



The Wintonbury Drummer

Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

September 2021

ARTFUL GARDENS TOUR

September 19: See page 8

Graphics by Robin Sherwood

Bloomfield's
Artful Gardens Tour
self-guided
Sunday, Sept. 19, 2021
Noon - 4:00pm, Rain or Shine!
Ticket Price: \$20.00 in advance, \$25.00 at the door
To purchase tickets online or for tour information:
www.bloomfieldcthistory.org
Tickets are also available at
Wade's Farm Fresh
498 Simsbury Road, Bloomfield

Generously Sponsored by:
 **Duncaster**
is where to live.
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An Active Life Plan Community

WHS ANNUAL MEETING: The Society's annual meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 22, 3:00 PM, on Zoom. We will vote for a secretary and four directors. Watch for your email announcement and link.

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2023

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vacancy

BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

The Board of Directors met in a special meeting on June 30 with eighteen people present at the Gabriel History Center. The question of whether or not to request a history room in the proposed new Prosser Library was extensively discussed. The board voted to ask the Library Building Committee to include space for a history room in its planning for the new library. No commitment is implied as to what the history room will contain. The Board also voted that, if townspeople vote in November for a new library, it will then name a committee to study what the WHS can contribute to a new, enlarged history room.

The Board met virtually on August 11 with 17 people present. The treasurer's report for the fiscal year ending June 30 showed income of \$10,048 and expenses of \$13,614. Dues brought in \$4,660, and donations amounted to \$4,384. Utilities cost \$4,511, and we spent \$5,694 on building repair and maintenance. Our investments did well, and our total assets increased to almost \$350,000.

ATTENTION!

The Wintonbury Drummer invites readers to contribute articles, personal reminiscences, book reviews, photographs, etc. Materials for publication in the November issue should be received by October 1, 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
 Printmark Services, 21 Old Windsor Road
 Wade's Farms, 498 Simsbury Road
(And there's room for more!)

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OLD FARMS SCHOOL 225TH ANNIVERSARY 1796-2021



In 1795, the State of Connecticut’s “Western Reserve” (in what is now northern Ohio) was sold to a man named Cleveland and a group he represented for \$1,200,000. With this money the State of Connecticut established a trust fund and shared the bounty with local governments for the support of schools. Wintonbury parish at that time had seven small schools (under control of the Congregational church) spread throughout the community; and with the state grant, a fine new two-story brick school was built in the “Old Farm” district.

For about the first 100 years or so, school was in session for four winter months, November to March, and four months in the summer. It was not held during spring planting or fall harvest so that children could help with the work in the fields. Attendance was not very good because the scholars were often needed for work at home or on the farm. Often very cold or snowy days kept them at home, especially the little ones, because of the long walks.

The earliest teachers needed to have completed only “normal school,” which was the eight grades they would be teaching. Early wages were about \$1 per week with board furnished, or \$2 a week if one furnished one’s own board. Men teachers were paid more since they were considered heads of household. A list of all the teachers at the Old Farm School has been compiled and many familiar Bloomfield family names are among them. Teachers not only prepared and gave the lessons but were responsible for all the duties involved in running the small schoolhouse, such as stoking the fire, clearing snow, and bringing in water. Older students helped the teacher with these chores.

After it closed as a school, the building was used for public meetings. From 1931 to 1971, the American Legion met here adding a small kitchen to the back of the building. In 1976, the 90-ton brick building was successfully moved approximately 100 feet to the west to accommodate a redesigned intersection of the two highways.

Interior renovations had to wait for several years until the Wintonbury Historical Society could raise funds. The first floor was restored and opened to the public in 1987 and two years later the second floor was ready to be opened. The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. —*adapted from an article by Fred Hesketh, April 2015*



New gardens, July 2020
R. Pierce photo



See Ralph Schmoll’s video on the Old Farm School at bloomfieldcthistory.org.

BLOOMFIELD'S SCHOOLS FROM THEIR BEGINNINGS UNTIL TODAY

Note: The questions and answers that follow were first published by Roberta Kania, town historian, in *The Bloomfield Journal*, July 10, 1998. They have been augmented and edited to bring them up to date. Street numbers cited are those which exist today. For more information see *From Wintonbury to Bloomfield*, pages 119-185, and watch Ralph Schmoll's video, "Early Education," on the WHS website. Many thanks to Karen Youngstrom of the Bloomfield Board of Education for her help with recent facts.

Q. Who had the responsibility of overseeing early Bloomfield schools, even before our nation was founded?

A. By 1700, Connecticut law required public schools and a "common schedule." According to the laws of colonial Connecticut, the local Ecclesiastical Society of the Congregational Church was responsible for public schools in its town. (There was no separation of church and state in Connecticut until 1818.)

Q. When did we first have public schools in Wintonbury/Bloomfield?

A. When Wintonbury Parish was set aside about 1738, it was required to provide a school. The laws of the colony dictated one half a school year for communities of forty to seventy families.

Q. How many school districts were there in Bloomfield in 1796? How many in 1840?

A. A 1795 state law (following sale of Connecticut's "Northwest Reserve" lands) required towns to establish school districts. In 1796 there were seven school districts in Wintonbury. In 1840 there were nine because "Scotland" (now North Bloomfield) had been annexed to our newly incorporated town, adding two school districts. The school districts were geographically small because students had to walk to school. The buildings continued in use after school societies were abolished in Connecticut in 1856 and towns became responsible for education. The districts were:

- ▶ South Middle, 1796: on Cottage Grove Road in the vicinity of CIGNA
- ▶ Northeast, 1798: Filley Street near the Newberry house
- ▶ Southwest: at 430 Simsbury Road, opened in 1851 and used until 1921
- ▶ Center: A two-story building was built on Whirlwind Hill, just west of cemetery, about 1795. Due to problems with the building, the students were moved to the Academy building on Wintonbury Avenue in 1873.
- ▶ North Middle: Tunxis Avenue at today's Ridgeview Drive
- ▶ Duncaster: The first building was at the northwest corner of the Duncaster Road/Mountain Road intersection. The second building was a mile north on the east side of Duncaster, built before 1826; it was moved in 1926 (*continued on next page—>*)



Southwest District School
R. Pierce photo 2013

to 44 West Street and rebuilt as a home, still standing today. The third building was on the east side of Duncaster. It was built in 1926, and later became a VFW hall, then a Grange Hall, and now a private dwelling.

- ▶ Old Farm (“Brick School”): 151 School Street, opened in 1796 and used until 1922, when students were moved to Center Grammar School
- ▶ Scotland South: 1861 at the northeast corner of Duncaster and Adams
- ▶ Scotland North: built in 1826 near St. Andrews Church and closed in 1891. The building was moved to the Simsbury history campus in 1969. In 1910 Scotland South and North were combined in a new brick building at 259 Duncaster Road (now a house).

Later, two more school districts were added:

- ▶ Gravel Hill: 1835; this district was shared between Bloomfield and Hartford. (See below.)
- ▶ Mitchelson: built in 1919 on land donated by George Mitchelson on the west side of Blue Hills Avenue near its intersection with Woodland Avenue. The school closed in about 1930. (See below.)



North Scotland District School
Wintonbury Historical Society, Inc.
Bloomfield, Hartford, Connecticut



Center School. WHS Archives photo

Q. Which was the last one- or two-room school to close and why didn't it close sooner?

A. Mitchelson School in the “plantations,” on Blue Hills Avenue Extension. In 1929 when the high school opened, all other small schools were closed; but the roads were so muddy in that school district that school buses couldn't get through, and the school was kept open for one more year.

Q. What other towns/cities has Bloomfield school system been affiliated with?

A. An 1869 map of Bloomfield's school districts shows a “joint district” comprising the southeast corner of Bloomfield from Mt. St. Benedict Avenue south. This was the Gravel Hill District. Bloomfield students of elementary age went to school in Hartford, at a school not far from the town line on Blue Hills Avenue, and older grades attended Northwest School, corner of Blue Hills and Albany Avenues. Children from this district attended school in Hartford until the Blue Hills School on Rockwell Avenue was completed in 1923. Another interdistrict cooperation occurred when Bloomfield High was built in 1930 and there was room for East Granby students, who did not have their own high school. They traveled by bus to Bloomfield. Also, in prior years, Bloomfield shared a Superintendent of Schools with various towns, usually under the jurisdiction of the state.

Q. Did you know that there was once a Junior College in Bloomfield? It was an accredited Junior College, and it was operated for 27 years.

A. St. Thomas Seminary at 467 Bloomfield Avenue is owned by the Archdiocese of Hartford. The Bloomfield campus opened in September 1930. It offered four years of high school and two years of college, ending with an associate of arts degree. Today it houses the Archdiocesan Center, a retreat and conference facility, a library, and numerous archdiocesan offices. *(continued on next page —>)*

Q. When did school buses start transporting students in Bloomfield?

A. School buses started being used in 1922 when Center Grammar School opened. (See sidebar)

Q. How many town school buildings were built in the 20th century? Can you name them?

A. Four schools were built between 1900 and World War II and nine afterwards.

Before World War II:

- ▶ Center Grammar School, 34 Jerome Avenue: built 1913; burned down in 1963.



Blue Hills School today
R. Pierce photo

- ▶ Blue Hills School at 73 Rockwell Avenue: built 1922, with later additions. Now used as the Robert L. Watkins Community Center, which includes the Bloomfield

Early Learning Center, the Bill Lee baseball field, basketball courts, a gym, playground apparatus, a play field, and four lighted tennis courts. (Watkins, 1921-2001, retired in 1985 as Bloomfield's Director of Social Services.)

- ▶ In 1926 a one-room school was built on the southern end of Duncaster Road, replacing a nearby one-room school. It later was owned by the Grange and is now a private residence.
- ▶ High School: built 1929-1930 at 785 Park Avenue. Demolished and replaced by the present Police Station. (continued on next page—>)

Frank Guilmartin (1897-1977), father of WHS member Homer Guilmartin, was one of the town's first school bus drivers in 1922. Four other drivers began at the same time: George Neuhauser, Earl Loveland, Fred Markles, and Fred Smith.

A requirement for the job of school bus driver was that the man owned a team of horses and an enclosed sleigh that could be used if the bus could not make it some morning. That was no problem for Guilmartin, who already had a team of horses that worked his fields.

Bloomfield's Code for Bus Drivers in the 1920s said: "The bus shall not be operated at a speed greater than 20 miles per hour. It shall come to a full stop before all railroad or trolley crossings. The driver shall not leave the bus while the motor is running and shall not stop with the bus left in gear. Chains must be used when roads are slippery. The driver shall use his judgment whether he shall operate a horse driven or motor driven bus when bad weather conditions prevail. Each pupil shall be comfortably seated, and every effort should be made to keep the children warm. The car shall be equipped with storm curtains. When road conditions demand the use of horse driven sleds, the sleds shall be covered with heavy canvas or duck to protect the children from cold and exposure. There shall be a covering at the rear with a light in it, so that the bus will be completely enclosed, warm, and lighted."

Guilmartin's 1923 contract stipulated pay of \$6.00 per day; by 1932 this had increased to \$10.00. Frank Guilmartin, who drove a school bus for 35 years (probably 1922-1957), was well known to generations of Bloomfield children.



Guilmartin's school buses: 1922 at left; 1930s below, with Frank



Photos courtesy of Homer Guilmartin

After World War II:

- ▶ Vincent School, 11 Turkey Hill Road. Demolished about 2014 and replaced by the CREC Museum Academy.
- ▶ Wintonbury School, 1133 Blue Hills Ave. Now offices for the Board of Education.
- ▶ Metacomet School, 185 School St. Renovated 2011. Now third and fourth grades.
- ▶ Laurel School, 1 Filley St. Renovated in 2012. Now kindergarten through grade 2.
- ▶ Junior High School, 330 Park Ave. Replaced by the Middle School, but used for years afterward by the Senior Center, Leisure Services, and BATV. Demolished in 2018-2019 to make way for playing fields next to the new Human Services Center building.
- ▶ High School, 5 Huckleberry Lane, opened in 1956. Renovated 2012.
- ▶ Middle School, 390 Park Avenue, opened about 1971, now housing Carmen Arace Intermediate School (grades 5-6) and Carmen Arace Middle School (grades 7-8).
- ▶ Global Experience Magnet School (grades 6-12), 44 Griffin Road South, opened 2009.
- ▶ Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School, 44 Brown Street, opened 2009

Q. What other schools are there in Bloomfield?

- A.** The Capital Region Education Council (CREC) has three modern schools in town.
- ▶ Metropolitan Learning Center (grades 6-12), 1551 Blue Hills Ave. at Woodland Ave. Opened in 1998 in old Junior High on Park Avenue; moved to new building in 2001.
 - ▶ Museum Academy (preschool—5), 11 Turkey Hill Road, opened 2017
 - ▶ Ana Grace Academy of the Arts (elementary and middle), 29 Griffin Road North—opening Fall, 2021



Global Experience Magnet School

R. Pierce photo



CREC Museum Academy 2016

R. Pierce photo

Metropolitan Learning Center was founded in 1996. Educators from CREC and the original participating communities of Bloomfield, East Windsor, Hartford, Windsor and Windsor Locks planned this global studies school. In 1997, the Connecticut State Legislature approved the appropriation of \$32 million for the construction of a grades 6–12 Metropolitan Learning Center, a School for Global and International Studies, which opened in September 1998 in the old Bloomfield Junior High School Building. Enfield later joined the program in 2000. In the fall of 2001, with grades 6–9, the school was moved to its new building at 1551 Blue Hills Avenue Bloomfield. It now serves nearly 700 students in grades 6–12 from Bloomfield, Hartford, Enfield, Windsor, East Windsor, and Windsor Locks. Public Act 07-3 allowed students in non-participating districts to apply for a seat in an inter-district magnet school if seats are available. With this legislative change, students in any town are allowed to apply to MLC and may be granted a seat.

—from Wikipedia

BLOOMFIELD'S ARTFUL GARDENS TOUR

Sunday, September 19, noon to 4:00 PM

This is not your ordinary garden tour! Come and immerse yourself in an outdoor tour through Bloomfield that combines, nature, art, history, and sustainable community gardening, all in one package! You'll delight in beautiful flowers in inspiring gardens by historic homes spanning four centuries. You will also see a variety of gardens reflecting different creative, environmental, and cultural purposes. You'll see how people celebrate natural beauty, nourishment, and sustainable food production. As part of the tour, you'll also enjoy many "art surprises" planted along the way, from local artists painting in the open air, to artworks on display at select points. Join us, rain or shine, for the Bloomfield Artful Gardens Tour on Sunday, September 19, noon to 4:00 PM. The tour price is \$20.00 if paid in advance; \$25.00 on the day of the tour .

Select homeowners have agreed to allow access to their garden retreats in Bloomfield. This self-guided tour starts at the Fannie Gabriel History Center of the Wintonbury Historical Society on 151 School St. After admiring the onsite Old Farm School built in 1796 when George Washington was president, visitors can drive or bike (at their own pace and sequence) to several unique gardens. This tour is presented by the Wintonbury Historical Society and Ironwood Community Partners, two non-profit organizations committed to historical preservation and to ensuring that Bloomfield's heritage remains vibrant and connected to the continuing culture of our town. Proceeds go to preserving the 1796 Old Farm School and the 1834 Captain Oliver Filley farm barns. This tour is made possible through the generosity of our sponsors, Duncaster, Seabury, and Janney Investments, among others.



Image from themicrogardener.com

Ticket information: The tour price is \$20.00 if paid in advance; \$25.00 on the day of the tour. There are several ways to purchase, but save your receipt! Tickets are available online via the website www.bloomfieldcthistory.org. You can also pay in-person, by cash or check, at two sites: **(1)** Wade's Farm Fresh, 498 Simsbury Road or **(2)** the Gabriel History Center, 151 School St., on Sunday and Monday afternoons, 1-4 PM (call first 860-243-1531). On tour day, bring your receipt to the History Center where the tour begins. You'll receive a brochure which will serve as your ticket and map for the tour. Admission is also available on the day of the tour at the History Center. Tickets going on sale at the in-person sites may be purchased August 1 through September 17.

Parking: Ample parking is available in the lot shared by the History Center and Old Farm School at 151 School Street where you obtain your tour brochure. Overflow parking is available at Metacomet School down the street on School Street. Your brochure provides directions to each garden on the tour as well as specific directions regarding parking at each individual site. Please alert the staff at the History Center if you, or someone in your party, needs specific accommodations. Some homes will have parking attendants to assist people with parking and/or special needs.

Attention Bicyclists: Participants who wish to enjoy the Artful Gardens Tour via a guided bike ride for no extra charge should plan to depart from the History Center no later than 11:30 a.m.! Please allow time for both parking down the street at the Metacomet School (School Street) and picking up your tour brochure/map. Those wishing to ride on their own are also welcome to pick up a tour brochure/map at the History Center.