

The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

April 2013

Past Perambulations

by Dick Pierce

In the 1964-65 school year, Jean and I took square dance lessons. The lessons were sponsored by the Bloomfield Square Dance Club, Inc. All over Connecticut—indeed, it seemed, all over the country—people were doing western-style square dancing. In most cases a club offered lessons taught by a paid caller/teacher for a period of about six months. The newly-graduated dancers then attended dances, commonly held in school gymnasiums, where they danced for about three hours on any night of the week. Most callers carried their own PA systems and directed the dancers' movements to the accompaniment of popular songs, largely but not solely of country-western genre. Four couples were needed to form a "set," and there could be anywhere from one to twenty or more sets on the floor. It was a craze. People would travel to as many clubs as possible, eagerly collecting autographs from one hundred different callers and earning a "century" badge—sometimes more than one.

The Bloomfield club, sponsored by the town "Parks and Rec," had been formed just a few years earlier under the leadership of Walt and Dot Hill, the first presidents. Our caller/teacher was Tom Nichols, a Simsbury man who had started calling as an avocation, but for many of our regular dances we had guest callers from all over New England. Each spring Connecticut clubs came together in a huge "convention" held in whatever community had enough space. One year Bloomfield hosted the convention using the high school, middle school, and elementary school gyms. There were also conventions at the New England and national levels, each attracting hundreds of dancers dressed in their finest square dance clothing.

In the fall of 1970, since many members had children who kept hearing their parents talk about square dancing, I was asked to start a club for teens. Our first year of lessons was held in the Vincent School gym, and when the kids graduated, they decided to form a club and call it the Bloomfield Barnstompers. . After the first year (my daughters were then quite young), I was able to turn the club over to Jerry and Gloria Kiel, who continued as adult advisors for several years. At one point the club had over a hundred members. Jean and I became advisors again when our daughters reached seventh grade—about 1977.

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APRIL PROGRAM: PLAY READING

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3, 2013, 7:00 PM AT PROSSER

The Wintonbury Historical Society will present a reading of the play "A Glass of Water," written by Anna Ferraresso of Bloomfield in 1952. The Society owns numerous Ferraresso manuscripts and believes this to be the first public performance of this play.

Miss Ferraresso, a Bloomfield High School graduate, was one of 52 students accepted from 800 applicants for the launch of Prof. George Pierce Baker's new Department of Drama in the 1925-26 season. This was the beginning of what is today the Yale School of Drama, and Baker is described on its website as the "foremost teacher of playwriting in America" at that time. No degrees were given in the school's first half-dozen years, and Ferraresso moved on to study at Columbia University with Hatcher Hughes, who had won the 1924 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Active in New York and Hartford theater for many years, Ferraresso saw some of her plays produced and two published in *The Best One-Act Plays* of 1948 and 1951.

The play reading will take place at Prosser Public Library on April 3, 2013, 7:00 PM. The play will be performed by Marilyn Johnston, Tom Nicotera, and Al LeFebvre, with Libbie Merrow as emcee. There is no admission fee, but please register by calling 860-243-9721.



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OVER TUNXIS TRAILS WINS AWARD OF MERIT

The Society's newest book, *Over Tunxis Trails*, 2012, was recently nominated for an Award of Merit from the Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO). This book was an extensive revision of the earlier edition and was edited by Angela Hauptmann and Ralph Schmoll, who added original new research and carefully verified existing data. At the end of February, CLHO sent the following letter:

"On behalf of the Awards Committee of the Connecticut League of History Organizations, I would like to officially inform you that the CLHO has awarded the Wintonbury Historical Society an Honorable Mention for the publication *Over Tunxis Trails*. This project was a huge undertaking and the committee was impressed with the Historical Society's effort to bring the disappearing historic buildings to the community's attention and encourage them to become involved in saving them.

"Please accept the Committee's sincerest congratulations on receiving the CLHO Honorable Mention. We look forward to presenting it to the Wintonbury Historical Society at the annual meeting [of CLHO] on June 3."

The letter was signed by Jessica D. Jenkins, chairperson of the Awards Committee.



Past Perambulations, continued from page 1—

By then the numbers had started falling off, and we often danced with twenty or fewer kids. In fact, the four teen clubs in the area supported each other by attending each other's dances each Friday, making the rounds of New Hartford, East Hartford, Windsor, and Bloomfield.

Eventually, due to dwindling numbers, it became financially impossible to continue the Bloomfield clubs, and they folded. Jean and I danced in Simsbury for three or four more years until that, too, folded. We had thirty-five years of fun, and we remember fondly all those with whom we shared it. In this short article, I couldn't begin to mention people's names, but I know that many still live in town. If you are one of them, maybe you'd like to send me a few of your memories for a longer history of the Bloomfield Square Dance Club. (send to 14 Julie Lane or Wintonbursociety@att.net)

Curator's Corner

Over the past few months I have provided assistance to families with Wintonbury/Bloomfield connections, such as: Rowley, Peck, Sedgewick, Cadwell, Thrall, and Eggleston; this last-named person was thrilled with the knowledge that his ancestor's house was on our December tour. For more on the Samuel Eggleston house, see our publication *Over Tunxis Trails*, 3rd edition, page 59.

Fannie Gabriel

Board of Directors Highlights

At its meeting on March 13, the Board welcomed new directors Bob Berman, Selena Brooks, and Quentin Johnson. We also had a visit from Elizabeth Wong, Miss Bloomfield 2013, who will compete for the Miss Connecticut title later this spring.

On Tuesday, March 12, the town and the University of Hartford cohosted a visit from the president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. A gift basket given to Mr. Kagame included three items from the Historical Society: a cookbook, a copy of *Images of Bloomfield*, and a 250th anniversary mug. An invitation-only luncheon at St. Thomas Seminary was attended by local leaders with the idea of creating economic opportunities and business relationships.

Dick Pierce and Doug Barnard have attended recent StEPs sessions in Middletown on Historical Structures and Landscapes. From documents created in previous StEPs units, the Board approved an Incident Report Form, a Maintenance Checklist, and a Board Self-Assessment form. On March 25, Bloomfield will host its StEPs mentoring group of Farmington, Canton, Lebanon, and Bristol's American Clock and Watch Museum. (StEPs = Standards & Excellence Program)

The Treasurer's report showed income for the fiscal year of \$3,606 and expenses of \$6,619. The checkbook balance on February 28 was \$1,695. We hope that the upcoming tag sale (see separate article) and other contributions will help with the income shortfall.

Along with other museums in the state, we will observe Connecticut Open House Day on Saturday, June 8, 10:00 to 3:00. Both the History Center and the Old Farm School will be open to visitors that day.

Recent building improvements include a new enclosed bulletin board for the door to the History Center, a new gutter for the rear of that building, and the purchase of fire extinguishers. The flower garden will be upgraded this spring. Selena Brooks has arranged with the High School's Harris Vo-Ag Center to choose plants for the garden appropriate to the 1800s.

The Board voted to recognize past presidents with certificates of appreciation and life membership. This will be done for the June 5 meeting.



ANNUAL TAG SALE APRIL 27

The annual tag sale will be held this year on Saturday April 27th from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M., with a preview on Friday evening, April 26th from 5-8 P.M. There will be a \$5.00 admission charge on Friday evening. The rain date is one week later.

This is the Society's major fundraiser of the year, and we rely on donations to make it a success. This year we are adding a "Boutique" which will contain our "fine" items and also jewelry and accessories.

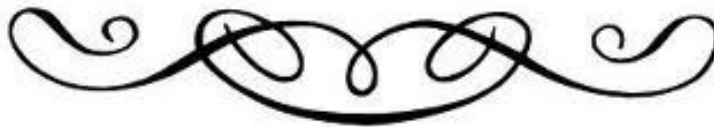
We will be collecting donations beginning on Monday, April 1st. A representative of the Society will be at the Old Farm School from 2-4 P.M. every Monday, Saturday and Sunday throughout April until Monday April 22nd. Donations will not be accepted after April 22nd in order to allow us enough time to sort and price all items.

This year we are looking for decorative household items of any type, kitchen and glass items, small appliances in working order, small furniture in good salable condition (no bulky items), curtains and draperies, and jewelry and accessory items such as scarves. No clothing or books, please.



Attention Seabury and Duncaster residents: We will have a truck available the weekend of April 6th and 7th to pick up your donations. Please call 860-242-8696 and leave a message if you would like this service.

We appreciate your donations and hope to have a very successful tag sale with your help.



HAVE YOU VISITED THESE SITES?

Historical organizations in our area offer a lot to the visitor. The following are just a few of those that are well worth visiting. When you visit them, be sure to mention Wintonbury Historical Society.

American Clock and Watch Museum, 100 Maple Street, Bristol
 Canton Historical Society, 11 Front Street, Collinsville
 Connecticut Historical Society, 1 Elizabeth Street, Hartford
 Farmington Historical Society, Route 10, Farmington (pictured below)
 Lebanon Historical Society, 856 Trumbull Highway, Lebanon
 Salmon Brook Historical Society, 208 Salmon Brook Street, Granby
 Windsor Historical Society, 96 Palisado Avenue, Windsor



A Bit of History

Editor's Note: In the May, 2012, issue of this newsletter, we published some information about the First Baptist Church of Bloomfield, organized in 1786. In 1920 it discontinued services and merged with the Blue Hills Baptist Church of Hartford. In the August newsletter of the same year, we published a letter from Sol Cushman describing his memories of the Rev. Jesse Smith, who seems to have grown up in the Bloomfield church, been ordained by it, and gone out as a missionary to Burma. Smith later taught at Suffield Academy, but a visit to the archives of Second Baptist Church, Suffield, showed only that Smith's journals were not on the shelves. However, the library of First Baptist Church, West Hartford, has turned up a book by the Rev. George W. Hinckley, who was pastor of the Bloomfield church from about 1879 to 1882. Here, then, is a short biography of someone who worked in Bloomfield over 130 years ago.

A 19th Century Bloomfield Pastor

George Walter Hinckley was born in Guilford, Connecticut, on July 27, 1853, the second of four children. He grew up doing typical farm chores, but even early in life he displayed such intellectual gifts that it seemed like his mother's prayer that he become a minister of the Gospel might eventually be realized.

In 1868 Hinckley was a student at Guilford Institute, a precursor of the modern high school, where he met someone who made a deep impression on him. This was a new boy in town, a boy who had been sent by the New Haven Orphan Asylum to live in Guilford and go to school. The two became friends, and Hinckley invited the boy to come live with his family. It was the beginning of Hinckley's lifelong concern for ministry to boys.



As a teenager, he dreamed of going to Yale for college and seminary. However, the family could not afford such an education. In 1875 he borrowed \$400 and entered New Britain Normal School. As a penniless student, he didn't spend much on food and so got run down and so sick he had to return home to recuperate. Having missed so much time, he gave up on New Britain. In spite of his lack of formal schooling, he was asked to teach in a small school in North Guilford and did well in it. Later, while visiting a friend, he met a young man who was leaving a teaching position in Rhode Island to enter Yale. With the young man's urging, Hinckley applied and in 1876 was appointed teacher in Kingston, Rhode Island. He was twenty-three years old and was to have a good three-year experience in that classroom. He also became active in the local Congregational church, running the Sunday School and putting on Sunday Evening concerts.

When his service at the school was over, he was offered a job by the owner of a general store in Allenton, a village near Wickford. Hinckley was convinced that he would never be a preacher nor again be a teacher. He felt keenly his lack of education, so he took the job in the general store. One evening at the Allenton church, the speaker was David Frost, a temperance person whom Hinckley had once heard back home in Guilford. When Frost met Hinckley, he asked him to give a testimony at a subsequent meeting in Wickford. His testimony was so well received that it forced him to acknowledge that his true calling was not business, but the ministry. His pastor, Rev. A. R. Babcock, encouraged him; and he was licensed to preach by the Allenton Baptist Church. He resigned his position at the store without knowing what the future would bring, but determined to preach the Gospel.

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Six months later he was called to the pastorate of the Baptist Church of Bloomfield, Connecticut.

He had been invited as a candidate by both the Bloomfield church and First Baptist of West Hartford. He traveled from Rhode Island with two sermons in his pocket, hoping to be invited to preach a second time. He preached Sunday morning in Bloomfield, and went to West Hartford in the afternoon accompanied by Deacon Phelps of the Bloomfield church. Sure enough, he was invited to preach the following week and was called by each church to be its pastor. The date was October 30, 1879. The West Hartford church was at a low ebb. For sixteen months in 1888-89 its doors had been closed. Hinckley apparently helped the situation. We're told that "Mr. Hinckley was greatly respected and loved by our members during his two-year tenure. After leaving [West Hartford] he had a short pastorate at Rainbow in the town of Windsor, and then went to Maine as a missionary of the American Sunday School Union. A few years later, he founded the Good Will Home for Boys, which has since become an institution of nationwide reputation for giving thousands of boys a fine start in life."



Hinckley writes, "[I] was to receive a salary of five hundred and twenty dollars a year—an equal amount from each church. There were two routes between the two churches, one involving a one mile walk to the terminus of the Hartford horse-car system at the foot of Vanderbilt Hill, a horse-car ride of two miles and a fraction to the railroad station, and six miles by steam railway to Bloomfield. The other would be by 'horse and buggy' over the country road six miles between the two churches." He boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Scarborough on South Main Street in West Hartford. After some time he persuaded his sister, Jennie E. Hinckley, to join him in West Hartford and to help him open and occupy the parsonage.

He still knew something was missing in his life and recalled the beautiful girl he had met one day back in Rhode Island. He wrote to her brother, asking his advice about writing to her; and the brother encouraged him to do so. Thus it came about that on August 12, 1880, George and Harriett Palmer were married in Wakefield, R.I. by the Rev. William Pendleton Chipman.

The Baptist parsonage in West Hartford, on the north side of Farmington Avenue, was just two houses away from the home of Mr. William H. Hall. Congregationalists like Hall had little regard for Baptists, but Mr. Hall must have taken a liking to Hinckley because he invited the young man to bring the devotional message at a Sunday School conference to be held in another part of the state. The trip gave the two men some time to talk, and Hinckley confided in Hall his longtime dream of providing homes and schools for needy boys. The two men became good friends, and Hall eventually introduced Hinckley to wealthy citizens who might financially back his dream.



The members of the Bloomfield and West Hartford churches liked Hinckley and appreciated his ministry. They knew he had no degrees from college or seminary, but they felt he should be ordained. They convened an ordination council at the West Hartford church presided over by Rev. George M. Stone, D.D., pastor of the Asylum Avenue Baptist Church in Hartford. The council voted unanimously to proceed to ordination.

Hinckley writes, "I was obsessed with the idea of being of service to God and humanity—especially of that section of the human family known as boys—boys and youth; though the distinction between boys and adolescents had not then become prominent. [. . .] In the freedom of camp life—boating, swimming, fishing, evening campfires—[. . .] with a perfectly natural recognition of God each day, could I not get into the heart of boys a better concept of manhood, of the ministry, and of life?" (Continued on page 8)



In the first year of his pastorate, Hinckley decided to try out his ideas. He persuaded a number of church people to allow their sons to go camping for a couple of weeks. From Hartford the group took the Connecticut Valley Railroad to Saybrook Junction and then traveled on the N.Y., N.H. & H. Railroad to Wakefield. There they got into boats that took them down to Point Judith Pond to Gardner's Island. At this time, boys' camps were unfamiliar to most people, but Hinckley set up a well-organized camp. There were lots of outdoor activities, and each day ended with devotions. One day the Kingston Brass Band, the members of which were old friends of Hinckley, came and put on a concert.

In 1881 Hinckley announced his resignation from the Bloomfield and West Hartford pastorates. When notice of it appeared in the Hartford papers, he got a call inviting him to become pastor of the Rainbow Baptist Church in Windsor, which he accepted. The village of Rainbow was dependent upon the income from three paper mills; and Mr. William L. Bidwell, head of one of the mills, was a parish-ioner.

"There were unusual activities one evening around the Rainbow parsonage. Two elderly women arrived at the front door, apparently in haste. The doctor from Poquonoc [sic] arrived and entered the parsonage without knocking. At nine o'clock that evening a child was born in the chamber." This was the couple's first born, Alice Louise, born in 1881. Three siblings were to follow: Walter, 1885, Edward Benjamin, 1887, and Faith, 1891.

Hinckley was pastor in Rainbow for fifteen months when he received a letter from Nelson E. Kingsbury of Hartford, New England Secretary of the American Sunday School Union of Philadelphia. The Sunday School Union was offering him a job as its representative in either Oregon or Maine at a salary equal to that in Rainbow. It was 1883, and he chose to go to Maine, took his wife and daughter to spend a few weeks in Wakefield, and headed north. He traveled by boat from Boston and eventually arrived in Bangor. His mission was to start Sunday Schools in Maine, and he arranged for a service in a small town six miles from the city. He continued to travel around Maine, founding Sunday Schools and then visiting them. He was also invited by a number of churches to preach at evangelistic services. Eventually he left the employ of the Sunday School Union and became State Evangelist for the Baptist Churches of Maine. Although a few churches asked him to become their pastors, he resisted, for he had something else in mind.

In 1889 he bought a 125-acre farm in Fairfield, Maine, and the Good Will Farm was on its way. The school, eventually known as Good Will, has served ever since as a residential school for needy boys and girls. Hinckley ran the home until 1919, when his son Walter became administrator. Girls were admitted in 1897, and some 200 children were living there by 1913.



George Walter Hinckley died in 1950 at the age of 97.

Sources: (1) *The Man of Whom I Write: Incidents in the Life of Reverend George Walter Hinckley, Founder of The Good Will Homes, Hinckley, Maine* (Galahad Press, Fairfield, Maine: 1954). (2) *Sesquicentennial History, First Baptist Church of West Hartford, 1858-2008* (published by the church, 2008). (3) www.mainememory.net. (4) www.gwh.org/About/GWH/History.aspx

