

Like

Tweet

in

# DM | DANBURY MUSEUM



## Hello, Friends!

It's good to see everyone again!

As a first order of business, we want to extend our most sincere gratitude, once again, for everyone who helped to make this year's **Hat City Ball** a success; whether you sponsored the event or ordered a meal to enjoy with your friends/family, THANK YOU. We cannot wait to see you all in person next year.

We've been busy—you know the drill—getting **our calendar** set for the coming year and there are all kinds of fun programs to look forward to.

On February 27, at 2pm, the Danbury NAACP has put together a local

panel to discuss the lasting legacy of Marian Anderson as we commemorate her 125th birthday. The Zoom event will be co-sponsored by the Danbury Museum, the Danbury Library, and the Waterbury Chapter of The Links, Incorporated. The [Zoom registration link](#) is live, and it will also be on our website, [DanburyMuseum.org](http://DanburyMuseum.org) as well as our Facebook page.

As you all are well aware, the museum's gardens are beautifully cared for by the Danbury Garden Club. To celebrate the gorgeous gardens and bring everyone back together again, we'll be hosting First Fridays in June, July, and August, in concert with our generous Hat City Ball sponsors. There will be free live music and food available for purchase—just bring your chair and join us on June 3, July 1, and August 5. You can always find the most up-to-date info on events and museum happenings on our social media platforms and our website.

Everyone was so supportive of last year's online auction, we hope you'll all join us again and bid early and often! The auction features great Connecticut attractions, splendid baskets, and more and will kick off on March 14, 2022, on the 32auctions platform we used last year.

Looking ahead to spring (and summer!), our hours will continue to be Wednesday through Saturday, 12-4. If you're looking to do onsite, staff-assisted research, bookings can be made [here](#); if you're interested in a tour of our historic buildings, book those [here](#). Speaking of summer, we will be holding our very popular Cursive Camp once again this summer, August 8-12 as well as other fun family programming!

Finally, we are SO pleased to have new essays from Dr Tom MacGregor and John O'Donnell. Tom writes about the hopes and joys of browsing seed catalogs and John invites us to meet the real Scrooge. (Editor's note: John's piece on Scrooge was originally to run in December, but this editor *goofed*. So please enjoy a little ghost of a Christmas not long past!)

Think spring—we sure are—and we'll look forward to seeing you all soon.

Brigid Guertin (*Executive Director, City Historian*)

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

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

---

The Staff, Trustees, and Friends of the Danbury Museum are most grateful to all who made this year's event such a success!



*Veteran Sponsor*

Savings Bank of Danbury

*Derby Sponsors*

Union Savings Bank

Webster Bank

M&T Bank

WCSU

Amber Room Colonnade

Non-Profit Development Corporation

Berkshire Corporate Park

*Advertising Sponsors*

Earthmovers \* Omaha Beef

Mulvaney Mechanical, Inc. \* Norbert E Mitchell Company

Sikorsky Credit Union \* Newtown Savings Bank  
Nuvance Health \* Cramer & Anderson  
seventy2architects \* Friends of Danbury Cemeteries



## A Celebration of the 125th Anniversary of the Birth of Marian Anderson

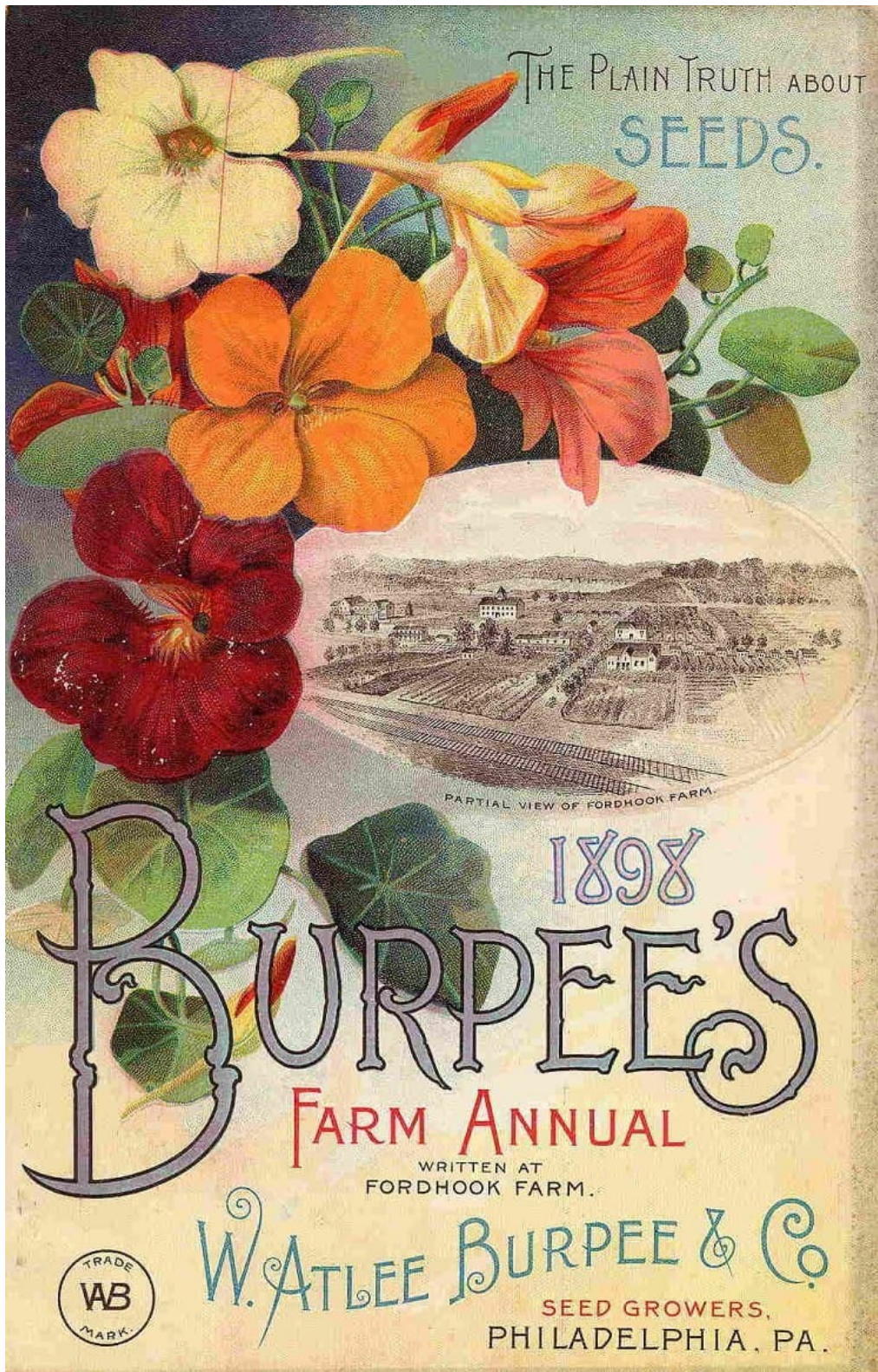
A cooperative venture created by the  
Danbury NAACP and supported  
by the Danbury Museum,  
the Danbury Library, and The Waterbury  
Chapter of The Links, Incorporated.



Join us for a local perspective  
panel discussion on  
Marian Anderson and her broad  
and lasting legacy.

Sunday, February 27, 2022  
2:00 pm via Zoom

*Register to join the panel discussion!*



## Vegetables & Oil

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

February is an excellent month to browse seed catalogs and plan your

2022 vegetable garden. Always look for seed varieties (and later plants) that are compatible with Danbury's climate. North of I-84, Danbury is in USDA (U. S. Department of Agriculture) hardiness zone 6a, while in zone 6b south of the interstate. Prior to 1990, all of Danbury was in zone 6a, but the climate has gotten increasingly warm since then. According to annual averaging, our last frost occurs between May 1st –10th, and our first frost occurs between October 1st–10th, giving us a 5-month growing season, i.e., about 150 days. Rainfall during those 5 months averages slightly more than one inch per week, as determined from many years of compiled Danbury weather data. Therefore, one should look for seeds that produce vegetables that can be harvested within 150 days.

Seeds are usually listed as “certified organic,” “conventional,” or “heirloom.” Certified organic seeds are grown, harvested, stored, and handled according to the strict legal guidelines of the USDA National Organic Program. Conventional seeds are not organic, but are harvested, stored, and handled in a manner similar to organics at most reputable seed producers. Open-pollinated seed-line varieties that have been passed down by gardeners and farmers for generations because of desirable traits including appearance, taste, and/or flavor are called heirloom seeds. The term, “open-pollinated,” means having relatively stable traits from one generation to the next. Seeds harvested in the fall from heirloom plants produce plants in the following growing season that are consistent with those of the previous year. If seeking heirloom seeds, look for seeds from New England as those from other regions of the country (e.g., California) may not yield the desired produce because of locality and climate.

Some seeds which are a cross between two genetically-distinct parent lines yield a hybrid. The Augustinian friar, Abbot Gregor Johann Mendel (1822-1884), demonstrated with pea plants that cross-breeding produced characteristics of the dominant parent in the first generation (called F1), but not in the second generation (F2). Seed producers cross-breed to produce hybrid seeds that have desirable characteristics, such as, flavor, rapid growing times, or specific disease resistance. Collecting these seeds at harvest and planting them the following spring will not produce plants equivalent to the first generation. I tried this last summer by planting seeds that I collected from various squash produce purchased in the fall of 2020 at a local farmers' market. My plants were very green and leafy and

produced flowers, but no fruit.

When thinking about your last year's garden, did you have plants that grew well until bugs, mildew, or fungi attacked them? This was a perennial problem in mid-20th-century America that had a tremendous impact on our commercial food supply. Interestingly, a change followed a Supreme Court decision about oil. In 1976, Ananda M. Chakrabarty, while working for General Electric, altered the genes of a bacterium so that it would break down oil and be used in treating oil spills. General Electric filed for a patent for this bacterium, but both the examiner and the Board of Patent Appeals rejected the application on the basis that living things could not be patented. Eventually, the case was heard by the Supreme Court. In 1980, in the case called *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* (the Commissioner of the Patent Office was Sidney A. Diamond), the Supreme Court ruled 5 – 4 that Chakrabarty was not trying to patent a “natural phenomenon,” but had instead developed a man-made bacterium for a particular purpose. This patent case, considered one of the most important decisions in American history, allowed for patenting any genetically modified organisms, including plants and biotech pharmaceuticals.

Since 1980, many seeds have been produced that are resistant to specific diseases, such as, blights, powdery mildew, mosaic viruses, and various wilts that affect tomato plants. In 1993, USDA regulatory oversight of genetically-modified plants was removed if the seeds were derived using methods deemed environmentally benign. Many seeds are now patented with variety names that sound enticing to the catalog reader. Seed producers recommend planting vegetable varieties that are resistant to diseases common to Connecticut. Catalogs list disease-resistance codes for each packet of seeds. You will need to read closely to determine if the seed's resistance was derived through hybridization or by gene modification.

As you will learn, seed catalogs don't just provide information about acquiring seed packets that are right for the Danbury area's 150-day growing season. They also instruct about our myriad of plant diseases and are a good resource for heirloom seed varieties if one is inclined to harvest seeds for future plantings in subsequent years.

February is an exciting month for dreaming about this year's garden. Enjoy getting lost in your seed catalogs.

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

---



## The Real Scrooge

By John O'Donnell

With the publication of *A Christmas Carol* in 1843 Charles Dickens started a renewed interest in the celebration of the Christmas holiday, how it should be celebrated, and what a difference it can make in people's lives. In 2011 Les Standiford published *The Man Who Invented Christmas: How Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol Rescued His Career and Revived Our Holiday Spirits*. Immediately upon the publication of his Christmas tale, the story became an integral part of people's celebration of the holiday. It has become an incredible success story and has also launched several cinematic and dramatic versions. As we are all aware it is the story of the redemption of a character called Scrooge who is a repugnant and reptilian miser who mistreats everyone in the story. The tendency of readers who are familiar with the story is to think that Dickens has exaggerated the



dastardly character of Scrooge for dramatic effect. As I will show to you this is sadly not the case. Charles Dickens was markedly and uncharacteristically restrained in Scrooge's portrayal. The man who Scrooge was based on was even more horrifying than we could ever imagine.

Dickens wrote in a letter from 1865 that the inspiration for Ebenezer Scrooge was the life of a man named John Elwes. He had been born John Meggot on April 7, 1714, into a respectable English family. His father was a very successful brewer and his grandfather was a Member of Parliament. His maternal grandmother, Lady Isabella Hervey, however, was a celebrated miser; John would go on to outclass even her.

Meggot received an excellent education at Westminster School. He went to Switzerland when he finished his education and he became very skillful in horsemanship and had a love of the hunt. The first major sign of trouble in the immediate family occurred on the death of his father in 1718. His mother inherited an estate of £100,000 (about £8,000,000 in 2010). She was reluctant to spend any of the inheritance and starved herself to death. The inheritance devolved to John and he also inherited the family estate, **Marcham Park**. He seemed poised for a life of extreme luxury with this massive inheritance. Perhaps he was influenced by the examples of his maternal grandmother and of his own mother to embark upon his life of parsimony in which he would outdo them and Scrooge at the same time.

The third member of the triumvirate of influences upon his miserly direction, with the greatest influence, was his uncle. Sir Hervey Elwes had dedicated his life to miserliness. John imitated his uncle in order to gain his favor. Sir Hervey lived on only £110 per year even though he commanded extremely powerful resources. He and his nephew would spend the evening carping about other people's extravagances while sharing a single glass of wine between them. John changed his name to Elwes in order to inherit his uncle's estate, which he did in 1763. In addition to his first family inheritance which was quite substantial he now added to it his uncle's fortune of £250,000 (approximately £18,000,000 as of 2010). He had available to him an enormous fortune which could have provided him a life of comfortable ease (and more than one glass of wine per night!) but he instead chose a life of extreme miserliness.

Space constraints prevent me from giving a detailed portrait of his

stinginess but some examples will suffice to give you a good idea of his lifestyle. He mimicked his uncle's example but then surpassed him: he would take to his bed as soon as darkness fell to avoid lighting candles; sit fireless at his meals saying that eating was exercise enough. Dickens' portrayal of Scrooge emphasizes these traits: "he used his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas... External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, nor wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty."

Elwes began wearing tattered clothing which made him look like a beggar and passersby would give him money of which he had no need. His houses were full of expensive furniture but he ate spoiled food in them. He once ate a grouse that a rat had pulled out of a river. He let his estates and his rental properties become uninhabitable because he refused to pay for repairs.

Towards the end of his life he grew feverish and restless and dreamed constantly that he was being robbed of his money, fearful he would die in poverty. He slept in his tattered clothes and died on November 26, 1789. He had outdone his uncle and lived on only £50 per year. He left an estate worth £500,000 (approximately £74,000,000 as of 2018). By contrast, when Dickens died in 1870, his estate was £80,000 (approximately £7,825,000 as of 2020) and he was considered quite wealthy but nowhere near Elwes.

We know that Scrooge was redeemed by the visits of the three spirits which made him alter his life dramatically. Unfortunately these spirits were probably afraid to visit John Elwes and he died a miserable, unlamented, miserly death. He was a masterful skinflint to the end of his life and there was no redemption for him.

**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!**

---

**Follow Danbury Museum & Historical Society on Facebook**

**Follow @DanburyMuseum on Instagram**

**Follow @DanburyMuseum on Twitter**

---

**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 soon.**



©2023 The Danbury Museum & Historical Society | 43 Main Street,  
Danbury, Connecticut 06810, United States

[Web Version](#)

[Preferences](#)

[Forward](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by  
[GoDaddy Email Marketing](#)®