

What's new at the Connecticut State Library!

Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council

December 5, 2023, CSL, Van Block Facility

Hosted by Susan Bigelow, Allen Ramsey & Mel Smith

Overview:

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1. Personnel Update:

Many changes in Connecticut State Library staff; what a year it has been!

Museum of Connecticut History

In January 2023 Jennifer (Jenn) Matos was hired as the new director of the Museum of Connecticut History. Matos has more than 20 years of experience in the museum profession and most recently served as the Executive Director of the Noah Webster House & West Hartford Historical Society from 2014-2023.

In October 2023 Elizabeth Burgess was hired as the new museum curator. Beth is a museum professional with 20 years in the collection stewardship field and comes to the State Library from the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center where she served as Director of Collections and Research and earlier as Collections Manager.

Former museum curator David Corrigan, who retired in the Fall of 2021, continues in his role as a temporary museum employee and helping the new museum staff members in completing various inventory tasks and acting as a font of institutional knowledge.

Public Records

Nicole Besseghir, Public Records Analyst, started working in the Public Records Office in March 2023. She will be responsible for administering the Historic Document Preservation Grant Program, working with the Public Records Administrator on various vault construction & modification projects, and conducting Records Management webinars and training sessions. Formerly she was the Project Coordinator for the Connecticut Digital Newspaper Project.

Nicole Marino, Electronic Records Analyst started working in April 2023 with the Public Records office. She will be working on electronic records management initiatives such as a digital initiative that the State Library is working on with DAS/BITS; developing and revising records management policies, procedures, and regulations which govern public records in any format; and assisting in the development of records retention schedules for executive branch agencies and municipalities.

Mail Room & CSL Storekeeper

In early May 2022, our lone mail room attendant, left State Library service. In June of 2023 we were happy to gain Rafael Conde as our new CSL Mail Room Master! He is already making strides in clearing the backlog of surplus items at CSL!

CSL- Reference Services: A great deal of movement on this front!

In May of 2023 Mel Smith of the History & Genealogy Unit was promoted to the position of Library Specialist and will oversee the professional library staff of that unit. Mel has been with the State Library since 1994 and has been heavily involved with the indexing and digitization of many genealogical record collections and has spoken to many historical and genealogical groups about resources at the Connecticut State Library.

In early August of 2023, Lindsay Cawley of the Law & Legislative Reference Unit was hired to serve as the Division Head of Reference Services at the Connecticut State Library! Lindsay has served as a reference librarian for over 15 years and as a union steward for the agency. She brings a great deal of enthusiasm and knowledge to her new position as she leads the reference staff into the future!

Librarian II Susan Bigelow, who split her time between the History & Genealogy Unit and the Government Information Reference Unit, was shifted to full time in H&G in August and will supervise the paraprofessional staff. Susan will continue to help service the Connecticut Town Documents collections and will assist with other important projects. We are very lucky to have her vast knowledge and enthusiasm for local and state history as we move forward!

Back in July of 2022, History & Genealogy Unit Office Assistant Kristi Finnan retired and while H&G staff members have temporarily taken on the many aspects of Kristi's position; it is with pleasure that we inform you that interviews for her replacement have concluded and a replacement is imminent!

As reported last year, the position of Government Information Reference Librarian, previously held by Steve Rice, was posted for refill. We are pleased to announce that in September of 2023, Wafaa Razeq has joined the Government Information Services unit. She will be instrumental in harvesting born digital agency assets and preserving them for generations to come!

2. History & Genealogy Staff Indexing projects.

Pauper database

In late March a new Connecticut State Library staff created database, *Connecticut Paupers 1844-1907*, (ctatatelibrarydata.org/connecticut-paupers-1844-1907/) was added to our online database platform. This unique online Index to Town Claims to the Connecticut State Comptroller for payment for care of State Paupers contains over 11,000 entries, and indexes thousands of original documents found in the Connecticut State Archives as part of archival record group (RG) # 008, Records of the Connecticut State Comptroller. This index will allow easy access to documents that detail the lives of individuals and families facing an uncertain future in Connecticut during a time of great economic and social upheaval in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Early Connecticut Superior Court divorces

In late July a new database of divorce cases found in 31 volumes of early Connecticut Superior Court Records, 1716-1798 (ctatatelibrarydata.org/divorce-records-superior-court-record-books-1716-1798/) and consisting of over 1,000 entries was released. This index should offer a wealth information on colonial and early State of Connecticut families. In fact, many previously unknown early colonial marriages and divorces have been discovered that may solve many existing genealogical brick walls!

Ongoing indexing projects include the following:

Hartford County Jail Commitments, County Government Records (Archival Group #61)

Kevin Johnson is currently entering data into a new database that covers primarily the 1817-1902 time-period and consists of 7 boxes of records from our Country Records collection. The database will include

names of individual, court involved and date of incarceration as well as cause. A great deal of debt cases can be being found in these records!

Department of Social Services, Pauper Accounts, (Archival Group #19)

Barbara Austen is currently indexing a volume of State Pauper accounts that covers the 1877-1883 time period. This unindexed volume of important records of state supported paupers continues to highlight the lives of those in lower economic status who are often lost in other genealogical and historical records. It is hoped to add this information with two earlier such volumes, circa 1775-77 and 1809-1824 for future patron use.

H&G staff with assistance from our colleagues in the State Archives are continually striving to make available to our patrons' unique information online from the wide and varied resources found in the State Archives and Special Collections of the Connecticut State Library.

3. Digitization at CSL / LOC newspaper grant project.

The State Library continues to digitize and place items on-line to be discovered and accessed via the State Library online [Primo Catalog](#). You may also access the [Connecticut Digital Archive](#) (CTDA) directly as well to search and find items. Barbara Austen continues to add digitized objects to CTDA and I would encourage you to investigate this resource from time to time to determine what new materials have been added that might be helpful to you in your genealogical and historical research.

In the near future: Digitization of the [Governor Jonathan Trumbull Papers](#), 30 manuscript bound volumes of thousands of important personal and wide-ranging Connecticut governmental and military related documents. A rich primary resource for all manner of Connecticut history and events. About a half dozen volumes away from completion! away from being digitized!

Library of Congress Newspaper Grant Project

The fifth National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP) grant cycle concluded on October 31, 2023. During this cycle, we reached 500,000 newspaper pages digitized and publicly available in [Chronicling America](#), see: [chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/](#)

Of note, we expanded our geographic coverage into Windham County with the following titles:

- The Willimantic Journal, 1857-1911:
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016399/issues>
- Windham County Observer, 1905-1949:
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92051419/issues/>
- Putnam Patriot, 1908-1949):
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84022396/issues/>

The Connecticut State Library was awarded a sixth NDNP grant (2023-2025), and we'll be announcing the titles to be digitized in early 2024.

4. What's new in the Archives?

New Haven Court Records Project

Staff, interns, and volunteers including from CPGC and FamilySearch continue to process the New Haven County, County Court and Superior Court records for enhanced public access and use. You will find an online [subject guide](#) along with a published [blog](#) that chronicles a selection of the interesting, amusing, tragic, and sometimes infuriating cases found in these court records. Uncovering New Haven Project Archivist Sarah Morin participated in Connecticut Explored's Grating the Nutmeg podcast with Dr. Kathy Hermes (publisher, Connecticut Explored), and Beth Caruso (author, Windsor), which aired November 1.

They discussed the history of witchcraft and the exoneration project, civil court cases relating to witchcraft accusations, and the persistence of belief in witches into the eighteenth century: <https://gratingthenutmeg.libsyn.com/176-witchcraft-uncovered-new-discoveries-and-exonerations>. Sarah also wrote an article titled *Uncovering the Hidden Lives of New Haven* for Connecticut Explored fall 2023 issue. The article discusses what we have discovered about women, free and enslaved African American and Black persons, and Indigenous persons in the court records from 1700-1810.

To date, we have discovered 296 cases involving African-descended, African American, Black, Indigenous, Spanish, and multiracial persons or groups in the court records. Library Technical Assistant Todd Gabriel has scanned 955 court cases (approximately 4,162 pages) for upload to the Connecticut Digital Archive (CTDA). These cases involve African-descended, African American, Black, and Indigenous persons, as well as other selected topics of research interest.

Connecticut Charter of 1662 Conservation

State Archivist Lizette Pelletier continues to work to make the needed arrangements to have the Connecticut Charter of 1662 sent to the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) for treatment. This would allow for the preservation and digitization of this very important document to ensure access for future generations. Tentatively the Charter will be away for treatment sometime early next year.

Planning to Preserve Connecticut's Digital Government History Project: Archives Connection System Grant

The State Library was officially awarded a \$948,000 federal grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) on September 28, 2022. This grant was received through the Community Project Funding / Congressionally Directed Spending process (also known as "earmarks") as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 signed into law by President Biden on March 15, 2022. The funding will support the library's efforts to automate the transfer of electronic archival state government records to the CTDA, the State Library's digital preservation repository, and to research and plan for a digital repository to preserve records restricted by law.

The project team is currently working with vendor Slalom to automate the redaction process for Personally Identifiable Information [PII], Personal Health Information [PHI], and other confidential information contained in electronic state agency records transferred to the State Archives. Mark Conrad accepted the part-time grant funded Information Management Consultant position. Mark previously worked with electronic records in various roles at NARA and NHPRC for twenty-eight years. He started in mid-November.

Governor Dannel P. Malloy records

Digital Records Archivist Barbara Austen continues to process digital records the State Archives received from the previous gubernatorial administration. Approximately 60,000+ constituent email messages found in an PST email archive in a shared network drive space from a staffer in the previous administration have been converted to PDFs; reviewed for personally identifiable information (PII), personal health information (PHI), and other sensitive content; and redacted. All the reviewed and redacted messages are now available to the public in CTDA.

Norwich Police Department transcripts

Transcripts from a 1964 investigation into the practices of the Norwich Police Department were made available to the public after being restricted for 50 years per an agreement between the town and the Public Records Administrator at the time. They have been scanned are available at collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/30002%3ARG062-104 [CCCommittee](#).

New England's Hidden Histories: Colonial-Era Church Records Project

The State Library continues its partnership with the Congregational Library and Archives [CLA] in Boston on its *New England's Hidden Histories: Colonial-Era Church Records Project* which is funded through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities [NEH]. The project seeks to identify and digitize early Congregational Church records especially those involving Black and Indigenous people. The grant allocated funding to hire a part-time temporary digital technician to do the scanning and metadata preparation for the 6,000 images of sermons, faith commitments, excommunications, and other documentation found in our collections. Dan MacNeil, who is completing his public history degree at Central Connecticut State University [CCSU] and has worked on a couple of digitization projects there, accepted the position.

Some new acquisitions of interest for genealogists in the State Archives include:

Probate Records (RG #004, probate courts)

East Hartford Probate Court Records, record books, 1887-1975, 171 volumes, accession 2023-028

Municipal Records (RG # 62, Town & Borough Records)

Canterbury records, 1923-1989, 0.25 cubic feet, accession 2023-008. The records consist of beekeepers' records and permit forms, 1960-1989 and ledger (account book), 1923-1926.

Eastford voter registration cards, 1942-2016, 2 cubic feet, accession 2023-006

East Lyme school records, 6 cubic feet, accession 2023-015. The records are not open to the public per the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) except to students.

Montville school records, 1963 June-1972 June, 1 cubic foot, accession 2023-019. The records are not open to the public per the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) except to students.

Newington school records, 1969-1973, 0.5 cubic feet, accession 2024-007. The records are not open to the public per the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) except to students.

Stratford records, 1865-1999, 34 volumes, accession 2023-018. The records consist of grantor/grantee indexes; personal property indexes; annual reports and personal property; tax lien indexes; and dog license registry, 1878-1883.

Personal Collections (RG 69, Personal Papers/Records)

Abby H. Smith family correspondence, 1854-1879, 17 letters, accession 2024-0066. Abby was one of the infamous Smith sisters of Glastonbury who decided they could fight town hall. These are letters from Abby to her cousin Emma Austin, and between other family members. One particularly interesting letter from 1866 is critical of President Johnson and his treatment of the formerly enslaved.

Thomas Rose Papers, circa 1720-1730, 3 manuscript documents, accession 2020-033. Correspondence from Thomas Rose regarding encroachment by white settlers on land set aside for use by Pequot Tribal members in the Groton area. Documents attributed to Thomas Rose addressing Governor Joseph Talcott, the citizens of Groton, and the General Court. He advocated on behalf of the local Pequots to regain access to land set aside for them. A local man named Dean fenced in most of the best trees in an apple grove planted and tended by Pequot women. Dean also took six cart loads of apples when they were ripe denying them to the women. One document appears to be a draft petition requesting a land patent for the Pequots based on the boundaries "beginning at a small black oak then running on an east point to the Winthrop Pine swamp, then running south by the pine swamp to the south end, the running to Lanthorn Rd, the turning southward to the mouth of the Mistick River..."

The King's School (Bolton) cumulative student files, circa 1995-2007, 5 cubic feet, accession 2023-024, RG 196:001. The King's School was a private Christian school for grades 5 through 12 in Bolton that operated from approximately 1995-2007. The records are not open to the public per the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) except to students.

For information additional information about our archival holdings, please always consult the Connecticut State Library [ArchivesSpace](#) search engine!

Outreach: The State's Filing Cabinet, a three-part series sponsored by the Old State House featured staff from the State Library. Staff presented on the history of record keeping from quill pens to computers, records management concepts, archival appraisal, preservation, and access to our collections. You will find online recordings of the presentations at <https://ctstatelibrary.org/special-event-presentation/>.

5. FamilySearch and final words

Ongoing scanning of Connecticut State Library materials at the Van Block facility by new volunteers Kerry & Geraldine Buck. A second camera was placed in November 2023 and will be operated by new volunteer Jesus Villanueva.

The Connecticut State Library, in partnership with FamilySearch, has begun in 2022 a massive collaboration which will result in the digitization of millions of images of items from our State Archives and other book collections.

The following are the items are some of the materials that **have been digitized** to date this year!

- CT vital records, Arnold copy of Connecticut Town Vital Records used in the creation of the Barbour Collection of Connecticut Vital records.
- Coroner records for many Connecticut Counties
- Barbour Cemetery Records.... Not Hale!
- Manuscript Town Vital Records
- Connecticut Archives Series, Estates of Deceased Persons, Estates of Incompetent Persons and Estates of Minors

For a full listing, see our [Newly Digitized Records on FamilySearch!](#) page for links to the records!

Scanning now:

- CT vital records from RG #72 (Barbour II, 1845-1905) various towns
- CT Probate Court files (to 1940) various courts

Our correspondence (mail & e-mail) remains high from historical levels as we answered 1,831 such queries in fiscal 2023. This is up by about 125 from the previous year and reflects more remote usage of our staff and materials than in previous years.



**Wishing you all a safe and prosperous holiday season and wonderful New Year!
Hope to see you at the Connecticut State Library in 2024!**