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Hello Friends!

Thank you for joining us again this month, and yes, it's *still* January! We're so pleased to have our regular team of essayists with us and writing about most interesting topics. John O'Donnell focuses on two celebrated hoaxers in his essay, and Dr. Thomas MacGregor writes about how a changing climate has united Danbury (north and south of I-84) into a single hardiness zone for plantings.

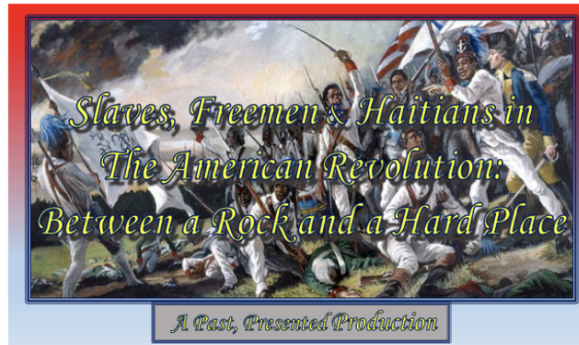
We're busy putting the finishing touches on our annual gala, held this coming Friday, February 2. [Full details and tickets here!](#) We hope we'll see many of you there.

Do mark your calendars, popular presenter Eric Chandler is back with Revolutionary War programming this spring. "Slaves, Freeman, and Haitians in the American Revolution" is FREE, open to all, will be at 2pm in the museum's Huntington Hall on Saturday, February 24, 2024.

You'll want to check in on the [Danbury Museum YouTube channel](#), as new content is being uploaded weekly. From old Danbury hat parade footage to the Great Danbury State Fair and Racearena, there are many great videos to watch. Thank you to our Eagle Scout/Rho Kappa volunteers and the United Way SAVE volunteers who are moving this project forward.

Also of note, our friends, The Friends of the Danbury Library are having a re-opening book sale on February 1, 2, & 3. Check out all the details below.

Stay safe, warm, and well.



*Slaves, Freeman & Haitians in the American Revolution:
Between a Rock and a Hard Place*

Among those largely written out of the historic narrative of the American Revolution were the people of color who fought for both sides, Rebels and Redcoats, and often for the same reason – the opportunity for emancipation and freedom from chattel slavery.

Free Blacks also fought, as did White colonists, to protect their families, their homes and their livelihoods. There are estimates that at times these soldiers of color would constitute as much as 25% of General Washington's Continental forces.

Haitian troops sent over by their French masters protected Southern ports such as Savannah. But their participation in the American War for Independence would have even greater ramifications later on back on their home island.

Blacks were motivated by different social forces in the South than in the North where there was much more of a social revolution than in the slave-holding South.

Most of these people of color are anonymous, as were many of their White comrades in arms. But some have had their stories memorialized for future generations. Those are who we will introduce to you in this program. Perhaps the next time you have the happenstance to view artwork commemorating the American Revolution you will bear in keep in mind who is missing as well as those portrayed.

Presenter bio:

Eric Chandler is retired from a 30+ year career as an underwriter for a leading land title insurance company. He has been involved in American Revolutionary War Living History since 1974. He has portrayed infantry, light infantry, whale-boat raider, and mounted and dismounted dragoons. He is currently serving his third term as a member of the Norwalk Historical Commission and sits on the Norwalk Historical Society Board of Directors.

His artistic endeavors included writing and recording a comedy CD, and decades as a musician playing Saxes in area Rock & Roll and Blues bands. To his credit, or shame, he had his likeness used in an issue of MAD Magazine. Eric is enjoying retirement with his wife Catherine, taking classes, giving lectures on historical topics and continuing to live history.



Eric Chandler is back at the Danbury Museum on February 24!



Orson Welles

Two Great Hoaxers

by John O'Donnell

Orson Welles (1915-1985) was an American actor, filmmaker, magician, wunderkind, and trickster. His rise to prominence was buoyed by a radio broadcast (Welles was a great believer in the power of radio and invented the use of narration in radio) by his Mercury Theater Company of *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells on October 30, 1938. In spite of a disclaimer by Welles at the beginning of the broadcast that this was a work of science fiction, people listening to the broadcast began to panic because they really believed that a Martian invasion was taking place. Welles employed a breaking news style of storytelling to heighten the realism of the broadcast. The resulting mythology surrounding the broadcast was reported around the world and even mentioned disparagingly in a public speech by Adolf Hitler. Welles apologized for the panic created by the broadcast at a news conference on the very next day, but the broadcast enhanced his already growing popularity. How had Welles come up with

this great idea? He was aware of a precursor who had created a similar panic in 1926 in London; a person who was an unlikely source for this type of broadcast.

On January 16, 1926, the fledgling radio service of the British Broadcasting Corporation presented a program titled "Broadcasting the Barricades" which was a simulated live report of revolution in London. This is an excerpt from the script: "Unemployed demonstration in London. The crowd has now passed along Whitehall and, at the suggestion of Mr. Poplebury, Secretary of the National Movement for abolishing Theatre Queues, is preparing to demolish the Houses of Parliament with trench mortars...The clock tower, 320 feet in height, has just fallen to the ground, together with the famous clock Big Ben, which used to strike the hours on a bell weighing nine tons." During the broadcast the BBC would cut to a band playing at the Savoy Hotel. This would be interrupted by fresh reports of more unrest, including the capture of Mr. Wotherspoon, the Minister of Traffic, who was trying to make his escape in disguise. He was then reported to have been hanged from a lamppost on the Vauxhall Bridge Road. Then there would be more music from the Savoy followed by more fresh reports of the activities of the crowd. There was a loud explosion, and the announcer reported the Savoy Hotel had been blown up by the crowd. Then, the announcement that the crowd was approaching the BBC's London station with a threatening demeanor. "One moment please." At this juncture, accounts of their progress come to a halt, replaced by an hour of assorted music. Just as with Welles's broadcast, there was panic amongst the people who had heard the broadcast or who were told about it. The next day, newspapers, government offices, and the Savoy Hotel received hundreds of calls about the incident. The Admiralty took calls from people demanding it send a Royal Navy battleship up the Thames River immediately to quell the violence. The broadcast rippled throughout the United Kingdom making people nervous and unsettled. Now we come to the strangest part of this story. The author of the script was none other than a man of the cloth!

Ronald Arbuthnott Knox (1888-1957) was, like Welles, a man of multiple extraordinary talents: theologian, satirist, author, radio broadcaster, classicist, and translator. And he was actually a man of two cloths. He was first an Anglican priest before he converted to Roman Catholicism. He was born into an Anglican family and his father became Bishop of Manchester

in the Church of England. He received and excelled in his education at Eton and then at Balliol College, Oxford, where he was a superior student in classics. He was elected a Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford. He was a classics tutor to the future Prime Minister of England, Harold Macmillan. They became lifelong friends. Knox was ordained an Anglican priest in 1912, and appointed chaplain at Trinity College. During World War One, he served in military intelligence.

In 1917 Knox converted to Roman Catholicism and resigned as Anglican chaplain. This prompted his father to cut him out of his will. In 1918 Knox was ordained a Catholic priest and would ultimately rise to the rank of Monsignor. He joined the staff of St. Edmund's College. He also became chaplain at the University of Oxford (1926-1939). In 1936 he undertook retranslating the Latin Vulgate Bible into English using Hebrew and Greek sources. Knox explained his own spiritual journey in his book *A Spiritual Aeneid* (1926). His conversion was heavily influenced by G.K. Chesterton who was likewise a convert to Catholicism from the Anglican faith. Knox gave a eulogy at Chesterton's funeral in 1936.

Knox's literary talents were not confined to only religious subjects. He wrote classic detective stories. According to Knox, a detective story "must have as its main interest the unravelling of a mystery as its main interest; a mystery whose elements clearly presented to the reader at an early stage in the proceedings, and whose nature is such as to arouse curiosity, a curiosity which is gratified at the end." In 1929, Knox codified the rules for detective stories into a decalogue. He was one of the founding members of the "Detection Club" and wrote several works of detective stories. As we know from his script for "Broadcasting the Barricades," he was a wicked satirist. In 1935 he published *Barchester Pilgrimage*. It was a sequel to the *Chronicles of Barsetshire* written in the style of Anthony Trollope. It follows the fortunes of the children and grandchildren of Trollope's characters up to the time of writing, with some gentle satire on the social, political, and religious changes of the Twentieth Century.

In 1957 Knox suffered a serious illness which prevented him from working. At the invitation the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, he was allowed to stay at 10 Downing Street while consulting a medical specialist in London. He died on August 24, 1957, from terminal cancer. He was remembered in biographies by Evelyn Waugh (an old friend and the person I would have

guessed as the author of "Broadcasting the Barricades") and by Penelope Fitzgerald, his niece, who wrote a composite biography of him and his three brothers who were equally talented. The great hoax of 1926 was not forgotten and was part of his legacy. An article was written about it titled *Holy Terror: The First Great Radio Hoax*. Orson Welles told Peter Bogdonavich : "I got the idea from a BBC show...when a Catholic priest told how some Communists had seized London and a lot of people in London believed it. And I thought that it'd be fun to do it on a big scale, let's have it from outer space--that's how I got the idea." Welles and Knox implicitly understood the power of radio and used it in devastating ways.

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!



Ronald Arbuthnott Knox



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Danbury Reunited

by Dr. Thomas MacGregor

Throughout the 1960s, Interstate 84 (I-84) was constructed connecting the New York border to Hartford. This interstate highway divided Danbury into two parts. When the post office in 1963 introduced their zone improvement plan, called “ZIP codes,” it roughly divided Danbury into two zones: 06810 for the area south of I-84 and 06811 for the northern section.

Meteorologists on television often refer to snow forecasts as either north or south of I-84. The city of Danbury’s alternate week leaf pickup each autumn is divided by your yard’s location in relation to the interstate. For years, Danbury has been and, in some ways, still is a divided city.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) created a geographical hardiness zone system in 1960 to aid gardeners in choosing perennial plants that withstand or survive average minimal temperatures in winter (-10 to zero degrees for Connecticut). Of interest, northern parts of Canada and Alaska are designated “1” and the southern portion of Florida is a “10.” Since inception, this system has divided Danbury into two zones, 6a (north of I-84) and 6b (south of I-84). However, due to climate change, the new map released in November 2023

(<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov>), has reunited Danbury into one zone, 6b, where lowest winter temperatures on average have fallen between -5

and zero degrees over the past 20 years. The climate in Connecticut has warmed nearly four degrees over these 20 years, and the northern towns of New Fairfield, Brookfield, and New Milford have also all been changed from zone 6a to the zone 6b, joining Danbury and southern Connecticut. Our entire region has been united under one hardiness zone.

All gardeners understand that local conditions (soil, water, weather) determine the success or failure of their plants' life cycles. The USDA Hardiness Zone system has played a significant role in determining which plants to sow. It may seem obvious that orange trees and pineapples are not good candidates for Connecticut backyard gardens, but what about a different variety rose bush or a viburnum shrub? The November 2023 map may present new opportunities to try more uncommon flowers or hybrids this year, particularly in the rezoned northern area of Danbury.

One area that all gardens require is the cultivation and growth of pollinator perennials. A warmer, local climate can have a positive impact in this area. Choosing native plants that attract bees and birds will increase the viability and harvest of your fruits and vegetables by using nature's interdependent ecosystem. Perhaps you might consider surrounding your annual vegetable garden with perennial bee-loving blooming herbs (a win-win at dinnertime) or planting perennial bird-loving medicinal flowers (such as echinacea) amongst your annuals and bulbs. Using the revised hardiness map presents many new thoughts on how to freshen up your gardens with more varieties of pollinator-friendly plants.

January and February are the months to plan your 2024 summer garden. Now is the time to peruse seed and potting catalogues that indicate hardiness zones for each plant in order to make an informed purchase. Additionally, by considering all four seasons, one can design perennial gardens that extend beyond this year. Gardeners throughout the Danbury area can dream this winter and harvest the fruits of their dreams and plans this summer and beyond.

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

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