

CONNECTICUT

HISTORY
DAY

Connecticut Topic List

2026-27 School Year

NATIONAL HISTORY DAY 2027

**INNOVATION
IN HISTORY**

IMPACT, INFLUENCE, CHANGE

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

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

Dutch vs. English

Both the Dutch and English began to explore and settle in the region that became Connecticut in the 17th-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 19th 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

Connecticut's Code of 1650

Written by Roger Ludlow, this was the first codification of the laws of the Connecticut Colony, including laws later 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 Whitefield 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. Whitefield'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

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

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 present-day 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

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 for the United States. 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 Roger Sherman, William Samuel Johnson (Connecticut's signers of the Constitution), and others such as Oliver Ellsworth actively participated in forming those documents.

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

Tags: #revolutionarywar #law #voting

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

Eli Whitney's Guns and Villages

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. Whitney's innovative approach to factory worker housing created a new model for CT's industrial towns, improving morale and serving as a model for future factory villages.

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

Tags: #technology #innovation

Mrs. Mary Kies: First Woman to Receive a US Patent

On May 5, 1809, Mrs. Mary Kies of South Killingly became the first woman in the United States to receive a patent. Her patent was for a new way to braid straw with silk and other threads in the

making of women's bonnets. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, many New England women were employed in the weaving of straw hats: a vital early industry. First Lady Dolley Madison – a great hat lover – praised Connecticut native Kies for her contribution to American hat making. The hats produced with this technique were sturdier than others, because Kies' method of using silk instead of straws in the seam held the cross-hatching together.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/first-woman-to-receive-us-patent-today-in-history/>

Tags: #technology #innovation #womenshistory #fashion

Eli Terry: Talented Clockmaker

Eli Terry was born in 1772 in East Windsor, CT, and began his career as an apprentice under Daniel Burnap ("the forerunner of manufacturing"). He received the first clock patent granted by the United States Patent Office in 1797, and later devised ways to use waterpower to operate his machines. He introduced mass production to the art of clockmaking, which made clocks affordable for the average American citizen.

Learn more: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eli-Terry>

Tags: #technology #innovation

Amelia Simmons and the First American Cookbook

Growing up an orphan in 18th-century America, Amelia Simmons overcame modest means and authored *American Cookery* in 1796, the first cookbook authored by a European American published in the United States. Printed in Hartford, CT, the book was so popular that it remained in print for 35 years.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/amelia-simmons-adds-a-uniquely-american-flavor-to-cooking/>

Tags: #innovation #womenshistory

John Fitch: Inventor of the Steamboat

Born on a small farm near Hartford, CT, John Fitch (1743-1798) grew up experiencing only two years of formal education. An avid learner, he overcame adversity and financial ruin throughout his life to invent the world's first steamboat.

Learn more: <https://craven-hall.org/fitch-steamboat-museum-the-legacy-of-john-fitch/>

Tags: #innovation #maritimehistory

Freedom Suits and the Limits of Gradual Abolition

Connecticut's 1784 gradual abolition law freed no enslaved adults, and children born to enslaved mothers remained bound until adulthood. Court records show how Black residents used petitions, writs, and lawsuits to resist enslavement one case at a time.

Learn more: <https://collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/node/1352898>

Tags: #blackhistory #slavery

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-pcctbxnngbdvzf5wpeiuncqxpq-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 19th 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> Primus's digitized letters at CT Museum of History and Culture; 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

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/abohistory/learn/education/John-Brown's-Raid-(U.S.-National-Park-Service).htm)

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

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

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

Simeon North: America's First Pistol Maker

Born in Berlin, CT in 1765, North unsuccessfully tried to enlist in the Continental Army during the American Revolution. He became an excellent craftsman and secured government contracts for the delivery of pistols. This led to his innovative ideas of identical components & construction for mass assembly.

Learn more: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Simeon-North>

Tags: #innovation #technology

Elias Howe: Inventor of the Sewing Machine

Elias Howe was born near Spencer, Massachusetts in 1819 and overcame a physical disability and financial limitations when he secured the first US patent for a sewing machine using a lockstitch design. Later in life, he established The *Howe Machine Co.* in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Learn more: <https://historycambridge.org/innovation/Sewing%20Machine.html>

Tags: #innovation #technology

Charles Goodyear: The Father of Rubber

After attending school in Naugatuck, CT, Charles Goodyear (1800-1860) started the first retail hardware store in the country in Philadelphia. After going bankrupt, he and his family discovered and patented the vulcanization process, which proved revolutionary for using rubber in commercial products.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/charles-goodyear/>

Tags: #innovation #technology

The Farmington Canal: New England's Big Project

The rise of the industrial age in the early 19th century saw the construction of artificial inland waterways for mass transport of goods. During the height of "canal fever," the Connecticut Legislature approved the construction of six canals in the state, with the Farmington Canal spanning 80 miles and earning the distinction of the most ambitious canal project in all of New England.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-farmington-canal/>

Tags: #innovation #technology #commerce

The Norwich & Worcester Railroad

Seeing the success of railroad projects elsewhere on the East Coast, Norwich's business leaders organized a stock company to construct a railroad linking Long Island Sound with Boston via Norwich and Worcester. Construction at Norwich began November 18, 1835, and the railroad threaded its way north through the Quinebaug Valley of eastern Connecticut to Worcester, then east to Boston. It was the product of skillful engineering, enormous manpower and huge sums of money.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/iron-and-water-the-norwich-worcester-railroad-story/>

Tags: #innovation #technology #commerce

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. \(museumofcthistory.org\)](#)

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 was of the first 6 Americans to earn a PhD in Physics in 1876. Bouchet was not the first Black man to enter Yale, but he was the first to graduate. He graduated 6th 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

Francis Pratt: Businessman and Inventor

Francis Pratt apprenticed as a machinist at a young age and met Amos Whitney working at the Colt Manufacturing Company in Hartford. In 1860, the duo began manufacturing machinery resulting in the founding of Pratt & Whitney. The company was formally incorporated in 1869. They manufactured guns and gun making machinery, as well as tools to make sewing machines, putting into practice the concept of interchangeable parts. Pratt & Whitney is credited with being instrumental in bringing about the adoption of a standard system of gauges in the United States and Europe.

Learn more: <https://cedarhillfoundation.org/notable-resident/francis-a-pratt/>

Tags: #innovation #industry #technology

Frederick T. Stanley and the “Hardware City”

Born in New Britain, CT, Frederick Stanley (1802-1883) grew a small local shop into one of the largest and most successful hardware companies in the world. By the turn of the century, the name Stanley was a fixture, not only in New Britain but at hardware stores across the country.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/stanley-works-for-new-britain/>

Tags: #innovation #industry #entrepreneurship

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>
<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

William Gillette: Sherlock on Screen

Actor and playwright William Gillette helped popularize a quieter, more natural acting style in place of the exaggerated performance common on nineteenth-century stages. His work also used theatrical effects such as sound effects, fade-outs, and quiet act endings.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/holmes-at-home-the-life-of-william-gillette/>

Tags: #entertainment

Hiram Percy Maxim's Amateur Radio Relay Networks

Early amateur radio stations could not communicate reliably over long distances. In 1914, Hartford inventor Hiram Percy Maxim organized operators to pass messages from station to station, helping turn scattered amateur stations into a national communication network.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/hiram-percy-maxim/>

Tags: #innovation #technology

James Bradford Olcott and Experimental Turf Science

In 1890, South Manchester horticulturist James Bradford Olcott began an experimental turf garden at the request of the Connecticut State Agricultural Experiment Station. He tested grasses from different climates in mapped plots and invented tools for cultivating them.

Learn more: <https://cslarchives.ctstatelibrary.org/repositories/2/resources/3>

Tags: Tags: #innovation #technology

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 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

Mary Townsend Seymour

In early 20th- century Hartford, Mary Townsend Seymour fought for civil rights and to ensure that Black women were included in the 19th 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

19th 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

Collecting War as It Happened: Connecticut's War Records Department

Connecticut created a War Records Department in the State Library in 1919 to collect military-service and home-front records before evidence disappeared. After a postwar questionnaire campaign produced incomplete results, the department changed its approach during World War II by using local committees and a common filing system.

Learn more: <https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/hg/militaryrecords>

Tags: #worldwar1

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 and signs, and driver's licenses.

Learn more:

http://www.simsburyfreelibrary.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=593357&module_id=136308

Tags: #transportation

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 and 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

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, the 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

The Connecticut Guide: What to See and Where to Find It

This 1935 travel guide, while not the first about Connecticut, was compiled as a survey of historic places for the Civil Works Administration and funded by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration as part of Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration within the New Deal. The Connecticut Guide became a national model.

Learn more: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102073783>

Tags: #entertainment #innovation

Windsor Tobacco: Made in the Shade

Commercial tobacco production has had a long history in Connecticut, beginning as early as 1640 when Connecticut farmers imported tobacco seeds from Virginia. By the mid-19th century the “Tobacco Valley,” which ran from Springfield, Massachusetts, to Hartford, Connecticut, had become a center for cash-crop production. By 1910, tobacco was the leading agricultural commodity in the valley: more than just shaping the landscape, the crop helped shape the region’s identity.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/windsor-tobacco-made-in-the-shade/>

Tags: #industry #commerce #agriculture

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 transgender 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

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-17th 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

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

John Enders: The Father of Modern Vaccines

John Enders (1897-1985) was born in West Hartford, CT and was the son of Hartford National Bank's CEO. After a wide range of schooling and professional experiences, he entered the biomedical field and gained a PhD from Harvard University. He would go on to win a Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine and work with a team to successfully develop a measles vaccine.

Learn more: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Franklin-Enders>

Tags: #medicine #discovery #health

Igor Sikorsky's Flying Machines

While many people contributed to the development of helicopter technology in the early 20th century, Igor Sikorsky (1889-1972) played a standout role in the advancement and manufacturing of helicopters in the United States. Born in Russia, Sikorsky fled to America following the Bolshevik Revolution and founded the Sikorsky Aero Engineering Corporation in 1923. On January 14, 1942, Sikorsky himself piloted the first successful test flight of the helicopter in America. The flight established a standard for the future development of the helicopter and in the process made the Sikorsky Aviation Company a leader in helicopter design.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/igor-sikorsky-and-his-flying-machines/>

Tags: #innovation #industry

Dr. Benjamin Spock: Raising the World's Children

Dr. Benjamin Spock and his book, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (published in 1946), forever changed how people raised their children. His innovative approach incorporated physical, psychological, emotional, and social aspects and shifted from parental control to parental guidance. Spock's anti-Vietnam war activism saw him convicted for encouraging young men to resist the draft.

Learn more: <https://connecticuthistory.org/benjamin-spock-raising-the-worlds-children/>

Tags: #health #medicine #education

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 1st 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

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 19991 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/lgbqtimeline/> 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

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

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

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 embrace. 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://ctexplored.org)

Tags: #education #entertainment

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

Barbara McClintock: Nobel Prize Winning Scientist

Born in Hartford in 1902, Barbara McClintock enrolled in the Cornell College of Agriculture at the age of 17. Genetics as a discipline was still new in the 1920s, but McClintock took to it immediately and developed a lifelong interest in the field of cytogenetics – the study of chromosomes and their genetic expression. She received Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1983 for her research. She is best remembered for discovering genetic transposition (“jumping genes”), a concept that is still fundamental to understanding genetics, medicine and evolutionary biology.

Learn More: <https://www.nobelprize.org/stories/women-who-changed-science/barbara-mcclintock/>

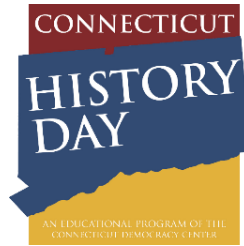
Tags: #womenshistory #science #innovation

Ralph Nader: Consumer Advocate

Born in 1934 to Lebanese immigrants, Ralph Nader established a number of advocacy organizations that took on issues such as nuclear safety, international trade and insecticides and radically transformed the fight for consumer protections. Nader ran for president several times the Green Party candidate.

Learn more: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ralph-Nader>

Tags: #law #socialreform #commerce



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