



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

November 2020

EARLY EDUCATION IN WINTONBURY/BLOOMFIELD

Monday, November 2, 2020, 6:30 PM

Inaugural showing via Zoom of the latest Schmoll video!

This new video by Ralph Schmoll is an overview of the development and evolution of Education and Schools in Wintonbury/Bloomfield. In colonial times great value was placed on education, not only to prepare children to read the Scriptures, but to prepare them to find honest work. In the years that followed, education changed in ways the Founding Fathers could not have imagined.



Center School
WHS Archives photo

Register ahead of time by logging on to the Bloomfield Library website, <https://bplct.org>. Click on Event Calendar and navigate to November 2. Click on the program listing and register. You will then receive by email a link to the Zoom program. (If you haven't done it, download Zoom software at <https://zoom.us/download>.) You can actually use any device that accesses the internet, or you can listen on your telephone. Call Prosser for help.

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Society held its annual meeting via Zoom on Wednesday, September 9. The meeting was hosted by Prosser Library, using its paid Zoom membership. The minutes of the June 2019 meeting were approved. By-laws changes, which had been sent to the membership well ahead of time, were approved. The change you'll notice most is the move of the annual meeting to September so as to fit better with our July to June fiscal year. Officers and directors were elected as listed in the September *Drummer* and at the left of this page. The treasurer's report showed \$8,200 in income and \$8,600 in expenses. Total assets are \$286,000.

COVID-19 protocols were approved, and Dr. John Cappadonna agreed to coordinate their implementation. Our buildings will remain closed to the public until the Board of Directors meets following the governor's approval of reopening.

The Board of Directors approved Bill Weissenburger's offer to paint the deteriorating Old Farm School windowsills. Bill and Doug Barnard are working to obtain estimates on trimming or removing certain trees. The Society will move ahead on replacing the History Center ramp at a cost of \$1,500. The Old Farm School heat will be shut off over the winter and the plumbing drained.

Correction: In the September *Drummer*, on page 7, the words "Chief Bill Riley, who in turn asked former chief Adolph Jacobson" should have read "Chief Bill Riley, who had learned from former chief Adolph Jacobson." Jacobson died in April 1998.

Please send in your reminiscences, book reviews, photos, letters, etc. Deadline for the February issue is January 13, 2021. Thank you!

OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS*(renewals currently on hold)*

Bloomfield Garage, 986 Park Avenue
 Bloomfield Village Pizza, 34 Tunxis Avenue
 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
 Sir Speedy Printing, 21 Old Windsor Road
 Wade's Farms, 498 Simsbury Road

*(And there's room for more!)**The Wintonbury Drummer*

is published five times a year by
 Wintonbury Historical Society, Inc.
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BLOOMFIELD'S BLUE HILLS ORIGINS

In 1661, a Windsor resident named Edward Messenger bought land from the Indians in an unsettled part of town called Greenfield (now Bloomfield). He built a house on what is today Blue Hills Avenue, about where O'Reilly's Auto Parts now stands. Wintonbury Parish started here in 1735 with a petition from Peter Mills, Daniel Eggleston, and others. Life didn't change much on the Avenue until, in 1897, a trolley line was built from Hartford up Blue Hills Avenue to where the cemetery is today. Then commuters built new homes, and a neighborhood took shape. The Blue Hills "jog" (the part that extends south to Tower Avenue) thus became a progenitor of modern Bloomfield, receiving new, nonfarm residents from its neighbor city.



32 Elizabeth Avenue about 1900

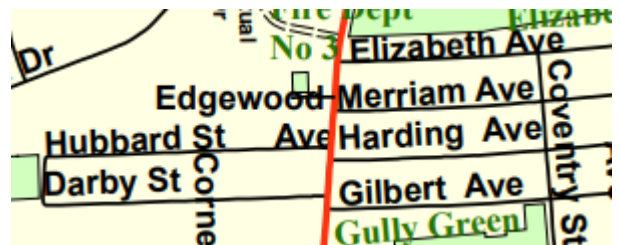
Photo supplied by Denise Robinson

In November 2018, the *Drummer* published an article on the house at 32 Elizabeth Avenue, stating that it was the first house built in the first planned residential development in Bloomfield. This house was the home of the Manion family from 1897 to 1992, when it was sold to its current owner, Denise Robinson, a few months before Mae Manion's death. The following article, discovered in Society files, was written by Nancy Mason after her interview with Mae's mother. It was originally published in the May 1975 issue of *Bloomfield* 06002.

SOUTHEAST BLOOMFIELD AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

A vivid picture of Bloomfield at the turn of the twentieth century emerged from a chat with Mrs. Emma Manion of Elizabeth Avenue. Mrs. Manion was one of Bloomfield's longest living residents. She and her brother moved there in 1897 with their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Malling.

At that time, the dirt (often mud) streets of Gilbert, Harding, Merriam and Elizabeth made up an area named Oakland Terrace. Hubbard and Darby streets were called Engleside. Blue Hills Avenue was paved, however, and a trolley traveled along it. There was no ice, no water, no central heating (only a kitchen and parlor stove), no electricity or bathroom facilities in their house. Water had to be carried from a nearby farm during August, September, and October, when a well digger finally arrived to dig a well.



The nearby produce farm, called "Newton's Farm," was on the Mt. Saint Benedict Cemetery site. Produce was grown there and sold at Newton and Burnett's store on the corner of North Main and Trumbull in Hartford.

Because of transportation problems (apparently cross-town transportation was a problem even then), Mrs. Manion and her brother could not attend Park Avenue School, so they went to Gravel Hill School opposite the First National building on Blue Hills Avenue for three years. They spent 4th through 9th grade at Northwest School on the corner of Albany Avenue and Woodland Street in Hartford, walking to school unless someone with a horse and wagon gave them a lift. Occasionally they rode the trolley (continued—>)

on wintry days, but this was too costly (60 tickets for \$1.00) for average weather.¹

Mrs. Manion's mother shopped at Pilgard's Store in Hartford. This was supplemented with purchases from the vegetable man and butcher's wagon once a week. Large purchases would be delivered by Pilgard's.

At the age of ten, Mrs. Manion remembers a spectacular fire at the farm next door when Newton's barn burned to the ground. No fire-fighting equipment was available.

Mrs. Manion voted during President Hoover's election for the first time after women finally won the right to vote.

Most of the land surrounding northern Blue Hills Avenue was used for farming. Some slaughterhouses were operating. The large white house next to [the old] Wintonbury Library² and the [Fuss] house on the north-west corner of Park Avenue and Blue Hills Avenue³ are two very old homes in the area as well as a few in the Oakland Terrace and Engleside areas. Woods were found at the foot of Elizabeth Avenue.

Mrs. Manion remembers well a long-time first selectman, Frank Hall, whose family ran a slaughterhouse and grew fresh fruits not too far away. He sometimes delivered mail on horseback.

MORE BLUE HILLS AVENUE HISTORY

In 1995, Bloomfield historian Roberta Kania gave a talk at a historical society meeting on the history of the Blue Hills area. She added several more interesting insights on early twentieth century life in that neighborhood. She started with where the children went to school. The 1869 town map shows that families living south of the present-day Mt. Saint Benedict Cemetery belonged to a joint school district with Hartford. Their children attended Gravel Hill School. Mabel Butler and Morgan Clark both went to Gravel Hill



Northwest School, Hartford
Albany Avenue at Woodland Street
R. Pierce photo 2020

School. Mr. Clark writes: "By 1903 I was attending the Gravel Hill School located on Blue Hills Avenue in Hartford near the city line. Mrs. Stratton was our regular teacher. Her daughter, Hazel Stratton, also taught us on occasion when Mrs. Stratton was out. . . . After completing three years of school there, we were transferred to the Northwest School on Albany Avenue in Hartford."⁴ Mabel Butler adds, "We walked, usually, and walked home. If it rained, I took the trolley. I rode with Bert Snyder, Llewellyn Tobie, Ethelwin Bidwell, and Willy Breiner, who lived on Cottage Grove Road at Lincoln Terrace. They all came in on the trolley to Northwest School. We had to pay for our own transportation, forty car tickets for a dollar. The town paid my tuition to Hartford."⁵

Clifford Butler, daughter Mabel, and the rest of his family, lived on Darby Street. Mr. Butler was a mailman, 1921 through 1954, at first with horse and wagon (which he took care of as part of his duty), then with a Model T Ford. Driving anything in Bloomfield in the spring was a chore. There were few paved roads and mud to your axles, whether car or wagon. Butler even delivered the *Hartford Courant*. Also living on Darby Street was John Milvae, who was town clerk for many years. Some people paid their property taxes to Mr. Milvae at his home, rather than travel from Blue Hills all the way to Town Hall. (continued—>)

BLOOMFIELD
WOMAN
VOTES FOR
PRESIDENT IN
1920!



—google images
(This is not Emma
Manion)

Clifford Butler continues: “A short distance from Darby Street was Hubbard Street, on which lived Fred and Clarence Starr and Clinton Jaycox. Continuing north on Blue Hills Avenue and on the west side of the street lived George Hubbard. He owned a small farm to which I was frequently sent in the late afternoon to purchase a pail of milk. The cost? Two cents!”

Morgan Clark adds some interesting details about the area. “On the northwest corner of Blue Hills Avenue and Darby Street the general store of E. B. Copeland was located. To enter one ascended the three or four wooden steps (typical of the construction of that era) In that store one could purchase general groceries, grains, feed, and penny candy, etc. Many items such as sugar, pickles and crackers were in barrels and would be weighed by the grocer on a sliding bar scale with a scoop at one end and provision for weights at the other. Lard and butter were sold from wooden tubs. Since most houses were lighted by kerosene oil lamps, customers purchased oil in their own one-gallon cans with a pouring spout. We would stick a potato over the spout to prevent spilling. Since there was no checkout counter at the time, a customer would tell the grocer what he or she wanted and the grocer would pick the item off the shelf and place it on the counter to add it up for the cost.”



Typical country store, about 1900
From dustyoldthing.com

As Roberta Kania noted, people in Bloomfield Center were farmers, while people in Blue Hills were commuters. She says that Blue Hills people, feeling left out of town government, formed the Citizens Party in 1925. Some of the organizers were John Milvae, Frank Hall, Leslie Goodrich, and Homer Reid.



Wintonbury Branch Library

Old building at 1041 Blue Hills Avenue
2020 photo by R. Pierce

They ran nine candidates for office, and everyone was elected. John Milvae was elected Town Clerk, and he did such a good job that even after the Citizens Party had served its purpose and disbanded (after about ten years), he was nominated by both Republicans and Democrats and attained a permanent appointment. The Citizens Party not only secured representation as selectmen, school board members, and constables, it also initiated the beginnings of the Blue Hills Volunteer Fire Department and of a branch library.

The first branch library, established in September 1933, was in the living room of a private home. Mrs. Blake was the first librarian. Later, the library was moved to the former fire house on Elizabeth Avenue, then to two rooms in a house at 885 Blue Hills Avenue. The present library was dedicated in November 1972 and replaced the rental property (1041 Blue Hills Avenue). Lee Kelmer was its popular librarian for several years.

The establishment of the library, expansion of the fire department, and the founding of Christ the King Church all took place during the “Great Depression” of the 1930s. It was remarkable, especially since the people here suffered from the Depression as did everyone else. Long before the rapid expansion of the 1950s, Bloomfield was stretching and growing and becoming a more modern town. *-The End-*

Notes:

1. In 1912, 65 Bloomfield children were attending school in Hartford. The town paid \$15 per pupil tuition to Hartford, an amount that came to be regarded as inadequate. In 1920 a proposal for Hartford to annex the southeast section of Bloomfield was defeated as financially unfavorable to Hartford. See the *Courant*, Dec. 20, 1912, page 15, and April 4, 1920, page 5.
2. The old library building at 1041 Blue Hills Avenue, just north of the Park Avenue turnoff. After it was a library, it became a hardware store and then a Christian bookstore. Today it is a hair salon.
3. What used to be called the Fuss House, the oldest house in town. It was eventually demolished, and a duplex Habitat for Humanity house now stands in that location.
4. *The Good Old Days* was published by the Wintonbury Historical Society in 1992 and contains articles written in 1985, the 150th anniversary of Bloomfield becoming a town. Mr. Clark’s story is on page 48. Mrs. Butler’s is on page 19.
5. This is from a script written by Roberta Kania for a program she presented to Society members in 1995. Her script is preserved in WHS files.

Postal Service in Bloomfield, Early 20th Century

By David C. Butler, BHS Class of 1937

Thanks to Ralph and Louise Schmoll for discovering this article at the Gabriel History Center.

My dad, Clifford O. Butler, was the mailman who delivered R. F. D. #2 in Bloomfield from 1921 through 1954. In the earliest days of his tenure, he delivered the mail by horse and wagon. I remember vividly the horses and wagon, the barn, the feedings and other aspects of this daily toil; but I do not recall clearly delivering mail by this method. Just a little later, though, the demands of progress intervened, and Dad was forced to buy a Model T Ford and learn to drive. Those days I remember as if it were yesterday, and peddling mail was part of our family life for the next thirty-odd years.

The Bloomfield Post Office at that time was a cubicle about six-foot-wide by twelve-foot-long located in Ladd's store. Ladd's store was situated about where the Drummer Boy statue is today.¹ The cubicle mentioned was between the part of Ladd's store that dealt in groceries and the part that served as an ice cream parlor.

A typical day would have Dad leaving for the post office at 7:00 A.M. to sort the mail for delivery. The mail arrived both by trolley car and train. That which arrived by trolley the motor man carried into the post office. That which arrived by train was wheel-barrowed from the train station, which was located just east of Jerome Avenue, to the post office by a Mr. Miller. While Dad was sorting the mail, the rest of the life of Bloomfield seemed to come and go around the post office. O. D. Filley, the tax collector, would come in and buy a big cigar from the grocery store operated by Mr. Ladd. Frank Hall, Sr., first selectman, would come in to pass the time of day, and then Mel Barnard would drive up in a touring car that seemed miles long. I can see them now: Tony Russo, the barber, Ernie Tavener, Ernie Allen, Hattie Goodwin, the town clerk, and the town blacksmith, Mr. Jacobsen. The topics were typically the progress of the Bloomfield High Team, the newly organized Citizens Party,² the most recent meeting of the Grange, or when the open trolleys would start running this summer.

Mom and I would get on the trolley at the corner of Hubbard Street and Blue Hills Avenue about 9:00 o'clock and ride to the post office. Shortly after our arrival, Dad would have finished sorting the mail and arranging it in order of delivery. The Model T is loaded and off we go. Bloomfield Avenue is not a problem, paved all the way. Delivery is easy and uninterrupted: the Barnards, Titcomb, Utleys, Calloway, Hayes, Carpenter, Daniels, Mill, Norwood, Kenney, and back to Cottage Grove Road; then east on Cottage Grove to Beebes, Lagan, Eddy, and Hubbard. That's as far as the road is passable, so we peddle Cow Hill:³ Cy Bestor's, Painters, Dudenhofer, Vincents, Marks, and Mann. Now can you imagine Cow Hills is impassable from Mann's to Park Avenue? So it's back to Cottage Grove, to Bloomfield Avenue, return to Bloomfield Center, take Park Avenue to Tyler Street and back to Cottage Grove Road. From the junction of Cottage Grove and Tyler Street, Dad would walk west to Cawtes, Kriss, Carrs, Wahlsted, Berkowetz, (continued—>)



Model T Ford Woody

Restored by Charlie Robert and seen here in his driveway on Julie Lane. He found the wagon moldering in a Putnam barn, determined that it was once his father's, and lovingly rebuilt it.

Photo supplied by Marilyn Robert

Ostopkaveck, Petsche, Demeo, et al., while Mom walked east to Blue Hills Avenue and delivered mail to Curtiss, Weishers, Hubes, Cheeseman, Birch, Douglas, Lynch, Urban, Gianetti, Willis, Lihou Karo, and Engel. Then Dad and I meet Mom at the corner of Blue Hills and Cottage Grove.

Most of the Blue Hills sector was either paved or the boxes were on Blue Hills Avenue. The backing, detouring, and walking would continue on parts of School Street, Wintonbury Avenue, and Woodland Avenue. Many times, we were pulled out of mud by a team of horses. Another irony of the times: the man who repaired Dad's broken-down auto was usually Mr. Jacobsen, the town blacksmith.



The mail played a much different role in the 1920s and 1930s than it does today. Many of the daily newspapers were delivered by mail and anxiously awaited by the recipients. Can you imagine living on Filley Street and receiving the *Courant* about 4:00 P. M. daily? Religious and club periodicals seemed to play a larger role in family life: Jewish newspapers, the Polish newspaper, the *Catholic Transcript*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and the Grange periodical seemed so important to the receiving families. However, I think the one piece of mail that was of ultra-importance, eagerly awaited, zealously protected, and read from cover to cover, was the Sears or Montgomery Ward catalog. Once received, this became the shopping list for the family until next year's edition came out.



from google images

After the Model T chugged down Woodland Avenue and back into the post office, Dad would sort that mail which came in on the afternoon train or trolley. Then it was off to Blue Hills and home after a long day. On the way home we would deliver mail to the few residents on Park Avenue west of Tyler Street: Bill Lagan, Bemans, Moore, McLaughlin, Joyce, and Smith.

An irony pursuant to this article: In the very beginning I mentioned that Dad had to buy and learn to drive a Model T Ford. He purchased that car from Mr. Merton Aldrich. About thirty years later, Mr. Aldrich's son Merton took over Dad's route upon his retirement. Merton, of course, is the present-day supervisor in Bloomfield's post office.

Permit me a personal aside. Dad was a devoted mailman. Outside of his family, the most important people in the world were those who lived on his mail route. No matter what got in the way, they must get their mail. Not a single Christmas card or package was ever left in the post office, no matter how late he delivered on Christmas Eve. When World War II came along and a letter from a serviceman was received, it wasn't just left in the mailbox. It was hand carried or the horn tooted until the family was alerted to the letter. -The End-

Notes:

1. Butler refers to the original location of the Drummer Boy, placed at the back (eastern) side of the town green in 1976. After the renewal of the green, the statue was resituated in 2020 close to the Park Avenue/Tunxis Avenue intersection.
2. The Citizens Party was formed in 1925 to promote the interests of Blue Hills area residents. It was very successful, but was disbanded about ten years later after it had served its purpose.
3. Cow Hill is known as Prospect Street today.

THEN AND NOW

by Lydia Wadhams

Reprinted from *The Bloomfield ZIP—06002* for April 1976

The selling of groceries in the early days was probably carried on in an extra room in someone's house. The provisions were undoubtedly meager since much of the needs of the kitchen were supplied by each family. Each homestead had its own source of dairy products, and meats were preserved by primitive methods, but such necessities as flour and sugar, coffee, tea and spices, and probably such articles as needles and thread and a few types of dress materials were made available by some enterprising individual.

There were two sites in Bloomfield Center which in later years became used as grocery stores. One was on Tunxis Avenue, across from the Congregational Church and the other faced on the original Wintonbury Avenue on what is now the western edge of Wintonbury Mall. Members of the Rowley family were the proprietors of this store in the 1800s. Later Mr. Raymond Ladd conducted a business there with Mr. Jesse Webster having a meat market in the rear.

One of the early owners of the store on Tunxis Avenue is remembered as Mr. Wallace Dean. An interesting aspect of his store was the little metal cash box which ran on an overhead track from the grocery clerk's position to the cashier's desk, manned by Miss Lena Mexcur. Mr. Ernest Tavener, with his always helpful wife, Katie, was for many years the owner of that store. One of the nicest parts of their store was the addition of a small section to accommodate an ice cream parlor complete with soda fountain, small round tables, and bent metal chairs. Mr. Ladd also conducted such a facility as well as housing the post office in one corner of the store with Mrs. Ladd as postmaster. The Tavener store burned in 1849 and, while rebuilding, they conducted business in the lower room of the Old Town Hall. An A & P, the first chain store in Bloomfield, used the Tunxis Avenue location at one time.

The East section of the town seems not to have been served in the early days by a store as such, but an older resident remembers being supplied by a butcher's cart and purveyors of fruit and vegetables, coffee and dairy products. With the advent of supermarkets, very few privately owned stores are in existence.



THANK YOU!

WHS President Bill Weissenburger volunteered this Fall to paint the deteriorated windowsills at the Old Farm School. This will protect the wood from the weather until the Society can secure a grant for about \$75,000 needed to do more extensive work. Thanks, Bill!!!



Left: Windowsill before painting; Right: rotted wood