



Signs of the Times Around Connecticut: Messages of Hope and Appreciation
Photographs are courtesy of Michael Hanratty

Heroes Live Here

On March 13th, 2020, President Donald J. Trump declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national emergency. Around the country, schools and workplaces closed, citizens sheltered in their homes, and hospitals began to overflow with patients struggling against a new, deadly virus. The economy faltered and many people lost their jobs as a result of COVID-19, adding an economic crisis to an already dire public health situation. The lives of millions of Americans were suddenly, violently disrupted, and many were forever impacted. With all the uncertainty and chaos at that time, it would have been easy for people to panic, or to allow fear and grief to paralyze them.

Instead, many saw the work that needed to be done and answered the call of duty. Profound thanks go to the first responders and essential workers who continued to provide vital services to our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that dark time, our understanding of who is an essential worker continuously expanded to include teachers, grocery workers, and others who kept our economy moving and provided necessities to those in need. Volunteers across Connecticut also aided those who were hardest hit by the virus, sometimes at great personal sacrifice to their own families. To all those who bravely stepped up, know that the work you did for your country and state was admirable, and you have made a positive impact on so many lives.

Healthcare workers struggled to keep up with the burdens COVID placed on the medical system, often working overtime under hectic, dangerous conditions to provide excellent care to every patient. We appreciate these workers for all they have done in this time of crisis, and this pandemic simply brought to light the necessity of their work.

Over the past year and a half, we as a state have endured hardship and difficulty. We lost many lives due to COVID-19, including more than 8,000 Connecticut residents, people that will never be forgotten. The pandemic also continues to weigh heavily on its survivors: loss of jobs, loss of in-person contact and a sense of belonging, loss of learning, loss of dreams and plans made, all contribute to a sense that the world will never be the same.

Despite all this loss, we can feel uplifted and inspired by all of those who stepped in and stepped up when the challenge of COVID-19 presented itself, and by the tireless service they provided for us all. We proved that



CLOE POISSON/CTMIRROR.ORG

Health care workers at Kimberly Hall North, a long-term care facility, wave to supporters paying tribute to the workers with a drive-through parade on May 5, 2020.



Hartford Courant/TCA

An estimated 1,000-plus cars lined up at Rentschler Field on May 1, 2020, where Foodshare was distributing 35,000 pounds of food.

in times of trouble, Connecticut comes together as a tight-knit and caring community. I am honored to dedicate the 2021 State Register and Manual to the essential workers, first responders, volunteers, and everyday heroes who stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The state of Connecticut will be forever grateful for your hard work and sacrifice to keep our state moving forward during one of its darkest hours.



Denise W. Merrill
Secretary of the State



CLOE POISSON/CTMIRROR.ORG

At a celebration of National Nurses Week in October 2020,
a Hartford Hospital anesthesia technician holds up
a heart sign with a reassuring message:
“We Got This.”



Students at a voter registration class, July 12, 1971.

Courtesy of the Seattle Municipal Archives

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Old Enough to Fight, Old Enough to Vote: 50 Years of the 26th Amendment

“Old enough to fight, old enough to vote.” The concept is simple: a young person fighting for the United States overseas should be entitled to that most basic civic right back home. Until the passage of the 26th Amendment, though, it was not the case. Ratified on July 1, 1971, the 26th Amendment to the Constitution lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 across America. Those who were old enough to fight were now old enough to vote. Millions of young Americans saddled with the responsibilities of citizenship now had access to its most cherished right. It is for that reason that I am proud to dedicate the 2021 State Register and Manual to the 50th anniversary of the ratification of the 26th Amendment.

The fight for the 18-year-old vote began long before 1971. It began in earnest during World War II, when legislation lowered the military draft age from 21 to 18. Sen. Harley Kilgore (D-WV), Sen. Arthur Vandenburg (R-MI), Rep. Jennings Randolph (D-WV) and Rep. Victor Wickersham (D-OK) led the movement for a constitutional amendment lowering the voting age to 18, taking “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” as their slogan. Congress took no action, but Georgia became the first state in the Union to lower the voting age to 18 in 1943. After World War II, the debate was dormant for almost a decade until President Eisenhower endorsed an amendment lowering the voting age to 18 in his 1954 State of the Union address. Spurred by the President’s words, the Senate voted on such an amendment that year. It failed to reach the necessary two-thirds majority to advance, winning only 34 of 58 votes. (37 Senators did not vote.) Public polling, though, showed a breakthrough in support for such an amendment after President Eisenhower’s proposal: 47% of Americans supported it and 49% of Americans opposed it in 1951, while 58% supported it and only 34% opposed it in 1954.

After this, debate over lowering the voting age to 18 once again took a back seat. The tumult of the 1960s, however, brought it back to the forefront. Teenagers and young Americans played a pivotal role in many of the defining cultural and political fights of the 1960s: the struggle for civil rights, anti-Vietnam War protests, the campus free speech movement. President Kennedy’s Commission on Voter Participation endorsed the 18-year-old vote in 1963, and President Johnson came out in favor of an amendment in 1968. Their support, though, didn’t translate into political success. Here in Connecticut, a proposal at the 1965 Constitutional Convention to lower the voting age to 18 was also defeated.

Despite these setbacks, a constellation of groups across the nation came out in favor of an amendment during this time. Specific advocacy groups also

proliferated: Project 18 and the Youth Franchise Coalition were just two. In Connecticut, an organization known as Let's Vote organized an all-day vigil at the State Capitol to encourage lawmakers to lower the voting age. Fifteen states voted on age-lowering amendments in 1970; the amendments failed in 10 of them. This included Connecticut, where “no” votes outnumbered “yes” by a 52%-47% margin.

The Vietnam War, though, began to shift congressional debate on the issue. As 18-year-olds were being drafted to fight a bitterly polarizing war, giving them the right to vote and determine the war's direction became imperative. In fact, my own political awakening came when my brother was drafted in the late 1960s, and “Old enough to fight, old enough to vote” took on real significance.



In 1970, Congress decided to act. They added a provision lowering the voting age to 18 in all elections to the Voting Rights Act amendment of 1970. President Nixon signed the bill into law despite his constitutional misgivings, saying “although I strongly favor the 18 year old vote, I believe—

along with most of the Nation's leading constitutional scholars—that Congress has no power to enact it by simple statute, but rather it requires a constitutional amendment.” The Supreme Court agreed with him. In *Oregon v. Mitchell*, they ruled that Congress could lower the voting age for only federal elections by statute, meaning that the universal 18-year-old vote would require an amendment. The ruling created an administrative nightmare: states would have to maintain one set of voter rolls for state elections and another for federal elections.

Recognizing what a cumbersome and expensive undertaking this would be for the states, Congress quickly worked to pass an amendment lowering the voting age to 18. The proposed amendment passed the Senate 94-0 on March 10, 1971 and then passed the House 400-19 on March 23. Connecticut ratified the amendment later that day, one of five states to do so. North Carolina became the 38th state to ratify the amendment on July 1, 1971, and it officially became the 26th Amendment to the Constitution. The ratification process was the fastest in history, with the required 38 states ratifying the amendment in just 100 days.



(Above left: Vintage protest pin. Above right: Logo of “Let's Vote,” the student group that organized efforts in Connecticut to lower the voting age.)

The 26th Amendment enfranchised 11 million voters across America, 343,000 of whom were here in Connecticut. It was yet another important step in our nation's long history of expanding access to the ballot in our ongoing quest to live up to the lofty ideals of equality and justice upon which our nation was founded. In our celebration of the 26th Amendment, we reaffirm our commitment to that cause. I am proud to dedicate the 2021 State Register and Manual to the 50th anniversary of the ratification of the 26th Amendment and to the many people who fought to achieve its passage.



Denise W. Merrill
Secretary of the State



Three 18-year-old students witness the signing of the
twenty-sixth amendment by President Nixon

*Courtesy of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum
(Image: WHPO-6749-09A)*



Designed by noted architect Charles Bulfinch and built in 1796, the Old State House is one of the nation's oldest.

All photos in the section are courtesy of Annika Mathias.

Connecticut's Old State House: 225 Years of Living History

On the Corner of Central Row and Main Street in downtown Hartford is a perfectly rectangular brick and brownstone building topped with a cupola, the entrance lined with neoclassical columns facing towards the Connecticut River. It stands out against the high rise office buildings, crowded streets, honking cars, and fast food joints that surround it, a lone relic of a time when Hartford was just a small Puritan settlement by a river. This building, formerly the seat of Connecticut state government, is Connecticut's Old State House, and it will celebrate its 225th anniversary of completion this year. A quintessential model of Federalist architecture, the typical style of State Houses at the time, the building has served our state as the seat of its government, a museum of curiosities, a painting studio, the Hartford City Hall, a community gathering space in times of national crisis, and finally a Connecticut civics and history museum. As the state government grew and evolved over time, the Old State House evolved with it, a documentation of history in its own right. This year, we recognize an integral part of Connecticut history, and just how lucky we are that the Old State House is still standing and open to the public 225 years later.

The Old State House was built on the land of the Father of Connecticut Sir Thomas Hooker, where the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, the thirteen colonies' first written Constitution, were signed in 1637. George Washington first met with French General Rochambeau on that land, and during that meeting, successfully convinced Rochambeau to lend French support to the Americans during the Revolutionary War. From its completion in 1796 to the opening of the current State Capitol building in 1878, the Old State House encompassed all three branches of state government. Generations of great judges, legislators, and governors, as well as esteemed Connecticut citizens such as P.T. Barnum, Gideon Wells, and Noah Webster passed through its doors. The 1815 Hartford Convention, in which disgruntled members of the Federalist Party met to discuss their opposition to the War of 1812 and the Madison administration, as well as toyed with the idea of secession from the United States, occurred at the Old State House.

Many presidents visited the Old State House, including Andrew Jackson, James Monroe, Lyndon B. Johnson, Jimmy Carter, and George Bush. It is astonishing to think about how much history the Old State House has witnessed. Sally Whipple, Executive Director of the Old State House, draws comfort from this, saying, “Whatever we’ve seen, this building has seen something like it before, and it’s still here”. The constancy of the Old State House is a symbol of the tenacity and resilience of the Connecticut people.

One of the chief goals of the Old State House is to help people explore aspects of history with which they may not be familiar, and to give them a perspective they may not have had before. The Old State House has seen great moments of progress in history, such as the passage of the 1818 Constitution, which made important steps towards religious inclusivity (though it still marginalized non-Christian religions), and the Amistad ship trial, when, spurred along by the activism of Connecticut citizens, the district court at the Old State House ruled that the captured Africans on the Amistad could not be claimed as property or continue to be enslaved. The case was then sent to the United States Supreme Court, which upheld the Connecticut court’s ruling. The historic capitol also holds aspects of our history about which we are less proud. In this building, the “Black Law” was passed, which stated that Black students could not come from out of the state to be educated in Connecticut, effectively shutting down our state hero Prudence Crandall’s racially inclusive school. Crandall’s trial was also conducted here, and the decision constitutes an important part of not only Connecticut, but national history; her case was used as precedent for landmark civil rights cases such as *Dred Scott v. Sandford* and *Brown v. Board of Education*. By showing how progress is not always linear, the Old State House teaches history in all of its complexities, but ultimately wants visitors to leave optimistic about America’s progress and future.

The Old State House stopped being utilized as a government building in 1995, and it is currently a renowned museum and a community space. While engaging the more than sixty thousand museum visitors it gets a year, the institution lends its support to many educational initiatives, such as specialized museum tours, National History Day, Connecticut’s Kid Governor®, and Red, White, and Blue Schools, as well as events like com-



The State Constitution of 1818 replaced the Governor's Council with an elected state Senate. Both bodies met in this room.



Today, a unique civics program for 5th Graders brings an elected Connecticut's Kid Governor® and Kid Governor's Cabinet to Hartford each year. They meet and work in their own Cabinet Room, pictured here.

munity conversation series, concerts, and farmers' markets. Executive Director Whipple hopes that a visit to the Old State House will not only help people understand important pieces of Connecticut history, but that it will also give them a long term perspective on the world, their lives, and how to change both for the better. All of the great historical figures linked to the Old State House believed in something and fought to make things better; now the Old State House helps visitors realize that they can do the same.



Reverend Joseph Steward established a portrait studio and “Curiosity Room” on the third floor of the Old State House shortly after it opened in 1796. In today’s recreated room, there are original portraits by Steward, taxidermy, tusks, and other “curiosities” of the world, including a memorable two-headed calf.

For several centuries the Old State House has been the place great Americans go when they want to make change, and now the Old State House educates and inspires the next great Americans to make change. Once another 225 years have passed, the Old State House will surely add significantly to the roster of historical change makers that have passed through its wrought-

iron gates, and will still be making Connecticut history and civics come to life for visitors. It is my great privilege to dedicate the 2021 State Register and Manual to Connecticut's Old State House, in honor of the 225 years of rich history that have happened there, and the history in the making that will likewise occur inside its hallowed halls.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise W. Merrill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Denise W. Merrill
Secretary of the State



The House Chamber