



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society
Bloomfield, Connecticut September, 2016

FALL FILLEY FEST COMING!

September 7 Program Highlights Local Family

Filley Street, Filley Pond, and the Filley House remind Bloomfield residents of the once-prominent local Filley family. Moreover, Filley descendants, now living in other states, are still supporters of the Wintonbury Historical Society.

At the WHS September program at Prosser Public Library, Ralph Schmoll will show his new video, *Stone House Farm, The Filleys and Beyond*. Called the Stone House Farm in the 1800s, it is commonly known today as the Filley House. Learn how it came into being and about other occupants of the house after the Filleys sold it. Some history of Captain Oliver Filley and his son Jay completes the film.

Then Marilyn Johnston will give us a preview of her later program by reading excerpts from Julia Filley's poems and her own poems on similar themes.



Julia Ann Newberry Filley, Age 31

This free program will take place on Wednesday, September 7, 2016 at Prosser Public Library, 1 Tunxis Avenue, at 6:30 PM. Put it on your calendar now!
Registration is appreciated. Call 860-243-9761 or go to www.prosserlibrary.info.

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DIRECTORY

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Vacancy

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2017

Winifred Granger

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Nicholas Panke

Alvin Taylor

2018

Homer Guilmartin

Ralph Schmoll

Joan Sullivan

Vacancy (1)

2019

Elizabeth Merrow

William Weissenburger

Vacancy (2)

NEW DIRECTORS ADDED TO BOARD

Class of 2017:

Alvin Taylor, a life member of the Society, a resident of Bloomfield for over forty years, lives on Regency Drive. He is a retired attorney and has been active in various community organizations.

Class of 2018:

Joan Sullivan has lived on Worthington Drive with her husband Douglas for fifteen years. She is a native of Jamaica and a UCONN graduate. She is a Special Education teacher in Hartford and looks forward to getting involved in Bloomfield history.

Class of 2019:

Bill Weissenburger is a life member of the Society and a resident of Bloomfield since 1970. He retired from CIGNA and is now an investment advisor and financial planner. He is Treasurer and Finance Chair of The Connecticut Historical Society and has served in several other volunteer organizations.



Homer Guilmartin and George Merrow
rebuilding the basement stairs at the
History Center last June
—Libbie Merrow photo

HELP NEEDED!

Donations to our collection have been coming in so fast that we cannot keep up with them. We need volunteers to sort, label, shelve, and enter into the database. Please call Ralph and Louise Schmoll at 860-242-2953 or email rdschmoll@comcast.net, or stop by the History Center on a Monday afternoon, 1:00 to 3:00 and set up your own schedule.

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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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board of Directors met on August 17 with seven directors and two committee chairpersons present. The treasurer submitted her year-end report (through June 30). Income for the year totaled \$8,007, slightly above the budgeted amount of \$7,800. Expenses totaled \$7,584, somewhat less than the budgeted amount of \$7,800. Utilities expenses were \$3,118, which was the largest expense, with House Committee expenses running second at \$1,836. Our Vanguard investments totaled \$176,355. The Charles Walker Bequest was at \$11,200, and the Cynthia Barnard Bequest at \$5,518. With \$7,592 in our checking account and \$50 in petty cash, our total assets as of June 30 were \$200,718.

The terms of office of the president and treasurer having run out as of June 30, the Board voted to continue Dick Pierce and Judy Dahlgren-Dechand as president and treasurer, respectively. Two new directors were welcomed to the meeting: Joan Sullivan and Bill Weisenburger.

Total membership stands at 127, with quite a few not having yet sent in their dues. To increase our membership and reach out to the whole community, the Board authorized an expenditure of \$4,500 for a town-wide mailing. With even a three percent return rate, we'll recoup our expenses and hopefully double our membership.

Ralph Schmoll said we have had many donations recently, which means we have a lot of material to process. We have an urgent need for more people to help in this.

Changes in the scheduling of our public programs were discussed. The Board okayed holding the November and February programs on Sunday afternoons. A committee was appointed to study the By-laws and see if revisions need to be made in this and other areas.

The Board voted to name our new building the "Fannie Gabriel History Center" after such naming receives town council authorization in September.

Notes from my reading

"Why does one read books? To instruct oneself, amuse oneself, train one's mind . . . certainly all this and much more. Ultimately it is to understand life with its thousand faces and to learn to live life. Books give us the experiences and thoughts of innumerable others, often the wisest of their generation, and lift us out of our narrow ruts."

--quoted from Jawaharlal Nehru, "Prison Diary," 1935. Found in Iyengar, Uma, 2007, *The Oxford India Nehru*. Quoted by Naomi S. Baron, *Words on Screen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2015.



Bloomfield High School, 1941. This year the school marks 100 years of educating young people. (See page 8) —file photo



CATALOG OF CONGREGATIONS, #7 of a series

Beth Hillel Synagogue, 160 Wintonbury Avenue

It was 1952 when seven Jewish families got together to explore the needs of Jewish families in the Bloomfield area. The Bloomfield Jewish Community Center was founded. A full-fledged congregation was born. Three years later, an eight-acre plot was purchased at 1095 Blue Hills Avenue. Ground was broken and a building with seating capacity of 300 was erected, with most of the men donating their time and labor. In September 1955, the first High Holiday Services were conducted in the new synagogue, now renamed Beth Hillel Synagogue.



Beth Hillel website photo

In June 1956, Rabbi Louis Kaplan was named Beth Hillel's first spiritual leader. During his tenure and that of his successor, Rabbi Irving Spielman (installed December 4, 1960), Beth Hillel's membership increased to 250 families and the congregation purchased land at 160 Wintonbury Avenue. The new home was dedicated in November 1966, under the spiritual leadership of Rabbi Spielman.

In September, 1969, Temple Beth Sholom, which had been located at 290 Cornwall Street, Hartford, merged with Beth Hillel. Dr. Philip Lazowski, educational director at Beth Sholom since 1955 and rabbi since 1962, became the spiritual leader of the new Beth Hillel Synagogue and was installed on November 9, 1969. Membership by now numbered more than 450 families.

Beth Hillel, of course, is more than just a place of worship. It serves the religious, cultural, and social needs of the surrounding Hartford Jewish community. Religious school classes play an important function, as well as a full range of social and educational activities. Beth Hillel has been intensively involved in promoting better relations and cooperation among all religious institutions of Bloomfield.

In the late 1980's Beth Hillel Synagogue erected a larger social hall, a dairy kitchen, a multi-purpose room and a chapel allowing capacity to expand the main sanctuary to over 1300 seats. After more than 30 years as Beth Hillel's spiritual leader, Rabbi Lazowski retired in 2000 and was honored as Rabbi Emeritus. He remains active and loved at Beth Hillel. The congregation was served from 2000 to 2006 by Rabbi Edward Friedman. Then Rabbi Gary Atkins was spiritual leader from 2006 to 2016 and has been named an emeritus. He and his wife, Iris, brought a renewed spirit of life and involvement to the congregation. The present interim rabbi is Gary Karlin.

Many persons, men and women, have served as president of Beth Hillel. Edward Bromberg was one of the first (see sidebar, next page). Jerry Wagner, Hillel president during

1957-58, was also president of the Historical Society. Other members of the Historical Society include Joel Neuwirth, synagogue president during 1981-1983; David Baram, who served from 1991-1993; and Sydney Schulman, who was president from 2011 to 2013.



Rabbi Gary Karlin

—website photo

Beth Hillel's history has been very rich. The past decades have been filled with memorable events, such as births, bar/bat mitzvahs, marriages, anniversaries, and the loss of loved ones. In this synagogue people have found friendships and shared goals, holidays, and prayers. Here they have identified themselves as Jews, and affirmed their faith. Beth Hillel maintains a traditional yet contemporary approach within the Conservative movement. It prides itself on being a truly egalitarian synagogue both in religious practice and synagogue governance. From its beginnings, Beth Hillel has been an active member of the United Synagogues of Conservative Judaism. Beth Hillel and its affiliates have received numerous awards for excellence. Beth Hillel has contributed numerous regional and national leaders.

—Thanks to Tobie Katz of Beth Hillel and Jeanne Lowrey of the Jewish Historical Society for help with this article! Material also drawn from the website, www.bethhillelsynagogue.org.

In Memoriam

Carrie Allison died on July 7. Always active in her community, she leaves her husband, Alfred, and five children.

Lawrence Cohen, 87, died on August 15, 2016. Well-known as both musician and pharmacist, Larry operated the Park Avenue Pharmacy in Bloomfield for many years in an older building near Park Avenue and then in the Wintonbury Mall when that was built. His many loyal customers appreciated the friendly family atmosphere and were saddened at the pharmacy's closing in 2000.

"Mr. Bromberg"

Edward N. Bromberg was an important part of Beth Hillel Synagogue from its beginnings. He was born in Hartford in 1927 and went to Hebrew School as soon as he was old enough. He "took to Hebrew like a duck takes to water," he would later say, and his love of the Hebrew language stayed with him all his life.

He attended Hartford Public High School, where he ran track and cross country. But this was during World War II, a popular war which young men wanted to be a part of, and Edward joined the Navy before graduation. He left the Navy in 1946 and two years later married Harriet Kirshnitz. They were married for 48 years until her death in 1996. They moved to Bloomfield in 1950 and had a daughter and a son. In 2000 he married Dorothy Cohen, and they enjoyed seven happy years until his death in February, 2007.

Ed had a job selling vacuum cleaners, television sets, and paint at Sears Roebuck. He played softball for the Sears team. He then went into selling insurance and after that into the egg business. In the 1950s and 1960s he had an egg farm with 5,000 chickens on Park Avenue in Bloomfield. After that, Ed sold real estate.

Meanwhile, Ed felt that there should be a synagogue in Bloomfield, as there were about fifty Jewish families living there. He was instrumental in getting the people together, and they formed what became Beth Hillel Synagogue in 1952.

In 1960 Rabbi Irving Spielman asked Ed to be a Hebrew School teacher. Ed took courses in Teaching Methodology at Hillyer College and became the sole Bar and Bat Mitzvah teacher. He was responsible for shaping the lives of many of his students. They respected him and remember him as "Mr. Bromberg" to this day.

A Reminiscence

When the *Journal* published a photo of the Goodman Hotel in July, it brought back memories to George Bragdon of 102 Duncaster Road. George and his wife Joan lived in a house across from the hotel from about 1968-70. However, it was no longer a hotel at that time, but the residence of the large Williams family.

George had been born in Wethersfield when it was still a farming community, and his love of farming began at an early age. He can remember helping drive cattle to summer pasture when he was as young as eight or ten. He grew up to graduate from the Agriculture School at the University of Connecticut. He bought a farm in Scotland, Connecticut, and raised pigs for about sixteen years. One place that would buy pigs from him was the Connecticut Packing Company in Bloomfield, and so George got acquainted with Irving Bercowetz.

Irving was born in that house on Goodman Street where George and Joan later lived. The house had been bought by Irving's father, Kalman, when he bought 120 acres in Bloomfield and moved there from New York City in 1910. Bercowetz owned the land from Granby Street west along Cottage Grove Road to Goodman Street. (The businesses along Granby Street and Toby Road bought their land from Bercowetz.) The first slaughtering of animals for market was done in the barn behind the Goodman Street house, before the original Copaco slaughter house was built. In the early days, cattle were shipped in by rail, but when the railroad lost a whole car of cattle, Irving switched to truck transportation. Irving started up a hot dog store, then expanded it into a grocery store, and finally built a modern market towards the front of the property. When Zayre built a department store to the east, the development of the present-day Copaco Shopping Center was under way.



Goodman Hotel, which burned down in 1978

WHS file photo

George Bragdon made such an impression on Irving Bercowetz that Irving hired him in 1968, and George was to work at Copaco for some sixteen years until Irving retired. George had a variety of responsibilities, including the hot dog packing plant, security, and the construction of the new shopping center. At the time he lived on Goodman Street there were three or four houses there, all of which are now gone. After two years there, he moved to Hiram Lane, and after that to Duncaster Road.

—Thanks to George Bragdon for sharing these memories!

President's Letter

In one of Agatha Christie's novels, I came across a curious epigram, "Old sins make long shadows."¹ It's a subject much in the news these days. A lot happened in the past that makes us feel ashamed when we think about it. Maybe it's better not to know anything about history at all rather than to feel it pressing down on us with its reproachful hand.



In Oklahoma, Becky Hobbs remembers that some of her Cherokee elders wouldn't touch a \$20 bill because they so despised Andrew Jackson. To this day, she pokes him in the face whenever she gets one.² Amherst College made the news this year by deciding to drop as its mascot "Lord Jeff," because Jeffrey Amherst, 18th Century military man, suggested using smallpox as a weapon to eradicate Native Americans. Yale has also been tussling with history. Calhoun College there is named after John C. Calhoun, an ardent supporter of slavery.³ In June an African-American dining services worker, looking at a stained-glass window depicting slaves in a cotton field, got so fed up that he smashed it with his broom handle.⁴ Colin McEnroe then suggested that long ago the window "should have been moved to the 'Look How Stupid We Used to Be' wing of one of the university's many museums."⁵ The past sometimes seems to stain us.

England's Oxford University has a large statue of Cecil Rhodes, an architect of colonialism (remember Southern Rhodesia?), and it has become quite an embarrassment to some.⁶ Then there's Northwest Catholic High School in nearby West Hartford, which used to be the Indians and is now the Lions. It's like Jeremiah's confession, "We acknowledge our wickedness, Lord, and the guilt of our ancestors."⁷ Many people today are grappling with a painful past of which they're ashamed.

It can be especially hurtful if the painful past is recent—if, for example, your parents were a negative factor in your childhood. In her book on the problems of men in today's world, Carolyn Custis James speaks of a "father wound." She writes, "Wounds caused by a distant, emotionally unavailable, physically absent, or abusive father run deep and leave a gaping hole behind that can, like an unseen congenital defect, diminish the quality of a man's life or escalate over time into something worse."⁸ Individuals and nations are alike in this.



Is history poison? Not necessarily so. We all know people who, despite difficult childhoods—perhaps because of them—have grown up to be considerate and responsible citizens. Our ghosts, personal and societal, can be dethroned. Whatever its blemishes, the past contained great people and inspiring events that nourish us all

through our lives. We do have to take down Confederate flags and other symbols or our own misplaced loyalties and put them in museums, but doing so allows us to rise above the animosities of the past and mature into a better society. You don't forget the Holocaust; but, by look-

ing stubbornly forward, you leave it behind, prevent its reoccurrence, and make a better world.

There's more to history, of course, than facts. The past is the past—a record of events that occurred in bygone eras: dates, facts, and things that “happened.” But history is much more than that. History is how we think about the past.⁹ It involves study, reasoning, good will, and maybe even a sense of humor. All of which makes a big difference. If you don't like history because of all the bad things and bad people, think again. Our nation's progress has been messy, but we've come a long way from 1776. The study of history develops perspective. It shapes thinking. You learn from it. You see the good in life today. You begin to understand difficult people. You resolve to do better in your own life. You realize that life has more than one dimension, more than one appearance, and that you are a part of the whole. History is a great teacher.

—Dick Pierce



Sources cited:

1. Agatha Christie, *Postern of Fate* (1973), page 162
2. “\$20's new look a deeply symbolic change,” *Hartford Courant*, April 24, 2016, page A3
3. *Hartford Courant*, January 25, 2016, page A1
4. *Hartford Courant*, July 13, 2016, page A1
5. *Hartford Courant*, July 17, 2016, page C3.
6. *Hartford Courant*, January 31, 2016, page C4
7. Jeremiah 14:20, *New International Version*
8. Carolyn Custis James, *Malestrom: Manhood Swept into the Currents of a Changing World* (2015), page 78
9. See John Fea, *Why Study History? Reflecting on the Importance of the Past* (2013), pages 2-3

BLOOMFIELD HIGH SCHOOL TO CELEBRATE 100 YEARS

This fall Bloomfield High School will begin an observance of its one-hundredth anniversary. As of press time, detailed plans were not yet complete. The following two paragraphs, taken from the Society's 1983 book, *From Wintonbury to Bloomfield*, pages 168-169, and previously reprinted in the September 2013 *Drummer*, tell about the establishment of the high school.

“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 six-room 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 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.”

