

THE OWL

Vol 30 Issue 1

NEWSLETTER OF THE NORFOLK LIBRARY

January 2021

The Year of the Pandemic

The outbreak of Covid-19 last winter brought with it the sudden and unexpected closing of the Norfolk Library for a period of three months from March through May. As the pandemic spread around the world, the uncertainty surrounding this deadly disease called to mind the Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918. How the Library responded to that pandemic remained a mystery until a letter to Isabella Eldridge, founder of the Norfolk Library, was uncovered in the archives of the Norfolk Historical Society. The letter was written on October 25, 1918, by Ellis Sylvernale, a 22-year old soldier stationed at the Camp Devens military base, 35 miles northwest of Boston.

Ellis was the youngest son of Foster Sylvernale, a carpenter, and his wife, Jennie, of Norfolk. After graduating from high school, he worked as a library clerk at the Norfolk Library. He was inducted into the National Army in July of 1918. Perhaps because of his clerical experience at the Library, he was soon promoted to Army Field Clerk for the Adjutant General at Camp Devens.

By the summer of 1918, the Spanish flu had swept through the trenches of the Western Front. It appeared in the United States in mid-August, spreading through East Coast military bases, where young soldiers were being trained. Camp Devens was one such base. Seriously overcrowded, it had been built to house 36,000 troops, but contained more than 45,000 in early September. The Spanish flu struck there with a suddenness and virulence that had not been seen before. "These men start with what appears to be an ordinary attack of LaGrippe or Influenza, and when brought to the Hosp. they very rapidly develop the most vicious type of Pneumonia that has ever been seen ... It is only a matter of hours until death comes," wrote Roy Grist, a doctor at the Camp Devens hospital. "We have been averaging about 100 deaths per day.... We have lost an outrageous number of Nurses and Drs." Nearly 11,000 influenza cases were reported by September 23.

Influenza was little understood in 1918. The speed of infection, the devastating symptoms, and the typically robust health of its young adult victims confounded public health officials. Norfolk-born physician Dr. William Henry Welch, a pioneer in pathology, was sent to Camp Devens with a team of epidemiologists to investigate the outbreak. They found the medical situation "grave," and recommended measures to control the outbreak, the most dramatic being a halt to transfers in or out of Camp Devens until the epidemic passed. Performing an autopsy, Dr. Welch nervously remarked: "This must be some kind of new infection, or plague."

In Connecticut, the Spanish flu spread from New London north and west across the state. October marked the outbreak's deadliest month here, with more than 5,000 flu-related fatalities recorded. For four successive weeks, beginning on October 12, deaths totaled in excess of 1,000 per week, reaching a peak of more than 1,700 during the week of October 19. Ellis wrote to Isabella on October 25, expressing concern that she may have succumbed to the virus.

My dear Miss Eldridge,

Seeing the item in the Hartford Courant the other day that the Library had again opened after the influenza epidemic and had again been arranged for the winter as last winter as a coal saving measure, I said to myself, "Yes, and don't I wish I were back there to work this winter." Somehow or other any mention of the library gives me a homesick feeling.

I suppose the reading table is in the same place as last year, waiting to be cleared on Friday nights for the weekly prayer meetings along about January first and from then on. I remember Mr. Uffendale and I having argued the point last year that the Conversation Room was no place for the reading table, because as a place for little social talks and meetings, the Conversation Room had proved an absolute necessity.

I suppose it seems strange to you to have half of the

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FROM | THE | DIRECTOR



The year 2020 was like no other. In this issue of *The Owl* we take a look back at how the Norfolk Library has navigated the pandemic. From creating a “Porch Pick-up” station for curbside service in June to hosting a virtual carol sing in November, we have adapted as best we could to the new normal. I am deeply grateful to the library staff for their resilience and dedication during this challenging time and to the Trustees of the Library for their support.

As many of you know, the Library has always been a place where people have enjoyed gathering, in no small part due

to our beautiful historic building, which sets a very special tone for all who enter. So it has been difficult to have to close the Library to all but circulation activity. We hope that by next summer we will once again be able to welcome everyone to the Library for concerts, lectures, art receptions, book discussions, or simply to spend time here working, reading, and enjoying the company of others. In the meantime, our virtual programs have engaged friends, new and old, near and far, a silver lining of sorts during the pandemic, and I encourage you to join us. You may find a long-lost former neighbor in the Zoom grid!

Thank you for your patience and cooperation, and warmest wishes for a happy and healthy New Year.

Continued from page 1

building closed again. I know last year it took me quite a long time to accustom myself to it. There is one other thing I have wondered about too, though, perhaps it is no business of mine at all. I remember last spring all coal users were obliged to sign statements as to how much coal they would require for the winter of 1918-1919. I think I signed for 50 tons for the Library and I am wondering how much of this was delivered. As I say, you needn't answer this if you don't consider it any affair of mine, but I assure you I have lost no interest in the Library since I left Norfolk.

How are you feeling these days of October sunshine and warmth? I hope you weren't one of the victims of the influenza. Norfolk was pretty hard hit according to the papers. I guess Emilie told you that I was in Base Hospital for a couple of weeks although I wasn't sick for more than a couple of days. However, the fever left everyone pretty weak and it was about a week after I was discharged from the Hospital before I did any drilling. I can't say that it is my fault as I couldn't help leaving the window open too wide and in-flew-Enza.

There isn't much in the way of news around camp except that the quarantine was lifted from the Camp yesterday and

passes are again being issued for weekend. I am sitting in the Red Cross House writing this letter as many others are doing. A number of the fellows are singing the latest songs around a piano and it is quite noisy here so if there are many mistakes in this letter you will know the reason.

*Will you please remember me to your sister, Miss Mary? Trusting that this finds you well, I am
Sincerely your soldier librarian,
Ellis*

Ellis' letter sheds light not only on the effect of the Great War on the Library (the Great Hall was closed and coal was rationed) but also on weekly activities such as the prayer circle held in the so-called Conversation Room (now the Reference Room, see photo on page 8). In jest, he refers to his own bout with the flu, having left the window open too wide and “in-flew-Enza.” Of course, we are now advised to keep all of our windows open and rooms well ventilated to curb the spread of Covid-19.

By mid-November, the numbers of new cases and deaths in Connecticut had dropped sharply. While the epidemic would linger into 1919, the worst had passed. The Spanish Influenza killed tens of millions of people worldwide. An estimated 675,000 Americans perished, including some 9,000 men, women, and children in Connecticut.

Ellis Sylvernale remained at Camp Devens until his discharge on October 8, 1919. He was a lifelong resident of Norfolk, and served as postmaster and longtime chief of the Norfolk Volunteer Fire Department. Isabella did not catch the flu, but died the following year at the age of 70.

— Ann Havemeyer

NORFOLK LIBRARY STAFF

Ann Havemeyer, Director

MaryAnn Anderson

Leslie Battis

Eileen Fitzgibbons

Laurie Foulke-Green

Kelly Kandra Hughes

Chris Keyes

EXHIBITION

Norfolk Artists and Friends

We are pleased to continue our partnership with Norfolk Artists & Friends in displaying works of art on the library walls, while the monthly solo exhibits and art receptions are on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions. NAF is a membership organization of professional artists living and working in the Norfolk area. Members embrace a wide variety of visual arts including, but not limited to, painting, sculpture, photography, jewelry, and decorative arts. The winter show will be on display during the months of February and March, and sales will benefit the Library Associates and the free library programs they fund. If you prefer to see the art



Tom Hlas, "Fields of Gold" (Mixed media on wood panel)

from the comfort and safety of your own home, NAF will once again post a video of the show. Past videos have been superbly narrated by Peter Coffeen and posted on both the library and NAF websites.



The Eldridge Sisters

During the month of January, artifacts from the collection of the Norfolk Historical Society relating to the Eldridge sisters will be on display in the Great Hall. Isabella Eldridge, founder of the Norfolk Library, was one of five sisters, the daughters of the town pastor, Rev. Joseph Eldridge, and his wife Sarah Battell Eldridge. The three youngest sisters—Mary, Isabella, and Alice—contributed visibly to the enhancement of the town of Norfolk by providing not only the Library but also a town gymnasium, golf course, and a fountain on the Village Green, transforming the village into a fashionable center serving residents and summer visitors alike.

NORFOLK LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

Jack Dillon, *President* Louise Davis, *Secretary*
Jennifer Almquist, *Vice Pres.* Paul Madore, *Treasurer*

The Associates is a group of dedicated volunteers who contribute their time and talents to support the Library. They organize the art exhibits and annual book sale; decorate the Library with a tree and beautiful poinsettias for the holidays; help plan events; and raise funds for the cultural programs offered by the Library. The group welcomes new members. Meetings are held the first Tuesday of the month at 4:00 p.m. now via Zoom. Please email the Associates at 4lasecretary@gmail.com for the link. It's a great way to connect!

NORFOLK LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Sally Estock, *President*
Rita Freedman, *Vice-President*
Eliza Little, *Secretary*
Steve Getz, *Treasurer*

Adam Heller Michael Selleck
Coleen Hellerman Barbara Spiegel
Ruth Melville

VIRTUAL | PROGRAMS

There's a popular meme making the rounds of social media these days: virtual meetings are basically modern séances.

"Isabella, are you here?"

"Make a sound if you can hear us!"

"Is anyone else with you?"

We can't see you! Can you hear us?"

We've certainly had our fair share of Zoom-related snafus during the pandemic. Nothing too harrowing, and thankfully, we learned early on that any Zoom event scheduled requires an extra 15-minutes on the front end to ensure our technical difficulties are resolved before our patrons show up.

Virtual presentations enable people from all over the country to join us, and this has turned out to be one of the more fun aspects of Zooming our Library presentations during the pandemic. Opening the waiting room a tad early gives us extra time to connect with others we haven't seen in a while.

For example, Margaret O'Malley, a former Norfolk resident and Library Board member who now lives in Michigan, attended the Modern Calligraphy Workshop with Granby professional lettering artist Debby Reelitz on December 2. The greetings of delight that echoed throughout the Zoom room among Margaret and friends who hadn't seen her in years brought joy to many of us in attendance, even those of us who didn't know Margaret! It was a "pure delight," says Margaret of her experience. Kristin Mudge, another calligraphy attendee, agrees. "The main reason I had signed up was that I wanted to spend time doing something fun with a group of people, and I knew that a number of local friends would be there. However, one of the great things about Zoom is that participation is not limited by location. It

was such a nice surprise to see Margaret!"

Our Norfolk Knitters continue to meet every Friday via Zoom. While this winter nothing will replace gathering around the warmth of the fire in the Great Hall, the group has now grown to more than 30 knitters from New Mexico to Massachusetts, all busy

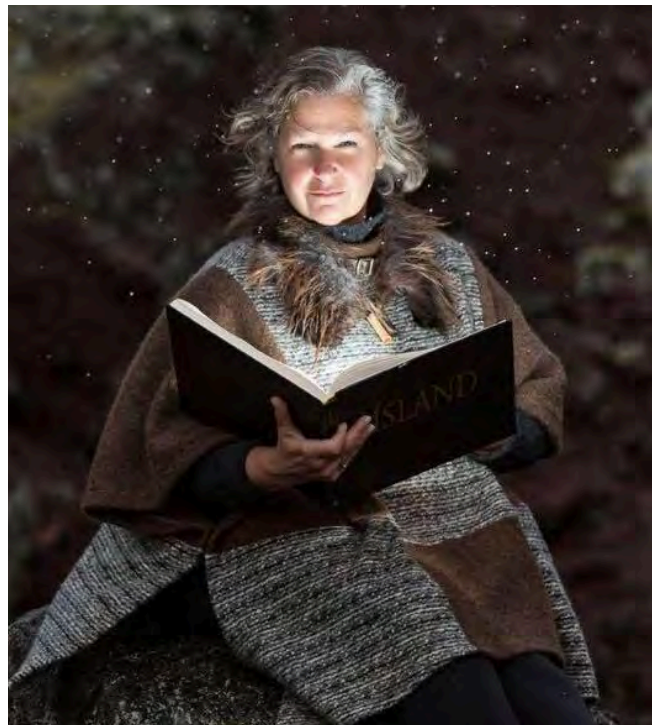


Kate Atherley, photo by Amy R. Singer

knitting hats for Prado de Lana "Warm Heads, Warm Hearts" project for families in need. They were especially pleased to participate in a Zoom with legendary knitter Kate Atherley, author of numerous knitting books, who brought them tips for the craft from Toronto.

Other fall programs included online history lectures on witchcraft and taverns in colonial Connecticut; a storyteller celebrating the centennial of Washington Irving's *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*; an inside look at the exhibition "Making the Met" with curator Laura Corey; a personal tour of Greenwich Village through its literary and artistic history; and National Book Award 2020 nominee Christopher Beha in a lively conversation with author Courtney Maum. In addition, we offered in-house multi-week educational opportunities centered on a variety of Great Course lectures, all available to Norfolk patrons via hoopla.

Our most popular programming event was "Iceland Through My Heart" with Gerri Griswold on December 3. Since the pandemic has prevented many of us from traveling, Gerri's presentation was a welcome respite of wonderlands far away. We were dazzled by Iceland's perpetual sunsets in summer; awed by the icy and stony topography; charmed by the Icelandic ponies, goats, and sheep; and amused by her tour guide anecdotes. When told that she holds the



Gerri Griswold in Iceland, photo by Art Bitnick/Reykjavik Grapevine

VIRTUAL | PROGRAMS

distinction of being our most popular pandemic presenter to date, Gerri graciously deferred the honor to her beloved Iceland. "I can only credit Iceland's Elves and Huldufolk (Hidden People) with choosing me as their vessel to deliver the message about Iceland's staggering beauty, wonder, quirks, and lovely people."

Barbara Gridley, one of our frequent patrons and Zoomers, is thrilled with the variety of offerings at the Library. She's especially keen on the genealogy virtual drop-in "office hours" with staff member and family researcher Laurie Foulke-Green. In addition to finding out that she is second cousin eight times removed to John Adams and John Quincy Adams, she learned of her husband's ancestral uncle, Captain Edward Cahill, who raised the first African-American Infantry Unit in Michigan during the Civil War. Widowed six years ago, Barbara realized she knew nothing about her husband Bill's genealogy. Considering that he was vice-chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Tuskegee Institute (now called Tuskegee University), she is fascinated by the influence of Cahill's legacy on the social justice issues that kept her husband's attention while alive.

Stay tuned for more of our virtual programs this winter and spring by visiting our website at www.norfolklibrary.org, where you can sign up for our weekly e-newsletter Night Owl for the latest details. Hope to see you in the Zoom room!

— Kelly Kandra Hughes

Community Connections

Grab a cup of coffee, and join us from 10:30-11:30 a.m. on the first and third Wednesdays of the month in January, February, and March to chat and connect.

No registration needed. Zoom link will be available on our website - www.norfolklibrary.org.

Each hour will include a 15-20 minute presentation on a self-care topic, such as stress reduction, preventing falls, and ways to stay active in winter.

Remaining time will be for discussion and support. Let's help each other get through the COVID-19 winter!



Upcoming Programs

The Great Backyard Bird Count

Sharon Audubon Center

Thursday, January 28, 5:30 p.m. via Zoom

Join Sharon Audubon Center's staff naturalist, Bethany Sheffer, as she tells us about the Great Backyard Bird Count. Each year over President's Day Weekend in February, tens of thousands of everyday bird and nature lovers throughout North America take part in this fun Community Science activity. A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this event is an opportunity for families, students, and people of all ages to discover the wonders of nature in backyards, schoolyards, and local parks, and, at the same time, make an important contribution to conservation.

Anyone can take part, from novice bird watchers to experts, by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and reporting their sightings online.

Norfolk Library Book Group with Mark Scarbrough

The Norfolk Library Book Group has moved online via Zoom on select Thursdays each month. Traditionally, Mark has chosen a "big winter novel" to take us through the darkest months of the year. This year's selection is Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875). Visit our website for details.

Author Talk: Janice Nimura, *The Doctors Blackwell*

Date TBA

We are thrilled to welcome Janice Nimura later this spring to discuss her forthcoming biography *The Doctors Blackwell: How Two Pioneering Sisters Brought Medicine to Women – And Women to Medicine*, due to be released January 19. In 1849 Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman in America to receive an MD. Together with her sister Emily, a brilliant physician in her own right, she founded the first hospital staffed entirely by women in New York City. "This major new biography celebrates two complicated pioneers who exploded the limits of possibility." (janicenimura.com)

CHILDRENS | PROGRAMS

This fall we put away our swim suits and sandboxes and wondered.... What can the Norfolk Library do for the kids in town? We came up with a constellation of stellar ideas, but in the world of Zoom, would they appeal to kids? We decided to give it a try.

We began with a series of Sweet and Savory baking classes, which I loved! Katie Shepard of Food Explorers taught us how to make scones, pasta from scratch, and chocolate peppermint pop-tarts, all the old-fashioned way. The children were very focused and enjoyed being able to reap the benefits of their creations.

By the middle of October with Halloween fast approaching, we invited families to help decorate the Library with a "pumpkin parade." Each family was given a complimentary pumpkin, complete with carving utensils, and asked to return a Jack o' Lantern. The carved pumpkins arrived in time for the weekend parade, and the windows of the Children's Room glowed with the magic of Halloween.

Later in the season, we offered two art workshops from Second Nature Arts, based in Great Barrington. For the first workshop, children repurposed items from around the house to create a meaningful mobile. In the spirit of Thanksgiving, Susan Smith encouraged the kids to think of someone for whom they are grateful as they fashioned their mobiles and then to give the mobile to that person. In the second workshop, we made winter luminaries out of a simple jar and some lovely papers provided by the teacher. Families dropped off the lanterns to brighten the Children's Room for the longest night of the year, the Winter Solstice.

As the chilly air set in, we celebrated Picture Book Month in November. Illustrated children's books are favorites of mine. They are the ones we read to our little ones, and sometimes we can almost recite them by heart. Some are longer with more complex storylines, often about historical figures and events, or artists and musicians and the twists and turns of their youth. For the challenge, we asked each family to read 12 picture books, and offered to pack up a selection chosen especially for the ages and interests of that particular family. All families that participated received a gift card from the Berkshire Country Store. We are happy to continue this service of selecting books for you. If you are 5 or 95, these beautifully-illustrated books are perfect to share with your family.

Looking ahead, please check our website and the Botelle

newsletter to see what is on the horizon. If your child likes theatrical dance, our own Rockette Amber Cameron will be teaching the kids to dance to the music of Mulan and Lion King this winter.

We hope our programs continue to engage children in playfulness, creativity, and the spirit of being together even if it is on a Library Zoom.

— Miss Eileen



This year the library Christmas tree stood in the side alcove of the Great Hall, and it was beautifully decorated with paper ornaments made by Botelle students in Shana Bazelmans' art class.

DEWEY | DELIGHTS

In September, I began the project of updating the Norfolk Library's nonfiction section, which meant dusting off my memories of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). While the DDC can seem intimidating, it does a great job of putting books in order by subject. Melvil Dewey, an 1874 graduate of Amherst College, created the system when he was hired by Amherst immediately after his graduation to reclassify its library collections. He published the DDC in 1876. At that time, most libraries in this country assigned a shelf position based on the book's date of acquisition. The DDC assigns shelf positions by subject. There are 10 subject groups that each have 100 numbers assigned to them (600 to 699 for example). The Dewey system is adaptable to today's titles, as decimals allow infinite expansion for topics, some of which were not dealt with in the 1870's. *American Moonshot* (Douglas Brinkley, 2019), for example, has a Dewey Decimal number of 629.4097. The Norfolk Library was founded in 1888 and seems to have started using this new system right away. Today it remains the most widely used classification system in the world.

One of the perks of working in the nonfiction section is handling each book. So many books on so many interesting topics! In the 100's (Philosophy and Psychology), there is a how-to book for witches. Want to learn how to cast a spell? *Essential Spellcraft* is for you. A popular book in the 200's (Religion) is *Create Your Own Religion*. Really? You can do that? The 600's seem to have the highest number of outdated books, which makes sense because this section is about technology. While not all outdated books need to be withdrawn, books about medicine are best kept up to date. *Know Your Drugs and Medications* was published 30 years ago. Medicine has changed a lot since 1991!

A good library collection represents the community that it is in. *The Joyful Community: an Account of the*



Dr. Richard Barstow competes in a Norfolk bonspiel (tournament).

Bruderhof is an example of a book that reflects Norfolk's unique relationship with the Deer Spring Bruderhof (Society of Brothers), a Christian community that lived on Westside Road for 40 years. There are 16 books in the Library's collection about the Bruderhof. On the other hand, curling books are few and far between—and we have a curling club in town! There are just two books about curling. *An Analysis of the Art of Curling* by Hugh Edwards Weyman was first published in Canada in 1945 and claims to be the first authentic text book on curling ever published. *Sports Illustrated Curling* (1973) was donated by the late Dr. Richard Barstow, a veteran curler. We have updated the collection by ordering *Bare Bones Stones* (Ingersoll, 2018), which is a guide for new curlers and for non-curlers who want to impress their friends by knowing why the players sweep.

Join us for our nonfiction challenge and see if you can find your own Dewey Delights!

—Leslie Battis

The 2021 Nonfiction Challenge!

We challenge you to read one book from each of the Dewey Decimal sections each month. At the end of the month, we can gather in a Zoom call and talk for a few minutes about the books we read. In January, we'll take on the 600's: technology, medicine and health, gardening, guns, cookbooks, pets, and papermaking to name a few topics. Give us a call to sign up and get a complete list of subjects in this section.

THE OWL

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www.norfolklibrary.org
ph. 860 542-5075

HOURS

Monday	10:00 am	–	5:00 pm
Tuesday	10:00 am	–	5:00 pm
Wednesday	10:00 am	–	5:00 pm
Thursday	10:00 am	–	5:00 pm
Friday	10:00 am	–	5:00 pm
Saturday	10:00 am	–	2:00 pm
Sunday	Closed		

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The “Conversation Room” is pictured in a photograph taken by Marie Kendall about 1900. The fireplace overmantel was recently retrieved, after being removed when the room was remodeled as the Harden Reference Room, and is in storage at the Library.