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Hello Friends!

Thank you for joining us again this month--we're glad to be in touch with everyone and we trust you are keeping well.

February was a VERY busy month for us and we'd be remiss if we didn't extend a very sincere thank you to all of you who helped us to have a Hat City Ball that exceeded our expectations. The Amber Room staff, led by Douglas Polistena, was superb and the meal pick-up went like clockwork. Thanks to all the Corporate Sponsors, Advertising Sponsors, and ticket purchases, we were able to donate more than 600 hot meals for Danbury's senior citizens to the New American Dream Foundation's Senior Hot Meal Program. This was a Hat City Ball like no other, and we're most grateful for everyone's stalwart support. And if you bank with, do business

with, or shop at any of our sponsors, please let them know how integral their support is to our mission.

(There are great photos from the evening--thank you Marian Hesemeyer!--on our [website!](#))

We know you all missed the fabulous auction that we have each year in conjunction with the Hat City Ball, but never fear, we'll be holding it as a stand alone event online this spring.

Speaking of spring. . . Dr Thomas MacGregor's column this month is all about yearning for springtime and he has some great terrarium ideas to get you started. And John O'Donnell writes eloquently this month about author W G Sebald. We're so happy to have both Tom and John with us again this month.

A reminder that if you're looking for Danbury-themed gifts, we have you covered. We have online shops at [TeeSpring](#) and [TeePublic](#) and between the two they offer socks, tumblers, totes, pillows, and so much more. Check them out and remember the Danbury Museum gets a portion of each item purchased.

We'll see you in March!

Brigid Guertin (*Executive Director, City Historian*)

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

Michele Lee Amundsen (*Collections Manager, Newsletter Editor*)



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The Trustees, Staff, and Friends of the
Danbury Museum are most grateful to all who
supported our 2021 Hat City Ball efforts.

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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.



Yearning for Spring

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

For the past forty years in February, the Connecticut Flower and Garden Show has been held. This year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the show was canceled. Gardeners from across New England have always participated in and/or enjoyed the show because it presents a prelude to spring in contrast to the weather outside. During the four-day-long show, the Hartford Convention Center offers vendors displaying plants, seeds, and equipment; educational classes on gardening; and interesting displays.

While I usually attend some of the lectures along with hundreds of other gardeners and enjoy visiting the vendor displays to drool over the backyard greenhouses, my favorite time at the Flower and Garden Show is spent looking at all the award-winning entries in the Federated Gardens Club section. Garden clubs across Connecticut compete in themed topics as diverse as horticulture specimens, flower designs, cacti, succulents, container-grown plants, table displays, botanical arts, and botanical

photography, to name a few. I always look for entries from the Danbury Garden Club, founded in 1925, which is a charter member of the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut, established in 1929. The Danbury Garden Club maintains the gardens on the grounds of The Danbury Museum as well as other areas around the city. For more information about the Danbury Garden Club visit <https://carrassm.wixsite.com/danbury-garden-club>

With the Flower and Garden Show cancelled this year and excessive snow still on the ground (I'll never write about snow and blizzards again), what can gardeners turn to this February? Terrariums! The modern terrarium was a result of a serendipitous scientific discovery by London physician Dr. Nathaniel Ward in the summer of 1829. Dr. Ward planted the chrysalis of an adult Sphinx Moth in garden soil within a closed glass container to observe its emergence. Thinking that the glass container was "airless," he expected anything in the soil to die off (not sure why he didn't expect the moth to die, as well). However, seeds and spores in the garden soil began to grow and flourish, so he began to experiment with plantings in bigger and more elaborate glass cases. These "Wardian Cases" became the rage in cold, drafty Victorian drawing rooms, and many terrariums full of orchids even lasted for years. The plants flourished in the glass cases because the moisture in the soil never evaporated and the air within was recycled by the plants. In fact, the enclosed air was much cleaner than the air of London streets. The glass cases protected against extreme temperature fluctuations and were ideal for plants that prefer cool environments, such as, orchids, ferns, and mosses. Nowadays, terrariums are sometimes used in science classes to illustrate the principles of environmental interdependence.

The favorite plants for English Victorian terrariums were ferns and mosses from exotic locales. Sarah Whittingham traces this phenomenon in her book *Fern Fever: The Story of Pteridomania*. She indicates that the daughter of Charles Dickens developed mild fern fever and writes: "*The novelist Charles Dickens was sometimes irritated by his daughter Mary's lack of vigour and purpose in life. In 1862 he wrote to a friend to whom Mary (then aged 24) had expressed a wish for some ferns to plant in their home: 'After careful cross examining my daughter . . . I do NOT believe her to be worthy of the fernery . . . When I ask her where she would have the fernery and what she would do with it, the witness falters, turns pale,*

becomes confused, and says: Perhaps it would be better not to have it at all."

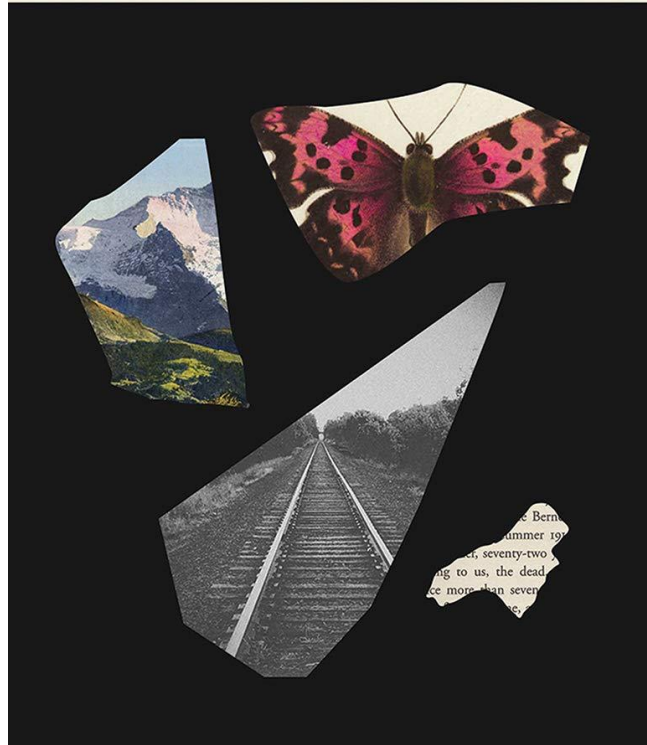
If you aspire to build your own terrarium, choose a glass container (many are found at antique shops or just repurpose a clear glass jar) and line the bottom with small rocks or marbles. A drainage hole is not needed. Add a little sphagnum moss layer on top of the rocks to prevent soil from leaking between the rocks, top it with lightly moistened potting mix, and then plant your chosen plants. Small plants that prefer a humid environment are preferable, e.g., ferns, begonias, African violets, or orchids. Give the plants a mist of water and then close the lid. You may try experimenting by making your own soil, choosing plant cuttings from around the house, or adding non-plants for support. Some ideas are found at <https://uconnladybug.wordpress.com/tag/terrariums/>. Perhaps you will want to have a theme for your terrarium, such as the Great Danbury Fair, using a miniature totem pole, a tractor, or a race car to decorate the inside. Be patient and diligent about care and your terrarium may thrive until the next Connecticut Flower and Garden Show, February 24-27, 2022.

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



THE EMIGRANTS

W.G. SEBALD



A Literary Comet

By John O'Donnell

In 2005 while working at the Danbury Library, staff were asked to pose for a photograph holding their favorite book for a reading promotion. I unhesitatingly got ahold of my copy of *The Emigrants* by W. G. Sebald and had my photograph snapped with the book. It was turned into a poster and I have a copy of it in my study.

How had I become acquainted with the work of Sebald? I read a glowing review of *The Emigrants* (which discussed his other works as well). The author of the review was Susan Sontag, who was an astute critic as well as being an incredible writer. The review appeared in 2000 and after reading it I quickly purchased a copy of the book I read it with great admiration. Let me quote the first lines of the review: "Is literary greatness still possible? Given the implacable devolution of literary ambition and the concurrent ascendancy of the tepid, the glib, and the senselessly cruel as

normative as normal fictional subjects, what would a noble enterprise look like now? One of the few answers available to English-language readers is the work of W.G. Sebald.” In addition to her other talents, Sontag also proved to be a seer.

I read *The Emigrants* and was astonished by it. I had never encountered anything quite like this book in all of my reading life. It consists of four essays which are loosely related. These meld elements of travel writing, local history, memoir, fiction, and photographs in a seamless, masterful fashion. The Holocaust is the unifying theme in all of the essays and they detail the harrowing effects it had on people who escaped death in it, but whose lives were fundamentally altered in a way that there was no recovery from. Sebald was able to give me profound insight into the true meaning of the Holocaust. It was not just statistics and names but an insight into how this event destroyed people’s humanity on a vast, industrial scale never before seen in human history. How was Sebald able to the meaning of the Holocaust in such a clear, masterful fashion? We need to look at his life for the answer to this question.

W. G. Sebald was born on May 18, 1944, in the village of Wertach im Allgau in the southern region of Germany near the Swiss and Austrian borders. He was primarily raised by his mother and his maternal grandfather. His father served in the Wehrmacht during the war and was a prisoner of war at its close and did not return to his family until 1947. Then he got a job in a nearby town where he stayed all week and only saw his family on weekends. He was described as morally and physically diminished as a result of his service in the war as well as being authoritarian and distant. He never talked about his service in the war and was not a significant factor in Sebald’s upbringing. His grandfather became his male role model and they became extremely close. Sebald described him as his real father.

Sebald was deeply upset that his father refused to talk about his wartime service. When he went to school he encountered the same reluctance in his teachers to confront Germany’s wartime issues and this alienated him even more. When he was old enough, he chose exile (like James Joyce from Ireland) first in Switzerland, and then in England. He felt freer in both of these countries and his two sisters also chose to live in Switzerland. He devoted major effort to deal with these issues and bring them to people’s

attention.

He became a professor at the University of East Anglia where he had a very successful career as an academic and was appointed to the Chair of European Literature in 1987. Two years later, he became the founding Director of the British Centre for Literary Translation. There is no satisfactory explanation I have come across to explain his decision to change direction and become a major force in imaginative literature. But the world is in his debt because of this decision. He started off by publishing a book of poetry, *After Nature*, which was well-received. Then he published *Vertigo* and followed it with *The Emigrants*. Both were successful and his second career was launched.

Tragically, after this spate of success, Sebald died in a traffic accident on December 14, 2001, at the age of 57. Fortunately for us, he left behind a healthy body of work including literary criticism, essays, poetry, travelogues, and novels. He was mentioned as a possible Nobel laureate. Someone once asked him where he felt he belonged. He thought that to be a very good question. His reply was I would be very relieved if you could tell me.

(Editor's note: If you'd like more Sebald--check out this YouTube video of one of his appearances at [The 92nd Street Y](#).

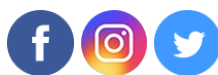
John O'Donnell first became a history devotee while in elementary school. He was raised in Brooklyn and frequently went to Prospect Park which has a Revolutionary War monument. He was hooked!

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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 March.



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