

The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

November 2001

NEXT MEETING : Wednesday, November 7, 2001 at 7:30 p.m. –

NOTE NEW PLACE: SENIOR CENTER, 330 Park Avenue, across from Bloomfield Health Center

PROGRAM: Adelaide Mitchelson, her life and times, presented by Mary Jane Springman, Trustee of Simsbury Free (Genealogy) Library. (Postponed from last meeting)

President's Message:

There has been substantial progress on our properties!

SOUTHWEST DISTRICT SCHOOL: On October 9th, through our architect, Eloise Marinos, the contract for roof and stabilization work was awarded to the American Construction Company of Stafford Springs.

CAPT. OLIVER FILLEY HOUSE: Several members of the Umbrella Committee did a "walk-through" to determine what was necessary in order to stabilize the house for the winter.

WELL HOUSE FILLEY HOUSE GROUNDS: The Well House is being restored with our Saturday morning volunteers and carpenter extraordinaire Franklin See, Contractor. The Town will dig the trench that will carry electricity to the site.

"IMAGES OF BLOOMFIELD" :Through the diligent labors of historians Lucy Woodford Wirsul, Elizabeth Merrow, Eileen Phelps, and Roberta Randall Kania, the brand-new book, "Images of Bloomfield," hit the stands last month. Part of a series for each town, this volume is packed with photographs and history. It was made available at the Drum Festival – and it was a hit. It was nice to know that so many members visited the booth – it showed us to be the vibrant historical society that we are! A full report will be given at the November 7th meeting regarding the Drum Festival – total sales of \$700 were realized through saleswomen Winnie Granger, Carrie Allison, and other WHS members.

Fannie R. Gabriel

IMAGES OF AMERICA – BLOOMFIELD

Our latest book is hot off the press, just in time for a good read during the long fall evenings, just in time for holiday giving to anyone who has ever loved our town. The book is called "Bloomfield" and it is part of Arcadia Publishing Company's series "Images of America." You may have seen these books on Hartford and other cities or towns.

You might say it's more of a "good look" than a "good read" because it is really a picture book with about 200 photographs and a few drawings of Bloomfield from 1850 to 1950. Attics, basements, and closets were searched for never-before-published pictures. We appreciate the generosity of all the folks who loaned us their precious pictures.

The chapters include Early Farms and Industries, Taverns and Inns, Historic Cemeteries, Community Life, Activities Around the Town Green, and other events and pictures of our town's history.

Copies of the book will be available for purchase at the November meeting or from the authors any time. The price is \$19.99, or for members, a discount price of \$18.00. Would you like to sell some? Every book sold by our organization means eight or ten dollars for our Preservation Fund.

The four authors, Lucy Woodford Wirsul, Elizabeth Merrow, Eileen Phelps, and Roberta Randall Kania, all members and long-time Bloomfield residents, will be at the Wintonbury Branch Library, 1051 Blue Hills Avenue in Bloomfield on Thursday, November 8 from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. for a book signing. You may purchase additional books at that time or bring in any books you already have for signing by all our authors.

There is also a plan to have a book sale and signing at the Prosser Library in December (an opportunity to complete your Christmas shopping).

Roberta Kania

This and That

The November 7th meeting, as announced on the first page of this newsletter, will be at the Senior Center, 300 Park Avenue, across from the Bloomfield Health Center at 7:30 p.m. It was necessary to secure a place where our speaker – rescheduled from September 12th – would be able to show slides. Mary Jane Springman will present a program on Adelaide Mitchelson, her life and times.

I hope all members will have a chance to view Janis Langston's lovely painting, on view at Seabury's Artist Alley, 2nd floor – Such a talent!

We are grateful for members passing along items for our collection:

Councilman Sid Schulman for his postcards of old Bloomfield; Jan Thatcher's photos of the Copaco barn before it was demolished; Librarian Laura passing along a photo left by a library patron of a 1910 ice scene of Bloomfield; and real fine contractor Franklin See, who is dismantling the yellow house on the site of the new golf course for his donation of the document that fell from the ceiling! (see the article in this newsletter).

Ask me to see the nice piece Libby Merrow did on Bruce Hale for the Congregational Church spire.

Our congratulations to member Kevin Johnson (our April speaker) upon receiving the Governor's Service Award.

Our best to Marc and Judi Sitkin on their move to Florida. You may reach them at Winton Park, 4305 52nd Street, Coconut Creek, Florida.

Fannie Gabriel

FILLEY/NEARING, 1819 DOCUMENT FALLS FROM CEILING!

Franklin See, carpenter, historic building expert, Saturday volunteer, and Bloomfield resident was working recently on taking down the yellow house on Terry Plains Road that was in the way of the future golf course. An early 18th century house, it had seen many better days. As he dismantled one of the ceilings, a piece of paper fell. He opened it up and realized that it was a historic document – handwritten, brown ink, old lettering, with Oliver Filley's signature. He donated it to the Wintonbury Historical Society, and was shown to Sharon, our Research Chair of the Filley House project. She noticed that the document was an account page, a list of many items that Capt. Oliver Filley sold to Asahel Nearing, no doubt to load onto Nearing's Yankee peddler cart as so many hundreds of other men did at that time. The list includes finished tinware – buckets, pans, "basons", sugar boxes, molasses cups, bedpans — raw tin, buttons, and combs, each group individually priced with a 25% discount, payable in 60 days. The captain, ever the savvy businessman, carefully detailed everything.

There are two puzzles: one, the name of Asahel Nearing is known to those of us who have been researching this house. There is a contract for carpentry to be done for the Filley House given to the carpentry team of Nearing and Shepard in 1833. It is unclear at this point before further research is done whether these Asahel Nearings are one and the same, or if one is the father and one the son. The census records, among other resources, will be searched shortly.

The other puzzle is that, according to the 1820 census, Asahel Nearing appears to live on Filley Street, not Terry Plains Road. We are working on identifying just who built and lived in that yellow house, but we have no answers yet.

I call on all the town's historians – and all of us — to put all our heads together and solve this puzzle!

The conservator at the Connecticut Historical Society where I work graciously and without a fee, enclosed the document in mylar for its protection. This process doesn't touch or laminate the document, just seals it on four sides. I have made copies of it which will be available at the November meeting.

I also understand that Franklin is planning a small ceremony at some point when the yellow house is almost taken down, inviting a minister, in order to honor the builder and the many residents of this venerable old house -- such a moral and honorable thing to do!

Thank you, Franklin, for this treasure.

Sharon Steinberg

THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS!

To everyone who has been working on restoring the well house – Bruce Hale, Rich Dudenhofer, Bob Stiles, Franklin See, and many others – to everyone who volunteers to make phone calls, host meetings, bring refreshments, write news releases, deliver messages, and make this historical society the gem that it is – Thank you!! We can't be a society without being a community as well!

The Winterthur Presentation — “No Time to be Idle” — Julia A. Newberry Filley is Presented to the Costume Society of America

Sharon Steinberg, in collaboration with Connecticut Historical Society Curator of Collections Susan P. Schoelwer and historian Kathleen Varda, gave a presentation entitled, “‘No time to be idle’: Costume and Portraiture in the Life of Julia Ann Newberry Filley, Yankee Farm Wife” at the Costume Society of America’s conference entitled, “Conversations about Costume and the Visual Arts, which took place at Winterthur in Delaware on October 19 and 20, 2001. This presentation was one of 20 papers chosen by jury for inclusion in this very special conference.

In the space of 20 minutes, the three historians presented not only Julia, but also an analysis of her clothing as well as clothing worn by many other women who were painted at that time, in order to learn about women’s dress and roles..

Sharon, who is Research Chair for the Capt. Oliver Filley House Restoration Project and Vice President of our Society, in her 6-minute portion of the talk, told about Julia’s life, her activities, and her family. She read portions of the diaries to illustrate who Julia was, what she believed in, and how she survived and succeeded during a difficult time for women. Sharon used slides of the portrait of Julia and Jay painted c. 1840; a slide of the gold and pearl cross that Julia wears in the painting; a slide of a photograph of Julia much later in life that she glued into the bible for her son, Louis, upon his enlistment into the Civil War; the mourning brooch encasing the woven hair of Marcus Dwight Filley, her first child who died at 28 months old, that she wears in the photograph, slides of Capt. Oliver and Annis; a slide of the stone Filley House; a slide of the Brown Street Filley house and farm that burned in the 1950s.

Other slides shown by Susan and Kathleen included paintings of other women that also told how costume reveals personality and class. They also showed slides of Julia’s gold silk wedding dress that Costume Curator Lynne Z. Bassett of the Connecticut Historical Society mounted on a manikin, steamed the dress, puffed out the sleeves with special paper. That dress — along with another of Julia’s dresses and a later wedding dress — was donated to the Wintonbury Historical Society by Cynthia Barnard and her sisters, Dorothy and Harriet. Sharon was surprised to be approached by two publishers interested in the book that she is working on about Julia and her world through Julia’s diaries and poetry!

Winterthur is the former DuPont estate consisting of almost 1000 acres and many buildings. The main building has upwards of 6 floors, complete with an enormous collection of furniture, paintings, silverware, ceramics; the museum’s grounds are meticulously kept with a vast variety of flowers and gardens.

The video of their presentation should be available within a month and will be shown at a future meeting.

CALLING ALL GARDEN CLUBS!

The Town and Country Garden Club, at their October meeting at the home of Carolyn Jones, invited Sharon Steinberg to speak on the research needed on historical gardens and landscaping for the Filley House Project. Sharon gave out several articles and information about such gardens, but the reason for the meeting was to spread the word that the Filley House Project needs the expertise and help from Bloomfield garden clubs as we plan what the site will look like – what flowers and plantings would be appropriate for the three historical periods presented:

The Filley period (1834-1854); the Pinney period (1854-1913 – Victorian); and the LaSalette period (post-1913). The Filley period might include raised beds, pathways, and dooryard gardens with flowers mentioned in Julia's diaries. The Pinney or Victorian period might be represented by elaborate Victorian plantings, complete with a sundial, organized beds, and elaborate, ostentatious flowers. The LaSalette period might include meditation areas with benches for quiet contemplation.

The Society welcomes all its Bloomfield gardeners and garden clubs – we need your expertise, your planting hands, your recommendations for plantings, and your donations of flowers in the interim as the house and site take shape. If you are interested in joining the garden committee, giving your expert advice, or sharing your recommendations, please call Carolyn Jones at 242-4514; Fannie Gabriel at 242-1016; or Sharon Steinberg at 286-1066. Thank you.

FROM OUR HOSPITALITY CHAIR

Workers are needed for the following meetings — February, April, and June – you don't have to do your own baking, just bring baked goods, help us set up, and help clean up after the meeting. I will take care of coffee and tea.

Please volunteer – your help and contributions are much needed.

Please call me at 243-2720 (mornings or evenings) or Fannie Gabriel at 286-1066.

**Doris L. Jordan,
Hospitality Chair**

A SPEEDY RECOVERY TO YOU!

We send our best wishes to Marion Filley (Mrs O.D. Filley) of Virginia for your speedy recovery -- glad to hear that you are recovering well, and we look forward to whenever you, O.D., Barbara and Bob's visit us again!

FROM JULIA'S DIARY - NOVEMBER 1867 - A TRIP TO ST. LOUIS TO SEE FAMILY

Tuesday, November 19, 1867

Have been packing my trunk for St Louis - & doing up lots of little things preparatory to leaving

Wednesday, November 20, 1867

I have torn myself away from my family - and am moving toward St Louis - felt bad to leave them - even if they are men and women. They will always be children to me

Thursday, November 21, 1867

Yesterday arrived in New York & left at 5 for Pittsburgh - to a sleeping car and after many discomforts arrived in Pittsburgh about half past 9 this morn. Pittsburgh is a dirty smoky place where I should not like to live

Friday, November 22, 1867

After a very tedious days ride we reached St Louis at about half past 9 this evening

Saturday, November 23, 1867

Am resting to day though I have been down to O.D. Filleys -weather warm and pleasant -

Tuesday, November 26, 1867

Am very anxious to get letters from home

Our dear lost Marcus birth day - and he would have been thirty one to day - 29 years almost in Heaven

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