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*Purple coneflowers in front of the John & Mary Rider House, part of the pollinator garden planted by The Danbury Garden Club.*

## Hello Friends!

Happy Friday!

Somehow, it's the end of August. We're not quite sure how that happened so quickly, but we are glad to be with you all again.

We've kept ourselves quite busy during this final month of summer. There are 3 completed outdoor exhibits (Brigid, Patrick, and Michele are available for yard sign installation and we've perfected our eye screw and zip-tie techniques as well). The first exhibit features specially selected images from *The Fair That John Built* (curated by Elaine Lagarto); next, an outdoor read along that we did in partnership with the Danbury Library's summer reading program "Imagine Your Story" where visitors can read about the legend of Johnny Appleseed (beginning by the

Michael Kallas memorial in the middle of the museum's garden); and finally, all 15 panels of the 1918 Pandemic exhibit are mounted on our split-rail fence. We are very excited to share these outdoor experiences with you, we only ask that you wear a mask on our campus and that you practice social distancing when viewing the exhibits. There's one more big outdoor surprise coming, so stay tuned!

We're so fortunate to once again have excellent essays from John O'Donnell (writing about WWI and historical fiction) and Dr Thomas MacGregor (giving us *food* for thought on sustainability, seed saving, and the "three sisters" approach to gardening) in this newsletter. Thanks very much to both John and Tom for their enlightening and enjoyable contributions.

We will look forward to meeting you all back here in late September, until then,

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)



*Read the story of Johnny Appleseed in our museum garden!*



*"The Fair That John Built" outdoor exhibit panels run along our back fence--after you've visited, you can stop and see the Leahy Monument in the museum's garden.*





All 15 of our 1918 Pandemic panels are up along the side of our driveway. Begin with the panels closest to the museum's parking lot. Click on the photo to be taken to the 1918 Pandemic page of our website for more context on our community, WWI, Women's Suffrage, and more.



Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Glasgow School of Art before it was devastated by fire in 2014.

## Historical Fiction and World War One

By John O'Donnell

My recent reading led me to a novel titled *Mr. Mac and Me* by Esther Freud. I had never read anything by her before and am happy to tell you that this book is a very worthwhile read. Freud deftly weaves together multiple themes in this piece of historical fiction. When historical fiction is done well, as I think it is here, we have the fiction and the history seamlessly complementing one another. We learn history in an enjoyable fashion while enjoying the fictional world as well. I am going to focus on three themes in the book that I think are masterfully presented by Freud. These are the setting of the novel in the village of Dunwich, a seaside English village and the family of the young boy, Thomas Maggs, whose family resides there. The second is the depiction of two real historical figures, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret, who come to stay in the village. The third theme is the effects of the beginning of World War One on the Maggs family, and

on the Mackintoshes as well.

This is a coming of age saga about Thomas Maggs and his family. The family consists of his father and mother, two sisters and Thomas. There were numerous other brothers but Thomas is the only one who has survived. Their father owns a pub which is not a thriving enterprise, so the boy takes odd jobs around the village and succeeds in saving some money which he keeps in reserve to help his mother. His relationship with his father is strained. The descriptive passages about the life of the village are incredibly detailed and beautiful.

Then we have the arrival in the village of mysterious strangers from Glasgow, Scotland. They are Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret. He is a noted architect and painter and his wife is a painter as well. They rent a house as well as a studio building and go on with their artistic work. They befriend Thomas and encourage his nascent artistic endeavors. Both of the Mackintoshes had enjoyed early artistic successes. Charles' design of the Glasgow School of Art was highly praised, and some of Margaret's paintings were also recognized as being of great artistic value. What Freud depicts wonderfully for us is the problem of having an artistic vocation, dedicating yourself fully to it, and then trying to cope with the problem of the loss of commissions and support for their artistic endeavors. The main reason the Mackintoshes are in Dunwich is that it is cheap to live there and enables them to conserve their limited resources. They have not wavered in their artistic dedication, but now they are struggling to make ends meet. They encourage Thomas to pursue his artistic ambitions which improves his lot in life.

Freud then shows us how World War One intrudes on the heretofore peaceful village. The pub that the father owns is deleteriously affected by the Defense of The Realm Act. The hours for all pubs are severely curtailed to 12:30-3:00, and 6:30-9:00pm daily. The beer is watered down and no patron can buy drinks for another patron. Business drops off at the pub and Thomas' relationship suffers from more strain. The village is also subject at night to sporadic raids by German dirigibles which are utterly terrifying.

Before the declaration of war, Charles Rennie Mackintosh had been in the habit of taking long walks in the village and by the seashore both day and night and always with binoculars. Now with the war on, the villagers become suspicious of him and the local constabulary also takes an interest in him. Eventually the constabulary go to his house to interview him and become more suspicious of him. Because Mackintosh had done some designs for an Austrian artistic prize, he has numerous designs, some of which are in German. The constabulary try to question him about this but cannot understand his Glaswegian accent and think he is speaking German! He is arrested and held in jail on suspicion of being a German spy until his wife returns from Glasgow and is able to get him released. Their idyll in the village, however, is over.

The plotlines of the novel are beautifully resolved by Freud: Thomas Maggs eventually fares very well. Sadly, the Mackintoshes faded into obscurity and were only recognized posthumously. The design for the Glasgow School of Art is now commonly referred to as the most beautiful building in the United Kingdom.

**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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Just like many of you are doing in your own homes, we're taking time to do needed maintenance and make some cosmetic refreshes to much of the museum campus. Julie Siergiej has persevered--through heat and storm!--and the painting project in the John & Mary Rider House continues.

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## Bon Appétit!

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

It's harvest time in Danbury! During this pandemic many households have tried vegetable gardening. Perhaps you used store-bought tomato and zucchini plants or lettuce and basil seeds out of seed packets. The late summer provides the culinary rewards for all that care and watering you gave your plants over the past few months.

Once you've harvested enough fresh fruits and vegetables from your garden for your use, try to obtain seeds from your best plants; then you may want to exchange seeds with your neighbors for next year's plantings. Prior to 1850, seeds were obtained by subscribing to a few horticultural seed houses or from farmers and gardeners exchanging seeds after the harvest. In the 1850s, the U.S. government funded the propagation and collection of seeds to feed an ever-expanding population and country. The collected seeds were placed in packets distributed by the U.S. Patent and Trade Office. By the beginning of the 20th century, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had distributed billions of seed packets. Eventually, commercial seed companies were formed, and the packets that we purchase today are the result. For an extensive history of seeds and politics, I recommend reading the online review at [www.seedalliance.org](http://www.seedalliance.org).

However, plants and seeds are only part of the story of gardening. If you were a bit creative this

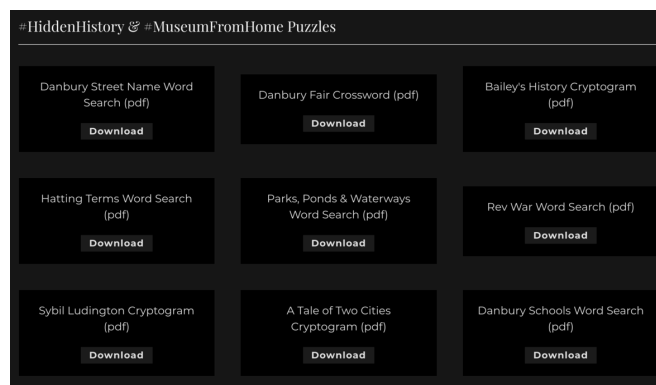
summer, perhaps you planted the “three sisters” (corn, pole beans, and melon or squash). The “three sisters” introduce many farm sustainability concepts. The corn provides a structure for the climbing pole beans, the beans provide additional strength to the corn stalks and capture nitrogen from the air to feed the soil for future use, and the cucurbit melon or squash vines deter pests while their large leaves act as a living mulch. According to folklore, the “three sisters” originated with the Iroquois and were their main farming staples.

Sustainability is important in garden farming if you want to be able to plant year-after-year and incrementally increase harvest output. Use a variety of diverse seeds and rotate locations in your garden to increase harvest output. The “three sisters” is an example of compact gardening, mulching, and land use. Left over fruits and vegetables should be re-introduced into the garden as compost along with some of those colorful autumn leaves that Danbury is known for.

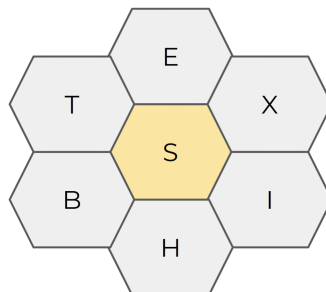
As you tear down your garden this year, obtain a soil sample and have it analyzed for which nutrients may be missing and/or what noxious chemicals may be present. As Danbury was settled in 1685, the land you are gardening has a long environmental history. For example, leaded gasoline was used from the 1920s through the majority of the 20th century, so any garden soil near a busy road has the potential to have lead residue. To obtain an accurate soil sample for your garden, go to [www.soiltest.uconn.edu](http://www.soiltest.uconn.edu) and follow the instructions. Once you get your results, you can modify your garden before the snowfall so that it is in great shape for planting next spring.

As you harvest from your pandemic garden this year, “Bon Appétit,” but also plan ahead for a bumper crop for the summer of 2021.

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



### Danbury Museum “Buzzwords”



Puzzlemaster Patrick has made a really great new Buzzwords puzzle on our Museum from Home Page. You'll want to check it out and see how well you do! Stimulate your brain and visit the [#museumfromhome](#) page for lots of great puzzles, activities, and PDFs of exclusively Danbury content. There are trail maps for Museum in the Streets and the Ives Trail, word searches, cryptograms and more. Also on the [#MuseumFromHome](#) page are cursive worksheets, Danbury "school newspapers," and links to Bailey's *History of Danbury* as well as the Tricentennial Book series.

There's also an entire page dedicated to you jigsaw puzzle fans over at [Jigsaw Planet](#) and we've put up another classic Danbury image for your puzzling pleasure.

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**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.](#)

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*A happy bee enjoying the museum's pollinator-friendly plants.*

**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 September.**



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