



The Wintonbury Drummer

Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

September 2019

WITCH TRIAL IN WINDSOR: AUTHOR BETH CARUSO TO SPEAK AT PROSSER LIBRARY WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 6:00 pm



Alice, a young woman prone to intuitive insights and loyalty to the only family she has ever known, leaves England for the rigid colony of the Massachusetts Bay in 1635 in hopes of reuniting with them again. Finally settling in Windsor, Connecticut, she encounters the rich American wilderness and its inhabitants, her own healing abilities, and the blinding fears of Puritan leaders which collide and set the stage for America's first witch hanging, her own, on May 26, 1647.

Author Beth Caruso grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Cincinnati and later obtained Masters degrees in Nursing and Public Health. As a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand, she helped to improve the public health of local Karen hill tribes. She also cared for hundreds of mothers and babies as a labor and delivery nurse. Her latest passion is to discover and convey important stories of women in American history. She will talk about *One of Windsor: the Untold Story of America's First Witch Hanging*, her debut novel.

--quoted in part from www.oneofwindsor.com/about. Accessed 7-22-2019.

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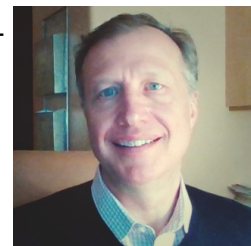
Wendy Wolcott

WHS DIRECTORS TO MEET NEW CHS CHIEF

WHS president Bill Weissenburger is well-acquainted with the Connecticut Historical Society (CHS), Elizabeth Street, Hartford, since he serves as its treasurer. In May of this year, he was on hand to greet the new CHS director, Robert Kret.

Weissenburger has invited the WHS Board of Directors, along with board members from neighboring historical societies, to meet Mr. Kret over lunch at Seabury Dining Room on Wednesday, September 18, 2019. Weissenburger says, "We are looking for a great turnout, and this is a fun opportunity to meet others with common interests."

Robert Kret has a bachelor's in history from the University of Detroit Mercy and a master's in museum studies from SUNY Oneonta. He has served as Director of Museums and Supervisor of Properties for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Boston, and was most recently Director of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He came to CHS in May of this year and is busy getting acquainted with history organizations in this area. (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/robert-kret-93441921/>)



Robert Kret

LinkedIn photo

OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

Bloomfield Garage, 986 Park Avenue
 Bloomfield Village Pizza, 34 Tunxis Avenue
 Executive Financial Services, 19 Cherry Hills Circle
 Geissler's Supermarket, 40 Tunxis Avenue
 Ginza Japanese Cuisine, 14 Wintonbury Mall
 Isaac's Bagel Café, 16-B Mountain Avenue
 Pasticceria Italia, 10 Wintonbury Mall
 Thai Palace, 18 Wintonbury Mall
 Romano and Fetterman, P. C., 55 Woodland Avenue
 Sir Speedy Printing, 21 Old Windsor Road
 Wade's Farms, 498 Simsbury Road
 Windsor Federal Savings, 54 Jerome Avenue

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The Wintonbury Drummer solicits reader response, such as letters, articles, and photographs. Please respond by email or call the editor at 860-242-7639. —R. Pierce

we ♥
volunteers!

All-America City Update Report: DVD and Booklet

It's always good when a community finds a moment to stop, look around, take stock of what it has been and what it hopes to become, measured against its traditions and values. A new DVD and booklet added to the History Center collection offer just such an opportunity for reflection. Each of these two items is entitled, "Bloomfield: All America City Update 2001-2018: Unchanging Aim for a Better Community." The DVD is a recording of the PowerPoint talk given by Marilyn Johnston on May 8, 2019, at Prosser Library. The town received the All-America City award almost fifty years ago in part for its dedication to diverse schools. The report covers the history, meaning and relevance of the award itself. It also provides an overview of the progress of the public schools from 2001 to today, including student achievement levels in 2018.



Marilyn Johnston
WHS Archives photo

The PowerPoint talk is a distillation of a 28-page report written by Ms. Johnston. Dick Pierce oversaw publication of the full written report in booklet form, while Chris Siloac produced the DVD under the auspices of Prosser Library. Both are available for checkout at the History Center, and copies of the book are also for sale. The video may also be viewed on your home computer using this link: <https://youtu.be/Guo4HklGNFY>.

*The past is a place of reference, not a place of residence;
the past is a place of learning, not a place of living.*
—Roy T. Bennett

WINTONBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROGRAMS 2019-2020

Programs will take place at 6:00 pm
in the Prosser Library Community Room, unless otherwise noted.
Admission is free. The public is invited.

2019

- October 2 *One of Windsor: The Untold Story of America's First Witch Hanging*, with Beth Caruso, author
November 6 *The Evolution of Bloomfield Center*, with Ralph and Louise Schmoll, curators

2020

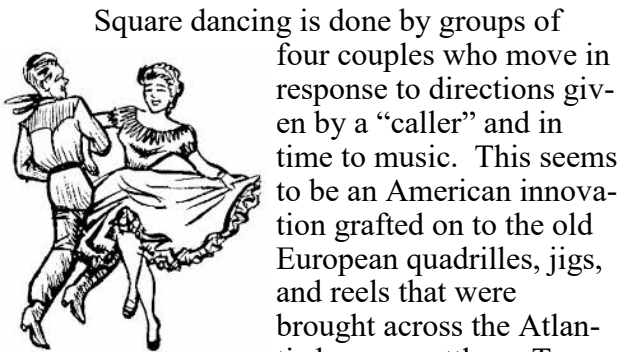
- February 5 African American music
May 13 *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights from the 1930s to the 1980s*, with Traci Parker, author
June 3 Year-end Potluck Supper with The Band of Steady Habits

THE BLOOMFIELD SQUARE DANCE CLUB: A HISTORY

Jean and I square danced for thirty-five years. When we started, it was enormously popular; when we ended, there were not enough dancers to support clubs anymore. What happened? Part of the answer to that is found in the social movement described in the sidebar, "The Rise and Fall of Community Involvement," on pages 6-7. Clubs were folding all over the nation. Other factors inhered in the activity itself. Too many dancers dropped out. Then there were fewer people left to take the jobs that needed doing to run a club and put on dances. It had been a wonderful activity. There had been a lot of fun, good fellowship, and healthful exercise. There are still a few clubs around, but far fewer people are still dancing today. If you have memories, photos, and/or memorabilia from the Bloomfield Club, please share them with me by email or call 860-242-7639. —Dick Pierce

AN AMERICAN INNOVATION

During the heyday of square dancing clubs in the 1960s and '70s, young married couples across the state stepped out once or twice a week in soft-soled shoes, the men sporting cowboy shirts with pearly buttons and Western-style string ties, the women in frilly blouses and skirts fluffed over petticoats. The dances were held in well-lighted halls with wood floors. All was very bright and light and happy. Where had this new phenomenon come from?



Square dancing is done by groups of four couples who move in response to directions given by a "caller" and in time to music. This seems to be an American innovation grafted on to the old European quadrilles, jigs, and reels that were brought across the Atlantic by new settlers. Today's square dancing seems to have developed from those European dances, starting in Appalachia during the 1800s.

So, some of the first American colonists brought with them dances popular in Europe. By the end of the seventeenth century itinerant dancing masters were teaching minuets and English "country dances" (later called contra dances) at dancing schools in towns and settlements throughout the colonies. Once dancers had learned the steps and figures, they could attend a public ball. Early accounts of dancing in the Appalachian region also refer to contra dances, reels, and jigs that were performed without the aid of a caller.

Philip Jamison reports that as early as 1690 slave fiddlers played for dances on plantations in Virginia, and by the mid-1700s slave musicians (continued on next page —>)

PART 1: THE FIRST DOZEN YEARS, 1960-1972

By 1960, the parent Greater Hartford Square Dance Club had spun off clubs in Bloomfield, Newington, Windsor, Wethersfield, and Glastonbury. In October 1960, the Greater Hartford club celebrated its tenth anniversary with a large dance filling two gyms at the Bloomfield High School. Western-style square dancing had blossomed in central Connecticut.

In 1958, Tom and Mim Nichols from the Greater Hartford Club came out to Bloomfield, and Tom taught its first series of western-style lessons. A second series of lessons started in October 1959. After this, the Bloomfield Square Dance Club, Inc., was formed, prodded by the efforts of Howard and Kathy Greenwood, who contacted Karl Kurth, the town's recreation director, to sponsor this activity under the Recreation Department. The club could use school facilities free any weeknight when custodians were already working. The first class of nineteen couples graduated in the spring of 1960, and the new club was organized on March 31, 1960 during a meeting at the home of Julian and Florence Perlstein on Cottage Grove Circle. Club dances were held on the second and fourth Thursdays. By the spring of 1961, membership had increased to thirty-six couples.



Original club badges

The officers elected for that first year, 1960-61, were Walt and Dot Hill, president; Julian and Florence Perlstein, vice-president; Dwayne and Becky Rowley, secretary, and Walt and Dot Nordstrom, treasurer.

During the first year of the Bloomfield's club's existence, dances were held at the Joseph P. Vincent School on Turkey Hill Road. Club members were enthusiastic about their new pastime and enjoyed dressing up western style. A dance in March, 1961, even featured a fashion show of square dance clothing presented by Ruth deTurk's Ox Yoke Shop (continued on next page —>)

(An American Innovation, continued)

were common at white social functions, both urban and rural, throughout the colonies. Slave musicians, who were respected by their own culture, kept alive the tradition of the professional itinerant “griot” musicians of West Africa. African Americans, thus exposed to the figures of the European dances, began to mix them in with African dance at plantation “frolics” during the early 1800s. Jamison says, “Written evidence from the nineteenth century suggests that the first callers were African-American musicians and that dance calling was common in the black culture throughout the country before it was adopted by whites and became an integral part of the Appalachian dance tradition.” In the call-and-response tradition of African music and dance, calling evolved as slaves called out the figures of the

European dances at their own balls.

With the invention of calling, it was no longer necessary to attend dancing school to learn the figures of the dance. It was easier to hire a caller. At some point white dancers asked black musicians to call figures for their dances as well, and eventually dance calling was adopted by white musicians, too.



Liz D’Esopo dancing with caller Bill Mager. From *The Bloomfield Journal*, February 26, 1982

Fast forward to the twentieth century, and you’ll find people attending square dances all over the country, including Connecticut. You didn’t have to learn the figures ahead of time; you just went and did what the caller directed. The movements were simple enough that everyone could do them. However, change was coming.

On the evening of May 10, 1950, hundreds of square dance enthusiasts gathered for a big jamboree at the Torrington Armory. Several groups put on exhibitions, one of which was done by sixteen members of Al Brundage’s Country Barn Dancers from Stepney. Brundage had been influenced by certain Texas callers to change his calling to their “western” style. Esther Emerson explains, “The dancing was perfectly performed by the smooth graceful,

(continued on next page —>)

(The First Dozen Years, continued)

on Route 10 in Tariffville. Following that first year of club dances, members gathered on July 16, 1961, for a swim and dance party at the home of presidents Walt and Dot Hill at 234 Tunxis Avenue.

Bloomfield’s second year of lessons began with an open house at the Vincent School in September 1961 with Tom Nichols teaching. The club celebrated its second anniversary jointly with the Windsor Old Towners club in April 1962 at the Poquonock School in Windsor with Al Brundage calling. The dance committee included Bloomfield members Walt and Dot Hill and Thorwald and Elsa Nielsen. By the time the club celebrated its fifth anniversary in June 1965, it had grown to 85 couples (an increase of over 400%).

Dancing was normally done inside a school gym on a nice wood—or at least tile—floor over which feet could glide smoothly. However, with the idea of publicizing square dancing, in June 1962 the club held a dance in the parking lot of First Congregational Church. Julian Perlstein was chair of the arrangements committee. The hope was that people who didn’t know about square dancing would see it happening and decide to learn it for themselves.

More publicity came from TV Channel 30, which featured our dancers in a demonstration dance in the fall of 1963. In March 1964, at the end of that year’s lessons, twenty-four couples graduated; and in 1965 a record seventy-two dancers completed lessons. By the spring of 1966, membership stood at 212 dancers.



New club badges designed by Dave Kelmer

During the 1967-1968 year the club adopted a traveling outfit, in purple and white gingham, through the efforts of Terry Watkins and Audrey Schubert. Badges and banners were redesigned in the new colors by Dave Kelmer. In September club members wore their new outfits to dance on Constitution Plaza during Square Dance Week (as proclaimed by Governor Dempsey). This was also the year when Joe Prystupa became the club’s new caller and teacher.

On May 16, 1971, the club celebrated its tenth anniversary with (continued on next page —>)

(An American Innovation, continued)

relaxed movements of the dancers. They and the caller were in rhythm and it seemed that one figure flowed effortlessly into the next. The dancers were also colorfully dressed.” The Stepney group’s exhibition made a big impression on the jamboree.

Al Brundage was soon asked to teach the new style of square dance in West Hartford, and the first series of classes started in September 1950. One thing led to another, and the Greater Hartford Square Dance Club was formed. Writing ten years later in 1960, Esther Emerson noted that by then clubs had been started in Bloomfield, Newington, Windsor, Wethersfield, and Glastonbury. Western-style square dancing had blossomed in central Connecticut.

Sources:

- Jamison, Philip A. “Square Dance Calling: The African-American Connection.” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2003, pp. 387–398. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41446577.
- See also <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/square-dancing-uniquely-american-180967329/>
- Emerson, Esther. “Square Dancing Fad Comes Back to Stay—but Western Style Takes Over.” *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut) · Sun, Sep 11, 1960 · Main Edition · Page 123

The Rise and Fall of Community Involvement

The popularity of western-style square dancing in America seemed to increase suddenly from 1960 onwards and continue for twenty to thirty years. Even if you were never part of square dancing, if you lived during this era you surely noticed other social phenomena like this involving clubs and other organizations. The rise and fall of square dancing closely parallels other social trends studied by Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone*, published in 2000. His title focuses on how after World War II bowling leagues were very popular and groups of people (fellow employees, church members, women, men) met to bowl by day and night. Gradually that popularity petered out, until most bowlers went by themselves, if at all. The bowling is just one example of a noticeable social trend.

In A.D. 2000, Putnam wrote, “For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago—silently, (continued on next page —>)

(The First Dozen Years, continued)

a dance at the Middle School. Some sixty-two sets (496 people) filled both gyms, dancing to Manny Amor, Red Bates, Dick Jones, and Joe Prystupa.

Many members of the Bloomfield club had teenage children who got interested in their parents’ enthusiasm for this new recreation. Accordingly, in 1970 a decision was made to start a teen club.

The town recreation department agreed to sponsor it; and club member

Dick Pierce, a high school teacher, became adult ad-

visor. An open house was held on October 19 at Vincent School, with lessons beginning the following week. Club member Al Shenkman, who had three teenage daughters, joined in as a second advisor; and other club parents helped from week to week at the lessons. In February 1971, 102 teens received diplomas. At a meeting in the Junior High cafeteria, Scott Davis suggested the name “Bloomfield Barnstompers” for the new club.

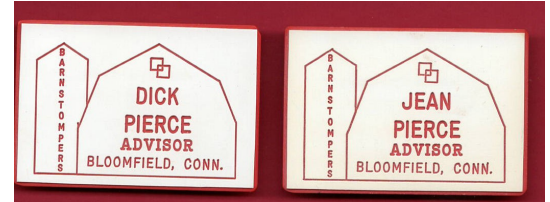
Teens then took a bus to a square dance convention in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, winning a trophy for bringing the most dancers. After the first year, parents Jerry and Gloria Kiel became advisors and attendance continued to grow, soon reaching 100 teens.

In 1971 Bloomfield was named an All-America City, and the square dance club sponsored a float in the All-America City Parade on October 2. Enthusiasm for square dancing continued high. The Barnstompers graduated fifty young people in January. Thirty-seven adult couples attended a mystery ride to dance to Dick Leger in Glastonbury. Thirty adult couples and sixty-three teens went to the Connecticut Square and Round Dance Festival. It was a time when joining clubs was in the air, and square dancing was at its height of popularity.

To be continued

Dancers collected fun badges from special dances, festivals, and more

—R. Pierce photos



Barnstomper badges



(Rise and Fall of Community Involvement, continued)

without warning—that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current. Without at first noticing, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the century.”

“In the 1960s, in fact,” he avers, “community groups across America had seemed to stand on the threshold of a new era of expanded involvement.” People all over were joining together, getting to know one another, working together in clubs and societies, and enjoying a heightened sense of belonging to their towns and cities.

But, Putnam observes, “active involvement in local clubs and organizations of all sorts fell by more than half in the last several decades of the twentieth century.” In the mid-1970s nearly two-thirds of all Americans attended club meetings, but by the 1990s near two-thirds of all Americans never did. Putnam calls this active interaction with people in voluntary activities “social capital.” “Social capital,” he says, “makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy.” No wonder that over the twenty years since Putnam’s book appeared, many have noticed a decline in civility, tolerance, and social interaction within our nation.

Why did this happen? Putnam lays 50% of the blame on the “graying of civic America.” Beside generational differences, other factors are the movement of women into the work force, television, suburbanization, commuting, and sprawl.

Putnam maintains that “people who have active and trusting connections to others—whether family members, friends, or fellow bowlers—develop or maintain character traits that are good for the rest of society.” If you are one who still belongs to something—the senior center, the garden club, the church, the lodge, yes, even the historical society—you are helping to maintain some social capital in our nation. And you are the better off for it.

Source: Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2000).



Royal free stock photo by dizain

www.shutterstock.com



NEW CAMPUS GARDENS

Bloomfield’s history campus has been beautified this summer with landscaping around both the Old Farm School and the Gabriel History Center. The George Merrow Memorial Fund supported these improvements. Sharon Mann of the Bloomfield Beautification Committee provided input on appropriate period plant choices, and Libbie Merrow of the Society guided the installation. Volunteers have helped with weeding and watering. The photo at left, by Janis Langston, shows a bed adjacent to the History Center ramp.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

5:30 PM

Gabriel History Center

September 11, 2019

(Note: photo at 5:15)

November 13, 2019

January 15, 2020

March 11, 2020

May 13, 2020

June 10, 2020

September 9, 2020

November 11, 2020

NEW BUILDING EVOKES NOTABLE HISTORY



Dennis Hubbs photo

Bloomfield residents filled the new building on Saturday, August 3, as Mrs. I. Beatrice Llewellyn cut the ribbon to formally open the Alvin and Beatrice Wood Human Services Center, named after her parents. Llewellyn is a long-time member of the Wintonbury Historical Society, and her family has deep roots in town. The new building replaces the old Junior High School (as some still call it!) and will have the same address, 330 Park Avenue. And there's a good bit of Bloomfield history discernible in this naming.

M. Beatrice Wood died in 2009 at age 95 and was buried beside her husband, Alvin, in Mountain View Cemetery. They had met when they were both students at Howard University. She was born in West Virginia and came to Hartford with Alvin after they were married on June 8, 1934 in Washington, D.C. The officiating clergyman at their marriage was Rev. Howard W. Thurman. Bea Wood graduated with honors from Howard and earned her master's at the University of Hartford. She began teaching at the Arsenal School in Hartford in 1948 and, by the time of her retirement in 1979, was Coordinator of Reading, the highest position in reading instruction with the Hartford Public Schools

Alvin B. Wood died in 2002 at his home on Wadhams Road, age 92. He held an A.B. from Howard University and an M.S. from Central Connecticut State University. He had been born in Hartford, where he attended Dwight and Burr schools, got a job as a grocery delivery boy, and took piano lessons at the Hartt School on Collins and Sigourney Streets. His family moved to Bloomfield in the 1920s, and in 1925 Alvin wrote the music for the school song adopted by Bloomfield High. When, as a new college graduate, he applied for a teaching position in Hartford, he was turned down by Superintendent Fred D. Wish, who told him Hartford wasn't ready for a black teacher. His father, who was employed at Aetna, got him a job there as a janitor. Later, he delivered mail for the Bloomfield post office for thirteen years. Finally, in 1954, Wood got his teaching job, teaching science at Mark Twain School. In 1963 he was named principal of Clark Street School (the city's first black principal) and, after a year, became principal of Fred D. Wish School (ironically, named after the man who turned him down thirty years earlier). He retired in 1978.



Alvin and Beatrice Wood
courtesy of I. B. Llewellyn

Alvin and Beatrice Wood were both active in the Bloomfield community. He was the first black Town Council member (1961-1969), a member of the Human Relations Commission and of the group that drafted Bloomfield's application to be named an All-America City (see article on page 3). Beatrice Wood was elected in 1969 as the first African American woman on the Bloomfield Town Council and was Deputy Mayor in 1974-75. The Woods were active members of Union Baptist Church in Hartford and of numerous other local, state and national organizations. Residents of Bloomfield for over seventy years, they epitomized high ideals of family, profession, and civic involvement.

Education and politics ran deep in Alvin Wood's ancestors. His great-grandfather, Ballard T. Edwards (1828-1881), was elected to the state legislature in post-Civil War Virginia. Edwards' parents were members of the free African American community in Manchester, Virginia, across the river from Richmond. Woods' grandmother, Nancy G. (Edwards) Robinson was a public-school teacher in 1900 Manchester. Ballard T. Edwards identified himself as a brick mason in the 1860 census and in 1870 had two apprentice brickmakers working for him. He opened a night school in his home, making it possible for African American workers to learn to read and write. In October 1867, in a Freedman's Bureau School Report, he had twenty-six students. He was clerk of the African Church of Manchester (today the First Baptist Church of South Richmond) and served for years as clerk of the Colored Shiloh Baptist Association of Virginia, composed of churches in central Virginia. Alvin Woods' third great grandfather, Edward B. Edwards, was enumerated in the 1820 Census of Chesterfield, Virginia.

When you drive by the Alvin and Beatrice Wood Human Services Center, remember the depth of history behind this Bloomfield family name.

—This article was based on extensive research by WHS genealogist Janis Langston.