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Hello Friends!

Happy Friday! We're glad to be with you again.

We appreciate everyone who has reached out to us asking about the museum's plan to reopen per [Governor Lamont's Phase 2 Reopening](#) guidelines. However, the necessary PPE required (and the critical cleaning aspects), in conjunction with our small spaces within the historic buildings and Huntington Hall, makes a current reopening both financially unrealistic for the Danbury Museum and unsafe for staff and visitors. The Museum will reopen to the public as soon as it is safe to do so. We hope to have limited Huntington Hall exhibit accessibility at the beginning of September. This date is subject to change as we continue to evaluate public health information. Opening the hall to visitors and small group meetings will be done only after discussion with local health department officials and following State of CT guidelines. For our entire reopening plan, [please visit our website](#).

The usual suspects, aka Brigid, Patrick, and Michele, have been working both from home and spending some time at the museum on a very limited basis. We still have our weekly webinars, though they are fewer these days, and we continue to work on improving the Danbury Museum

both inside and out.

In lieu of being open for a couple of months, we're most excited to announce that we're working on two outdoor exhibits that will go up in July and you can enjoy these on foot--before or after a lovely walk in the museum gardens that are so beautifully maintained by the Danbury Garden Club's Civic Committee. We've also got plans in the works for more music and outdoor reading opportunities and we'll definitely keep you apprised. And don't forget that our [Museum From Home](#) page has brainteasers, books, and the Museum in the Streets and Ives Trail walking tour maps for download.

In this month's newsletter we're so pleased to welcome back two of our great columnists, John O'Donnell and Geoff Herald, and to introduce a new one, Dr Thomas MacGregor. Being outdoors is so important for mental and physical health, and both John and Thomas write eloquently about trees, nature, and history this month. Former Danbury Fire Chief Geoff Herald shares his insights into this phase of our current situation.

For our puzzle people, we've added a couple of summer-themed new puzzles to our [Jigsaw Planet](#) page.

Patrick's uploaded more great Danbury merch at Teepublic [online shop at TEEPUBLIC!](#) And there is a lot more than t-shirts, there are masks and stickers and many other ways to show your Danbury pride. The museum gets a cut of everything purchased, so in addition to some fun Danbury swag to sport around town, you're supporting the museum, too.

We'll see you again at the end of July, but in the meantime, be sure to follow us on social media (the buttons are all below!) and that way you'll know the latest and greatest of our goings on.

Keep well,

Brigid Guertin (Executive Director, City Historian, Fearless Leader)

Patrick Wells (Research Specialist, Social Media Manager, Membership Maestro)

Michele Lee Amundsen (Collections Manager, Newsletter Nudge)



The Charter Oak, oil on canvas, Charles De Wolf Brownell, 1857

Trees

By John O'Donnell

For the past few months I have had the great treat of being educated about trees and their importance in our environment. This is thanks to a book reading that I have done for the Danbury Library book discussion group. My own experience with trees started with memorizing Joyce Kilmer's poem *Trees* while in elementary school. Beyond that, I did not think or read much about them until quite recently. As a result of these readings, my awareness of trees has grown exponentially and I have developed a new found appreciation for them thanks to our book discussion.

The book we read was *The Overstory* by Richard Powers which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2019. This book has been described as climate fiction. It is a very intricately plotted book and roughly the first 200 pages are used to enable us to get to know the characters before the novel proper begins. This part reminded me very much of the techniques that John Dos Passos used in his fiction as well. One of the other writers whom I think influenced Powers in his writing is Thomas Pynchon in his novel *Vineland* (1990). Pynchon was very aware of the danger to the giant redwoods in California and how they could possibly be protected. But this not the main thrust of his novel. The introduction enables us to better understand the subsequent behavior of the characters. These stories hinge on their relationship to trees and subsequently motivate them to become eco-warriors in order to prevent the further harming of trees by our society. It is an intricate plot, but Powers makes it work smoothly. We come to care deeply about the fate of the characters, but because of our exposure to the complicated life of trees, we care equally about their fate and future as well.

Powers has said in interviews that writing this book quite literally changed his own life. He was living and teaching in Palo Alto, California. While there he had an encounter with a giant redwood tree which he likened to a religious conversion that showed him his own place in “a system of meaning that doesn’t begin and end with humans.” This scene is also used in the novel for one of the main characters. While writing the novel he moved to the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee where he lives deep in the woods, of course. He describes how important this mode of living has become to him as where “walking a trail has become as important to me as writing.”

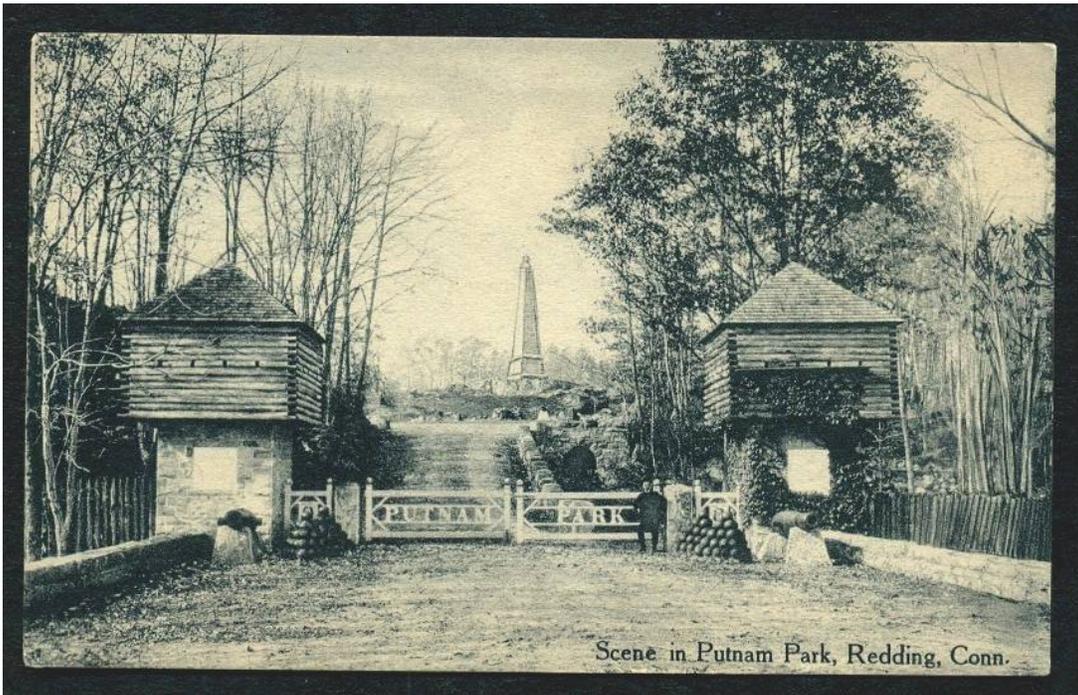
You will learn (and not in a ponderous way) how the nine main characters are educated about the important role that trees play in their lives and how these people respond to the enormous dangers facing trees in the modern world. We learn not to take trees for granted and begin to understand the vital role that they play in our lives. One of the characters, Patricia Westerford, is scorned by the scientific community for her asserting to her colleagues the idea that trees can communicate with each other. She is attacked and vilified and essentially exiled to far scientific outposts while still working on buttressing her research. She is subsequently vindicated and accepted back into the scientific community. She attends a scientific conference as the keynote speaker and gives one of the most moving addresses you will ever read about the problems we are facing in the natural world. The character is based on Dr. Suzanne Simard, a professor of forest ecology at the University of British Columbia. Simard (and this is only one facet of her extensive research) helped to identify something called a "mother tree" (or a hub tree). Mother trees are the largest trees in forests that act as central hubs for below-ground networks. A mother tree supports seedlings by infecting them with fungi and supplying them the nutrients that they need to grow. There are more aspects to this story but it is an incredible example of interspecies cooperation.

I was staggered to become aware of this tree communication and how complicated this world is and in dire need of our protection. I can readily accept Richard Powers description of his experience with trees as a quasi religious experience. We are greatly in his debt.

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!



J. E. Burkhart, Charter Oak (circa 1859) Oil and bark on panel.



Scene in Putnam Park, Redding, Conn.

Studying the American Revolution as a Naturalist

By Thomas MacGregor, Ph.D.
UConn Advanced Master Gardener

When living in New England, someone may easily look for remnants of the American Revolution. After all, the first colonists came to Danbury in 1684, nearly 90 years before the war. Often students and amateur archeologists look for cannon balls, battle fragments, and human remains

at known campgrounds and battle sites. Unfortunately, looking for these war remnants may disturb hallowed sites for future investigators.

An alternative method is to look for and collect natural flora present at the time of a battle. With a bit of research followed by hiking into nearby battlefield encampments like Putnam Memorial Park in Redding/Bethel, you can construct natural re-enactments of the land and forests present at the time of a battle.

Connecticut native trees observed in Putnam Memorial Park are the Maples (Red and Sugar, but not Norway), the Birches (Black and White), Eastern White Pine (Henry David Thoreau said "There is no finer tree"), Eastern Hemlock, Northern Red Oak, and others. Unfortunately, we have lost the Chestnut (a favorite food for Native Americans) and Elm trees to diseases since 1777, and will soon lose the Ash. Besides looking up at the canopy, you should also look down at the forest carpet. Connecticut is home to over 80 fern varieties, some of them exclusive to this region of the world. Ferns (Polypodiophyta) are vascular plants with xylem and phloem just like trees, but reproduce by spores. They have existed for over 145 million years. They have neither flowers nor seeds and they differ from mosses (Bryophyta) because they are vascular. You will find mosses in the wetter areas of the forest. Mosses are essentially one-cell leaves on stems that form a soft mat on the ground and can store up to 20 times their weight in water. The commercial product Sphagnum (called "peat") is a moss.

You can collect leaves, ferns, and mosses and preserve them using the Japanese art of "oshibana" or flower pressing. Your fresh biological specimen should be placed between two sheets of white paper, like computer paper, and then pressed under heavy books until dry (about 2-4 weeks). Alternatively, you can use a commercial flower press and dry the specimen in a microwave for about 10-15 seconds. Sometimes the microwave method preserves more of the color. You should place your finished sample in a 3-hole punched plastic sheet protector, labeled with the scientific and common name, i.e., *Acer rubrum* for Red Maple, along with a photo of the tree and its location. Keep all your samples in a 3-ring binder with your diary for later use.

Lately, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental (DEEP) has been trimming many of the dead trees at Putnam Memorial Park. By counting the rings on a very large stump, you can see if the tree was there back in 1777. This is called "dendrochronology." Each ring represents one-year's growth for the tree and results from the seasonal weather pattern for that year. Wide rings indicate a rainy year, whereas skinny rings are a result of drought conditions. A recently cut tree stump with more than 243 rings means the tree would have been present during the American Revolution. What was the weather like that year? Take a picture of the tree rings for your notebook and check it against historical records.

In your notebook you will have captured the essence of the natural flora of 1777 and a bit of history.

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



Chapter 2

By Geoff Herald

Coronavirus disease 2019, COVID-19 for short, is something burned into all of our memories perhaps and probably for our lifetimes. The wide-ranging impact of this pandemic is yet to be found. The social unrest and indeed social upheaval that we see occurring in areas, some even in the United States, and in other parts of the world include aspects that we thought we would never see in our lifetimes. Armed protesters in the capital of a state in the United States? Food lines of serious length for rice and beans in the third world have unfortunately been common sights. But today they are even more common. Here in the United States food banks are short of donations of food. And the need is only growing. Economic pressures, recession and even depression are now bantered about in the news. As we begin to open our social interactions with the reopening of businesses, what may be the permanent changes to our lives?

So COVID 19 has come and unfortunately it hasn't gone yet. We are told by various sources that in one form or another it will probably be here for a long time if not forever. So what does that mean? I know I find myself looking for mindless entertainment after a long day in the office. Hello YouTube! In reality, I'm glad I have an office to go to. But the office is running a fire department. And when you run a fire department, you go to bed and the last thing on your mind is what you may have forgotten. What is it that we should have done today that we didn't do to protect the firefighters and protect their families? And the first thing you think about when you arise in the morning is what do I need to do today? What is going to come at us that's unexpected? What are the numbers looking like? Are we flattening the curve? Is the hospitalization rate and that always critical and so damaging death report dropping?

The governor and our local political leaders are listening carefully to the medical officials and scientists, and also to the business leaders as they try to find a way to safely reopen our state for a return to dare we say it, normalcy. Well, normalcy refers to a point in time and like it or not, the normalcy of today is not the normalcy of January. That is gone. When the September 11 attacks occurred, and are now forever etched in our minds, the normalcy of September 10, 2001, never returned. Likewise, it is safe to say this pandemic will have lasting changes. Not only will the business world change for many thousands of restaurants and other small businesses of all types, but it is reasonable to assume there will be significant changes to the public's demands for safety nets socially and economically. What the normal of tomorrow is will be is yet to be written. Until

next time, be smart out there.

Geoff Herald is a 44 year veteran of the fire service. A Danbury resident, Geoff has served three departments as Fire Chief. He loves history and is currently serving as president of the Danbury Museum and Historical Society's Board of Trustees.

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At the Danbury Museum, we've been collecting and archiving items that document our city's past for **more than 75 years**. Our collection includes several buildings worth of archival materials as well artifacts that tell the tale(s) of our collective past, that inspire and inform the present and that we will be preserving for future scholars, researchers, students and Danburians.

We are currently living through a momentous, somber moment in our collective history. We need your help to document what is going on in your homes, at your jobs, and in communities across Connecticut. We want to hear your story. We want to know how you and your family are experiencing the current pandemic and "new normal."

Below are examples of what we're looking for:

Writings - letters, notes, emails, postcards, poems

Signage - images of window signs, directions, posted community information

Photos - of you, your family, your neighborhood, your street, YOUR Danbury!

Drawings, paintings, and other forms of art you're creating and documenting

Short videos (limited to 500MB file size) for larger files please email to Patrick Wells, Research Specialist, at p.wells@danbury-ct.gov.

Please stay safe when documenting these historic times. Do not put yourself in danger when capturing photographs or videos.

Why is this Important?

The Danbury Museum collects material that documents the full range of our lives in Danbury, CT because...you INSPIRE us, you INSPIRE the future. Documenting our community response to COVID-19 is a way to preserve the daily struggles of our stay at home community, our work from home community, our students, our critical care and healthcare workers, our first responders and our essential workers. From every perspective, what you are doing right now matters, to us right now, and to future Danburians.

So, when you email Collections Manager, Michele Lee Amundsen at m.amundsen@danbury-ct.gov or mail us your submissions to 43 Main Street, Danbury, CT 06810, please include any or all of the following information:

What else should we know about this object? Please explain who is in the photo, why you created this piece...basically all the information YOU would want to see to give context to a museum exhibition item or an archival file.

Please know that:

By providing my material to the Danbury Museum & Historical Society Authority (DMHSA) I hereby give the DMHSA a royalty-free, non-exclusive, worldwide, perpetual, irrevocable, and fully sub-licensable license to copy, digitize, reproduce, edit, translate, create derivative works, distribute, and publicly display and perform certain materials described below. I agree that the DMHSA may add the material to the collection according to the DMHSA Collection Management Policy and to make it available to researchers in a manner consistent with the practices of the DMHSA. I agree that the DMHSA may utilize any medium or media now existing or that will exist in the future to achieve the above-described purposes.

Thank YOU for entrusting the Danbury Museum with your memories, your stories, your art, your

images. We take this responsibility seriously and will maintain your gift for future generations so they too may understand what it was like to be here, in Danbury, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 health crisis has had a strong impact on the Danbury Museum, not unlike other public service organizations. To help us continue doing the work we love--from home and from behind the scenes over the next few months--please consider making a donation. Your gift, regardless of size, is important to us as we regroup and continue to work toward eventually reopening to the public.

[Donate here.](#)

[Become a member here.](#)

We'll keep in touch, and we hope you will, too. Be well, take care of yourselves, and we'll look forward to meeting here again in July.



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