

THE MUSEUM INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

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Last spring in cooperation with the History Department of Western Connecticut State College, the Danbury Scott-Fanton Museum and Historical Society launched a new program...a college credit course called "Museum Internship".

The society had long contemplated how it could be of value to history students at the college, both as a museum and as a place where individuals could actually have some museum and historical research library experience.

With attendance at museums soaring in recent years it seemed to us that it was important to expose history students to the interesting possibilities that exist in museum work. We reasoned that students had been exposed to teachers and teaching for most of their young lives but that very few of them had even been behind the scene of even a small museum such as the Scott-Fanton.

Were students in our local college aware of the many facets of museum work...not just research but exhibit planning, cataloging of a variety of materials...archive, manuscript and artifact? How could we be of value to the students and at the same time reap some benefits from having them work here?

In our museum library and archives we had some materials students had prepared over a period of years as part of their college work under the direction of Dr. Truman A. Warner, a Western Connecticut State College faculty member and archivist for the society. Dr. Warner is also currently the society's president. These papers and theses had been of great value to researchers using the museum's library.

We also felt that we had untapped resources that could be developed with serious students of history with time to devote to such study. Our exhibit techniques is a very fundamental way because we are a small museum where all members of the staff, volunteer or paid, are exposed to a variety of work experiences.

Dr. Herbert Janick, Chairman of WesConn's History Department, it seems, had been thinking along the same lines. And so starting last spring term the first museum interns, Lorraine Ostergren and Allison Roth began working at the Scott-Fanton.

It was decided that each of these pioneer students would research and set-up an exhibit. Lorraine decided women's role in early American and 19th century society would be her topic, but she eventually narrowed it down to "Women and Work in the 19th Century". Allison took a local subject of special importance to the community, James Montgomery Bailey, The Danbury Newsman, who had compiled Danbury's only "History". Although most Danburians knew at least that

there existed "Bailey's History of Danbury" very few knew anything about the man who wrote it. Allison developed her exhibit nicely, and at the same time, did future researchers a great favor by partially re-indexing the book - if any of you have used it as a reference you know how difficult it is to locate the simplest of facts.

Both the college faculty and I were very impressed with their exhibits. There were not only good for a first try but just plain good...and our visitors enjoyed the displays which is important too. We felt that we had made a good beginning.

It would have been tempting to keep to the same format, but we felt that the program should be very flexible and so when Constance Van Horne applied to take the course and work in the museum's library we decided to give that a try...from the museum's standpoint this was one intern we needed, perhaps even more than she needed us.

Mrs. Van Horne immediately went to work on a new acquisition of the society, two hundred photographs of old Danbury assembled by the late Albert Hamilton. She has nearly completed the job and has made referral cards for them, done a great job of cross-referencing them and storing them in acid-free boxes and folders. Although Mrs. Van Horne had some library experience she had never worked with photographs and so this has been a learning experience for her. The photographs had to be retrievable to a variety of users...those putting up museum exhibits, individuals searching out bits of family history, businessmen trying to establish some of the pictorial history of their present business, and of course, providing illustrative material for schools and various publications that requested such memorabilia of the town.

William Devlin, the other intern, is spending most of his time in the record rooms of the Danbury Probate offices or in the vital statistics of the Town Clerk's office. He has chosen to find the early craftsmen who lived in Danbury along its main street - then called "Town Street" at the turn from the 18th to the 19th century.

John Rider who built the museum's original building as his home in 1785 was a carpenter and cabinet-maker so Devlin has named his project "John Rider's Danbury". Rider died in 1833 so this gives the researcher a period of nearly fifty years. His is a very tedious and painstaking job requiring a lot of control to keep to his subject. Those of you who have had an opportunity to search town records, old maps, and newspapers know how tempting it is to just read everything because "everything" is so fascinating to a history buff.

At the end of this term I hope that we can sit down and evaluate what we have been doing, perhaps meet with the History Club or have a general discussion group meeting to decide where we go next. Any suggestions???