

# The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

April, 2015

## OLD FARM VIDEO FEATURED IN APRIL PROGRAM

This is no joke! On April Fool's Day, Wednesday, April 1, 6:30 PM, at Prosser Public Library, 1 Tunxis Avenue, Ralph Schmoll's video of the Old Farm School will be shown. Dr. Schmoll has added several minutes of additional material on schools in Wintonbury Parish and will be talking about his research and methods. This is a great program to invite your friends to.

The Old Farm School bell tolled daily in the morning, at noon and afternoon, as well as for public functions, funerals and notifying residents of fire. Completed in 1796, just twenty years after the Revolution, the building was in continuous use as a school until 1921, when the Blue Hills School was completed on Rockwell Avenue.

In 1795, land in Ohio which had been owned by the State of Connecticut (the "Western Reserve") was sold for \$1,200,000; and with this money a trust fund was established with proceeds to be used to support the schools of the state. Wintonbury Parish, which then had seven small schools, was in this way enabled to build a fine new two-story brick building on Park Avenue. The second floor remained unused until 1829, when it was finished off for the use of the older "scholars" (as they were called then). The desks and seats now on the second floor were installed at that time.



Old Farm School

For 125 years, students got along without indoor plumbing or electricity. The building, located at 151 School Street at the corner of Park Avenue, has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1972.

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DON'T FORGET! APRIL 1, 2015, AT 6:30 PM AT  
PROSSER PUBLIC LIBRARY. BE THERE!

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**Recent Event:** On February 4 at our Black History Month Program, Actress Stephanie Jackson performed the role of Mary Todd Lincoln's dressmaker in a program entitled "They Called Me Lizzy." The audience was treated to a moving dramatic experience.



Stephanie Jackson — R. Pierce photo



**LETTERS**

*A letter from member George Grisevich, retired Hartford history teacher, regarding the article in our February issue about the Gravel Hill School District, which straddled the Bloomfield-Hartford town line:*

I remember many years ago the abandoned school house on Blue Hills Avenue between Harold and Burnham Streets, Hartford, about where a Hartford Public Library branch is now located. I did not know the District was organized in 1835. It eventually merged with Hartford's Northwest District.

The "joint district" does not surprise me. There was another one called Prospect Hill (Avenue) Union District, where West Hartford and Hartford students attended the same district school.

Bloomfield's southern boundary has always puzzled me. I have questions why Bloomfield's line goes as far as Tower Avenue, almost near the Simpson-Waverly School in Hartford!

[Editor's note: Can anyone explain the southern boundary for our readers?]

**we ♥  
volunteers!**

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Wintonbury Historical Society, Inc.  
151-153 School Street, P.O. Box 7454, Bloomfield, CT 06002

Tel. 860-243-1531

Email: [Wintonbursociety@att.net](mailto:Wintonbursociety@att.net)

Web: [www.bloomfieldcthistory.org](http://www.bloomfieldcthistory.org)

**OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS**

Bloomfield Garage,

689 Park Avenue

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## CELEBRATE BLOOMFIELD WEEK AND HISTORY DAY

An ad-hoc committee of the Bloomfield Town Council is planning a week of celebrating our town, from Saturday, May 30 through Saturday, June 6, 2015. The Historical Society is represented on the committee by Mary Murray, and the co-chair is Society member and Councilman Joel Neuwirth. According to the *Bloomfield Messenger* of February 20, “the idea is to organize a week-long event showcasing everything that is good about the town.” History Day will be on Sunday, May 31. The Old Farm School will be open, and bus tours of historic Bloomfield will be offered. Other events are still in the planning stage. Actively involved in the project are Ron and Ruthanne Marchetti, Ralph and Louise Schmoll, and Libby Merrow.

## CHECK OUT THOSE CHURCHES

A new research project of the Society is a survey of all the religious institutions in Bloomfield: churches, synagogues, mosques, and anything else we can find. So far the project is very loosely organized and a lot more help is needed. It is a formidable task to make contact with every religious organization in town—more than thirty at last count—and record some basic information. Of course, we have some histories already written, but there are other congregations, large and small, whose presence in town should be chronicled as a part of Bloomfield history. If you would like to be a part of this, please email [Wintonbursociety@att.net](mailto:Wintonbursociety@att.net). For the moment, here’s a list of survey questions written by Ruthanne Marchetti.

- Do you have a formal or informal written history of your congregation? If so, may we please have a copy for the Wintonbury Historical Society Archives?
- When did your congregation have its beginning?
- What were some of the most difficult challenges you faced in your early days?
- Was your congregation part of another before forming in your present location?
- If there was a move, where did you move from and why?
- Is your congregation affiliated with a larger religious or spiritual group?
- Do you have a written mission statement and/or statement of beliefs?
- What is the size of your membership or weekly attendance?
- Do you have a full-time officiant/clergy? Part-time?
- Do you have other paid staff members? If so, what are those positions?
- Do you have active youth programs? Are they affiliated with other area churches or groups?
- Do you have a school or weekly educational program?
- Thinking back over the past five years, what three things make you proudest of your congregation?



First Congregational  
Meetinghouse

## IN MEMORIAM

Jeanne M. Hunciker died on January 19, 2015. Jeanne was a long-time teacher and then Social Studies Chairperson for the Hartford high schools. Among her many leadership positions and plaudits, she was treasurer and president of the Wintonbury Historical Society. Jeanne was a prime mover behind the production of the hardcover book *From Wintonbury to Bloomfield* in 1983.



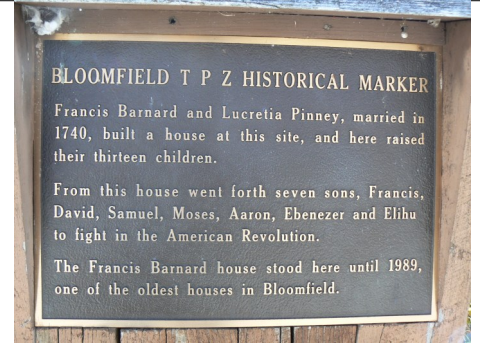
Hartford Courant photo

## CURATOR'S CORNER by Fannie Gabriel

√As we approach the date of the yearly tag sale, April 25, the Society will have deaccessioned books for sale to the public.

√On the corner of Duncaster and Adams Roads stood the 1760 Lt. Francis Barnard House. In 1988, Roberta Kania, Society curator at the time, noted that there had been several changes in the house and that presently the only original evidence appeared to be in the cellar—18 X 10 foot beams over the fireplace—which still had the baker's brick oven. The house was demolished in 1989.

√Welcome to Mr. and Mrs. Philip Schenck as new members of the Society.



The Barnard marker at Vista Gardens, Duncaster Road at Adams

—R. Pierce photo

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board met on March 18 with eleven members present. President Richard Pierce reported that the Metacomet third-graders will visit the Old Farm School on March 25 and 26, snow and cold having prevented their visiting in February.

Treasurer Judy Dahlgren-Dechand reported that as of February 28 we had income for the fiscal year (2014-2105) of \$3,560 and expenses of \$4,877. With the tag sale and membership renewals coming up, we should make out all right. We have not had an official budget for this fiscal year due to too many unknowns on the income side, but Judy worked out a feasible balanced budget, which the Board approved, as follows:

### Income:

Dues	2,500
Publication Sales	300
Donations	2,700
Memorials	300
Tag Sale/Flea Market	500
Program Support	<u>400</u>
	6,700

### Expenses:

Utilities	3,000
Printing and Postage	700
Insurance	850
Website	450
House Committee	1,000
Program Committee	300
Office	300
Membership Fees	<u>100</u>
	6,700

Fred Hesketh, historian, reported a recent meeting with a representative of *The Journal*, in which he and Ralph Schmoll were able to supply the paper with old photographs of Bloomfield. *The Journal* plans to print one in each issue along with an explanatory comment from Fred.

Programming for the fall is shaping up. In September, Ralph

(Continued on next page)



Schmoll will show his Gillette House video at Prosser. In November, Barbara Beeching will speak about her research in Connecticut African American history. We cannot yet announce the speaker for June 3, but we expect to have a person well-known in town.

The revision of the Society website has made good progress. Eleven meetings with consultant Dan Utti have been held so far. The website is up-to-date, but there is always more to be done. Go to [www.bloomfieldcthistory.org](http://www.bloomfieldcthistory.org). The latest innovation is a FaceBook account. Visit it if you possibly can!

George Merrow reported that a plumber had come over and replaced the defective sump pump in the basement of the History Center at a cost of \$377.

There was discussion of tag sale plans for Saturday, April 25. Board members will be soliciting Society members for baked goods to be sold that day.

The question came up of whether the Old Wintonbury Cemetery should be on the National Register of Historic Places. Libby Merrow was encouraged to gather information in support of this idea.

## ANNUAL TAG SALE AND FLEA MARKET

The tag sale on the historical society grounds at Park Avenue and School Streets will be held this year on Saturday, April 25, with a rain date of May 2. Over twenty vendors are expected, and baked goods made by Society members will be for sale. To reserve a vendor space, call 860-242-2943. For general information or to volunteer, call 860-242-7639. This tag sale has been held annually for many years. Tag sale aficionados wouldn't miss it for anything.



APRIL 25, 2015



2014 PHOTO BY  
JANIS LANGSTON



## THAT NEW-FANGLED TYPEWRITER

Employment of female office workers began as an experiment during the [Civil War], when the United States government and some private businessmen hired female clerks, copyists, and bookkeepers to fill a wartime manpower shortage. [. . .] What was more, women seemed better suited than men for two skilled jobs—stenographer and typist—created by the newly invented typewriter. [. . .] Typewriters caught on slowly in the business community. Early machines were slow, expensive (about \$125), and undependable. Moreover, many people considered it rude for a firm to type its correspondence. Still, many government, legal, and business offices were employing “type girls” by the mid-1870s. [. . .] “No invention has opened for women so broad and easy an avenue to profitable and suitable employment. . . . More girls are now earning from \$10 to \$20 per week with the ‘Type-Writer,’ and we can at once secure good situations for one hundred expert writers on it.” --from Daniel E. Sutherland, *The Expansion of Everyday Life 1860-1876* (1989), pp. 205-206.

## FROM MY READING by Richard Pierce

*In February of last year, I invited you to think about History and a Civil Society. I quoted from Why Study History? by John Fea: “Our nation is being threatened by our failure to resolve our differences in a civil fashion, work for the common good, and develop the virtues necessary for our republic to continue functioning.” I went on to maintain that the study of history, when rightly pursued, can teach us empathy—the ability to see someone else’s point of view—and thus change us so that we can live peaceably together, comfortable with our own beliefs, respecting differences but not inflamed by them.*

*This year, browsing the shelves of the public library, I came across Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding by Gustav Niebuhr (2008). Niebuhr, grandson of H. Richard Niebuhr of Yale and longtime religion reporter for The New York Times, is now a professor at Syracuse. As I began reading his book, I was struck by the following words. I think they’re part of what a historical society is all about.*



Interfaith “Coexist” logo (Google)

“John Paul II, elected pope in 1978, had come of age in Nazi-occupied Poland, whose German rulers unleashed terror against one of the largest Jewish populations in Europe. More than five decades after that era, in a speech in Assisi, Italy, the pope praised cooperation among people of different religious faiths. Speaking before a crowd that included representatives of twenty different religious traditions, he called it a ‘sign of hope’ at the turn of the twenty-first century. He didn’t dwell on the dangers of religiously inspired violence—he didn’t need to. But a subtle urgency pervaded his speech, as if in choosing to address such a spiritually mixed audience, he was telling them that if they wanted to be peacemakers, they would be going head-to-head with fanatics for the world’s future. Make no mistake, this is a war of ideas under way, as important as the long struggle of democratic ideals against crushing authoritarianism. [. . .]

“Yet the best of this work, it seem to me, is not about erasing differences but trying to understand and allow for them. ‘This isn’t about meeting in the middle,’ a rabbi who specialized in Christian-Jewish relations has remarked. In other words, if you’re a Christian, you don’t deal authentically with other religious people by muzzling your affirmation of Jesus’ divinity. Likewise, a real Muslim who wants to speak as such with Christians and Jews can’t be expected to declare Muhammad just another prophet. [. . .]

“The sign of hope has to do with the willingness of people to take one another seriously, to acknowledge the vitality of the beliefs that separate adherents of different faiths rather than their lethal potential. As one Catholic theologian put it succinctly to me: ‘Can one admit differences without being adversarial? Now, that’s a radical thing in the world—that you’re not me, and I’m not you, but that doesn’t mean a threat.’ Radical it is, indeed. It cuts directly against tribalism, an impulse to which most of us are prey. It is about living in the world, which we are repeatedly told is globalized and globalizing, throwing us daily into ever-widening contact with people who would have been unknown to our grandparents and perhaps our parents as well. [. . .]

“This isn’t about tolerance—essentially, living and letting live. Mere toleration of differences can be a wonderful alternative to mayhem. But it is not a stopping point in human relations. It does little to educate people about one another. That’s an activity that demands a greater, more committed effort.”

