



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

June 2021

JUNE PROGRAM FEATURES STATE HISTORIAN

“Creating Connecticut” presented by Walt Woodward
Wednesday, June 23, 2021, 4:00 PM via Zoom.

Connecticut State Historian Walter Woodward helps us understand how people and events in Connecticut’s past played crucial roles in forming the culture and character of Connecticut today. Woodward, a gifted story-teller, brings the history we thought we knew to life in new ways, from the nearly forgotten early presence of the Dutch, to the time when Connecticut was New England’s fiercest prosecutor of witches, the decades when Nutmeggers were rapidly leaving the state, and the years when Irish immigrants were hurrying into it. Whether it’s his investigation into the unusually rough justice meted out to Revolutionary War hero Nathan Hale, or a peek into Mark Twain’s smoking habits, *Creating Connecticut* will leave you thinking about our state’s past—and its future—in a whole new way.

► This is a ZOOM Program. To attend, please register ahead of time at the Bloomfield Public Library website. Go to <https://bplct.org>, click on Event Calendar, and complete the registration. The library will send the necessary link to your email inbox.



Walt Woodward

Photo from <https://history.uconn.edu>

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board held a Zoom meeting on Wednesday, April 14, with seventeen people present. Reports included a fine attendance of 77 people for Wendy Wolcott's April 6 program. The treasurer's report showed income of \$6,600 since July 1 and expenses of \$9,100 (including the tree removal). She also said that our Vanguard investments have grown to \$304,000. Libbie Merrow reported that she has had the gardens at the history campus prepared for the season. Meanwhile, maintenance is being done on the History Center's HVAC system, and a new dehumidifier is needed. Also, research questions have come in and been responded to by Janis Langston.

The question of when to open our buildings was discussed. If we observe the usual COVID-19 protocols and complete a self-assessment questionnaire, we are free to open. We will open the Gabriel History Center on Monday afternoon, May 3. The Old Farm School will open Sunday afternoons beginning on May 16. In addition, the Society will once again participate in Connecticut Open House Day, Saturday, June 12, 11:00 to 3:00.

The Board also met on May 12, again with seventeen present. One of the discussions at that meeting involved a request from the town's Library Building Committee for input on a possible History Room at the new library (currently in the planning stage). Should it be large enough to hold all of the WHS document files?

The Society's annual meeting will be on September 22, 3:00 PM.

ATTENTION!

The Wintonbury Drummer invites readers to contribute articles, personal reminiscences, book reviews, photographs, etc. Materials for publication in the September issue should be received by July 31, 2021. (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*(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
 Many Rivers Community Acupuncture, 3 Barnard Lane
 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
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Snippets from Mrs. Warner

By Lydia Wadhams

Published in *The Bloomfield ZIP—06002*, January 1976

One of the best accounts of early Bloomfield history is in Trumbull's *Memorial History of Hartford County* published in 1886. The section on Bloomfield was written by Mrs. Elisabeth Warner; and while much of it may be quite familiar to most of you, I would like to quote some of the interesting items in this well-written history.

Her description of the geographical and ecological make-up of the town includes this bit of interest to naturalists: "All this fertile region abounds in birds. A former resident remembers counting forty-six kinds about her home, among them the scarlet tanager, cuckoo, rose-breasted grosbeak, killdeer, and indigo bunting.

"It was always the home of the fringed gentian and almost every other flower in New England. There are woods of oak and chestnut, with roads intersecting each other in every direction like Indian trails or cow paths, so that the saying came about that 'every farmer had a road of his own to Hartford.'"

Concerning early schools, Mrs. Warner writes: "The schools were generally kept by male instructors in winter and females in summer. One of the teachers, an old gray-haired man, had the habit of getting his queue done over during 'noon spell.' One little girl trembled so that she could scarcely tie the black ribbon as the master sat by the fire keeping order. This same little girl had such a good memory for grammar that her teacher delighted in taking her about the streets and into the homes of evenings to show off, where her listeners would exclaim, 'What a pity she isn't a boy.'" Early male chauvinism?

Finally, a quotation about the real predecessors of our town: "In the early days, Indians often went roving through the town selling their baskets and other wares. A family of Mohegans used to settle down to their basket-making by the Old Farms Brook. They would say to the little boys that all the land belonged to them and they could get their basket stuff wherever they liked. As they fished in the stream, they would tell how in the days of their fathers the salmon and lamprey-eels used to run up there from the Connecticut." This is difficult to imagine on the eve of 1976.



Fringed gentian
(*Gentianopsis crinita*)
From Google images



BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT:

Many Rivers Community Acupuncture was founded in 2011 as a way to provide high-quality healthcare at an affordable rate. Many Rivers provides acupuncture treatments on a sliding scale to help everyone afford the healing they need. The clinic moved to Bloomfield from Windsor in 2019 and its staff is proud to be part of this vibrant community. They work every day to continue to make Bloomfield "the nicest town in Connecticut." Their highly trained acupuncturists treat pain, digestive disorders, allergies, depression and anxiety, gynecological disorders, and more. Their goal is to help their patients release stress, promote healing, and regain peace. Their office may be found at 3 Barnard Lane, off Bloomfield Avenue across from Town Hall. See www.manyriversacupuncture.com or call 860-683-0011. Owner Carrie Sawtell (right in photo) is a Bloomfield resident and WHS member.



Editor's note: The following poem was found in Society files.

BLOOMFIELD FOREVER!

By James H. Roberts, Wethersfield, Conn., October 31, 1930
Presented to the Wintonbury Cemetery Association, Bloomfield, Connecticut, November 2, 1930, on the occasion of the unveiling of a monument in honor of Gov. Roger Wolcott and his Lady.

Let others tell of valiant deeds of yore
 By men who freed us from the British Crown,
 Or those who came as Pilgrims to this shore;
 I sing THE FOUNDERS OF THE LITTLE TOWN.

2

Dense was the forest. In its dismal shade
 Lurked deadly reptile and the prowling bear.
 Wolves were a terror, swamps their fevers spread,
 And the sly savage, grim and fierce, was there.

3

Into this woodland came the brave and true—
 Men, women, children—cultured, kind, and good,
 Seeking to build their homes and churches new,
 Armed but with faith and prayer and flintlocks crude.

4

Welcomed in Hartford's hospitable strand,
 Yet here attracted by a field of flowers.
 "Here," said the Leader. "Here we take our stand.
 This favored town of BLOOMFIELD shall be ours."

5

Three nearby towns gave Wintonbury's name.
 Three shallow vales each had a rippling rill.
 Brave heroes toiled, this "wilderness" to tame.
 And once a church was built on Whirlwind Hill.

6

Keen were their axes, their minds keener still.
 Strong were their arms, and stronger yet their hearts:
 Great in the power of consecrated will,
 Firm with the strength that Christian faith imparts.

7

Loud were the echoes of their forest toil,
 Felling great trees from dawn to starlit night,
 Clearing for better use the fertile soil,
 Building their homes on this most favored site.

8

Distant six miles, God's house in Windsor stood.
 Thither they marched through forests deep with snow.
 Then, souls refreshed, as if with angels' food,
 Homeward they'd plod, in grace and truth to grow.

9

Oft-times they tramped to Windsor "to get fire,"
 Bringing it home to fill a pressing need.
 One happy year they earned their hearts' desire,
 Building a church, devoid of care for creed.

The author, James Hudson Roberts (1851-1945), was a Congregational pastor and missionary to China. He was a Mayflower descendent and member of the Sons of the American Revolution. These memberships imply a knowledge of his family tree; and, even though no direct connection with the Roberts family of Bloomfield has been found, they suggest a Bloomfield connection as a reason for writing this poem. He was, moreover, an accomplished author and composer. His obituary in the *Courant* on May 16, 1945 says, "The songs which he composed were sung by the First Church of Christ in Wethersfield, Congregational Church in Bingham, Me., by the Wethersfield Businessmen's and Civic associations and many other groups. Master of ten languages, he translated many of his hymns into Chinese and Mongolian for distribution in the Orient."

Some readers may find that Roberts' poem does not measure up to the work of well-known American poets of the early twentieth century. After all, this was the era of Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, Carl Sandburg, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Wallace Stevens. The old, measured forms of poetry had been jettisoned in favor of the new and different. Yet the traditional forms remained alive, particularly in popular taste. E. E. Cummings may have been new and modern, but Edgar Guest was far more popular.

James Hudson Roberts was, basically, a hymn writer; and the hymns of the Church are written to be sung—that is, they conform to musical values such as metrical structure, stanzas, and the use of a formal diction. Rhyme had fallen out of favor in poetry, but it was almost universally present in hymn lyrics. His poem could easily be sung to a familiar hymn tune such as "Abide With Me." Robert's regular four beats per line and his rhyming of every other line were, thus, familiar and (continued—>)

10

Pastor Gillet with power could preach or pray,
 Comfort the sick or warn poor souls from sin.
 "There was no use to pray for rain," they'd say,
 Till all the parson's hay was gathered in."

11

Old grew God's shrine; its beams waxed weak and frail.
 Stebbins arrived and said of this disgrace:
 "When every clapboard dangles on one nail,
 No love nor fear of God is in this place."

12

Lucas, the teacher, well knew what to do,
 Giving Miss Wealthy new and strange employ,
 Spending her "noon-spell" braiding up his queue.
 Folks said, "A pity she was not a boy."

13

Some slaves there were, in bondage not severe.
 Well-mannered Indians came to camp and fish.
 Fugitive slaves found cordial welcome here,
 Making them happy as their souls could wish.

14

Near Talcott Mountain was a lovely brook,
 Wondrous in beauty, worthy of renown,
 Clear rippling waters, flowers in every nook,
 Known by the fitting name of "Tumbledown."

15

Such was the brooklet, till the luckless day
 When Hartford city thirsted for its flow,
 Made it a pool and piped its streams away,
 Spoiling the fairest scene this town could show.

16

When war was raging, Bloomfield sent her men,
 Nearly two hundred, more than were required,
 Valiant to serve and save their country then,
 Till the last foe was quelled, the last gun fired.

17

In the great conflict for the north and west,
 Our Roger Wolcott led men to the fray.
 Louisburg fell; our men came home to rest,
 And Roger won new honors every day.

18

Warrior and Judge, a statesman wise and true—
 Governor, patriot, Christian truly great,
 Leading men on, as valiant heroes do.
 Thou art a pride and honor to our state.

19

Likewise thy Lady, brave, refined, and fair,
 Newberry-named and true to noble birth,
 Well-loved our country, strong to do and dare,
 Proving herself, like thee, of boundless worth.

20

Hither we come, our offerings to bring,
 Here to their name a monument to bring,
 Glad for their deeds our songs of joy to sing,
 Thanking their God and ours with hymns of praise.

expected in 1930. His poetry should be judged by criteria such as originality, imagery, and unity, by how consistently he carries out his pattern, and by his knowledge of his subject.

The inscription for this poem is of interest: *Presented to the Wintonbury Cemetery Association, Bloomfield, Connecticut, November 2, 1930, on the occasion of the unveiling of a monument in honor of Gov. Roger Wolcott and his Lady.* Who is "his Lady"? A report of the Cemetery Association's November 2 annual meeting in *The Hartford Courant* for Monday, November 3, 1930, never mentions this poem or a monument to Gov. and Mrs. Wolcott. It does, however, say that the meeting included "exercises in observance of the restoration of a headstone to the memory of Mrs. Elizabeth Newberry, daughter of Roger Wolcott, Governor of Connecticut 1751-1754." Roberts says in stanza 19 of his poem that "thy Lady" is "Newberry-named," which can only mean the Lady is Roger's daughter Elizabeth, who married Roger Newberry, not Wolcott's wife Sarah. Thus, the monument honors Elizabeth and secondarily mentions Roger, whereas the poem honors the father and gives brief mention to the daughter. Nevertheless, Roberts seems to have written this for the ceremony marking the restored gravestone (photo, next page).

NOTES ON THE TEXT:

Stanza 4 is an obvious reference to the legend that Francis Gillette suggested the name of the town. **Stanza 5** refers to "three nearby towns," Windsor, Farmington, and Simsbury. The church on Whirlwind Hill was the Methodist Church, later moved to Park Avenue. **Stanza 8** mentions the onerous travel between homes in Wintonbury and the church in Windsor, the reason for the establishment of Wintonbury Parish and its church. (The Puritan ideal was one church in each town.)

The reference to "Pastor Gillet" in **Stanza 10** is interesting. Abel Gillet separated from the Congregational Church about 1760 and founded a new congregation. His son Ashbel became its pastor. James (continued.—>)



Elizabeth Wolcott Newberry stone
Old Wintonbury Cemetery
R. Pierce photo

Roberts, himself a staunch Congregationalist, may have confused his facts here. **Stanza 12** refers to some Bloomfield lore found in Lydia Wadhams' column on page 3 of this issue. **Stanzas 14-15:** Tumble Brook, as it is now called, flows into Bloomfield out of Reservoir #6 in northern West Hartford. On July 1, 1930, the Metropolitan District Commission was formed and assumed responsibility for the previously existing six small reservoirs in West Hartford and the larger Nepaug Reservoir. The reference must be to the construction of Reservoir #6.

Stanza 17 refers to Wolcott's service as Commander-in-Chief of troops that captured Fortress Louisbourg in Nova Scotia during the 1745 King George's War, an important victory in securing British control of Canada.

Stanza 19 mentions "thy Lady" who is "Newberry-named." One of Roger and Sarah's daughters was Elizabeth, who married Capt. Roger Newberry and is buried in Old Wintonbury Cemetery. Finally we know the identity of "his Lady" mentioned in the introductory inscription.



Grave of
Roger and Sarah Wolcott
Palisado Cemetery, Windsor
R. Pierce photo

Leaving a Legacy

The Wintonbury Historical Society is a nonprofit organization dependent on the generosity of people who value history and Bloomfield history in particular. Its mission is to identify, collect, organize, preserve and make accessible historical information about the diverse people, places, institutions and events of Bloomfield, Connecticut.

A larger endowment would put the Society upon a firmer financial foundation. To this end the Society solicits contributions from individuals and businesses. You can make a difference by (1) setting aside a gift in your will to the Society, (2) naming the Society as beneficiary of an insurance policy, (3) remembering loved ones with gifts to the Society in their honor, and (4) naming the Society as beneficiary of an IRA or 401K.





HOUSE WITH A HISTORY: REVISITING 462A TUNXIS AVENUE

The April 2020 issue of the *Drummer* included an article entitled “House With a History: 462A Tunxis Avenue.” (Available on the WHS website.) The article quoted from “Landmarks by Maselli,” an article in a November 1963 publication called *The Bloomfield Column*, which said that 462A Tunxis was the old Bloomfield Baptist church which had been moved from Jerome Avenue to that site.¹ But that was too easy.

I sent a copy of that issue to the homeowner, and he was extremely interested. When he bought the house, he was told that it had been moved to Bloomfield from Tariffville, where it used to be the meeting house of the Tariffville Baptist Church. He even provided copies of documents which supported this claim. Well, that made your editor put on his thinking cap! Had I too easily accepted the veracity of my source?

All signs of the Baptist Church have long ago vanished from Bloomfield Center. Today a Shell gasoline station occupies 47 Jerome Avenue on the corner of Park Avenue, the successor to WHS member Charlie Regini’s service station.² According to a map in the town clerk’s office, the Baptist meeting house was very nearly in that location.³ When the Bloomfield congregation merged with the Blue Hills Baptist Church in 1920, however, the Bloomfield people started traveling to Hartford (Blue Hills Avenue at East Euclid Street) for all church activities.

After the Baptist Society vacated the Jerome Avenue building, it was used by the Boy Scouts for a dozen years. According to a 1976 article by Lydia Wadhams, the building was demolished in 1932.⁴ There is certainly a contradiction here: Was the building moved, as Maselli said, or demolished, as Wadhams said? Bloomfield town records don’t help. Neither the town clerk’s office, nor the assessor’s office, nor the building department have demolition or moving records going back to those years. But all is not lost. There may be another alternative to resolve the contradiction. Could the building have been, not demolished, but disassembled, then moved, and then rebuilt?⁵



Former Meeting House of the Baptist Society
Rebuilt at 462 Tunxis Avenue
William Talbot’s stonework is visible.
WHS Archives photo



William Talbot at home
Courtesy of Allan Warner

Enter William Talbot, craftsman and antiques maven.⁶ Mrs. Maselli described him as an antiques collector who restored and refinished fine clocks and furniture. She says he lived at 462 Tunxis Avenue and moved the old Baptist Church building to his property to use as a workshop. The photo on page 8 shows his creative stone foundation. After his death, in 1974-75, the property was sold; and in May 1977, a Town of Bloomfield building permit was issued to convert “an existing building” to a dwelling.⁷ That new home, on the bank of the Farmington River, was then designated as 462A Tunxis Avenue.

Now, was Talbot’s workshop really the old Bloomfield Baptist Church or was it the old Tariffville Baptist Church?⁸ There is no record of Talbot buying the Bloomfield church,⁹ but he bought the Tariffville property in January 1931 and sold it in September 1940.¹⁰ And if he sold it, he didn’t move it.

Is the Tariffville meeting house still in Tariffville? A *Hartford Courant* story on October 4, 1994, was entitled “Tariffville History Inspires Barber to Develop Photographic Memories.” It seems that Roland Wolf lined the walls of his Tariffville barber shop with historic photographs. One of those (continued—>)



Tariffville Baptist Church
Photo in Valley Barber Shop

photos showed the “Baptist Church on Church Street Extension, which,” said Wolf, “is a house now. They just took down the steeple.”

Barbara Strong, Museum Administrator of the Simsbury Historical Society, confirms Wolf’s statement. The Tariffville church building may be seen today at 47 Church Street Extension, she says. It has been much modified, and a two-story addition with wrap-around porch was built in 1989. Strong cites the Historic Resources Inventory completed by the Connecticut Historical Commission in 1992, which says “The original portion of this building (c. 1880) was the second church building built by the Baptist congregation of Tariffville. Though substantially compromised by the street-facing addition (1989) and the attached garage, the original building retains some architectural interest because of the Gothic revival details visible in its gable ends.” (see photo, below)

We can conclude, then, that the Tariffville church was not moved but remains to this day in Tariffville. That being the case, it follows that 462A Tunxis Avenue in Bloomfield has to be the old Bloomfield Baptist building, disassembled on Jerome Avenue and rebuilt by William Talbot at his home near the Farmington River.



Notes:

¹Concrete evidence is lacking, but based on dates, I think this was Philomena Maselli (1912-2003), wife of Nicholas A. Maselli (1911-2000) of 10 Filley Street. *The Bloomfield Column* was an amateur 8 ½ by 11 newsletter about the town (found in WHS files).

²The church’s location was at the corner of Jerome and Park Avenues. In a phone call, Charlie Regini told me that on May 30, 1956, his father Armand Regini bought from Gene Pinney the service station at 47 Jerome Avenue at the corner of Park. Charlie took over the business in September 1968 and is now retired.

³See town maps in Volume 00, map 16, dated February 1930 and Volume 2, map 48, dated August 29, 1910.

⁴Lydia Wadhams, writing in *The Bloomfield ZIP—06002*, May 1976. Wadhams’ statement is backed up in *From Wintonbury to Bloomfield* (1983), page 17. An earlier source is a church history written between 1935 and 1943 as a WPA project (Works Progress Administration, a federal program to pull the nation out of the Great Depression). This historical article, under the name of the Blue Hills Baptist Church, is found in a book of church histories in the Connecticut State Library. Thanks for this information to Charles Wyand of the Historical Committee of American Baptist Churches of Connecticut.

⁵The difference between demolition and disassembly may not be apparent to the casual observer. I watched the disassembly of an A. C. Petersen farmhouse near my home. The contractor told me he would take the pieces to Vermont and rebuild the house.

⁶Talbot was born in East Granby in 1886, died in Bloomfield in 1973, and is buried alongside his wife (Rose) in Old St. Andrews Cemetery.

⁷From a report by Tom Howard supplied to me by homeowner Allan Warner (whose help was appreciated).

⁸The Bloomfield church was built in 1795, and the Tariffville church was built in 1843 and rebuilt in 1876 after a fire.

⁹An extensive search of town land records has not revealed who bought the property in the 1930s nor when Gene Pinney bought it.

¹⁰From a 1991 letter written by Betty Guinan to Allan Warner in which she cites Simsbury land records vol. 75, page 457. The building was, thus, in Tariffville when sold (and is still there on Church Street Extension).



The Gothic revival details at the gable end, right, reveal this house’s origin as the Tariffville Baptist meeting house. —R. Pierce photo



462A Tunxis Avenue, Bloomfield: Notice the unique stone-work of the foundation. —R. Pierce photo

“. . . a constant curdled dissent, in the form of disdain for the nation’s past that produced its present, is incompatible with patriotism.” —George F. Will, *Hartford Courant*, April 19, 2021