Connecticut Landmarks’ Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic

This year’s Coronavirus pandemic brought significant challenges to Connecticut Landmarks. As we searched for new ways to tell the stories contained within our sites, we were reminded of the pioneers of the past who kept moving forward in the face of uncertainty. The Butler-McCook House & Garden has stood witness to more than 200 years of Connecticut history, including the 1792 smallpox epidemic, when

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Connecticut Landmarks

Amos Bull House
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, CT 06106
860.247.8996
ctlandmarks.org

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The world is being hit by the swirling landscape of the COVID pandemic which has battered the world of historic house museums and historic preservation. Museums have faced how best to raise funds and survive the storm. Our Board of Trustees has made wise choices that have allowed us to continue even with a 60% decrease in attendance and event income. I am now tasked with steering the organization forward to ensure Connecticut Landmarks’ ongoing survival.

One of the first things the board has asked me to do is build up our community relationships. I am meeting with a wide range of community partners statewide. I strongly believe that without partnership programs we cannot sustain and grow—please reach out to me at Aaron@CTLandmarks.org.

In this issue, you can see our staff’s passion and commitment. While the pandemic has been increasing in the weeks leading up to this newsletter, we hope that this spring you will come back to your sites, support our ongoing work, and enjoy what we offer. I can’t wait to meet our members, our friends, and our visitors.

Aaron Marcavitch, Executive Director
Twitter: @CTLDirector

Hello Connecticut!

I am thrilled and honored to have been appointed Executive Director at Connecticut Landmarks. Thank you to the board and hiring committee that have been supportive of this transition—particularly to Beth Iacampo who stepped in and served as the Interim Executive Director and to Deborah Ullman and James Parry, serving as board co-chairs during this period. I am particularly honored to be working with the talented and capable staff here at Connecticut Landmarks.
At the Hempsted Houses, we introduce visitors to Adam Jackson, one of the most well-documented stories of an enslaved person in Connecticut, and his family’s quest for freedom. We can connect the history of slavery in New England to issues that continue to affect our communities today. Through a collection of virtual conversations, Site Administrator Olivia Sayah has been working hard to put current issues into historical context with the help of historians and activists.

In May, the Hempsted Houses launched a new AskAnActivist series on Facebook featuring conversations with members of local activist groups to educate our audience about current issues in their community, explore initiatives that seek to solve these problems, and present ways for viewers to get involved. Recent collaborators include Melinda Johnson from the YWCA Hartford Region, and Leighton Johnson of Stop Solitary CT.

While we were unable to hold our annual Juneteenth Celebration with the NAACP – New London Branch and our neighbor the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) in-person this year, we were thrilled to convene virtually instead. This year’s Juneteenth commemorated the 155th anniversary of the end of slavery in the United States, and we felt it was particularly important to create space for dialogue around monuments, racial injustice, and modern interpretations of the past this year as protests took place around the country. During a follow-up program in October, storyteller Tammy Denease was joined by Tamara Lanier to consider the legacy of slavery and societal reparations. Lanier, who has filed a landmark reparations lawsuit against Harvard University, discussed her case to reclaim possession of her enslaved ancestor’s photographs.

This fall, the Hempsted Houses hosted a new history in aCTion virtual event series on topics surrounding racial trauma, environmental racism, and abolition, which will continue in 2021. To access our virtual programming, make sure you are following the Hempsted Houses on Facebook at facebook.com/HempstedHouses.

“We will continue to develop partnerships with community groups and highlight their activism, finding connections between the Hempsted and Jackson stories, and modern New London life,” says Sayah.

Special thanks to the generous sponsors that made our 2020 programming in New London possible: the Frank Loomis Palmer Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee; the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut; and the Chelsea Groton Foundation, Inc.

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I am extremely grateful to The Hempsted Houses for giving me a platform [...] The Peabody would have us to believe that [this] is a case about a photographer and a photo shoot. But in Lanier v. Harvard, we allege that because Slavery was abolished in the State of Massachusetts in 1783, that the only way that Harvard could have acquired these images was illegally! The daguerreotypes are not just archives, they are the plunders of Slavery. At issue are the questions of Reparations, Expropriation, and Repatriation. This case raises a moral question that the courts will now be required to answer, “Who owns the rights to the violence of the past?”

- TAMARA K. LANIER

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Photo Credit: Tamara Lanier.
Photo by John Shishmanian, courtesy of The Bulletin.
Look What We’ve Been Up To This Season!

**Amasa Day House**
The Amasa Day House is sporting a new cedar shingle roof following the restoration of both the north and south chimneys. Members of the East Haddam community were invited to tour the exterior of the property when the projects were completed.

**Bellamy-Ferriday House & Garden**
As our historic garden was in peak bloom, we welcomed visitors back to our grounds beginning in June. Nearly 500 visitors enjoyed the Bellamy-Ferriday property this season. See preservation feature on back cover.

**Buttolph-Williams House**
Crews reinforced the foundation, replaced worn clapboards, and completely refurbished one of the fireplaces at the Buttolph-Williams House in Wethersfield. The site was open for tours by appointment through the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum.

**Butler-McCook House & Garden**
Download the izi.TRAVEL app on your smartphone and search for “Butler-McCook” to discover two self-guided audio tours, which showcase stunning photos, written and audio descriptions, and GPS mapping. Special thanks to The West Hartford Garden Club for maintaining our historic garden.
Hempsted Houses
Restoration projects at the Hempsted Houses included replacing damaged wooden siding and downspouts with new, historically accurate materials at the Joshua Hempsted House. See Hempsted programming feature on page 3.

Isham-Terry House
Collections were removed from the Butler’s Pantry to allow for re-staining of the space following roof work. The Butler’s Pantry contains over 300 pieces of delicate glass and serving ware, which was painstakingly cleaned by our collections department and returned to the pantry.

Nathan Hale Homestead
This October, the Homestead welcomed nearly 120 guests for our Things That Go Bump in the Night tours. Many attendees reported ghostly sightings through our candlelit windows. “I love the ghost tours here…The staff shares personal ghost experiences, the home is architecturally preserved, and the whole place just gives you that Halloween fix you’re looking for.”

Phelps-Hatheway House & Garden
Despite the pandemic, the site offered hybrid in-person and livestreamed programs, including a lecture series on the American Revolution in Connecticut. Socially-distanced programming and timed garden entry allowed visitors to appreciate the blooms lovingly maintained by the Suffield Garden Club.

Palmer-Warner House

Virtual community engagement will continue this spring, and we will test activities next summer.
Dr. Daniel Butler assisted with inoculations. In 2020, it saw unusually empty city streets as people were asked not to congregate in public spaces. As the spring turned into summer and Connecticut residents were able to gather safely outdoors, Connecticut Landmarks welcomed music lovers for a socially-distanced version of “Sunset Sounds”, our annual outdoor concert series in the Butler-McCook Garden. In response to community demand for this type of programming, we doubled our offerings with a special focus on showcasing musicians from the Greater Hartford community. Matt Chasen, a member of the Hartford Jazz Society Board of Directors, said it best when he noted that, “Within this community, we are so very blessed, honored, privileged, and proud to have a musical and artistic history that is loaded with heritage, legacy, and tradition at every level. From one generation to the next, the talent never ceases within Connecticut’s capital city.”

It was a treat to be able to provide vital support for local bands and a special place for members of the community to gather and be in solidarity with each other. As audience member Beatrice Sullivan said, “The concerts have really been a stress reliever with all that’s going on.”

Our historic properties, which are usually open to visitors from May through October, were shuttered until August. Our staff was tasked with finding new ways to fulfill our mission at a time when the state was significantly impacted by the virus. We were pushed to create new ways of connecting with our visitors by increasing our social media presence and presenting programs via video-conference. To ensure that we kept both our staff and visitors safe, a CTL COVID-19 Task Force was created to establish policies for re-opening our six core properties by advance reservation in accordance with state guidelines. In addition to the concert series, we welcomed visitors back to our grounds in June and opened our doors for tours of the historic interiors in August. Staff took up enhanced cleaning protocols that balanced visitor and staff safety with collections care, hybrid programming supplemented our limited in-person attendance capacity with live-stream broadcasts, and interpreters were still able to share the powerful stories of their sites. As we look to winter – typically our off season – we are excited to extend our programming in a virtual format.

A year ago, we could not have imagined the circumstances in which we find ourselves. But Connecticut Landmarks’ staff and visitors are working together to find new ways to make meaning from the past. Even in the face of uncertainty, Connecticut residents always find ways to help each other, whether by making clothing for colonial soldiers as the women of the Hale family did, or stitching masks during a pandemic. Many of the stories we tell at our sites are those of resilience, and we know that Connecticut residents are carrying on that legacy today.

Photo credits: Sunset Sounds Concert Series, photos by Andy Hart.

Give the Gift of Connecticut History!

At Connecticut Landmarks, we steward the architecture, landscapes and collections of some of the state’s most treasured historic places and share them with the public in new and innovative ways.

This work is only possible through the generous support of individuals, corporations, foundations, and governments. In particular, your unrestricted Annual Fund gifts go directly to where resources are needed the most at any given time. Visit cildmark.org and click on ‘Donate Now’.

Planned giving supports our mission for future generations through tools such as a bequest, life income gifts through an annuity or trust, or donations of assets. For more information about how to plan a legacy gift, please email Executive Director Aaron Marcavitch at Aaron@CTLandmarks.org.

Thank you to our donors, members, community partners, sponsors, and volunteers. You are the bricks and mortar of this organization who keep our doors open and make history matter. Your generous gifts are essential to all that we do and for that we are truly grateful.
New Staff

Aaron Marcavitch was appointed Executive Director of Connecticut Landmarks in September of 2020. Marcavitch served for a decade as the Executive Director of Maryland Milestones (Anacostia Trails) Heritage Area Inc. He has extensive experience with non-profit operations, community relations, planning, advocacy, and heritage tourism. He has been honored with partnership awards from Preservation Maryland and the Prince George's Historical Society and was recognized as a "40 Under 40" in both Maryland and Nantucket, Massachusetts. He holds degrees from Roger Williams University and Middle Tennessee State University.

New Board Members

Joe Grabarz has an inspiring history of public service and advocacy for the LGBT community, including serving as State Representative from Bridgeport where he was one of the first openly gay state elected officials in the US. He has advocated for HIV treatment and a cure; pushed for health reform during the Clinton Administration; and led the effort to pass a gay civil rights bill and to establish the first ever LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network. Joe has worked on several film and art projects. Joe continues advocating for social justice, representing almost four dozen labor and nonprofit organizations before the Connecticut General Assembly.

Margaret Steeves, of West Hartford, recently retired from a career in brand management, marketing strategy and execution, public relations, and corporate communications, where she held senior positions at Masonicare and Webster Bank. She continues to do freelance writing for non-profit organizations. She was named a distinguished alumna of University of St. Joseph and volunteers as an ambassador for the University. She has served on many Boards and committees, including the United Way, Wallingford Education Foundation, and the Greater New Haven Health Care Council. She loves historical properties and is an avid gardener.

Thank You to Our New Members!

Connecticut Landmarks uses historic properties to inspire an understanding of our complex past.

Bellamy-Ferriday House Shines!

It took six months, but we are so pleased with the Bellamy-Ferriday House’s new paint. We repaired nearly 100 linear feet of damaged wood clapboards and trim, then hand painted the entire dwelling and attached visitor center. The 82 windows were re-glazed where needed and painted. Most importantly, though, the hazardous lead paint and encapsulant were removed from the historic house.