



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

November, 2016

DEAR NEIGHBOR, DEAR JULIA

Two Bloomfield Poets Born 150 Years Apart

Sunday, November 6, 3:00 PM at Prosser Public Library

The 1834 Filley Stone House on Mountain Avenue was the bridal home of Jay Filley and Julia Filley. Julia was a sensitive and hard-working farmer's wife born in 1808 who wrote journals and poetry until her death in 1881. Marilyn Johnston, a published poet (with two books from Antrim House Books) and a long-time neighbor of the Filley House, has researched the writings of Julia Filley, with whom she feels a strong bond. As women, poets, and residents of Bloomfield across three centuries, how do they differ? How are they the same? An exploration of their poetry tells the tale. Selected poems of each woman, read side by side on similar themes will be presented, covering childhood/nature, women's roles, war, loss/grief and faith. This "conversation" between poets of the 19th and 21st centuries will enhance your appreciation not only of Bloomfield's history, but also of America's, and your own history as well.



Marilyn Johnston

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The photo above shows part of the audience that packed the Prosser Library meeting room on September 7, 2016, as Ralph Schmoll showed his video “Stone house Farm: The Filleys and Beyond” and Marilyn Johnston read her own poetry and some written by Julia Filley, who lived 150 years ago. Johnston expands on this history on November 6. —Dennis Hubbs photo

IN MEMORIAM

Ruth Bestor Messenger passed away on July 20, 2016 at the age of 93. Ruth was the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Eugene Bester and grew up on Mountain Avenue at the top of the hill across from Mountain View Cemetery. Her husband, Herbert, was a descendant of Edward Messenger, the earliest settler in what is now Bloomfield and was in the 1640s “Messenger’s Farms.”

Theodore M. Space died on September 2, 2016. He was an attorney and was active in the Connecticut Historical Society. He served on the Bloomfield Board of Education from 1973-1985. He was a Life member of the Wintonbury Historical Society and had lived on Prospect Street for many years.

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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
Web: www.bloomfieldcthistory.org

OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

Bloomfield Garage, 689 Park Avenue
Caruso’s Auto and Body, 36 Tunxis Avenue
Geissler’s Supermarket, 40 Tunxis Avenue
Sir Speedy Printing, 21 Old Windsor Road
(And there’s room for more!)

PROGRAM PLANS

February 5, 2017, Sunday at 3:00, place TBA: Amherst College Gospel Choir

April 5, 2017, Wednesday at 6:30, Prosser Library: The GHI House on Bloomfield Avenue, with Dale Bertoldi and Ron Marchetti

May 3, 2017, Wednesday at 6:30, Prosser Library: The CT Civilian Conservation Corps Camps, with Marty Podskoch

June 7, 2017, Wednesday at 6:00, place TBA: Annual meeting and potluck supper. Program by David Leff: Penwood Park and the Veeder Family.

September 6, 2017, Wednesday at 7:00, place TBA: Bloomfield 1956-2016 with Richard Pierce



NEW SIGN FOR OLD FARM SCHOOL

Thanks to Mary Murray's initiative and persistence, the weather-beaten sign at the Old Farm School has been replaced by one much nicer and more attractive. (The grayscale photo above doesn't do it justice.) Mary received a donation of wood from Moore's Saw Mill on Mountain Avenue. She took the wood over to South End Woodworking on Douglas Street, and they made it into a sign at no charge. She then took it to Zocco Memorials on Blue Hills Avenue for finishing. They painted it and sandblasted it until it had a traditional look. The result of this community effort is a beautiful sign that will last for many years.

What does the Wintonbury Historical Society try to do?

- (1) to collect, preserve, and make available for viewing and research various records, facts, and materials relating to the history and citizens of Bloomfield, Connecticut;
- (2) in our organizational structure, research, collection, and publication, to value the societal diversity which characterizes our town;
- (3) to identify, preserve, and mark buildings and locations within the town that are of historical interest;
- (4) to record current history for the benefit of future generations of the town;
- (5) to distribute documents, pamphlets, journals, and books relating to town history;
- (6) to maintain historic buildings and a museum/library in which people can experience what it was like in the past and do research in local and family history;
- (7) to work with our public schools on programs of local and area history.





CATALOG OF CONGREGATIONS, #8 of a series

First Congregational Church in Bloomfield, United Church of Christ

As in so many New England towns, the steeple of the Congregational Church rises above the center of Bloomfield.

The story of this church goes back a long way to the Puritans in England who sailed to these rocky shores in 1630, settled in Dorchester, Massachusetts, then settled Windsor. One hundred years later, the town had spread and a few families came to what is now Bloomfield.

In the beginning, in colonial times, the church and the town were as one. The church was supported by town taxes and the town made rules about the church. One rule said you must attend church each Sunday even if you now lived miles away. It was very hard for the folks over here, especially in the winter, so the state legislature decreed that a branch of the Windsor church could be built in what was called Wintonbury Parish.

The first church looked like an ordinary barn. They hired a young minister, fresh from Yale, Hezekiah Bissell. He spent his life here. You can read about how beloved he was on his box tomb in the old cemetery.

In those perilous times, most people fervently believed in an active and often angry God and spent a lot of their lives trying to please or appease Him. The church was their access to God and was often the primary pillar of their lives.

The first building lasted sixty-three years, to be replaced by a proper white steepled church in 1801. In those days, church was an all-day Sunday affair, with two-hour long sermons such as "Christ, the Rod of Iron" one that was by the Rev. William F. Miller. His old house, on the corner of Maple Street and Mountain Avenue, was recently torn down. You can read some of his sermons at the Connecticut Historical Society.

That second church lasted only fifty-seven years and was outgrown and replaced in 1858 by the church we love now. You can come in and sit in the pews, on cushions still stuffed in part by newspapers from 1858. Just think of all that these walls have heard. The church favored abolition, and a slave that had escaped from the South talked there. Then the news of the Civil War, and on and on through other wars, other struggles, joys, conflicts. The Temperance movement generated a lot of heat in this town. So did the Vietnam War.

Bloomfield stayed a farming town, with just a few manufacturers, and the church was the hub of the town social life in spite of the fact that the only space was in and under the basic church building and there was no running water. The Women's Guild put on glorious Chicken Pie Suppers and Oyster Fries in the basement. Their fairs were a highlight of the year.

The Congregationalists were no longer the only church in town. The Baptists had split off early and were very popular. The Episcopalians had been active up north in Scotland Par-



First Congregational Church

10 Wintonbury Avenue

ish since 1740. The Methodists built another white steepled church. It was first up on Whirlwind Hill, where the big cemetery is now, and then was moved down to the corner across from Roberts Green.

In 1922, it seemed prudent to combine the Methodist and Congregational congregations and form the Federated Church. The Congregational Church housed the Sunday Services and the offices, while the Methodist church became the Parish House with an above-ground meeting room, a real kitchen and Sunday School rooms.

Right after World War II, the church hired a young veteran chaplain, Roscoe Metzger. He and his wife, Jonie, and their growing family stayed for thirty-one years, years of tremendous growth of the town and the church.



The Federated Church in 1940

In 1950, they finally built the Annex, the little hall/ office off the church, with water, and Ross no longer had to go over to the gas station to wash his hands.



The new Gale Memorial, 1958

In 1958, as the farms swiftly became house lots, the old Methodist church building was torn down to make way for the new Town Hall and the church put on a big brick Parish House for which Philip Gale generously contributed a lot of money with the provision that the building be used for the good of the whole community. And so it has been: Scouts, Support Groups, and Nursery School have kept the building lively through the years. The big Fellowship Hall is used by many townspeople for dinners, big meetings, big parties. There are three stories of small rooms that were once chockablock

full of Sunday School kids. In those days, there were two services each Sunday and many meetings were held to try to figure out how to cram more people into the pews. Many, if not most, influential people, usually men, who ran the town belonged to the Federated Church.

The Methodist Church reassembled itself as a separate church and built a new building on School Street.

Time brings change and the church's concept of God has morphed into a loving, encouraging, strengthening parent and the church members try to be his helping hands. The Congregational Church has always been about helping the poor and encouraging Good Works. During the Metzger years, this moved full speed into Fairness and Peace. Town Forums were held to ensure that the inevitable integration of Bloomfield went well. Since the 1940's the church has sponsored refugee families from Eastern Europe, Vietnam and now are involved with helping a Syrian family.

The Church has always been about inclusiveness, ahead of the curve of society in general. From the education of Lemuel Haynes, 1753-1833 (a slave's son and the first ordained black Congregational minister) to our enthusiastic Sunday School, we have been racially integrated. It is very natural and relaxed, the way we trust all society will be soon. We have been grateful for the many enrichments our gay and lesbian members have added over the years and formalized that by becoming officially Open and Affirming.

The First Congregational Church in Bloomfield, United Church of Christ, is now just one of many active Bloomfield churches. It is between settled pastors at the moment. But just like their forebears who crossed the Atlantic, its people sail into the future with Faith and Hope for a bright future.

—Thanks to Libbie Merrow for writing this article about her church

—photographs from WHS archives

In his book, *Hezekiah's Children: A History of the First Congregational Church in Bloomfield, Connecticut* (1989), Roscoe Metzger writes:

From its earliest beginnings, this church has been concerned for the care of those who live in its parish. Our Puritan ancestors were not shirkers: they had learned that in a harsh climate it is either work or perish. But they also knew that a sick child is a sick child, an old woman is fragile, and a poor man must be cared for.

Consider that when Peletiah Allyn died, he had already stated in his will that, after all proper obligations had been discharged, the balance of his estate was to go to the church, and the largest portion of the income therefrom was to go to persons in Wintonbury who were in "circumstances of want." That was in 1821, and income from that legacy is still used for the care off persons in Wintonbury/Bloomfield who are "in circumstances of want."



Bloomfield Methodist Church, undated photo

Park Avenue at Bloomfield Avenue



The Federated Church, with the Old Town Hall
in the background

BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board met on October 12 with twelve people present. The president reviewed his presentation to the Bloomfield High School Class of 1956 and announced that the Metacomet School third graders will be visiting the Old Farms School in November.

The treasurer reported income for July through September of \$1,103 and expenses of \$1,320. Of the expenses, 57% went for utilities, 23% for printing and postage, and 19% for maintenance and repairs. Dues brought in 79% of our income, with the other donations being 18% and sale of publications being 2%.

The Society currently has 142 members. In an effort to increase membership, a town-wide mailing is planned for this fall. We have recently been approved by the post office for a bulk mailing permit.

The Program Chairperson announced plans for programs well into 2017 (see list on page 3). The House Committee expressed thanks to the Bloomfield Lions Club for work on the gardens this year, a project headed up by Dorothea and Patrick Goffe. The Committee also thanks the Bloomfield Department of Public Works for the new sidewalk to Old Farm School and the new parking lot lighting.

The Collections Committee has been sifting through four boxes of donations and making decisions about what to add to our collection. This is a labor-intensive process, and more helpers are needed.

Both the Society and the Town Council want to express appreciation to Fred Hesketh for his years of service as town historian. Announcement will be forthcoming about the details of this recognition.

On October 24, the Town Council is scheduled to vote on authorizing the naming of the History Center, as previously reported. The name “Fannie R. Gabriel History Center” was approved by the Board. Libbie Merrow and Ruthanne Marchetti are planning an event, probably not until next spring, to celebrate the naming.

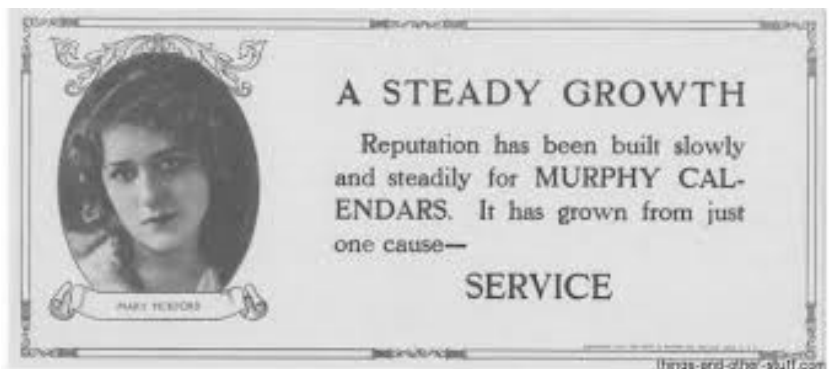


Two views of Emhart Manufacturing Company offices on Cottage Grove Road in 1963. The award-winning design was eventually torn down and replaced with the Gillette Ridge Golf Course and housing. The company, under the new name of Alstom, still has a presence in Bloomfield on Tobey Road. (WHS archives photos)

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INK BLOTTERS

Back in the days when everyone used quill pens and fountain pens, the one thing that could be found on every office or writing desk was an ink blotter. Ink blotters were usually made of a soft absorbent paper formed into a card and were used to dry up excess ink. With the invention of the ballpoint pen in the 1950s, ink blotters disappeared from the average office desk. Today, these vintage blotters, made in the 1930s and 1940s, are very highly prized and sought-after collectibles. Ink blotters were a very popular form of advertising that was often given away by fountain pen manufacturers, banks, merchants, and especially insurance companies. They were as common as business cards are today. Written references to ink blotting paper in America have been found beginning in the late 1700s. It was not until the 1850s that blotting paper came into common use in America, when Joseph Parker and Son started manufacturing blotting paper. In the late 1800s, a patent was issued for improved blotting paper which featured a smooth surface on one side and a blotting surface on the other. (—from *Killingly Historical Journal*, Fall 2016, Vol. 22, page 40. Published by the Killingly Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc., 196 Main Street, Danielson, CT 06239.)

After its discovery, absorbent blotting paper replaced the earlier use of sand or powder (pounce) to dry fresh ink. It is reported that a Berkshire (England) paper mill worker failed to add sizing to a batch of paper that was being produced. The batch was discarded. Subsequently someone tried to write on a piece of this discarded "scrap" paper and found that it rapidly absorbed any ink applied, making it unusable for writing. Its marked absorbency having been noted, however, led to its subsequently being produced and used as blotting paper. In a time when most paper was produced from "rags," red/pink rags, from which it was difficult to remove all color and had generally been discarded, were now directed to the production of blotters, hence the historically characteristic pink color of blotters. (—Wikipedia, "Blotting Paper," accessed 8/16/2016)



A typical ink blotter used for advertising. Pictured is Mary Pickford (1892-1979), a Canadian-American movie star, a founder of United Artists, and one of the original thirty-six founders of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. (google image)

NOTES FROM MY READING

Printing and individualism are inextricably bound up with each other. It would be absurd to argue that "individualism" was created by the printing press. But it is true that printing helped to create a social environment within which the idea of individuality made sense. And in a way, that may have been its most profound effect on our world.

—from John Naughton, *From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: Disruptive Innovation in the Age of the Internet* (2012), page 12