

The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

February 2013

Past Perambulations

by Joan Sereda

Today it seems like there is so much traffic in Bloomfield, so many stop lights, cars lining the streets waiting to go. When I moved to Bloomfield in 1963 with my husband and family, it was much quieter. You'd see only a few cars downtown, never any traffic congestion. We lived on Kenwood Circle for 43 years. My husband set up his medical practice upstairs over the bank, and our children attended local schools—including, in our first year, our fifth-grader going to the old school on Park Avenue.

These were the days of the First National Store (later Amazing Stores and now a dialysis center), and then a new block featuring the Shopping Bag (where Park Avenue Pizza is). The Post Office was on Park Avenue near the block containing Goldenthal's Five-and-Ten and Larry Cohen's Park Avenue Pharmacy.

For a few years I was a stay-at-home mom. There were many of us in town, and plenty of activities to choose from. I joined the League of Women Voters, which was very active under the leadership of Zelda Chester and others.

When I started teaching, I was at Metacomet for ten years and Laurel for twenty-three years. I remember how the community worked together to integrate its schools, earning the All-America City Award in 1970. I decorated the walls of my third and fourth grade classrooms with scenes of children from different lands, representing the different backgrounds of my students. My students learned how to say phrases in Spanish, French, German, and Cantonese because these languages reflected their backgrounds. I wanted them to know that a good community means that there are a lot of different kinds of people living together.

[Former Metacomet third grader, Sarah Pierce, now a fourth-grade teacher herself, recalls when a child told her she had "happy eyes" and it made her think of Mrs. Sereda. Sarah writes, "She was so full of life and energy! She made me feel that I mattered, and that I was indeed a member of our classroom family."]

Please send your memories to PO Box 7454 or Wintonbursociety@att.net.

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FEBRUARY PROGRAM TO BE A DOUBLE FEATURE

In February we celebrate Black History Month with not one, but two programs! On Wednesday, February 6, 7:00 PM at the Prosser Public Library, Historian **Fred Hesketh** will speak on the history of African Americans in Bloomfield, starting in the earliest days when Bloomfield was just Wintonbury Parish and on down through the years until 1970 when our town was named one of the nation's "All America Cities." In this presentation co-sponsored by the library and the Wintonbury Historical Society, Fred will show dozens of pictures illustrating the people and places which make up the town's own Black history.

Then two weeks later, on Wednesday, February 20, 7:00 at Prosser, a panel of town leaders will address the years since 1970. Moderated by **Richard Pierce**, the panel will consist of former deputy mayor, BHS principal and current Board of Education chair **Donald Harris**, Library Director **Beatrice Llewellyn**, former Board of Education chair and WHS director **Shirley Thompson**, and former mayors **Edward Stockton** and **Joseph Suggs**. The panelists will share memories and discuss the African-American experience in town during the last forty years.



Dick Spafford photo

Ray McMahon and Ed Stockton with sign, 1970

SPRING PROGRAMS

On **Wednesday, April 3**, we are working on a program featuring a reading of one of the plays written by Anna Ferrarresso of Bloomfield in the 1950s. The Society has in its archives a number of Ferrarresso's manuscripts and is cooperating with Prosser Library to stage a reading of one.

Sir Edward Coke believed that "custom, precedent, and procedure all influenced a legal judgment, and all involved knowledge and historical fact. Like a living thing, the law had evolved and adapted; its history influenced its response to a new circumstance as much as pure logic did." —John M. Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul* (2012), p. 32.

A Bit of History: The Origin of Black History Month

On December 19, 1875, Carter G. Woodson was born in Virginia to former slaves who could neither read nor write. In spite of his beginnings, Woodson achieved an education. He attended Berea College in Kentucky for two years until the college closed its doors to Blacks. He then took courses at the University of Chicago, returning to Berea when Blacks were readmitted to complete his bachelor's degree in literature in 1903. Later, when Chicago would not recognize his Berea degree, he completed a second bachelor's degree at Chicago in 1907 and a master's degree in 1908. He then enrolled in a doctoral program at Harvard, earning his degree in 1912. He was the second African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard, following W. E. B. Du-Bois.

He proclaimed that there was very little accurate written history about the lives and experiences of Americans of African descent. In 1915 Woodson established what was to become the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History. "We have a wonderful history behind us," he said. "If you are unable to demonstrate to the world that you have this record, the world will say to you, 'You are not worthy to enjoy the blessings of democracy or anything else'. They will say to you, 'Who are you anyway?' Your ancestors have never controlled empires or kingdoms and most of your race have contributed little or nothing to science and philosophy and mathematics." But a history—that provides real people, their experiences, the stuff of their lives, and highlights the value of all persons.

He fought for the observation of an annual Negro History Week to provide recognition of the race and to promote the documentation of that history. It took eleven years, but in 1926 mayors of cities across the country began issuing yearly proclamations recognizing Negro History Week.



By the late 1960s, thanks in part to the Civil Rights Movement and a growing awareness of black identity, Negro History Week had evolved into Black History Month on many college campuses.

President Gerald R. Ford officially recognized Black History Month in 1976, calling upon the public to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

To honor Mr. Woodson, the National Park Service is planning for the future of the Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic Site. The site today serves as the headquarters for the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

--from a talk by Fred Hesketh to be given on February 6, with some additions from encyclopedia.com

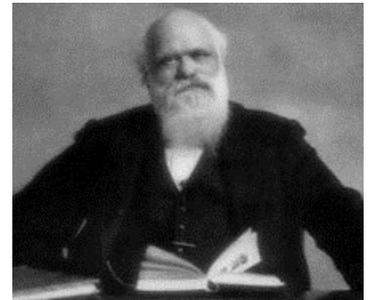


Browsing the *Courant* Archives

Last November, when Prof. Matthew Warshauer described to Society members local opposition to the Civil War, we were reminded how knowledge of history provides us with perspective on our own contentious times. What was going on here in Bloomfield a hundred and fifty years ago? The *Hartford Courant* archives provide a number of glimpses into our town in 1863—and remind us that the newspapers of that time were flagrantly partisan.

Was there opposition to the Civil War in our town? In an election report on October 7, 1863, the *Courant* celebrated solid Union victories in many area towns. In Bristol, however, the Copperheads won handily, and the report for Bloomfield was “Copperhead, as usual.”

The *Courant* was on the Union side. The following letter appeared there on March 26: “I notice by the *Times* of the 23d inst. that some copperhead spy, probably in the employ of the *Times* office, has stolen a letter addressed by the State Central Committee to J. L. Spencer of Bloomfield. If the copperheads have not decency and manliness enough to forward the letter to Mr. Spencer, which they must have purloined from the mails, or in some other way equally disreputable, they will please publish it as an advertisement and send the bill to me, as the committee have written no letters that they are afraid to see in print. Will the copperhead committee give us the same privilege?” The letter was signed by James G. Batterson, Chairman, Republican State Committee. Batterson, a Bloomfield boy, became known for his New England Granite Works and the Travelers Insurance Company.



James Batterson

In March, we learn that “There was a glorious good meeting at Bloomfield Friday night. James G. Batterson, Esq., Hon. John A. Kasson, and Hon. Henry C. Deming furnished the entertainment. Better speeches (and effective ones) were never made in old Bloomfield.” Batterson was back in Bloomfield in April to speak “on the issues involved in the coming election in the Congregational Church in Bloomfield on Saturday evening, April 4th, at 7 o’clock.”



The extent of public interest is shown by the size of a gathering at Alyn Hall in Hartford in April. The *Courant* of April 4 reported that “Every available spot was filled, the windows, aisles, seats, gallery, stage and boxes, and at least two thousand were turned away, disappointed in not obtaining admission even to the vestibule. . . . A large portion of the Gallery was occupied by ladies, many of them wearing the badge of the Patriot’s League.” There was a long list of vice-presidents, including N. F. Miller of Bloomfield.

Three speakers that evening sought to stir up the crowd. A Mr. James T. Brady of New York declared, “I shall tonight take the liberty of showing Mr. Burr of the *Hartford Times* that he is no Democrat and that I am. . . . I have read the resolutions of the Seymour organization (you cannot make me call it Democratic), and would say that not the boldest, vilest man in New York would ever dare to express to his minions such sentiments as are embraced in those resolutions. While I respect Mr. Seymour for his purity and amiability of character, I despise the platform and the principles it sets forth. I was born a democrat, and early taught to stand by my country, right or wrong—to seek redress, if any was needed, from the proper tribunal, and not seek to openly rebel against the government.” After the speakers finished, Colt’s Band played “some most eloquent music” and the meeting adjourned.

Continued on next page ►

Browsing the *Courant* Archives, continued

Meanwhile, life went on as usual. The June 18, 1863 *Courant* reported that Mr. Charles R. Watkins of Bloomfield “has left at this office a few stalks of rye, which measure seven feet nine inches, and which is said to be a fair average of the whole field.” There is no explanation of why Mr. Watkins took these to the newspaper.

In November a couple of men employed by livery keepers in Hartford went out to Bloomfield to get brush for barn brooms and trespassed upon the premises of Mr. Frederick Bushehhagen [sic], who proceeded to drive them off. They resisted, and “thereupon pounded Mr. B., and otherwise injured him.”



A Bloomfield man’s horse was injured in Hartford when another horse took fright and ran up North Main street. The horse’s wagon was filled with some heavy sticks of timber. In passing above Trumbull Street, the front wheel of the wagon and the timbers struck a horse belonging to Harris Dudley of Bloomfield and knocked him down, inflicting such injuries that his owner had him knocked in the head on the spot.

In February, we read that “Several Farms in the town of Bloomfield, adapted to the raising of Tobacco” are for sale. The agent is J. O. Filley of Bloomfield. In September, we read that Mr. Toohy sold a small farm, with stock and tools, at auction in Bloomfield.

Mr. Elisha C. Phelps died suddenly in Bloomfield on July 12, age 75. Later that summer Sarah Rockwell, four-month-old daughter of Van Buren H. Rockwell and Sarah J. London, died. And so the war years went on.



Corrigendum

In our last issue we reprinted an article from the *Hartford Courant*, 1909, which mentioned the Barnard family. Dorothy Barnard Cyr of Noank spotted some errors in the story. She writes that Ellen Barnard was the daughter of Judah Harrison Barnard (not Harrison J.) and Sarah Blakeslee. They had seven children (not six): six daughters and then Dorothy’s grandfather, Louis Harrison Barnard. Louis Harrison Barnard married Rosa Belden, and they had two sons: Carlton and Raymond, the latter of whom was Dorothy’s father. Thanks, Dorothy, for setting the record (and the *Courant*) straight.



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The Connecticut Historical Society.

Barnard House

CURATOR'S CORNER

More on town schools this month. Here's the background:

1701: a common school system went into effect in Connecticut

1712: school records were kept by the Church Society in each town

1795: the Connecticut General Assembly passed a law that all towns be divided into school districts. Wintonbury Parish was divided into seven:

Center (located near the entrance to Mountain View Cemetery)

North Middle (west side of Tunxis Avenue, short way north of Terry Plains Road

South Middle (on Cottage Grove Road, near the current entrance to CIGNA)

Northeast (on Filley Street)

Duncaster (at junction of Duncaster Road and Mountain Avenue)

Scotland North (near St. Andrew's Cemetery)

Scotland South (on corner of Duncaster and Adams Roads)

1818: church control of public schools ceased

At a meeting of the Board of Visitors (now Superintendent of Schools) on October 17, 1854, H. B. Case served as chairman and F. G. Barber as clerk. It was noted that H. B. Blasé, F. B. Barber, and Mrs. Sackett were appointed Acting School Visitors for the ensuing year. Textbooks were to be left with the Acting School Visitors.

The Jerome Avenue grammar school was built in 1913. The High School started in 1917-1921, and its first graduating class had seven students.



Fannie Gabriel

Leaving a Legacy

The Wintonbury Historical Society is a charitable and non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historical sites in Bloomfield and the memory of the ones who inhabited them.

The Society's ongoing expenses include the year-round heating and cooling of the History Center (our museum and library), the heating of the Old Farm School, maintenance and utilities for both buildings, and the three p's—printing, postage and programs. Fund raising can cover only a portion of our budgeted expenses. Therefore, we actively solicit dues-paying members and larger donations from those who value the history of Bloomfield and want to help preserve it. Here are a few ways you can leave a legacy:

1. Set aside a gift to the Society in your will.
2. Name the Society as beneficiary of an insurance policy.
3. Remember your loved ones with a gift in their honor.
4. Name the Society as a beneficiary of your IRA or 401K.

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Trivia: Noxzema is a trademark name with a personal history. Soon after its invention, it was marketed as an efficient cold cream as well as a remedy for relieving sunburn under the name "Dr. Bunting's Sunburn Remedy." Shortly after its introduction, a surprised and happy customer wrote to the company, reporting, "You cream knocked my eczema!" and a new name and use were announced for the remedy.

--reprinted from the *Killingly Historical Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2012)