



MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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April 2018

PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Hello members of the Historical Society. With spring right around the corner it's time for all things to awaken from their winter hibernation. For the Society that means preparing new programs and exhibits for this year and planning for the museum opening in June. Program director Bruce Clouette has lined up a terrific selection of programs, starting in April with "Fashionably Connecticut: A Century of Connecticut Fashion, 1860-1960" (see more information within this notice.) This program will work nicely to

introduce our main exhibit this June which will feature selections from our costume collection and transform our general store exhibit into a late 19th century millinery shop.

Laura Crow, one of our newest board members-at-large, will be a crucial figure in the creation of this exhibit. She is a Professor Emerita of Costume History and Design with the UConn Department of Dramatic Arts. Also joining the board recently as members-at large are Mia Mitoma, proprietor of The Fitch House Bed & Breakfast in Mansfield Center, and UConn Professor of Painting Kathryn Myers. IT Professional Scott Dunstan has also joined the board as assistant treasurer.

We still have open spots on our Executive Council for the following chair positions: Library, Education, Hospitality, Newsletter, Publicity, Museum, and Collection Management. If you have interest or experience in any of these areas, please consider volunteering your time in any way you can. If you're interested, please contact myself, David Landry through the web site's contact page (www.mansfieldct-history.org).

And a special thanks for the service of board member George Waller who has stepped down, having relocated to Farmington, Connecticut. We thank him for his time and expertise and wish him well with future endeavors.

David Landry, President

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Friday, April 6, 7:30 p.m.: April Meeting and Program

Taylor McClure, Museum Educator at the Connecticut Historical Society, will present "Fashionably Connecticut: 100 Years of Connecticut Fashion History, 1860 - 1960."

Friday, May 11, 7:30 p.m.: May Meeting and Program

Historian William Hosley will present "America's First Sculpture: Looking at Connecticut Gravestones."

Both of these programs will be held in the Buchanan Auditorium at the Mansfield Public Library (54 Warrentown Road, Mansfield Center).

Sunday, June 3, 1:30 - 4:30 p.m. – Museum Opening

Following the opening, the museum will be open on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, 1:30 - 4:30 p.m. through the end of September.

UPCOMING SPRING PROGRAMS

Our spring programs were selected to provide an introduction to the exhibits that we are planning for this summer.



On **Friday, April 6, 7:30 p.m.**, Taylor McClure will present an overview of Connecticut fashion from 1860 - 1960 as represented in the vast collections of the Connecticut Historical Society. Her program will explore how clothing communicates who we are, what we do, and the society in which we live. You'll look at everything from military inspiration during the Civil War to the influence of political liberalism in the 1960s. You may recall the clothing of your ancestors, your parents, and your own fashion choices as we take this little trip through over 100 years of fashion.

Taylor McClure is a Museum Educator at the Connecticut Historical Society. She teaches educational programs for school and adult groups both at the museum and on location. She is a former high school social studies teacher, with a B.A. in History and a Masters in Teaching from the University of Washington.

On **Friday, May 11, 7:30 p.m.**, we will once again welcome back historian and popular speaker, William Hosley. His program will focus on one of our earliest native arts – the fashioning, decoration and inscription of grave markers, tombstones and monuments. This program explores the diverse stylistic traditions in dozens of small shops that produced gravestones from the mid-17th century to the advent of the industrial age during the mid-19th century.

It chronicles the transformation of gravestone making from a domestic craft to a modern industry and offers insight into the domestic life, taste and cultural values of Connecticut's peoples. From the earliest work of Connecticut stonecutters like the Griswolds of Windsor and the Stanclifts of Middletown, to the rise of elegance and refinement in the baroque styles of Thomas Johnson and Michael Baldwin, the flowering of Connecticut folk expression in the hands of Benjamin Collins, Josiah Manning and Obadiah Wheeler, to the development of a mass export industry by the Bolleses and

Battersons of New Preston, the story of Connecticut gravestones is a chain of innovation and expression.

William Hosley is a cultural resource development and marketing consultant, social media expert, historian, writer, and photographer. He is passionate about local history and historic preservation. He was formerly Director of the New Haven Museum and Connecticut Landmarks, where he cared for a chain of historic attractions. Prior to that, as a curator and exhibition developer at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Bill organized major exhibitions including *The Great River: Art & Society of the Connecticut Valley* (1985), *The Japan Idea: Art and Life in Victorian America* (1990), and *Sam & Elizabeth: Legend and Legacy of Colt's Empire* (1996). Bill has also served as a content specialist for PBS, BBC and CPTV film documentaries.

Please join us for these two exciting programs. We hope they will whet your appetite for our upcoming summer exhibits.

Both programs will be held in the Buchanan Auditorium at the Mansfield Public Library. General admission is \$3.00; free admission for Mansfield Historical Society members.

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

When Laura Crow, Emerita Professor of Costume History and Design, joined our board, we realized that this would be an opportune time to review our costume collection. Over the past couple of months, Laura has been examining our collection of women's garments and accessories. With her expertise in costume history, she has more accurately dated many items, identified later alterations, and pointed out conservation concerns to be addressed.

With her guidance, we are planning an exhibit of women's clothing and accessories, spanning from the mid-19th century to about 1910. We are very excited to have Laura's help with this endeavor.

Some of you may have seen the costume exhibits that Laura has curated locally. In 2012 she curated the exhibition *Women of New England: Dress from the Industrial Age 1850 - 1900* at the William Benton Museum of Art. It attracted some 7,000 visitors. She was also curator of the exhibition *Beatrice Fox Auerbach: The Woman, Her World and Her Wardrobe* that appeared at the Mandell Jewish Community Center in West Hartford (2013), the Hartford Public Library and the Jorgensen Gallery at

UConn (2014) and ultimately at the Connecticut Historical Society (2015). Last spring she curated the exhibit *The Timeless Art of Dyllis: Forty Years of Creative Clothing* at the Windham Textile and History Museum, that moved over to the Woodstock History Center from July - December 2017. It showcased fashions designed by Dyllis Schlosser Braithwaite, a Class of 1951 graduate of UConn.

Our exhibit will feature an interesting selection of women's fashions from the latter half of the 19th century. Most were worn by local women, some have interesting histories, and most have never been exhibited before. They reveal that Mansfield women were well aware of current fashion trends despite living in a rural area.

Women's magazines, store catalogs and newspaper advertisements brought fashion news to Mansfield's residents. Rail service connected Willimantic with New York and Boston making it a fashion center for local women on their shopping excursions. This era also saw the advent of affordable home sewing machines, first introduced by I. M. Singer & Co. in 1851, and of paper sewing patterns, first produced by Ebenezer Butterick in 1866. These innovations enabled women to make their own garments in the latest styles.

Part of the exhibit will feature hats and bonnets from our collection. Our general store exhibit is being redesigned and restocked to represent a turn-of-the-century millinery shop. Millinery was a popular female occupation in the 19th century and offered women a rare opportunity to own their own business. There were a surprising number of milliners and millinery shops in nearby Willimantic.



Edith Barrows Wilcox wearing a hat adorned with ostrich plumes, 1898

Societies, the establishment of bird sanctuaries, and the passage of federal laws to protect birds.

Part of the millinery display will focus on the feathered hat mania in the late 1800s. Millions of birds were slaughtered during this period to provide feathers for the millinery trade. Some hats were adorned not only with feathers but with bird wings and whole stuffed bird carcasses. Outrage

over this practice led to the founding of many state Audubon

WANTED: We are seeking a standing floor mirror to use in the millinery shop display. If you have one that we could borrow, please contact the museum at 860-429-6575 or mansfield.historical@snet.net.



Detail from the gravestone of Olive Storrs carved by Josiah Manning, 1783, Old Mansfield Center Cemetery

Our other new exhibit will examine the art of 18th century gravestone carvers working in what has been dubbed the Eastern Connecticut Ornamental Style. This style is characterized by a winged cherub face surrounded by border carvings of vines or abstract geometric designs. Several noted carvers working in this tradition are represented in Mansfield's colonial cemeteries. Photographs and rubbings of gravestones carved by Obadiah Wheeler, Benjamin Collins, Josiah Manning, Gershom Bartlett, Jonathan Loomis and others will be on display. They demonstrate that a great range of artistry and originality existed within the constraints of this stylistic tradition.

OPENING DAY: The Museum will open for the season on Sunday, June 3, 1:30-4:30 p.m.

Following the opening, the museum and research library will be open on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, 1:30 - 4:30 p.m., through the end of September. We look forward to seeing you there!

WELCOME TO OUR SPRING INTERN

We are pleased to welcome Henry Kennell as our museum intern for the spring semester. Henry is a junior at the University of Connecticut, studying in the Honors History program. He hails from Vienna, Virginia.

Henry comes to us with some interesting experience. Last summer he worked as a Historic Farm Educator at the Frying Pan Farm Park in Herndon, Virginia. He helped in supervising its summer camp program for children, 8-14. The previous summer, he studied abroad with SEA Semester, a program devoted to the study of maritime history and the environment. He assisted in sailing the tall ship *SSV Corwith Cramer* from Cork, Ireland to Douarnenez, France, then to Lisbon, Portugal and finally to Cádiz, Spain. Henry is also an Eagle Scout and is currently president of UConn's Scouting Association.

Henry will be helping us prepare the new summer exhibits. His work with us will be an adventure of a different kind!

UPDATE ON THE DAM KIOSK PROJECT

This past fall, Museum Director Ann Galonska and Bill Altomare completed work on the content for the kiosk planned for the Mansfield Hollow Dam site. This is a collaborative project of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Mansfield Historical Society. Many thanks to Bruce Clouette who helped with editing of the final text.

A five-panel roofed structure is planned that will be installed by the flag pole near the dam spillway. The first panel will provide a history of the Mansfield Hollow area and its mills. The three central panels will describe why the Army Corps of Engineers developed the Thames River Basin Flood Control Project and constructed the Mansfield Hollow Dam as part of it. These panels will include photographs of the dam under construction and also photographs of some of the houses that were removed. The final panel will provide information about the establishment of the Mansfield Hollow State Park and the building of the recreation lake.

The text, photographs and maps for the kiosk were submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in December. Once everything is approved, design work will begin on the panels. The kiosk will be built and installed later this year.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Many thanks to those who responded to their December membership renewal requests by paying dues by January 2018, the beginning of our 2018 dues year. We continue to accept 2018 dues. A second notice will go out soon to all who have not yet renewed.

If you receive a second notice, please respond. Wouldn't it be wonderful to get our renewal percentage up to 100%? We count on your support.

Your support assists the Society's Executive Council in making decisions and strengthens our membership profile, increasing our negotiating position for collaborative local, state and federal opportunities.

When you respond, please consider sharing information on ways you might volunteer your time and talents to the Mansfield Historical Society by filling out the interest survey at the bottom of the form.

Remember also to recommend membership to those you know who wish to celebrate and learn more about the history of Mansfield. **Thank you for your support.**

Pam Roberts, Membership Committee Chair

NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY

To build upon the work of our late librarian Richard Schimmelpfeng, the MHS Executive Council voted at its January meeting to renew our contract with Daniel Allie for another year. Daniel was originally tasked with migrating the library/archives records from the old card system into a new database. His duties have now been expanded to include the accessioning and cataloging of a large backlog of materials for the library and archives. He reports on his progress below.



Since the last newsletter was published in November, I've been working on transferring all of our existing manuscript files into our Access database. I am now happy to report that as of last week, our library and archives records as found in the card catalog are now fully digitized.

This step completed, I am now tracking down missing items and making sure everything is where it is supposed to be. I'm also making revisions to the database in order to make our cross reference terms more useful. Going forward, I will begin adding new and older backlogged items into the database in the near future.

Our library is continually getting better. Continue to watch this space for future updates. Or, better yet, stop by and see for yourself! I'd be glad to show you.

Daniel Allie

THE INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC OF 1918-1919

This year's flu season has been the worst in nearly a decade. But it pales in comparison the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 which killed some 20 million worldwide.

As soldiers began to return home from the Great War, now known as World War I, some brought with them a deadly virus known as the Spanish flu. It was a particularly virulent strain of the H1N1 virus that still plagues us today. At that time there were no flu vaccines to provide immunity nor any effective means to treat it.

In the United States, an estimated twenty-five million fell ill, and six hundred and seventy-five thousand died. Eighty five hundred died in Connecticut alone. Unlike regular strains of the flu that mostly affect the weak, old and very young, the Spanish flu affected people of every demographic.

The first outbreak of influenza in Connecticut occurred in the port city of New London. By the third week of September 1918, some 600 to 700 influenza cases were reported in the city. About half of those stricken were service personnel.

From there, the illness spread rapidly north and then west across the state. The number of cases quickly overwhelmed Connecticut's healthcare system. In October the State Council of Defense issued an official call for additional medical aid. Clara Atkins of Mansfield was among those asked to provide nursing care for patients ill from influenza. Her Official Call letter, dated October 11, 1918, is preserved in our archives.

Mansfield was visited by the influenza epidemic around the first of October, 1918. Between October of 1918 and April of 1919, 444 cases were reported. And there were many other cases that went unreported. Of the reported cases, 288 occurred during October. A second outbreak occurred in December, with 126 cases reported.

During a part of this time the local schools were closed and fear of influenza kept people from gathering. Church attendance dropped, and was even canceled for a few weeks in October.

The newly formed Mansfield State Training School and Hospital was affected most harshly. Out of the approximate 300 patients, there were 200 cases of the flu, and about 30 patients died. The treatment of all these cases fell on Dr. LaMoure, the only physician, and one nurse.

Surprisingly, the Connecticut Agricultural College was not hit hard by the epidemic. Only a few students were recorded as contracting mild cases of

the flu in early October. Daily inspections of noses and throats were held to ensure that the illness did not spread.

Edwina Maud Whitney, librarian at the Connecticut Agricultural College and Storrs resident, left voluminous diaries that are filled with her observations and comments about the campus and town communities. In the following excerpts from her diaries, she writes about the effect of the influenza outbreak on the college and town of Mansfield. She also describes its tragic impact on some local families.

October 1, 1918: The U.S. Military Dept. took over the college today.* Rather impressive ceremony though there were only about 100 there as the Influenza epidemic has kept many away. College is not to open formally till Oct. 10. Dr. Simonds is not able to give physical ex. as he also is sick with influenza.

[In July of 1918, the Connecticut Agricultural College entered into a contract with the War Department. It became one of six hundred U.S. colleges to give three months training to men of the Students' Army Training Corps (S.A.T.C). Of the 411 men who enrolled in the program, 278 were inducted on October 21, just three weeks before the Armistice was signed. The war ended before their training was completed. They were discharged shortly before Christmas but many continued on as regular students at the college.]*

October 5: Influenza continues to spread. Everybody alarmed. All schools in town closed. Many deaths. Willimantic is specially scourged. Several of our boys sick. I am not specially alarmed but think it best to be cautious.

October 6: No church today because of the epidemic....

October 7: Little Dorothy Parker [age 13] was buried today, the first victim of the influenza hereabouts. Two of the other children are sick Elizabeth & the baby. Some others around here are sick, but it is not probable they have the real influenza. College opening postponed again till 20th.

October 8: A child (boy) of Albert Warren (deceased) died yesterday in Willimantic. That family has lost so many. No evident lessening of the epidemic in Willimantic.

October 23: Two of the new [S.A.T.C.] boys take with influenza. Just got here.

December 15: Influenza is around again quite seriously.

December 22: The Kerwins still sick. Viola has come down with influenza today very sick. Fever over 104. But they will not have a Doctor. They may get well but it is a foolish risk I think.

December 23: A sad record today. Florence Kerwin died at 4:30 of pneumonia following influenza... Ruth too very sick. They had a Doctor this morning but too late for Florence. Viola some better. It is a great shock. Florence was a dear sweet girl, 16 years old. I mourn for her as if she really were my niece.

December 24: Things have not bettered much at the Kerwins. Ruth has pneumonia & they have taken her to St. Josephs. John has a temperature of 103. Baby is sick. Viola has also now pneumonia. Poor Jim is about crazy between remorse at not having the Dr. sooner & grief for he certainly loved Florence, as did the whole community...

December 25: This has been I think the saddest Christmas I ever spent. We had no celebration as Pearl felt too melancholy and sad to do any cooking & neither Mother nor I wanted anything done either.

December 26: We laid little Florence away today. It was inexpressibly sad. No one of her immediate family could be present but her father. The community sent a lovely wreath. Maiden hair, blush carnations, lilies and marguerites. Quite a few came out. It was hard to see her lowered down she who less than a week ago was a bright beautiful girl.

December 27: A very sad day again. Kerwin was summoned by telephone this morning to his wife in the hospital who was very low. We have not heard tonight if she is still alive, but we fear not.

Johnny & Winifred were taken to the hospital this morning. John has a temperature of 104 & they are anxious for him. Winifred not so sick but they know she needs care.

Viola had temperature of 106 all last night. Do not see how she can survive but she may pull through. (Ruth died this afternoon at 3:30.)

December 29: Ruth was laid today beside her beloved daughter. It was at 10 o'clock this morning & but few were out. Poor woman, her life was not a

short & merry one. But she married, bore children & rejoiced in them. It seems sad to think she is gone...

December 30: Poor little Viola died this morning at four o'clock. That makes the third from the family. I hope now the dread disease is stopped and the pestilence fiend satisfied. It is all too dreadful to think or talk about.

January 1, 1919: Poor little Viola was buried today. I was the only outsider there. The third in the family. All the rest seem to be doing well so perhaps the angel of deaths is satisfied now. Mr. Rosebrooks (the sexton) says that is the 5th grave he has dug within a week. It is the worst time he ever knew for deaths.

EDWINA MAUD WHITNEY (1868 – 1970)



This February marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of Edwina Maud Whitney. A descendant of two of Mansfield's early families, Edwina was born February 26, 1868, the daughter of Edwin Whitney and Minerva Barrows Whitney.

Her father was the founder of the Connecticut Soldiers' Orphans' Home and served as its first superintendent. In 1866 he had donated his nearly completed boarding school building and its associated 50-acre farm to the state for this purpose. He died in August of 1867 during an epidemic at the Orphan Home that also claimed his infant son and two of the orphans. His wife was also sickened but survived, giving birth to Edwina six months later. She named her daughter after her late husband.

After the Orphan Home closed in 1875, the property reverted to Minerva Whitney who later sold it to Augustus Storrs. In 1881, Augustus Storrs and his brother Charles, donated the property to the state, along with \$5,000 in cash, to establish a state agricultural school. The former orphan home became the site of the Storrs Agricultural School, precursor of the University of Connecticut. Thus the Whitney family became forever entwined with the history of the university.

Edwina Whitney grew up in the colonial house next to Mirror Lake that last served as the University's Rainbow House. [The lake however was not there until its creation in 1922.] She graduated

from Oberlin College in 1894 and after a brief time teaching in Wisconsin, she returned to her native Mansfield where she remained for the rest of her life.

Miss Whitney was appointed librarian of the Connecticut Agricultural College in 1900, a position she held for 34 years. During part of her tenure at the college, she also taught German, English and American literature. Active in church, women's groups, college and community activities she was frequently asked to speak. Her remarks on local history, literature, church and missions, the College, and the importance of preserving landmarks were always enlightening, entertaining and enthusiastically received.

Later the University of Connecticut fittingly named a dormitory after her and a Campus road after her family. She was also honored by the Mansfield

Historical Society and became their first honorary member.

Shortly after her appointment as librarian she began to keep a diary. These diaries are important not only as a record of her life but as a chronicle of the changing scene in and around Mansfield from 1901 to 1951. The diaries were given to the Mansfield Historical Society by Miss Whitney in 1960. Excerpts of them were transcribed by Betty Seaver of the University of Connecticut's Oral History Project, completed in 1975.

Miss Whitney's comments throughout her diaries are frequently shrewd observations and reflect the intellect and personality of a woman of strong opinions, outspoken, feisty, witty and mentally keen. She remained thus throughout her long life. She died at the age of 102 on September 3, 1970.



Early photograph of Whitney Hall, Storrs Agricultural School. This side view of the former Connecticut Soldiers' Orphans' Home shows the addition made to the rear of the building in 1869. The section on the far right of the photograph is the original building. Note the fenced side yard that remains from the building's days as an orphanage. Whitney Hall was demolished in 1932. Its front doorstep remains, marked by a commemorative plaque.

In addition to her diaries, Edwina Whitney also presented the Mansfield Historical Society with the Superintendent's Daily Record of the Connecticut Soldiers' Orphans' Home. It was recently digitized by Archives & Special Collections at the University of Connecticut. A wonderful resource, it can be viewed and studied on their website: <http://archives.lib.uconn.edu>. Search for it under Digital Collections.

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR: Meeting/Programs - April 6 & May 11; Museum Opening - June 3

Advertisement for a New Millinery Establishment in Willimantic
The Willimantic Journal, May 7, 1858

(Such descriptions are helping us to re-stock our general store exhibit as a millinery shop with side offerings of fancy goods. Come see the transformation this summer!)



*Mary Barrows Royce dressed
in her finest garb*

New Millinery Establishment. The undersigned begs leave to say, that in connection with his Fancy Goods Business, he has added Millinery in all its branches, having procured the services of a first class Milliner to superintend the business, who for taste and competency for getting up first class work, stands unrivalled. Our Millinery Goods are all new, every article; therefore we shall not burden the community with an old kept-over stock, for we have not got it. Having just returned from New York with a stock of goods of the latest styles, carefully selected and bought for Cash, and will be sold for Cash, and no pains spared to please the most particular. We assert that we shall get up any and every kind of Millinery that should be wanted, or that can be got up in New York first class houses. Our arrangements and connections with New York are such that we shall be perfectly posted on the fashions at all times. Our Fancy Goods Department will ever contain a good assortment of White Goods, Embroideries, Curtain Draperies, Linen Goods, Gloves, Hosiery, Knitting and Tidy Cotton, Colored Cambrics, Calicoes, Dress Silks, Trimmings, Fancy Baskets, Worsteds, Ladies' Gaiters, Jewelry, Yankee Notions, &c. &c. Our terms are cash, and prices to correspond with times and terms. Thankful for past favors, hoping that by strict attention to business, and studying the wants of the community, I shall merit a share of the public patronage, which is respectfully solicited. L.W. Jacobs. Directly opposite the Depot, Willimantic, March 26, 1858.