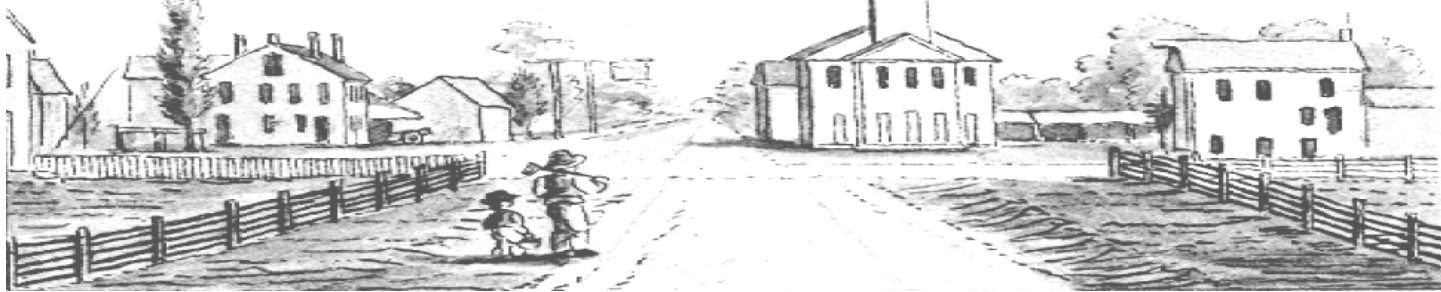


The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

June 2022

THE SOUL OF A NEIGHBORHOOD

With Mark Oppenheimer, June 21, 3:00 via Zoom



Mark Oppenheimer
Google photo

Mark Oppenheimer will speak via Zoom on June 21, 3:00, about his book, *Squirrel Hill: The Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting and the Soul of a Neighborhood*, published in 2018. It's about the Squirrel Hill section of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the 2018 synagogue massacre which shook the community.

Mark is senior editor of *Tablet* magazine, an online magazine which supports Jewish literature, culture, and ideas. *Tablet* publishes news and analysis related to Jewish issues in the United States and worldwide.

"Every week," he says, "we talk about 'the news of the Jews,' interview a guest Jew, and interview a Gentile of the Week. We make fun of ourselves (and you), but also take Jewish life, in all its forms, seriously. [The podcast] has been downloaded something like six million times." From 2010 to 2016 Mark wrote a regular column called "Beliefs" in the *New York Times*. He

writes for *Christian Century*, and is co-author of *The Newish Jewish Encyclopedia*, 2019.

Mark lives in the Westville neighborhood of New Haven with his wife, five children, and two dogs. He has a Ph.D. in religion and has taught at Yale, Stanford, New York University, and other schools.



This is a Zoom program. To attend, please register ahead of time at <https://bplct.org>. Click on Event Calendar and register. The library will send you the necessary link.

IN THIS ISSUE: **Page 2:** Board of Directors Highlights. **Page 3:** Portrait of Auntie Mae. **Pages 4-6:** The Story of Prosser Library by Emily Wilcox, 1931. **Page 6:** In Memoriam, Al LeFebvre. **Page 7:** Last Business in Old Shopping Center Closes, 1970. **Page 7:** Member Benefits. **Page 8:** Stores May Open Soon in Wintonbury Mall, 1970.

DIRECTORY**President Pro Tem**

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Vacancy

2024

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board met on April 20, 2022, at the Gabriel History Center with fifteen people present. The financial report was reviewed and accepted. As of March 31, we had a checking account balance of \$27,121 and total assets of \$378,741. Upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, it was voted to transfer funds that had been in Wells Fargo and Webster banks (\$11,303 and \$5,518, temporarily held in checking) from our checking account to our Vanguard account. Our Connecticut Humanities grant (\$5,000: see April *Drummer*), which was for “operations,” will remain in our checking account to help with ongoing expenses. There was discussion of our problem keeping track of specified donations, such as memorials and stipulated Old Farm School funds.

On May 11, fifteen people logged on to Zoom for a Board meeting. The Board accepted, with regret, the immediate resignation of Bill Weissenburger as president and the retirement of Judy Dahlgren-Dechand as treasurer, effective June 30. Dick Pierce was named to serve as President Pro Tem until the Annual Meeting in September. A Nominating Committee (Mara Whitman, Libbie Merrow, Ruthanne Marchetti) was appointed to fill vacancies. Mary Laiuppa will be Old Farm School Docent Manager this year.

Many thanks to Bill and Judy for their years of outstanding service to the Wintonbury Historical Society!

OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS

Many Rivers Community Acupuncture, 3 Barnard Lane
Printmark Services, 21 Old Windsor Road
Wade's Farms, 498 Simsbury Road

ATTENTION!

The Wintonbury Drummer invites readers to contribute articles, personal reminiscences, book reviews, photographs, etc. Material for publication in the September issue should be received by August 1, 2022

The Wintonbury Drummer

is published five times a year by
Wintonbury Historical Society, Inc.
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Portrait of Auntie Mae

By Sandra Belliveau

Reprinted from The Bloomfield ZIP, June 1982 (Final Issue)

Volunteering is neither new to Bloomfield nor to “Auntie Mae” Manion who has dedicated her whole life to helping other people.

The family homestead at 32 Elizabeth Avenue was built by her grandparents in 1897. “Life in the 20s was quite different than now. There was no snow removal and when snow struck in the course of the school day, farmers transported children home in sleighs. Transportation into the center of town and Hartford was by horse and buggy or trolley (discontinued in 1930).” She attended the Center Grammar School which was located on Jerome Avenue near the Post Office, the Parish House where the Town Hall now stands, and the Academy School where the Center Fire House is now located. In 1928, she graduated with eighteen classmates from Bloomfield High School which is now the Board of Education building and graduated as a registered nurse from St. Francis Hospital. She was appointed Bloomfield’s first full-time school nurse in 1934 and was responsible for 700 students. In 1953 she became the school nurse for Prince Tech and retired in 1969.

People of all ages benefited from her kindness and generosity. She collected clothing, which she distributed to children very carefully in order to keep the recipients anonymous. Her sensitivity and kindness included anonymous payment of Girl Scout dues so indigent girls could become Girl Scouts, transportation to doctors and dentists and payment of bills including eyeglasses for those in need. As if that were not enough, Aunt Mae spent many evenings and weekends volunteering her services to nurse residents back to health and writing letters to Bloomfield servicemen during the war.

In her spare time, she managed to attend all the Bloomfield High basketball games, ministering to bumps, scrapes and hurt pride. She taught Sunday School at Blue Hills Baptist Church for eleven years, has been a Red Cross volunteer for forty years, still works with the Bloodmobile, and is a fifty-year member of the Grange.

Convalescing from a knee operation and itching to “get going,” Aunt Mae quipped, “Today I am sixteen and yesterday I was 116,” characterizing her spirit in a nutshell.

Although she never married, everyone who knows her fondly claims her as “Aunt Mae.”



Mae Manion, school nurse
From the 1952 Bloomfield High School
Tattler

Editor’s Note: Eleanor M. (Mae) Manion was born in 1910 and died in March 1993. *The Wintonbury Drummer* published an article in November 2018 featuring 32 Elizabeth Avenue, with information supplied by the house’s current owner, Denise Robinson, who bought 32 Elizabeth Avenue in 1992.

THE STORY OF PROSSER LIBRARY

By Emily Wilcox, September 25, 1931

Editor's note: In the April issue, we published "Dedication of the Prosser Library, 1903," an article that contained the text of a 1903 speech by Ella Roberts Wood given at the dedication ceremonies of the combination town hall/library building at 1 Tunxis Avenue. In this issue we move forward to 1931 and a history and description of Prosser written by its capable librarian, Emily Wilcox. The building in which Wilcox worked was demolished in 1963 and replaced by the current building. By the time the September *Drummer* is published, the current building will be closing in preparation for its imminent demolition and replacement. Wilcox's description is a first-person glimpse into the past.

A library is a collection of books. There are many kinds of libraries, for mankind for thousands of years has wished, in some manner, to conserve the wisdom and eloquence of his predecessors.

In earlier days, books heavily bound in wood or leather and oftentimes beautifully decorated by artists of the period were chained to a shelf so that they would not be taken away.

People of much wealth have lavished elegant surroundings and exquisite bindings on their favorite volumes, and others have almost starved that they might possess a coveted book.

Many libraries are private, many for the study of some particular line of business or profession; but the idea of a general, free public library is of comparatively recent date. Lately I read the statement that the first tax supported, free, public library in this country was established in Peterboro, New Hampshire in 1833, just a little less than 100 years ago.

Our library is free, public, and generously endowed, for the purchase of books, by the income of the legacy of \$16,699.54, which was left by Mr. Levi Prosser.

Even a partial review of the material contained in the library would far exceed the bounds of a short paper, so I think that instead of the story of Prosser Library, it will be more truly the story of people and things connected with Prosser Library.

Two years after the receipt of the legacy, a building was erected by the town of Bloomfield and a pleasant room in it was set apart for library use and furnished with weathered oak chairs, tables, a small office desk, and steel book-stacks. The library was opened to the public with appropriate dedicatory ceremonies on May 19, 1903. At first the library was open two afternoons and evenings a week, but a third day was soon added.

Over the fireplace now hangs a large portrait of Mr. Prosser donated by his daughter, Mrs. Harriet Prosser Field and inscribed with the dates July 10, 1823—January 28, 1898. Other portraits are that of Nathan Flint Miller, given by his grand-daughter Mrs. Mary Emily Miller Gale; that of Lester Roberts, from his daughter, Mrs. Jeanie Roberts Wells; that of the Hon. Francis Gillette, donated by his son William, the actor; and that of James G. Batterson, first president of the Travelers Insurance Company, from his daughter, Mrs. Charles Beach.

The kindly eyes of Mrs. Henry Perkins look out from a photograph. Mrs. Perkins gave her services in caring for a small branch of the Prosser Library at her home in North Bloomfield for a period of eighteen years, resigning in 1930. She is still active at 92 years of age. (continued on page 5)



Town hall/Prosser Library building about 1910
Gabb Tobacco Warehouse at the right
WHS Archives photo

The clock is a gift from Mrs. Louis J. Filley, and the case of old books is from Mrs. Julia Roberts Meacham of St. Louis, Mrs. Jeanie Roberts Wells of Brooklyn, and Mrs. Ella Roberts Wood of Bloomfield, in memory of their fathers, Lemuel Decatur Roberts, Lester Augustus Roberts, and James Munroe Roberts.

In 1906, the children's corner was established in memory of Mrs. Virginia Thrall Smith, who was born in the old Oliver Thrall Inn, near the button-ball tree in the eastern part of Bloomfield. She was much interested in the welfare of children and was city missionary in Hartford for many years. Her son, Dr. Oliver Smith, gave two pictures: one a framed photograph of his mother, the other "The Children of the Shell" by Murillo. This depicts the little Christ offering to his playmate John a cooling drink from a conch shell they have picked up in their play. The gift of \$25 from a friend of Mrs. Smith's made possible the purchase of the small reading table and chairs.



Prosser interior 1951
Jane Medbury, librarian
Bloomfield Public Library photo

In 1911, Mr. George Mitchelson gave \$5 to start a subscription for securing a cabinet for historical relics. There have been additions to this sum, which now amounts to about \$50.

During the same year, a bequest which is now nearly \$2,000 was received from the estate of Levi E. Latimer of Tennessee City, Tennessee, for the purpose of providing a historical room in connection with Prosser Library.

There are now nearly 10,000 books which cover a wide range of subjects. On the reading tables for adults may be found copies of forty current magazines, and on the children's table are ten juvenile periodicals. There are about 700 borrowers. The average

number of books added yearly is 300. Books and magazines are freely loaned to all the schools of the town.

Three libraries have had their day prior to the present one, proving that this locality has ever been of cultural bent. The first, in the Parish of Wintonbury, the former name of Bloomfield, was called The Wintonbury Society Library and was in the church. The old record book bears the date of 1793, and the first record was made September second of that year.

The second was the Wintonbury Union Library. Dates are hard to find, but several books have been found, proving its existence.

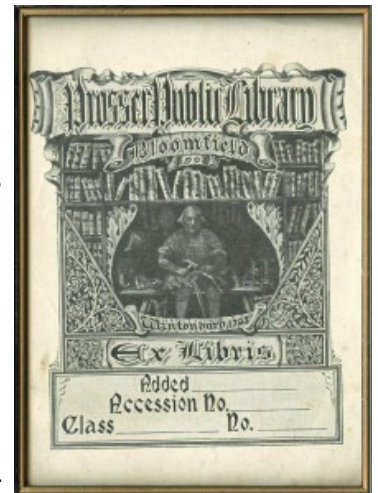
The third, known as the Bloomfield Library Company, was in use in 1864 and was kept by Samuel C. Buckingham in his shoe shop in the house on Tunxis Avenue in which a barber shop is now located. The ell extending toward the Federated Church was the section of the house which contained the shoe shop, and the books were ranged on shelves on the wall above the head of the cobbler.

The books in the library were bid off auction fashion. The highest bidder was permitted to take a book home for two weeks, the bids going anywhere from one to twenty-five cents.

When Mr. Buckingham was 87 years old and a member of the Congregational Church Sunday School, he was a teacher of the old people's Bible class, which numbered about twelve persons, all around 80 years of age or more. Members of this class included Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Bidwell, Mr. Johnathan Bidwell, Deacon and Mrs. Jerome, Mrs. Albert Brewer, Mrs. Lucy Brewer, Mr. Kingsley Hitchcock, Mrs. Mary Briggs, Mrs. Emily Owens, and Mrs. Julia Wyckoff. The design of the beautiful book plate which is pasted inside the cover of every Prosser Library book commemorates the cobbler-librarian and his shop.

Mr. Buckingham's daughter Ellen married Levi E. Latimer, whose connection with Prosser Library has been previously noted.

The Board of Directors are elected by the town, two each year, to serve for three years. The members of the first board were Mr. Alfred N. Filley, president; Mrs. Ella R. Wood, secretary; (continued on page 6)



Prosser bookplate with Samuel Buckingham at his cobbler's bench
Bloomfield Public Library photo

Mr. Nathan F. Miller, treasurer; Miss Annie Miller (now the wife of Dr. William T. Owens); Mr. Alfred C. Case; and Mr. George M. Phelps.

Mr. Filley was president fourteen years, Mrs. Harriet M. Barnard eight years, Mr. William C. Hubbard two years, Mrs. Wallace C. Dean three years, and Mrs. Charles Williams three years. Mrs. Ella R. Wood was secretary eleven years, Mrs. Harriet M. Barnard one year, Mrs. Mary E. Warrington eleven years, Mrs. Robert Capen three years, and Mrs. John B. McCormick four years.

The Rev. Mr. Hadley was treasurer two years. Mr. N. F. Miller, for his 28 years of service as treasurer, merits a sincere "well done." Mr. J. C. Capen was a member of the board for several years. In the secretary's report for 1911, there is a tribute to Mr. William J. Gabb, whose interest in the welfare of the town library never waned throughout his lifetime.

There have been but two librarians, myself and Miss Grace L. Hayes. The town of Bloomfield pays the salary of a librarian and the current expenses of the library. Although well supplied with money for books, there is no fund for further equipment.

In accordance with a vote taken by the Board of Directors, a modern charging desk has recently been purchased at a cost of \$360. This handsome piece of furniture is now in place, and payment for it has been partly made by means of a gift of \$100 from the town, the proceeds of a subscription bridge party, and some cash received from the payment of fines. The amount now unpaid is \$135.

Prosser Library has now outgrown its room in the Town Hall. The time will soon come when the affairs of a rapidly growing town will require all the space in the building, and a change in the location of the library will become imperative. It is much to be desired that a public library fulfill as far as possible the literary needs both recreational and educational of the community in which it is situated. If the fates are kind, perhaps some way may be found so that Prosser Library will function from a now much-needed library building.



Prosser Library, December 1991
WHS Archives photo



IN MEMORIAM



Al LeFebvre
Prosser Library photo

Alfred LeFebvre, 95, died on April 26. He was a member of the Historical Society and made a gift to the Society of a seal which he designed and produced with help from his son Neil and granddaughter Marielle. Al was the epitome of involved citizen, holding elective office, volunteering, and participating in a number of groups, including the Prosser Library Board of Directors. A Navy veteran and graduate of UConn and other colleges, Al was an engineer and multi-talented hobbyist.



DO YOU REMEMBER THIS?

LAST BUSINESS IN OLD SHOPPING CENTER CLOSES

Reprinted from *The Hartford Courant*, March 22, 1970. From a clipping in WHS files.

The lights in the Park Avenue Shopping Center went out for the final time Saturday as the last of the ten businesses in the center closed.

The center was built in 1947 and will soon be demolished to make room for parking spaces in Wintonbury Mall, the major part of Bloomfield's redevelopment project.



Whiton house and Savings Bank
Park Avenue, about 1970
WHS Archives photo

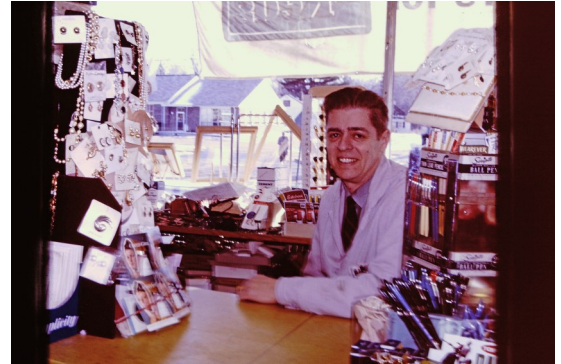
Several occupants of the center moved to the new Wintonbury Mall Shopping Center located directly behind the old shopping area. Others moved out of town or closed their doors altogether. Two occupants of the old center are building new stores in Bloomfield.

Harold Noble's Hardware store was the oldest business in the shopping center, and rather than move into the mall he closed the store. Noble says he realizes redevelopment is for the good of the town, but he could not afford the rents he would have to pay to move into the new shopping center.

Cumberland Farms is closing its store until a location can be found to build a new building.

Another businessman, Lawrence Cohen, owner of the Park Pharmacy is happy with his new store in the mall. He said that while his rent doubled the increase in business will offset the cost. His customers seem to like the new location, and he has had to increase his work force since the move, less than a month ago, he said.

The Park Avenue Department Store, one of those who refused to make the move, has relocated to the Pine Plaza Shopping Center, Forestville. The Sports Centre, a wholesale sporting good outlet, has moved to Windsor. A beauty parlor and shoe shop relocated to other shopping centers in town.



Albert Goldenthal in his
Park Avenue Department Store
April 1965
Petersen's Restaurant visible through window
WHS Archives photo



MEMBER BENEFITS

Your membership in the Society provides needed financial support. Along with this support, here are some practical benefits that you can take advantage of: ● Scanning of old photos ● Help in writing and publishing memoirs ● Recording oral memoirs ● Genealogical research ● Help with genealogical software programs ● House research. Call or just send a message to wintonburyhistory.genealogy@gmail.com .

DO YOU REMEMBER THIS?

STORES MAY OPEN SOON IN WINTONBURY MALL

Reprinted from *The Hartford Courant*, June 1, 1970. From a clipping in WHS files.

The new Wintonbury Mall may be finished by the fall, according to Louis Beckenstein, mall developer.

The Samuel H. Donchian Rug Co. will be moving in next to the Lighting Center, and a new men's boutique shop will be moving in next to the pharmacy, Beckenstein announced. He is currently negotiating with two "top notch" dress shops, he said. They should all be operating within the next 30 days, Beckenstein added.

The Society for Savings should open between June 5-10, and the movie theater should be completed by August, according to Beckenstein. The movie theater will be located on the east side of Jerome Avenue, according to Redevelopment Director Ennals Berl.

Regini's Humble Station will be reconstructed to complement the proposed Connecticut Bank and Trust Building to be built on Park Ave., at the front of the mall, Berl said. The Redevelopment Agency is working with the architects for both businesses to produce a unified design which is coordinated with the over-all town plan, he added.

When asked about the landscaping, Berl said the Wintonbury Mall is one of the "most unusual in the country" in that respect. The Mall's raised landscaping is a "unique feature," with whole areas one type of plant, including forsythia and rhododendron, Berl said.

Trees will be planted in a ten-foot grass strip between the sidewalk and Jerome and Wintonbury Aves., Berl said, and landscaping around the outside of the mall. Parking lot roadways will be marked by large concrete planters with trees and shrubs, Berl said.

Norway maple trees will line the Park Ave. side of the mall, according to Berl. They cannot be planted until the plans for widening Park Ave. are laid out, however, he added. Town Engineer Barry Berson said no detailed plans are available yet.



Wintonbury Mall 1991
WHS Archives photo



Wintonbury Mall fountain 1971
WHS Archives photo

Completing the landscaping around the mall will be the town green. The green will be across from Prosser Library, and blend into the mall property, Berl said. The Redevelopment Agency has not yet approved a design for the green, Berl said. Several possible designs will be submitted soon, however, and the agency will choose one, Berl added.

When the agency gives final approval for a town green design, the town Public Works Department will work on the landscaping, Berl said. This will help pay for the town's share in the whole redevelopment project, he explained.