As We Were: New Haven, 1862

The New Haven Colony Historical Society was founded in the troubled year of 1862, when the very existence of the Union of States was in doubt.

New Haveners realized that war with the South was a reality. The previous year nine Southern states had withdrawn and formed the Confederate States of America. On January 9, 1861, Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor was fired upon by the rebels. The surprise attack forced the Union soldiers to surrender and pull down the American flag.



President Abraham Lincoln immediately called for 75,000 men to enlist in the army to fight for the Union.

In New Haven, amidst displays of patriotism, there were fears that the Union would be dismembered. Some residents sympathized with the South and were called "copperheads," a name applied to members of the Democratic Party who were opposed to the war.

There were concerns in homes as families discussed the likelihood of fathers, sons, and brothers joining Lincoln's army.

As battles raged up and down in the South that year, there were some Northern successes, such as the victory of the ironclad *Monitor* over the Confederate ship the *Merrimac*, and some failures; Union forces were severely repulsed by the Confederates at Secessionville. Many people were on edge as to the outcome of the conflict.

Meanwhile, New Haven women brought food to the Union Army's sick and wounded soldiers at the General Hospital, as well as to the fresh troops leaving from Camp English at City Point and to the Second Regiment under General Alfred Terry, assembled at Brewster Park.

Citizens continued their daily routines with troubled hearts, but life had to go on.



In 1862, New Haven was the largest city in Connecticut with a population of some 40,000, a cultural mix of Americans (U.S. born, 53%), Irish (24%), Germans (18%), and Russians (13%), plus Italians, Polish, and African Americans. There were 4,500 homes, 232 factories, 507 stores, four banks, and five insurance companies.

Under the administration of Mayor Harmanus M. Welch (1860-63), great advances were made in the comfort and welfare of the people. Wells and cisterns had been replaced by cast-iron mains and lead pipes, which carried water to every neighborhood. The New Haven Water Company began to pump water from Mill River into a reservoir on Prospect Hill. A regular Police Department was instituted, twelve policemen making up the force. Fire companies were already in operation with regular paid members. Eli Whitney Blake's stone crusher had, ten years earlier, facilitated the smooth paving of roads.

Most important in the social consciousness of the community was the gradual abolishment of slavery by Congressional and Presidential acts.



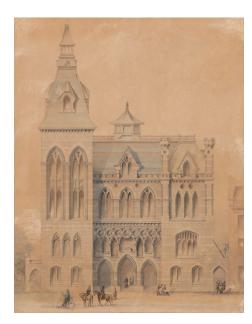
In spite of this period of change and uncertainty, one man was inspired to establish an organization for the preservation of the city's long history. The Connecticut Historical Society, founded in 1825, provided an example for such an enterprise.

Horace Day (1816-1902), New Haven's superintendent of public schools, was already a forward-looking educator, accepting the new graded school system and introducing music to the public schools. He gathered like-minded Yankee entrepreneurs to petition the Court of Common Council with a proposal to form an association to collect and preserve documents and relics of the past and current history of the ancient New Haven Colony: Branford,

Guilford, Milford, New Haven, Stamford, and Southold.

The petitioners also requested that the organization be quartered in the new City Hall on Church Street.

In Mayor Welch's office on November 14, 1862, the mayor and the aldermen granted all the proposals and assigned a room and vault on the third floor of the building. A constitution was duly adopted with a significant bylaw that required the directors to prepare papers on some historical subject to be read at each meeting. Attorney Henry White (1803-1880), the Historical Society's first president, delivered the inaugural paper titled, "The New Haven Colony."



The New Haven Colony Historical Society was chartered by the Connecticut General Assembly on June 17, 1863.



Early gifts included Noah Webster's desk, a model of the *Constitution*, Benedict Arnold's account book, *Sage's Genealogical Dictionary*, election sermons, law books, almanacs, and a fork and knife taken from the tent of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown. In 1918, William Scranton Pardee, a descendant of the Morrises, bequeathed the family's colonial home, famously burned by the British in 1779 during the raid on New Haven, to the Historical Society.

After being housed in several buildings, including the English Memorial Building (removed for Yale's Silliman College) on Grove Street, the Historical Society finally settled into the present structure at 114 Whitney Avenue in 1930. Since then its mission has been fulfilled and grown far beyond the founders' vision. The collections include more than 10,000 decorative and fine art objects; an extensive photographic archive (75,000 prints, negatives, film); and the holdings of the Whitney Library, which exceed 30,000 volumes and 320 manuscript collections, as well as architectural drawings, maps, broadsides, newspapers, and other items. Exhibitions, lectures, and publications bring 375 years of New Haven history to nearly 7,000 visitors annually, including some 2,000 schoolchildren.

The commitment and traditions of the New Haven Colony Historical Society continue with its new name, the New Haven Museum, as the organization celebrates its 150th Anniversary.

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