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Hello Friends and Warmest Holiday Wishes!

It's good to be with you all again—we trust you are keeping safe and well.

The end of any year is a time we look back and take stock—even in this year of persistent change and challenge. Our accomplishments, despite being closed to the public since March 13, 2020, are things we are quite proud of. We installed five outdoor exhibits utilizing spaces we'd never used before; we completed interior and exterior painting projects in our historic

buildings; staff attended (virtually) regional and national museum conferences with museum colleagues from around the world; and as a team we redoubled our social media efforts to reach 75,000 people across our platforms **every month**. Your stalwart support makes all of this possible.

We're fortunate this month to again have written contributions from John O'Donnell and Tom MacGregor and both have a holiday theme! Patrick has added two festive puzzles, too, and you'll find those as always on our [MuseumFromHome](#) page.

And YES we are having our annual Hat City Ball fundraiser. We'll miss being with all of you, but we've planned a very safe event with to-go meals...all the details are below and on our [website](#)!

While the last nine months have been nothing close to normal, they have reminded us of our strength and resilience as a community. We are always stronger together. Thank you for supporting us and sharing your stories and artifacts and time.

We raise our glasses to toast a brighter and better new year in 2021!

Sending our best holiday wishes to you all,

Brigid Guertin (*Executive Director, City Historian*)

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

Michele Lee Amundsen (*Collections Manager*)

Hat City Ball 2021

Apart, Together.



A very special evening of dining-in with your Valentine to benefit the Danbury Museum.

2021 Hat City Ball Tickets Make GREAT Holiday Gifts!

Tickets to our signature fundraiser, the Hat City Ball, have always been great holiday gifts. This year, it's a gift that keeps giving.

Our 2021 Hat City Ball will look very different, to be sure. But we've teamed up with Doug and his stellar Amber Room staff to bring you the best part of the Hat City Ball, (the delicious meal) for you to enjoy in the safety and comfort of your own home on Friday, February 12—the perfect kick-off to Valentine's Day weekend.

This year, the Friends of the Danbury Museum are honoring the work of the New American Dream Foundation and the Amber Room Colonnade with our Hat City Award for Preservation Excellence.

As Brigid Guertin noted in her award letter: "Your combined efforts to preserve our local, multi- generational immigrant story, as well as your outstanding pandemic efforts to feed the 'storytellers' and story-keepers' whose long lives have contributed to our community success and whose critical needs for food and community support/love are among the many reasons we choose

to highlight and recognize your good works.”

To that end, for every ticket sold, a meal will be donated to Danbury seniors for the 2/13/21 meal delivery outreach by the Amber Room and the New American Dream Foundation.

Your ticket purchase is a great gift, a support to the Danbury Museum, and a small way to pay it forward for our senior population.

All the details are available [here](#) and tickets can be purchased via our [website](#).



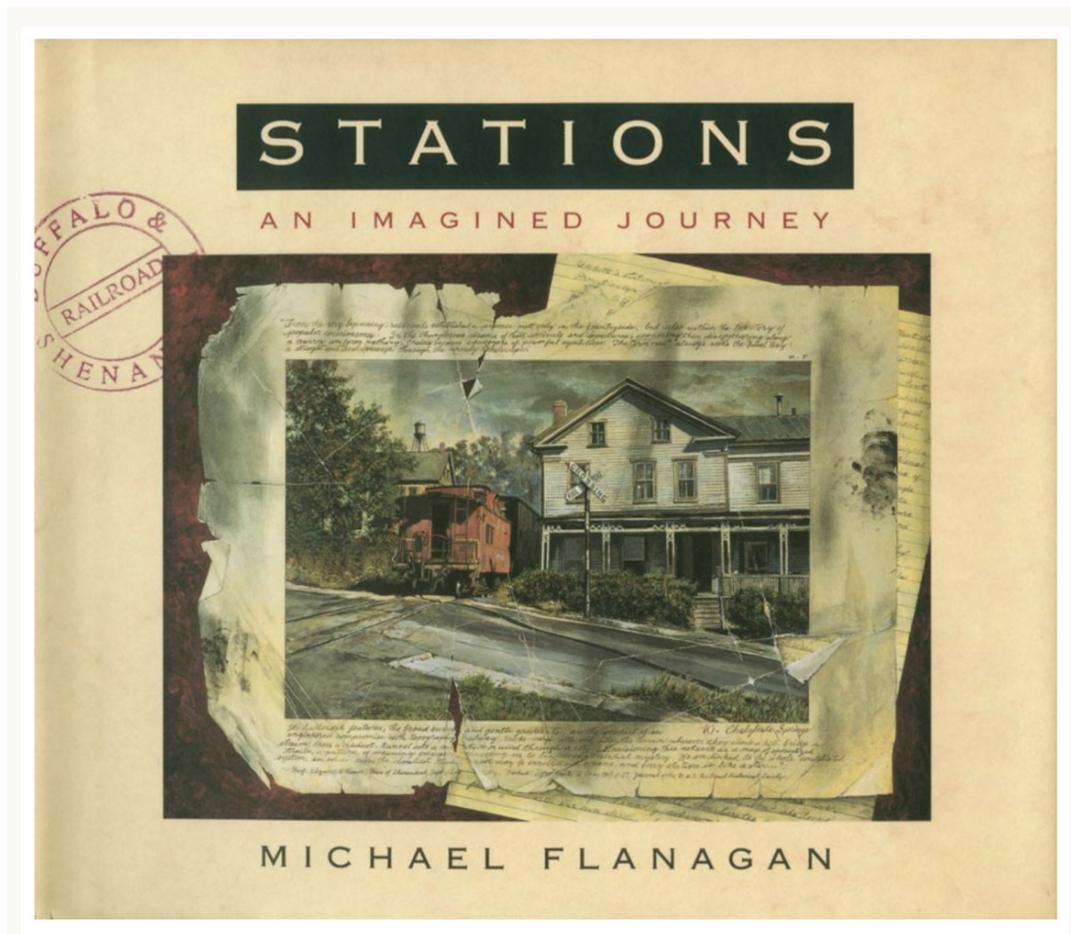
There's Still Time!

Add your cards to our holiday donation!

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. Christmas/holiday cards will be collected on December 22, you can leave cards in our mailbox and we'll collect them.





Christmas, Trains, and Art

By John O'Donnell

The association of model trains running around the Christmas tree is a long one. It became part of the holiday tradition very early on and persisted for quite a long time. When I was growing up in Brooklyn, this was a traditional custom for our family. Because of a tendency to expand the railroad layout our family went from one set running around the tree to procuring a four feet by eight feet plywood board and placing the Christmas tree in the middle and running three sets around it. Model trains were a core part of the celebration of Christmas. The driving force behind this expansion was my father. He enjoyed the trains as much as I did if not more. The enlargement of our layout continued year after year with my father getting more and more creative with the layout.

Like many other people, I have tried to explain the origin of this

love of model trains. I think the big factor in this interest, bordering on obsession, was the fact that my paternal grandfather was a fireman on the New York Central Railroad in the early part of the twentieth century. And in the course of doing my family history research I was fortunate to discover a great uncle who was an engineer on the Adirondack Railroad near Herkimer, New York. There are several other relatives who were likewise employed by the railroad, so I think it is safe to say that there is a genetic predisposition at work here that drove us to model trains. The hobby has become a lifelong one for me and I was able to share it with my own son as well. I am still at it today and deriving as much pleasure as I did when I was growing up. But now I would like to tell you another person's approach to model railroading which is one of the most unique that I have ever come across.

Michael Flanagan was born in Buffalo, New York in 1943. He was raised in Baltimore and the Shenandoah Valley, and started photographing trains at the age of thirteen. He attended the Yale School of Art and the Parsons School of Art and Design. He taught at the School for Visual Arts in New York City. He worked briefly on a track gang for the Richmond & Potomac Railroad. He was a narrative painter who exhibited his work in New York City galleries. He retained his interest in railroads even when he became a book designer who worked closely with Jacqueline Onassis who was an editor at Doubleday. He took his love for history and railroads and turned these passions into a unique book titled *Stations: An Imagined Journey* (1994). Jacqueline Onassis convinced him to craft the book as a work of fiction. The book is an imagined journey on two fictional railroads that is complex, unconventional, and unique in combining fiction, autobiography, painting, photography and model railroading to create not just a book but an artifact. Harvard Professor John Stilgoe (himself a train buff) said in a review "no summary can adequately address the layers of character and narrative that

embed Flanagan's text and paintings. Mike Flanagan was speaking about himself through the voices of his invented characters."

Later in life Flanagan finally built his own railroad layout and got to know several model railroaders very well. Like his book, his layout was an imaginary world modeled on Strasbourg, Virginia, where his grandfather lived and his father was born. Model railroading, as it was in my own case, was for him a way of connecting with his father and grandfather and remembering your father introducing you to the world of model railroading. It becomes a hobby and sometimes an obsession. It starts with trains around the Christmas tree and can grow into a full-time hobby and empire. Michael Flanagan died on August 17, 2012 in Lyme, Connecticut after a valiant eight year battle with cancer.

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!



Give the Gift of History. 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.

If you're in a position to make an end of year contribution, [donate here](#).

[Become a member here](#).



O Tannenbaum

By Thomas MacGregor, Ph.D.

UConn Advanced Master Gardener

In a scene from a recent romantic comedy on the Hallmark Channel, a young couple are walking through a Christmas tree lot. She asks him whether he is “a Blue Spruce or a Fraser Fir guy.” He replies that he prefers Blue Spruce. (Spoiler Alert: This must have been the correct answer because at the end of the movie they kiss.)

The Blue Spruce is a variety of the Colorado Spruce (*Picea pungens*) known for its densely-spaced branches with prickly, four-sided, blue-green needles that whorl around each branch. The overall conical-pyramidal shape and strong branches allow for colored lights and heavy ornaments to hang without sagging to give that traditional “Christmas tree” look.

On the other hand, the Fraser fir is also blue-green in color, but has that Christmas tree smell that fills the room when the tree is brought indoors. The Fraser fir (*Abies fraseri*), which is nearly identical to the Balsam fir, is commonly found in nature along the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina. It is considered the southern cousin of the Balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) that is native to Connecticut. Firs are symmetrically pyramidal trees with flat, one-inch long, blue-green needles that generally point upward. These needles are easily bruised to release that familiar holiday fragrance. Firs typically last longer indoors than spruces, and their slim tops allow for easy placement of an ornamental star or angel.

There are more than ten Christmas tree farms in the Danbury area. The Fairfield County Master Gardeners office in Bethel subscribes to disease alerts that provide the latest and best advice for tree farmers and others throughout the year. Hard-to-

treat fungal infections in the spring and summer months can cause unsightly needle blight in a grove of spruces. Invasive insects, such as balsam wooly adelgids, can produce a crippling disease in a Christmas tree farm because fir trees have no natural immunity to these wingless, egg laying insects. Connecticut Master Gardeners routinely monitor fir and spruce disease progression in New York state because Fairfield County diseases are usually observed two-to-four weeks later. Even ornamental lawn trees, such as hemlock (used for making wreaths and holiday swag), can be harmed by hemlock wooly adelgids. Control of wooly adelgid insects using soaps and oils is a year-round treatment program.

In our middle school science classes, we learned that chlorophyll, which is essential for photosynthesis, is responsible for the green color in the leaves and needles of trees. In the fall, cooler temperatures and less sunlight reduce production of chlorophyll in deciduous trees and leaves turn yellow, red, and orange before falling off. But why do evergreens stay ever green throughout the year? Coniferous trees stay green in winter to conserve primarily nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, calcium, and magnesium nutrients in their needles. Most evergreens live in an environment with poor, rocky soil. By retaining their needles, they are able to conserve these nutrients in order to make small amounts of energy through photosynthesis. The needles are coated with a waxy polyester of fatty acids, called cutin, to prevent water loss.

Evergreens also create their own antifreeze by concentrating sugars to depress the freezing point of water and by synthesizing ethylene, oils, and plant hormones. These substances force ice crystals to take on a hexagonal shape rather than cell-damaging needlelike crystals.

Firs and, to a much lesser degree, spruces produce that woodsy “Christmas smell” due to the essential oils within their needles. These volatile oils act as a natural pesticide for the tree to fight off

native, disease-causing insects. Each tree species has its own distinctive odor and can be used for identification of similar-looking evergreen species.

You can extract the essential oils by collecting fresh needles, gently washing and drying them, and adding the needles to a small amount of an odor-free oil, such as, light olive oil or grapeseed oil. After heating the mixture at a low temperature for two hours, for example, in a small crock pot, and straining away the spent needles, you will have a bottle of extract that smells of Christmas to use during a year of watching Christmas reruns on the Hallmark Channel.

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



Last Minute Shoppers!!

We've added a number of new designs to our NEW [TeeSpring](#) shop including Danbury Fair, Danbury street scenes, Durkin's Diner, and Charles Ives. And yes, there's still John Oliver

Memorial Sewer Plant merch, too!

Take a look (there is so much more than just t-shirts, there are socks and mugs and more!) and remember that the Danbury Museum receives a cut of each sale!

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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 2021.**



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