

Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut September, 2013



BUSINESS HISTORY IN THE SPOTLIGHT: WILLIAMS SERVICE CENTER

Mike and Dayle Williams, owners of Williams Service Center, Inc. at 56 Tunxis Avenue, have a long history in the car business. They are Bloomfield residents who grew up in town, and each of their fathers was in automotive service and repair.

Dayle's dad, Don Evans, had a garage on the west side of Tunxis Avenue near Filley Pond, about where the Roberts Insurance building is today. At this time, the old town hall was at the corner of Tunxis and Mountain Avenues, and to its north stood the Masonic Hall, a block of stores, and Evans' garage. When the old town hall was torn down and replaced by Prosser Public Library, the block of stores also was razed; and a new gas station was built, Bloomfield Hardware was expanded, and Roberts Insurance went up. Don Evans moved his business to a new site created at 56 Tunxis when Wash Brook was rerouted under the road in its present configuration.

Meanwhile, Mike's dad, Russ Williams, operated an Esso station and garage across the street from Filley Pond at 30 Tunxis Avenue. After he moved, Earl Mattingly ran a garage there for several years. Then the building was remodeled and became Mom's Donuts. Today it is occupied by Grace and Mercy Ministries.

Although Dayle and Mike grew up in Bloomfield, they went to different high schools. After her dad retired, Dayle had no one to fix her car and took it to the Williams garage for service. Mike was working there, and they got to know one another, eventually uniting the two automotive families.

Russ Williams moved just up the street in 1981 to buy from an oil company the gas station once owned by Don Evans. When Russ retired in 1993, Mike and Dayle bought the business from him and have operated it ever since. They offer a full line of automotive repairs and the sale of preowned cars.

SEPTEMBER 18 PROGRAM TO MARK CENTER SCHOOL CENTENNIAL

On Wednesday, September 18, 2013, the Wintonbury Historical Society will present "When High Schools Were Scarce," a program on the history of public secondary education in Hartford. The speaker will be R. J. Luke Williams, retired Social Studies teacher at Hartford Public High School. Williams is Archivist and chair of the HPHS Museum Advisory Committee.

The program will begin at 7:00 P.M. at the First Congregational Church Hall, 10 Wintonbury Avenue in Bloomfield. Refreshments will be served, and there is no admission charge. For more information, call 860-242-7639.

Hartford Pubic High School is the second oldest secondary school in the nation, and many Wintonbury/Bloomfield young people graduated from it in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. It is located on Forest Street in the historic Nook Farm area that was originally developed by Bloomfield's Francis Gillette and his brother-in-law John Hooker. (The Gillette home was among those torn down to build the present HPHS building.) Gillette, like other Bloomfield children in the early 1800s, needed to travel to another town to receive his secondary education. His son, William, was four when the family moved to Forest Street in 1857, and so he attended Hartford Public. As populations grew and the idea of "high school" developed, however, changes were coming. By 1913 ninth graders could attend school in Bloomfield, and three years later Bloomfield High School was opened.

One historian writes, "The first consolidated Center School for all students above the sixth grade opened on Jerome Avenue in 1913 and contained grades one through nine. By the end of the school year, however, the ninth grade was dropped. There were only five ninth—grade students in the school during the school year and only three graduated. Most students who wished to continue their education went to high schools in Hartford, East Hartford, or West Hartford. [...] The sixroom consolidated school was considered quite advanced with its inside lavatories, steam heat and assembly hall.

"In September 1916 sections of the assembly hall of the Jerome Avenue School were partitioned off to become the first classrooms of the Bloomfield High School. Concerned parents had been advocating



Center School, Jerome Avenue

this step for some time and the town was practically forced into such a consideration when West Hartford stopped admitting any new pupils from out of town and East Hartford was setting a time limit on accepting them. There were 36 students attending high schools in these towns as well as in Hartford and Simsbury at this time." (*From Wintonbury to Bloomfield*, pages 168-169)

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WHS PUBLICATION RECEIVES AWARD

On Monday, June 3, President Richard Pierce attended the annual meeting of the Connecticut League of History Organizations at the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury. Several awards were given at the luncheon, including an Honorable Mention to the Society's 2012 revised edition of *Over Tunxis Trails*, edited by Angela Hauptmann and Ralph

Schmoll. The framed award now hangs on the wall in the History Center. In the category of publications, there was only one award, to Dr. Jon Permont for his book *Ella Grasso, Connecticut's Pioneer Governor*, and there were just two Honorable Mentions, one to the Sherman Historical Society and one to Wintonbury. Interestingly, Carolyn Ivanoff, who spoke at Wintonbury June 1, 2011 on the Arlington National Cemetery and still remembers us, was there to receive an Honorable Mention for her program, "Dare to Teach: the Life and Legacy of Prudence Crandall."



Mr. Pierce with Liz Shapiro and other officers of CLHO



JUNE 5 PROGRAM

Marc Banks, center in photo, talks with Doug Barnard (right) and Eric Sclare (left) following Dr. Banks' talk on Native Americans in north Bloomfield fishing in the Farmington River.

About forty people were present at the

Center Fire House to hear about this part of Bloomfield's ancient past. The program was presented in cooperation with the Farmington River Wild and Scenic Study Committee.

New Members:

Kurt and Nancy Wirsul Kramer, Auburn, NY Alfred LeFebvre, Bloomfield Ronald and Ruthanne Marchetti, Bloomfield Nancy Sprotte, San Diego, CA

Deceased:

Charles Dechand Norman Fenichel Lorne Rozovsky Vincent W. Watson

OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

- ► Bloomfield Garage, 689 Park Avenue
- ► Simsbury Free Library, 749 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury
- ► Geissler's Supermarket, 40 Tunxis Avenue
- ► Sir Speedy Printing, 21 Old Windsor Road
- ► Williams Service Center, 56 Tunxis Avenue

THANK YOU!

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO: A MILE OF PENNIES

Reprinted from the *Hartford Courant*, September 9, 1913, ProQuest Historical Newspapers



A mile of pennies contest was inaugurated in the Congregational Church Sunday School Sunday and the contest is to continue for four weeks ending Sunday, October 5. The Sunday school classes have been divided into two parts and are to be captained by Mrs. Lily W. Marvin, superintendent of the primary department, and Mrs. J. G. Snyder of the cradle roll department and are to be designated as the Red and the Blue. The teachers of the Sunday school are denoted as lieutenants in the contest and a lively time is looked for in the

coming weeks. The church has had for a number of years a small debt, most of it contracted for several years ago, which has been carried along in notes, and the pastor, Rev. Frank Totten, and Superintendent of the Sunday School N. F. Miller hit upon this novel plan of raising the funds to wipe out the debt. The debt in all is about \$600, and to raise this sum about 4,000 feet or three-quarters of a mile of pennies will be required, as each foot is to contain 18 pennies or the equivalent. The captains have distributed paper holders, divided into sixteen sections, to be filled and returned on or before the closing day. Mrs. Marvin's army consists of the Yoke Fellows Class, of which Fred H. Griffin is the leader, and the classes of Mrs. N. F. Miller, Mrs. Charles M. Eddy, Mrs. Ella R. Wood, the Miss E. L. Davis class, now in charge of Miss Lois Woodford, and the primary class. Mrs. Snyder's army is composed of the Ladies' Bible Class, of which Mrs. W. A. Wadhams is the leader, classes of Mrs. R. C. Eddy, Mrs. D. H. Phelps, the class of Mrs. J. B. French, now in charge of Rev. Frank Totten and Mrs. O. C. Wolfe.

CURATOR'S CORNER

Charles Dechand was very proud of the database he developed for the Wintonbury Tracers (an organization interested in Bloomfield genealogy and research). He was able to develop a database of 32,500 entries covering 262 families in Bloomfield. This is available as a resource at the History Center.

The curator has assisted several people with genealogical research recently. One, from Cromwell, was looking for information on his grandfather, who lived in Bloomfield, and his involvement with an organization

called Forresters of America. Material on the Hubbard family has been sent to Dublin, NH, and San Diego, CA. Other inquiries have come from Thomaston, CT, and from Canada.

A question came in about when Bloomfield High School was first built. An item in our files showed that the Building Committee was set up in 1930.

Through the good services of our library gurus, Jean Perreault and Gail Tinto, our books are being reviewed with an attempt to keep only what refers to Bloomfield and the immediate area.

In the ongoing process of sorting through materials, more information has popped up about the Chinese Mission in Hartford in the 1870s and 1880s. This has been sent off to Hong Kong.



Bloomfield High School 1941

Also, a pamphlet surfaced entitled *The Homestead*, edited and printed by Mason Weld of Hartford. It contained an advertisement for Ely's Nursery in Bloomfield, which today is Wade's Farm. A back page advertisement promotes "Homes for the industrious in the garden state of the West"—Illinois. Abraham Lincoln was attorney for the Illinois Central Railroad and pushed through the law for land to be sold at a low price to attract new settlers. As new farms shipped their produce, the railroad would get more business.

Fannie Gabriel

PRESIDENT'S LETTER: GETTING FOCUSED WITH StEPs

Background: The Standards and Excellence Program (StEPs) in which WHS has been participating for the past two years is the creation of the American Association for State and Local History (AALSH) and is administered in Connecticut by the Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO) and Connecticut Humanities. It has been made up of six units, three per year, each one involving a two-day Introduction and Workshop, one or two Open House Sessions, and a Wrap Up Session. All the meetings were held in Middletown except for some Open Houses which were hosted by participants. The twenty-five participating history organizations come from all parts of Connecticut and include larger museums such as the American Clock Museum in Bristol and local historical societies smaller than Wintonbury. Our Society has been in a mentoring group with American Clock, Lebanon, Farmington, and Canton Historical Societies. Fred Hesketh, Doug Barnard, Dick Pierce, and Ralph and Louise Schmoll have participated in one or more units. Each has contributed considerable time and travel expenses. Now there is one more opportunity.

New unit: The sixth and last unit starts on September 23 and 24 in Middletown. The topic is Interpretation. The AALSH StEPs Workbook defines *interpretation* as follows: "(1) A communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meaning inherent in the resource. (2) The use of cultural, artistic, and scientific resources such as collections to illuminate the past." That's probably an accurate definition, but it's a mouthful. Notice the key words: <u>connection</u> between the <u>audience</u> and the <u>resource</u> (the "resource" in our case being in large part our two buildings on School Street, what's in them, and the people who staff them).

Our *audience* must be people who visit us on School Street, contact us by telephone and internet, or attend one of our programs. Most of those people live in Bloomfield or have Bloomfield roots, and we always want to connect with more of them. We do it through our publications, our programming, and our people. We're part of a community, and we want the community to feel a part of us.

The StEPs Workbook says, "The institution [that's WHS] asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role." That means "providing meaningful and relevant information and programs for a variety of public audiences is [our] primary reason for existing." It also means that anyone active in the Society should be able to keep on learning.

When I was teaching in the public schools, I always asked why we were there—why faculty and students spend all that time and money doing what they do. (After all, citizens pay a lot of taxes to support schools.) The best answer I could come up with was that it was the mission of the school to instill in the student a lifetime fascination with learning. I hope our historical society is a continuation of that.

Dick Pierce



I VISITED OLD FARM SCHOOL

Wintonbury Historical Society

Graphic and text from the badge given to students, Fall 2012

BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

At its meeting on August 14, 2013, the Board voted to elect Judy Dahlgren-Dechand as treasurer to fill the vacancy left by her husband's untimely death. Judy reported a checkbook balance of \$5,029 on June 30 (the last day of the fiscal year).

Board Member Agreements were given to each of the fifteen Board members present. Board members sign these Agreements to indicate, among other things, their support of the Society and its mission, their intention to attend at least 70% of Board meetings, and their resolve to be effective representatives of the Society within the community.

Because our investment accounts are not paying much interest, there was discussion of moving funds to a higher-yield account. It was decided to seek input from one or more people experienced in investment and to hold a special Board meeting on September 11 to



make a decision on this one topic.

As of August 14, Society membership totals 185. This number includes sixteen new teacher members (funded under a grant from the Dun-

caster Community) and 87 life members. We also have five business members, as noted elsewhere. Since membership is a main source of funding, we are always looking for new members.

The Board approved an additional program to be held on Wednesday, December 4 in conjunction with Prosser Public Library. This will involve a radio play reading by a professional company from East Haddam of a Sherlock Holmes story. The connection with William Gillette, son of Bloomfield's Francis Gillette, will be mentioned. Our regularly scheduled program will be held on November 6, when Fred Hesketh speaks on Brown Drums.

Our Hospitality Committee is at a juncture. New people are needed to fulfill this important function. Other committees also need people, such as Collections, Fund Raising, and House. Our gardens were improved this summer by an energetic volunteer, but there is always more to do.

2014 MEETING DATES

All meetings below will be on Wednesdays at 7:00 unless otherwise noted.

Board of Directors (at the History Center) Note: These are open meetings which any interested persons may attend.

January 15

March 12

May 21

August 20

October 15

Programs for all members and the public (at various locations):

February 5

April 2

June 11 (potluck supper, annual meeting, & program,

6:00)

September 10

LATIMER HILL UPDATE

In the May newsletter we featured an article and photographs on Latimer Hill Cemetery and the sad shape it was in. Since that time, largely through the influence of Nancy Wirsul Kramer, president of the Cemetery Association, the town of Bloomfield Department of Public Works has cleaned up the cemetery, removing all the branches and trees brought down in the Hallowe'en storm of 2011. Many thanks to Bart Ritsen and his men. The improvement is dramatic!

