

# The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

September 2022

## ANNUAL MEETING AND PROGRAM THE ROBERTS HOUSE: 200<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

Wednesday, SEPTEMBER 14, 2022, 6:30 PM at Sacred Heart Church

Dessert and beverages at 6:30

Annual meeting at 6:45

Program at 7:00

“Of all the structures that once encircled the green, the only two remaining are the Congregational Church and the Roberts’ Homestead at 717 Bloomfield Avenue, which faces north. This Federal-style brick house built in 1822 by Lemuel Roberts has a beautiful front entrance door featuring a large Palladian window overhead and leaded-glass side windows. [. . .] The house remained in the Roberts family for 115 years prior to its purchase in 1937 by Dr. Donald and Margaret McCrann, and it is often referred to as the McCrann House.” (*Over Tunxis Trails*, Page 8)



Roberts-McCrann House, front/R. Pierce photo



Please join us in person as Ron Marchetti, Dick Hughes, and Dale Bertholdi discuss the Roberts House, its history and its characteristics.

**IN THIS ISSUE:** **Page 2:** Nominations list; 2022-2023 programs. **Pages 3-4:** A Centenarian Visits Old Farm School; Lemuel Haynes: Student etc. **Pages 5-6:** The Witness Stones Project; Slaves in Wintonbury Parish. **Pages 7-8:** A Hundred Thousand Daffodils in Bloomfield.

**DIRECTORY****President Pro Tem**

Richard Pierce

**Past President**

William Weissenburger

**Vice-presidents**

Elizabeth Merrow

Ruthanne Marchetti

**Treasurer**

Judy Dahlgren-Dechand

**Secretary**

Marilyn Johnston

**Curators**

Ralph &amp; Louise Schmoll

**Genealogists**

Jean Perreault

Janis Langston

**Prosser Liaison**

Allison Wilkos

**Board of Directors****2022**

Paula Baram

Mary Laiuppa

Aaron Romano

Wendy Wolcott

**2023**

Tobie Katz

Ron Marchetti

Vacancy

Vacancy

**2024**

John Cappadona

Homer Guilmartin

Richard Hughes

Mara Whitman

**Nominations 2022 (for annual meeting)**

President: John Cappadona

Vice-president: Libbie Merrow and Ruthanne Marchetti

Treasurer: Susan Vancour

Board of Directors:

**Class of 2023:** Tobie Katz, Ron Marchetti, David Roones, vacancy**Class of 2024:** Homer Guilmartin, Richard Hughes, Mara Whitman, vacancy**Class of 2025:** Paula Baram, Halesteen Graham Days, Mary Laiuppa, and Wendy Wolcott**PROGRAM SCHEDULE FOR 2022-2023**

Days and times TBA

**November 2022:** What is a Certified Local Government? with Mary Dunne of the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. With this certification, Bloomfield would establish a Historic Preservation Commission.

**February 2023:** The Bloomfield High School Gospel Choir performs a Sunday afternoon concert at Bloomfield Congregational Church.

**April 2023:** The Witness Stones Project. The task force of Tollie Miller, Donna Wnuck, Nancy Bowden, and David Roones will bring us up to date on the effort to acknowledge the slaves who lived in Wintonbury Parish. See pages 5-6 for David's informative article on this project. See also the West Hartford Historical Society site: [www.noahwebsterhouse.org/witness-stones-project-west-hartford](http://www.noahwebsterhouse.org/witness-stones-project-west-hartford)

**June 2023:** Bloomfield's Earliest Houses 1690-1800. A report with some surprises by WHS researchers.

**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 November issue should be received by October 1, 2022.

*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](mailto:wintonburyhistory@gmail.com)Web: [www.bloomfieldcthistory.org](http://www.bloomfieldcthistory.org)

# Centenarian Visits Old Farm School

*Text and photos by John Cappadona, June 2022. Reprinted with the author's permission from the Bloomfield Messenger, July 15, 2022.*

Early one recent Sunday afternoon, Ruthanne and Ron Marchetti and I met a remarkable woman. Her name is Vera Taylor, and she had just celebrated her 100th birthday. She lives on School Street in Bloomfield, near the Old Farm Schoolhouse. Because her friend and neighbor, Joaner Weidman, rightly felt that this milestone warranted some notice from the Historical Society, she approached me a week before, while I was sitting out in front the schoolhouse as docent, to inform us of it.

Mrs. Taylor accepted our invitation to visit. She arrived arm in arm with her friend Joaner, and put us all at ease with her easy manner, charm, and wit. We sat and had cookies and tea as she gave us a brief but comprehensive history of her life. Now, this has been reported in a wonderful article in the May 26 *Bloomfield Messenger*—how she came to Hartford in 1960 from her native Jamaica with her two small children, to join her husband Amos who worked for the Culbro Tobacco Company in Windsor; how they had another child, and made a life together in America, Amos rising to supervisor at Culbro, Vera working at the Hartford National Bank in Hartford. Both of them were members of, and Amos a founder of, the West Indian Social Club in Hartford; and they both facilitated the enlistment of Jamaican workers to come to the US and work for Culbro.

That day she gave us a real flavor of family life as a young girl and woman in Jamaica in the 1920s through 1950s. She and her sisters were taught to be busy and industrious while growing up—music lessons and household chores after school, church on Sundays. "Come on, mon" (a favorite expression of hers), she told us with a chuckle, "you couldn't just sit around and be idle!"

That ethic persisted in her life in America. She was employed for 40 years at the bank while raising their three children. And Amos, an industrious man, who supervised over forty camps and hundreds of workers at Culbro, took meticulous care of their home and property on School St., so much so that Vera worried that the neighbors would talk about what a demanding a wife she must be, to have her husband working on the property till all hours!



I expected to hear from her how much Bloomfield had changed since she and her husband and children moved to Bloomfield in 1971, but I was happy to hear that the town's character was similar then to how it seems now—with a great deal of small-town feel to it, not a "bedroom" suburb like several of our surrounding towns.

She remembers watching the relocation of the Old Farm Schoolhouse from one side of School St. to the other, in October 1976, and was stunned to see how quickly it was done! Seeing her enter the 224-year-old structure, it occurred to me that it was a century younger when she was born. Until that Sunday afternoon, she had never stepped foot inside.

Well, she made up for lost time. As Ron Marchetti explained the features and the history of the schoolhouse, she took it all (continued —>)

in, wide-eyed, interested, wanting to see everything! She is petite, so she fit nicely into the child's desk chair, and read the spelling chart, while Ron explained to her that, back in the day, the school bell would also be used to summon and alert the townspeople. She rose from her seat toward its rope in the center of the room, and while Ron rang the bell, she joined him, repeatedly and with vigor. Not many people her age can even raise their arms overhead.

Towards the end of her tour, she saw the stairs to the second floor, which Ron explained became a classroom for the older children, and she could see what it looked like from the photos at the bottom of the stairs. She was having none of it; she climbed the stairs with ease and took it all in firsthand. She and her friend Joaner sat side by side in the desk seats like eager students. I've never felt more in touch with Bloomfield and its history than during my afternoon with Vera. Perhaps it's because of sharing part of our town's history with someone who has so much history herself. Thank you, Vera.



## Lemuel Haynes: Servant, Soldier, Student, Pastor

Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833) is an intriguing figure in Bloomfield history. The town can boast that it was here that he received the education that equipped him for his long career.

“The record is somewhat vague,” comments Roscoe Metzger in his history of Bloomfield Congregational Church, “but it is entirely possible that it was during these latter years [of Hezekiah Bissell’s ministry that] Lemuel Haynes studied theology under the tutelage of one of Mr. Bissell’s assistants, in return for which he taught the children in the early Wintonbury school. Mr. Haynes preached a sermon in our church, was later ordained in the Litchfield Association and commissioned by that Association to serve as a missionary in Vermont. Mr. Haynes, who was a black, was an ardent and successful preacher of the gospel in West Rutland and Manchester, Vermont.”<sup>1</sup>

Haynes was born in West Hartford, but he grew up in Granville, Massachusetts from the age of five months as an indentured servant. His term of indenture expired in 1774, just in time for him to join the militia.

When the Revolutionary War began in 1775, blacks responded to the call for troops, and many of them were among the militiamen who converged on eastern Massachusetts. Lemuel Haynes of West Hartford, whose father was an African, was no longer living in Connecticut, but he did serve with Minutemen who fought in the first engagements at Lexington and Concord. Haynes later saw duty at Fort Ticonderoga.<sup>2</sup>

After his military service, Haynes studied for the ministry. This is what brought him to Wintonbury Parish. He was formally ordained in 1785 and served in the pastorate for over forty years in Vermont and New York. His last home, in South Granville, New York, is a National Historic Landmark.

1. Roscoe Metzger, *Hezekiah’s Children: A History of the First Congregational Church in Bloomfield, Connecticut* (1989), page 13.

2. From *African American Connecticut Explored*, edited by Elizabeth J. Normen et al. (Wesleyan University Press, 2013), page 27.



# Expanding our Lens on Bloomfield's History

The Witness Stones Project

by David Roones

In 2017, Dennis Culliton, a retired teacher in Guilford, CT, conceived the Witness Stones Project as a way to honor the enslaved people in his town whose contributions to society were largely forgotten. He modeled the idea on the Stolpersteine Holocaust Memorial Project in Berlin, Germany, created by artist Gunter Demnig in 1996. Stolpersteine means “stumbling block” in German. Each concrete block is capped by a four-inch square brass plate inlaid in a sidewalk near the last home of each victim of Nazi cruelty. The plaque begins “Here lived”, contains the victim’s name, date of birth, and where and when he/she died. The stones are deliberately set above grade so that people trip on them and are forced to look down at the inscription.

The Guilford effort quickly caught the attention of Tracey Wilson, a retired teacher and the Town Historian in West Hartford. She was joined by Elizabeth Devine and Denise deMello. Sponsored by Noah Webster House, the three searched Census data, wills, estate inventories, account books, church records, and newspaper ads for slave auctions and runaways, and found that more than 80 persons were enslaved in the West Division of Hartford (now West Hartford) in colonial times and the years following the Revolution. So far, in the last five years, 50 Witness Stones have been placed in the Old Burying Ground on North Main Street in West Hartford. Each brass plaque lists the enslaved person’s name, dates of birth and death (when known), the person who enslaved him/her, and perhaps a skill he or she had or a personal detail such as when she or he was baptized. The purpose is “to restore the history and honor the humanity of the enslaved individuals who helped build our communities.” The Project begun in Guilford is now in 44 communities in five states.

Education is a key component of this program. The three women mentioned above created a curriculum on slavery that is used in five West Hartford Middle schools. Students do their own research and create a poem, artwork, or song to honor the life of an enslaved person. In addition, Mss. Wilson, Devine, and (continued —>)



Witness Stones in West Hartford

DeMello have conducted webinars for teens and adults about slavery in West Hartford, and collected soil samples, stored in large mason jars, from places where the enslaved may have worked. All this is done in the belief that White settlers were able to pass wealth down from one generation to the next, while the Black enslaved had little to give their heirs, contributing to disparities in wealth we see today.

The Witness Stones Project in West Hartford has offered to conduct three workshops in early 2023 to train staff from local history centers in how to include slavery and race in their exhibits, provided that the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving approves a grant proposal. So far, Wintonbury Historical Society members Libbie Merrow and David Roones have agreed to the training, which will be funded by WHS. We welcome additional trainees, **especially people of color**. *Contact Ruthanne Marchetti if you are interested in these workshops or call WHS at 860-243-1531 or email [wintonburyhistory@gmail.com](mailto:wintonburyhistory@gmail.com).*

African Americans, West Indians, Jewish settlers, and Muslim newcomers all add to our town's heritage. Oral histories might be collected as part of a new project in the early stages of planning. *Do you know of anyone who might talk about why they settled in Bloomfield, the challenges they faced, and/or the benefits they enjoy living in our town?*

**Editor's Note:** *Connecticut Explored* magazine has named Witness Stones one of its Twenty Game Changers in Connecticut history. See the Fall 2022 issue, page 25, available at the Gabriel History Center.

## Slaves in Wintonbury Parish

It is a matter of record that a slave named Cyrus, valued at 30 pounds, was listed in 1680 as a part of the estate of one Henry Wolcott, a native of Windsor. It is quite likely that he was the first slave in the colony of Connecticut. The Rev. Hezekiah Bissell, first pastor of our church, lists two young people as his property; their names were Lucy and Caesar, and they were baptized by their "owner." It seems to be pretty generally agreed that there may have been as many as a dozen men and women, boys and girls, who were held as slaves in Wintonbury/Bloomfield during the eighteenth century. They were expected to go to church, to be baptized, and to be instructed in the meanings of the Christian gospel. But there was a peculiar blindness in all this; when they went to church, they sat "under the stairs" (wherever that may have been); it was agreed that they were immortal souls, but their bodies could be bought and sold, and when they heard the gospel, it was to be understood as "pie in the sky," not as human freedom here and now, in this world. And when they died, they were buried off in a secluded corner of the cemetery.



Unidentified couple  
NPR photo

---Roscoe Metzger, *Hezekiah's Children: A History of the First Congregational Church in Bloomfield, Connecticut* (1989), page 55. Available for sale at the Gabriel History Center.

# A HUNDRED THOUSAND DAFFODILS IN BLOOMFIELD

by Fred Cawte, 1985

**Editor's note:** The following reminiscence was published by Bloomfield town historian Roberta Kania in her "Good Old Days" column in the *Bloomfield Journal* for July 19, 1985. Kania's column was part of the Wintonbury Historical Society's observance of Bloomfield's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The author, Fred Cawte, writes about forty years in the florist business on Goodman Street (off Cottage Grove Road west of the railroad tracks). This memoir was republished in the Society's *Good Old Days*, and is for sale at the Gabriel History Center.

A short time ago, I took a ride on Goodman Street. If I didn't have this picture, I would never believe myself that we had a greenhouse. There were two more greenhouses below the ones in the picture. The house was right behind the tree. Now where the greenhouse was are trees and weeds ten or fifteen feet high. I think of all the days and hours we put in down there, and now there's nothing there.

All the houses on Goodman Street have been demolished. The Fire Department said they were a hazard. Bercowetz had cattle coming in on cattle cars. The railroad was going to run a spur track over to Granby Street, but they abandoned that idea. The hotel is down; Osty's house is down.

A man named Beauford owned the hotel. This was really something. It was a summer hotel, about ten rooms. He used to advertise it in the New York papers. "In the country, right on the train. Private bathing for men and women." He was right; it was Cottage Grove Station. But all the bathing was in Christ's lot, a clump of bushes here for the women and a clump of bushes there for the men. They came out for a week or so for a vacation. To swim they had to go down to the brook. There were a few snakes and water snakes. They had a pavilion, screens around it. It was about twenty feet by twenty feet. They had pole lamps—oil lamps, that is. In the twenties they had Japanese lanterns. They danced to victrola music. Mind you, the hotel was on a 100 square foot lot.



Cawte Greenhouses, Goodman Street  
*Bloomfield Journal* photo

The brick house near the corner that later was painted pink, that was the Christ farm. Christ went out of business when the state started tuberculin testing on the cows. We all used to buy their milk. It wasn't pasteurized. It was still warm when we got it. Nobody ever got sick. But the state came along and tested the cows. They took all thirty cows. They left the bull. They allowed him \$75 for each cow. Pre-tested cows, those that had passed the test, that he would have to buy, would cost \$175—which today, of course, would be dirt-cheap. In those days a few dollars meant a lot. It put him right out of business. He couldn't buy the cows, and he couldn't make a living. There wasn't as much money around in those days as there is now.

Goodman Street has been there for well over 100 years. When [Richard] Goodman was our mayor, I told him I had lived on Goodman Street. He said he had never heard of it. It was named for the Goodman family. They used to have a farm on Cottage Grove Road between Tyler Street and School Street. They lived in the brick house. But Mr. Goodman was born in the house at the corner of Goodman Street. When we moved here in 1918, Goodman Street was only a stone road. Every year, we had to pay a share, and the town paid a share to maintain it. We didn't have any electricity or water when we moved here. At first, we used kerosene lights. We had to bring in electricity through the lots and pay rental for each pole. And we had to dig our own trench for our private water pipe from Cottage Grove Road to the greenhouse.

Our family came from England when I was eight years old. Working men never owned anything in England. My father was head gardener on an estate. He had twenty-one men working for (continued—>)



him. You didn't have an eight-hour day. If the Lord wanted you to work eighteen hours, that's what you worked. Anyway, that's where he leaned the florist business.

When we first came here, we came to Elmwood. My father worked at Vine Hill farm. We were poor. I had to go to work when I was fourteen. We started our business in 1918: R. Cawte and Sons, my father, my brothers and I. It was mostly wholesale. I used to do the delivering. There were many more florists in Hartford than nowadays. The florist business was booming in those days. You'd be surprised how men used to buy a bunch of flowers on Friday or Saturday to take home to their wife. Now they buy a bottle of liquor. Coons was the leading florist. He had a shop on Main Street and also at Hotel Guard on Asylum Street, two stores. Spear McManus was up the street where the Civic Center is now. In those days, they would have three trucks delivering all the time, not just holidays. You would deliver to the hospitals 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Loose flowers. The nurses had to take them out, put them in water and arrange them. Now, flowers are all arrangements.

We delivered all over Hartford, Manchester, New Britain, Newington and sometimes Bristol. We sold to stores, mostly. In those days funeral flowers were a big thing. People would have a roomful of flowers. We sold mostly to stores, but also locally to our friends. Funerals were 75 percent of the florist business. Now, florists have to put up baskets of fruit or silk flowers just to stay in business. Stores would have three trucks delivering all day every day except Sundays. Now, if there is a holiday, that makes a rush with the florists. The big holidays are Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. And they want the flowers delivered right on Valentine's Day.



Our specialty in those days, before the Second World War, was growing Dutch bulbs. About 200 Hollanders sent their salesmen here, all over the United States. They took their orders and sent the bulbs in the fall. They collected after Easter the following years. We had a big bulb cellar underground. We would raise maybe 150,000 tulips, thirty or forty thousand hyacinths, and about 100,000 daffodils. We would take them all out of the root cellar in the spring.

We used to raise chrysanthemums. We had a half-acre tent outside on Goodman Street, but you'd never believe it now. For Christmas we had six or seven thousand poinsettias. Those were our main crops. Of course, there were odds and ends.

Our bulb center underground had an iron roof because of trains. There were five or six trains a day. They didn't have any screens. The hot coals would blow out. They would come down on building and set your roof on fire. Sometimes they set the grass on fire.

In 1958, we sold the greenhouse to some young fellows, friends of Bercowetz. We had to sell. Charlie had heart trouble. The doctor told him, "If you don't get out of that place soon, they'll pick you up and plant you out back." The young fellows were going to set the world on fire. They didn't have the business six months before they went broke. They sold it to Culbro. Inside of six months they made \$10,000 more than we sold it for. Culbro raised nursery stock there for three or four years. Then they sold to Mrs. Berman. She bought all of Goodman Street. She must own over 150 acres.

Ride up Goodman Street now. There's nothing there.



Goodman Street today—  
address of only Dunkin' Donuts  
and Frontier Communications  
R. Pierce photos

