supporter of female suffrage and an independent woman. She lived with Thomas Southwood Smith, and they shared a mutual desire to bring about fundamental changes in society. They were champions of the poor and worked tirelessly to alleviate their sufferings. Southwood Smith worked on the Poor Law Commission and wrote reports for Parliament on sanitation, poverty, and unsafe working conditions in the mines.

The finished portrait shows Charles Dickens at the age of thirty-one with long flowing locks, a clean-shaven face and an intense determined look. He was on fire while writing the novella and this clearly shows in the portrait. It is very likely that Dickens read some of Southwood Smith's reports about the sufferings of the poor while working on the book. Also, it

is very likely that Gillies and Dickens discussed these issues during these sittings. Gillies had already illustrated a government report about the working conditions of women and children in the mines. Interestingly, Scrooge is taken to see the mines in Cornwall.

The portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1844. The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote that the portrait subject “has the dust and mud of humanity about him notwithstanding those eagle eyes.” And then the portrait disappeared, and Gillies was uncertain what happened to it. The painting was ultimately discovered in South Africa in 2018. A collector had bought it in a box of junk and the painting was sorely in need of restoration. It has now returned to London and has found a new home at the Charles Dickens Museum. The rediscovery of the portrait has also resurrected interest in the work and career of Margaret Gillies, which she very richly deserves.

Dickens’ story succeeded beyond his wildest imaginings. Despite being beset by so many converging problems while writing it, Charles Dickens produced a masterpiece and changed his life forever. He produced an immortal, joyous Christmas story but he was also able to seamlessly weave into it a plea to the hearts and minds of the people of England to change their minds about the extent of the poverty in their midst and see how inadequate the measures they were taking were failing to deal with this problem. The Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge the children who are crippled by Ignorance and Want (and so named), and tells Scrooge and the people of England to take strong, effective measures to alleviate these heinous problems.

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!

Building a creative community one project at a time.

January 19–21 2024

Danbury Museum & Historical Society
43 Main Street, Danbury, CT 06810

Seats are limited! Advanced registration required.



A 3-DAY WORKSHOP

Be part of creating an art-based project that will be implemented in the Danbury community. Projects have a one-year timeline and under \$10,000 budgets.

REWARDS!

Collaboration skills
Design thinking
Business planning
Create a small, local, implementable art project.
Build trust & community!



Food provided by Mothership Bakery

Collaborate



A little action often spurs a lot of momentum.

This 3-day workshop is tailored for people of ALL ages and walks of life to participate. Can you imagine a room of people who would not normally come together to create something bigger than any one person for their community, together? That's what this workshop does! It allows us the space to work towards a common goal and achieve something truly special. The goal is to design art projects for Danbury. These projects allow individuals to express themselves creatively, while also working together towards a shared vision. Small teams learn to use collaboration skills, design thinking, and business planning to create small, locally implementable projects. This 3-day workshop will shift mindsets. Build trust and community. Your skills will improve and ultimately you will be part of creating an arts-based project that will be implemented in a year for the Danbury community. Projects have a one-year timeline and under \$10,000 budgets. The Cultural Alliance is committed to support the project through implementation.

The Danbury Museum is excited to co-sponsor and play host for this initiative! For more details and to register, visit [Eventbrite](#).

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