

Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

June, 2018

WALT WOODWARD AND HIS BAND

Handed Down In Song: New England History and Culture

SACRED HEART CHURCH, 26 WINTONBURY AVENUE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 2018

6:00 POTLUCK SUPPER/7:00 ANNUAL MEETING/7:30 PROGRAM

Walter Woodward is a member of the University of Connecticut history faculty and serves as our fifth State Historian. He is also an award-winning songwriter, author of four books, and a columnist for *Connecticut Explored*, the magazine of Connecticut history.

The six-member acoustic Band of Steady Habits came together in 2014 to create a new kind of public history presentation. Rachel Smith, Teagan Smith, Jeremy Teitelbaum, Walt Woodward, Duke York, and Rick Spencer use banjo, guitars, violin, recorders, bass, percussion, and beautiful harmonies to perform songs – some old, some original, and some contemporary – to accompany Walt’s visually rich and evocative stories.



Walt Woodward: photo from bandofsteadyhabits.wordpress.com

Walt Woodward and the Band of Steady Habits take a fresh new look at The Helen Hartness Flanders Folk Song Collection, tracing the histories of these folk songs back in time with insight on their meaning and significance to earlier generations of New England. These venerable tunes are brought back to life in what is sure to be an immersive experience for all in attendance. In the continuing tradition of New England folk music gatherings, audience participation is strongly encouraged!

IN THIS ISSUE: Board of Directors Highlights, page 2; Jerome Brothers, Part 3, pages 3 & 7; Sacred Heart Church, pages 4-6; Potluck Supper announcement, page 6; Marty Podskoch’s Connecticut 169 Club, page 7; President’s Letter, page 8.

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board met on May 16 with thirteen people present. The president announced the appointment of Ralph and Louise Schmoll as curators. Jean Perreault and Janis Langston were named as genealogists. The Board reaffirmed the decision to send the *Drummer* to all town council members and to the Community Awareness Task Force. There was no treasurer's report. The Flea Market and Bake Sale of April 28 raised \$775 for the Society.

Ruthanne and Ron Marchetti proposed an Autumn House Tour as a fund raiser. This would be done in partnership with Ironwood Community Partners and feature three or four homes. The Board agreed to go ahead with the planning of this event.

Doug Barnard reported that the town's pest control contractor has examined our buildings and found some cause for concern. The Board asked that the contractor give us a price for his services.

The Program Committee has a tentative schedule for the next program year, starting on September 5 with "The Way It Was: Hartford's Northend 1900-1965" with Bloomfield's Dennis Sullivan. Other programs will be given by Ralph Schmoll and Ron Marchetti (Trap Rock Houses), Marilyn Johnston (All-America City Update), and Barbara Beeching (G. Fox Women's Service Bureau).

On June 3, for Celebrate Bloomfield weekend, Ron Marchetti will lead two bus tours, at 1:00 and 3:00. On Saturday, June 9, we will have our buildings open for Connecticut Open House Day.

The Nominating Committee submitted a slate to be voted on at the WHS Annual Meeting on June 6: for president, Bill Weissenburger; for vice-president: Libbie Merrow and Ruthanne Marchetti; for treasurer, Judy Dahlgren-Dechand; for directors (new terms): Mary Laiuppa, Paula Baram, George Merrow, Richard Hughes, Mara Whitman, and Homer Guilmartin.



OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

Caruso's Auto and Body, 36 Tunxis Avenue

Sir Speedy Printing, 21 Old Windsor Road

Geissler's Supermarket, 40 Tunxis Avenue

(And there's room for more!)

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JEROME BROTHERS, Part 3: Successful Farmers

Note: Michael Borders, well-known local artist, was asked to do a painting of the Jerome brothers for the new Heritage Flats apartment complex on Jerome Avenue. When he turned to the Historical Society for information, Janis Langston responded by researching the Jerome family, after whom the avenue in Bloomfield is named. She uncovered a large amount of information, some of which is summarized in this article. Part 1, on Cousin Jennie Jerome, appeared in the February 2018 issue and Part 2, on Cousin Chauncey, appeared in April.

The Rev. Amasa Jerome, pastor of the First Congregational Church in New Hartford, Connecticut, died in 1834 when only 57 years old. His widow, Roxy, was left with six children. Two of the sons concern us here, Amasa H., 25 years old at the time, and Timothy, just 15. The family continued living in New Hartford for another fifteen years, but sometime between March 1848 and March 1849 Roxy L. Jerome sold several parcels of land in New Hartford. On April 12, 1849 she bought from Shaylor F. Burnham over seventy acres in Bloomfield, paying \$5,600. Roxy Jerome then moved to Bloomfield with her four unmarried children, Amasa H., Timothy, Lucy, and Sarah.



Amasa Jerome House
South side of Park Avenue
1939 photo, WHS archives

Amasa established himself in town quickly. On December 9, 1852, He married Rebecca Phelps Filley, Jonathan Filley's widow, and was elected to the State House of Representatives in 1853. In that same year, 1853, Amasa and Rebecca purchased two parcels of land for \$1,200 from Amasa Holcomb. The first, with buildings, was $\frac{3}{4}$ acre and the second contained 95 acres.

Timothy was also settling into his new town. In 1849 and 1850, he bought from Nathan Brown, James Prosser and Caleb Hitchcock for \$760 two parcels totaling about fifteen acres, part of these acres bordered on the north by his mother's property. In 1854, Timothy became a deacon of First Congregational Church, a position in which he was to serve for twenty-six years. As the Civil War began amidst controversy in 1861, Timothy was elected chairman of an avid regional pro-Union meeting held in Bloomfield's Congregational Church. He told the crowded room that, although he felt inclined to shrink from such a position, it was not a time for any man to shrink from the crisis facing our country.



Timothy Jerome House
North side of Park Avenue
C. 1900 photo, WHS archives

Bloomfield in 1850 was one of the smaller towns in Hartford County. Its population of 1,412 was less than all but five of the twenty-five other towns in the county. Of course, Hartford, with 13,555, surpassed all other towns; but even Windsor and Simsbury had twice as many people as Bloomfield. New Hartford, which the Jeromes had left behind, was a prosperous town of 2,643.

Farming was by far the most prevalent occupation in the state in 1850. The 31,756 farmers outnumbered every other occupation by many times. *(continued on page 7)*



CATALOG OF CONGREGATIONS, #16 of a series

SACRED HEART CHURCH, 26 Wintonbury Avenue

The Sacred Heart Church building on Wintonbury Avenue is the single Catholic Church in Bloomfield today. But it is the successor to six earlier Bloomfield buildings where Bloomfield Catholics have worshipped over the years, first in a private home and later in five other earlier Bloomfield buildings.

Bloomfield Catholics first found organized religion in a mission setting (without “resident” priests) begun by the Rector of the Cathedral of St. Joseph. Prior to that time, they had to travel to a church either in Hartford or in Tariffville. The first recorded celebration of Mass in Bloomfield was reportedly in a private home at 60 Wintonbury Avenue. Later the place of worship was transferred to a building then known as the Academy on Woodland Avenue.



Woodland Avenue building

Photo courtesy of Sacred Heart

In 1879, a church building was constructed on the west side of Woodland Avenue just north of Wintonbury Avenue on land gifted to the church by a group of generous parishioners. The building was a source of pride for Bloomfield Catholics. At its consecration, the Bishop of Hartford, proclaimed, “The Catholics of Bloomfield had, in their act of dedication, built a church practically free from debt, given example to more wealthy churches elsewhere, and done credit to yourselves.” From an organizational point of view, Sacred Heart remained a “Mission,” initially of the Tariffville parish and later of the Cathedral Parish.

The 1879 church was the house of worship but was only 34 years old when the nearby First Congregational church celebrated its 175th anniversary in 1913, a time when Bloomfield was still a predominantly agricultural community. There is ample evidence that, during the first half of the twentieth century, Sacred Heart became closely allied with religious brothers, and later, with the priests and sisters of the LaSalette Novitiate, who constructed a building on Mountain Road in the second decade of the 20th century.

Bloomfield was a small agricultural community in the early years, and the “Mission” church was served by priests from Hartford and from St. Thomas Seminary. It was 1946 before a private home at 22 Wintonbury Avenue was purchased for a “rectory” to house a resident priest.

The ownership of the Wintonbury Avenue property was expanded later to allow construction in 1963 of the present church/school building at 26 Wintonbury Avenue. The school educated students in grades five and six the first year and added grades seven and eight by 1965. The school provided quality Catholic education for 639 graduates over 25 years before financial difficulties resulted in the closing of the school. The former classrooms were converted to offices, a chapel, conferences rooms, libraries, etc. and are still functional for parish activities.



26 Wintonbury Avenue

David Royce photo

A Catholic church was built at 116 Cottage Grove road in 1931 and named “Christ the King Chapel.”¹ The number of worshippers at that chapel grew to the point that a larger church was required to accommodate

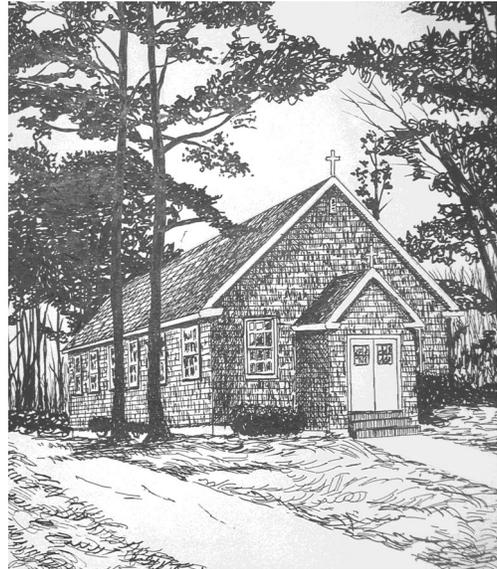
them, and this growth resulted in the construction of “Christ the King Church” at the intersection of Blue Hills Avenue and Wintonbury Avenue in 1960.² Catholics in the east side of Bloomfield had their own church in addition to Sacred Heart in the town center and the Assumption church in the north tobacco fields.

Christ the King was actually the third place of Worship in Bloomfield. Our Lady of the Assumption Mission was a church dedicated in 1936 on Blue Hills Avenue west of its intersection with Woodland Avenue.³ The Reverend Stanislaus Halewajk, guest homilist from New London told the congregation (primarily eastern European Immigrants who worked the nearby tobacco fields), “There is always a future for people who build a church. Immigrants came to this country from the old country, to this new world; but they brought with them their old faith and their old love of God. They brought with them their priests. And their first thought was to build, not costly homes for themselves, but homes for the living God; and while they lived in huts and cottages themselves, they combined to build a house worthy of the Lord.”

The echo of those first worshippers would be seen in the Stations of the Cross that ultimately lined the walls of the church with inscriptions in Polish, Lithuanian, and English. The dedicated parishioners were worshipping in a “Mission,” but parishioners considered that to be “only a word” and they worshipped and acted as if they were a parish. The parishioners arranged a number of family-oriented activities reflecting the diverse background of the mission families. There were Italian night supers, Polish night supers, potluck dinners, regularly held raffles, and tag sales. There were holiday parties, fairs, a CYO club and CCD classes. They even undertook the movement of the church a few hundred yards to preserve their church when the State of Connecticut wanted to widen Blue Hills Avenue.

The changing demographics in Bloomfield in the late 1970’s resulted in declining church attendance and forced an Archdiocesan decision to close the church, and the final Mass at Our Lady of the Assumption was celebrated in January 1989. Many of the furnishings, statues, and tabernacles, etc. were preserved and brought to Sacred Heart. Many other articles were donated to other churches and to parish families.

In 1991, dwindling attendance and a smaller number of young men entering the ministry as priests resulted in the announcement by the Archdiocese that Sacred Heart and Christ the King parishes would both remain in Bloomfield but be shepherded by a single priest and a consolidation for Catholic worship at Sacred Heart Church. Five years later the Archdiocese praised the parishioners and Christ the King’s



Christ the King, Cottage Grove Road
Photo courtesy of Sacred Heart



Our Lady of the Assumption, Blue Hills Ave.
David Royce photo



Christ the King Church
Wintonbury Avenue at Blue Hills
David Royce photo

efforts; but, because “there are not enough folks to worship and support two parishes,” Christ the King parish would be closed in October of 1996.

Today at Sacred Heart there are visible memories of Christ the King: the Christ the King statue and garden at the entrance to the church property, candlesticks on the altar, the deep red chalice, a ceramic nativity, and many other items that came to Sacred Heart when the two parishes were made one.



Sacred Heart interior

David Royce photo

Parishioners from the two parishes worked tirelessly together to facilitate the move and encourage the mingling and togetherness that still permeates Sacred Heart today. Sacred Heart was never just a place to worship one day a week, but rather has provided a wholesome parish atmosphere of activities, with something happening almost daily in addition to the celebration of the Eucharist (Mass) six days a week.

The Sacred Heart congregation strives to continue the family-like spirit and traditions that have marked the character of Sacred Heart for decades. The spiritual and emotional bonds that have united the people of this parish are the hallmark of a community on the life-long pilgrimage to the kingdom of heaven.

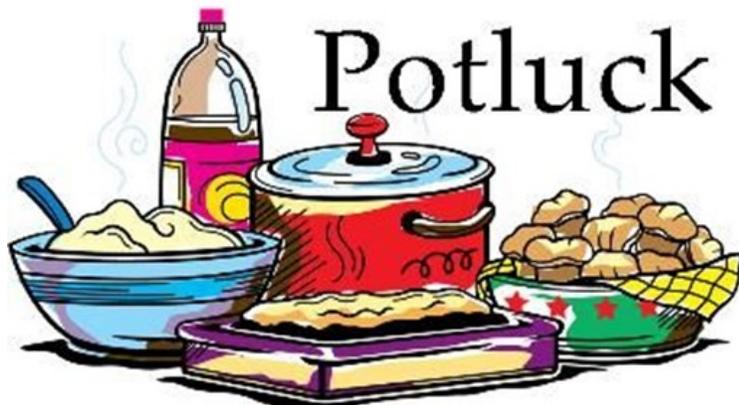
Notes:

1. The building on Cottage Grove Road at Chapel Street is today the home of the Pentecostal Church of Faith.
2. The building on the corner of Wintonbury and Blue Hills Avenues is now the home of the Apostolic Fellowship Church. See the April 2017 *Drummer* for an article on that congregation.
3. The building at 1601 Blue Hills Avenue is now the home of Destiny Church, a recent merger of Life United Pentecostal Church of Simsbury and New Mercies Apostolic Church of Bloomfield.



Thanks to Fred Hesketh for preparing this article. It represents a condensation of his 2003 book, *The History of the Catholic Church in Bloomfield, Connecticut*, published by Sacred Heart Church and available at the Fannie Gabriel History Center.

JOIN BLOOMFIELD HISTORY LOVERS AT THE ANNUAL POTLUCK SUPPER



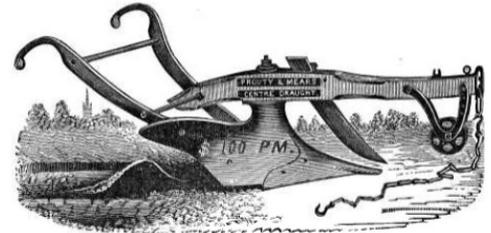
SACRED HEART CHURCH,
FATHER PICHET HALL
6:00 PM, JUNE 6, 2018

PLEASE BRING A MAIN DISH
OR SALAD
Dessert and beverage will
be provided

Aside from 15,707 laborers, only five other occupations numbered two thousand or more (carpenters, cordwainers, mariners, merchants, and smiths).

By 1853, Timothy, Amasa, and their mother owned about 180 acres in Bloomfield. Three years earlier, the 1850 census says, they had owned two oxen, two milk cows, two pigs, and one horse. They grew Indian corn, oats, hay, Irish potatoes, and tobacco. They had an orchard, and they made 300 pounds of butter a year.

This was the heyday of agricultural fairs. Timothy Jerome's butter was awarded 3rd prize at the Bloomfield Cattle Show and Fair in 1854. In the same year, at the 1st State Agricultural Fair, "A & T Jerome" won a prize with their team of oxen and a Prouty & Mears' Plow.



The celebrated Centre-Draught Plough.

The Prouty and Mears Plow

From David Prouty & Sons 1850 catalogue

At the Connecticut State Agricultural Society's 1856 Fair, Amasa took 1st Premium in the Plowing Class for "Other than Michigan Plows," and Timothy took 1st Premium in the Plowing Class for "Michigan Plows." A & T Jerome's butter took first place. The program noted, "This butter was made from Native cows, the old-fashioned way, without anything being added but salt, as soon as churned, and worked, and that by taste. We know no better rule, for all have not the same taste."



Park Avenue, 1900, looking west
past Timothy Jerome House

There were other prizes for the Jeromes: 2nd best steers under three years old, 3rd best Westchester Native Boar, 2nd Best turkeys, Best Common ducks, Best sample Indian Corn, 1st Premium in the Plowing Class for "Michigan Plows."

The next time you drive down Jerome Avenue, think about Roxy and her sons Amasa and Timothy. They relocated to Bloomfield, made it their home, and became active and successful farmers.

Sources:

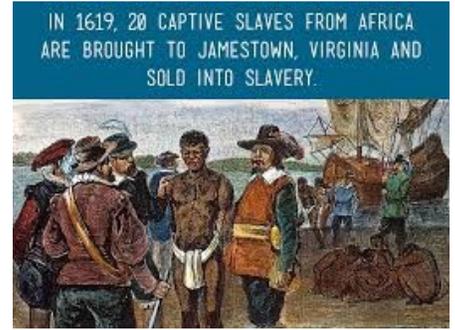
- *Hartford Daily Courant* (1840-1887); Aug 13, 1861; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Hartford Courant pg. 2.
- Jerome family relationships, census extracts, and other information may be accessed in two large binders prepared by Janis Langston and located at the Fannie Gabriel History Center, 153 School Street, Bloomfield. Thanks to Ms. Langston for all the research on which these articles have been based.



Travel and history author Martin "Marty" Podskoch of East Hampton is hoping to give residents and tourists a view of every municipality in the state with his new book "Connecticut 169 Club: Your Guide and Passport to Adventure." The book, which will come out this summer, invites people to join the "Connecticut 169 Club" by traveling to every one of the state's 169 towns. The book will have a space for journaling and a place to gather a stamp, sticker or signature from every municipality visited. The reward for visiting all 169 towns, cities and villages will be a "Leatherman" patch, named after the famed Leatherman who traveled to many areas of Connecticut. Podskoch suggests that the whole family, including grandparents, can enjoy the adventure of exploring all 169 municipalities together. "Let's all take the road less traveled," he said.

President's Letter

The first Africans who were brought to North America as slaves arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. Next year will be the 400th anniversary of this event. In his *Hartford Courant* column for February 22, 2018, Prof. Frank Harris asked how we as a nation should observe such an anniversary. How should we think about this difficult past?



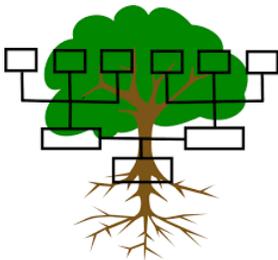
Many members of our historical society love old things. Their homes are cluttered with cherished mementos, and their thoughts are never far from all that has gone before them. Kelley Nikondeha has suggested that people everywhere have a similar urge to return to the past. “We return,” she writes, “for identity’s sake, for the sake of wholeness and redemption. We return to right historic and enduring wrongs with confession, contrition, and repentance.” Her words suggest that there are ways to live positively in spite of the problem of the past.

Identity can, of course, be cast aside. A person can block off that difficult past. But why not redeem your identity? I remember the days when people took their Green Stamps to Redemption Centers and traded them for valuable merchandise. Suppose you could do that with the difficult past you have let go of—restore its value, recover it, own it again. That history could enrich and fortify your identity.

However, to make this work, you would have three steps to take. First, there is confession. Whatever is bad back there in your past, admit it. Some ancestors behaved badly. Some were abusive, some selfish. The evil, the violence, the pathology, cannot be minimized, cannot be rationalized. Let’s face it: we—our people—have done despicable things.

The second step, contrition, is hard. To be contrite is to acknowledge how sorry we feel about what happened back then. We maintain some degree of separation from the past, of course, but denial or indifference work only to cut it off. My goal may be virtue, but I carry baggage with me. I love my country, but I am sorry it has so often been unjust and uncharitable. Its history isn’t going to change, but I can change how I think about it.

Repentance, the third step, involves positive movement. It is making a change for the better as a result of contrition. It has been called a u-turn. One need not acquiesce in “historic and enduring wrongs” but instead work to put things right. My great-grandfather enlisted in the Union Army in 1861, contracted dysentery, and became an alcoholic when he tried to cope with its aftereffects. Before the war he had farmed a 75-acre farm in Plainfield, CT, and been a school teacher. After the war, he was an invalid who battled “chronic diarrhea, liver diseased, rheumatis [sic], inflammation of spine and a general disability” for the rest of his life. It didn’t ruin my grandfather. He, by contrast, lived a long and productive life, farming the same acreage for 55 years and serving as Superintendent of the Sunday School at his church for 25 years. He helped bring up three fine sons, two of whom lived long enough to provide distinguished service to their respective communities. They rose above their stained past. They looked at it and decided to make things right. In this way they achieved wholeness and identity. They made my life fuller, too, because they redeemed the family history.



As we approach the 400th anniversary of slavery in America, then, let us freely acknowledge those first Africans in Jamestown and the evil of what began there. Let us admit that it was wrong. But let us move on towards making today a time to right wrongs, respect people, and build a better tomorrow.

Dick Pierce

Sources:

Frank Harris, “Remembering: 400 Years After Slaves Arrived,” *Hartford Courant*, February 22, 2018, page A7.
 Kelley Nikondeha, *Adopted: the Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* (Eerdmans, 2017), p. 150.
 U. S. Archives, pension file of William I. Hyde.