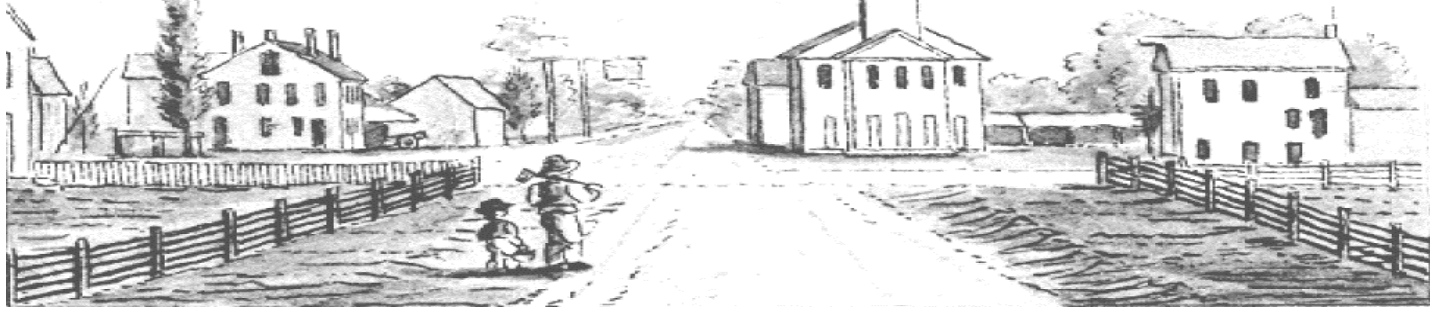


The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut — February 2014

FEBRUARY PROGRAM TO BE AT CARMEN ARACE

NZINGA'S DAUGHTERS WILL SING HISTORIC SONGS

Wintonbury Historical Society will sponsor the annual Black History Month celebration this year on Wednesday, February 5, 7:00 PM at the Carmen Arace Middle School Auditorium, 390 Park Avenue. The event is cosponsored by Carmen Arace and other supporters. The event is entitled "Songs of the Underground Railroad" and will evoke memories of the people Francis Gillette hid at his home on Bloomfield Avenue during their travels toward freedom.

The performing ensemble, Nzinga's Daughters, is a group of women who share their gift of song and prose from the East Coast of the USA to the West Coast of Africa.

The program invites the audience to experience the creativity, ingenuity, and perseverance employed by African American slaves in their efforts to shepherd runaway slaves to safety. Because slaves were prohibited from learning to read or write, they developed an elaborate system of communication which included embedding coded messages into the verses of Negro spirituals.



Nzinga's Daughters Performing Ensemble

The ensemble engages the audience with sing-alongs and performers acting out stories or reading short excerpts about relevant historic figures or events.

The group is named for early seventeenth century Angolan ruler Queen Nzinga, remembered for her efforts in resisting the Portuguese slave trade. Known for her exceptional statesmanship and guerilla warfare tactics, Queen Nzinga effectively resisted Portuguese forces for decades through her military strategies and alliances with the Dutch. (continued on p. 2)

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February Program, continued from page 1:

America's "Underground Railroad" refers to the secret routes and the network of resource people in various states used by thousands of enslaved Africans to escape to freedom in Canada and Mexico. As a covert resistance movement, the Underground Railroad was decentralized in nature.

"Conductors" responsible for moving enslaved Africans from "station" or safe house to "station" and the "stationmasters" who housed them (such as Gillette)

knew little more than their own part

in the operation. Oral traditions passed

down about the Underground Railroad indicate that songs, quilts, and specific code words and phrases were used as communication aids along the routes. The performance by Nzinga's Daughters will feature inspiring songs and stories about this little-known part of America's (and Bloomfield's) past. (Thanks to the Windsor Historical Society for some of this material.)



Francis Gillette House

To learn more about Nzinga's Daughters and hear their songs, go to www.nzingasdaughters.com.

2014 MEETING DATES

All meetings will be on Wednesdays at 7:00 unless otherwise noted.

Board of Directors (at the History Center) Note: These are open meetings which any interested persons may attend.

January 15

March 12

May 21

August 20

October 15

Programs for all members and the public (at various locations):

February 5

April 2

June 11 (potluck supper, annual meeting, & program, 6:00)

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151-153 School Street, P.O. Box 7454, Bloomfield, CT 06002

Tel. 860-243-1531

Email: Wintonbursociety@att.net

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AASLH

American Association
for State and Local History

Sanctuary: Kelly's Barn, Duncaster Road

By Marilyn Johnston

Step off the winding road of the daily track,
take the invitation to a weed-shagged path
up the earthen ramp, mound rising to an open door
over the straw-flecked threshing floor

to stand under a high-roofed basilica
of cool blackness in broad day. Pine board walls
send criss-cross streaks of shining light
like sun behind teeth of a broken comb.

A staggered mountain of spiraled
hay bales rises to the ceiling in this November cold,
at rest in a century all its own,
not this century, not ours, but one of the past's

secret holdings, secure, entwined with time
in the sweet rancid breath of ancient harvests.
Liquid coos and soft wing-brushings flutter high
above us in the rafters. I remember Kelly,

in his eighties, strong, dogged Yankee, still working,
doing fix-it jobs for the widow Kit Stevenson
who owned our house before we owned it.
How he showed off his saltbox by standing in the fireplace,

and led us to his barn, slipping through
massive slider doors out of the sun-blast heat
into the mystery of a cool dark nave, the hush
calling us into a deeper attendance.

I recall tiers of scythe handles in rows, the loops
of burnished reins, still waiting a master touch, burning
through the fragrant hay heat surrounding them,
things still at the ready at the run-out edge of farming.

How we craned a backwards glance up as if in Notre Dame...
not the fabled Rose in the gable end, not stained-glass,
but a saw-cut oblong window framed its image:
deep-stained blue crossed by running clouds.

—Marilyn Johnson of Bloomfield is author of two full-length poetry collections, *Weight of the Angel* and *Silk Fist Songs* (Antrim House Books) and a chapbook, *Against Disappearance* (Redgreene Press).



Kelly's Barn on Duncaster Road (R. Pierce photo)

In Memory of Eileen Phelps

Eileen was pleased to have lived almost all of her life on the old Phelps farm, in the house that her father built at 151 Wintonbury Avenue. At sixteen, she was valedictorian of her class at Bloomfield High. Hartford Hospital's business office was her 8-5 job but she happily spent lots of her energy on History. She was a walking encyclopedia of Windsor/ Wintonbury/ Bloomfield history. She was a precise researcher for our Society and for the Descendants of the Founders of Ancient Windsor, a kindly executive as she led the Prosser Library Book Sales for years, a faithful spark at the Congregational Church. Her interests led her to many friends and her many friends loved her for her gentleness.

Late in life, her great intelligence began to crumble and she moved away from her beloved Bloomfield to live with relatives. She died last October. Her old house still stands, looking forlorn which is just how we feel when remember the loss of Eileen. (by Libbie Merrow)



OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

- Bloomfield Garage, 689 Park Avenue
- Simsbury Free Library, 749 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury
- Geissler's Supermarket, 40 Tunxis Avenue
- Sir Speedy Printing, 21 Old Windsor Road
- Williams Service Center, 56 Tunxis Avenue

LEAVING A LEGACY

The Wintonbury Historical Society is a nonprofit organization dependent on the generosity of people who value history and Bloomfield history in particular. The Society solicits contributions from individuals and businesses. You can make a difference by (1) setting aside a gift in your will to the Society, (2) naming the Society as beneficiary of an insurance policy, (3) remembering loved ones with gifts to the Society in their honor, and (4) naming the Society as beneficiary of an IRA or 401K.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

At the meeting on January 15, 2014, President Pierce reported that the Society has now completed all six units of the StEPs Program and qualifies for making application for a grant of up to \$3,000. He stressed that the various standards we've worked on during the past two years of StEPs are things we need to continue to strengthen and improve in the year ahead.

The Board reviewed the draft of an investment policy and tabled adoption until the next meeting pending further input. Concerning the Emergency Response Plan, the Blue Hills fire marshall will visit the History Center and make recommendations.

The Website Committee (Dennis Hubbs, Ralph Schmoll, Dick Pierce) has met with a professional web designer. We will view other historical societies' sites and ask some of them who designed their sites.

After February, upcoming programs are April 2, a panel discussion on History and a Civil Society, and June 11, a presentation by Carolyn Ivanoff on the Civil War's impact on families.

The House Committee (George Merrow, Doug Barnard) reported that the Southwest District School has been cleaned up. At the History Center, a first aid kit was purchased and mounted near the front door.

Fund-raising has been missing so far this year, and our bank balance has diminished. The Board voted to have our annual tag sale on Saturday, April 26 with a rain date of May 3.

CURATOR'S CORNER

Did you ever wonder where the brownstone step at the Old Farm School came from? In a September 6, 1978 letter, then-president Dwight Burnham wrote, "Yesterday John Zito delivered and set the brownstone step. It came from the Arsenal School on Main Street in Hartford."

Fred Hesketh's files on the history of Prosser Public Library yielded these old Wintonbury names: A membership fee of twelve shillings was paid by Zadock Brown, Enoch Frisbie, Dr. and Deacon Caleb Hitchcock, Major Cadwell, Nathan Eggleston, Samuel Colton, Elihu Mills, Jonathan Bidwell, Amos Gillett, Samuel Eno, Job Higley, Joseph Brown, Isaac Burr, Solomon Griswold, Jonathan Palmer, David Grant, Jonathan Filley, Rev. William Miller, Thomas Newberry, Jedushan Bumstead, Jonathan Allyn, George Latimer, Dosethrus Hubbard, Widows Abigail Bidwell, Ashsah Gillett, Sarah Wait, Dr. Tyler, Lieutenant Gordon, Joseph Gordon, Jr., and C. Case.



Old Farm School

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: BLOOMFIELD GARAGE, INC., 90th Anniversary



It may seem that Bloomfield Garage has been on the corner of Park Avenue and Prospect Street forever. Well, not really. Only for seventy-six years and three generations.

On April 2, 1913 Kasimiras Povilaitis (Charles B. Politis) arrived at Ellis Island from Lithuania to pursue the American dream. He lived with relatives in Waterbury and later moved to Hartford.

In Hartford he worked various jobs, like Hartford Rubber Works, Pope Hartford, and Miner Pierce-Arrow, where he learned his mechanical skills. When Miner Pierce-Arrow sold some new trucks to Griffin Farm, he was temporarily sent to Bloomfield to train their personnel on maintenance and repair of the new trucks. During this, his first exposure to Bloomfield, he stayed on the third floor of the Griffin house on Tunxis Avenue at the end of Day Hill Road (which used to be Griffin Road).

In 1919 and 1920 Charles B. Povilaitis resided at the home of R. C. Knox on Kenyon Street in Hartford as a valet and chauffeur. As fate would have it, R. C. Knox had a summer home in Madison, as did a family from Scranton, Pennsylvania. It was there that Charles met “Bessie” Mahon (an Irish immigrant), who was a domestic and cook for the Scranton family. (She was a great cook, but was always embarrassed when she told the story of when she cooked asparagus for the first time for the family but cooked the stalks, served them, and threw the tips away.) Charles and Bessie married in 1921 and had four children: Charles, William, Catherine, and John.

In 1924 Charlie Politis started his repair business on Congress Street in Hartford, not far from

where R. C. Knox had his business.

In 1930 he found a place to rent in a garage owned by Domenic Masselli on Tunxis Avenue in Bloomfield. It was between Doc Fenton’s Restaurant and Filley Park (where the Roberts Agency is now). Early on he specialized in the repair of Stutz autos and later became an associate dealer for the Ford Motor Company.

In 1937 Politis built the building on the corner of Park Avenue and Prospect Street, where his sons later joined the business: Bill in 1945 and John in 1957. Son Charles was a casualty of World War II.



Bloomfield Garage. R. Pierce photo

During the postwar years the business sold Texaco Fire Chief gasoline and Goodyear tires. It also sold a series of classic names in American automotive history: Kaiser-Frazer, Packard, and Studebaker. In the 1950s John Deere tractors were sold to area farms.

The business is currently run by John Politis, C. Francis Politis (William’s son), and John’s son-in-law Gary Hacia. It is still in the business of auto repairs and auto sales and in 2014 is celebrating its 90th anniversary, eighty-four years in Bloomfield.



1798 MAP SURPRISINGLY ACCURATE

The internet and computers have made the acquisition of a map child's play. Maps of towns, cities, states, or even nations are available with a simple "click" or two. How then did Windsor's very accurate map of 1798 come into being? That map rivals anything that Google or MapQuest can give us. Yet it is 215 years old and depicts the parishes, roads and houses as well as the two rivers and the location of the 200 homes for Windsor's 2000 residents.

An overlay of a 2013 map of the same area over the Pease map illustrates that the highways (excluding Interstate 91) serving Windsor today, for the most part, follow the paths traveled by its residents more than two centuries ago.

What master surveyor/cartographer could have accomplished such a feat? Suffield native Seth Pease, considered by many to be among the most distinguished of the early American Surveyors, was the fifth of eleven children born to Suffield shoemaker/sawmill operator Joseph Pease who also served as Suffield town clerk and a judge of probate.

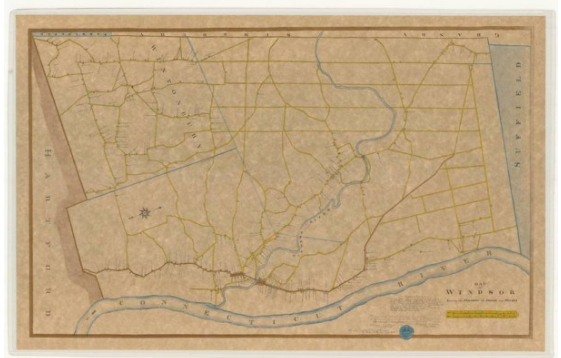
Young Seth's survey career began in faraway Maine in 1794-95 as a starting point from which he went on to perform extensive surveying in the area that later became known as the "Connecticut Western Reserve." Following the colonists' Revolution against the English Crown, the Connecticut Colony was granted a strip of land about 75 miles wide "extending from Ocean to Ocean." Connecticut subsequently ceded the bulk of the western portion of that land to the U. S. Congress but reserved unto itself a strip south of Lake Erie and the 41st parallel near present Youngstown Ohio, later known as "New Connecticut" and still later as the "Connecticut Western Reserve."

Army officer General Moses Cleaveland was put in charge of the new "reserve" and recruited Seth Pease to map the acquired land, to lay out the townships and lots, and to make maps of land to be sold to stockholders.

Pease is also credited with creating the maps with a layout of roads and building sites for the City of Cleveland (Named after the General after deleting the "a" in his name). Those who worked under Pease's supervision converted the wilderness into grids of townships and farms for sale to investors and settlers in the 5700 square mile "Reserve." Funds received from the sale of such land subsequently supported programs for the education of Connecticut's children for many decades.

Cleaveland and Pease were both meticulous record keepers to the point that the Western Reserve Historical Society has voluminous collections of Pease's maps and notes on the 3,000,000 acres of land in the reserve. Included among them are the first maps of Cleveland (1796) showing a proposed layout of street and very early subdivision maps. Not unlike his later map of Windsor, the original map is a treasured document on display at the Western Reserve Historical Society."

--submitted by Fred Hesketh to the Windsor Historical Society Significant Object Writing Contest, 2013



we  volunteers!

Have you seen those reports that people who volunteer are happier and live longer? Your Historical Society is always in need of more volunteers. You could work at the History Center on our collections. You could arrange our programming. You could write for this newsletter. You could organize fund raising projects. You could dust and clean. You could prepare and serve refreshments. The list goes on and on. All you have to do is speak to one of the officers or directors or email Wintonbursociety@att.net.

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