

# DM | DANBURY MUSEUM



## Hello Friends!

The staff and trustees of the Danbury Museum send warm Thanksgiving greetings to you all!

We're glad to be with you again--albeit virtually, still--and we've got a packed newsletter this month. Dr Tom MacGregor writes thoughtfully about the Elm tree's plight in New England and beyond, and John O'Donnell shares the story of a young boy's WWI diary. Thank you again to Tom and John for their contributions!

Busy. The Danbury Museum crew has been busy. Even as our work options from Phase 3 to Phase 2.1 have shifted, we've managed to keep the progress steady and push forward a number of projects; we have also been attending (virtually) the New England Museum Association conference all this week. Board of Trustees President Geoff Herald made it possible for Brigid, Patrick, and Michele to attend the

conference and he even joined us for some of the sessions this year. We're most grateful for Geoff's generosity as NEMA always inspires, educates, and reinvigorates us. Museum staff has had great (over the phone or by group text) recaps of the sessions we've attended and we're already making plans on how to implement some of the new ideas in 2021. Stay tuned!

Our Marian Anderson Studio was next up in our painting projects, and we're pleased to show you how well it's going. There are photos below and both the interior and the exterior are getting a lovely refresh.

And finally, let's talk turkey. And cookies. And maybe a tasty punch. Brigid has kindly shared a few favorite Durkin family cookie (and cake!) recipes for your baking needs; Patrick tested out and approved a Romaine Punch recipe from Saveur for your toasting needs; and Michele (via her White Turkey obsession) shares many stuffing and dressing options for your holiday table. Head over to our [#MuseumFromHome](#) page for these recipes plus puzzles, books, and other family fun.

We're grateful for your generous (and necessary) support and we wish you and yours a safe and delicious Thanksgiving!

Brigid Guertin (*Executive Director, City Historian*)

Patrick Wells (*Research Specialist, Social Media Manager*)

Michele Lee Amundsen (*Collections Manager*)



We have much to be thankful for once again this Thanksgiving! We're pleased to work with, and be a collection site for, a card initiative via Dr. Annie Tucci and the Danbury 2020-21 School Community Support Facebook group. Through the cards,

we can show our gratitude to first responders and connect with local seniors, too. This is a great opportunity for your children, grandchildren, (or YOU!) to get your arts and crafts creativity flowing and say thank you to first responders and provide welcome greetings to Danbury seniors. There's a weatherproof green bin under the overhang of Huntington Hall and you can leave all cards there. Thanksgiving cards will be collected on Tuesday, November 24, and after that, Christmas/holiday cards will be collected on December 22.



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## Your Membership Matters!

**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. A monthly, sustaining membership via PayPal has the most impact and is an easy way to support the museum for as little as the cost of a cup of coffee each month.

Thank you for helping us to be here as your home for Danbury history in the post-Covid world.

[Donate here.](#)

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*Main Street--St Peter's Church looking toward Elmwood Park.*

## Elm Street in New England

By Thomas MacGregor, Ph.D.

UConn Advanced Master Gardener

Nearly every town in New England, including Danbury, has an Elm Street. Ornamental planting of native American Elms (*Ulmus americana*) on village greens and rural bucolic lanes was a New England tradition because these large and majestic trees could withstand severe winter freezes and provide cooling shade in hot summers. Colored lithographs (produced by Nathaniel Currier from 1850-1888 of typical village squares with elm trees and dairy or maple farms) portrayed the essence of New England to the rest of America. Many 19th century homes displayed these kind of Currier and Ives prints on their walls as artwork.

Unfortunately, Dutch Elm Disease effectively wiped away the American Elm from the New England landscape. The disease is caused by a micro-fungus (Ascomycota) spread by elm bark beetles. Fungal spores enter the elm tree through breaks in the bark caused by the beetles and invade the xylem. Recall from middle school biology

that the “xylem” is the tree’s vascular system that brings water and nutrients from the soil to its branches and leaves. (Xylem is also a common word in crossword puzzles.) In an attempt to stop the fungal infection, the tree produces an outgrowth of cells which, unfortunately, also blocks nutrient flow from roots to leaves. Constant diminishment of flow over a period of years eventually kills the tree. In 1921, Dutch botanists Bea Schwarz and Christine Buisman discovered the causative fungal agent and mechanism of tree death. Hence the disease is called Dutch Elm Disease although the fungus had its origins in Asia. It was originally thought that the fungus entered the United States following the return of soldiers from WWI, but more likely it arrived in 1928 with a shipment of logs brought into New York harbor from Europe.

In 1935, Connecticut Governor Wilbur L. Cross ordered agents of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station or the US Department of Agriculture to remove and dispose of any dead or weakened elm trees in Danbury and surrounding towns. Before any tree was removed, written notice was given to the owner. If the owner objected to a tree’s removal, he had to file a letter of protest with William L. Slate, then Director of the Agriculture Station, who reviewed the facts and made a final, binding decision about the fate of the tree in question within one week. The goal was to greatly reduce the elm bark beetle population, thereby reducing the spread of the disease. However, this plan failed. As the Danbury region is the gateway to New England from New York harbor, eventually all of the Northeast and, within years, all of North America lost the majority of their native elms. Mature elms are still found sporadically throughout the United States, most notably on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. where the Park Service diligently prunes the trees and injects them with a fungicide to keep them healthy.

Development of an elm tree cultivar through selective breeding that is resistant to the micro-fungus began in the Netherlands in 1928 and in the United States in 1937. In fact, the first two cultivars were named after Schwarz and Buisman for their groundbreaking research. Many cultivars have been produced and tested and some are now in commerce. While resistant in normal environmental conditions, these cultivars succumb to the disease in drought, so research continues. Some towns plant clusters of the same cultivars, such as the commercially-available “Jefferson,” on a village green trying to reproduce those idyllic scenes of a Currier and Ives lithograph. This type of planting produces a monoculture with no genetic variation and should be avoided because one infected tree can easily infect the rest.

So, this Christmas, as you look at a Currier and Ives card received from a friend and listen to the words of the “Sleigh Ride” song, “. . . It’ll nearly be like a picture print by Currier and Ives . . .”, recall the plight of the American Elm and wish for its resurgence.

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



*Winter Morning, Currier & Ives*

## John Oliver Memorial Sewer Plant Tees Are Here!

For those of you that live in or around Danbury we are selling a limited number of hoodies and tees in our [museum online shop](#). These heather-gray hoodies and black t-shirts are available now, and they must be purchased via our website and contact-free pick up will be arranged. We will not be taking phone orders or shipping this merchandise. Both the hoodie and the tee have the green John Oliver Memorial Sewer Plant sign graphic on the front and the graphic designed by Christopher Mihaly on the back.





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*Yves Congar -- avec l'autorisation de l'archiviste - archives des Dominicains de la Province de France*

## **A Diary of World War One**

The Twentieth Century is remarkable for having witnessed two cataclysmic wars in a very short span of time. These wars produced seismic changes on a vast, worldwide scale. But World War One also resulted in an outpouring of outstanding literature which included novels, short stories, memoirs, histories, and diaries. The output of quality literature was vast and was a way for people who experienced these cataclysms to deal with the experience. One of the remarkable subcontexts of studying this war is looking at people who kept diaries during that time. Today we will look at a remarkable diary which was kept by a child who was ten years old when the war commenced in 1914.

Yves Congar was born on 13 April, 1904, in Sedan, which is in the Ardennes section of France. The place of his birth is a vital element in his subsequent history. Sedan was on the road leading to Belgium, the road to the North, and most prophetically, the road of invasions. During the Franco-Prussian War, Sedan was the site of an enormous battle in 1870 in which the French lost to the Prussians, resulting in the capture of Emperor Napoleon III. During the summer holidays of 1914, Congar's mother instructed her four children to keep a daily holiday. Yves took this task very seriously and he used drawings, maps, and poetry he wrote his daily entries. He was precocious and very perceptive about his experiences. Because Sedan, as we noted above, was a route of invasions, the German army quickly occupied it. The diary entries started on 5 June, 1914, and ended on 8 November, 1918. Yves Congar recorded all that the Ardennes went through during these painful years. As early as 25 August, 1914, Yves wrote, "This is the beginning of a tragic story." Everyday life collapsed under the impetus of the German occupation. His father, who was a bank manager, was deported to Lithuania for the duration of the war. His family suffered from the privations that the war brought on the civilian population. But the diary obviously helped Yves Congar to cope with his experience and gave him an outlet for vast creative talents. The diary shows an adolescent who was deeply rooted in his environment, his hometown, his country and the Catholic Church with its strong tradition of faith and liturgy. These factors were vital to Congar's surviving the brutal occupation. The occupation was perhaps also a factor in Yves Congar's diary entry in 1917 when he writes about feeling that he had a vocation to the Catholic priesthood.

Yves Congar survived the war and as he had written, acted upon his call to a vocation to become a priest. He was ordained a Dominican priest in 1930 and became a prominent theologian and scholar. He wrote seminal works on the unity of the Church, and his reputation as a theologian grew from 1931 to 1939 and he became a prominent professor of theology. Unfortunately, the Germans were not yet finished with him. They again invaded France, once again using the traditional road of invasion through the Ardennes. Congar was drafted into the French army as a chaplain with the rank of Lieutenant. He was captured and held as a prisoner of war from 1940 to 1945 at the camps at Colditz and Lubeck. He repeatedly tried to escape. He was made a Knight of the French Legion of Honour and was awarded the Croix de Guerre.

After the war he returned to his career as a priest and a scholar. He continued to publish widely as a theologian and became an advocate for ecumenism. He espoused the promotion of cooperation and unity among Christians. His emphasis on this concept has been linked to his having witnessed in Sedan the friendly way in which Catholics, Protestants and Jews lived together. He was picked by the reforming Pope John XXIII to spearhead the reforms of the Second Vatican Council which resulted in the reform of the Catholic Church. He continued to teach and publish after the Council and before he died in 1995 was made a Cardinal of the Church. This man who suffered under wartime occupation, was a prisoner of war for

five years, did not let these experiences hinder his great efforts to make the world a better place to live in.

**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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### **Great Danbury State Fair Emblem T-Shirt**

Fair T-Shirt Designed and Sold by [Danbury Museum](#)



We've added a number of new designs to our [TeePublic](#) shop including Danbury Fair, Danbury street scenes, Durkin's Diner, and Charles Ives. Take a look (there is so much more than just t-shirtss, there are journals and mugs and tumblers and more!) and remember that the Danbury Museum receives a cut of each sale, so shop early and shop often!

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### **Danbury Museum Painting Projects Continue!**

The painting deities have been incredibly kind to us this month and we've been able to begin painting work on the Marian Anderson Studio. The exterior is moving along apace, though the windows will be getting a little extra TLC now that they've been scraped and prepped.

On the rainy days, interior painting was obvious option. The lavender paint you've all

come to know is being replaced by a buttery yellow, a favorite color of Ms Anderson's.

We'll share more photos as the projects continue!



*A little before and a little after as we repaint the Marian Anderson Studio.*



*The front of the Anderson Studio fully painted with Hale Navy.*



*Buttery yellow will replace the lavender wall color inside the Marian Anderson Studio.*



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**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 December.**



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