

The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut — September 2014

DENNIS HUBBS TO PRESENT IMAGES OF BLOOMFIELD

On Wednesday, September 10, the Wintonbury Historical Society will present an illustrated program by Dennis Hubbs entitled Images of Bloomfield. Hubbs has recently published his third book of photographs, this one focusing on the town of Bloomfield. The books are available online at www.blurb.com. Just type “Dennis Hubbs” into the search box.

Those who have seen Hubbs’ photographic work will agree that he is an accomplished photographer who captures remarkably beautiful images. He will show the audience about a hundred of his shots, talking about them and sharing his love for photography.

Hubbs is a Society member and owner with his wife Donna of D & D Travel Services of Bloomfield.



D. Hubbs photo

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 7:00 PM

BLOOMFIELD HISTORY CENTER

153 SCHOOL STREET

NO ADMISSION CHARGE

ADDITIONAL PARKING AT METACOMET SCHOOL

NEWSLETTER CHANGES

It cost the Society about \$1,700 last year to print and mail five newsletters. In order to cut costs we are forced to announce that future newsletters will be emailed, with a small number going by surface mail to those who don’t have email.

Inside this issue: Board Highlights for August, page 2; Business Spotlight: Sir Speedy, page 3; LaSalette Demolition, pages 4-5; Gillette House Visit, pages 6-7; Financial Report, page 7; Curator’s Corner, page 8; Board Highlights for May, page 8.

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS, August 20, 2014

The treasurer's report for the year ending June 30, 2014 caused some concern for the Board. It is reprinted in this issue on page 7, and you will notice that our income was \$8,856.98 and our expenses were \$10,092.86. Our checking account balance of \$7,417.17 includes the CTH grant stipulated for website improvement, and so there is really only about \$6,000 to pay our bills. Various cost-cutting measures were discussed. Printing, postage, and program expenses can be lowered, and we probably can cancel our insurance, since all it covers is our furniture, not our collection. Additional fund-raising is needed, but ideas are hard to come by. The Board did authorize putting out a donations basket at our September meeting.

Curator Fannie Gabriel reported responding to thirty-six different requests for information since May. The Collections Committee list of new acquisitions was approved by the Board. The Website Committee has already made improvements to our website, and it hopes to complete work by year's end. A new laptop computer for committee use has been purchased with grant monies.

As reported earlier, a committee formed by town manager Philip Schenck has been studying the Filley House outbuildings (Fred Hesketh, Ron Marchetti, and Dick Pierce represented WHS). The town has received a price quote of \$10,611.50 for stabilizing the buildings. The town can contribute \$8,000 towards this, and is wondering if the Historical Society and the Land Trust could make up the remaining \$2,610. The Board thought this to be a good idea but realized that we have no funds available. The idea of applying for a grant from the neighboring Duncaster Retirement Community was broached. It was decided to first contact the Land Trust and then proceed from there.

The lamentable state of our flower gardens was discussed. Louise Schmoll has suggested doing away with the garden by the sign and improving the garden next to the building. Fred Hesketh said that Metacomet School children have some gardens and he will talk to teacher Lisa Lamenzo to see if they would like to help. Meanwhile, we need help from gardeners within our membership.

Dick Pierce asked if we should continue to make video recordings of our programs, as Charlie Dechand used to do. It was suggested that we might get help from BATV and/or high school students needing public service credit.

In Memoriam: We are sorry to report the loss of long time members Richard Hoff, a generous benefactor of the Society, and Barbara Barenz, community activist.



OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

Bloomfield Garage,
689 Park Avenue
Sir Speedy Printing,
21 Old Windsor Road
Windsor Federal Savings,
54 Jerome Avenue

THANK YOU!

The Drummer is published five times a year by
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



BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT:

SIR SPEEDY PRINTING

Printing has come a long way. The newsletter you're reading was entered into a computer at home, saved in something called Personal Document Format (pdf), and sent by email to Sir Speedy, where it was downloaded into a digital printer, printed on 8 ½ by 17 inch sheets of paper, and collated (put in the right order). Another machine folded the newsletters into halves and then into thirds, and they were ready for us. Sir Speedy could go further, if we wished, to address the newsletters and have them taken directly to the post office.



Mark Jacobs and Diane Muska founded Sir Speedy at 21 Old Windsor Road in Bloomfield in 2001 and are still business partners. Prior to that time they both were employed in Human Relations at Cigna. The business is a franchise of Sir Speedy, a company based in California and having some six hundred franchises around the United States. Other Connecticut franchises are located in Waterbury, Stamford, and New Britain; and all are owner-owned and operated. The owners set their own goals and shape their own business practices. The Bloomfield business employs ten other people besides Mark and Diane. Mark has lived in Bloomfield for twenty years, served on the Town Council, and is presently on Planning and Zoning.

Sir Speedy of Bloomfield is a Certified Minority-Owned Corporation and recognized as such throughout Connecticut and New England. It is consistently one of the top one hundred franchises in the Sir Speedy system and has won numerous awards, including Aetna's 2013 Supplier of the Year. Its location on Old Windsor Road puts it the center of the busy Bloomfield business district. It is said that 45,000 cars a day travel through the intersection of Old Windsor Road and Blue Hills Avenue. Many businesses in the area make use of Sir Speedy's services, and the last twelve months has seen some 20% growth in business. Besides digital printing, the company does signage and scanning.

One of those many amazing machines was seen taking one letter at a time from a tall stack of letters, folding it into thirds, and inserting it into a window envelope all ready to mail. Sir Speedy's mailing services can target a segment of the population in a certain postal district or send mail to everyone in town. The company works with the post office to check accuracy of addresses, print postal bar-codes, and arrange pieces in "walk order," i.e. the order which the delivery person would need. So the next time you see Sir Speedy's delivery van around town, you can say to yourself, "That's one of many prosperous Bloomfield businesses."



Left: Ernesto Diaz

Right: Mark Jacobs

(R. Pierce photos)



LASALETTE BUILDING DEMOLITION IMMINENT

The LaSalette office building at 120 Mountain Avenue has been purchased by Duncaster Retirement Community and is slated to be torn down in September. The building is next to the Filley House property. WHS member Jim Lehmann of Duncaster has been working to save three stained glass windows in the building and have them donated to the Historical Society. Thanks to Jim and with the help of Ben Whittaker, town Department of Public Works, the windows were safely removed in August and stored in the Filley House.

From 1895 the Missionaries of Our Lady of LaSalette maintained a Mother House and Preparatory Seminary in the Parkville Section of Hartford. The Order had begun in France following an Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountain of LaSalette in 1846. Two priests crossed the ocean looking for a place for the Order to settle in peace and safety and were eventually led to Hartford. They were encouraged by Bishop Lawrence McMahon (served 1879-1893) and his successor, Bishop Michael Tierney (served 1894-1908). By 1895 they were strong enough to be entrusted with the care of two parishes, Our Lady of Sorrows in Hartford and Saint James in Danielson. In 1901 sixty seminarians were registered at the Hartford seminary and classes were growing (See www.lasalette.org).

From Wintonbury to Bloomfield, published by the Historical Society in 1983 (pp. 32-33) tells how in 1913 the LaSalette Community purchased a farm in Bloomfield. The farmhouse, which was on the Pinney property, was over 140 years old at the time and was used as a summer house for the Hartford-based group. The first general outing for the entire college to visit the new property was on April 14, 1914. The whole town of Bloomfield was in a state of excitement. Work was suspended, and everyone turned out to see the student body en route to the farm.

By 1916 work was started on the Novitiate building in Bloomfield, which was dedicated September 25, 1917 by the Bishop of Hartford. The priests and brothers taught boys entering the service of the Church and took part in social and civic events in town.

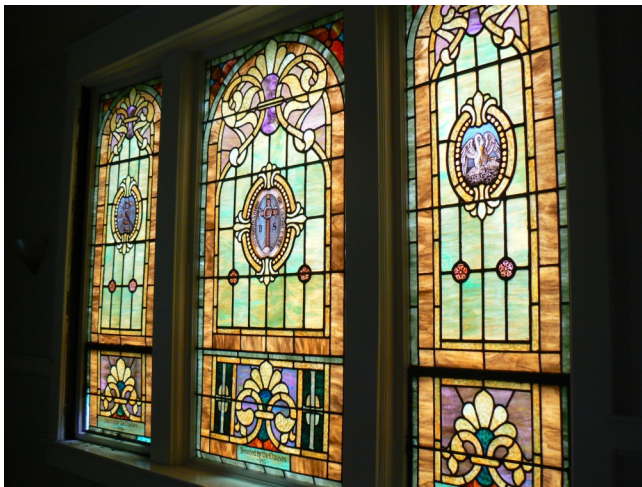
The property was up for sale in 1974, and the town would have bought it as a recreation area except that voters turned it down. In March 1980 Milton Levine bought the land and buildings and converted the main building into offices. Soon the only physical evidence of the novitiate's presence in Bloomfield will be the three stained glass windows remaining. The Duncaster Community will stabilize these and donate them to the Historical Society, and the Society will find a good home where they can be on permanent display.



Front of building, July 2014



East side, opposite the parking lot



Photos by R. Pierce



Top left: Southeast corner

Left Center: The windows

Bottom left: Windows detail with date

Top right: Brickwork detail

Right Cener: Rear porches

Bottom right: Escutcheon with novitiate seal

GILLETTE HOUSE VISIT

by Richard Pierce

This summer on July 23, Ralph and Louise Schmoll and I visited the Francis Gillette House at 545 Bloomfield Avenue. For Ralph, who is working on a video about Gillette and the Underground Railroad, this was an opportunity to photograph the house close up.

Serendipity arranged this visit. Through my granddaughter Shannon McMahon's involvement at Sacred Heart Church, I happened to meet Leigh-Ann Hammond and have lunch with her and others at Park Avenue Pizza. In talking with Leigh-Ann, I learned that she is very interested in history and that she is employed at Oak Hill School. This piqued my interest; and, knowing that the Gillette House was an Oak Hill residence, I asked her about it. She responded enthusiastically about the house and her work and offered to give a tour of the house for a few WHS people. With Ralph's project in mind, I accepted her offer.

Oak Hill is a longtime Hartford neighbor. The following brief history is excerpted from its website (www.ciboakhill.org). In 1893, Emily Wells Foster formed the nation's first nursery for blind children in her home in Hartford. Through Foster's efforts an institution grew and changed forever the lives of hundreds of blind Americans and their families. In time, it would become known as the Connecticut Institution and Industrial Home for the Blind, then the Connecticut Institute for the Blind.

By the mid-1960s, important changes in federal law concerning the education of children with disabilities freed up considerable grant money for expanded special education curricula. In 1976, Oak Hill began providing services for people with multiple disabilities, following the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, which guaranteed all children free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment possible. In 1978, Oak Hill opened its first group home in the community. By 1986, Oak Hill amended its articles of incorporation and bylaws to enable the school to officially serve people with disabilities which did not necessarily include visual impairment. Expanding the school's mission more accurately reflected the changing needs of society.

Today it is simply known as Oak Hill, a recognized leader in providing community-based programs:



Gillette House southeast corner



History wall just inside the front door



Living Room

Continued on next page—>

Financial Report, July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014

Bank of America Operating Account

Beginning Balance 7/1/2013	\$ 5029.05
Plus: Income	4,611.79
Less: Expenses	(8,969.95)
Less: Transfer to WFS*	<u>(670.89)</u>
Ending Balance 6/30/2014	(0.00)

Windsor Federal Savings Operating Account

Beginning Balance 7/1/2013	
Transfer from Vanguard	\$ 2,000.00
Plus: Income	4,245.19
Less: Expenses	(1,122.91)
Plus: Website grant	1,624.00
Plus: From BOA*	<u>670.89</u>
Ending Balance 6/30/2014	7,417.17

<u>FY 2014 Income</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget to Date</u>	<u>Variance</u>
Dues	\$ 2,510.00	\$2,500.00	\$ 10.00
Fundraising	1,392.81	3,625.00	(2,232.19)
Donations	2,976.09	1,500.00	1,476.09
Memorials	1,060.00	600.00	460.00
Program Support	315.00		315.00
Publications	460.29	500.00	(39.71)
Misc. Income	141.00		141.00
Bank Interest	<u>1.79</u>		<u>1.79</u>
Total	8,856.9	8,725.00	131.98

FY 2014 Expenses

Utilities:

Electricity	\$ 764.97		
Telephone/Internet	1,126.81		
Water	167.19		
Heating Oil	56.94		
CT Natural Gas	<u>1,046.36</u>		
Total Utilities	3,162.27	3,800.00	(637.73)
USPS Box	80.00		80.00
Memberships	193.50	150.00	43.50
Meeting/Speakers	1,347.86	500.00	847.86
Printing	1,197.00	800.00	397.00
Postage	530.81	400.00	130.81
Publication Printing			
Office Supplies	446.48	350.00	96.48
Web Site	419.40	425.00	(5.60)
Insurance	804.00	800.00	4.00
House Committee	1,404.54	1,500.00	(95.46)
Collections Committee			
Hist Center Coord	397.00		397.00
Bank Service Charge	60.00		60.00
State Filing Fee	<u>50.00</u>		<u>50.00</u>

Total	\$ 10,092.86	8,725.00	1,367.86
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Assets

Vanguard (Hoff/Barnard)	\$ 61,021.78
Charles Walker Bequest	11,166.47
Cynthia Barnard Bequest	5,167.65
Bank of Amer checking	(0.00)
Windsor Fed checking	<u>7,417.17</u>
	\$ 84,773.07

*The checking account was shifted from Bank of America to Windsor Federal Savings

(Continued from page 6) housing, employment training, education, assistive technology, healthy relationships, early intervention, and recreation to children and adults with multiple disabilities (including visual impairments) in Connecticut. Oak Hill has 11 distinct programs; 120 program sites (including about 80 group homes) located in 59 towns. Oak Hill employs over 1,200 professionals to successfully meet the changing needs of thousands of people with disabilities each year. It maintains offices at its campus on Blue Hills Avenue at Holcomb Street in Hartford.

In his video, Ralph Schmoll explains that Francis Gillette built his brownstone farmhouse on Bloomfield Avenue in 1833. He was an ardent abolitionist, and his home became a safe haven for African Americans escaping from slavery, most of them heading towards Canada. Through the efforts of the Win-tonbury Historical Society, the house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. In May, 1990, the house, now owned by Cigna, was moved a half mile north to its present location. Cigna, which was already renting to Oak Hill a house that was scheduled for demolition, offered it to Oak Hill as a group home. As the accompanying photographs will show, the house is in excellent condition and beautifully furnished.

(Photos by R. Pierce)



Dining Room

CURATOR'S CORNER by Fannie Gabriel

I came across a 1903 issue of *Connecticut Magazine* the other day and was pleased to find an article on the Children's Aid Society, which was founded in 1892 by a Bloomfield native, Virginia Thrall Smith. This organization grew out of the earlier City Mission for the Needy. In 1898 Thrall Smith purchased a fifty-six-acre farm in Newington to build a facility for incurable physically-handicapped children. Half of the construction cost of \$10,000 was donated by Elisha Turner of Torrington. The Society also owned a dairy farm in Bloomfield of over two hundred acres known as Cold Spring Farm. The farm had been owned by Levi Prosser and was donated to the Society for its use. Children could spend time at the farm during the summer.



Virginia Thrall Smith

The Children's Aid Society expanded over the years to become the Newington Hospital for Crippled Children, renamed in 1968 Newington Children's Hospital. In 1986 it signed an agreement with Hartford Hospital to open a new children's hospital in Hartford, and in 1996 pediatric patients from Newington, Hartford Hospital, and the UConn Health Center were relocated to a new facility adjacent to Hartford Hospital.

Cedar Hill Cemetery photo

Thrall Smith was born in 1836 to Hiram and Melissa Thrall. Educated at the Suffield Institute, the Hartford Female Seminary, and Mount Holyoke Seminary, she married clothier William B. Smith at age 21. By 1879 she began advocating for children, starting Connecticut's first free kindergarten in 1881. She died in 1903 and in 1994 was one of the first women inducted into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS, May 2014*

The Board met on May 21 with twelve members present. President Richard Pierce announced the award of a grant of \$2,030 from Connecticut Humanities for updating and improving our website. Pierce and Dennis Hubbs already met with Dan Uitti, professional web designer, and work has begun. The process should be completed within a few months.

Treasurer Judy Dahlgren-Dechand reported that the Tag Sale on April 26 brought in \$1,883 to help our ailing bank balance. The financial report for April 30 shows income for 2014 of \$4,912 and expenses of \$8,767. The major components of those expenses were utilities, programs, printing, and building maintenance. When our checking account balance of \$2,300 is added to our investments and CDs, we have assets of \$59,733.

The meeting's agenda called for discussion, but no actions taken. Fund raising ideas were suggested, such as a raffle, a house tour, and renting the Old Farm School for birthday parties. Selling historic house signs has been delayed pending the upgrade of the web site. The idea of selling engraved bricks for a brick walkway was well-received. The walk would lead to the Old Farm School front door.

There was some sharing of ideas on possible uses of the Filley House (see separate article on pages 4-5). While the town is not likely to finish the interior of the house in the near future, it is helpful to the ongoing conversations to have some ideas on the table. Ideas suggested ranged from having certain town offices located there to using the house as a library and exhibit space for the historical society. It is understood that the property and responsibility for its maintenance belongs with the town.

*Note: This article was inadvertently omitted from the June newsletter.