



The Wintonbury Drummer

Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

February, 2015

MARY TODD LINCOLN'S DRESSMAKER TO SPEAK AT PROSSER

Elizabeth Keckly was born as a slave in Virginia, but through her talents as a seamstress she gained her freedom, moved to Washington, D.C., and started her own business. She became the dressmaker/designer for Mary Todd Lincoln and was a frequent visitor to the White House during the Lincoln presidency.

Actress Stephanie Jackson will perform the role of Elizabeth Keckly at Prosser Public Library on Wednesday, February 4, 2015, 6:30 PM. Entitled "They Called Me Lizzy. . . From Slavery to the White House," Jackson's program comes to us through the East Haddam Stage Company, which presented "The Speckled Band" as a radio play at Prosser a year ago. East Haddam's Kandie Carle has written and directed this new production. The library and the historical society are co-sponsors.

Stephanie Jackson, of Farmington CT, is a graduate of the University of Connecticut. She has previously created roles in such diverse productions as Tiwana Lewis's social issues theatre piece "Slice of Life" and portrayed the ancient African leader Yaa Asantewaa for UCONN. During the past 15 years Stephanie has been an assistant special education teacher with Connecticut's Oak Hill School for the Blind.

Elizabeth Keckly's book *Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* is still in print and has been supplemented by at least two biographies including the recent *Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker* by best-selling author Jennifer Chiaverini. During the Civil War, she was active in a number of charitable causes through her church and community, especially in aiding newly freed people arriving in Washington. She went on to become head of Wilberforce University's Department of Domestic Arts and Sciences in Xenia, Ohio. After a mild stroke in the 1890s, she returned to Washington to live out her days at the Home for Destitute Women and Children that she had helped found many years earlier.

Don't miss this inspiring production at Prosser. While advance registration is not required, Prosser appreciates your registering by calling 860-243-9721 or visiting www.prosserlibrary.info and clicking on Events for Adults.



**FEBRUARY PROGRAM AT PROSSER PUBLIC LIBRARY, 1 TUNXIS AVENUE,
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 6:30 PM. FREE AND OPEN TO ALL.**

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HESKETH EXPLORES AUER FARM

On November 12, 2014, in a cosponsored program, Society Historian Fred Hesketh spoke to a full meeting room at Prosser Public Library, describing the history and development of Auer Farm on Simsbury Road, from its purchase by the Auerbachs, its heyday under Beatrice Fox Auerbach's direction, and its eventual transfer to the 4-H Education Center at Auerfarm, as we know it today.



—R. Pierce photos

BATHING IN EARLY NEW ENGLAND

Most early New Englanders did not bathe; certainly not as thoroughly as we do today. Without hot running water or much privacy, baths were just not practical. Until the late 1700s most Americans washed no more than what showed—hands, faces, and necks—using a basin of cold water and a coarse cloth in the kitchen, or by the well. At that point, cultivated people began to wash themselves completely, in the privacy of their bedchambers, with basins of water and towels—what we call a sponge bath—or with coarse dry towels or brushes to scrub their skin “until it glowed.” Cleanliness slowly spread from the wealthy to the middle class, from city to village, and eventually from village to farm, and by the 1830s bathing was widely promoted by advice books. --reprinted from *Old Sturbridge Village Visitor*, Fall/Winter Edition 2014-2015, page 9

Connecticut
still revolutionary

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THANK YOU!

There is room for more!

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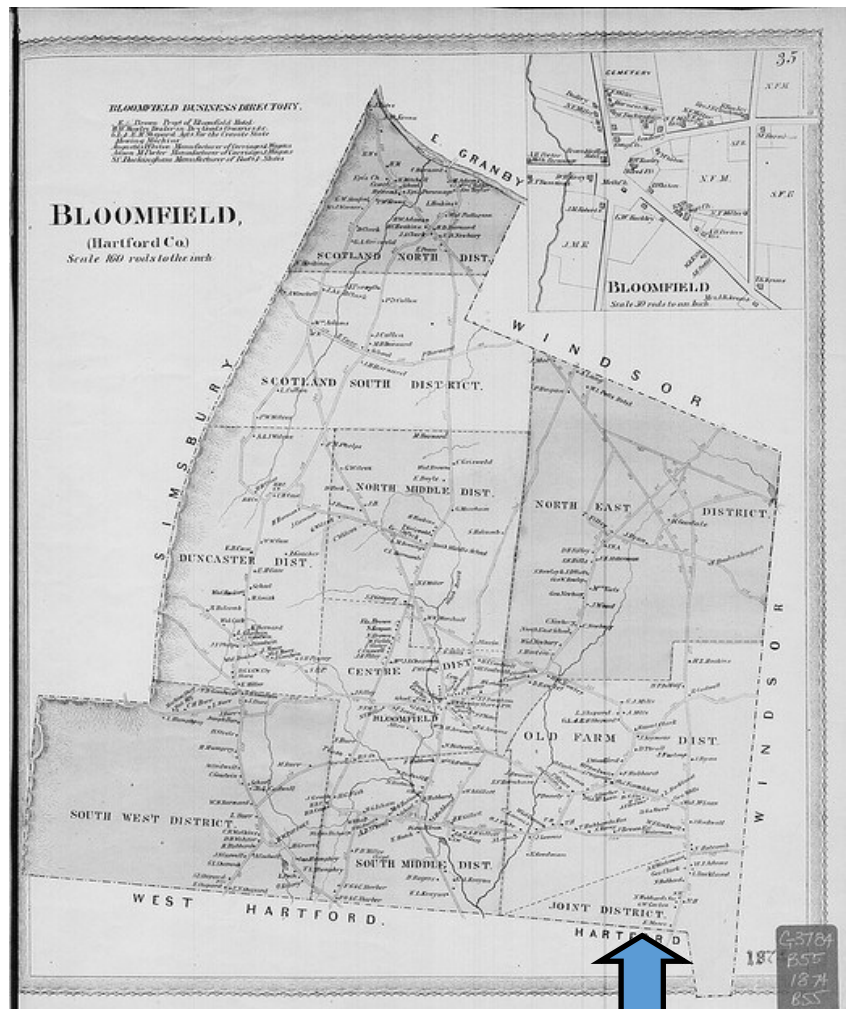
ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO IN BLOOMFIELD

“Shall Hartford Annex Bloomfield?” You may have thought regionalization to be a modern idea in Connecticut, but one hundred years ago, in February 1915, the question was being debated. The *Hartford Courant* of February 19, 1915 reported:

The city plan commission held a hearing last night on the petition of eight residents of the town of Bloomfield for the annexation of the Gravel Hill School district to the city of Hartford. The hearing lasted two hours, during the course of which the advantages and disadvantages of three separate plans were discussed separately and together and full explained by those present. The plans were for the annexation of the Gravel Hill School district, comprising about 800 acres, for the annexation of a larger share of the town of Bloomfield comprising about 1,700 acres, known as the ‘Wilcox plan,’ and for the annexation of the entire town of Bloomfield. There is a bill pending in the Legislature annexing the Gravel Hill district. At a meeting of the town of Bloomfield held February 12, it was unanimously voted that the entire town of Bloomfield annex Hartford and the city of Hartford the entire town of Bloomfield. The city plan commission will meet next Thursday to confer with a committee appointed at the town meeting regarding the advisability of adopting the town as a part of Hartford.

The Gravel Hill School District was established in June, 1835. It included part of Hartford’s Northwest District and part of Wintonbury’s Old Farm District. It was unusual in that it crossed town lines. Spanning the town line as it did, the District seems to have been a source of conflict. In 1885 it was the subject of a legal suit challenging its boundaries. The court at that time upheld the right of the town (now Bloomfield) to alter the boundaries of its school districts. On the 1874 Petersen Collection map of Bloomfield, the district, in the southeast corner of town, is labeled as “Joint.”

From ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *Hartford Courant* (1764-1988) pg, 13. Also from *Connecticut School Document*, Issues 1-25, *New England Reporter: All Cases Determined in the Courts of Last Resort*, by James E. Briggs, and *Special Acts and Resolutions of the State of Connecticut*, Vol. 2, p. 1076 (last three accessed on google.com/books, 1/12/15). See also the Petersen 1874 map at www.magic.lib.uconn.edu/historicalmaps.



Memorial Golf Tournament Supports Bloomfield High Golfers

Daniel Novarr of Bloomfield died a year ago, in January 2014, age 60. A graduate of Yale University, he worked for 37 years in the family business, Star Silk and Woolen Company, with his father Leo. He loved to discuss politics and history, particularly the U.S. Civil War and sports. He was past president of the Bloomfield Jaycees and coached youth soccer, baseball, and basketball. He was a UCONN basketball season ticketholder for thirty years, attending both men's and women's Final Four games. He was a charter member of the Men's Club of Wintonbury Hills Golf Club, where he won several golf tournaments and scored a hole-in-one on the 12th hole. Dan left his parents, Leo and Sylvia, his wife, Avra, and two sons, Matthew and Jason. This past fall, his memory was honored at Wintonbury Hills with a golf tournament.

In its first year, the Dan Novarr Memorial Golf Tournament, held on September 27, 2014, netted more than \$18,000. There were 92 golfers, and 132 individuals enjoyed the Awards/Raffle Dinner which was emceed by Dr. Bradford Newman. The event was chaired by Avra Novarr along with Mark Jacobs of Bloomfield, President of the Wintonbury Men's Golf Association (WMGA), and Joel Kosovsky of West Hartford, member of WMGA and Dan's partner for many golf tournaments.

Some of the money earned from the tournament will benefit The First Tee of Connecticut, and \$5,000 of the earnings will be distributed by the WMGA for the benefit of the Bloomfield High School Golf Team. The particular needs of the golf team will be discussed periodically in a meeting with Tammy Schondelmayer, Director of Athletics at Bloomfield High School, and Gary Barcher, Coach of the BHS Golf Club. It will be used for such things as green fees, equipment, and lessons.

The First Tee of Connecticut will be establishing a \$5,000 scholarship fund in Dan's memory from which \$1,000 will be distributed annually. The scholarship will be for a Bloomfield resident with priority given to someone attending Bloomfield High School. Applications will be available beginning March 15th through the guidance department of Bloomfield High School as well as the area private schools or by visiting The First Tee of Connecticut's website, www.thefirstteect.org. The deadline for applying is Friday, May 15, 2015. The scholarship will be awarded at the Travelers TPC Breakfast on June 27th. The remaining funds will be used by The First Tee of Connecticut for programing in Hartford County.

Wintonbury Hills Golf Course has been open since 2005 and is ranked as one of the top ten public courses. One of the goals of Leon Rivers, Chairman of the Town of Bloomfield Gold Subcommittee and Ciaran Carr, Manager and Pro at Wintonbury Hills, is to have increased use of the golf course by residents of Bloomfield. Both have been working with the Bloomfield schools to develop youth interest. Carr has introduced a program in the elementary schools using age-appropriate equipment and rules. Rivers has worked with middle school students. Carr has volunteered to help Coach Barcher with golf lessons for high school students. Also, Mark Jacobs says the WMGA will establish a mentor program and invite students to play with them.

Next year the tournament will be held at Wintonbury Hills Golf Course in Bloomfield on September 26, 2015. It will continue to benefit The First Tee of Connecticut and Bloomfield High School Golf Club.

Continued on next page —>

Corporate Sponsors were Horizon Financial Advisors LLC, West Hartford, and Avon Wellness Center Dental Associates Avon. Dinner Sponsors were NEFCO Corporation and Super Cellars Warehouse Liquors. Closest to the Pin Sponsor was Pan De Oro Chips, and the Driving Range Sponsor was Sir Speedy Printing. The Hole in One Sponsors were Mitchell Auto Group and Golfer's Warehouse. Hole Sponsors were: Family Optometric Care, Star Silk and Woolen Co, Susan and Michael Schenker, Cindy and Mark Lovejoy, Marc Needelman, Esq., Woodland Auto Body, Williams Service Center, Inc., Phyllis and Bill Starkie, Boyles Furniture and Rugs, Suzy and Dave Rosenthal, White and Katzman Property Management, Jennifer Lamprecht, Dr. Ben Skaught and Dr. Barbara Steele, FMI Chemical Corporation, Marc and Paula Katzman, Lewis H. Stengel, CPA, Bernheimer Insurance, Beaudry Homes, Breaking Ground Construction, LLC, Joe Tapper, James and Susan Duncan, CollegeHelp1.com, Hooker Brewery, Wade's Vegetable and Fruit Stand.

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This door knocker was salvaged from the Miller House on Maple Avenue and mailed to the Historical Society by an anonymous donor. The house was once home to the family of Dr. and Mrs. Richard Otis, and Curator Fannie Gabriel has sent the door knocker to their son, Rick Otis of Washington, D.C., as a keepsake. Before the Otis family, the house belonged to Dr. and Mrs. Alfred Burgdorf, who are buried in Old St. Andrews Cemetery. The Burgdorf Health Clinic in Hartford was named after Dr. Burgdorf.



From Left to Right: Mark Jacobs from Bloomfield, President of Wintonbury Men's Club; Joel Kosovsky from West Hartford; Avra Novarr, Bloomfield; Cathy Morway, Director of Development of The First Tee of Connecticut; Mark Moriarty, Director of Development of The First Tee



The cornerstone from the now-demolished LaSalette Novitiate on Mountain Avenue is placed next to the Filley House on January 6, 2014. Jim Lehmann (facing the camera, with dark jacket) of the Duncaster Community and workers from Duncaster cooperated in the placement.

—R. Pierce photos

CURATOR'S CORNER by Fannie Gabriel

New member: Jeffrey Atwood, 84 Gun Mill Road

During 2014, forty-one visitors viewed the two exhibits at the History Center, the first on Buildings Moved within Bloomfield (such as the Old Farm School and the Gillette House), and the second on the Filley Family.

The History Center is usually open Sunday and Monday afternoons, and this past year 130 volunteers were on duty at various times.

The November 3, 2014 front page of the *Hartford Courant* had a photo of the Mattatuck Drum Corps of Waterbury marching in the Veterans' Day Parade—using Brown Drums!

The dedication program for the Bloomfield Grammar School on June 17, 1914, included a presentation of keys by George F. Woodford, building committee chair, to Selectman George Humphrey. There was a vocal solo by Mrs. T. H. Gabb and an address given by Simsbury Superintendent of Schools Rev. J. B. McLean.

Bloomfield's Buttonball Tavern was destroyed by fire in 1929. The Blue Hills Fire Department was able to prevent the fire from spreading to adjacent buildings. In the cellar of the tavern was a well, which had been dug there to assure a water supply in case of Indian attacks.

During prehistoric times, extrusions of lava in the Barn Door Hills of Granby formed several trap rock ridges called Greenstone Mountain situated in the foothills of Talcott Mountain. Bloomfield has four homes built of trap rock: the Oliver Filley House, the David Grant House on Maple Avenue, the Zelah Case house on the corner of Adams and Duncaster Roads, and the Francis Gillette House on Bloomfield Avenue. Some years ago, Edward Stanley of our Society gave a talk on these houses.

FREE CLASSES AT PROSSER

Prosser Public Library subscribes to Universal Class, an online data base that offers courses on a myriad of subjects. Of special interest to Wintombury Historical Society members are courses on history from Ancient Civilizations to American History. Universal Class also provides a course on Genealogy 101 and Haunted Places 101.

Courses are supervised by college professors and carry continuing education units (CEUs). To continue your lifelong pursuit of knowledge with Universal Class, simply go to www.prosserlibrary.info. Select Universal Class and log on with the barcode located on your Prosser Library card. For additional information and help, contact Allison Wilkos at Prosser Public Library, 860-243-9721.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board met on January 14, 2014, with fourteen people present. President Richard Pierce announced that the letter sent out in December asking for year-end donations had received forty responses, with a total of \$2,185 given to the Society. This is some 26% of our projected budget for the 2015 year and provides a good start at raising the remaining 74% (about 30% of that should come from dues in June). An Honor Roll of Donors is printed on page 8 of this issue.

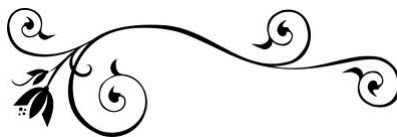
The treasurer's report showed income since July 1 of \$2,724 and expenses for the same period of \$3,674. About one-third of the expenses are for utilities. Other larger costs are printing and insurance.

Mary Murray described Celebrate Bloomfield Week, May 30 through June 6, 2015. Sunday May 31 will be History Day. A committee was appointed to start planning for the Society's activities that day.

Ruthanne Marchetti announced that Barbara Beeching, Ph.D., will be our speaker at our annual meeting on June 3. At our April 1 program, Ralph Schmoll will present his new video on the Gillette House and the Underground Railroad. An outgrowth of the meeting with Dr. Beeching is an interest in cataloging all the places of worship in town, complete with an historical summary of each. A small group will be beginning work on this task.

The Society has applied for an Award of Merit from the Connecticut League of History Organizations for Ralph Schmoll's two videos, the Gillette House one and the previous one on the Old Farm School. We thank Roberta LaMonaca and Lisa Lamenzo for providing letters of recommendation as a part of our application.

The Fund Raising Committee has been having a difficult time identifying feasible projects that will bring in any appreciable money. A long discussion about the annual tag sale resulted in a lack of support for going forward with it.



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Honor Roll of Year-end Donors

(Some gifts represent couples.)

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