



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society
Bloomfield, Connecticut November, 2017

PORTRAIT OF NANCY TONEY

Wednesday, November 1, 2017, 7:00 at Gabriel History Center

On November 1st Karen Parsons will present a program on “Seein’ Nancy Toney and her Portrait: The Intersections of Race, Art, Innovation, and Daily Life in mid-19th Century Windsor.” The title is long, but says a lot. A well-rounded picture of a real person is planned. We can look forward to a warm, personal look at Nancy Toney, a slave in Windsor prior to Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, and the world she lived in.

The presenter is Karen Parsons, archivist and history teacher at Loomis Chaffee School in Windsor. She graduated from Amherst College and completed a master’s degree in the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture at the Winterthur Museum and the University of Delaware. Her essays and articles on material culture, art, and other historical topics have appeared in anthologies published by the University of Virginia Press and the University of Massachusetts Press, various journals, and the *Loomis Chaffee Magazine*. In her twenty years at Loomis Chaffee, she has taught a range of American history courses, coached varsity softball teams to two Western New England championships, worked for five years in the College Guidance Office, and co-chaired the school’s 2014 Centennial celebration. This past summer, she joined Writing Studio and Writing Initiative colleagues at Bard College’s summer Institute on Writing and Thinking.



Nancy Toney
Courtesy of Karen Parsons



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BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board of Directors met on Wednesday evening, October 11, with fourteen people present, including seven directors (Guilmartin, Marchetti, Marchetti, Panke, Schmoll, Weissenburger, and Whitman) and three officers (Dahlgren-Dechand, Johnston, and Pierce).

The Board welcomed four new members: Marilyn Johnston, secretary, and directors Mara Whitman, Aaron Romano, and Naomi Fetterman.

The treasurer's report for July 1 through September 29 showed expenses of \$1,588 and income of \$2,186. The bulk of the income was from dues. The main expenses were \$827 for utilities, \$257 for printing and postage, and \$200 for repairs to the ceiling of the Old Farm School.

For the Program Committee, Ruthanne Marchetti announced plans for the next twelve months. We hope to have speakers on a Windsor slave's life (see page 1), playing Negro League baseball, Katherine Hepburn, and Dolly Madison. Walter Woodward, Connecticut State Historian, will bring his fascinating presentations to us twice in 2018.

Ralph Schmoll, History Center Coordinator, told of recent inquiries that have come to us on topics such as Messenger family, Jerome brothers, J. P. Vincent, and the Bloomfield High School rocks. He reiterated the need for more help at the History Center.

In House Committee business, Dick Pierce noted the installation of new LED light bulbs in the History Center. Thanks to Jim Niland of the Bloomfield DPW for volunteering to install them. Also visible were two new display cases donated to us by Beth Hillel Synagogue. Tobie Katz of the synagogue and Tim West of the incoming Baptist church facilitated the moving of the cases, and Doug Barnard, Jim Niland, Bart Ritson and Pete of the DPW did the actual work.

The Board discussed the possibility of a bulk mailing this year, similar to last year's effort. Pat Braun of P & S Services has advised us how to cut down on costs. The Board authorized \$1,700 for a mailing to about 3,300 addresses.

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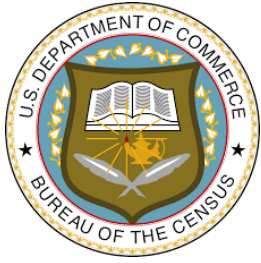
Web: www.bloomfieldcthistory.org

OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

Caruso's Auto and Body, 36 Tunxis Avenue

Geissler's Supermarket, 40 Tunxis Avenue

(And there's room for more!)



NEW BOOK FROM SOCIETY MEMBER

In a new publication, Jean Perreault, a Bloomfield resident since 2005, takes an in-depth look at the 3,248 Bloomfield residents enumerated in the 1930 United States Federal census. This is Jean's third book and will be available this December.

The publication, entitled *Footprints Across Connecticut From Bloomfield 1930 Census*, is a digest of information concerning these Connecticut residents. During April of 1930, at the very onset of the Great Depression, 3,248 men, women and children living in Bloomfield were enumerated in the decennial U.S. Federal census. Now nearly nine decades later, the lives of most of these individuals have ended, but each of their personal histories lives on through public records that reveal their origins, their military service, their occupation, their family, and their eventual demise. Vital statistics, prior census records, town directories, newspaper articles, and obituaries are but a few of the many sources which serve to document the lives led by these early 20th century Bloomfield residents. This compilation pulls together many of these details in one place for future reference by family members, genealogists and town historians. Jean's hope is that it will prove to be a valuable resource for many generations to come.



Interestingly, in the census that year, only 15% of the residents enumerated had actually been born in Bloomfield. In fact, nearly as many residents had immigrated from other countries, which they designated as their birthplace. These 444 Bloomfield immigrants included 109 native Italians, 71 Poles, 53 Russians, and 49 each Canadians and Irish. Most of the remaining residents had been born elsewhere in New England.

The book is completely indexed so that information about all 1930 Bloomfield inhabitants can be easily located. In most cases, genealogy data on these residents extends back into the prior century as well as forward in their remaining lifetimes.



Jean is a member of The Connecticut Society of Genealogists, Inc. She is the youngest of three sisters and has been interested in genealogy for over forty years. Jean and her husband Steve settled in Simsbury in 1966 where they raised their four sons. They have been members of the Wintonbury Historical Society since they decided to downsize and move to Bloomfield in 2005. Jean's two previous books focused on Simsbury and Granby residents in the 1930 census and received Awards of Merit from both The American Association for State and Local History and the Connecticut League of History Organizations as well as the First Prize in New England Genealogical Resource Publications from The Connecticut Society of Genealogists.



CATALOG OF CONGREGATIONS, #13 of a series

Bloomfield United Methodist Church, 297 School Street

In 1814, small gatherings were held in private homes in Bloomfield with the guidance and encouragement of Methodist clergy. In 1817, just 34 years after the founding of the Methodist Church in America, the first Methodist church service was held on July 4 in Wintonbury, CT (then part of Windsor). The first pastor was the Rev. Aurora Seagur, a Bloomfield native, who had a class of three young ladies: Maria Palmer, Olive Hoskins, and Fanny Griswold. By 1832, this little group had achieved such strength that it was able to erect a modest building on Whirlwind Hill, present site of the Mountain View Cemetery. The modest structure was erected at a cost of \$500. That building was moved to the corner of Bloomfield and Park Avenues, where it was enlarged, graced by handsome pillars and a portico, and crowned with a slender and graceful steeple. In 1870, a new parsonage was built on Bloomfield Avenue, next to the church. For more than fifty years, the church occupied these buildings and ministered in the community.



Front view of Methodist Church (website photo)

Around 1920, the Methodist and Congregational churches were the only functioning churches in town (St. Andrews Episcopal being dormant), but both were small congregations. There were people in both churches who felt it would be a good idea to merge the two congregations. This would not only save money, but would be a witness to the hoped-for unity of the Church. In November 1922, after much preparatory work, the Congregational and Methodist churches united as a federated church. The former Congregational meeting house was to be used for Sunday worship service; and the Methodist building became a parish house for educational, recreational, and community activities. Each church adhered to its original legal, financial, and ecclesiastical structure. There was one minister who served as pastor, preacher, and teacher to the entire body. There was one Executive Committee and one Board of Deacons.

On Sunday, March 25, 1923, a joyful service of “re-dedication” was held in the Congregational church building. For some months the building had been closed while workmen were renewing the interior with paint and plaster and installing several memorial plaques

which now adorn the walls of the hallway leading out of the meeting room. Speakers included William C. Hubbard, Frederick C. Bidwell (who spoke of the valuable service of Nathan F. Miller), and Mrs. F. H. Bidwell.

It was not until 1937 that steps were taken to make the Federation permanent. After adopting a constitution, “Bloomfield Federated Church” was chosen as the official title. Even then, while many activities were held jointly, the Congregational and Methodist churches maintained separate membership rolls. And so it went until the 1950s, a time when numbers of people were filling the rolls of churches and other community organizations.

Seeing the renewed strength of the local church, the Connecticut Conference of Churches felt that a more visible Methodist presence was needed in Bloomfield. At its urging, thirteen core Methodist families who were part of the Federation decided to move to a separate facility. Roy and Grace Oettle held organizing meetings in the rec room of their home. In 1960 the Rev. David Benedict was sent to

pastor the new congregation, and the new Methodist Church held Sunday services in the Bloomfield Junior High School, 330 Park Avenue. The Sunday school used the classrooms while the worship services were conducted in the cafeteria.



Pastor Esau A. Greene
(website photo)

Meanwhile, land for a new building was purchased at the corner of School Street and Wintonbury Avenue, the Ledyard property, for \$32,000. The original Methodist church and parsonage had been demolished about 1964 to make room for a new town hall. (The original parsonage, known as Allen House, had been located at the foot of Whirlwind Hill.) The only surviving part of that original Method-

The Methodist Denomination

The history of Methodism began, with John Wesley, a priest in the Church of England, as a renewal movement. In May of 1738, Wesley's heart was “strangely warmed” as he attended a prayer meeting. His interest was not to form a church, but merely to bring the gospel to the poor and needy who had been neglected by the Church of England. This movement was dispersed through the organization of classes and societies led by lay preachers. This effort continued throughout England and then to the colonies in America.

Methodism as an independent church in America began on December 24, 1784, in Baltimore, Maryland. The Christmas Conference of preachers was held that year in Baltimore at Lovely Lane Chapel. Most of the American preachers attended, probably including African Americans Harry Hosier and Richard Allen. At this gathering the movement became organized as The Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Francis Asbury was consecrated as General Superintendent and later Bishop. Under his leadership Methodism thrived in America, and became the fastest growing Christian group in the country.

Two German-speaking denominations were forming in the early 1800s in Pennsylvania. They united in 1946 as the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and this group merged with the Methodists in 1968 to form today's United Methodist Church.

Nationally, the United Methodist Church does not have a single executive leader or a central headquarters. It has a General Conference, which meets every four years, a Council of Bishops, which meets at least annually, and a Judicial Council, which upholds its constitution. There are Annual Conferences, which make up the operational body of the church. Then each local church is part of a geographically-determined administrative district. (see umc.org)

The Bloomfield church belongs to the New York Conference of the UMC, a group of over 450 churches in six districts, one of which covers the western half of Connecticut.

ist meetinghouse is the weathervane, part of which is displayed outside the main entrance of today's church.

The building began in 1963, with a cornerstone placed in the foundation on the eastern side of the building. Rather than choose a typical New England style with a steeple for the church, a contemporary design was selected. The octagonal chapel and adjoining fan-shaped educational unit, erected on a six-acre site, cost \$75,000. The sanctuary, with seating in a three-quarter circle arrangement, has space for 90 members, including the choir as part of the congregation. A square, white-marble communion table is central to the chancel arrangement, its style and shape reminiscent of the tombs in Roman catacombs around which Early Christians gathered to worship and on which they celebrated the Lord's Supper. The building was completed in 1964, and had its first Easter Sunday service there, with an organ donated by the Caswell family.

A 1984 directory, published while Traci West was pastor and Landy Gobes was organist and choir director, shows photos of the Tiny Tot Nursery School, United Methodist Women's group, and Sunday School children. Other activities in the church have included United Methodist Men, a bell choir, annual School of Missions, Vacation Bible School, and senior, men's and youth choirs. The annual Strawberry Festival continues to this day. A new parsonage was purchased in 1993 during the pastorate of Arun Jones. In 2002 a total membership of 221 was reported. A Celebration Banquet was held in October 2005 to mark John Simmons' tenth anniversary as pastor.

In 2014, Bloomfield United Methodist Church celebrated its 50th year on School Street. That year saw many celebratory events. One was the Rachel Rathbun Tea Party which paid tribute to the elder Mr. Rathbun who was present at the signing for the purchase of the land. At Easter, a Sunrise service was held to rededicate the cornerstone. Following this, at the 11 o'clock morning service, the organ was rededicated by Mr. Rae Caswell, a family member of the donor, and who was present at the first Easter Service. The final event was a banquet at the Hilton Hotel.



BUMC Sanctuary, looking east (church photo)

Led since July 2014 by current pastor Esau A. Greene, the present membership continues the legacy that began 200 years ago in a place called Wintonbury Parrish. The congregation has been empowered by the same spirit that "strangely warmed" the heart of John Wesley over two centuries ago. It continues to show the love of God to the Bloomfield community through the Bloomfield United Community Food Kitchen, Bloomfield Strawberry Festival and various community and outreach opportunities. It remains a faith community committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ through word and deed.



Sources: Much of this article was contributed by Saleena Holder of the Bloomfield United Methodist Church. The article also quotes liberally from *Hezekiah's Children*, a history of the Bloomfield Congregational Church written by Roscoe F. Metzger in 1989 (see Chapter 7, "The Bloomfield Federated Church"). Joan Whitman and Judith Dahlgren-Dechand made available a number of old directories and programs. See also the church's website, www.bumcct.org.



Original Methodist meetinghouse at Park and Bloomfield Avenues (WHS archives photo)

Ministers of the Bloomfield United Methodist Church

David Benedict, 1960 to June 1963
 Fred Clark, July 1963 to January 1969
 Barton Bovee, January 1970 to June 1970
 George Harris, July 1970 to June 1973
 David V. Samuelson, July 1973 to June 1975
 Barton Bovee, July 1975 to June 1977
 Thomas Beveridge, July 1977 to June 1982
 Edward Norman, July 1982 to June 1983
 Vincent Watson, July 1983 to June 1984
 Traci C. West, July 1984 to 1988
 Arun W. Jones, July 1988 to June 1995
 John T. Simmons, Jr., July 1995 to 2005?
 Esau A. Greene, July 2014 to present

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS AVAILABLE!

Please consider giving a gift membership in the Society for a friend or family member. Memberships help support the Society and its programs. Members receive five issues of the *Wintonbury Drummer* over the course of one year. Memberships given this year will expire in December 2018. A gift membership form is enclosed with this mailing. For more forms, call WHS at 860-243-1531 and leave a message, or email wintonburyhistory@gmail.com.



Memberships are available for \$15 (Sponsor), \$25 (Booster), \$40 (Patron), \$100 (Advocate) or more. Larger amounts carry no greater benefits but provide increased support for the Society.

The Wintonbury Drummer solicits articles, personal reminiscences, book reviews, photographs, etc. from its readers. Materials for publication in the February issue should be received by January 7, 2018. (Or better yet—do it now!) Send directly to the President at 14 Julie Lane in Bloomfield or email in MSWord format to: wintonburyhistory@gmail.com.



DUST AND DIRT DESTROYER: The historical society needs help in keeping its buildings clean. Is there anyone who could volunteer an hour every week or so to carry out this important role? Equipment and materials will be provided. Choose your own time. It would be a huge help to the good name of the Society. Call Ralph and Louise Schmoll at 860-242-2953 or call the Gabriel History Center on Monday afternoon at 860-243-1531 or email wintonburyhistory@gmail.com.



Prosser Public Library Bloomfield Veterans' Digitization Day



Wednesday November 1, 2017, 1:00 to 4:00 PM and 5:00 to 7:00 PM

Bloomfield veterans and family members of veterans are invited to bring scannable memorabilia to the library on November 1. Library staff will be on hand to help scan and label letters, certificates, medals, photographs and other memorabilia of Bloomfield veterans.

The scanned material will be saved on a flash drive to be kept by the family or veteran, and a copy will be saved by the library for its local history collection and library displays. A copy of the digital material will also be made available to the Wintonbury Historical Society for their archives.

To honor Bloomfield veterans during the month of November, some of the scanned items will be displayed on the bulletin board by the lower level entrance.



President's Letter

E. J. Dionne, Jr. is a syndicated writer in Washington, D. C., whose columns appear in the *Hartford Courant*. It was his July 4th essay that got me to thinking. He called us as Americans to put aside our differences and celebrate a shared love for our country. "People who can't stand the views of friends, relatives and neighbors," he wrote, "can and should love them anyway." At the least, says Dionne, it means "we need to nourish [the] capacity for empathy, mutual assistance and shared endeavor." We need to affirm the words of the Declaration of Independence that *all* human beings are created equal, with the rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." This is our history, and we need to see it accurately, not distort it to fit our political agenda.

This year New Orleans removed its statues of Confederate leaders. Dionne quotes Mayor Mitch Landrieu: "The Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis and P.G.T. Beauregard statues were not erected just to honor these men, but as part of the movement . . . to rewrite history to hide the truth. [. . .] These monuments purposefully celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy; ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, and the terror that it actually stood for." We make a mistake, Dionne concludes, when "we distort the past to serve the political interests of the moment. [. . .] We cannot fabricate new facts just because we like them better than the real ones." But Dionne is painting with too broad a brush. Past history is never all good or all bad, but a messy mixture of the two. It isn't the statue that's the problem, it's our thinking about it. A statue of Christopher Columbus can be seen as a reminder of the shameful history since 1492, not as the veneration of a national hero.



Columbus statue in San Francisco (google)

On July 9th, Jonah Goldberg's op-ed piece in *The Courant* added an interesting thought. He commented that "a lot of our political polarization is fueled by plain old ignorance." Then he found an apt quote from Daniel Boorstin: "The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance; it is the illusion of knowledge." The lack of historical knowledge gets filled, willy-nilly, with made-up, unsubstantiated information. Now, more than ever, we Americans need to know about our nation's history. Goldberg quotes Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "An ill-educated person behaves with arrogant impatience, whereas truly profound education breeds humility." Perhaps one of the unspoken goals of a historical society such as ours is to convince us to examine the past without prejudice, neither exalting nor debasing our ancestors, but empathizing with them, "warts and all." We all do need a good dose of repentance. We all need to learn from history. —Dick Pierce