

Newsletter | March 17, 2023



The dashing fellow in the back row of this photo, third from right, is James Reardon. It's 1928, and he's sailing to America, leaving behind County Kerry, Ireland. He would settle in Hartford, meet and marry fellow Kerry native Helen Foley, and have six daughters, including my mother. Happy St. Patrick's Day. -- Kevin Flood

Trivia question

Alexander Calder's massive red sculpture in steel,

“Stegosaurus,” has been one of the most familiar sights in downtown Hartford since its arrival in 1973. It dominates the Burr Mall, an open space between City Hall and the Wadsworth Atheneum. For whom is Burr Mall named?

Scroll to the bottom of the newsletter for the answer.



Mayor Antonina P. Uccello, 1922-2023

On the Sunday before the city’s 1967 elections, a front-page article in the Hartford Courant began with a question: “Can a Republican be elected mayor of Hartford, and a woman at that?”



The voters answered yes, giving Antonina “Ann” Uccello more votes than any other Council candidate, which, under the City Charter of the time, made her mayor. In a city where Democrats already held a 3-1 majority in voter registration, she became the first Republican to win the office in more than 20 years. No Republican has won it since. As for being “a woman at that,” a political cartoon accompanying the Courant article only further underscored the gender roles of the day. It depicted two of her male rivals dressed as football players, attacking each other while leaving a football labeled “mayor” on the ground. Uccello was shown running in to scoop up the ball—dressed as a cheerleader.

Uccello, who died Tuesday at age 100, is remembered primarily for her “firsts”: first female mayor of Hartford, first female mayor in Connecticut, first female mayor in any capital city in the U.S., and more. But she’s also remembered for the tone and dignity she brought to an office that didn’t have as much power as it does now. When unrest broke out in cities across the country following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968, Hartford was no exception. According to biographer [**Paul Pirrotta**](#), Uccello insisted on a strong police response to control rioting and looting but also insisted on police bringing her to the North End—against their advice—to hear out residents’ concerns and answer questions.

After a failed run for Congress in 1970, Uccello served in the Nixon administration as the U.S. Department of Transportation’s first consumer affairs director. In 2008, Ann Street was renamed Ann Uccello Street in her honor.

News coverage: [**Hartford Courant**](#) | [**Connecticut Public**](#) | [**Associated Press**](#) | [**Fox 61 News**](#) | [**Eyewitness News 3**](#) | [**News 8**](#) | [**NBC Connecticut**](#)

Biography: “[**Hartford Mayor Ann Uccello: A Connecticut Trailblazer**](#),” by Paul Pirrotta, with forward by Dennis House, published in 2015 by the History Press

Inductee profile: [**Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame**](#)

Uccello photo: courtesy of the Hartford History Center at the [**Hartford Public**](#)

In Downtown, modern apartments in historic buildings

The former firehouse on Pearl Street and the former municipal office building on Main Street, across from City Hall, are both undergoing renovations into apartment buildings, the [Hartford Courant reports](#). The \$17 million conversion will add 77 apartments to downtown: 35 in the firehouse, which also served as Fire Department headquarters, and 42 at the office building, at 525 Main St.

In Parkville, a huge conversion planned

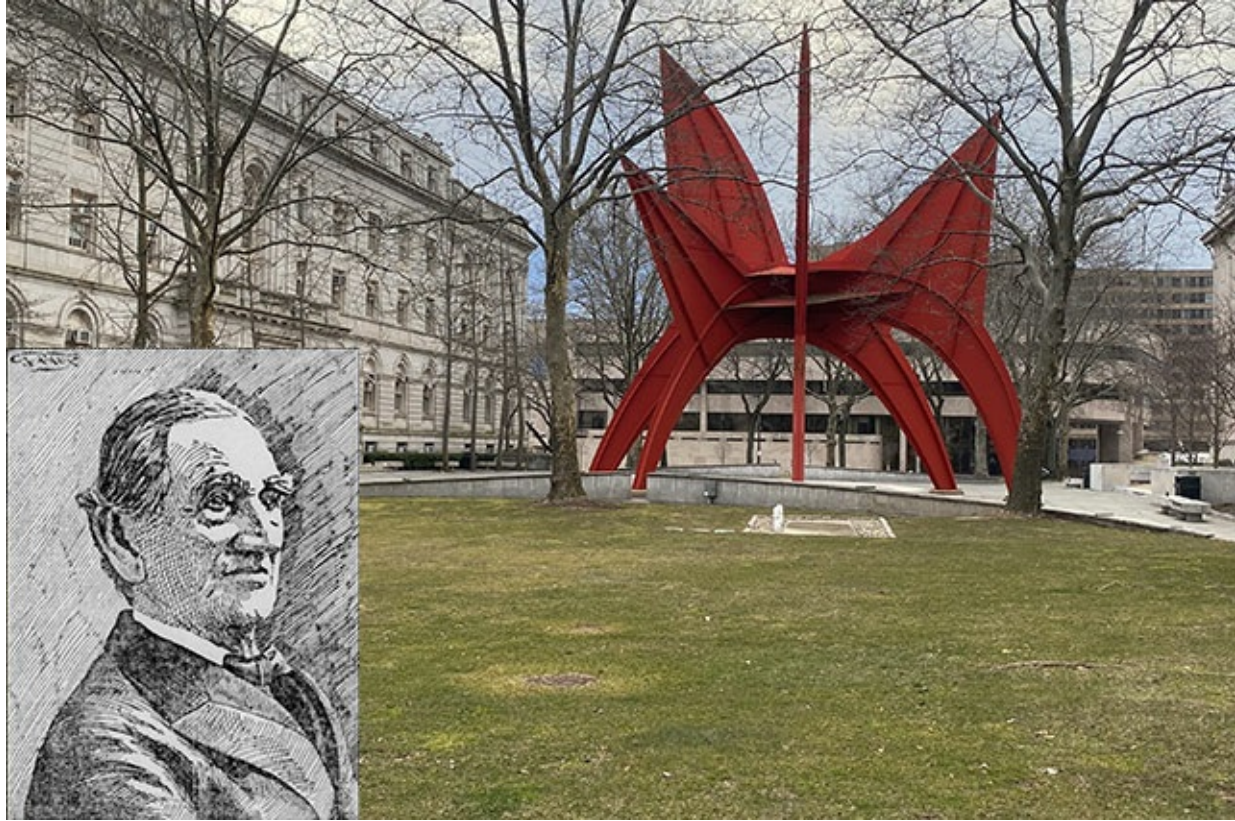
The Hartford Business Journal [reports](#) that the Capital Region Development Authority has tentatively approved an \$8.5 million loan to developer Carlos Mouta's effort to transform the vacant Whitney Manufacturing site in Parkville into 235 apartments and 45,000 square feet of commercial space. Whitney Manufacturing first built on the site, at 237 Hamilton St., in 1906 and expanded there steadily over the years.

Passages

David Etnier Austin died February 18 at age 90. An architect and founding partner of Austin Patterson Disston of South Norwalk, Austin was described in his [obituary](#) as "a modernist whose work included private residences and community spaces across the Northeast." Austin was also the Hartford-born son of Helen Goodwin and A. Everett "Chick" Austin, the legendary director of the Wadsworth Atheneum from 1927 to 1944.

To learn more about Chick Austin—and get a vivid portrait of cultural life in Hartford in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s—read Eugene R. Gaddis's [excellent biography](#), "Magician of the Modern: Chick Austin and the Transformation of the Arts in America." The Austins' eye-popping home on Scarborough Street, [now held by the Atheneum](#), was a gathering place in the 1930s for such leading artists as Salvador Dalí, Alexander Calder, Gertrude Stein, George Balanchine, Agnes de Mille, and Aaron Copland.

Trivia question answer



The Mall is named in honor of Alfred E. Burr (inset), who led the Hartford Times as owner, publisher, and editor from 1840 until his death in 1900.

Burr's daughter, Ella Burr McManus, created a trust that left \$50,000 for the construction of a memorial to her father, as a gift to the city. The memorial, she specified, "must be artistic in design and humane in purpose, preferably a drinking fountain for both human beings and animals." But even in 1906, when McManus died, animals were giving way in Hartford streets to automobiles—which made devising a project that would satisfy her requirements especially difficult.

Various proposals came and went, including one for building a public library. (A probate judge concluded it wouldn't be "humane in purpose.") Finally, a proposal to create the Mall, complete with a fountain (non-drinking) and a sculpture, won approval in 1960. By this time, investments gave the trust a value of more than \$1 million. An agreement between the trustees, the City, and the Atheneum eventually led to the mall's dedication in 1969. Calder's sculpture was installed in 1973. It has drawn strong opinions, for and against, ever since.

Sources:

- "Hartford: Connecticut's Capital," by Glenn Weaver and Michael Swift, published in 2003 by the American Historical Press.
- "Calder Dinosaur Sculpture To Be Installed Today," Hartford Courant, April 30, 1973, page 30.
- "Alfred E. Burr Dead," Hartford Courant, January 9, 1900, page 5.

More trivia questions at HartfordHistory.net



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