

The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, CT

September 2023

Annual Meeting Thursday, September 28 6:30 P.M. Via Zoom

The Zoom link will be emailed to all members prior to the meeting date.



The agenda will include approval of the financial report for 2022-2023 and elections of a secretary and five directors. Marilyn Johnston has agreed to continue as secretary. Khalid Williams is nominated for director, Class of 2024; and nominated as directors for the Class of 2026 are incumbents Tobie Katz, Ronald Marchetti, David Roones, and Richard Pierce. Several committees will report on their activities. All WHS members are encouraged to attend.

NEW NAMEPLATE FOR THIS ISSUE

Artist Michael Borders has inserted the image of a drummer into the *Drummer's* nameplate/banner, above, giving our newsletter a fresh, new look. Borders is a Bloomfield resident and a nationally known artist. He holds degrees from Fisk and Howard Universities and has painted numerous murals, portraits, and other works of art over his long career. Borders has participated in the Historical Society's Oral History Project. See page 8 for notes on the historical background of his drummer.



Michael Borders
You Tube Image

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: Board of Directors Highlights, page 2. From Bloomfield to Broadcasting: Bob Joyce and David Ushery, pages 3-5. Hidden Histories Project, pages 6-7. Help Wanted, page 7. Society Receives Collections Assessment Grant, page 8. In Memoriam, page 8. Drummer history, page 8.

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Ron Marchetti

David Roones

Richard Pierce

2024

Homer Guilmartin

Richard Hughes

Mara Whitman

Vacancy

2025

Paula Baram

Halesteen Graham Days

Mary Laiuppa

Wendy Wolcott

BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The Board met on June 1 and 28 and on August 14 via Zoom. The Board accepted with regret the resignations of Ralph and Louise Schmoll as Curators, expressing appreciation for their important contributions to the Society and to the Gabriel History Center.

The treasurer reported income of \$13,253 for the fiscal year July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023 and expenses of \$8,668. Vanguard investments reached \$376,878. Grants accounted for \$5,325 of the income.

Donna Wnuck of our partner Bloomfield Humanities Committee reported on the Oral History Project. We have fifty people to interview, and eleven of those have been completed. The transcription, editing, and review processes are ongoing, and the Board agreed to spend \$2,500 to hire Christian Wolliston, a CCSU student, as summer intern to work with Professor Vernal on the transcriptions. Completed interviews will be uploaded to CT Archives and feed into an eventual exhibit.

An application for a Historic Preservation Grant for the Old Farm School is ongoing. We are working with an architect and seeking bids from three contractors.

The Collections Committee has sold some old furniture for \$275. The Board agreed to put this amount into a new Collections Fund to be used by the Committee for its expenses.

Doug Barnard reported that the History Center sump pump and dehumidifier need replacing, and the Board approved \$2,600 for this work. Doug added that the Southwest District School building is urgent need of repairs.

On June 28, guests Khalil Williams and Caroline Archer were introduced. Archer spoke of her Filley family research.

In 2024, the Society will be 75 years old. The Board solicits ideas on how to celebrate the anniversary.



**we
volunteers!**

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 11, 2023.

**OUR BUSINESS MEMBERS**

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Printmark Services, 21 Old Windsor Road
Wade's Farms, 498 Simsbury Road

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FROM BLOOMFIELD TO BROADCASTING

By Sarah Pierce Fowler

Bob Joyce



Brad Horrigan photo

Bob Joyce comes from an old Bloomfield farming family. His grandfather, James M. Joyce, Sr. (1892-1961) lived in Bloomfield

all his life and farmed about seventeen acres north of Park Avenue. The 1800s brick farmhouse, where they lived in the early 1900s, still stands today at 422 Park Avenue. (See *Over Tunxis Trails*, where the house number is given as 420, page 58.) James's father (Thomas, born 1863) had moved there from Hartford following his marriage to Sarah McLaughlin, daughter of the homeowner Elizabeth McLaughlin.



422 Tunxis Avenue
R. Pierce photo

James married Johanna Knox (1893-1956) and had four sons and two daughters. The youngest of their six children was Robert F. Joyce, born in 1931. Robert, after service in the U.S. Air Force, returned to Bloomfield and married Phyllis E. Kilby (who died in May of this year at age 90). (continued, page 4)



James & Johanna Joyce
Wedding photo
Courtesy photo

David Ushery

David Ushery, the only child of Solomon and Winifred Ushery, was raised in Bloomfield and graduated from Bloomfield High School in 1985.



Getty Images photo

David's father, Solomon Ushery, was one of the oldest living members of St. Michael's Church in Hartford and served for nearly three decades as Minister of the Eucharist, aiding patients at St. Francis Hospital and fellow parishioners. He founded his church's usher board and helped found the local unit of the Knights of Columbus. He died on Good Friday, April 22, 2011.

Solomon Ushery was born January 15, 1925, in Virginia and came north as a young man to work in Connecticut's tobacco fields. Before moving to East Euclid Street in Bloomfield, he had lived in Hartford's North End. He was a "popular, easily recognized figure in the Hartford/Bloomfield area." He worked for nearly 37 years in the departments of Public Works and Licenses and Inspections. "Through the years, Sol received many awards and citations for his work as a union shop steward and his active (continued, page 5)

(Joyce, continued) They had three sons, including Bob. Bob grew up in the family home at 92 Lincoln Terrace and graduated from Bloomfield High School in 1983.

Joyce's trajectory toward a sports broadcasting career began at an early age. He grew up enjoying the Red Sox, NFL, NHL, NBA, and collegiate game broadcasts on television and radio. There was not a single moment of inspiration that initiated his pursuit of a career in broadcasting but rather a multitude of moments listening and watching his favorite teams' games. This love for sports led him to enroll at Eastern Connecticut State University as a physical education major. Eventually, realizing that college was not the place for him and with his parents' support, he discontinued his educational pursuits.



92 Lincoln Terrace
R. Pierce photo

At the time, WDRC in Bloomfield ran the New England Broadcasting Institute on Cottage Grove Road. This provided Joyce with an introduction to the basics of broadcasting, with an emphasis on radio. His first gig on the air was a Thanksgiving Day football game in Wallingford in 1984. This was followed by his first play-by-play broadcast when he began calling Bloomfield High School basketball games on BATV, the town's cable access channel. His first part-time radio job, off air, was working at WRCH, an automated station. Joyce's first on-air gig was at the sister station of WRCH, WRCQ AM. He recalls that he learned a great deal spending overnights at the station from Sunday evenings into Monday mornings for a few years.

Joyce credits calling high school games in the Enfield area with providing valuable experience with all aspects of broadcasting. His first "big break" came in the fall of 1987, when he worked in the studio running the broadcasts for the Hartford Whalers Radio Network. During his tenure with the Whalers, he began working at WTIC, successfully juggling broadcasting duties with both entities.

In 2000, Joyce filled in on a UCONN women's basketball broadcast, which led to him becoming the secondary play-by-play announcer. When the Big East expanded and UCONN wanted the women's basketball team to have its own broadcast team, he became the full-time voice. Since then, he has become widely known throughout Connecticut as the radio voice of UCONN women's basketball.



The Joyce Family
Courtesy photo

Currently Joyce is the Executive Producer of UConn Sports for the Hartford iHeart Stations. He and his wife Michelle have a son and grandson. This native son's remarkable career path reflects the value of determination, hard work, and following one's passion.

Notes: Thanks to Bob Joyce for sending us family photos and information about his career. Searches in ancestry.com and familysearch.org were also fruitful. Sarah Fowler is a teacher in Kingwood, West Virginia and was Bob's classmate, BHS 1983. Richard Pierce also contributed to this article.

(Ushery, continued) involvement with the Greater Hartford Central Labor council.”

Solomon Ushery and Winifred Gordon were married on February 23, 1946. She was born in Mississippi on February 15, 1921, one of eight siblings. For 27 years she worked for the Connecticut Department of Revenue, and she died in Hartford on August 16, 1992. A choir member at St. Michael’s and a literacy volunteer, she accompanied her husband every Saturday to St. Francis Hospital, where he distributed communion to patients.

Winifred’s obituary said, “Besides her husband, she leaves a loving son who was the center of her life, David S. Ushery of Bloomfield.” And this, as they say, is “the rest of the story.”

David Ushery’s career began when, at age eleven, he was chosen to host a nationally syndicated program, *Kidsworld*, a role he held until he was 18 years old. Ushery credits an interview with Walter Cronkite during this show for inspiring his pursuit of a career in broadcasting as a reporter and anchor. He graduated from the University of Connecticut with a double major in journalism and political science. During his time there, he juggled his academic responsibilities with writing for the *Hartford Courant* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Once he graduated, he was hired by the Hartford CBS affiliate, WFSB-TV. Within a brief time, he was offered a full-time reporting position.

In 1993, he was recruited by WABC-TV in New York City, where he was a general assignment reporter. From that point on, he became a recognizable and respected broadcaster. Ten years later, he started anchoring a popular morning newscast on WNBC, and in 2009 he developed the popular “The Debrief with David Ushery,” for which he was nominated for an Emmy in 2011. He has received the McDonald’s



Austin & David Ushery
Internet photo

Black Media Legends: Faces of Black History Award and the National Association of Black Journalists Award. His other awards are described on the website of WNBC, where he actively reports the news daily.

Currently he is the co-anchor for NBC4, New York’s twice-daily broadcasts. He is a member of the news team and covers a variety of breaking and high-interest news stories across the greater New York region and the world. David is married to Isabel Rivera, and they have a son, Austin. This Bloomfield High grad has gone out from his hometown to make a positive impact on the world of broadcasting.

Sources: This article includes material from Wikipedia and from *Hartford Courant* obituaries. See also WNBC’s website, nbcnewyork.com/author/david-ushery for more information.



David, Isabel & Austin Ushery
Getty images

Hidden Histories Project

A Progress Report by Libbie Merrow

Four of us, John Cappadona, David Roones, Mara Whitman and I, Libbie Merrow, agreed to be part of a program, Hidden Histories, learning how to research the lives of the slaves in colonial Connecticut. It was a revelation!

The program was funded by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. The Society also put in some money. (I believe it is known as “skin in the game.”) It was run by Tracey Wilson, Liz Devine and Denise DiMello from the Noah Webster House. Those three have been working for years for “Witness Stones” in the West Hartford area. They uncovered many Hidden Histories and have found ways to honor them, including having a school named “Bristow,” after a former slave, and changing the name of the Town Green from “Goodman Green,” a slave holder, to “Unity Green.”

There were six groups: The Noah Webster House, the Farmington Public Schools, the Wood Memorial Library in South Windsor, The Old State House/ Freedom Trail, The Museum of Connecticut History, based at the Connecticut State Library, and us. Mara is a professional who was representing the Library as well as the Historical Society. We other three were the only lay people in the program. Everyone else was an expert and was paid to be there, but we did the best! We really did, and it was all thanks to David who put many hours into a talk, “Slavery in Wintonbury: A Story Uncovered,” that he gave to an audience of seventy for the Bloomfield Public Library and the Society. You can hear it on YouTube by typing in that title.

We were given two texts, *How the Word is Passed* by Clint Smith and *Black Lives, Native Lands, White Worlds* by Jared Hardesty. They were both instructive! Especially the Hardesty book, which told us that slavery was not only a Southern institution but an established, essential part of New England’s economy both as cheap labor and as trade commodities. They are well worth your time.

The leaders, Tracey, et al., had done a lot of the basic research already, and they shared it with us and told us how to access censuses and church records, old newspapers, and account books. We each chose people to research. David chose Caesar and Jenny, slaves of Hezekiah Bissell, the first minister of the dominant church in Wintonbury, and we decided they should be our focus. David enlarged on the basic research, added historical context and Bissell genealogy, and presented an excellent virtual program!

This has roused curiosity among those who heard it. Others would like to do research. Janis Langston has already compiled a large book, as (continued on next page >)



Witness Stones in
West Hartford
“Infant” & “Dinah”

Janis so competently does, on the free blacks in town before the Civil War. We plan to incorporate what we have learned into a course to be given at the High School. We have found out about grants available from the state archeologists that we might use to explore the back of our ancient cemetery where there are supposedly slave graves.

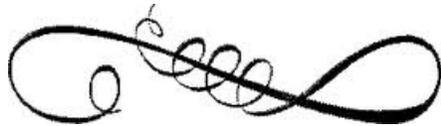
At our final meeting of the six groups, everyone shared what they might do (we were the only ones that had actually done something!). It was thought-provoking and inspiring.

The Noah Webster house gives tours to school children. They have been offering costumes for role playing, but now they are squeamish about whether they should have kids playing slave owners and about what costumes for slaves. How do we feel about our Old Farm School tours?

The Farmington Schools already have an African American History course in their High School and a Diversity Director for the system. But they have so few Blacks in the system, they couldn't estimate the percentage. What we could copy from them is that they have a fourth-grade study unit called "Unheard Voices of the Revolution." Fifth graders learn about the Amistad (Farmington was a big player in helping the Africans) and the Underground Railroad. All eighth graders do research on Farmington's history, the Paidea program, and, in some way, share the results. Ditto for Seniors in High School.

The Connecticut State Library told us of records that they hold that haven't been digitized. There is something called the SHRAB Project, "a subject guide for finding aids."

The Old State House focuses on Civics. They too are rethinking the way they have been presenting history. They will talk more about the power structure. Children will be investigators. Their cooking programs are popular. They have a powerful role-playing adult who presents interpretations of historic Black women. She would be a good program for us.



HELP WANTED

Volunteering is good for you! Within your historical society there are many jobs that can keep you busy and engaged. *The Wintonbury Drummer*, for one, needs more staff. The actual content involves writing, editing, layout (currently using Microsoft Word and Publisher), and sending a pdf file to the printer. There are other jobs, such as distribution, printing mailing labels and attaching them (Microsoft Access), and posting the newsletter on the WHS website (using WordPress). If you'd like to join the newsletter team, please contact the editor at 860-242-7639 or rnpierce3391@gmail.com.



David Roones and Greg Babal hand out water to runners during the Juneteenth celebration, June 17, 2023. Ruthanne Marchetti photo

SOCIETY RECEIVES COLLECTIONS ASSESSMENT GRANT

In June, the Society received word that its application for a Collections Assessment grant has been approved. WHS director Halesteen Graham Days was instrumental in writing this grant application and submitting it.

An assessor will carry out a three-hour visit to WHS facilities to view our collection and draw up recommendations for improvements that can be made in how we store, catalog, and provide access to our materials. WHS will receive \$650 from CT Humanities to pay the assessor when it receives their report. All site visits and reports will be completed by October 10.

The Collections Assessment Grant is a program managed by Conservation ConneCTion and is supported through a partnership grant of the Connecticut Heritage Foundation at the Connecticut State Library and CT Humanities (CTH), with funding provided by the Connecticut State Department of Economic and Community Development. The Conservation ConneCTion, 231 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, is an initiative to preserve Connecticut's cultural collections by providing learning opportunities for collecting institutions through site visits, hands-on learning, and webinars/workshops.

IN MEMORIAM

Barbara Beeching died on July 6, 2023, at the age of 94. She and her husband Paul had six children and seven grandchildren. After moving to Seabury, Barbara became a member and supporter of the Wintonbury Historical Society. In February 2016, she spoke at a Society program at Prosser Library about her upcoming book, *Hopes and Expectations: The Origins of the Black Middle Class in Hartford*. Beeching came late to the study of history. When she retired from public relations work in the Connecticut tourism office, she enrolled at Trinity College and earned a master's degree in American Studies. She then went on to study American history at the University of Connecticut. She earned a Ph.D. in 2010, at the age of 82. She was an active member of the Historical Society.

Revolutionary War Drummer part of history

The figure of the drummer in the nameplate on page 1 is inspired by a painting of Oliver Cromwell (1752-1853), an African American soldier from New Jersey who served more than six years in the Revolutionary War. He received the Award of Merit from George Washington. See <https://philacarta.com/blogs/news/oliver-cromwell>



Above: President John Cappadona carries a drum in the Memorial Day Parade, May29. —R. Pierce photo

