



The Wintonbury Drummer

Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

April 2019

THOSE CURIOUS TRAPROCK HOUSES

A program by Ralph Schmoll and Ron Marchetti
Prosser Public Library, April 3, 2019, 6:00 PM

The traprock houses of the Bloomfield area have piqued curiosity before. In 2000, Edward Stanley of our historical society researched them for his degree in American Studies from Trinity College. “The eight traprock houses of Bloomfield, Simsbury and Granby,” he wrote, “are at once extraordinary and enigmatic, providing anomalies among the contemporaneous wood structures of the central Connecticut area. The overarching, core question in my research on these structures was why they were built of stone and not of wood, the prevailing building material of the time because of its abundance, lower cost, and ease of use.”

Come to a special program on traprock houses presented by Ralph Schmoll and Ron Marchetti at Prosser Library on Wednesday, April 3, at 6:00 PM. There you will hear the latest about these houses, see a video presentation of the houses, and learn about their architectural significance.

Traprock, while readily available locally in our prominent ridgeline, is a difficult material to work with. It can't be quarried, and it fractures unpredictably. Who were the people who had these houses built in the early 1830s? Did they know one another? Whom did they find to build them? How do the houses compare to one another and to other, wooden, houses being built during that time? You have enjoyed other Schmoll/Marchetti collaborations in the past. Don't miss this one.



The Francis Gillette House
Bloomfield Avenue
WHS archives photo 2014

IN THIS ISSUE: Board of Directors Highlights, page 2; Flea Market and Bake Sale, page 3; Notes from my Reading, page 3; Greater Hartford Wesleyan Church, pages 4-6; Nathan F. Miller, page 6; Dr. Henry M. Gray, pages 7-8.

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BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

The Board of Directors met on Wednesday, March 13, 2019, at the Gabriel History Center. Sixteen people were present. The financial report for February 28 showed income of \$9,272 and expenses of \$5,610, for a checking account balance of \$10,863.

Libbie Merrow reported that the history campus will be improved by redoing the flower gardens, using the George Merrow Memorial Fund. Sharon Mann of the town's Beautification Committee has been consulted, and a landscape architect has sketched out plans for new plantings. Improvements will start as soon as weather allows.

The ramp on the History Center is rotting out, and Doug Barnard recommended replacing it and the railing with composite boards and other materials. A contractor will be invited to give an estimate on this.

Thinking ahead to the Annual Meeting in June, Bill Weissenburger asked for suggestions of people to fill vacancies on the Board of Directors.

UPCOMING**PROGRAMS**

April 3: Trap Rock Houses (see page 1)

May 8: Marilyn Johnston's report on "Bloomfield, The All-America City: A Retrospective 2001-2019" at Prosser Library, 6:00 PM.

June 5: Potluck, Annual Meeting, and Walt Woodward and his Band of Steady Habits

OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

Caruso's Auto and Body, 36 Tunxis Avenue
Sir Speedy Printing, 21 Old Windsor Road
Geissler's Supermarket, 40 Tunxis Avenue
Executive Financial Services, 19 Cherry Hills Circle

(And there's room for more!)

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Above: For Black History Month, Sara Franklin speaks about cook-book author Edna Lewis on February 6 at Prosser. Right: For Women's History Month, Barbara Beeching speaks about the G. Fox Women's Service Bureau on March 6 at Prosser.

Photos by R. Pierce



ANNUAL FLEA MARKET AND TAG SALE COMING ON MAY 4

Don't forget the Society's annual flea market and bake sale on Saturday, May 4, from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the history campus, School Street at Park Avenue. Rain date May 11. Call or email the society to reserve a space. Call Libbie or Ruthanne about baking and helping out.

Notes from my reading

The *Drummer* asks readers to send in memorable passages which they come across in their reading of books or other materials, especially on historical topics. Thanks to Marilyn Johnston for submitting the following.

“All those things—rock and men and river—resisted change, resisted the coming as they did the going. [Mt.] Hood warmed and rose slowly, breaking open the plain, and cooled slowly over the plain it buried. The nature of things is resistance to change, while the nature of process is resistance to stasis; yet things and process are one, and the line from inorganic to organic and back again is uninterrupted and unbroken. It is man's potential to try to see how all things come from the old intense light and how they pause in the darkness of matter only long enough to change back into energy, to see that changelessness would be meaninglessness, to know that the only way the universe can show and prove itself is through change. His job is to do what nothing else he knows of can do: to look about and draw upon time. A man lives in things and things are moving....”

—from *Blue Highways: A Journey into America* by William Least Heat-Moon, pg.251



CATALOG OF CONGREGATIONS, #20 of a series

Greater Hartford Wesleyan Church, 7 Walsh Street

Many churches in America have been started by a group of people who shared a particular national/regional origin. Before moving to Hartford, Pastor Keith Merrick lived in the Caribbean on Curaçao and the Virgin Islands. In Hartford in 1991, Merrick and his wife Esther gathered together people from the Caribbean-American community to found a new church, the Greater Hartford Wesleyan Church. At first, they rented meeting rooms on North Main Street, but the church grew so fast that they soon needed more space. They were able to buy a building on Franklin Avenue—a building once occupied by Latter Day Saints but then vacant for several years. The renovation and repair of that building proved difficult, and when Pastor Merrick died, the momentum diminished.



Church website photo

With hope in their hearts, they called a new pastor, the Rev. Peter Isaac, in 2006. Under his leadership, they sold the Franklin Avenue building in 2007, banked the money, and moved to rented quarters at the Roger Wolcott School in Windsor. They were to move once more, to the L. P. Wilson Community Center on Matianuck Avenue, before they decided they really did need their own building. In 2014 one of the church's Bloomfield members noticed a building for sale on Walsh Street, just off Blue Hills Avenue. The building had been built as an IHOP Restaurant, had served as an auto parts store, and had then been used by a church. The Wesleyan congregation looked it over and negotiated a purchase. It was basically an empty shell at the time, but after some \$60,000 in renovations it became the attractive and functional home which the church occupies today.



Photo contributed by Rev. Peter isaac

Pastor Peter Isaac was born in Oregon, where his Jamaican father was attending Bible college. His father later took a pastorate in Toronto, Ontario, where Peter grew up. He received his B.A. in 1999 from York University in Toronto and his M. Div. in 2005 from Toronto's Tyndale Seminary. He holds dual citizenship. When he became pastor of the Greater Hartford Wesleyan Church in 2006, the people saw in his quiet competence the promise of better times for the church. However, about a year later tragedy struck when his wife was killed in an automobile accident. After a long recovery, in 2009, he remarried. Now together with wife Sherene, they have two fine children, Michael and Mikaela. The family resides in nearby Windsor. (continued on next page—>)

The church is also served by lay leader Denis Thorington and resident pastor Rev. David Small. Its governing board includes the pastors, church secretary, treasurer, and department heads. It is a part of the Northeast District of the Wesleyan Church, which extends from upstate New York to eastern Pennsylvania. On an average Sunday at 11:00, there will be from 50 to 80 people worshipping at the Walsh Street building. Sunday School is provided at 10:00. There is a Wednesday night Bible study meeting; and, on Sunday evenings, via a conference call, members participate from their homes in a weekly prayer session.



Sanctuary of Wesleyan Church

R. Pierce photo

Heritage Sunday is observed once a year and is a day to celebrate the national origins of church people. About a dozen different islands and nations are usually represented. Flags may be displayed. This year on February 24, people were asked to “come in your national colors and native dress, then every nation that is represented will have an opportunity to share their national anthem and a highlight from their heritage.”

—Thanks to the Rev. Peter Isaac for supplying the information in this article.

What is Wesleyanism?

The Wesleyan Church is a Protestant Christian denomination in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Indonesia, Asia, and Australia. The church is part of the holiness movement and has roots in the teachings of John Wesley. It has almost 6,000 congregations worldwide, works in about 100 nations, and has about one million members.

Local Wesleyan churches are organized into a network of districts, with the national organization called the North American General Conference. Other general conferences exist in, for example, the Philippines and the Caribbean.

The blaze in the hearts of Wesleyans had caught fire in 18th century England with Oxford scholar and Church of England priest, John Wesley, who called upon Christian believers to commit to a life of holiness and the study of the Bible. The name “Wesleyan” honors him.

His study of the Bible inspired Wesley to develop a school for orphans, job programs and medical assistance for the poor, efforts to reform inhumane prisons, and arguments for the abolition of slavery. Confidence in the Bible as “the only and sufficient rule for Christian faith and practice” (to use Wesley’s own words) remains a hallmark of The Wesleyan Church today.

It was in 1843 that a group within The Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America organized to address social issues. An organizing conference held in Utica, New York by a group of ministers and laymen reached a decision to separate from the Methodist Episcopal Church primarily over their objections to slavery. Rev. Orange Scott, one of the founders, said, “I assume the position that the principle of slavery—the principle which justifies holding and treating the human species as property, is morally wrong—or, in other words, that it is a sin.” (continued on next page—>)



Church logo

copied from Sunday bulletin

Wesleyans were leaders in other areas of social change. It was the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York, that in 1848 hosted the Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Today this is commemorated by the Women's Rights National Historical Park in that village. Moreover, Wesleyans were the first denomination in America to ordain women when, in 1856, they ordained Antoinette Brown, the first woman ordained to Christian ministry in the United States. In 1867 a Wesleyan General Conference passed a resolution favoring the right of women to vote—fifty-three years before the 19th Amendment was passed.



Denominational logo copied from FaceBook

In 1966 the Wesleyan Methodist Church merged with the Alliance of Reformed Baptists of Canada and in 1968 with the Pilgrim Holiness Church to become, simply, the Wesleyan Church. The merger took place at Anderson University in Indiana, northeast of Indianapolis, still the site of denominational headquarters. The new denomination was strong in missionary and revival emphasis.

Throughout their history, Wesleyan groups in both England and North America have openly opposed slavery, called for women's rights, and stood up against child labor atrocities. This distinct call to holiness and witness has bound Wesleyans together as a diverse family of multiple nationalities, races, languages, and cultures. Members of The Wesleyan Church continue to be catalysts for individual and social transformation.

Sources:

www.wesleyan.org/about

Wikipedia articles on Wesleyan Church and Orange Scott

NATHAN MILLER (author of the article on pages 7 & 8)

Nathan F. Miller, Jr. of Wintonbury Avenue died April 22, 1935 and was buried in Mountain View Cemetery. He was born in Bloomfield and graduated from the nearest high school, Hartford Public High School, in 1869. He worked at the Hartford County Mutual Fire Insurance Company for more than 50 years, retiring in June 1924. He served on the Bloomfield Board of Education and “was instrumental through correspondence in having about \$17,000 bequeathed to the town under the will of the late Levi Prosser, the income to be used for purchase of books and magazines.” This is the fund that was used to establish a public library in 1903. Miller served as secretary of the Wintonbury Cemetery Association and was active in the Bloomfield Congregational Church. He served as treasurer of the Bloomfield Congregational Ecclesiastical Society for 36 years, was a longtime deacon of the church, and for 23 years was Superintendent of the Sunday School. Miller married Emily Wells Stoddard of Newington on December 31, 1884. (They were at Hartford Public High School together.) She died on December 12, 1920 of pneumonia, leaving three daughters. Miller took an active interest in Bloomfield history and contributed articles on Bloomfield history to *The Hartford Courant*, which spoke of him as town historian.



Courant photo

--from *The Hartford Courant*, April 23, 1935

QUALITY QUOTE caught on the run

“I think the key to a healthy prosperous community is a heightened sense of civic engagement, that when people know a place, they care more about it. Just like I always say, you can't love a person you don't know. You can't love a place you don't know. [. . .] That's what I think the power of local history is.” —Bill Hosley, historian, in *The Hartford Courant*, February 11, 2019, pages A1-2.

Henry Gray, M.D.

by Nathan F. Miller

Editor's note: The following essay was found in the files of the Wintonbury Historical Society. It is reproduced as written, with minor stylistic changes.

When writing articles about old Bloomfield houses and the people who occupied them, there came a recollection of a person who entered into the life of those homes for a friendly chat, to discuss town and church matters, or who was called professionally there—Henry Gray, “the beloved physician” of Bloomfield. He was born in Windham in 1824 and among his ancestors was Jedediah Elderkin of Revolutionary fame.

As a young man he showed a fondness for painting, and a picture done by him of Windham Village Green is in their library. After he and Mrs. Gray were located in their Bloomfield home, he became a practicing physician for nearly forty years, and, in his leisure time, he painted beautiful pictures of houses now seen in the homes of today.

A fine view of Bloomfield center was sketched from Cemetery Hill, now Mountain View Cemetery, before painting. The first and second Congregational churches, are in the vestibule of the Federated Church. He painted also fancy subjects, but perhaps the most wonderful of all was an excellent portrait of himself that he did.

He formed classes of young ladies whom he taught (continued on page 8—>)



Dr. Henry Gray served as the town physician for 20 years. He was a physician, a talented artist, and a concerned citizen who gave much time and effort in working to improve education in town. He lived in this house on Mountain Avenue, across from the library, facing a large green.

Photos provided by Janis Langston

from WPA Historic House Photographs, CT State Library



This view was taken looking west on Mountain Avenue. Dr. Henry Gray's house is on the left, the Bumstead house is down the hill, and in the distance is a house built in 1794 by Jonathan Palmer and later owned by Dr. Eugene Bestor and his wife. Mrs. Bestor was known for wearing elegant hats to church and always arriving just as the eleven o'clock bell tolled for the service. These families contributed much to Bloomfield.

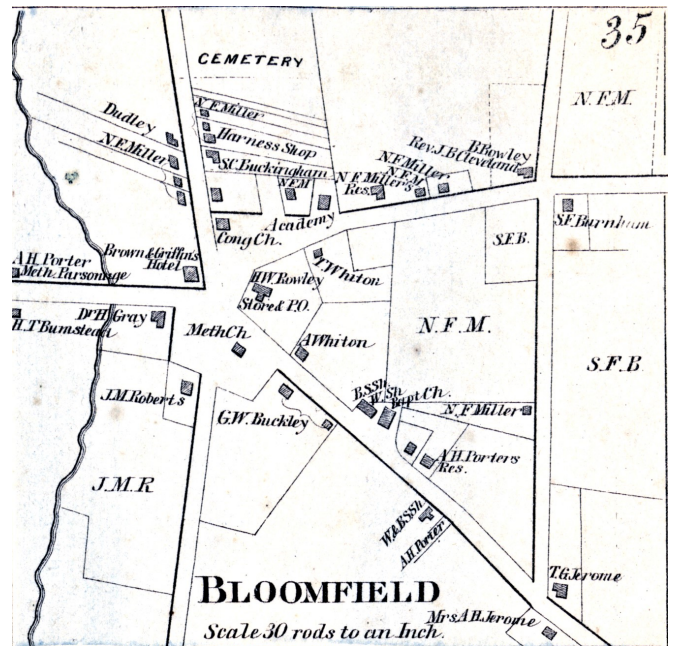
in the use of water and oil colors. He was deeply interested in civic affairs, an acting school visitor, a strong advocate of temperance, and represented the town in the legislature.

It is not an unusual sight for him with a laboring man to be engaged in setting trees about the church and the village. He built a narrow stone and gravel walk from his home to Rowley's store. At his suggestion, the first sidewalk was made from the center school-house to the church, the stones, gravel and labor being given by N. F. Miller, Sr.

In the rear of his house in Wash Brook he placed a water wheel, which he built, and which worked for many years—a delight to the children, and a pleasant sight for all—for he had an eye to beauty in all his planning.

He was a scholarly man of the old school, very modest of his own worth and ability, and with a quiet mirth and wit in his nature.

He was fond of music and among the furniture that came from Windham was a peculiar and ornamental piano which might have been traded off for a more modern piano, but today would be an antique of great curiosity. He sang the tenor in the choir, was a deacon in the church, and Superintendent of the Sunday School for eleven years. His life was exemplary, and he was an intimate companion of the pastors of the church.



Dr. Gray loved Bloomfield, and the children found in him one to love. He was a friend to all, sympathizing with them in their sorrows and anxieties, and rejoicing in their prosperity.

After the marriage of his daughter, Mary, to Dr. J. W. Morris of Jamestown, New York, he sold his residence and with his daughter, Annie, who later married Mr. Henry Smith, removed to Jamestown in 1892, where his death occurred, his burial being in Windham, Connecticut, where also are buried Mrs. Gray and their daughters.

“As the western clouds are tinged with gold after the sun is lost to view, so does the memory of a kind act bring joy to the heart when its author is no more.”

