A town as American as they made them

Exceptional exhibition at Gunn Museum examines Washington through its artifacts

The Rev. Gordon Hayos, pastor of the Congregational Church in Washington, Conn., in 1839 excommunicated John Gunn for allegedly calling the church ‘the synagogue of Satan.’

BY TRACEY O’SHAUGHNESSY

I

n 1839, abolitionist John Gunn of Washington, Conn., invited the social activist, Abby Kelley, a Quaker, to speak against slavery in his hometown. It did not go well.

The Rev. Gordon Hayos of the Congregational Church denounced Kelley as a “Jehova” and a “servant of Satan.” For his part in fomenting the controversy, Gunn, the elder brother of Frederick, was excommunicated from the church, for, in the words of Hayos, calling his church “a three hundred headed monster without soul or conscience — and the synagogue of Satan.”

A replica of that incendiary letter, and pictures of the two men, come midway through the Gunn Historical Museum’s exhaustive and spellbinding “Washington: An American Town.” The new exhibit, which explodes with 1,000 artifacts, five interactive iPads and three video screens, is as sophisticated and interactive as you will see in any local history museum in this state. In part, that stems from the museum founded in 1893 and now in its 126th year of operation.

The Brass Mill Center, heralded in today’s edition of The Sunday Republican, is a 24-page special section, Autumn Leaders/Almanac, with insights about the coming season and the activities that give this state a flourish.

This cover story deals with the history and traditions of Octoberfest, particularly its association with beer. With the proliferation of craft breweries in Greater Waterbury and Litchfield County, there are plenty of places to quaff a toast in the true spirit of Octoberfest.

And speaking of beer, don’t forget the wine, with a story about fall activities at one area winery in New Hartford. Ford is another hallmark of fall, from pumpkins to peaches, plums to pears, from tart to decided, and apple pies to apple fritters.

The tailgating story includes a handy checklist on things to pack when heading off to party before the game. Activities abound in the fall, from zip lining above the trees at one of the state’s casinos, to taking in the fall foliage to getting ready for Halloween.

There’s also a story that looks at some of the remaining country fairs in our area, ending with the Riverton Fair, which is celebrating its 110th anniversary this year.

Along with the change of colors comes the threat of hurricanes and other weather events, including snow, so there’s a story that highlights some of the things you can expect from fall weather.

And in the back of the section is a handy series of calendars highlighting some of the coming events this fall.

The Sunday Republican, SEPTEMBER 1, 2019

BY TRACEY O’SHAUGHNESSY

W

hen I first came to Waterbury 25 years ago, the mall was our promised salvation. The Brass Mill Center, heralded as an economic Paraclete, promised delivery from the post-industrial ruins that was Scovill Manufacturing Co. The old economic model — industry — would be replaced by another — retail.

In the past, we grew by making things. In the future, we would prosper by buying them. Anybody who didn’t see those shaky foundations was either desparate or naive and probably had a little bit of both. Retail jobs never paid what factory jobs did. The hours were erratic, the benefits were iffy and the career trajectory was bumpy.

Still, the most cynical could not have predicted what’s being reported. The Retail Apocalypse. Once rock-solid retailers — J.C. Penney, Radio Shack, Macy’s, Sports Authority, Payless, Sears — have all either closed or filed for bankruptcy. Profits for mall-based clothing retailers — which include trendy shops like Gap, as they made them

A town as American

As we move through the fall season, we can expect to see a variety of events taking place. Whether it’s the Halloween festivities, or the autumn foliage, there’s something for everyone.

For those looking for a spooky experience, there are Halloween-themed events throughout the area. Whether it’s a haunted house or a fear-inducing attraction, these events are sure to get the adrenaline pumping.

Meanwhile, outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy the beauty of the fall foliage. The trees change colors and create a picturesque landscape. This is the perfect opportunity to take a walk in the woods or go on a scenic drive.

As we move further into the season, we can expect the proliferation of craft breweries in Greater Waterbury and Litchfield County. With a variety of flavors and styles, these local breweries offer a unique taste experience.

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**GUNN:** Extraordinary town

**IMAGE SHOWS PAGE FROM A TWO-PAGE SPREAD**

**CONNECTICUT LIFE**

July 2, 1964, page 2

**2,764 Wore Skirts.** It had a short but momentous history. 

In 1912, the town of Washington began a mapping project to survey its slaves in Connecticut. A map showing the distribution of slaves in each town was based on a census taken in 1790. Beneath the story was a photograph of a leading slaveholding family.

**ELIJAH D. MORGAN, SLYVAN SEYFRIED, ANDERSON WILSON**

Of Lebanon was the top-selling politician, with 28. Rufus put the list with 7.

Continued from 1E

the vision of his creator, cura- tor Stephen Bartholomew, and its design date back to the turn of the century. Equally fantastic is the site and Colonel Cedar of Sandford. But without the leadership of the local town, the enthusiasm of the many individuals who contributed artifacts, time and energy to the project, and a workforce of many dedicated hands, the Gunn Historical Museum would never have come to be.

**THE EXHIBIT, MAKEABLE BILLS is al- most over. Great from the start, and the curator, Sallie Dutcher of Washington, has a beginning of the depth of its collection — 1,000 artifacts, including 15,000 pieces — that tell sto- ries of Washington's long and eventful and, at times, intimate. This is not history from a distance but close encounters.

Take this story from the life of Abner Al- mor Mitchell, who was draft- ed in the Civil War in 1862, only months after President Abraham Lincoln signed into law the coun- try's first draft law. It was a call that capped the Civil War, which had been going on for three years at the time these words were burned together in the Wash- ington town hall.

When Almor Mitchell was sum- moned to battle, he left his town, the recognizing him as a patriot, was the antithesis of the traitorous, offered to send a substitute. Almor Mitchell refused. He joined the 10th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry in August 1862. It was the first letter of Almor Mitchell, and his remain- ing service in the Civil War was the battlefield.

On July 18, 1864, Abner Mitchell was shot by a sharp- shooter in the Civil War and died two days later, leaving a widow and his five children. It was two years after his last letter from the battlefield.

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Algorists have found the earliest evidence of habitation in the area dates back to 10,000 years ago. That makes Washington one of the state’s earliest Native Amer- ican sites discovered in New England. Yet, the 18-acre- mile town, which began in 1673 as Pomperaug Plant- ation, is not as exceptional, in the curator’s mind, as typical. Its founders bartered, traded, offered to send a substitute. Almor Mitchell refused. He joined the 10th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry in August 1862. It was the first letter of Almor Mitchell, and his remain- ing service in the Civil War was the battlefield.

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