



# Connecticut Topic List

2024-25 School Year



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## Using this Guide

Connecticut History Day has developed this guide to help assist students and teachers in researching Connecticut topics for the upcoming National History Day season. This guide catalogs topics in chronological order with tags to help students find themes. To search tags, hold CTRL+F and search for the following tags:

#abolition	
#agriculture	
#art	
#blackhistory	#LGBTQ+history
#civilwar	#medicine
#commerce	#military
#discovery	#nature
#education	#nauticalhistory
#entertainment	#preservation
#government	#religion
#health	#revolutionarywar
#indigenouseoples	#slavery
#innovation	#socialreform
#journalism	#suffrage
#labor	#technology
#latinahistory	#travel
#latinohistory	#voting
#latinxhistory	#womenshistory
#law	#worldwar1
	#worldwar2

## First Encounters and the Colonial Era (pre-1775)

### **The concept of Wilderness and Undeveloped Lands**

What the European colonists considered "wilderness" and "undeveloped" differed from how the Indigenous natives viewed land, property, and land use. One place this difference is reflected is in court cases regarding land disputes, as well as treaties, trade agreements, and land purchases between the English colonists and Indigenous tribes/nations.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/breaking-the-myth-of-the-unmanaged-landscape>

Further resources: Connecticut State Library -New Haven, New London, Litchfield County Court records finding aids and indexes:

<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/archives/uncoveringnewhaven/ctcourts>

Tags: #indigenouspeoples #law

### **Samson Occom and the Brotherton Indians**

Samson Occom was a Mohegan educator and Presbyterian minister who advocated for indigenous education reform. Traditional practices were important to indigenous cultures, and Occom argued that Mohegan students should learn from indigenous teachers, rather than Anglo-American teachers who saw Native traditions as dangerous. He gathered a group of Christian Indians from across southern New England and relocated to New York, where they joined Christian Mohawks to found the Brotherton Indian Nation.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/samson-occom-and-the-brotherton-indians/> Tags:

#indigenouspeoples #education #religion

### **The Pequot War: A Turning Point for Native Americans in Connecticut**

Small CT towns were considered part of the western frontier for English settlers in the early 1600s. The conflicts between English settlers and indigenous residents over this land ultimately led to the Pequot War. At the time, the Pequot resided in what is now southeastern Connecticut. The conflict drew in numerous Native American tribes who fought on both sides of the war. The war culminated with the 1638 Treaty of Hartford, which outlawed the Pequot language and name, seized tribal lands, and disbanded the surviving Pequot, who were given to the victors as spoils of war or sold into slavery. Today, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation in southeastern Connecticut is proof of a people's endurance and a collaborative project funded by the National Park Service is under way to identify and preserve sites associated with the Pequot War.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/topics-page/pequot-war/>

Other places to research: Battles of the Pequot War Project (pequotwar.org), Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center

Tags: #indigenouspeoples #law #military

### **Dutch vs. English**

Both the Dutch and English began to explore and settle in the region that became Connecticut in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century bringing the two nations into conflict about this area. Dutch navigator, Adriaen Block, was the first European to explore the Connecticut River in 1614. The Dutch established a trading post, Huys de Hope, in 1633 on the site of present-day Hartford. Three years later, Rev. Thomas Hooker and his followers arrived and established a settlement close to the Dutch post. English settlers continued to arrive and establish towns while the Dutch focused on utilizing resources for profit. The Treaty of Hartford finally resolved the dispute between the two European nations in 1650.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/reckoning-with-the-dutch-the-treaty-of-hartford-1650>

Tags: #discovery

### **Were the Fundamental Orders the World's First Democratic Constitution?**

One of Connecticut's state nicknames is the "Constitution State" after the claim that Connecticut's Fundamental Orders of 1639 was the world's first democratic constitution. In 1638, Rev. Thomas Hooker delivered a sermon in which he said, "The foundation of authority is laid firstly in the free consent of people." The sermon inspired the creation of the Fundamental Orders in 1639, a document that united Hartford, Wethersfield, and Windsor under a framework of self-governance. John Fiske, a Hartford born historian of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was the first to argue that the Fundamental Orders were the first democratic Constitution; an idea that has been contested by other historians.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-free-consent-of-the-people-thomas-hooker-and-the-fundamental-orders>, <https://connecticuthistory.org/creative-license-or-fundamental-fact/>

Tags: #government

### **Witchcraft in Connecticut – Else Young, Mary Johnson, and others**

The first witch trials in colonial America took place in Connecticut during the mid 1600s. It was a period when superstition, patriarchy, and religion-fueled repression were bedrock features of colonial life. The witch trials lasted several decades and preceded the more famous cases in Salem, Massachusetts, by almost fifty years.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/witchcraft-in-connecticut/>

CT State Library LibGuide: <https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/c.php?g=1287648>

Tags: #law #womenshistory #religion

### **The Life of Venture Smith**

Venture Smith was kidnapped from a royal family in Africa and enslaved in Connecticut. He had many horrible interactions with slave owners, but he eventually persevered, purchasing his and his family's freedom, and acquiring property and the respect of his local community. Venture Smith was able to pass on his story so that generations of Connecticutans and American readers can learn the horrors that he endured.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/venture-smith-from-slavery-to-freedom/>

Tags: #slavery #blackhistory

### **Connecticut's Code of 1650**

Written by Roger Ludlow, this was the first codification of the laws of the Connecticut Colony, including laws latter referred to as the "blue laws." Born in England and trained as a lawyer, Ludlow helped found the town of Fairfield and was instrumental in the creation of the Connecticut Colony.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/topics-page/law/>

Tags: #law

### **Connecticut's Black Governors**

For approximately one hundred years, from the middle of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century, there was a black governor in Connecticut. Selection of a leader was an African tradition brought by black slaves to the British colonies and the practice became formally established in Connecticut in the 1750s. Despite its democratic origins, powerful whites usurped the position and used governors largely to help "maintain order" within the black population.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/connecticuts-black-governors/>

Tags: #blackhistory #law #revolutionarywar #slavery #suffrage #voting

### **The Great Awakening**

In the Great Awakening, a religious revival of the 1740s, impassioned evangelical ministers like George Whitfield attracted crowds of thousands. Convinced the colony had strayed dangerously from its early religious principles, they cried out for a return to the strict Puritanism of the 17th century. Whitfield's popularity threatened traditional church leaders, and the General Assembly promptly banned traveling preachers and even deported one.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/an-orderly-decent-government-searching-for-the-common-good-1634-1776/>

Tags: #education #law #religion #travel

### **Common Land in Connecticut**

The town green remains a quintessential and unique part of the New England landscape, and for those towns lucky enough to have one still, the green may be one of the only extant artifacts from colonial times. As English settlers laid out Connecticut's earliest towns in the 17th century, they reserved the best land for planting and for animals to graze, then plotted land close by on which to build their homes, often on equal-sized plots. In the middle of their settlement, they reserved a common area for public use and as a place to erect a meetinghouse. While some planned settlements were regular in arrangement, more often they were irregular tracts shaped by topography and burgeoning town development.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-connecticut-town-green/>

Tags: #agriculture #commerce #education #innovation #labor #nature #preservation #socialreform

### **Mohegan Indians v. Connecticut (1704-1775)**

The lawsuits between the Mohegan tribe and Connecticut are significant, because the litigation was the first British case to rule on indigenous land ownership and it revealed the strains in the relationship between the Crown, the colony, and the tribe. The dispute began in the 1600s when the Mohegan, after breaking with the Pequot due to alliances during the 1637 Pequot War, ceded all their lands, except for a reserve of farms and hunting grounds, to the New England colonies. The dispute centered on a tract of land that comes to about 20,000 acres in southeastern Connecticut. The Mohegans claimed the colony had reserved this land for their use. The heirs of John Mason claimed the Mohegan tribe gave the reserved lands to their ancestor, Capt. John Mason, the future deputy governor of Connecticut. Subsequently, the Masons then transferred the land to the colonial government, attesting that the Mohegans had received enough farmland to sustain them. Both the Mohegan and Mason heirs argued that this land transfer was invalid and thus began almost a century of dispute. In 1687, the Connecticut colony began granting the disputed land to settlers. The Mason family, on behalf of the Mohegan, argued that this violated existing treaties. The Dudley Commission found in favor of the Mohegan Tribe, but subsequent commissions of review sided with Connecticut. In 1773, on the eve of the American Revolution, the Privy Council gave its final ruling in the case of the Mohegan Indians versus the colony of Connecticut. It concluded that although the Mohegan were "not then Subject" to local municipal law, their lands had been included within the colony and their rights to the lands-if they had not already been ceded by treaty-had been extinguished according to British (imperial) law by royal charter.

Learn more: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohegan\\_Indians\\_v.\\_Connecticut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohegan_Indians_v._Connecticut) Tags: #law  
#indigenouspeoples

## Revolutionary War and a New Nation (1775-1815)

### Connecticut and the Western Reserve

Did you know that the state of Connecticut once owned part of Ohio? Under the 1662 Charter, Connecticut was to stretch from the "Narraganset-Bay on the East, to the South Sea on the West Part." If these western land claims were still held today, the cities of Albany, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Des Moines, Omaha, and Salt Lake City would be part of Connecticut. The royal charter provided a justification for claiming western lands. Following the model of other states, Connecticut gave most of its claimed land over to the federal government in 1786, but it "reserved" a territory in the northeast of presentday Ohio for its continued use and settlement. This became the Connecticut Western Reserve. Authority over the Reserve lands passed from Connecticut to the federal government in 1800, and Ohio was officially admitted as a new state in 1803. The social, cultural, and economic ties between Connecticut and Ohio, however, remained in place. Migration from Connecticut and New England to the former Reserve continued for decades after Ohio became a state, and these men and women helped shape Ohio's economy, laws, politics, educational opportunities, and religious organizations.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/new-connecticut-on-lake-erie-connecticutswestern-reserve>

Tags: #discovery #travel

### Jonathan Trumbull, Sr.

Jonathan Trumbull was a merchant and politician who rose to become one of the most famous governors in Connecticut's history. Born in Lebanon, Connecticut, in 1710, Jonathan attended Harvard and studied for the ministry before beginning a trading partnership with his brother in 1731. After playing a vital role in supplying troops during the French and Indian War, Trumbull won election as deputy governor of Connecticut in 1766. With the death of Governor William Pitkin in 1769, Trumbull became governor of the colony. During the Revolutionary War, Trumbull was the only governor to side with the colonists, subsequently making him both the last governor of the Connecticut colony and the first governor of the state of Connecticut.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/people/jonathan-trumbull/>

Tags: #government #revolutionarywar

### Benedict Arnold

Benedict Arnold was a businessman, soldier, patriot, and brilliant strategist. What caused him to turn traitor? Born and raised in Connecticut, Arnold led the first troops outside of Massachusetts to help reinforce the Patriots during the American Revolution. He was lauded as a hero after the Battle of Saratoga but called a traitor after he changed sides and led the British attack on Groton and New London.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/people/benedict-arnold/>

Tags: #revolutionarywar #military



### **The "Conference" State**

France's decision to assist the struggling Continental Army was predicated on the belief that helping the Americans win their independence was a way to cripple Great Britain. But the French Army would have to cross Connecticut to achieve that goal. For its role as a central location for plotting how and where the French and Americans would confront the British, the Constitution State could well have been called "The Conference State."

Learn more: <https://www.ctexplored.org/the-conference-state/>

Tags: #revolutionarywar #travel #military

### **The Connecticut Compromise**

On July 16, 1787, a plan proposed by Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth, Connecticut's delegates to the Constitutional Convention, established a two-house legislature. The Great Compromise, or Connecticut Compromise as it is often called, proposed a solution to the heated debate between larger and smaller states over their representation in the newly proposed Senate.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-connecticut-compromise/>

Tags: #revolutionarywar #law #voting

### **Connecticut's Role in the Creation of Democracy**

Many historians view the United States as the first country to become a democracy. Connecticut's Oliver Ellsworth, Roger Sherman, William Samuel Johnson (Connecticut's signers of the Constitution), and others actively participated in forming those documents.

Learn more: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/founding-fathers-connecticut>

Tags: #revolutionarywar #law #voting

### **Connecticut's Loyal Subjects: Toryism and the American Revolution**

At the outbreak of the war, Connecticut consisted of six counties and 72 townships. According to the census of 1774, throughout these counties and townships, there existed some 25,000 males between the ages of 16 and 50, of whom about 2,000 identified themselves as Tories. Nowhere was the presence of these individuals stronger than in the southwestern portion of the state, particularly in Fairfield County. The presence of Loyalists was such that, by the winter of 1775, the General Assembly passed an "act for restraining and punishing persons who are inimical to the Liberties of this and the rest of the United Colonies." Many Tories joined the British Army to fight against the rebels. After the war, Tories had to decide whether to flee to another British-controlled colony, or stay and face prosecution by the new government.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/connecticuts-loyal-subjects-toryism-and-the-american-revolution/>

Tags: #revolutionarywar #law #military



### **Noah Webster and the First American Dictionary**

Born in what is now West Hartford, Noah Webster attended Yale, studied law in Litchfield, and became a schoolteacher. He published what became known as the *Blue-Backed Speller* in 1783. Webster believed in the need for a unified language for the new nation and in 1828 published the *American Dictionary of the English Language*. Webster served in the Connecticut legislature and was involved in several issues, including anti-slavery; educational reforms; and establishing the first copyright laws.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/noah-webster-and-the-dream-of-a-common-language>  
Tags: #education #socialreform

### **Levi Pease and the development of stage route**

Levi Pease, known as the “Father of the Turnpike” was a transportation innovator who transformed travel on the East Coast and improved mail delivery. Many of his innovations are still used in railroads today. Pease opened his first long-distance stage route between Hartford and Somers before expanding his business into Massachusetts and New York. He won the first contract from the U.S. Post Office to deliver mail and improved mail delivery between Philadelphia and Baltimore.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/levi-pease-stage-route-and-transportation-innovator>  
Tags: #travel

### **The Rise and Fall of Silas Deane, American Patriot**

Silas Deane was an American patriot and prominent member of the Continental Congress at the dawn of the American Revolution. On a diplomatic mission to France, Deane played a key role in obtaining the military supplies that made possible the victory at Saratoga in October 1777, leading to an alliance with the French the following year. His early achievements lost their luster, however, after Deane was recalled to face a protracted, rancorous battle with Congress over his financial dealings. He returned to Europe bitter and disillusioned, publicly questioning the wisdom of colonial independence and the break with Great Britain.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-rise-and-fall-of-silas-deane-american-patriot/>  
Tags: #revolutionarywar #military

### **Eli Whitney's Gun Manufacturing Process**

Did you know that Eli Whitney aided in developing interchangeable parts for guns? After getting a contract from the U.S. government in 1798, he spearheaded the development of a new milling machine that could accurately cut metal according to a pattern. This meant that gun parts could be standardized, guns could be manufactured more quickly, and unskilled laborers could put together guns instead of highly skilled gunsmiths. The Whitney milling machine was so effective that modern versions of it are still in use today.

Learn more: <https://www.eliwhitney.org/museum/about-eli-whitney/factory>  
Tags: #technology #innovation

## The Era of Reform (1815-1859)

### The Connecticut Constitution of 1818

The 1817 gubernatorial election resulted in the election of Oliver Wolcott, Jr., transferring power from the Federalists/Standing Order to the Toleration Party. The new ruling party pushed for a new state constitution which led to the adoption of the Constitution of 1818. The Constitution was a turning point for the state, changing the existing state government as well as the rights of many Connecticut residents. Some of the new ideas and changes included establishing the Senate, the disestablishment of the Congregational Church, and disenfranchising black male voters.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/an-orderly-decent-government-a-new-state-a-new-constitution-1776-1818/>

Tags: #government

### A Pioneer in the Treatment of the Mentally Ill: Eli Todd

Born in New Haven, Eli Todd believed in the humane treatment of the mentally ill. He was the director of the Connecticut Retreat for the Insane, which began admitting patients in 1824. The Retreat later became known as the Institute of Living and is still in existence today. Todd was also concerned about alcohol consumption as a societal problem and was a member of the temperance organization, the Washington Society of Farmington.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/medical-pioneer-eli-todd-born>

Tags: #medicine #socialreform

### The Bemans: A Family of Reformers

The Beman Family rose to prominence in Middletown's African American community, leading the A.M.E. Zion Church and fighting for black rights leading up to the Civil War. The family includes Caesar Beman, who had been enslaved in Colchester before being emancipated in 1781; Jehiel Beman, who was a pastor who spoke in favor of abolition and assisted freedom-seekers on the underground railroad; and his son Amos, who also fought for abolition alongside his father.

Learn more: <https://www.courant.com/community/middletown/hc-middletown-beman-family--20190928-pcctbxnngbdvzf5wpeiuncxqpq-story.html>

Tags: #religion #blackhistory #civilwar #slavery #abolition

### Blacksmith Isaac Glasko Challenges the State Constitution

Isaac Glasko was an African American/Native American blacksmith from Griswold who petitioned the CT General Assembly to change the state constitution. In 1823, he argued that since African American men and women were not allowed to vote, their businesses should not have to pay state taxes.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/blacksmith-isaac-glasko-challenges-the-state-constitution/>

Tags: #law #blackhistory #indigenouspeoples #socialreform #commerce

### **Hartford's Talcott Street Church & School for Black Children**

Talcott Street Congregational Church was built on the corner of Talcott and Market Streets in 1826. It was the first Black church in Hartford and the first school for Black children. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was the center of community for Black and some Native American Hartford residents, an educational hub and a safe haven for fugitives of enslavement finding their way north on the Underground Railroad. Pastored at different periods by prominent abolitionists, James W. C. Pennington and Hosea Easton, the church was attended by people whose remarkable stories are available today in books and articles but are largely unknown. The people of Talcott Church and School include Deacon James Mars, who published a memoir of growing up enslaved in Connecticut; educator Rebecca Primus, who moved to Maryland after abolition to start a school for newly freed Black residents; writer and educator Ann Plato, whose book of essays, poems, and sketches made her the second published African American poet and the first published African American essayist in the United States, and whom scholars believe was also of Native ancestry; artist, educator, and businessman Augustus Washington, whose daguerreotype studio on Main Street attracted patrons such as Lydia Sigourney and John Brown. Under Rev. Pennington's leadership, the church actively participated in the Amistad Trial as it took place at the nearby State House.

Learn more: <http://ctexplored.org/faith-congregational-church-185-years-same-people-same-purpose/>

Further resources: <https://capital.libguides.com/c.php?g=1148870&p=8385335>; Rebecca Primus's digitized letters at CT Historical Society; books by Pennington, Plato, and Mars available online. Barbara Beeching's *Hopes and Expectations*; biography of James Pennington *American to the Backbone* by Christopher Webber

Tags: #blackhistory #abolition #religion #socialreform #slavery

### **The Heathen School of Cornwall**

The Heathen School was a school in Cornwall, CT, designed to educate people considered, at that time, to be heathen: people from Hawaii, China, and India as well as Indigenous Peoples. Teachers believed they were "civilizing backwards peoples." While students gained some skills they could use to help their communities navigate the 19<sup>th</sup> century world, many students refused to give up all of their cultural ways which were under assault to assimilate.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/an-experiment-in-evangelization-cornwalls-foreign-mission-school/>

Tags: #indigenouspeoples #socialreform #education

### **Ebenezer Bassett**

Ebenezer Bassett was the first African American student to graduate from the New Britain Normal School – now Central Connecticut State University, in 1853. After graduating, Bassett became a noted educator, abolitionist, and the first African American ambassador to a foreign nation for the United States when he was stationed in Haiti.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/ebenezer-bassetts-historic-journey/>

Tags: #education #blackhistory #abolition

### **Literacy Tests and the Right to Vote**

In 1855, Connecticut became the first state to require a literacy test to vote, with the goal of preventing Irish immigrants from voting. The test was later used to keep Puerto Rican laborers and other groups of people from voting, until civil rights activists made the literacy tests illegal.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/literacy-tests-and-the-right-to-vote/>

Tags: #education #voting #law #socialreform

### **The Most Famous American in the World**

The massive crowd in Liverpool, England, had been lined up at the dock for hours to get a glimpse of the famous American author, Harriet Beecher Stowe. She was internationally famous for her antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in March 1852. A complex work exploring family and home, religion, and justice, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exposed the immorality of slavery and cried for its demise. Stowe's book, originally run as a 45-part series in an abolitionist newspaper, was a runaway success, selling 10,000 copies in a week and more than 300,000 copies in the United States in its first year, despite being widely banned in the South. It changed public opinion, created characters still talked about, influenced ideas about equity, and fomented revolution from Russia to Cuba.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-most-famous-american-in-the-world/>

Tags: #abolition #art #blackhistory #civilwar #labor #law #slavery #socialreform #travel #womenshistory

### **John Brown: A Portrait of Violent Abolitionism**

John Brown was a staunch abolitionist famous for his beliefs in the equality of African Americans and for his use of violence in opposing the spread of slavery in the decade before the Civil War. Considered by pro-slavery Southerners as "a damned black-hearted villain," abolitionists met Brown's radical exploits with a combination of admiration and revulsion. October 16, 1859, Brown and his followers attempted to encourage enslaved people to revolt against their owners by seizing the U.S. Armory in Harper's Ferry, WV, and capturing two slaveholders and freeing their slaves.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/john-brown-a-portrait-of-violent-abolitionism/>, [John Brown's Raid \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/learn/visit/visit-details.cfm/john-brown)

Tags: #abolition #blackhistory #civilwar #slavery #socialreform

### **Thomas Gallaudet and Deaf Education**

Thomas Gallaudet championed and pioneered deaf education and started the American School for the Deaf in Connecticut. He became interested in education for the deaf after meeting Alice Cogswell, subsequently traveling to France and studying with Laurent Clerc. In 1816, Gallaudet and Clerc opened the American Asylum for Deaf-Mutes, which later became the American School for the Deaf. Gallaudet's son, Edward, founded Gallaudet University in Washington DC.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/gallaudets-vision-advances-deaf-education>

Tags: #education

### **The African Mission School, 1828-1830**

On October 6, 1828, the African Mission School opened for the purpose of training African American men to become Episcopal clergy in Liberia, Africa. Liberia was founded through the efforts of the American Colonization Society (ACS) which believed that formerly enslaved Africans and African Americans should be returned to Africa. The school was connected to Hartford Center Church and had board members from Washington (now Trinity) College. Six African American men attended the school and three were ordained in 1830. Several did work as clergy and teachers in Liberia.

Learn more: [African Mission School – The Episcopal Church](#)

Further Resources: [Nathaniel Wheaton – Trinity and Slavery \(trincoll.edu\)](#)

Tags: #blackhistory #slavery #religion

### **Prudence Crandall, Sarah Harris, and the Canterbury Female Boarding School**

Prudence Crandall and Sarah Harris were on the frontier of equal access to education for Black and Brown young women through the establishment of the Canterbury Female Boarding School as a school for non-white young women. Crandall's court trials, "Crandall v. Connecticut" impacted two U.S. Supreme Court cases and laid the foundation for the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Many students, such as Mary Harris, Julia Williams, and Mary Miles went on to become national and international reformers, educators, and leaders in their communities.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/prudence-crandall-fights-for-equal-access-to-education>

Further Resources: The Linda Lear Center for Special Collections & Archives, at Connecticut College

Tags: #education

### **Smith Sisters**

Abby and Julia Smith of Glastonbury were active in some of the most contentious political debates of their times. Following in the footsteps of their mother, who penned one of the earliest anti-slavery petitions, the Smith sisters fought for slave emancipation until the United States finally abolished the institution. When their parents died, the Smith sisters inherited their family's farm, the most valuable property in Glastonbury. The elderly sisters refused to pay property taxes after town officials raised their taxes, resulting in a three year legal struggle.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/the-smith-sisters-their-cows-and-womens-rights-in-glastonbury/>

Tags: #suffrage

### **Connecticut-Kansas Colony**

The Kansas- Nebraska Act of 1854 gave Kansas residents the opportunity to choose whether it would become a free state or one that allowed slavery. As a result, Kansas became a battleground during the antebellum period. The Connecticut-Kansas Company was formed to raise money to send sixty-one adults (the majority men) and two children, led by Charles B. Lines of New Haven, to settle in Kansas. Rev. Henry Ward Beecher's Brooklyn, NY, congregation donated rifles and Bibles to the settlers. Prairie life was difficult, and some settlers quickly returned home. Others joined "The Prairie Guard" and spent a month and half fighting pro-slavery Missourians who were attacking

Free State settlers. In 1861, Kansas entered the Union as a Free State. Many of the New Haven settlers left to fight in the Civil War.

Learn more: <https://mountmitchellprairie.org/history/beeher-bible-and-rifle-church>  
<https://www.courant.com/hartford-magazine/hc-hm-ct-anti-slavery-kansas-colony-20200329-20220806-qx3gd4bzk5cgdndwdsdwjll3cm-story.html>

Further resources: <https://archive.org/details/connecticutkansa00osme/page/n13/mode/1up>

Tags: #slavery #civilwar #abolition

### **Horace Wells and the Discovery of Anesthesia**

In the early 19th century Hartford dentists Horace Wells and William Morton played instrumental roles in the development of anesthesia for dental and other medical applications.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/horace-wells-discovers-pain-free-dentistry/>

Tags: #medicine

### **Jackson v. Bulloch and the End of Slavery in Connecticut**

Nancy Jackson, a woman enslaved by James Bulloch of Georgia, asked Connecticut's courts to grant her freedom in 1837. Bulloch split his time between homes in Georgia and Connecticut and had left Jackson enslaved in Connecticut for two years while he traveled. Connecticut law forbade slave owners from "leaving" slaves in the state, and ruled that Jackson should, indeed, be free.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/jackson-v-bulloch-and-the-end-of-slavery-in-connecticut/>

Tags: #blackhistory #law #slavery

### **Religious Freedom for Jews in Connecticut**

A small number of Jewish people lived in Connecticut as early as the 1650s, but they did not have the same rights as Christians. Connecticut had been established as a religious colony by Puritans and its laws linked government and the church. This meant that people of other religions did not have the ability to form their own congregations or worship in public. In 1818, the state adopted a new constitution which disconnected the Congregational church from the state government and gave all Christians the same religious rights. By the 1840s, more Jewish immigrants were settling in Connecticut cities and they wanted to establish synagogues and cemeteries to serve the needs of their communities. In 1843, a group of Jews from New Haven and Hartford petitioned the legislature to change the state constitution. The legislature did not agree to change the constitution, but they did pass a special law giving permission to Jews to form their own religious societies. This did not, however, give rights to any other non-Christians.

Learn More: <https://teachitct.org/lessons/religious-freedom-for-jews-in-connecticut/>

Tags: #government #law #religion #socialreform

## Civil War and Reconstruction (1860-1877)

### **Prison Reformer, Zebulon Brockway**

Zebulon Brockway advocated a program designed to educate and reform prisoners rather than punish them, but his unorthodox and brutal administrative style ultimately brought an end to a 50-year career full of innovation. Brockway also developed a program that was a precursor to the parole system.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/zebulon-brockway-a-controversial-figure-in-prison-reform/>

Tags: #socialreform

### **The Colt Revolver and a Revolution in Manufacturing**

Hartford native Samuel Colt invented a new type of gun called a revolver. In order to mass produce the gun and make it easier to repair them, his workers assembled the revolvers using interchangeable parts. Manufacturers had been trying to produce interchangeable parts for decades, but Colt was the first to achieve it by using precise molds and specialized machine tools. The Colt Armory attracted talented mechanics from all over the northeast, many of whom went on to manufacture other goods the same way, like bicycles, sewing machines and automobiles.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/samuel-colt-and-sewing-machines/>

Further Resources: [Research Guide - Colt Manufacturing Co. \(museumofcthistory.org\)](https://www.museumofcthistory.org/research-guide-colt-manufacturing-co)

Tags: #innovation #technology

### **Edward Alexander Bouchet—African American Pioneer in the Field of Physics**

Born in New Haven, Edward Alexander Bouchet was the first African American to earn a PhD from an American University when he earned one in physics (also one of the first 6 Americans to earn a physics PhD) in 1876. Bouchet was not the first Black man to enter Yale, but he was the first to graduate. He graduated 6<sup>th</sup> in a class of 124, but even with those impressive credentials, professional opportunities were limited. Bouchet taught at the Institute for Colored Youth for 26 years. Not until 1918, the year of Bouchet's death, did a second African American man obtain a PhD in physics.

Learn more: <https://www.aps.org/publications/apsnews/200706/history.cfm>

Tags: #education



### **America's First Ordained Woman Minister: Olympia Brown and Bridgeport's Universalist Church**

Olympia Brown served as the first female minister for the Universalist Church in Bridgeport. She graduated from the Theological School of St. Lawrence University, becoming the first woman to graduate from an established theological school. Even after graduation Brown struggled to be ordained until, in 1863, she became the first woman ordained as a minister in the Universalist Church. Brown was active in women's suffrage and abolition, and her sermons were highly acclaimed. Her opponents eventually forced her out of the church in Bridgeport and she went on to serve a church in Wisconsin.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/americas-first-ordained-woman-minister-olympia-brown-and-bridgeports-universalist-church/>

Tags: #religion #womenshistory #suffrage #abolition

### **P.T. Barnum and the Railroad Lobby**

"It always seemed to me," Barnum once wrote (and is quoted in Wallace's biography), "that a man who 'takes no interest in politics' is unfit to live in a land where the government rests in the hands of people." Taking this philosophy to heart, Barnum won election to the Connecticut Legislature from the town of [Fairfield](#) in 1865. He fought for the citizenship of black men and women as proposed in the Fourteenth Amendment and worked to limit the power of the New York and New Haven Railroad lobby. Barnum's successes got him reelected a year later.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/p-t-barnum-an-entertaining-life/>

Tags: #law #government #entertainment #travel

## Rise of Industrial America (1878-1900)

### Connecticut's Contributions to Flight

Many innovations in flight are associated with Connecticut. Inventor Charles Ritchel built and sponsored the first controlled flight of a dirigible in America in Hartford in 1878. Connecticut passed the world's first aeronautical law in 1911. Frederick Renschler established Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Company in 1925 in Hartford. He and his team designed the WASP engine, which along with the Hornet, created an engine that had increased power and had high reliability at a low weight.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/charles-ritchel-and-the-dirigible>  
<https://connecticuthistory.org/airborne-pioneers-connecticuts-many-contributions-to-air-transportation>

Further resources: New England Air Museum, Connecticut Air and Space Center

Tags: #discovery #technology

### Avon's Educational and Cultural Pioneer

Yung Wing was the first Chinese-born student to graduate from an American college. After earning his degree from Yale, he set up a program that sent Chinese students to American colleges to receive their education and advocated for education reform.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/avons-educational-and-cultural-pioneer/>

Tags: #education #socialreform

### Rivers of Outrage

Pollution of Connecticut's waters by industrial waste and sewage in the decades after the Civil War was arguably the state's first modern environmental crisis. In the end it was the actions of ordinary citizens, operating through the courts, that began a long journey toward waterway restoration by laying its legal foundations.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/rivers-of-outrage/>

Tags: #agriculture #commerce #health #law #nature #socialreform

### First Commercial Telephone Exchange Established in New Haven

Civil War veteran George Coy, the manager of a telegraph office in New Haven, founded the first telephone exchange in the world on January 28, 1878. Establishing the first commercial telephone exchange brought the telephone to people's homes, greatly enhancing communication. Coy also created the first telephone directory.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-first-commercial-telephone-exchange-today-in-history>, <https://lib.uconn.edu/location/asc/about/25-for-25-celebrating-twenty-five-years-of-collecting/the-worlds-first-telephone-directory>

Further resources: Archives & Special Collections, UConn Library.

Tags: #discovery #technology

### **Pope's Electric Vehicles and Transportation Innovations**

Albert Augustus Pope innovated with bicycles and automobiles through mechanization and interchangeable parts, enabling people to travel further and faster. Pope popularized the use of the bicycle and contributed early innovations to automobiles. He championed the Good Roads Movement to promote greater government participation in building America's roads.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/albert-augustus-pope-1843-1909>

Further resources: Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation (<https://invention.si.edu/interview-albert-pope>),

Tags: #innovation #technology

### **Frederick Law Olmsted - A Pioneering Landscape Architect**

Hartford native, Frederick Law Olmsted, is often described as the founder of landscape architecture in the U.S. As the designer of New York City's Central Park, Olmsted had many commissions in Connecticut, including New Britain's Walnut Park, Bridgeport's Beardsley Park, and the grounds of what is now the Institute of Living in Hartford. Olmsted was also a social reformer who advocated for the rights of the mentally ill.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/people/frederick-law-olmsted>

Tags: #art #preservation

### **The Ivory Industry in Deep River and Essex**

During the Industrial Revolution, pianos grew in popularity, as the instrument became more affordable to the general public. As a result, companies that produced combs out of ivory began producing piano keys and other parts. The mergers of several small comb businesses and an influx of capital produced two large manufacturing plants in Deep River and Essex. These two plants processed 90% of all ivory entering the U.S. and employed 1,400 people at their peak. While this provided many economic benefits locally, such intensive manufacturing spurred the destruction of elephants and sustained the practice of slavery in Africa.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/ivory-cutting-the-rise-and-decline-of-a-connecticut-industry/>

Tags: #commerce #technology #slavery

### **Educational Reformer: Henry Barnard**

A Hartford native, Barnard served in the CT House of Representatives and as the first Secretary of the Connecticut Board of Commissioners of Common. He argued in favor of offering more varied school subjects to children, using learning aids (like maps and globes) in the classroom, and providing more training for teachers. In 1867, he became the first US Commissioner of Education.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/henry-barnard-advances-state-and-national-education-initiatives/>

Tags: #education #government

## Progressive to New Eras (1900-1929)

### **Waterford's Seaside Sanatorium and Its Innovative Treatments**

The Seaside Sanatorium in Waterford, CT provided cutting edge medical treatment involving the ocean and the sea and is now a state park. When constructed, it joined four other sanatoriums in Connecticut (Hartford, Norwich, Shelton, Meriden). At Seaside, doctors advocated heliotherapy (exposure to sunlight and fresh, breezy oceanfront air) for patients, who usually stayed between 6 to 12 months. The Sanatorium was designed by well-known architect Cass Gilbert. After medical advances helped eradicate tuberculosis, the sanatorium was used for adults with pulmonary issues and later became a geriatric center and for the treatment of people with mental and emotional disabilities. Designated as a state park in 2014, the buildings have been abandoned.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/seaside-tuberculosis-sanatorium-waterfords-contested-oceanfront-gem/>

Tags: #medicine

### **Health Department Fights Unseen Enemies During World War I**

In the early 20th century, polio and Spanish Influenza killed millions of people around the world. Greenwich was one of many Connecticut communities to be struck by both epidemics. Dr. Alvin Klein and the Greenwich Board of Health passed measures and restrictions that helped stop the spread of these diseases.

**Learn more:** <http://connecticuthistory.org/health-department-fights-unseen-enemies-during-world-war-i/>

Tags: #medicine

### **Cristobal Rodriguez Hidalgo: Puerto Ricans Standing up for Citizenship**

In 1917 President Wilson signed into law the Jones-Shafroth Act granting U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans born after April 25, 1898. With this act came mandatory conscription into the U.S. military just as the U.S. entered WWI. Cristobal Rodriguez Hidalgo, a Bridgeport resident, became the first Puerto Rican soldier to die in the war.

Learn more: <http://digitalcollections.ctstatelibrary.org/islandora/object/30002%3A2255>

Tags: #latinohistory #latinxhistory #military

### **Ida Tarbell: The Women Who Took on Standard Oil**

Ida Tarbell, who spent her retirement in Easton, was one of the most famous investigative journalists in U.S. history. Her exposé of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company is one of the most famous examples of "muckraking" journalism, and the article (published in 19 installments) was pivotal in a 1911 Supreme Court decision that determined Standard Oil was a monopoly, forcing the corporation to split apart.

**Learn more:** <http://connecticuthistory.org/ida-tarbell-the-woman-who-took-on-standard-oil/>

Tags: #legal #journalism

### **Mary Townsend Seymour**

In early 20<sup>th</sup>- century Hartford, Mary Townsend Seymour fought for civil rights and that Black women were included in the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment giving women the right to vote. Seymour helped to found the local NAACP chapter and worked for labor rights. She was the first African American woman to run for the Connecticut State Assembly.

Learn more: <http://ctexplored.org/audacious-alliance-mary-townsend-seymour/>

Tags: #socialreform #womenshistory

### **Anna Louise James--Pioneer in the Pharmacy Field**

Anna Louise James was the first female pharmacist in the state of Connecticut. James grew up in Old Saybrook and in 1908 became the first African American woman to graduate from the Brooklyn College of Pharmacy. She operated a drugstore in Hartford until 1911, when she began working for her brother-in-law at his pharmacy. Eventually, she took over operation of the pharmacy, renamed it James Pharmacy, and worked there until her retirement in 1967.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/anna-louise-james-makes-history-with-medicine>

Further resources: Old Saybrook Historical Society

Tags: #womenshistory #blackhistory #medicine

### **Hartford's City Mother, Josephine Bennett**

Josephine Bennett was a women's suffragist from Hartford. She helped launch Hartford's local American Labor Party branch in 1919 and fought tirelessly for women's rights and for free speech.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/hartfords-city-mother-josephine-bennett/>

Tags: #suffrage #voting #law #socialreform #womenshistory

### **19<sup>th</sup> Amendment: The Fight Over Suffrage in Connecticut**

Leaders in Connecticut's women's suffrage movement such as Isabella Beecher Hooker and Frances Ellen Burr, along with countless women from across the state, urged state lawmakers to give women the right to vote. When several lawmakers blocked their efforts, these women wrote to President Woodrow Wilson and protested, which eventually won them the right to vote in 1919.

In every town, you can find examples of women who believed in women's suffrage, along those who were vehemently opposed to this movement. Activist Helena Hill Weed, a suffragist from Norwalk was imprisoned for three days for civil disobedience. Finette B. Nichols from Fairfield opposed women's suffrage although she later became a state representative.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/19th-amendment-the-fight-over-woman-suffrage-in-connecticut>; <https://connecticuthistory.org/women-of-the-prison-brigade>; <https://fairfieldmuseum.omeka.net/exhibits/show/wonder-women/finette-benson-nichols--repres>

Tags: #suffrage #womenshistory #voting #law #socialreform

### **Hiram Bingham III: Machu Picchu Explorer and Politician**

Hiram Bingham III was a distinguished scholar and public servant from Salem, Connecticut. After completing his PhD at Harvard University, he became an adjunct professor at Yale University in 1907. Bingham made one of the most famous discoveries in archeological history. In a series of three expeditions from 1911 to 1915, Bingham discovered and excavated the ancient Inca village of Machu Picchu, which was unknown beyond a small number of indigenous people and, possibly, missionaries who had traveled through the area.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/hiram-bingham-iii-machu-picchu-explorer-and-politician/>

Tags: #art #education #indigenouspeoples #latinxhistory #latinahistory #latinohistory #nature #preservation #travel

## Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)

### **Traffic innovator, William Phelps Eno**

Eno was the original architect of traffic regulations and transportation engineering that shaped rules that now govern the movement of people and goods throughout the world. He pioneered a plan for a New York subway, became involved in maritime activities, was a strong supporter of railroad development, and in the early 1920s launched research on the future of aviation. He developed and fought for most of the traffic-flow innovations we now take for granted, including traffic tickets, traffic lights & signs, and driver's licenses.

Learn more:

[http://www.simsburyfreelibrary.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=593357&module\\_id=136308](http://www.simsburyfreelibrary.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=593357&module_id=136308)

Tags: #transportation

### **Hiram Bingham IV: A Humanitarian Honored for Saving Lives during WWII**

Hiram Bingham IV served as vice consul at the U.S. Consulate in Marseilles, France in 1940-41. Jewish individuals and families from across Europe fled to France to escape the Nazis, but France fell to Germany in 1940. Bingham secretly smuggled thousands of refugees out of Europe during this time, going against official U.S. policy.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/hiram-bingham-iv-a-humanitarian-honored-for-saving-lives-during-wwii/>

Tags: #worldwar2 #military #socialreform #law

### **Hilda Crosby Standish, Early Proponent of Women's Reproductive Health**

Dr. Hilda Crosby Standish was a Hartford physician who advocated for women's reproductive rights. In the 1930s she ran Connecticut's first birth control clinic, even though promoting contraceptives was illegal in the state during that time. She devoted her life to protecting women's reproductive health and rights.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/hilda-crosby-standish-early-proponent-of-womens-reproductive-health/>

Tags: #womenshistory

### **Connecticut Lawyer Prosecutes Nazi War Criminals at Nuremberg**

Thomas Joseph Dodd, a Norwich-born lawyer from Connecticut, served on the United States' prosecutorial team as Executive Trial Counsel at the International Military Tribunal (IMT). The Allied nations assembled this tribunal to try Nazi leaders for war crimes. Taking place in 1945-46, the IMT, often referred to as the Nuremberg trial after the German city in which it took place, was an unprecedented effort to hold leaders of a nation-state accountable for their wartime actions while also endeavoring to uphold their rights to a fair trial.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/connecticut-lawyer-prosecutes-nazi-war-criminals-at-nuremberg/>

Tags: #worldwar2 #military #socialreform #law #religion



### **Merritt Parkway Creates Scenic Gateway to New England**

The first multi-lane, limited-access roadway in Connecticut, the Merritt Parkway was also one of the first scenic parkways in the nation. Characterized by its landscape design as well as by ornamental Art Deco and Art Moderne bridges, the 37.5-mile parkway improved access to New York City and influenced the development of Fairfield County. It cost \$21 million and was the largest public works project in Connecticut at the time of its opening from 1938-1940. Over 2,000 laborers worked on the project.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-merritt-parkway/>

Tags: #labor #preservation #travel

### **WWII: A Turning Point for Women in the Workplace**

Connecticut business boomed during WWII, with companies like Electric Boat, Pratt & Whitney, and Hamilton Propellers fulfilling huge defense orders for the federal government. With so many men away fighting in the war, women entered factories to take their places. Women also joined the military and worked many jobs, including as pilots for non-combat missions. Women proved they were capable of doing what was considered “men’s work” at the time.

Learn more: [Munitions Assembly Line 1943 - Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project World War II - Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project](#)

Further resources: <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/wwii-women.html>  
<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/HistoryDayPreviousTopics/women>

Tags: #womenshistory #worldwar2 #labor #military

### **The Wobblies: The Fight for Free Speech**

Through the 1930s, the definition of “free speech” in the United States was fairly limited. Protesters were thrown in jail for speaking about controversial issues, such as communism, in public places. The Industrial Workers of the World (or Wobblies, as they were called) set out to change this. They would gather in large numbers and speak freely, forcing police to arrest them and overrun the local prisons. The cost to arrest and hold these free speech advocates forced the court to widen its interpretation of free speech.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/how-the-wobblies-won-free-speech/>

Tags: #labor #law

### **The Hartford Circus Fire**

In a field on Barbour Street in Hartford, between six- and eight-thousand patrons sought distraction from the summer heat by attending a performance of the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus. A fire started and rapidly spread once in contact with the tent canvas, due largely to the canvas’ waterproofing using paraffin wax thinned with gasoline. By the time firefighters put out the flames, nearly 170 people lay dead. Most died from exposure to the fire and smoke, but a significant number were also trampled. This tragedy prompted Connecticut lawmakers to enact strict fire regulations for public performances.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-hartford-circus-fire/>

Tags: #law #entertainment

### **The Danbury Shakes: Mercury Poisoning and Workers Rights**

Danbury's hat-making business had the negative consequence of causing the "Danbury Shakes" (mercury poisoning) in people who worked in the felt-making factories. Medical professionals and a local labor union worked to end the use of mercury in the felt-making process, as well as to protect the individuals and families affected by the "Danbury Shakes."

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/ending-the-danbury-shakes-a-story-of-workers-rights-and-corporate-responsibility/>

Tags: #labor #law

### **U.S. Supreme Court case of *Cantwell v. Connecticut* 310 U.S. 296 (1940)**

This is one of series of famous Jehovah's Witnesses cases from 1930s and 1940s in which Newton Cantwell and family tried to practice their religion in New Haven by stopping people on the street or going door to door to pass out literature and play a record, all in violation of a law that required them to get a solicitor's license. This pitted individual rights of religious expression versus the responsibility to respect community order. Ultimately in a 9-0 decision, Court held that the state law violated Cantwell's religious rights.

Learn more: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cantwell-v-Connecticut>  
<https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/273/cantwell-v-connecticut>

Further resources: New Haven newspapers, the searchable Hartford Courant

Tags: #law #religion

## Post War United States (1945-1968)

### **Griswold v. Connecticut—A Landmark Supreme Court Decision**

Estelle Griswold, executive director of Planned Parenthood League of CT, was convicted of having violated the Connecticut law (Barnum Act of 1879) that prohibited the use of contraception. The Supreme Court eventually ruled that this was unconstitutional because it violated the right to marital privacy. The case became an important precedent because it was the first to establish a constitutional right to privacy.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/taking-on-the-state-griswold-v-connecticut>  
Cornell Law School (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/381/479>)  
State of Connecticut Judicial Branch: <https://www.jud.ct.gov/lawlib/history/privacy.htm>  
Tags: #law #womenshistory

### **LGBTQ+ Activist Canon Clinton Jones**

Canon Clinton Jones was a pioneer in the LGBTQ+ community in Connecticut and inspired subsequent activist groups and communities. Born in Brookfield, Jones became an ordained minister and served at Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford. Canon Jones was one of a group who formed Project H to provide educational and counseling services for gay people in the Christian community. He provided counseling to gay and transgendered prisoners and created a Hartford chapter of the George W. Henry Foundation.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/canon-clinton-jones-a-revolutionary-figure-in-connecticuts-lgbtq-history>  
Tags: #socialreform #religion #LGBTQ+history

### **Senator Abraham Ribicoff**

Born in New Britain, Ribicoff served in the State Legislature before becoming a Congressman and US Senator. Ribicoff served in President Kennedy's Cabinet as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. To date, he was CT's first and only Jewish governor. As governor, he worked to repair the state following the Flood of 1955.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/abraham-ribicoff-kennedy-confidant-and-connecticuts-first-jewish-governor/>  
Tags: #government

### **Simon Bernstein and the 1965 Connecticut Education Amendment**

Until 1965, Connecticut did not guarantee its citizens a constitutional right to an education. Legislator Simon Bernstein was given five minutes to write an amendment that would guarantee an education for Connecticut's students. The amendment he wrote passed through the legislature and became a law, leading to significant changes in Connecticut's education system.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/five-minutes-that-changed-connecticut-simon-bernstein-and-the-1965-connecticut-education-amendment/>  
Tags: #socialreform #education #law

### **Helen Keller: Communicating the Importance of Disability Rights**

Helen Keller, who moved to Easton at the age of 56, stood for disability rights. She became the first deaf-blind person to receive a bachelor's degree. She also became an author and advocate for people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act was a direct result of her lifetime of advocacy.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/helen-keller-in-connecticut-the-last-years-of-a-legendary-crusader/>

Tags: #socialreform #education #law #womenshistory

### **The Battle for Cockenoe Island: A Turning Point in Eminent Domain**

A Native American known as Cockenoe or Checkanoe, signed a deed in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century giving an island to the fledgling town of Norwalk. Just over 180 years later, Cockenoe Island became part of Westport, when that municipality emerged from parts of Norwalk, Fairfield, and Weston. The Bridgeport-based power company United Illuminating (UI) acquired the island in the 1960s and announced plans to build a nuclear power plant on the island. On March 10, 1969, hundreds of Westport residents traveled to the Connecticut State Capitol to support a bill giving Connecticut towns priority over utility companies in cases of eminent domain.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-battle-for-cockenoe-island/>

Tags: #agriculture #commerce #law #nature #preservation #technology

### **Tobacco Valley: Puerto Rican Farm Workers in Connecticut**

In 1947, the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico established its Migration Division to arrange contracts between mainland farmers and unemployed Puerto Ricans. Division recruiters traveled the winding island roads in cars with bullhorns, distributed leaflets, and placed ads in newspapers announcing good jobs in the United States. Puerto Rican farm workers labored in many parts of Connecticut. They pruned trees and watered plants in nurseries in Meriden, weeded tomatoes in Cheshire, and picked mushrooms near Willimantic. Most, however, came to work tobacco in the Connecticut River Valley. Puerto Rican farm workers began to put down their own roots in Hartford and other cities throughout Connecticut. Together, with other Puerto Rican migrants who had come to labor in factories, these former agricultural workers helped form the nuclei of entirely new communities.

Learn more: <https://www.ctexplored.org/tobacco-valley-puerto-rican-farm-workers-in-connecticut/>

Tags: #agriculture #labor #latinahistory #latinohistory #latinxhistory #nature #socialreform

### **The Rise of the Black Panther Party in Connecticut**

In Bridgeport, José Rene Gonzalves of California organized the first Black Panther Party chapter in Connecticut. He soon started chapters in New Haven, Waterbury, and Hartford. After establishing local leadership, national figures like Ericka Huggins came to the state to run political education courses and organize Panther programs. "This is a revolution," Gonzalves told a Stamford crowd. "It's a revolution against the system that teaches a man to be less than a man. A revolution against ignorance, fear and hate." The Panthers' goal, he said, was to "take the strength from the few and give the power to the people."

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-rise-of-the-black-panther-party-inconnecticut/>

Tags: #blackhistory #education #law #socialreform #voting

### **Clare Boothe Luce Changed Perceptions about Women in Business and Politics**

Clare Boothe Luce won election to the United States Congress in 1942. She was the first woman to represent Connecticut in the U.S. House of Representatives. By the time of her election, she was already an established author, editor, and playwright. Recognized for her efforts to reshape perceptions of women in the realms of politics and society, Luce later became the U.S. Ambassador to Italy—the first woman to hold such an appointment to a major European country.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/clare-boothe-luce/>

Tags: #law #art #socialreform #womenshistory #travel #government

### **The U.S.S. Nautilus Passes Under the Polar Ice Cap**

Built in Groton in the 1950s as the first atomic powered submarine, the U.S.S. Nautilus was the first vessel to go from the Atlantic to the Pacific as it journeyed underneath the Polar Ice Cap on August 3, 1958. Its journey was big news at the time. The U.S.S. Nautilus was decommissioned in 1980 after a 25-year career and currently is part of the Submarine Force Museum.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/uss-nautilus-passes-under-the-north-pole>

Tags: #discovery #military #technology

### **Constance Baker Motley on the Frontiers of Expanding Black and Women's Civil Rights.**

Born in New Haven, Constance Baker Motley obtained a law degree and became a central figure in the Civil Rights Movement and worked on the NAACP's fight for school desegregation. Motley was the first Black woman ever elected to the New York State Senate, and in 1964 became the first Black female federal judge. She spent her later life living in Chester.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/people/constance-baker-motley>

Further resources: *Civil Rights Queen: Constance Baker Motley and the Struggle Equality* by Tomiko Brown-Nagin

Tags: #socialreform #womenshistory #blackhistory

**Businesswoman Beatrice Fox Auerbach**

President of G. Fox and Company, Auerbach was an innovator through labor reforms at her company. She instituted the 40 hour work week, five day work week, retirement plans, and workplace advancement for African-Americans. Auerbach was also a part of numerous philanthropic and civic ventures.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/beatrice-fox-auerbach-retail-pioneer-led-iconic-family-department-store/>

Tags: #women #commerce

**Governor Ella Grasso**

Ella Tambussi Grasso is Connecticut's first female governor and the first woman in the United States to become governor in her own right. She had previously served in the Connecticut General Assembly and the U.S. House of Representatives. Grasso was elected to a second term but after being diagnosed with ovarian cancer, she resigned her office, dying shortly afterwards in 1981.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/americas-first-woman-governor-ella-grasso-1919-1981/>

Tags: #womenshistory #government

## Contemporary United States (1969-present)

### **Anthropologist Gladys Tantaquidgeon**

An Ivy league-educated anthropologist, Mohegan Medicine Woman Gladys Tantaquidgeon dedicated her life to perpetuating the beliefs and customs of her tribe for the generations who would follow; she also championed the protection of indigenous knowledge across the United States. Her best known work was *A Study of Delaware Indian Medicine Practice and Folk Beliefs*. Tantaquidgeon was instrumental in helping the Mohegan tribe receive Federal recognition.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/people/gladys-tantaquidgeon/>

Tags: #womenshistory #indigenouspeoples

### **The Black Panther Trials in Connecticut**

The Black Panther Party organized to end the oppression of black people in the U.S. The first chapter in CT was founded in Bridgeport by José Rene Gonzalves of California. He soon started chapters in New Haven, Waterbury, and Hartford. After establishing local leadership, national figures like Ericka Huggins came to the state to run political education courses and organize Panther programs. In 1969 in New Haven, Black Panther Alex Rackley was tortured and killed by other Black Panther members because they believed he was an FBI informant. The resulting investigation swept up Black Panther leaders Ericka Huggins and Bobby Seale who were in New Haven at the time of Rackley's murder and were accused of ordering his death. Their criminal trial spurred large protests in New Haven and drew nationwide media attention. While the people who killed Rackley were sentenced to prison, the jury deadlocked on whether Huggins and Seale were guilty. Instead of going to a retrial, the judge dropped all charges against the two.

Learn more: [“Free Bobby, Free Ericka”: The New Haven Black Panther Trials - Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project https://connecticuthistory.org/the-rise-of-the-black-panther-party-in-connecticut/](https://connecticuthistory.org/the-rise-of-the-black-panther-party-in-connecticut/)

Tags: #blackhistory #education #law #socialreform #voting

### **Maria Sanchez: La Madrina and Advocate for the Puerto Rican Community**

Maria Sanchez played a pivotal role in improving the quality of life for Puerto Ricans in Hartford. Her newsstand served as a community gathering spot during the 1950s and 1960s, where immigrants discussed concerns about their treatment and lack of economic opportunities. In 1965, she helped found the Puerto Rican Democrats of Hartford. In the 1970s, she worked to establish bilingual education in city schools. In 1988, Sanchez became the first Latina elected as a CT State Representative. She may be best known for her role in opening communications between community members, police, and the City Council during the Comanchero riots in 1969.

Learn more: [Maria Sánchez, State Representative and Community Advocate - Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project](#)

Tags: #latinahistory #latinxhistory #womenshistory #education



### **Weaver High School Students and the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment**

Marcus Manselle, an African American student at Weaver High School, was suspended in 1969 for publishing and distributing a student newspaper that criticized the education system and advocated student rights. When administrators, city government, and a state judge refused to overturn Manselle's suspension, his fellow students went on strike. Their protests led to a resolution that allowed students to continue distributing non-sanctioned student newspapers.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/a-first-amendment-lesson-weaver-high-students-teach-their-elders/>

Tags: #education

### **Betty Hudson**

Betty Hudson (1931-2016) was a politician and activist who was Connecticut's first female state senator in the 1970s. Hudson championed both women's and LGBTQ rights during her tenure in office. Among her accomplishments was introducing a bill guaranteeing equal rights to gay people, which, while it did not become law, was the first LGBTQ rights bill to pass any legislative chamber in the United States. After her time in office ended, Hudson lived in Simsbury with her long-time friend and companion, Fran Roberts. She passed away in 2016.

Learn More: <https://cslarchives.ctstatelibrary.org/repositories/2/resources/562> This collection from the CT State Library and Archives contains both political and personal papers, including legislative records, photographs, publications, and more.

Tags: #government #law #socialreform #womenshistory #LGBTQ+history

### **U.S. Supreme Court case of Healy v. James 408 U.S. 169 (1972)**

This case involves none other than our own Central Connecticut State College (now University), wherein Provost Richard Judd and President F. Don James denied recognition to a chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society and banned it from meeting in the student center on grounds that it was a violent group. Case pitted student rights of freedom of assembly and speech against the responsibility to protect social order on a college campus. Ultimately, Lewis Powell ruled for the Court that CCSC's action was a violation of student rights, another bellwether of its times.

Learn more: <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/healy-v-james/>

Tags: #law

### **Lyme Disease**

In the 1970s, many people in the town of Lyme reported health issues like skin rashes, fatigue, and headaches. While doctors were noticing some patterns, nobody knew exactly what was happening to these patients or why. Two mothers from Connecticut pushed and advocated for the medical community to figure out what was going on. Dr. Allen Steere was starting a rheumatology fellowship at Yale around this time. He helped discover the bacterium that we now know to cause Lyme Disease. Later, another scientist (Dr. Willy Burgdorfer) connected the bacterium to deer ticks.

Learn more: <https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Epidemiology-and-Emerging-Infections/A-Brief-History-of-Lyme-Disease-in-Connecticut>

Tags: #medicine

### **Gay Rights Bill of 1975**

Betty Hudson, a freshman state senator from Madison, introduced a gay rights bill in 1975. The bill cleared the Senate, but not the House. The bill finally passed the legislature in 1991 and was signed into law. It bans discrimination against gays and lesbians in housing, employment, public accommodations. Sen. Hudson began her career as a selectman in Madison before being elected Connecticut State Senator of the 33rd District. She became Governor Grasso's advisor on Human Affairs, State Director of Welfare Offices and a member of the state's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

Learn more: <http://www.courant.com/courant-250/moments-in-history/hc-250-gay-rights-where-we-are-now-20140628-story.html>

Tags: #LGBTQ+history #law

### **Charles Tisdale Campaigns for Congress**

Best known as the director of ABCD - Action for Bridgeport Community Development – Charles B. Tisdale was a giant in Bridgeport's community. In 1976, he ran a congressional campaign for the House of Representatives, making him the first African American in Connecticut to win the democratic nomination. While he lost the race, the work done would catch the eye of President Jimmy Carter and see Tisdale serve at a national level within the administration for four years.

Learn more: <https://ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/110002%3A19514>

Tags: #blackhistory #law #voting

### **Connecticut Yankee and Millstone: 56 Years of Nuclear Power**

Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Company, Connecticut's first nuclear power plant, began commercial operation, in Haddam Neck, on January 1, 1968. It was a time of high expectations for the economic potential of peaceful nuclear energy. As a competitor with coal, oil, and other fossil fuels, nuclear power in the United States has had mixed success since the 1960s. While Connecticut Yankee operated for nearly 29 years, generating over 110 billion kilowatt hours of electricity, high operational costs led to its closing in 1996. Low oil and natural gas prices; increased safety regulation; periodic plant shutdowns; and public concern about the dangers of radiation leaks and waste were important factors.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/connecticut-yankee-and-millstone-46-years-of-nuclear-power-2/>

Tags: #agriculture #commerce #innovation #labor #nature #technology

### **Murder of Richard Reihl**

The 1988 murder of Richard Reihl, a gay man from Wethersfield, galvanized and mobilized activists in Connecticut to advocate for LGBTQ+ civil rights. Two teenagers associated with the “Reformers”, a group that targeted gay men, followed Reihl to his home where they brutally murdered him. Following Reihl’s death, protests, vigils and rallies took place throughout the state. The reaction to Richard Reihl’s murder helped galvanize support for the 1991 Gay Rights Bill.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/richard-reihl-the-hate-crime-that-became-a-turning-point-for-lgbtq-civil-rights/>

Tags: #LGBTQ+history #law

Further Information: Connecticut Museum of Culture and History's LGBTQ Timeline

<https://www.connecticutmuseum.org/lgbtqtimeline/> and the GLBTQ Archives at Central

Connecticut State University

### **Richard Lee's Urban Renewal in New Haven**

Richard Lee, as New Haven's mayor, set out to revitalize the city through urban renewal. While his efforts put 8,000 people out of their homes and lost 2,200 businesses, he was also widely celebrated for turning New Haven into a model city by nearly eliminating slums -- housing without adequate access to running water, electricity, and other vital utilities.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/richard-lees-urban-renewal-in-new-haven/>

Tags: #government

### **Sheff v. O'Neill Settlements Target Educational Segregation in Hartford**

In 1989, Milo Sheff -- a fourth grade student from Hartford -- and his parents, along with 17 other students and their parents, filed a lawsuit against the State of Connecticut, arguing that Hartford students did not have equal access to quality public education. This group of students and parents won their lawsuit, resulting in the establishment of the Open Choice program that created more magnet schools and encouraged suburban students to attend Hartford schools, and vice versa.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/sheff-v-oneill-settlements-target-educational-segregation-in-hartford/>

Tags: #education #blackhistory #socialreform #latinohistory #latinahistory #latinxhistory #law

### **Mohegan Tribe Receives Federal Recognition**

On March 6, 1994, the Mohegan people received recognition as a tribe from the U.S. government, a complicated process that took sixteen years to complete. This recognition meant that the Mohegans could reach an agreement with the State of Connecticut to pursue economic development to support their own people. They chose to build a destination resort and casino (Mohegan Sun) that provided jobs for tribal members. Federal recognition also meant that they could create their own constitution and system of self-government.

Learn more: [Mohegan Federal Recognition - Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project](#)

Further resources: [Native American Museum in Uncasville CT | The Mohegan Tribe](#)

Tags: #indigenouspeoples #government #law

### **Federal and State Recognition of Native American tribes**

Currently, two tribes (Mohegan and Mashantucket Pequot) are federally recognized, with an additional three (Schaghticoke, Paucatuck Eastern Pequot and Golden Hill Paugussett) recognized by the CT. Why is it so difficult to receive official recognition? Are there other tribes trying to gain official recognition?

Learn more: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/PS94/rpt/olr/htm/94-R-0170.htm>,

Tags: #indigenouspeoples #government #law

### **Education/ Instrucción Combats Housing Discrimination**

Three people from different backgrounds joined together to form Education/Instrucción, Inc. -- a group that investigated unfair real estate practices in Connecticut in the 1970s. The group discovered that real estate insiders were steering minorities away from predominantly white neighborhoods, while encouraging white homeowners to sell their homes when minority neighbors began moving in.

Learn more: <http://connecticuthistory.org/educationinstruccion-combats-housing-discrimination/>

Tags: #socialreform #latinxhistory #latinohistory

### **Finders Not Keepers: Yale Returns Artifacts to Peru**

The objects from the Inca site of Machu Picchu spent the past 100 years at Yale University in Connecticut, where they were at the center of a long-running international custody battle. The university repatriated thousands of ceramics, jewelry, and human bones from the Peabody Museum in New Haven to the International Center for the Study of Machu Picchu and Inca Culture in 2010.

Learn more: <https://www.npr.org/2012/01/01/143653050/finders-not-keepers-yale-returns-artifacts-to-peru>

Tags: #art #education #indigenouspeoples #law #latinxhistory #latinohistory #latinahistory #preservation #socialreform

### **Florence Wald, the Founder of Hospice Care in the U.S.**

Yale nursing professor Florence Wald caused a major shift in how terminally ill patients were treated. In 1974, she founded The Connecticut Hospice in Branford, the first hospice facility in the U.S., which provided holistic and comprehensive care for patients and their family members. In her system, medical professionals worked with spiritual leaders, therapists, social workers, and bereavement specialists to provide the dying patient and their families with whatever they needed for end of life care.

Learn more: <https://www.cwhf.org/inductees/florence-wald>

Tags: #health #medicine

### **Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly**

Born in 1936, Kennelly represented CT in Congress for 17 years, leaving in 1999 as the highest-ranking woman member in the history of the House of Representatives at that time. She exhibited an unwavering dedication to helping those in need, most notably children, the elderly, and working families, not only in Connecticut but around the world. Throughout her political career, Ms. Kennelly fought for benevolent causes with strong conviction, and continues to do so today as the president of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare in Washington, D.C.

Learn more: <https://www.cwhf.org/inductees/barbara-kennelly>

Tags: #women #government

### **Jim & Jane Henson's Impact on Early Childhood Learning**

Together the Hensons created and performed the Muppets, which became popular guests on TV shows and in commercials during the 1960s. The Hensons were already well-known, and living in Greenwich, when they were invited to contribute to a new educational television show designed for preschool age children called Sesame Street. Jim and Jane were very interested in how children learn from watching their own kids grow up, so they jumped at the opportunity. Jim created Big Bird, Grover, Bert & Ernie and other Muppets as characters that children could identify with. Sesame Street soon had a strong educational impact, especially on lower-income viewers, and became a cultural phenomenon.

Learn more: [Jim and Jane Henson Create the Muppets and More - Connecticut Explored \(ctexplored.org\)](http://jimandjanehensoncreatethemuppetsandmore-connecticutexplored.ctexplored.org)

Tags: #education #entertainment

### **The Anti-Income Tax Rally of 1991**

With the signing of the state budget passed by the Connecticut General Assembly in the early morning hours of August 22, 1991, Governor Lowell Weicker overturned two of the state's steady habits – political opposition to a state income tax and reliance on the sales tax as the main source of state revenue. His signing of the budget also set in motion events leading to what is regarded as the largest public demonstration in the state's history – the October 5, 1991, Anti-Income Tax Rally on the grounds of the State Capitol. Official estimates placed attendance at 40,000, while rally organizers claimed 70,000 citizens attended.

Learn more: <https://www.ctexplored.org/sample-article-the-anti-income-tax-rally-of-1991/>

Tags: #law #socialreform #commerce

### **Capital Punishment in Connecticut: Changing Views**

Connecticut's struggles with the issue of capital punishment date back to its earliest days as a colony. Starting in 1636 and ending in 2005, Connecticut witnessed 158 executions. Throughout this period, changing ideas about crime, punishment, and human rights played out in public debates about the effectiveness and morality of capital punishment.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/capital-punishment-in-connecticut-changing-views/>

Tags: #law #socialreform