

THE OWL

SUMMER/FALL 2022

Norfolk – Town with a “Strange” Personality

A century ago, Norfolk was emerging from the heyday of its summer resort years. Many of the hotels would soon close their doors. The internationally recognized Norfolk Festival concerts would end in 1925, and in 1927 the Central New England Railroad would stop all passenger service to Norfolk. It was now time to take stock of the town's identity, as was done in the late 19th century when Norfolk was faced with the decline of industry and had to reinvent itself as a summer resort to remain vital.

The writer Philip Curtiss (1885-1964) did just that. His family had lived in Norfolk for six generations. Born and raised in Hartford, he began work as a reporter for the *Hartford Courant* before returning to Norfolk in 1917 to live full-time in the old family homestead on the Curtiss farm at the corner of Mountain Road and Golf Drive. There Curtiss wrote articles for *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, *Scribner's Magazine*, and *Ladies Home Journal* along with novels and plays. He was described in *Who's Who Among North American Authors* as an author of “general character writing, novels of village life, and light comedies or burlesques in mystery style.” (vol. IV, 1929-1930, 257).

Curtiss's move to Norfolk was part of a statewide trend of decamping to the country, made possible by improved transportation, decentralization of employment opportunities, and advances in technology. Sound familiar? The rural population of Connecticut doubled between 1900 and 1950. The United States Census recorded a seventy-five

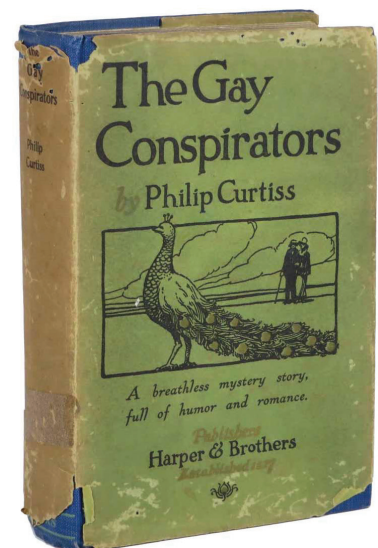
percent increase in the population of Norfolk between 1920 and 1980.

In a June 1935 article for *Harper's Monthly Magazine* entitled “They are moving to the Country,” Curtiss addressed the migration of city people to this “mountain village.” He defined these “back-to-landers” as residents who did not maintain a home elsewhere, and counted them to make up nearly ten percent of the families in Norfolk at the time. Ostensibly perplexed by the question of why city residents would choose Norfolk as their primary home, Curtiss humorously tapped into the legend of the town's isolation and forbidding natural environment, and began to develop a revised identity for the town:

“To realize the full significance of the new state of affairs it must be noted that our particular town is somewhat isolated and quite severe in its climate. The nearest large city is New York, which can be reached only by a drive of nine miles, followed by a journey of three and a half hours on the train, or by a drive of twenty miles and a train journey of two and a half hours. A temperature of thirty degrees below zero is not unusual and for weeks at a time the thermometer will hover between ten below and ten above.”

Yet it was not only the town's isolation and natural environment that played into its identity, it was something more, something Curtiss found hard to put into words. In an article for the local magazine *The Lure of the Litchfield Hills*, Curtiss described Norfolk as a town with a strange, distinct personality:

“The real truth is that from the earliest times the town of Norfolk seems to have had a strange, distinct personality of its own, a thing quite impossible to explain. Whether it lies in the thin, clear quality of its mountain air (which is physically noticeable as you drive up to Norfolk from any direction), whether it lies in the



The Library has six novels by Philip Curtiss, published between 1915 and 1929.

rugged beauty of its tumbled, wooded hills, or whether it is some local spirit which is impossible to analyze, one cannot say, but it is distinctly there.”

Curtiss painted a picture of the town, aligning it with his romantic image of colonial days when those who sought richer farm lands left town, and those who remained chose the “dignified, quiet” social life:

“There have never been, for any long
continued on page 6



The Norfolk Library has a small staff who work well together as a team. This spring we bid a fond farewell to one of our team members, cataloging librarian MaryAnn Anderson. After an unbelievable 50 years of service on the library staff, MaryAnn retired in April.

She joined the staff as a circulation assistant in 1972, two years after moving to Norfolk with her husband, Bruce, newly-installed pastor of the Congregational Church, and their four young sons. Over the course of her 50 years at the Library, MaryAnn worked with five directors, and I asked them to share their thoughts in letters to MaryAnn for a memory book.

Louise Schimmel (Director 1979–2000) commented on MaryAnn’s cheerful disposition, her ability to read people and give them the library service they needed, and her kindness. She wrote: “For her utter dependability, intelligence, and careful work I always respected and admired MaryAnn. For the lessons she taught me with words and by example I have always been grateful.”

Mary Lou Wigley (Director 2000–2004): “50 years! What a tremendous accomplishment. How fortunate for the town of Norfolk and for all of us who had the opportunity to work with you. I remember the very first day I started working at the Norfolk Library in November of 2000. I called a staff meeting and you were sitting directly across from me at the table. The first question asked (by you) was “What

changes do you plan to make?” I thought “uh-oh.” I’d better be on my toes with this employee. . . you adjusted so readily to all those new computer operations. Your work was always done smoothly, competently and on time.”

Rich Dann (Co-Director 2004–2012): “Your work ethic and friendly smile are admirable. I always enjoyed going upstairs for one reason or other and ending up having wonderful conversations with you. In my mind, I can still see you with a huge pile of books needing to be cataloged totally covering your desk and you peeking out over the top with a smile.”

We will miss MaryAnn, but we are very grateful for the knowledge and experience she brought to her job and for the years she was part of our library team.

—Ann Havemeyer

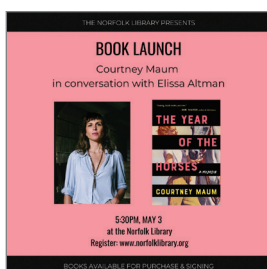
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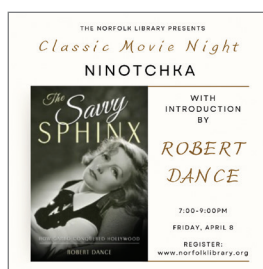


Use the QR code to follow us. Look for QR codes on our posters to access registration for our events. Programs are also listed in our weekly Night Owl e-newsletter. Subscribe on our website!

Books



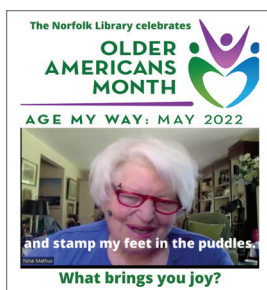
Cinema



Concerts



Fun



New Books



Resources



Art Exhibits

July Babs Perkins, *Moving Landscapes*
Babs Perkins is a cultural documentary and landscape photographer. She has traveled extensively in the Balkans, Ireland, and Iceland, creating parallel and complementary bodies of work in both styles as a means of better understanding the people and places she is exploring. Please join us for a reception for the artist on Sunday, July 3, from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., graciously hosted by the Library Associates.

UPCOMING EXHIBITS

For details and registration, please visit our website.

August Betsy Rogers Knox
September Heather Neilson
October Janet Andre Block
November Catherine Moore
December Sergio Villaschi

Mindfulness with Miranda Lee

Fridays in July

Mindfulness can be defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.” In this 4-week course, mindfulness practitioner Miranda Lee will teach participants how to live a more mindful life and equip them with the tools they need to help build resilience against the challenges of day-to-day life. Some gentle movement (no special clothing or equipment required) will be incorporated into the course. This course will be offered from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. on Fridays from July 8 to July 29 before the Library opens to the public.

Books & Boots

Read the selected book, then lace up your hiking boots and hit a Norfolk Land Trust trail to discuss with Kelly Kandra Hughes. Bring water and insect repellent. All hiking abilities welcome. This program is in partnership with the Norfolk Land Trust.

Saturday, July 30, 8:30 a.m.: *The Hawk's Way: Encounters with Fierce Beauty* by Sy Montgomery (Rain date – Aug. 13)

Sunday, August 28, 4:30 p.m.: *Migrations* by Charlotte McConaghy (All CT Reads book) (Rain date – Sept. 11)

SAVE THE DATES!

A Gala Cocktail Party

Friday, August 26, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Mark your calendars now for a festive summer evening gathering under the tent. Hors d'oeuvres, signature cocktails, and wine will be served. Tickets are \$35 at the door. Remember, your generosity supports the Library's many free special events, films, concerts, book discussions, children's programs — and more.

Annual Norfolk Library Book Sale

August 27 & 28

We are accepting books for the annual book sale this summer. You won't want to miss the opportunity to browse through these amazing books, donated from Norfolk's private libraries. Proceeds benefit the Norfolk Library Associates and the Library's free cultural programs they fund. Many thanks to Bridget Taylor and the volunteers who make the annual book sale such a success.

Haystack Book Festival

September 30 – October 2

A stellar lineup of author talks is planned.

A New Deal for the Nursery:

How Golden Books Changed Children's Books Forever

Thursday, Oct. 13, 7:00 p.m.

In the 1940s, Golden Books revolutionized American children's literature by making quality picture books available everywhere for just 25 cents each. In this illustrated presentation via Zoom, renowned historian Leonard Marcus will tell the behind-the-scenes tale of the visionary enterprise that brought together top-flight artists, writers, and marketing wizards to make Golden Books a cultural icon and household name.

French New Wave Film Series

Filmmaker Diego Ongaro will introduce three masterpieces of French cinema. Discussion will follow the screenings.

Thursdays at 7:00 p.m.

Oct. 20: “The 400 Blows” François Truffaut (1959)

Nov. 3: “Breathless” Jean Luc Godard (1960)

Nov. 17: “A Summer's Tale” Eric Rohmer (1996)

Bach & Beyond

Summer is here! With abundant sunshine and longer days, most of our Zoom programming is on hiatus until the fall. In the meantime, let's look back at some of the highlights of our winter and spring online programs.

For six weeks across January and February, humanities scholar Mark Scarbrough and professional pianist Anchie Donn delighted over 150 patrons with "The Goldberg Variations in Conversation." As Scarbrough said during one of his lectures, "Listening to the Goldbergs makes me feel more human." The Goldbergs in Professor Donn's mesmerizing hands transcended time, space, and Zoom; many attendees expressed grief and loss once the series was over.

Another emotional experience was the virtual world premiere of Kirk Sinclair's American Discovery Symphony. This illustrated, musical travelogue took us on a 10,000-mile journey on the American Discovery Trail with Kirk and Cindy Sinclair. With themes of beauty, culture, kindness, joy, and journey, American Discovery Symphony brought many of us to tears as we witnessed the love the Sinclairs have for hiking, humanity, and each other.

Although our virtual visits to the Galapagos Islands with Alex Green and rafting the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon with Barbara Spiegel and Tom Hodgkin didn't bring anyone to tears (that we know of), they did evoke wonder and awe. From smiling seals to raging river rapids, vivid photographs brought each of these trips to life. If you're worried you missed out on some wonderful travelogues, have no fear! All three of our travel videos are available on the



Barbara Spiegel and Tom Hodgkin tackle the rapids on the Colorado River.

library's website or the Norfolk Library YouTube channel.

Our most popular YouTube video with over 165 views is John Garret Thew's Copper Weathervanes. Who wouldn't want to listen to John as he tells stories about the making of his renowned weathervanes? In addition, over 100 people attended the program live, including old friends greeting John from near and far. The recording of artist Kate Gridley's studio tour is also not to be missed!

Moving from art to history, we offered several programs that took us into the past. Dianne Pierce educated us about slavery at Monticello, and the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame celebrated Connecticut's African-American Heroines. My favorite heroine was Constance Baker Motley, who decided to become a lawyer after reading that Abraham Lincoln believed the law to be the most difficult of professions. Despite receiving no encouragement from anyone in her family, she became a lawyer and represented Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She was the first Black woman to sit as a federal judge.

Some of our online programs taught us new skills. We offered a four-week American Sign Language Basics class in

January and in February we offered A Perky Pairing: Coffee & Fine Chocolates. Fifteen lucky patrons received a free chocolate and coffee tasting kit and then joined us as Kim Larkin from Klassic Kreations led us on a taste testing extravaganza of flavors.

Our longest online program lasted 10 weeks! A cohort of patrons joined together to attempt Yale University's Science of Well-Being course — the most popular course in the University's history and freely available through Coursera. At the end of the 10 weeks, everyone who finished the course reported increases in their objective happiness scores, as well as their subjective feelings of well-being. We now join the almost 4 million people across the world who have completed the course.

If you're disappointed that you missed out on so many wonderful online programs these past six months, make sure you subscribe to our Night Owl newsletter. The sign-up can be found on the Library's homepage. Once subscribed, you'll receive the Night Owl in your inbox every Friday morning, complete with links to register for upcoming Norfolk Library programs. We'll be Zooming again in the fall!

—Kelly Kandra Hughes

Feeling Blue?

Merriam-Webster lists no fewer than nine definitions of the word “blue.” In the context of the question above, it clearly means “melancholy.” In the 19th century, it sometimes meant “intellectual.” William Thackeray wrote: “the ladies were very blue and well-informed.” But it is the 18th-century usage of the word *blue*—rigidly moral—from which the title of one of the more interesting books in our non-fiction collection is derived.

BLUE LAWS

Our edition of *The Blue Laws of Connecticut* was published in 1861, more than 200 years after the 1655 New Haven Code of Law on which it is based. One might wonder why 200-year-old laws would be reprinted. According to the preface, “a new impression was deemed desirable to meet the frequent calls which were made for it.”

The New Haven Code of Law prohibited business from being conducted on Sundays and guarded against personal moral offences such as public drunkenness: “No person licensed for common intertainment, shall suffer any to drinke excessively viz. above halfe a pinte of wyne, . . . or to continue tipling above the space of halfe an houre” on penalty of five shillings.” This would certainly raise some good tax revenue if implemented today!

It is unknown when the term “blue laws” was first used to describe the New Haven Code of Law, although several theories have been advanced. But Connecticut’s blue laws received international notoriety after their inclusion in Reverend Samuel Peters’s *General History of Connecticut* (1781). Having been forced by the Sons of Liberty to leave Connecticut in 1774, Peters relocated to England and published 45 blue laws that he claimed were Connecticut’s law of the land. Some were outlandish: “Every male shall have his hair cut round, according to a cap” and when caps were not available the Puritans were to “use the hard shell of a pumpkin, which

being put on the head every Saturday, the hair is cut.” His work reinforced the contemporary English view of Americans as fanatical dolts in need of repressive legislation.

While Peters’s account of the New Haven Puritan government’s code has been proven unreliable, there are a few laws that were substantially true: “married persons must live together or be imprisoned”; “a wife shall be good evidence against her husband”; and “the selectmen, on finding children ignorant, may take them away from their parents and put them into better hands, at the expense of their parents.”

TREE LOSS

From notorious laws in Connecticut, we turn to notable trees. *Trees of Note in Connecticut* by Katharine Matthies was published in 1934. The trees included in the book are “noted for their size, beauty, or age, or some incident connected with their history.” One example is the Lincoln Oak in Litchfield: “grown from an acorn from a tree at Lincoln’s grave in Springfield, Illinois, this oak was planted in front of the library as part of the Bicentennial Celebration of the town in 1920.”

When I saw this book, I wondered how many of these trees survived the hurricane of 1938 that destroyed so many trees in New England. My question was answered by another book: *Connecticut’s Notable Trees* by Glenn D. Dreyer (1989). The Notable Trees Committee tried to locate all the trees mentioned by Matthies. Litchfield county was the most protected county in Connecticut during the 1938 hurricane with 12 of the notable trees weathering the storm. All of the dead trees were elms weakened by the Dutch Elm disease. In the rest of the state, only 5 of the 45 notable trees were still alive in 1989.

The website *Connecticut’s Notable Trees* lists the trees from Matthies book and shows that 7 notable trees are still alive today. These trees are all in the town of Litchfield, and one of them is the Lincoln Oak.

—Leslie Battis

"Strange" Personality... continued

period, any of those vivid, blatant sources of gayety which make and unmake the reputations of more gaudy resorts. There has been no beach—for obvious reasons; no large hotels, no sporty or smart set, no race track, no airplanes, no motor-boats, and a dance in Norfolk is usually about as exciting as a strawberry festival. The result has been in modern days what it was in Colonial—that those who demand gayety in visible forms or those who expect a definite result for every effort have speedily left town. Those who have remained are those who, precisely, have found some heart-tug in the region itself—who have loved its hills, its woods, its dignified, quiet social life, or who, without asking a reason, have been caught by that indefinable thing that is known as "Norfolk."

Curtiss's article appeared in 1930, the year that his friend and fellow writer Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Lewis's most famous book *Main Street* had been published in 1920 to great acclaim and was juried for the Pulitzer Prize, although it lost to Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence*. *Main Street* satirized small-town life in Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, a fictionalized version of Sauk Centre, the author's hometown, and it was an enormous commercial success.

A year after its publication, Lewis visited Curtiss in Norfolk. The two writers were the same age and had begun their careers working for newspapers. One can only imagine the conversation that must have ensued between them as they sat in the parlor of the Curtiss home in the small town of Norfolk. Lewis did sign his name on the ceiling of the parlor, as had other writers, but he did not record his impressions of Norfolk small-town life. He did, however, give inscribed copies of his book to several town residents, including Augustus P. Curtiss, who operated a local livery service and picked up Lewis at the

train station. He wrote:

"To. Mr. A.P. Curtiss with the wish that I could practice my art as well and as generously as he does his! Sinclair Lewis. August 3, 1922."

For a closer look at Norfolk's Main

Street at this time, be sure to visit the Norfolk Historical Museum this summer, where the exhibition "Main Street: A Look Back 100 Years" is on display weekends through mid-October.

—Ann Havemeyer

Teen Project

In an effort to engage the teen population, we are in the planning stages for a project that will give teens a dedicated space in the Library and teen-centered programs. Our hope is that teens will come to view the Library as a place they can gather for educational, social, and community engagement, as well as a place that values their insights and ideas. The project includes:

- A designated space with teen friendly furniture, a cyber bar, printer, and monitor
- A Teen Advisory Council, comprised of five local high school students, to inform us of desired teen services and programs. TAC members will be paid a monthly stipend for a one-year commitment. Recruitment is through applications available on our website, due July 30.
- Teen nights in the Library, using the Great Hall as a place to gather

NORFOLK LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

The Associates is a group of dedicated volunteers, who contribute their time and talents to support the Library. They organize monthly art exhibits and raise funds for the free cultural programs offered by the Library. The group welcomes new members. Meetings are now held in the Library the first Tuesday of the month at noon. Please join us!

Louise Davis, *Co-President*
Galene Kessin, *Co-President*
Elizabeth Scheel, *Vice-President*
Lise Read, *Secretary*
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Leslie Battis
Eileen Fitzgibbons
Laurie Foulke-Green
Kelly Kandra Hughes
Christopher Keyes
Hannah Silverman



Corner Club resumes in the fall.



A friendly goat from Lost Ruby Farm visited the children in the Merry Makers afterschool story hour this spring.



Children painted sea creatures for "Oceans of Possibilities." Look for them on the library lawn!



Norfolk Library SUMMER READING 2022



June 18 Happy Summer Beach Party! Caribbean Vibe Steel Drum Band
Saturday @ 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.
Wear island attire. Costumes from The Little Mermaid musical are welcome! Plan to picnic on the lawn. Dessert will be served.

Meandering Mondays @ 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.

June 20 Soro Bindi African Dance Workshop with Iddi Saaki (limit 25; registration required)

June 27 Sea Creatures Shadow Puppet Workshop with Sova Puppet Theater (ages 6 and up, limit 15; registration required)

July 11 Look Who's in the Water! With Riverside Reptiles

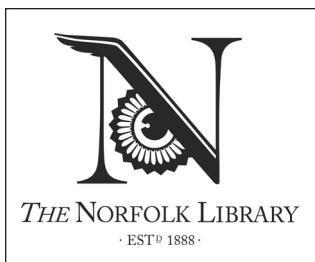
July 18 Bubble-mania: Comedy ... with a Drip!

July 25 Hip Hop Dance Workshop with Tiger (limit 25; registration required)

August 1 Midsummer Night: World Class Frisbee Show Cake will be served.



Our science and art-based summer reading program "Oceans of Possibilities" is geared towards children from ages 5 to 13 years old. If you are a little younger or older than this range, please join in if you wish. Each child must be registered. After registration, children will be given an adventure map, stickers, and a set of challenges to complete. There will be prizes for every child who registers and completes 12 or more challenges. And be sure to come to our Meandering Monday events. It's a great time to check out books! Any questions? Please email Miss Eileen at efitzgibbons@biblio.org



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Monday 10 am–7 pm
Tuesday 10 am–5 pm
Wednesday 10 am–5 pm
Thursday 10 am–7 pm
Friday 10 am–5 pm
Saturday 10 am–2 pm
Sunday 1 pm–4 pm

Local Postal Customer



At the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we looked for ways to express solidarity with the Ukrainian people. We honored their extraordinary spirit by celebrating their country's rich culture and literature with two programs: a performance by the Nadiya Ukrainian Dancers in the Great Hall; and a Reading of Poetry by Ukrainian authors via Zoom. You can access a recording of the poetry program on our Youtube channel.