

# The Wintonbury Drummer



## *Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society*

*Bloomfield, Connecticut*

*January 2012*

**Next meeting:** February 1, 2012 7:00 p.m.  
**Location:** Senior Center, 330 Park Ave., Bloomfield, CT  
**Program:** Ann Plato, one of Hartford's lesser known poets  
**Presenter:** Dick Pierce

**LOOK AT YOUR LABEL!** If your mailing label has "6/2011" on it, you haven't paid your dues, your membership has expired, and you will not continue to receive this newsletter. You may renew your membership by sending your dues to Wintonbury Historical Society, PO Box 7454, Bloomfield, CT 06002.

### **Past Perambulations: Growing up in Bloomfield**

When my brother and I were growing up, there was nothing in back of our home on Greenwood Avenue except fields and woods. There was a horse farm near Tower Avenue, well down the street from our home; and the Maglieri family next door kept a number of goats. Greenwood, which runs parallel to Coventry Street, was a good place to grow up. In the winter we could walk down a dirt road near our house and join neighborhood children to skate on the pond. We all had sleds. There were few cars on the winter streets, and we would pull our sleds up the hill to the edge of Blue Hills Avenue and slide down Gilbert Avenue, hoping to get as far as Coventry Street. Before my father began teaching in Hartford, he worked as a Bloomfield postman, using his own car (as all carriers did) to deliver the mail. I can remember how he put chains on his tires in the winter and what they sounded like when I was allowed to ride with him on his route.

Kindergarten was at Blue Hills School on Rockwell Avenue, the building long ago torn down. My brother took a trolley up Blue Hills Avenue to get to school, but by the time I was old enough we rode a school bus. I remember the huge room in the basement where we had recess when the weather was bad. My kindergarten classroom had a full-size playground slide, which we thought was marvelous. Blue Hills was one of two K-6 elementary schools in town. From there we went to the Junior High on Jerome Avenue (where there's now an office building) and the High School on Park Avenue (where the police station is). Things were more relaxed in those days. I remember how at recess we would leave the Blue Hills School and walk up to Gozzo's store at the corner of Blue Hills Avenue and Cottage Grove Road. We got back before recess was over, and nobody knew where we had been.

School banking was fun. We could open our own bank accounts and bring our money from home in envelopes. The banking monitors, of whom I was one, went around school to collect the envelopes and take them to the office. We loved the idea of having our own bank accounts, and I think it was Society for Savings that made it possible.

The library on Blue Hills Avenue was a special, cozy place. During the period from about 1945-55, it was in a house in the block between Rockwell Avenue and Cottage Grove, and I could even walk there from home to take *(continued on page 3)*

NOTE: You are invited to fill this space! I'd like to see your memories, clippings, or excerpts from your reading. Hand them to me or send by fax, mail or email to [mpierce@hartford.edu](mailto:mpierce@hartford.edu) and I'll edit them for the newsletter. There may be a limit of about 300 words.

## Society Directory

### PRESIDENT

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Vacancy

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Frederick Hesketh

### CURATOR

Fannie Gabriel

### HISTORY CENTER CURATORS

Ralph & Louise Schmoll

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## From the Curator's Corner

This sounds good in January: On November 12, 1949, August Freytag of Jerome Avenue picked two pints of raspberries Armistice Day. The following spring, on April 5, 1950, we read that Harold L. Woodford of School Street “has been notified by the Louden Machinery Company of Fairfield, Iowa, that he has received honorable mention in a national contest which the company sponsored. He will receive a credit certificate redeemable for a hay drier manufactured by the company.” The contest involved writing a sentence of fifty words or less on why the farmer needed such a drier.

Society members take pride in owning one of the original Brown Drums and so may find this November, 1966 letter to be of interest: It is addressed to Mr. F. Basil Austin, President, Austin Organs, Inc., 156 Woodland Street, Hartford.

Dear Basil:

On behalf of the Wintonbury Historical Society, please accept my sincere appreciation for the very beautiful drum stands which you and Mary presented to the Society in order that we might properly display our colonial drums. Certainly they are the work of fine craftsmanship and add immeasurably to the display of our artifacts which we are gradually accumulating.

At our last meeting your gift was announced and I only wish you could have been there to hear the many complimentary comments and expressions of admiration and appreciation.

Our thanks also to any others in your organization who might have been involved in the actual design and construction of these handsome stands.

Mrs. H. Ward Pinney, Society President, signed the letter and sent a copy to Mary T. Austin, Secretary. Fannie Gabriel (f.gabriel@att.net)

## Notes from my reading

“Conventions, in fact, had begun to involve many Americans with a variety of interests in those years [early 1800s]. The national political parties began to hold their great nominating conventions in 1831 and 1832. The African American conventions were simply one part of a broader tendency for people to come together around all sorts of issues, local, national, and international. The evangelical impulse that had brought so many people to the United States in the first place ramified in the early nineteenth century into a variety of social and religious causes, including abolition and temperance, education and moral reform. Every cause had its adherents and every devotee felt that he must be heard. Slavery, of course, was a critical issue for many, and it is not surprising that African Americans would have found conventions to be a useful tool with which to attack their own situation.”

—Christopher L. Webber, *American to the Backbone: The Life of James W. C. Pennington, the Fugitive Slave Who Became One of the First Black Abolitionists* (Pegasus Books, 2011), p. 63.

Submitted by Dick Pierce

## Our Publications

Wintonbury to Bloomfield (\$16.50), Images: Old Bloomfield (\$20., or to a member \$18.); History of the Bloomfield Catholic Church (\$15); Bloomfield & the Civil War (\$12); Not Lost ..Gone Before: A History of Latimer Hill Cemetery (on CD \$25); Barnard Genealogy (\$10.); Good Old Days (\$10.); Cook Book (\$7.); **NEW** Over Tunxis Trails, 2nd ed (\$15.); Bicentennial Activities (\$3); Note Paper (8 pk - \$3.); Filley House T shirts (\$12.); Brown Drums and Brown family (\$10.).

## Board of Directors Highlights

At the Board meeting on January 18, President Dick Pierce reported on an informal tour of the Filley House November 9. Emile Rouleau of Public Works showed several Society members how the house has been stabilized. New windows and exterior doors, new heating and air conditioning systems, and a new concrete cellar floor are all significant improvements. The interior walls are still bare lath strips. There is no plumbing, nor any wiring except for what the utilities need. But the house is now preserved and can be finished sometime in the future.

Dick also announced our participation in the Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPs-CT) sponsored by the Connecticut League of History Organizations in Middletown. During this two-year program, we will participate in six different areas of study, starting with (1) Mission, Vision, and Governance, (2) Audience, and (3) Management. Fred Hesketh starts us out by attending the first meetings late in January. We will be looking to improve our Society, get some professional help, and qualify for grant funding.

Charlie Dechand and Bob Whelan gave the financial reports. For fiscal year 2012 so far we have had receipts of \$7,095.52 and expenditures of \$6,054.03. Publications sales, spurred by the release of the new *Over Tunxis Trails* have been \$1,262.50, but we spent \$959.91 for printing and postage. It cost \$901.25 to convert the History Center from propane to natural gas, and we spent \$419.45 on website and software.

Fannie Gabriel, curator, reported that Jean Perrault has been helping select those books on our shelves that are worth keeping. Gail Tinto will be assisting in cataloging the books. The exhibit entitled "From Kitchen and Laundry," cancelled because of the storm last October 28, will be rescheduled for Sunday, April 15. Those who attend the exhibit kickoff on that date will receive a free prize. The exhibit will remain on display for a couple of weeks at least.

The Collections Committee has been busy, according to co-chair Winnie Granger. The Board voted to accept several items into our collection: tinware, letters, photographs, and a copy of "Bloomfield: All America City" from the 1971 Hartford *Times*.

Under the topic of fund raising, Fannie reported that \$1,610 is the new total of receipts from last October's auction. This year's tag sale was discussed for some time, with some people feeling we should go ahead with it and some feeling it should not be held. We anticipate renting table space to vendors and any members who wish to have a table. We don't expect to solicit donations of items to sell as we have in the past. Our income from the sale is not expected to reach even \$500. When the vote was taken, the majority voted to go ahead with the sale on April 28 (rain date May 5). Baked goods to sell at that time will be solicited from Society members. Two other fund raising ideas are still percolating: the sale of historic house signs and the sale of a 2013 calendar with historic photographs.

As the meeting closed, discussion turned to the Old Farm School summer opening hours and the need for volunteers to be there on Sunday afternoons.

## Past Perambulations: Growing up in Bloomfield (*continued from page 1*)

out books. Later, Hartford built a Blue Hills branch library, which was even nearer my house, and I used it frequently. In those days we thought nothing of walking to get to where we wanted to go.

As I got older, I used the city bus a lot. A friend and I would catch the bus and go downtown to Saturday matinee at the movies. If my parents had driven me to an activity at Union Baptist Church, I knew how to take a bus down North Main Street to the "tunnel" and change buses to go out Albany Avenue to Bloomfield. I took swimming lessons at the Y and caught the bus home.

In summers, we kids were on our own quite a lot. We rode our bikes up and down Greenwood Avenue, and the boys played football in our side yard. The Blue Hills Fire Department (on Blue Hills across from Elizabeth Street) had activities for kids, such as a carnival on their open lot and a Christmas party, where I once won a new sled. Sometimes our family would go out for ice cream at A. C. Petersen's on Park Avenue (where Rite-Aid is) or to Christiansen's at the corner of Hall Boulevard and Simsbury Road. I've lived in Bloomfield all my life and taught school here; and so, of course, the town and its past are a large part of whom I am.

Bea Llewellyn

# Calendar of Events

2012

- Mar 1** Prosser Public Library - "Bloomfield's Railroad" **Fred Hesketh**  
**Apr 11** **WHS Regular Meeting** - "Herman Melville and the Battle of Shiloh," with **Christopher Hager**  
**Jun 6** **WHS Annual Meeting with election of Officers & Pot Luck Supper**  
"Connecticut Valley Barns," with **Lowell Fewster**

## February Program

February's program will be an observance of Black History Month. Dick Pierce will talk about one of Hartford's lesser known poets, Ann Plato. Her book, *Essays: Including Biographies and Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose and Poetry*, was printed in Hartford in 1841 and made her the first Black woman to publish a book in this country. (Phyllis Wheatley of Boston published her book in England.) Her pastor at Talcott Street Congregational Church, Rev. James W. C. Pennington, wrote a preface commending her "chaste and pious affection for those of her own age [20] and sex" and assuring the reader that "you will. . .read this book with pleasure and profit." Hartford of 1841 was a hugely interesting place (think Amistad), and poetry was a game people played by the rules of that time.



Rev. J.W.C. Pennington

## Bloomfield at War-Seventy Years Ago

Seventy years ago last month, the United States naval forces at Pearl Harbor concluded an agreement with the Hawaiian empire to construct a major naval facility there. It was ten years later (December 1911) that the first US Warship, the USS California, entered Pearl Harbor.

The events of December 7 thirty years later are emblazoned in history and in the memory of all Americans, born before and since that fateful day. World War II, begun at Pearl Harbor and spread throughout the Pacific and Europe, had a major impact on Bloomfield.

In addition to sending scores of men and women to the Armed Forces, Bloomfield citizens found themselves serving on the local "Price and Rationing Board," "Aircraft Warning Service," and/or "Air Raid Warden" Service. "Salvage Drives" in Bloomfield resulted in the collection of approximately 300 tons of scrap (142 pounds per capita) dedicated to the war effort. Some 116 Bloomfield residents volunteered to join the "Aircraft Warning Service," and more than 300 citizens were trained for all night service to alert the 24 hour report center in Town Hall of any foreign aircraft over Bloomfield. Also, 31 residents were trained to act as auxiliary police, and 63 high school students were trained as fire watchers.

By the end of 1942, 179 Bloomfield residents were serving in the US Armed Forces and 25 others were serving in the Connecticut State Guard Reserve, trained in commando and guerilla warfare tactics to protect Bloomfield in the event of an invasion or military emergency. New personnel were added throughout the period of WW II as members entered the US Armed forces and new recruits were trained. Those listed as serving in federal service as of December 1943 totaled 361. (The estimated Bloomfield population at War's end was 5,000).

During the war, those at home could not just walk into a store and buy whatever they wished for. In order to insure that needed supplies were available for the military efforts, war ration books and tokens were issued to each American family, dictating the quantities of gasoline, tires, sugar, meat, silk, shoes, nylon and other items they could buy. Those who wished to buy more than the allotted number of items for their family had to apply for permission.

The Town Manager's annual report for the twelve months ending June 30, 1945 indicated the War Price and Rationing Board processed 14,510 such applications in the preceding 12 months. They included: gasoline, 7,907; foods, 3,407; fuel oil, 1,621; shoes 847; tires, 405; rubber boots, 68; stoves, 46; and automobiles, 9.

The Manager's report also indicated that Bloomfield folks put up with the inconvenience of the times. "The general spirit of cooperation shown by the people of Bloomfield is greatly appreciated by the Board members," the Manager concluded.

—Fred Hesketh