

# Building Cultural Connections

## *Fieldwork in Coastal Fairfield County*

**S**INCE OCTOBER 2021, Impact Coordinator Janet Evelyn (below) has been working with the Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program (CCHAP) and the Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County (CAFC) to learn more about community expressive life and cultural heritage in the region. She has been speaking with artists, documenting art forms, conducting interviews, and looking for opportunities to strengthen the statewide network of support for cultural heritage arts.

The Connecticut Office of the Arts provided this six-month opportunity to partner with a knowledgeable local culture leader to build connections in coastal Fairfield County. Janet Evelyn is the Executive Director of the Norwalk International Cultural Exchange (the NICE Festival), an annual event that celebrates global cultural heritage through local and regional arts experiences. As part of her work as Impact Coordinator, she reached out to some of these same artists



as well as explored new cultural communities.

She says, “Doing this work is like being a global explorer, you literally get to experience and learn about cultures from around the world. I don’t think there are too many other places in the world where you can get an intimate knowledge of so many different cultures like the opportunity we have here in the United States. It is to be celebrated. I’ve learned that all groups take delight in preservation and cultivation of their unique attributes. Many of these groups have worked very hard to preserve their cultural heritage through the creation of language and art schools. You see this in small and marginalized communities that can easily lose their history and cultural heritage to dominant influences.”

Janet points to The Organization of Chinese Americans, whose Fairfield County Chapter has schools that teach Mandarin and Cantonese, as well as elements of Chinese traditional dance and customs.

The Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation actively sustains and maintains their history and culture as one of the original Indigenous groups still living in this area.

In the course of Janet Evelyn’s work as Impact Coordinator, she has met many amazing cultural heritage artists. Here are some you should know:

**Alison Wang** is the Creative Director of Connecticut Chinese Dance in Stamford (above). The all-female members of the group come from different towns and professions across Connecticut and are united by their commitment to performing traditional Chinese dance.



**Pascale Millien-Faustin** (above) is a Haitian-American living in Fairfield County. Pascale is one of the founding mothers of the Haitian Women Association of Connecticut, home of the Anacaona youth enrichment program that teaches meaningful Haitian cultural traditions, including how to speak Creole. She is the author of *Tim Tim: Jaden Kreyasyon*, a book of short stories in Creole.



**John Lawrence** (above) is a fiddler who plays with the group Long Meadow in Fairfield County. Originally from Yorkshire, England, John honed his skills in playing bluegrass over 20 years living in North Carolina. He plays a violin with five strings, which gives it the additional range of a viola.

**Shoran Waupatukuay Piper** (above right) is Clan Mother of the Golden Hill Paugussett and grew up learning from the elders in her family. As



Clan Mother, she is the overseer of the tribe, entrusted with passing on cultural traditions including spirituality, cooking, stories, songs, ceremonies, and teaching tribal history. She is also author of *Red Road: Traditional Voices of Afro-Indigenous America*.

This partnership helps us to highlight some of the cultural heritage and traditions in southern Connecticut.

*Photos courtesy of Janet Evelyn.*

## Connecting People and Nature

### *Formative: Frederick Law Olmsted in Connecticut*

**T**HIS APRIL MARKS THE 200<sup>TH</sup> anniversary of the birth of famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. Although his most well-known projects are elsewhere, such as Central Park in New York City, the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, and Yosemite Valley in California, Olmsted was born and raised in Hartford, Connecticut. This anniversary provides an opportunity to reflect on Olmsted's legacy and explore the impact on his career of his early years in Connecticut.

The exhibition *Formative: Frederick Law Olmsted in Connecticut* considers how the people and scenery of early 19th-century Connecticut influenced Olmsted's philosophies and career choice. In Hartford's libraries, Olmsted discovered the works of landscape gardeners, theorists, and

others examining the relationship between people and nature.

Social reformers in Olmsted's neighborhood, such as Reverend Horace Bushnell and the Beecher family, exposed Olmsted to new ways of thinking about his community. On family vacations, he explored the Connecticut landscape, from its small farms to its coastline, observing both its form and function. Olmsted's eventual career in landscape architecture was undoubtedly shaped by these early experiences in Connecticut.

Today, Olmsted's Connecticut legacy lives on through the public spaces he designed. Walnut Hill Park in New Britain, Seaside and Beardsley Parks in Bridgeport, and the grounds of the Institute of Living in



Hartford are examples of not just his aesthetic, but how he pictured the natural environment contributing to the betterment of society.

Connecticut is home to nearly three hundred other commissions carried out by the Olmsted firm, which operated until 1979.

*Formative: Frederick Law Olmsted in Connecticut* runs from April 22 to August 28.

Photo: *Girls near a path in Walnut Hill Park, New Britain, 1910. CHS Collection, 1983.121.109.*