

# The Wintonbury Drummer



## *Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society*

*Bloomfield, Connecticut*

*January 2005*

**Next meeting:** February 2, 2005 7:30 p.m.

**Location:** Marilyn Michaelson Senior Center, 330 Park Ave., Bloomfield, CT

**Program:** Calvin Barber, Gravestone Carver, Simsbury, Connecticut

**Speaker:** Stephen Petke, M.A. in American Studies from Trinity College

### *President's Message:*

Considering the interest in Bloomfield cemeteries, the February meeting should prove of interest — since a part of Wintonbury-Bloomfield was a part of Simsbury, we will find that Calvin Barber did indeed feature carvings of graves, especially St. Andrews Cemetery. Steve holds a M.A. in American Studies from Trinity College. His research is concentrated on colonial gravestones of the Farmington Valley (including Old St. Andrews). His study of Calvin Barber's work, is based in part on account books in the Simsbury Historical Society Archives. Steve's paper was published in 1993 by the Association for Gravestone Studies. Steve is a Bloomfield resident, and employed by CIGNA.

Fannie R. Gabriel, President

### **This and That**

We wish Bruce Hale a speedy recovery—and a much needed rest—the best from all of us—

Sorry to read of Peter Otkowski's passing—our sympathy to Dee

Our thanks to Robert Stiles, who has been good enough to keep track of the utilities at the Old Farm School.

Latest Connecticut Historical Society publication noted Sharon's presentation to historians of Connecticut Conference in May in Glastonbury, on guidelines for researching collections.

The Society continues to receive interesting inquiries—keep your eye on our web site for new developments.

We continue to receive interesting items for our collections—

Charlie Regini has passed along a collage of outstanding Bloomfield buildings. This was put together by Jean Turek in 1984. Also copy of Old American Homes (vol. 1) by Hensley and Ottalie Williams-1700-1900

Gladys Goodrich Dunbar has given the Society a beautifully framed silhouette of the Charter Oak-The reverse states "This frame is made from wood from the "Charter Oak" from the estate of Elizabeth Colt through Mr. Ulrich, Secretary of the Colt Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co." 1934.

Fannie R. Gabriel, President

## 2004 Wine & Cheese Gala Presentation

by Sharon Steinberg

### THE CAPT. OLIVER FILLEY HOUSE

Welcome to our gala and thank you for sharing with us our vision for the future of the Capt. Oliver Filley House, an exciting collaborative effort between the Wintonbury Historical Society and the Town of Bloomfield.

Commanding a bucolic view of rolling hills, patchwork fields, and the City of Hartford from the highest point on the land, the Capt. Oliver Filley House waits in dramatic silence for the next phase of its life. Sitting high and isolated like a stone temple on a prominence in Greek revival style on 145 acres of Open Space land, the House was built at the direction of Capt. Filley in 1834 for his son, Jay Humphrey, and Jay's wife, Julia Newberry, who had married a year before.

Captain Oliver Filley was a farmer, a Yankee peddler, a tin craftsman, an astute businessman, a merchant who created a network of traveling peddlers, a doting father, and a loyal friend whose ancestor – William Filley – came to Windsor in the early 1600s. He got the title "Captain" for his work in the War of 1812. When young Oliver was 12 and living in what was then called Simsbury, his father died, and he was given the responsibility of running the farm with his mother, Tabitha. When Oliver was 21, he married Annis Humphrey of Simsbury, continued to farm, learned the tinware craft, taught it to others, and started a peddler business. He hired people in town as well as his sons, brothers, cousins, indentured servants, and apprentices to hitch their horses to a wagon, load it up with everything from tinware to ribbons, pots and pans, threads and fabrics, and the classic traveling salesman was born.

In order to help the Captain make the tinware for peddlers to sell, he hired Irish women to paint the designs as well as apprentices to learn the business. During the age of slavery, Oliver stands out as a man not only fair but also focused. Indenture papers reveal that he hired at least one black man, Harry Crane, son of Jack Crane, in 1811, promising to teach the 17-year-old the art of tinware and painting on tin. By 1815, Harry was decorating tinware as an apprentice to Augustus Filley, Oliver's brother-in-law, in Lansingburg, New York, as the business branched out. He was mainly a farmer, however, who, in received an award of a silver chalice from the Hartford Agricultural Society for the best cultivated farm, but with all help on the road or in the tinshop, who would take care of the farm?

Enter Jay Filley, one of the Captain's sons, born in 1810, who liked neither making nor selling tinware, and who wanted to stay and farm the land. He and his wife, Julia, born in 1808, would need a place to live and farm, and so, the stone house was built up on a ridge behind two wooden Filley houses that no longer stand. Jay grew tobacco and corn, cultivated apple and peach orchards, experimented with mulberry trees for silk, and raised sheep, pigs, chickens, and cows. Julia helped butcher hogs, made butter and pies for her family as well as for the market, spun wool, quilted comforters, made soap, candles, sewed clothing, first by hand and then by machine (although she preferred hand sewing to the balky machine of that era), made remedies for easing illness, visited and comforted the sick and bereaved, went to church on Whirlwind Hill, and entertained the legion of Filleys who visited from St. Louis, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. Jay and Julia had three children in the house: Marcus who died before his 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday, Alfred, and Louis, who would as a young man be taken prisoner in the infamous Andersonville prison as a Civil War soldier.

When Capt. Oliver Filley died in 1846, Jay and Julia moved to the Filley family home on Brown Street to take care of Jay's widowed mother, Annis – as was the custom — his yet-unmarried sister, Jennette, and to run the farm from that side of the mountain, property next to the stone house's land. And our Filley House went out of the Filley family. After the house and land on Mountain Avenue were probated in 1849, it was bought by Watson Wilcox of Simsbury whose family lived in the house until 1854. The Wilcox family also lost a child in the stone house, and Julia visited them in their grief to comfort them, knowing what they were going through.

The House and land were sold in May of 1854 to Amasa Holcomb, who sold it five months later to Samuel Pinney. The Pinney family lived in the house and farmed the land for 60 years, built a barn emblazoned with his initials, raised children, and prospered. In 1913, the Pinneys sold the house and land to the Missionaries of LaSalette who used it as a summer headquarters for its young priests-in-training and who continued to farm the land. When LaSalette built its brick building just up the road, it turned the Filley House into a two-family house, added a staircase for the second family, found tenant farmers, and continued working the land.

In 1980, LaSalette sold the house and land to a developer, who planned to create housing units, but when the real estate market fell, that plan was abandoned, although not before the beautiful barn had burned down, all except a small, stone piece of it.

By 1992, the house and about 140 acres, the Town of Bloomfield, with the help of the State of Connecticut, purchased the house. In 1993, a resolution was passed by the Town Council and in 1995 a 99-year lease agreement was signed leasing the house to the Wintonbury Historical Society for preservation.

It is a folk art house, whose unknown masons configured images of trees and leaves suggested by stones in a variety of earth tones, symmetrical stones near its roof, building a magnificent and solid house with traprock mined and hauled down dirt roads from the nearby Talcott Ridge. The front of the house faces south, ensuring that the interior will be warm in the winter, and because of its stone exterior, its summer temperature stays moderate, even cool. Many changes are apparent in the stone, ghost structures leaving just a trace, windows and doors bricked up to accommodate each family's needs.

Most of the inside of the house has been stripped of its original 1834 features except for wideboard floors, placement of the two remaining chimneys, and accordion lath with horsehair plaster. Its original staircase was removed during the 1880s and replaced with a more fashionable Victorian one.

Some of the land is leased by the Wade family, who continue the Filley House and land's unbroken tradition of farming through more than 200 years.

*(continued on next page)*

## Our Publications

Wintonbury to Bloomfield (\$16.50), Images: Old Bloomfield (\$20., or to a member \$18.); History of the Bloomfield Catholic Church (\$15); Barnard Genealogy (\$10.); Good Old Days (\$10.); Cook Book (\$7.); Over Tunxis Trails (\$5.); Bicentennial Activities (\$3); Note Paper (8 pk - \$3.); Filley House T shirts (\$12.); Brown Drums and Brown family (\$10.).

To order these items send a check in the above amount plus \$3. for S & H to: Wintonbury Historical Society, P.O. Box 7454, Bloomfield, CT 06002

### *Gala Presentation . . . continued from previous page*

There is much that we have learned about the house, about its people, about how the towns people lived. We all own the House and its land now, we are stewards of its history, and we will reap the benefits of its future life as a Bloomfield History Center, a historical library, a museum to house the hundreds of priceless artifacts and manuscripts that you and those who came before you have donated to the Wintonbury Historical Society for safekeeping and exhibition. We will be able to exhibit and catalogue the material culture of Bloomfield, create a headquarters and meeting place for us and for town groups, reach out to the schools for help in, for example, resurrecting the apple orchard, creating programs for our school children and a research center for us. The Connecticut Historical Commission eagerly awaits our application to list the house on the National Register of Historic Places, which will give it more status, make it eligible for federal grants, and make us all proud to have inherited this important piece of New England and Bloomfield history.

We invite you to come and see the property, walk the pathways, see the City of Hartford from the peak of the hill, and envision with us a Bloomfield History Center that will reflect all of us. If you are interested in a tour of the House, please let us know, and we will gladly meet you up there. Remember – our house is your house! We welcome your visits, your donations, your enthusiasm, your interest, and your belief in the future of historic preservation in Bloomfield.

Thank you.

## Committee Reports

**Acquisition Committee:** A formal acquisition policy is being developed. If you would like to help with this committee's work contact the chairman.

Judge Jerry Wagner, Chairman

**Education Committee:** Those interested in the Old Wintonbury Burying Ground please call if interested.

Libbie Merrow, Chairman

**Financial Development Committee:** Plans are under way for the Annual Tag Sale, April 30th, at the Old Farm School; with plans in the making for the second Annual House Tour, the middle of May.

Carrie Allison and Winnie Granger Co-Chairman

**Membership Committee:**

*Welcome to our new member!*

Arthur Bingham.

Jean Buscarello, Chairman

**Newsletter:** The deadlines for the newsletter, are for material to be received by Fannie the weekend before each of the regularly scheduled Board Meetings. For 2005 the deadlines are:

**Mar 20th** (Bd Meeting Mar 23rd)

**May 15th** (Bd Meeting May 18th)

**Aug 28th** (Bd Meeting Aug 31st)

**Oct 16th** (Bd Meeting Oct 19th)

Fannie Gabriel & Janis Langston

**Website Committee:** If you are working on a project and would like to share it with the world, or if you would like to expand the material already available on the site, please contact me and we can make the information available as part of the resources of the Society on its website.

Janis Langston, Webmaster

## Leaving A Legacy

The Wintonbury Historical Society is a charitable and non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historical sites of Bloomfield, and the memory of the ones who created them.

The Society is in dire need of funds or gifts in order to continue the restorations, and preservations in progress. We are therefore, soliciting the commitment of citizens who value the history of Bloomfield now and in the years ahead.

Listed are a few ways to leave a legacy:

1. Set aside a gift in your will to the Society
2. Name the Society as beneficiary of an insurance policy.
3. Remember your loved ones with a gift in their honor.
4. Name the Society as a beneficiary of your IRA or 401K.

There are several other means, just talk with your financial advisor.

Financial Development Committee

Wintonbury Historical Society  
P.O. Box 7454  
Bloomfield, CT 06002

## Calendar of Events 2005

- Feb 2**      **Regular Meeting** 7:30 p.m. Marilyn Michaelson Sr. Center  
- Calven Barber, Gravestone Carver - Steve Petke.
- Apr 6**      **WHS Regular Meeting** 7:30 p.m. Marilyn Michaelson Sr. Center  
- Filley Diaries - Sharon Steinberg
- Apr 30**      **Flea market/Tag & Bake Sale** (rain date May 1st)
- mid-May**      **2nd Annual House Tour**
- Jun 1**      **WHS Annual Pot Luck Supper with Business Meeting** 6:00 p.m.  
- Don Gorham of the Yankee Flyer
- Sept 14**      **WHS Regular Meeting** 7:30 p.m. Marilyn Michaelson Sr. Center
- Nov 2**      **WHS Regular Meeting** 7:30 p.m. Marilyn Michaelson Sr. Center

Visit the WHS website at: [www.bloomfieldcthistory.org](http://www.bloomfieldcthistory.org)

*Submit articles for The Wintonbury Drummer,  
the Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society of Bloomfield, to:  
Editor: Fannie Gabriel, President, 400 Seabury Drive, #5158, Bloomfield, CT 06002.  
Layout Editor: Janis Langston, 166 Duncaster Rd, Bloomfield, CT 06002*