



The Wintonbury Drummer

Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

April 2020

Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights From the 1930s to the 1980s

Presented by Dr. Traci Parker

Prosser Public Library

Wednesday, May 13, 2020, 6:00 PM

Dr. Traci Parker will examine the movement to racially integrate white-collar work and consumption in American department stores. In so doing she will broaden our understanding of historical change in African American class and labor groupings.

The department store movement was built on earlier struggles for justice. It channeled the power of store workers and consumers to promote black freedom in the mid-twentieth century. Sponsoring lunch counter sit-ins and protests in the 1950s and 1960s, and challenging discrimination in the courts in the 1970s, this movement ended in the early 1980s with the conclusion of the Sears, Roebuck affirmative action cases and the subsequent transformation and consolidation of American department stores.

In documenting the experiences of African American workers and consumers during this era, Parker will highlight the department store as a key site for the beginning of a modern black middle class and will demonstrate the ways that both work and consumption were battlegrounds for civil rights.



Prosser Library publicity photo

(Note: Previous WHS programs on related topics were presented on September 7, 2011 by Elizabeth Abbe on "G. Fox and Company in the 1950s" and on February 3, 2016 by Dr. Barbara Beeching on "Hopes and Expectations: The Origins of the Black Middle Class in Hartford.")

IN THIS ISSUE: Page 2: Board of Directors topics. Pages 3-6: History of the Bloomfield Square Dance Club, Part 4. Pages 6 & 8: Bloomfield's Dr. Bestor. Page 7: House With a History: 462A Tunxis Avenue. Page 8: Drummer Index for 2019; Metacomet kids visit Old Farms School.

DIRECTORY**President**

William Weissenburger

Past President

Richard Pierce

Vice-presidents

Elizabeth Merrow

Ruthanne Marchetti

Treasurer

Judy Dahlgren-Dechand

Secretary

Marilyn Johnston

Curators

Ralph & Louise Schmoll

Genealogists

Jean Perreault

Janis Langston

Prosser Liaison

Allison Wilkos

Board of Directors**2020**

Tobie Katz

Ruthanne Marchetti

Ron Marchetti

Nicholas Panke

2021

Homer Guilmartin

Richard Hughes

Mara Whitman

Vacancy

2022

Paula Baram

Mary Laiuppa

Aaron Romano

Wendy Wolcott

BOARD OF DIRECTORS TOPICS

Due to community efforts to stop the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the Board did not meet as scheduled in March. The Society has **three major capital improvement projects** in progress and prioritized as follows:

1.) We have submitted to Robert Smith, and the Town Council a request for \$15,000 to remove the existing **wood ramp and rear deck** (which has deteriorated and poses a safety hazard to the public) and replace them with Trex weather-proof materials at **The Fannie Gabriel History Center**. Following several meetings with Mr. Smith, he agreed to include our request in his current budget submission as a reasonable and necessary capital expense item. *Assuming all goes well, this project should be completed by this Fall.*

2.) We have an estimate of \$2,400 to **replace the existing sidewalk** to the **Old Farm School** with better grading, drainage and slate pavers from the parking lot to the front door. *Funds will need to be raised from donors, grants, etc.*

3.) The Society was awarded a mini grant in 2019 to have Robert Hurd, Architect, complete a cost estimate for restoration of the Old Farm School. This school is an important symbol of the history of public education in Bloomfield, having served as a school from construction in 1796 until 1922...over 125 years! It then served as a community meeting place until 1970 when the building was relocated to the present site and restored. After 50 years, the building now needs further restoration work, including new gutters, new storm windows, restoration of windowsills and repairs to the chimney, etc. *We are currently working with the Connecticut Trust for Historical Preservation to secure the estimated \$80,700 cost estimate.*

ATTENTION!

The Wintonbury Drummer requests that readers contribute articles, personal reminiscences, book reviews, photographs, etc. Materials for publication in the June issue should be received by May 15, 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

Aaron J. Romano P. C., 55 Woodland Avenue

Sir Speedy Printing, 21 Old Windsor Road

Wade's Farms, 498 Simsbury Road

Windsor Federal Savings, 54 Jerome Avenue

The Wintonbury Drummer

is published five times a year by

Wintonbury Historical Society, Inc.

151-153 School Street, P.O. Box 7454

Bloomfield, CT 06002

Tel. 860-243-1531

Editor: Richard Pierce

Email: wintonburyhistory@gmail.com

A HISTORY OF THE BLOOMFIELD SQUARE DANCE CLUB, PART 4

Part 4 concludes this historical sketch, previous portions of which were published in the September, November, and February issues. I hope it has been of some interest to general readers to review one of the numerous thriving volunteer organizations of the late twentieth century. Time has moved on and other volunteer causes now occupy Americans; but the enthusiasm, the optimism, and the willingness to serve are still needed today. Thanks for reading. –Dick Pierce

ACTIVITIES THAT HELPED BUILD CLUB SPIRIT

Clothing

Club spirit was built in special ways, one of which was the dance costume. Women usually wore blouses and full skirts over crinoline petticoats, though some invested in nice western-style dresses. Most dancers consciously tried to dress appropriately and add to the party-like atmosphere of a dance. In Fall, 1972, Janet Swan made arrangements with a fabric retailer called Calico House to buy fabric for club skirt kits at \$6.10 each. Club outfits were to be worn especially to Festivals and on banner raids where members were present as a group. The design was purple and white check. Men would have a matching tie from the same fabric. In those days, men were expected to wear long-sleeve shirts all year and not to dance in blue jeans. Most men bought special western-style pants and shirts at a square-dance shop and wore a tie of some sort. Women wore specially purchased soft slip-on shoes, and men wore a comfortable, usually soft-soled, shoe.



Example of an elegant dress
from google images

Special Events

Special events made many members more enthusiastic. In 1972, when Frank Johns, head of Oak Hill School on Blue Hills Avenue, was president, the club decided to have a New Year's Eve Dance. The dances were held at the Oak Hill School for three years from December 31, 1972 through 1974. The 1974 dance cost \$16 per couple and had a social hour 8 to 9, dancing 9 to 11:30, with a catered buffet and BYOB, 11:30 to 2:00. In 1975 the New Year's dance was held at the Junior High School. At its height this dance attracted 55-60 couples; but, since only half that number turned out at the Junior High, it was the last such event scheduled. Frank Johns passed away in late 1977, leaving his wife Caroline and a legacy of good leadership in the Bloomfield club.

Having a theme for a dance was fun to do. In November 1972 the club held a "Night of the Scarecrow" dance with special decorations and refreshments. By 1974 the club had appointed a Special Events Committee, the main job of which was to add color and interest to regular club dances using decorations, themes, door prizes, etc. Les and Millie Oxer were chairs of this committee in 1975-76. One theme that year was a Hat Dance, with prizes for prettiest, most original, and funniest hats. An International Night in 1975 featured the performance of folk dances from several nations. A Hallowe'en dance found some couples in costumes, and the one who guessed the weight of a pumpkin won a prize. A Gridiron Dance and a Thanksgiving-Harvest Dance were held in 1975. In 1976 there was a Valentine's Day dance, a Presidents Ball, and a Hawaiian Night, and a Hallowe'en Dance. At the Halloween Dance, Ev and Flossie Havens dressed as Raggedy Andy and Ann. Robert and Helga Toft came as Black Cats. Dick and Ann Bishop were clowns.

Workshops—where dancers practiced the more challenging figures—were enjoyable. At a workshop on March 5, 1980, caller Jack O'Leary did a great job. "Using the number system, we danced with many other couples." (Note: This was a way of mixing people up. Couples took numbers when they came in, and for each dance it was announced which numbers would dance together. This was a way of overcoming the tendency of friends to dance together and exclude visitors or newer dancers.)

Then there were special events. Saturday December 6, 1975 saw the club celebrating its 15th anniversary (the club was officially born on March 31, 1960). In the first year Walt and Dot Hill were presidents, Julian and Florence Perlstein vice-presidents, Dwayne and Becky Rowley secretary, and Wall and Dot

Nordstrom treasurer. “How sweet it is that two of these four couples are still active [in 1975] and that we occasionally see Walt and Dot Hill around town.” (Perlsteins and Nordstroms were the two still active.) The caller on the 6th was Don Hannhurst, who in October 1963 was the caller for the first “ticket dance” held by the club. Twenty sets (160 people) attended the dance. Ed and Maria Speck erected an entrance arch in the form of the Club badge. Home-made sandwiches and goodies were supplied along with an anniversary cake which was too beautiful to cut!

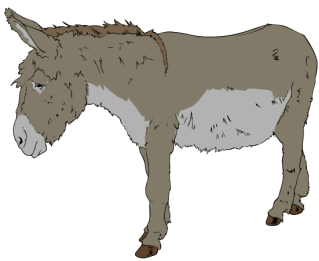
“The Twentieth Anniversary Dance on Friday, May 2, 1980 was a gala affair. Colorful signs made by Dave Kelmer proclaimed, ‘Welcome to Bloomfield’ and ‘20th Anniversary.’ Bunches of balloons furnished and inflated by Joe Kaunitz decorated the walls all around the gym. Six geraniums, later given as door prizes, ornamented the callers’ platform. Jean Pierce fixed pretty bouquets in bud vases for the tables, and Shirley Sabin made a beautiful floral arrangement for the buffet table. A large sheet cake with purple lettering against a white background was made by Ann Bishop and decorated by Flossie Havens. An historical booklet produced by Dick and Jean Pierce and duplicated by Ed Sabin was handed out to the dancers. Fifty-nine members and 104 guests filled the floor with twenty sets. Banners were awarded to the Rip Snorters and to Farmington Valley. [. . .] We welcomed and introduced the club’s first caller and teacher, Tom Nichols and his wife, Mim. The club’s first presidents, Walt and Dot Hill, were there, along with Armand and Mabel Chenette, Julian and Florence Perlstein, and Naomi Shenkman (Al was unable to be there), charter members who are still actively dancing.”



From google images

In May 1983 the club sponsored a live band dance with Russ Peterson and Frannie Heintz calling and the Country Spice Band. It was so well-attended, that it was held again in 1984, 1985, and 1986.

Special Promotions



From google images

Then there were occasional “gimmicks” to boost spirit. Pedro was a stuffed donkey who started out in East Hartford in 1967. The club having the most dancers over two squares got to take him home with them. Some will remember when this honor (?) was bestowed upon the Bloomfield club. Word was received in 1978 from the Cobequid Twirlers of Truro, Nova Scotia, that they had Pedro. They held a special tenth anniversary Christmas dance in his honor on December 13. Fortunately, Bloomfield was unable to be represented, and some other lucky club became the new temporary guardian of Pedro.

In February 1978, four couples went to Glastonbury and, although there were three banner raids that night, they came home with Merry Mixer. She was a two-foot doll owned by the Merrie Mixers of Portland. She went home with the club who attended a dance she was at with four or more couples from the greatest distance. The Bloomfield club had a Bloomfield Squares pin made to add to the collection already on her dress, kept her for two weeks where she lived “in style” at the Pierces, and sent her on her travels at their Beginners Ball. The Farmington Valley Squares of Simsbury were delighted to carry her off to her next adventure.

Badges and Fun Badges

Name badges were important to the friendliness of square dancing. Dancers always wore name badges identifying them and their club. And while a person could have attended a square dance without belonging to a club, very seldom did you meet a dancer like that. Callers, too, could have put on dances without any affiliation with a club—at least in theory, but a caller-sponsored dance was a rare thing in New England. In other words, square dancing was very much a club-centered activity. Each year the Bloomfield club ordered badges for its new members from an engraver in West Hartford. (See badge photos in the September *Drummer*.)

Many dancers purchased a small autograph booklet in which they obtained signatures of callers at

the dances they attended. When dancers had obtained the signatures of one hundred callers, they qualified for a “Century Badge.” Some people wore their Century badges in addition to their club badges when they went dancing. Some even purchased a second autograph book and tried for two hundred signatures.

Fun badges were small discs which could be hung from a plastic bar with a pin on it, to wear for fun when dancing. (A picture is in the September issue.) Some fun badges were given out as favors at a specially themed dance, such as a Friday the 13th Black Cat Dance. Others could be purchased at special events, such as state and regional festivals. The most important fun badge, it was said, was for being an “angel” at lessons—a graduate dancer who attended a certain percentage of a lesson series to help the new dancers. When the Bloomfield Barnstompers had their 10th anniversary dance, they gave a fun badge to attendees. Dancing on February 29 might get you a Leap Year fun badge with a frog on it. Dancing in blue jeans (uncommon) qualified you for a blue jeans badge. At a SMILE dance in 1977, everyone wore smile badges. This writer collected fourteen fun badges from the annual Connecticut Square and Round Dance Festival, 1980-1994. One caller had a humorous twist on this badge-collecting obsession. Frannie Heintz, a popular, even beloved caller, dispensed “bazonga” badges. He would have any dancers who wanted to come up front and go through a brief mock ceremony after which he pronounced them “bazonganized” and qualified to wear a special badge with the word “bazonga” on it along with a drawing of a stereotyped Native American (which would be considered bad taste today but was then deemed humorous). At graduation in 1981, Joe and Ursula Kaunitz, Art Hughes, and Jean Obed finally got Russ Peterson all wrapped up in toilet paper to qualify everybody there for a Mummy Badge.



Typical fun badge array
From R. Pierce

BARNSTOMPERS: THE TEEN CLUB

The teen club graduated its first class in February 1971 (teens needed fewer lessons than adults). In the 1972-73 year, Jerry and Gloria Kiel, Fred and Doreen Havens, and Bob and Judi McBair were advisors. Beginners Balls, such as the one in January 1973, were often done cooperatively with the adult club, with multiple callers calling. As mentioned in the last *Drummer*, in January 1973 the Barnstompers graduated 90 new dancers and then took a bus trip to a dance in Andover, Massachusetts.

In April 1974 a group of Barnstompers attended the New England Convention in Providence. In 1975-76, the teens had a class of 34 girls and 30 boys. The teens traveled to Bridgewater, MA for the annual teen jamboree. They brought home a trophy for the largest club attendance (for about the fifth time in the past six years).

In October 1976, at the time of the annual Open House (introductory lesson), teen club membership stood at about fifty. In 1977, the Barnstompers had a spaghetti supper and dance on January 21 with about twenty teens from the Swinging Squares of Chicopee, MA, joining them. February 28 was graduation night. The new class that fall had enrolled about 25 teens, but only 15 graduated in March 1978. Twenty-one teens took a bus trip to the CT State Festival on March 20. The 1979-80 class enrolled 28 students. In 1980 thirteen Barnstompers joined with more than twenty Windsor and East Hartford teens to travel to the Connecticut Festival in Trumbull. In April 1981, out of a membership of 26, 22 teens visited the Cellar Dwellers.

Brian and Bruce McCue were the first callers for the Barnstompers, starting in 1970. Suptei Rogers of Windsor was hired to teach teen lessons starting in fall, 1978, and continued until 1985. The 10th annual graduation was on April 11, 1980 with eight new graduates. The club’s 10th Anniversary Dance was on October 10, 1980. Fourteen graduated in 1981.

On Friday, May 18, 1979, there were 26 guests from the Tobacco Valley Twirlers, the Cellar Dwell-

ers, the Lone Stars, and the Happy Hoofers. Door prizes and Bubble Gum fun badges added to the fun. The club picnic was held near the town pool on June 15. At the dance afterwards, 17 visitors from the Hampden Junior Promenaders danced to Suptei Rogers. Officers for 1979-80 were Heidi Reisner, president, Patty Gray, vice-president, Sarah Pierce, secretary, and Mark Trumpler, treasurer. A November 1980 dance was attended by over forty teens, including visitors from East Hartford, Windsor, and Broad Brook (a new club).

Six Barnstompers shared one "Petersen Special" sundae after dancing in East Hartford to Ray Moskewich on December 21, 1980. A week later 14 teens and five adults went to the Beginners Ball with Ken Ritucci in Windsor. The next Friday was the Bloomfield Beginners Ball. Then a week after that was the annual spaghetti supper and dance on January 11. Fourteen teens and six adults enjoyed the supper with the help of Helen Marks in the Junior High kitchen. When Suptei Rogers called, there were five sets on the floor, 16 Barnstompers and 22 guests.

In the spring of 1982, the Barnstompers were drawing from 50 to 80 dancers. The 12th Annual Graduation Dance drew 65 dancers in March. In that year the club had 50 members (2/3 girls). In 1983-84 only seven people were taking lessons, and a second open house was held in January to attract more people. It was necessary to have at least 24 taking lessons to break even financially. In February 1984 only two new dancers graduated. Eleven club members were recognized that year as angels, arch-angels, martyrs, or saints (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year of helping at lessons).



Barnstompers banner made with a silk screen designed by one of the parents; measured 17 X 5"

In 1981 the Tobacco Valley Twirlers of Windsor had folded because no adult advisor could be found. However, there were still many teen dancers. Seven carloads of Barnstompers raided the Cellar Dwellers of East Hartford on December 4 of that year. One week later, on December 11, almost 90 teens danced to Suptei Rogers at Bloomfield Junior High. The following week, 41 teens boarded a school bus in Bloomfield and visited the Sundown Squares in New Hartford. But the downward trend continued. In March 1985 it was announced that the Barnstompers would not schedule any more dances. Membership at that point was only 15. "Since last fall we have been unable to have our own dances, and it appears that the club will have to cease all activities at the end of this season." The Pierces became advisors in 1978 and served for seven seasons (while their daughters were dancing). The club treasury was not exhausted, and the town Recreation Department was willing to support lessons financially. But the club could not go forward without advisors and the successful recruiting of dancers. It was time.

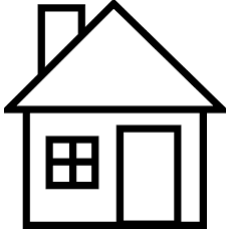


Bloomfield's Dr. Bestor

Whirlwind Hill is a mess—on the south side. That area, directly across from the entrance to Mountain View Cemetery (and owned by the Cemetery) is currently leased out as a staging area for the contractor installing the new water main under Maple Avenue, Brown Street, and Mills Lane. You would never know, driving over the hill, that this was (please turn to page 8)—



The Bestor Home, WHS Archives photo



HOUSE WITH A HISTORY: 462A TUNXIS AVENUE

The First Baptist Church of Bloomfield was incorporated under that name in 1904, but its history stretched back over a hundred years to 1786 when, early in the Second Great Awakening, a group of dissenters broke off from the Wintonbury Congregational Church to form a new congregation. Family names found among the Baptist membership included Gillette, Bidwell, Thrall, Hubbard, Newberry, and Griswold. A meeting house was built, and then a second, larger one. According to a *Wintonbury Drummer* article in 2014, “In the early 1900s the Bloomfield church saw a declining membership and in October 1920 merged with a group from Hartford to form the Blue Hills Baptist Church at the corner of Blue Hills Avenue and Euclid Street in Hartford. More recently, this church moved to Bloomfield Avenue in Windsor and was renamed Sanctuary of Faith and Glory.”

An undated photograph of the second building appears below, left. This photograph was featured in a publication called *The Bloomfield Column* for November 5, 1963. “The one-time Baptist Church,” it says, “was formerly situated where Regini’s Gasoline Station now stands [northwest corner of Park and Jerome Avenues]. This building was moved three times. Its final resting place is behind William Talbot’s home, 462 Tunxis. Mr. Talbot, an antiques collector, uses it for a workshop. He restores and refinishes fine clocks and furniture.”

Nowadays, the building—neither church nor workshop any longer—serves as a handsome home at 462A Tunxis Avenue Extension (photo below, right), occupying a rear lot that borders the Farmington River and the town’s Riverside Park. It has four bedrooms, two and a half bathrooms, and some 1,600 square feet of living area. Town records list it as having been built in 1930, which can’t be accurate but may be the date when it was moved.

Sources:

See *From Wintonbury to Bloomfield*, page 17, and the *Wintonbury Drummer* for May 2012, page 6, and for April 2014, page 3. On the Second Great Awakening, see <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Second-Great-Awakening>.



R. Pierce photo taken from the parking lot of Riverside Park.

INDEX TO THE WINTONBURY DRUMMER FOR CALENDAR 2019

All-America City Update Report	September	3
Band of Steady Habits	June	1
Bettencourt, Alice	November	8
Bidwell, Bruce	November	3
Bloomfield Square Dance Club	September	4-6
Bloomfield Square Dance Club	November	4-7
Bus Tours	June	3
Business Spotlight	June	5
Caruso, Beth	September	1
Catalog of Congregations, conclusion	June	4
Community Involvement, Rise and Fall	September	6-7
Demery, Robert and Edna	June	7
Destiny Church	February	4-5
Document scanning member benefit	February	3
Evolution of Bloomfield Center	November	1
Filley Street #34	June	7
Franklin, Sara	February	1
Gardens, New	September	7
Gray, Henry, M.D.	April	7-8
Greater Hartford Wesleyan Church	April	4-5
Green Machine, The	June	5
Honor Roll of Year-End Donors	February	8
House With a History: 34 Filley Street	June	7
Hubbs, Dennis	November	3
Human Services Center	September	8
It's Just an Old Barn	February	7
Johnston, Marilyn	September	3
Kret, Robert	September	2
Lewis, Edna	February	1
Marchetti, Ron	April	1
Member Benefits	June	8
Metacomet students visit OFS	February	3
Miller, Nathan	April	6
Mr. Bidwell Remembers Bloomfield	November	3
New Building Evokes Notable History	September	8
One Hundred Years Ago	February	6-7
Rise and Fall of Community Involvement	September	6-7
Schmoll, Ralph	April	1
Schmoll, Ralph and Louise	November	1
Seven Ways History is Essential, #7	February	3
Square Dance Club History, Part 1	September	4-6
Square Dance Club History, Part 2	November	4-7
Those Curious Traprock Houses	April	1
Traprock Houses	April	1
Wesleyanism	April	5-6
Wirsul, Lucy	February	7
Witch Trial in Windsor	September	1
Wood, Alvin and Beatrice	September	8
Woodward, Walt	June	1

(from page 6) once the site of the beautiful home of Dr. and Mrs. Eugene L. Bestor, replete with their famous woodland gardens.

Seventy years ago, in January 1950, more than 160 persons gathered at the Tumble Brook Country Club to honor Dr. Bestor upon his retirement from eighteen years of service on the Bloomfield Board of Finance and Town Council. He also served several years on the town's Board of Education. (*Hartford Courant*, January 31, 1970, page 14)

Dr. Bestor practiced as a physician and surgeon for 48 years. He was married to the former Louise Loveland of Bloomfield. Eugene and Louise were active members of the First Congregational Church, where he served as chairman of the finance committee. Bestor Lane, off Park Avenue, is named for him.

Dr. Bestor died at age 91 on July 26, 1973 at the Pierce Memorial Baptist Home, Brooklyn, Connecticut, where he had once served on the Board of Directors. (Louise came from a Baptist family and had grown up in the Blue Hills Baptist Church.) (See the *Hartford Courant*, July 27, 1973, page 3.)

Full disclosure: The Pierce Home in Brooklyn was the birthplace and boyhood home of your editor. See Over Tunxis Trails, pp. 42f. for more on this house.



Metacomet School third-graders visited the Old Farm School on January 22-23. Jan and Don Baker (left) talked about life in 1796 and demonstrated period clothing.

—Bill Weissenburger photos

