



Creating Community: Exploring Four Centuries of Our Past is an ambitious exhibition that engages visitors with the past through dynamic and interactive activities. The exhibition is an essential step toward realizing the Fairfield Museum’s educational vision to *use history to strengthen community and shape its future*.

Creating Community covers nearly 375 years of regional history, using the town of Fairfield as a model for a changing community. Fairfield, established in 1639, rapidly expanded in the 17th century and included parts of Redding, Weston, Easton, Westport, Greens Farms and the Black Rock section of Bridgeport. Through success and failure, loss and prestige, Fairfield emerged as a model suburban enclave within the major New York metropolitan area.

Education programs serve teachers and students across grade levels through field trips, outreach programs, professional development and educational resources.

A brief outline of these themes is listed below.



Building Communities: 1637 - 1700

Explore the 17th century in America when English colonists arrived and settled where the Native Americans had been living for centuries. How did these different groups interact? What was their impact on the environment? This land called “Uncoway” or “fair fields” offered unique resources for their basic needs including the land, salt marshes, Long Island Sound and more.



Interactive features include a map with magnets that compare and contrast how the colonists and Native Americans used the land. A reproduction wigwam shows students how the Native Americans used natural resources to build their shelters.

Defending the Community: 1700 - 1783



Explore Fairfield and Connecticut's role in the American Revolution – and how this conflict divided a town. What ideas and beliefs influenced the patriots and loyalists? What were the causes of this conflict?

A reproduction fort features the spy codes that were used in George Washington's Culper Spy Ring, passing through checkpoints nearby in Black Rock. Students can also analyze the perspectives of the Patriots and Loyalists and choose a side.

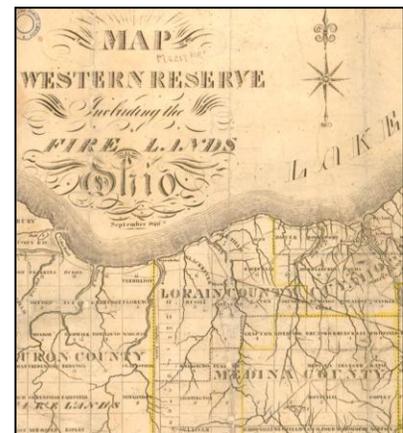
Examples of the community's wealth are contrasted with slave documents that give insight into the conflicts of slavery and freedom during the American Revolution.



Seeking Opportunity: 1789 - 1865

Fairfield fell into hard times following the American Revolution and the burning of the town by the British in 1779. As the new nation of America took shape, this community's identity struggled between the past and the future.

Economic opportunities expanded in the 1800s, offering tantalizing – and risky – choices. Townspeople faced tough decisions – continue with its farming roots or seize a chance at a new life? Americans were moving; migrating to the Western Reserve, exploring new lands in the west and setting sail to make money in shipping and global trade. Discover their choices and learn about their risks, rewards and challenges.



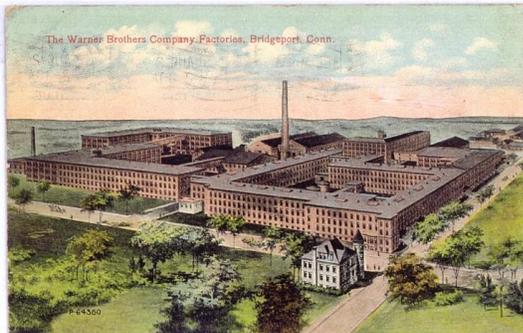


Changing Communities: 1880 - 1920

As Fairfield struggled in the early 19th century, several families emerged successful from their business ventures, such as Oliver Gould Jennings whose father invested in Standard Oil. During the Gilded Age many families displayed their wealth by building large estates. Jennings split his time between a mansion in New York City, a “cottage” in Newport, Rhode Island, and his \$1 million estate in Fairfield. His sister, Annie

B. Jennings, built a grand estate on the Old Post Road, known as *Sunnieholme*, which had 30 rooms, 15 bathrooms, and elaborate gardens. The area became a summer retreat and getaway for the wealthy.

This was the land of milk and honey.
Betty Toth, Hungarian Oral History Archives



At the same time, Bridgeport emerged as a major manufacturing powerhouse, expanding rapidly in shipping and manufacturing. Workers were needed and immigrants arrived from Hungary, Ireland, Poland and Sweden, contributing to the area’s economy and shaping new neighborhoods. The community embraced and resisted change. Many new immigrants and workers settled on the border between Fairfield and Bridgeport, causing cultural

tensions between their different ideas and beliefs.

World War II & The New Suburban Community: 1941 - 1960

Bridgeport and Fairfield played a key role in industrial production during WWII, leading to rapid growth. Explore how industry changed the community, powering the war effort and drawing thousands of people to the area. Objects on display include blackout curtains, uniforms and samples of the Fairfield Museum’s World War II propaganda poster collection.



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In the post-WWII boom, Fairfield became the ideal suburban community and a model for the American Dream. This era sparked huge growth in new neighborhoods, the rise of “car culture,” baby boomers and the nuclear family. Manufacturing transformed from war production into consumer production, encouraging Americans to buy the newest and greatest items on the market, from appliances to TV dinners. View some of the objects and images that epitomize the rise of consumer culture, such as a 1948 RCA television set and advertisements of the latest products.



The Fairfield Museum’s 1937 land use map is overlaid with the Merritt Parkway and Interstate 95, showing their impact on the built and natural landscape. View the consequences of growth; analyzing the benefits and drawbacks of change over time.



The Community of Today & In the Future

How can objects continue to tell the story of today’s community? How can individuals contribute to the community of the future? These questions are addressed in the final section of the exhibit, where visitors are encouraged to identify their own contributions to the community and history. An artifact wall compares and contrasts objects representing the past and present, such as a diary vs. a facebook or twitter post.

We hope that the *Creating Community* exhibition will promote dialogue about the importance of objects to interpret history and how artifacts can convey the stories of how a community changes and adapts.