



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

February 2020

Wednesday, February 12, 2020, 6:00 PM, Prosser Public Library

**EPISODES IN CONNECTICUT AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY:
WHAT NEWLY DIGITIZED NEWSPAPERS CAN TELL US.**

A talk by Robert Kinney

On Wednesday, February 12, 6:00 at Prosser, State Library Outreach Services Librarian Robert Kinney will give a talk on *Episodes in Connecticut African American History: What Newly Digitized Newspapers Can Tell Us*. Since 2013, the Connecticut Digital Newspaper Project has been scanning historic state newspapers and making them available to the public via the Library of Congress's database *Chronicling America*. This talk will highlight important moments in Connecticut's African American history that are detailed in newspapers published from the Gilded Age to the immediate post World War II era.

The Connecticut State Library, which includes the State Archives and the Museum of Connecticut History, contains extensive collections documenting the history of Connecticut and its families. The Library is an Executive Branch agency of the State of Connecticut that provides a variety of library, information, archival, public records, museum, and administrative services to citizens of Connecticut, and employees and officials of all three branches of State government. The Library is open, free to the public, Tuesday – Friday 9-5 and Saturday from 9-2. The Museum of Connecticut History is open Monday – Friday 9-4 and Saturday from 9-2.



Robert Kinney

Photo courtesy of Prosser Library

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For the **Women's Suffrage Centennial:** On Tuesday, March 17, 6:00 PM, Prosser Public Library will show the short film "Perfect 36: When Women Won the Vote."

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board met on January 15 with sixteen people present. The Executive Committee had met twice since the last board meeting and recommended action on by-laws, budget, and dues. Revisions to the by-laws, previously mailed to directors for review, were accepted without comment and will be submitted to the membership for approval in June. A \$11,175 budget for 2019-2020 was also approved. Members will also see a slightly revised dues schedule in June.

Our monthly cleaning service is working well. Mark Fitton of Sanitation Systems, Inc. cleaned the Old Farm School this week in preparation for the Metacomet student visit on January 22-23. Renovations of the school and of the History Center ramp are on hold for the winter.

The year-end appeal for donations received \$4,095 from 59 donors (about a third of the membership). This is up from last year's \$2,260 from 31 donors and funds over a third of our current annual budget.

The 2020 Flea Market and Bake Sale will be on April 25 (May 2 rain date). Mary Laiuppa will be the general chair, assisted by Inge Coates, Homer Guilmartin, Nick Panke, Ruthanne Marchetti, Libbie Merrow, Marilyn Johnston, and others.

(Due to space limitations, we cannot print the Board Highlights for November 13.)

ATTENTION!

The Wintonbury Drummer requests that readers contribute articles, personal reminiscences, book reviews, photographs, etc. Materials for publication in the April issue should be received by March 11, 2020. (Or better yet—do it now!) Send directly to the editor at 14 Julie Lane in Bloomfield or attach to an email. Thank you.

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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ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO IN BLOOMFIELD

As the year 1920 began, Bloomfield farmers were starting to harvest their next summer's crop of ice. Ice was ten inches thick in most ponds; and, while the farmers would have liked it thicker, they were not waiting like they did in the previous year when they didn't get any ice cut. (*Courant* January 2, 1920, p. 15)

Within another month, deep snow covered the ponds. On February 7, the *Courant* reported: Bloomfield has been practically snowbound for two days, and from 8 o'clock Thursday morning to a late hour Thursday night not a trolley car reached this town. Trains were three and four hours late. The train due to leave Hartford at 4:40 o'clock Thursday afternoon reached here after 8 o'clock at night. Today train service was cancelled, and trolleys resumed at 1:30 this afternoon. (February 7, 1920, page 18)

About three weeks later, another storm hit. The *Courant* of February 27 reported: Despite the efforts of 7,000 men to keep the tracks of the "New Haven" road clear of drifting banks of snow which were whipped up Wednesday night and yesterday by a 26-mile gale, from the northwest, railroad service the past thirty-six hours has been greatly crippled, and on the main line of the Central New England Railroad train service last night was at a standstill. Two trains scheduled to leave at 4:40 and 5:50 p. m. were annulled and hundreds of commuters to Winsted and Millerton, N. Y. and way stations were forced to remain in the city.



R. Pierce photo Dec, 2019

Among the passengers on the 5:50 Central New England train Wednesday night was Edwin H. Shattuck of the Loomis Brothers' general store in Granby. This train, which consisted of one coach, a smoker, a baggage car and the engine, did not leave Hartford until 7:15 p. m. and finally had to abandon the trip and return to Hartford at 2:30 a. m. In a letter to "The *Courant*" Mr. Shattuck describes the journey as follows: --

"It developed that the train contained forty-five passengers, ten of them being women and children. After proceeding very slowly and with considerable effort, mixed with various noises that only a train can make, it finally arrived at Cottage Grove, about three miles out, and after several unsuccessful attempts to proceed, finally found itself stalled beyond hope of either going forward or backward, in the snowdrifts. Another engine was finally sent for, and at about 10 p. m. arrived and hooked on to the rear car of the train. Both engines then, one at each end of the train, proceeded to puff, blow and whistle, but after over one-half hour of exertion, nothing had been gained but a general shaking up of the passengers. By this time said passengers were becoming accustomed to their fate, some sleeping, some matching pennies and the more energetic started out to hunt up telephones and 'grub' as many had left the city intending to eat supper at home as was usual.

"As luck would have it, the lights good naturedly went out in the passenger car and those not asleep went forward into the smoker, where gas was the lighting agent. At this point it was learned that a 200-ton engine had been sent for to pull the train back to Hartford, and it could be expected by about 12 o'clock midnight. In due course of time the 'big' engine arrived; at 1:45 a. m. and after some manipulation the train actually started for the city, arriving there at 2:30 a. m. The passengers were then left to their own resources, but some of the more prominent of the male passengers stormed the chief train dispatcher's office, followed by all of the marooned passengers, and the railroad decided to give them all a good feed at Longley's Lunch Room, and to furnish rooms for the crowd as far as the hotels were able to accommodate, also cutting all red tape and allowing the charges to be presented to the company.

"It had been a night full of excitement and by 4 a. m. all hands were sleeping and dreaming that some day a train would really run all the way out to Tariffville and perhaps beyond." (*Courant*, February 27, 1920, page 1)

Was that what is called an "old-fashioned winter"?

A HISTORY OF THE BLOOMFIELD SQUARE DANCE CLUB, PART 3

DEVELOPMENT AND DEMISE OF THE BLOOMFIELD CLUB

1. Membership

“In the 1960s,” Robert Putnam wrote, “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.” (See the September *Drummer*, page 7.) The Bloomfield Square Dance Club was like that, having its largest membership in 1966 and, on the “glow” of that time, continuing active for another twenty years. As in any volunteer organization, some members were the core workers of the club; but all members paid dues, and a sufficient number of dues-paying members was needed to maintain financial health. As the membership figures in the chart below show, club membership was at its height in the late sixties, became smaller in the seventies, and got too small to keep going in the eighties.

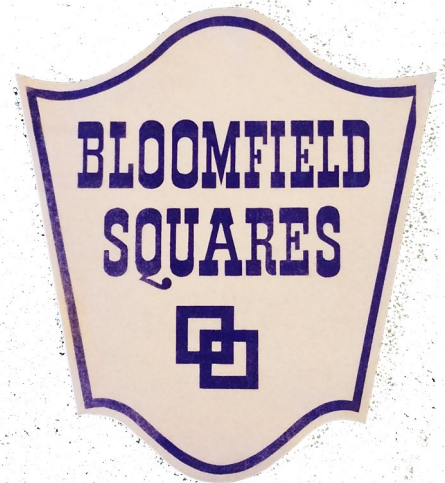
Year	No. of persons	No. of couples	No. of singles
1961	72	36	--
1965	170	85	--
1966	212	106	--
1977	135	62	11
1979	85	39	7
1982	92	41	10
1986	34	28	6

2. Attendance

Who went out square dancing? As in most traditional dancing, square dancing was done by a man and a woman, with four such couples forming a “set” or “square.” It was, for the most part, a couples activity. There was no attempt to exclude singles, but a single could not dance without a partner. This typically meant that “Mary” sat out a dance while her husband danced with a single woman. Much of the time this worked well and friendliness prevailed, but sometimes a person felt left out. One club in the area, the East Hartford Lone Stars, focused on serving singles.

Attendance at club events was critical, not just for the admission fees collected, but also for the sociable atmosphere that a larger number of dancers provided. Normal attendance at most Bloomfield dances included a majority of club members and a smaller number of visitors from other clubs. In 1972, when the club was past its peak years, dances were still drawing ten to twelve sets (80 to 96 dancers). In March 1974, over 15 sets (125 dancers) turned out for a guest caller from the Buffalo, NY, area; and within a month twenty sets were at a dance. Admission fees were very reasonable. An increase to \$3.00 per couple was not enough in 1972, and in 1974, still losing money, the club raised the fee again to \$3.50. But too many people stayed home. There was the equivalent of 30 squares (240 people) on the club roster in that year, yet fewer than ten (80 people) were showing up at dances. The February 3 dance did well, though, with 150 people attending. But with callers’ fees going up in 1975, it took 80 to 100 dancers to break even on Wednesdays and 120-160 on Saturdays (callers cost more on the weekend).

By March 1977 the club had sustained an operating loss of \$376 for the program year. Members had been requesting that higher-priced “name” callers be booked, but those dances lost money. Dues were increased from \$7 to \$10 to offset the loss. Yet in 1977-78 average attendance at dances was 34 couples (about eight sets), 24 from our club and ten guest couples. The Executive Board started wondering if it was feasible to schedule callers for the 1979-80 year. A dance in 1986 drew eight sets (64 dancers), but that year only



New club banner
Designed by Dave Kelmer
(measures 14 1/2 X 13")

30% of the membership was attending dances. However, in September 1985, 88 people (11 sets) from our club had visited the Bucks and Does Club in Berlin. The people were there, but too many were not supporting their own club dances. In December 1978, to save money, Saturday night dances were cancelled, because of the custodial fees required on that night, and round dance cuing was discontinued. In December 1978, a raffle held at a danced raised \$279, "which more than doubled our club treasury." By May 1979, the club treasury had rebounded to \$922.

In the spring of 1980, Treasurer Bob Baxley said the club had a treasury balance of \$1,498, of which \$1,212 was in a savings account. As recently as 1978 the club had struggled to maintain a balance of \$150. By May 1980 the treasury balance had grown to \$1,791 and by October it was \$1,813. In 1985 the balance was \$1,901.

In an effort to boost attendance and revenue, the club set up a prepayment plan in 1980 whereby club members could pay for dances in advance. Payment of \$50 per couple would mean a 25% savings on admission fees over the year. By 1982, with the club still uncertain financially, dues were increased from \$5 per member to \$15 per member with free dance admission all year.

In June 1985, in an ominous move, the Bloomfield club voted to discontinue holding its own dances and instead become a traveling club. The club continued as an organization and planned to have lessons, beginners balls, and other events.

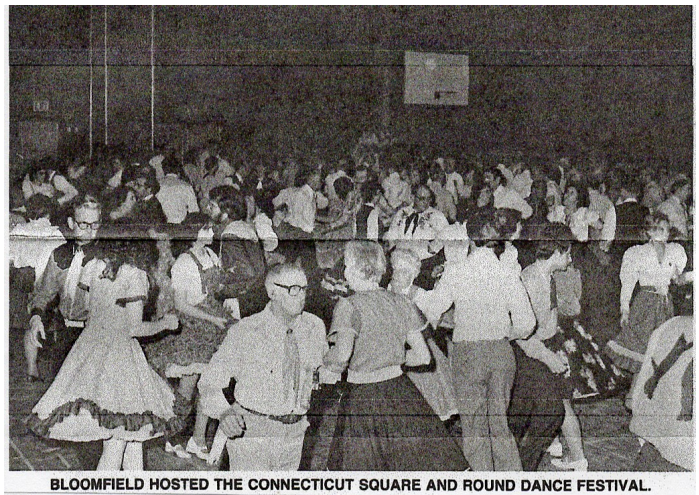
In May 1986, a special flyer announced, "Bloomfield is Back" and listed dances on first Fridays and workshops on third Fridays for the 1986-87 season. Round dance cuers would be George and Rita Taravella, and squares would be called by well-known callers. Lessons would begin in the fall on Tuesdays, and a beginners ball and live band dance were scheduled. However, when in December 1986, the presidents resigned, it was a severe blow to the club's morale. In January 1987 the Executive Board cancelled the remaining workshops, noting that attendance was low. At this point, the supply of old *Circu-Letters* ends, leading one to think it ceased publication. The best information we have is that the club folded by June 1987.

ACTIVITIES THAT ENHANCED THE FUN

1. Festivals

The fun and friendship didn't end with the local club. Square and Round Dance Festivals occurred annually at the state, regional, national, and international levels. Joe and Lucy Moran of the Bloomfield club were chairs of the 1973 Sixth Annual Connecticut Festival in Wallingford. About a dozen couples planned to attend the May 1973 International Square Dance Convention at McMaster University in Toronto. The Club reserved 30 double rooms at Howard Johnson's in Pawtucket for the New England Convention in Providence that year (\$23.10 per night).

The Eighth Annual Connecticut Square and Round Dance Festival was held in seven Bloomfield schools on Sunday, March 16, 1975, 2 to 10 PM. (Junior High, High School, Middle School, Metacomet, Vincent, Laurel, and Wintonbury Schools.) It was customary to have the Festival in the same town two years in a row, so Bloomfield hosted it again on March 21, 1976, with two to three thousand dancers present. Everett and Flossie Havens of Bloomfield did a lot of the work as local chairpersons. In 1977 eleven couples attended the New England Festival in Danvers, Massachusetts, and fourteen couples went to the National Square Dance Convention in Atlantic City. The Connecticut Festival in 1980 was in Trumbull (six couples went), and the New England Convention was in Manchester, NH, with 10,000 dancers expected. In 1982 some club members went to the 31st annual National Convention in Detroit in June.



BLOOMFIELD HOSTED THE CONNECTICUT SQUARE AND ROUND DANCE FESTIVAL.

Dancers at the Connecticut Square and Round Dance Festival in one of the Bloomfield schools, March 20, 1983
Found by Diana Barnard in the Town Report 1982-83

2. Banner Raids



Dancing at other clubs enhanced the social experience. When four or more couples visited another club, it was called a Banner Raid because the host club gave the visiting club a “banner”—usually a small triangular felt pennant with the club’s name silk-screened on it. In 1972 nineteen Bloomfield couples visited the Bucks ‘n Does in New Britain. This was not only a fun thing to do, it was also important because the admission fees paid by visitors increased the revenues of the host club. In 1979-80 the club had 443 member admissions during the year and 505 visitors. On other raids that year, Bloomfield visited the Greater Hartford Club, the Farmington Valley club in Simsbury (18 couples!), and the Friendly Westerners in Forestville. From the Torrington Trippers to the South Windsor Square Dance Club, Bloomfield dancers were out visiting. In 1975, fourteen couples raided the Foothill Steppers in New Hartford and eighteen raided the Bucks ‘n Does in New Britain. Destinations in 1979 were Glastonbury, Vernon, Longmeadow, Cromwell, New Hartford, and Plainville, among others.

Here’s a good example of Bill Kendall’s imaginative prose from 1973 when the teen dancers raided the adult club: “March came in like a lamb on Saturday the third this year as a whole flock of Barnstompers gamboled into our pasture under the watchful eye and ‘micro-crook’ of shepherd [caller] Paul Pratt. Despite a few bleats of protest from some resident sheep and some visitors from neighboring pastures, a good time was had by all. The yearlings gave a good account of themselves and we’re all proud of them—no ifs, ands or butts!”

A mystery ride in April 1976 saw 73 club members riding two Connecticut Company buses on a circuitous route to a dance in Glastonbury. Prizes were awarded to Janet Swan and Yolande Hesketh for guessing the destination correctly. Molly Dunbar won for guessing the mileage. Charlie Underwood was the caller, but some of the new grads found him difficult.

Some dancers continued to dance all summer. In 1977, for example, summer dances were available at Indian Hill Country Club, Newington, at Lake Compounce Ballroom, Bristol, and at Stanley Park, Westfield, MA. In the summers of 1984 and 1985, to keep members’ dancing skills up, the Bloomfield club held its own “workshops” at air-conditioned Beth Hillel Synagogue on Wintonbury Avenue.

3. Non-Dance Activities

Sociability was an important ingredient of the square-dancing experience. Bloomfield dancers would sometimes get together for recreation and socialization that did not involve dancing. A couple might invite other couples to their home after a dance. Early in the club’s history, Walt and Dot Hill invited dancers to their Tunxis Avenue home to swim in the pool. In September 1972, after a dance, Frank Johns invited members to go swimming at the Oak Hill Pool. In 1979, Simon and Helen Wasilausky invited members and their families to a picnic at their home on Gale Road. Many couples made new and lasting friendships through square dancing, going to dances together or going out to eat with other couples.

ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITY

The Bloomfield club was always connected with the town. Both the adult and teen clubs were sponsored by the town’s Recreation Department (today’s Leisure Services). Because of this, the clubs were able to use school gymnasiums on weeknights without cost.

The club did try to contribute to the life of the community. In 1972 and 1975, Herman Bercowetz invited the club to dance in the Copaco parking lot on a Thursday evening. Simon and Helen Wasilausky organized the dance in 1975 with Don and Sally Atkinson calling. Bercowetz hosted participants with pie and beverage after the affair.

The Club participated in the Bloomfield High homecoming parade in November 1975. A group with

matching club skirts and white blouses marched in the Bicentennial Parade on June 5, 1976. Demonstration dances were held during the Bicentennial Celebration on May 30, 1976 and at the annual Town Picnic in May 1977, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1982, and 1983. In 1980 a Bloomfield Expo was held at Connecticut General (now CIGNA) in May, and the club was there to dance to caller Suptei Rogers. In October 1985 club members marched in the town's 250th Anniversary Parade.

"Talk about fun—Bloomfield's 250th Anniversary Parade held on Sunday, October 20th was really a day to remember. The parade was colorful and well-attended. The floats were beautiful. Several of our own members were instrumental in decorating the floats, such as the Sabins and Laiuppas. Did you see the Chenettes in their colonial outfits being chauffeured in one of the antique cars? The Robert's antique station wagon [Model T Ford] is a beauty and so well preserved. Last, and certainly not least, were the Bloomfield Squares. Irving drove his van; Estelle sat in the back with the 'boombox'; Rosalie Fineberg and Christine Sargalski carried our banner; Bob Fineberg was our caller; and the dancers were Don & Jane Gorsline, Dan & Betty Pedini; Ed & Shirley Sabin; Ed & Barbara Sargalski; Simon & Helen Wasilausky; and Fred & Doreen Havens. They looked beautiful and were so well received by the spectators. Our Club received a beautiful Award from the Town of Bloomfield."

While these demonstrations had the potential of recruiting new dancers, those who danced at nearby nursing homes did so simply to entertain the residents. Initiated by Don and Scotty Davis, the nursing home dances involved four or more couples, music, and a caller visiting a home prior to a Saturday night dance. Such demonstration dances are first reported early in 1974; and in November of that year, seven Bloomfield couples, along with some East Hartford dancers, entertained at a nursing home. This continued through 1978, but in 1979, when the club cancelled its Saturday dances, the nursing home dates were discontinued.

For several years, club members brought nonperishable foods to the holiday dance in December to benefit Bloomfield's Social Services Department. This was done at least by 1972 and continued to at least 1984. In 1973 and 1974 the club donated square dance records, books, and magazines to Prosser Library including annual subscriptions to the *New England Square Dance Caller* and *Square Dancing Magazine*.

Mayor Ed Stockton proclaimed September 15-21, 1974 official square dance week in Bloomfield. Governor Thomas Meskill proclaimed the same week as Official Square Dance Week in Connecticut. In 1981, members donated square dance clothing to caller Norm Choquette who called in Springfield each month for 24-26 squares of people with intellectual and other disabilities. In August 1985 club members served as ushers for the Johnny Cash Country Music Concert held at CIGNA. (Part of the Summer Sounds series.) Members were to wear square dance clothes as they handed out programs.



Dick and Jean Pierce handing out programs at Sunset Sounds about 1985
WHS archives photo

(The conclusion of this series will be published in the April 2020 issue of the *Drummer*.)

(continued from page 8) cut up a calf for about \$2.50 and have about forty pounds of meat. Many Italians came to the market. Meat was wrapped in newspaper.

Herman was involved in running the grocery side of the business. Of the two brothers, Herman was the "idea" man with an outgoing, friendly, boyish personality. Both Herman and Irving credited the successful management of the store to Henry Goetjen, who operated the store "with an iron hand." Since he worked hard, he fit in with the family "like a glove." One day one of the employees came to work dressed in shorts, and Henry sent her home. He did not tolerate any nonsense from his employees. He knew all the prices of groceries, and he operated the catering business.

As the years passed, the business grew. "Few at the time realized it, but the rise in the 1930's and 40's of the Bercowetz family's influence in farming, butchering, retailing, wholesaling, building a shopping center, and working for industrial zoning was a bellwether of the dramatic change about to set in." (Paul W. Coons in *From Wintonbury to Bloomfield*, p. 225)

THE BERCOWETZ EFFECT

(Cynthia Bercowetz, wife of Herman Bercowetz, died on April 6, 2016 at age 86. A longtime consumer advocate, television hostess, and newspaper columnist, she wrote the 24-page The Copaco Story: Biography of the Bercowetz-Rosenthal Families, of which three copies still exist in the WHS archives. The following is excerpted and edited from that publication.)

On February 29, 1909, the trolley line to Bloomfield opened, making travel to and from Hartford more convenient and opening new possibilities of development in the rural town. In that same year Kalman Bercowetz came from New York City to Bloomfield, planning to farm the land. He could not have foreseen the impact that he, like the trolley, would ultimately make on the town.

Bercowetz, known as Charlie to friends and family, was 27 years old at the time. He had been an immigrant from Minsk, Russia, traveling to New York with his seven brothers. In New York, he got a job in the slaughter business because he had done that type of work in Europe. He did well enough that he could purchase a hundred-acre farm on Goodman Street in Bloomfield, on the south side of Cottage Grove Road.



Copaco barn
WHS Archives photo

Son Irving said that his father struggled for everything he had, but he was a good entrepreneur and always managed to figure things out. He bought and sold livestock and tools and operated a farm. "Pa was an expert on cattle and would know the costs within a few dollars," said Irving. "When he went to Chicago to buy the cattle, he could match them up." He had a remarkable memory and was a shrewd businessman.

Irving and his brother Herman said that their father developed Granby Street. He cut the road, and Irving developed the business on Granby Street. "I was the one," said Irving, "who had an interest in the farm." The slaughterhouse was opened in 1933. Irving wasn't paid for his hard work until he married Millie Fleishman in 1936, and even then he received only \$31 weekly. When Irving married at the age of twenty, however, his parents thought him too young; and for several months Irving and Millie lived with her parents in Hartford. Needing an income, Irving borrowed \$425 and bought some pigs. "I was making a lot of money," he said, "but my father was getting along poorly." So, he went back to Bloomfield and the family business. The market, known as K. Bercowetz and Sons, was opened in 1940. Irving's mother did all the chopping of the meat with a cleaver. They would (continued on page 7)

HONOR ROLL OF YEAR-END DONORS

Albert, Roger and Dori-Ann
 Babal, Gregory
 Baram, David and Paula
 Barnard, Douglas and Diana
 Beeching, Barbara
 Bernstein, Sara, and Joseph Shortall
 Bidwell, Bruce
 Biella, Doris
 Cappadona, John and Rise
 Cunnane, Margaret
 Curran, Kathleen
 Glassman, Sidney and Joyce
 Gough, Kevin, and Paula Jones
 Grisevich, George
 Guilmartin, Homer
 Hager, David and Lois
 Harrison, Lucia
 Havens, Florence
 Hubbard, Robert and Meta
 Hubbs, Dennis and Donna
 Hughes, Richard and Beverly
 Hunt, Dollie
 Hunt, Kimball and Dorothy
 Isaacson, Jacqueline, and Louis Blumenfeld
 Johnston, Marilyn and Ray
 Katz, Tobie
 Kelliher, Marion
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 Laiuppa, Mary
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 Lobre, John and Gloria
 Marchetti, Ron and Ruthanne
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 Rosenthal, Jan
 Schmoll, Ralph and Louise
 Schulman, Sydney
 Seidell, John and Leatrice
 Shalev, Dorothy
 Smith, Robert and Sharon
 Stockton, Edward and Marilyn
 Stolzenberg, Ginger
 Stout, John and Elizabeth
 Thompson, William and Shirley
 Tinto, Gail
 Wall, Anne
 Weissenburger, William and Lois Ann
 Whalen, Robert and Penny
 Wolcott, Wendy, and Jeffrey Small
 Wright, Claudia and Rick
 Zyla, Barbara

Total donations: \$4,095 as of 1/10/20