



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

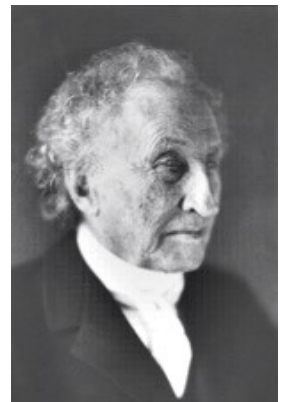
September 2015

SEPTEMBER FOCUS IS GILLETTE

On Wednesday, September 9, 2015, at 6:30 PM at the Prosser Public Library, Ralph Schmoll and Fred Hesketh team up to present a program on Francis Gillette (1807-1879), prominent Bloomfield citizen who built a home on Bloomfield Avenue in 1833. The trap-rock house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. It was featured in the September 2014 issue of the *Drummer* (pp. 6-7) following a special tour for Dr. and Mrs. Schmoll arranged by Leigh-Ann Hammond of Oak Hill School. The house is owned by the neighboring Cigna Corporation but leased to Oak Hill as a home for the blind.

One of the causes Gillette supported was the abolition of slavery. He would invite people from all over the area to his farm in Bloomfield for picnics featuring speakers on this topic. He is said to have sheltered runaway slaves in the barn on his property.

Dr. Schmoll will show the video he made on Francis Gillette and his times. The 17-minute video, accessible at www.bloomfieldcthistory.org, is worth viewing over and over again. Hesketh will read from Gillette's speeches. Gillette, as a member of the Connecticut General Assembly and the United States Congress, had plenty of opportunity to make his views known. Fortunately, many speeches have been preserved and give us a closer sense of Gillette's devotion to his causes.



WEDNESDAY

SEPTEMBER 9

6:30 PM

PROSSER

The library appreciates advance registration. Call 860-243-9721 or go to www.prosserlibrary.info.

Inside this issue: Curator's Corner: page 2; Caruso's Auto Body: page 3; Bethel A.M.E. Church: pages 4-7; Board of Directors Highlights: page 7; Year-end Financial Report: page 8.

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**CURATOR'S CORNER**

Fannie Gabriel

I was going through the genealogy files at the History Center and came across the following, written by an unknown student at the Old Farm School. Her mention of Miss Beatrice Farnham, who taught from 1919-1921, the last teacher before the school closed, helps to date the memoir.

“When I was in second grade and my brother in third, which was held upstairs in the school, a traumatic thing happened. One of the selectmen and Superintendent of Schools Mr. Mandrey, came with a pickup truck and took all of the third graders to the Center School on Jerome Avenue. My brother left, seated on the back of the truck, with some other boys, legs dangling off, and laughing at us because we were left behind. I frantically told Mr. Mandrey I would have to go too, because my mother had told me to stay with my brother. Somehow this did not seem to impress him, and I was left alone. My teacher for second grade was Miss Beatrice Farnham, later Mrs. Beatrice Noyes, in her first teaching post. I thought she was beautiful and enjoyed her teaching.

“Since the third grade had been moved out of the Old Farms [sic] School, the next year I boarded the trolley every morning at Rockwell’s Corner and sped through the fields to the station where it crossed Jerome Avenue, and attended third grade in a room on the second floor of the Center School, which had elementary grades on the first floor and high school on the second. [. . .]

“Our class of thirty members was the first to graduate from the new high school. . . on Park Avenue [in 1930]. We never got to attend classes there but it was finished in time for our graduation exercises. Just imagine the excitement—two new schools built during our education experience!”

[See *The Wintonbury Drummer*, September 2013, page 2, for an article on the Center School Centennial. It says the first classrooms for the new Bloomfield High School were partitioned off at the Jerome Avenue School in September 1916. BHS has its one hundredth anniversary coming up!]



THANK YOU!

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

Windsor Federal Savings, 54 Jerome Avenue

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BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF CARUSO'S AUTO AND BODY

It was in 1965 that Nicholas and Dolores Caruso opened their business at 36 Tunxis Avenue, still operating today as Caruso's Auto and Body, Inc. They offered a garage, a gas station, and sales of outdoor power equipment and trucks. In those days there were six garages in the town center, the others run by Charlie Regini, Bob Watkins, Russ Williams, Don Evans, and Rocky Russo.



Burnham's Garage and Shell Station, 1930s. Photo courtesy of Caruso's.

The site had been a garage for about thirty years, Burnham's Garage, Inc., founded by Watt Burnham and later run by his sons Frank Jr. and Robert. Ernest Caruso, Nick's brother, had worked there when a teenager. When the Burnham Garage went bankrupt in the sixties, Nick, a heavy-equipment operator facing unemployment, bought it.

During the first several years, the business was open seven days a week, 7 AM until 10 PM. Gasoline sales featured Citgo and later Sunoco. Auto and body repairs were carried out. They offered 24-hour towing service. Bolens power equipment was sold up until the eighties. Caruso's sold International Harvester trucks from 1965 until the mid-seventies. Because of their success in sales, Nick and Dolores won free trips abroad, traveling to such places as Morocco, Switzerland, and Italy.

The garage sponsored Ernie Caruso's stock car, which he raced at local venues such as Stafford and Riverside Park. For many years, the garage has been a collection point for tabs which benefit Ronald McDonald House. The business is also a longtime supporter of the Bloomfield Center Fire Company and, years ago, manned the dispatch telephone line. Roger Michaelman currently serves as Assistant Chief.

Michaelman and Michael Leahy, who had worked at Regini's on Jerome Avenue, joined the Carusos in 1977. Lou Roberson was a long-time associate. In 1998 Michael Allen came on board.

Caruso's Auto and Body continues to do a steady business. In addition to their many private customers, they service vehicles belonging to Cigna, the U.S. Post Office, First Cathedral, Butch and Loveland Construction, and numerous other companies. On June 22 of this year, the Bloomfield Town Council issued a citation honoring Caruso's Auto and Body on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary.



Caruso's Auto and Body, 2015

(R. Pierce photo)



CATALOG OF CONGREGATIONS, #2 of a series

Bethel A.M.E. Church: 1154 Blue Hills Avenue, www.bethelbloomfield.org, 860-243-5778

Bethel A.M.E. Church's location at the corner of Wintonbury and Blue Hills Avenues is significant in Bloomfield history. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Blue Hills Avenue was a main stage coach route from Hartford to points north, and many taverns or rest stops were built along it. These taverns were of importance to local neighbors, as well as travelers, for sociability and for the interchange of news and opinions. The Buttonball Tavern, also called Thrall Tavern, was located at the northeast corner of Wintonbury and Blue Hills Avenues. It was here on a visit to Hartford in the early 1800s that General Lafayette was entertained with a hundred or more guests. The Buttonball Tavern burned down around 1933, and Bethel A.M.E. Church is located today on the land where it once stood.

Bethel A.M.E. Church moved into its new building at the corner of Blue Hills and Wintonbury Avenues in April, 1992. Its history, however, goes far back before that time—back, in a way, to the eighteenth century.

The A.M.E. Church as a denomination traces its beginnings to 1787 when its founding fathers, Rev. Richard Allen, Rev. Absalom Jones, and a band of followers, withdrew from the St. George Methodist Church in Philadelphia because of the “unkind treatment” and discrimination with which these worshippers of African descent were faced.

In 1816, Richard Allen and representatives from several African churches met, and a church organization or “connection” was organized as the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The A.M.E. Church gives this description of its name: **African** means that the church was organized by people of African descent and heritage; **Methodist** refers to the church's membership in the family of Methodist churches; **Episcopal** refers to the form of government under which the church operates; **Church** refers to the “Christian Church,” which is a community of people who believe in God and who have accepted Jesus Christ as the guiding example of their lives.

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Bloomfield is a descendent of this tradition and a member of the Connectional A.M.E. Church which consists of 6,200 congregations and 2.5 million members in 20 districts located around the world.

The earliest documented proof of the existence of Bethel A.M.E. Church is an obituary clipping of the late Mr. Leonard Weston Martin taken from the *Hartford Times* dated July 29, 1940. The article states that Bethel Church was organized in Brother Martin's home at 42 Liberty Street, Hartford, in 1916. Further evidence of this date is in an article from the

PASTORS OF BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH

1917-1919 Rev. William Byrd
 1919-1920 Rev. C. H. Gibbons
 1920-1922 Rev. Dr. E. K. Nichols
 1922-1924 Rev. C. B. Lawyers
 1924-1928 Rev. M. F. Sydes
 1928-1940 Rev. W. K. Hopes
 1940-1948 Rev. Daniel D. Davis
 1948-1970 Rev. J. Blanton Shields
 1970-1978 Rev. W. Melvin Campbell
 1978—2008 Rev. Dr. Alvan N. Johnson, Jr.
 Feb. 2008-Jan. 2013 Rev. Ron McCune
 Jan. 2013-present, Rev. Daylan K. Greer, Sr.

Hartford Courant dated May 22, 1945. The occasion was the mortgage burning of 210 Bellevue Street, presided over by Bishop Sims. It too gives the founding date as 1916. It is believed that the Reverend J.S. Myric, a minister transferred from the Southwest Georgia Annual Conference, was present and assisted with the organization. This small group worshiped from house to house and finally secured their first meeting house, a storefront on North Main Street in Hartford.

When the New England Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church convened in May 1917, this small band was received into the Connection by the Rt. Reverend Evans Tyree, Presiding Bishop of the First Episcopal District. The Reverend Dr. William Byrd of Shorter College was the first appointed Pastor. It was under the administration of Reverend Byrd that the property at 180 Clark Street was purchased at a cost of \$4,100.00. This dwelling served as both a church and parsonage for the next four to five years.

In May 1920, at the closing session of the New England Annual Conference held at Newport, RI, Bishop William H. Heard appointed the Reverend Dr. Edward Kingston Nichols as the second pastor of Bethel. It was during his administration in 1922 that the Jewish Temple at 22 Winthrop Street was purchased. The church continued to show growth and finally became a station church. Reverend Nichols was transferred to Bethel, New Bedford in 1923.

Several years later, in 1937, while The Reverend Dr. William K. Hopes, was pastor of Bethel, the building at Winthrop Street was mysteriously destroyed by fire. But help was not lacking. The Arsenal School, Windsor Avenue Congregational Church Parish House, Union Baptist Parish House and the basement of Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church were all used as temporary worship sites. Rev. Dr. Hopes was a community leader and was appointed to the Hartford Housing Authority in 1938, becoming the first Black to hold such a position. While serving as Bethel's pastor, he also served as Presiding Elder of the Newport District, which included Northeast Connecticut, part of Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

In June 1940, the Reverend D.D. Davis was appointed as pastor of Bethel. He led the congregation in purchasing the building at 210 Bellevue Street. The basement of the building was made ready and the first worship service was held in October of 1940.

As time moved on, the church continued to grow. On the third Sunday in July 1948, the Reverend Jethro Blanton Shields assumed the pastorate of Bethel. A new building was needed, and on Sunday, September 10, 1950, Bethel A.M.E. Church was successful in using 2003 Main Street for its first service, a Women's Day Program. The buildings and grounds of 2003 Main Street were conveyed to Bethel A.M.E. Church for \$50,000.00. The sum of \$10,000.00, which had been raised by the members of the congregation, was paid down and a total of \$40,000.00 was left owed to the Workman's Circle Education Center, Inc. In 1957, the building was improved by the addition of a new front and renovation of the interior.



Bethel A.M.E. Church, 1950:
2003 Main St., Hartford

During Reverend Shields' administration the choirs of

Continued on next page—>



2003 Main Street with
new front, 1957

Bethel under the direction of Mrs. Gussie Shields, achieved great distinction, giving concerts throughout the eastern part of the United States. On January 18, 1970, after having pastored Bethel for 22 years, Reverend Shields died suddenly. The Rev. Melvin Campbell was appointed as our new pastor.

More than eight years later, in November 1978, The Reverend Dr. Alvan N. Johnson, Jr. was appointed new pastor of Bethel. In his first two years as pastor, the congregation started to increase and the building at 2003 Main Street was completely updated. The Men's Chorus, an extension of the Men's Club, was invited to sing throughout New England. The church has traveled to every state between Massachusetts and Virginia, to Bermuda and West Africa spreading the Gospel. Under Rev. Johnson's leadership the 6-7-8 Club, an organization for our senior citizens, was formed, as well as an after school tutorial program, Boys and Girls Scout Troops, a Prison Ministry, a senior citizen's nutrition and exercise program, and a Christian-based Day Care Center. During Reverend Johnson's administration Bethel established a website on the Internet and computerized the entire church finance and membership system. As a result of Bethel's involvement with the Capitol Region Conference of Churches Bridge Building Program (a program designed to promote and develop spiritual and racial harmony between urban and suburban groups), Bethel was paired with First Church of Christ of Wethersfield. This pairing has resulted in the program's longest and most successful pairing. Bethel was also instrumental in moving families from welfare and poverty to secured positions in society.

On June 1, 1986, Reverend Johnson and the members of Bethel broke ground for a new \$2.5 million edifice in Bloomfield, and in April 1992, they moved into their new church building. The new church houses class rooms, a State of Connecticut certified kitchen, the pastor's office and administrative offices, a beautiful sanctuary with a seating capacity of 1200, a large social hall, a Day Care, and the Bethel Center for Humane Services. Rev. Johnson served Bethel for thirty years, from 1978 to 2008, and was well-known throughout the area.



Bethel's current location at
1154 Blue Hills Avenue in
Bloomfield

Rev. Ron McCune was appointed pastor of Bethel in February 2008. Under his leadership new ministries were established and many renovations were made to the church and to the parsonage building in Hartford. He was also instrumental in creating "A Walk of Witnesses," which leads congregants and visitors into the church building.

In January 2013, the current pastor, The Rev. Daylan K. Greer, Sr. was appointed to Bethel. Under his leadership Bethel has firmly been established as a civic minded dynamo in the community. During the Ebola epidemic in Liberia last year, members of its Social Action Commission collected medical supplies and food items to be shipped to The Empowerment Temple A.M.E Church, Monrovia, Liberia. The first shipment went out on November 17, 2014 and arrived in Liberia in February 2015. In March,

after a devastating fire in Hartford, Bethel members gathered to feed sixty Hartford fire victims at Hartford's Kelvin Anderson Recreation Center. In June 2015, after the horrific shooting of the pastor and eight members of Emmanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, SC, Bethel initiated a city-wide prayer vigil for the victims.

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church continues today as a vibrant presence within the town of Bloomfield. Its website is easily accessed at www.bethelbloomfield.org. Its email address is bachurch01@snet.net, and its telephone number is 860-243-5778.

Thanks to Shirley Belcher for this article and its photos.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board met on August 19, 2015 with eight directors and four committee chairs present. The treasurer's report, which is reprinted below on page 8, consisted of the June 30 end-of-fiscal-year report. It showed a good year financially and was approved by vote of the Board.

Mary Murray announced that Celebrate Bloomfield 2016 will occur from June 1-6, Wednesday to Monday. The Historical Society will replicate what it did last year.

Austin White spoke about opening a Society account with Instagram, a free photo sharing service. This would work in tandem with our FaceBook account, which is administered by Dennis Hubbs. The Board approved an Instagram account.

There was discussion of the need for painting at Southwest District School. The president was authorized to get a quote from member Tom Farrell, if he is interested in doing it. If not, we will ask TC Painters (who painted the History Center and Old Farm School) for a quote.

The Board issued a formal thank you to the Bloomfield Lions Club for its work in upgrading the Old Farm School flower gardens (at its own expense). The Club does expect to come back next spring to do more work. The old hanging sign at one edge of the front garden was removed. Mary Murray said Member Don Moore has agreed to donate lumber for a new sign, and Southend Woodworking of 48 Douglas Street will make the sign.

Ralph Schmoll noted that our stock of bicycle tour brochures is dwindling and some updates are needed. We are looking for someone to take this on.

Ralph is looking ahead to a new exhibit. One possibility is Sunset Sounds, the concerts held for ten years on the Cigna campus. More memorabilia are needed, including photographs.

Treasurer Judy Dahlgren-Dechand said that our insurance cost of \$850 a year does not promise any real benefit, even in case of need. She recommended, and the Board agreed, that we not renew our insurance for another year.



Front: Rev. Daylan Greer and Mrs. Jennifer Greer; Back: Kendell Greer and Jai Greer

ERRATA

The name of Dr. Shirley Coker was inadvertently omitted from the article about Rehoboth Church of God in our last issue. Dr. Coker wrote that article, which began the Catalog of Congregations series so well.

THANK YOU, LIONS CLUB!

THANK YOU TO BLOOMFIELD LIONS CLUB WORKERS:

Dorothia Goffe

Carmen Boudier

David and Sue Stocker

Louisa Cummings

Toni Clark

Judy Dahlgren-Dechand

Mary Murray

Wintonbury Historical Society: Financial Report as of June 30, 2015

Windsor Federal Savings Operating Account:

Beginning Balance 7/1/2014	\$ 7,417.17
Plus: Income	\$ 8,284.99
Less: Expenses	\$(8,482.60)
Ending Balance 6/30/2015	\$ 7,219.56

FY 2015 Income	Actual	Budget to Date	Variance
Dues	\$ 2,950.00	\$2,500.00	\$ 450
Fundraising	\$ 970.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 470
Donations	\$ 3,223.25	\$2,700.00	\$ 523.25
Memorials	\$ 450.00	\$ 300.00	\$ 150.00
Program Support	\$ 152.00	\$ 400.00	\$(248.00)
Publications	\$ 364.00	\$ 300.00	\$ 64.00
Website Grant	\$ 166.45		\$ 166.45
Bank Interest	\$ 9.29		\$ 9.29
Total	\$ 8,284.99	\$6,700.00	\$1584.99

FY 2015 Expenses

Utilities:

Electricity	\$ 742.72
Telephone/Internet	\$ 1,120.20
Water	\$ 121.32
Heating Oil	
CT Natural Gas	<u>\$ 1,049.90</u>

Total Utilities	\$ 3,034.14	\$ 3,000.00	\$ (34.14)
USPS Box	\$ 80.00		\$ (80.00)
Memberships	\$ 90.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 10.00
Meetings/Speakers	\$ 245.00	\$ 300.00	\$ 55.00
Printing	\$ 915.00	\$ 700.00	\$ (215.00)
Postage	\$ 160.88	\$	\$ (160.88)
Publication Printing			
Website Grant	\$ 1,890.45		\$ (1,890.45)
Office Supplies	\$ 242.51	\$ 300.00	\$ 7.49
Web Site	\$ 349.55	\$ 450.00	\$ 100.45
Insurance	\$ 837.00	\$ 850.00	\$ 13.00
House Committee	\$ 588.07	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 411.93
Collections Committee			
History Center Coordinators			
Bank Service Charge			
State Filing Fee	<u>\$ 50.00</u>		<u>\$ (50.00)</u>
Totals	\$ 8,482.60	\$6,700.00	\$ (1,782.60)

Assets:

Vanguard (Hoff/Barnard)	\$65,641.11
C. Walker Bequest	\$11,166.47
C. Barnard Bequest	\$ 5,167.65
WFS Checking	<u>\$ 7,219.56</u>
Total	\$89,194.79

Grant:

CT Humanities	\$ 1,790.45
Expenses	
Staples	\$ (561.17)
Dan Uitti, consultant	\$(1,329.28)
Balance	\$ (100.00)