

Sound and Vision: The Arts

Art and music go through cycles of innovation, then acceptance and status quo, followed by innovation. In the 19th century, America tended to follow European style movements. The 20th century saw more experimentation in the visual arts. Jazz emerged as a uniquely American form of music.

During this time there were Geneva artists and musicians who nurtured a creative atmosphere. Famous musicians traveled through Geneva in the 1940s and 1950s, at the Sampson military bases and at Club 86, exposing residents to great music.



Arthur Dove (1880-1946) learned to paint in nature with his neighbor Newton Weatherly. After periods of illustrating magazine articles and visiting Europe, Dove began painting in an abstract style. He and his second wife, Helen "Reds" Torr, lived in Geneva from 1933 to 1938 where he painted a number of his well-known works.



Jazz bassist Scott LaFaro (1936-1961) developed a two-finger, melodic playing style that is still influential today. The Bill Evans Trio album, *Sunday at the Village Vanguard*, recorded 11 days before LaFaro's death in a car accident, is still considered one of the best live jazz albums. Left to right: Scott LaFaro, Bill Evans, and Paul Motian.



Drum and bugle corps traditionally played military music. The Geneva American Legion Appleknockers (1929-1964) was among the first to play popular tunes. In the 1950s they played jazz on single-valve bugles and other corps began copying the style.

Before YouTube Was Cool: Geneva Influencers

The United States has always had influencers. Before the internet, people had to rely on word of mouth and the written word. Charles Williamson distributed pamphlets to recruit settlers to the region. John Johnston wrote letters to agricultural newspapers promoting the use of drain tile.

Genevans have also influenced others through success, philanthropy, and connections. Successful industry owners like Samuel Nester encouraged companies to move to Geneva for access to transportation and materials. Wealthy company owners funded new churches, the YMCA, and a theater. Elizabeth Smith Miller used her connections and her cousin Elizabeth Cady Stanton to bring suffragists to town.



In 1142 the Great Law of Peace united the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) as five nations who could control their own affairs and also govern as one unit. Benjamin Franklin borrowed a number of principles from the Haudenosaunee as he planned the future of the 13 colonies, later states. The wampum belt shown here symbolizes the Great Law.

Beginning in the 1840s, local nurseries shipped tons of trees, shrubs, and plants to other states. As nursery owners became wealthy, they invested in new, non-nursery industries, and donated money to community causes. North Presbyterian Church (now Faith Community Church) on Genesee Street and the old YMCA on Castle Street were funded by nurserymen.



Samuel Nester (1840-1908) owned the Nester Malthouse, many properties, and stocks in local companies. In 1886 he gave money to form the Nester Hose fire company, a unit of Irish Americans.



In 1851 Elizabeth Smith Miller (1822-1911) began wearing a knee-length skirt over trousers. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, her cousin in Seneca Falls, copied the outfit. Amelia Bloomer began writing about the clothes in a temperance journal she edited, and they became known as bloomers.



Nurseryman William Smith (1818-1912) had an interest in learning although he had little formal education. He was the main donor to the Smith Opera House in 1894, and in 1906 founded the women's college that bears his name.

Geneva Trailblazers

A trailblazer made a new path in the wild and left marks, or blazes, on the landscape for others to follow. Today, the term applies to someone who is the first of a gender, race, or culture to achieve something.

Some trailblazers are quickly followed by more people in their field, while others seem like lone pioneers. Resistance to women doctors continued long after Elizabeth Blackwell received her medical degree. Female boxing coaches are still a minority. However, progress has been made in many other professions.



Marian Cruger Coffin (1876-1957) spent her childhood years in Geneva. She attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology as one of four women studying landscape architecture. In spite of resistance from men, she went on to design estate gardens for East Coast elite families.



Henry McDonald (1891-1976) was one of the first Black professional football players. At DeSales High School in the 1930s and 1940s, he was the first Black high school football coach in New York State.



In 1849 Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910) graduated from Geneva Medical College at the top of her class. She was the first woman in the United States to earn a medical degree. However, Geneva rejected her sister Emily several years later, who became the third woman doctor in the country.



Geneva native Gloria Peek is a boxing pioneer. She was the first woman coach certified at the highest level. She worked the 2004 Olympic training camp, coached the 2011 Pan American Games team, and in 2012 was the first woman to coach the US Olympic boxing team.



Jim Richmond, Jr. (1931-2021) came to Geneva from West Virginia. He rose from pumping gas at Firestone to become the company's second Black store manager in the United States. He co-founded the Geneva NAACP and was a founding member of the African American Men's Association.