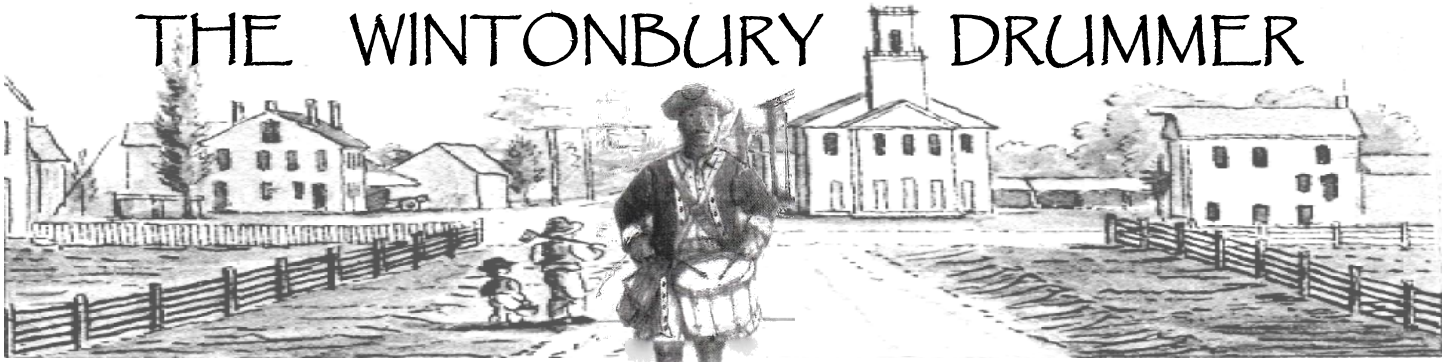


# THE WINTONBURY DRUMMER



NEWSLETTER OF THE WINTONBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BLOOMFIELD, CONNECTICUT • NOVEMBER 2023

## NEW BOOK BY MARILYN JOHNSTON ANNOUNCED

by Libbie Merrow

A new book of poems by the Society's own Marilyn Johnston, entitled *Downward Dreaming*, has just been published by Grayson Books. These poems reflect on the second half of life: a change from a corporate career to a creative life, mounting family losses, shifts in marriage evolution, difficulties with an aging mother. The historical context of her life is also reviewed, particularly the Vietnam War of her youth and its impact on a beloved brother, veteran of that war, who died of cancer at age 57. Bloomfield's verdant fields are in this book as well as interactions with Bloomfield's people, met over the desk of Bloomfield Public Library where Johnston worked for twenty years. Her poem "Circulation" begins: "I still track my brother/ through the lonely adolescent faces/ in the library. In black leather jacket, / this one, silent, somber, needs to scan/ his diploma and transcripts/ for potential dream/ employer. I congratulate him/ on his graduation/ as I would my brother who died/ and so things circulate in/ this way..."

Margaret Gibson, Connecticut Poet Laureate 2019-2022, has written: "Quest looks forward, memory looks back. These heartfelt poems are forged in the tension between these opposing directives. Johnston, a descendent of self-made immigrants, dreams of self-creation. That questing freedom returns in these poems, which confirm her own voice, word by word. Lucky us."

Published in numerous journals nationwide, Johnston's poems have garnered six Pushcart Prize nominations. Her two earlier books were published by Antrim House Books. Johnston has lived in town for 38 years. She is a retiree from Bloomfield Public Library where she co-founded the still popular Wintonbury Poetry Series and Open Mic. She lives in a 100-year-old house on four acres in Bloomfield with her husband, Ray.

The giving season is just ahead; consider giving a gift of poetry this year, to others-- or to yourself. *Downward Dreaming* is available from GraysonBooks.com (\$16.95) and also from Amazon.com.



Marilyn Johnston  
Courtesy photo

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

Twenty-five people attended the Society's Zoom Annual Meeting on September 28. Financial reports were made and elections held. The box on the left shows an up-to-date listing. Louise Schmoll reported statistics on the number of visitors and number of volunteer hours during the past fiscal year. Professor Fiona Vernal described progress made in our Mosaic Oral History Project and explained TheirStory, a remote interviewing platform that we use.

(Note: "TheirStory started as a way of sharing and preserving memories among family—but it has since transformed into a platform that streamlines the process for any community to collect, preserve, and engage with the audiovisual stories of the individuals that make up their community. We envision a world where everyone, everywhere embraces open dialogue. They value their community's history and engage across generations and cultures. By understanding each others' stories and perspectives, we can overcome obstacles, practice empathy, and better support ourselves, our families, and our communities—now and for generations to come." —from <https://theirstory.io>)

The Board held a special Zoom meeting on October 7 with fourteen people present to discuss the recently-submitted application to the Connecticut Office of the Arts for a Historical Restoration Fund grant application to restore the Old Farm School. The total cost estimate is \$120,000, of which the grant would supply at least half. Architect Robert Hurd has submitted a detailed "Opinion of Probable Construction Costs" and a letter spelling out the costs and services to be supplied by his firm, The Architect, of Arbor Street in Hartford. The Board voted to authorize payment of \$6,500 to Hurd as the costs are incurred. The Board also voted to secure a Zoom membership for the Society at \$8.00 per month.

we  volunteers!

### ATTENTION!!!

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

### OUR BUSINESS MEMBER

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### *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  
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# Fascinating Family History Projects, #3

Editor's note: The first two Fascinating Family History Projects are found in the *Drummers* of November 2022 and February 2023. Your editor would love to extend the series with more readers' contributions.

## FILLEY WRITINGS

by Caroline Filley Archer

When my husband, Bill, and I were getting married, he asked me a simple question. “Your Dad is very proud of being a Filley. Why?” I shrugged and didn’t have a good answer for him. My father was proud and always stressed that pride in his three kids.

It was just part of my life. I hadn’t thought to ask him, or my grandfather, why that was so important.

As I sat with my grandfather on a Sunday afternoon, he would start telling me stories about growing up in Bloomfield. He loved Bloomfield.

He had a beautiful painting of a big white house that we all called the farmhouse. There were other things around the house. Things like Civil War items that we weren’t allowed to play with. And a big dark oil portrait who, I was told, was “Uncle John... a pig bit him and he died.”

Many of my grandfather’s stories seemed the same and I tuned out quickly. And I wasn’t paying great attention.

On an east coast tour looking at colleges with our sons, we took a detour so I could see the Bloomfield, which had been so important to my grandfather. We headed to Filley Park as I knew my grandfather had donated some of the land. It was beautiful. We walked over to the cemetery, and I found some Filleys, but at that time I did not know who they were.

My sister and I lost the three key Filley men in our Filley family. Our grandfather passed away when I was in high school. Our father passed away when he was in his eighties. Our brother passed away from cancer.

After retiring when I turned 60, I began to think more about the Filley family. I wondered about the people buried in that Bloomfield cemetery. And I realized that I should have paid better attention to my grandfather’s stories about his life.

My sister had begun researching William Filley and his arrival in the New World in the 1600s. We decided to write the stories of all the generations.

We divided up the generations, giving each generation a chapter (continued—>)



Filley house on Brown Street  
Courtesy of Caroline Archer

in our effort. When we were done, we went to the copiers to make ten copies and mailed out the family history document to my sons, her kids, and my brother's kids.

It felt good to share the information, but our kids' lives were busy—working and raising their own kids. I imagined the documents were put on the shelf to await a moment when they had the time, the energy, and the interest to pick it up. (“Thank you so much. I will read it this summer!”)

My sister and I decided that the younger generations would be interested in their ancestors when they reached our age. I set a goal to not stop researching and wondered if there were other ways to tell family stories.



A tin box from the Filley family  
Courtesy of Caroline Archer

The Filley family has been fun to research. Why? We were “savers” of things, especially papers—letters, diaries, invoices, ledgers, and books. I am so grateful that we have been saving for generations. I have tried researching my mother's side of the family, and my husband's family, and there just isn't as much to be discovered. They led interesting lives, but not much had been saved.

The Filley research helped make American history become personal.

My great great-grandmother (Julia Newberry Filley) had kept yearly diaries from the early 1850s to the late 1870s. And through her writings and the writings of her husband, Jay, I have learned the lives (heartaches, health issues, legal fights, celebrations, reactions to historical events) of family members as well as their friends.

My direct ancestors were Bloomfield farmers. I doubt that their lives were greatly different than their neighbors.

Jay's brothers ventured away. St. Louis was one area—a key area for people heading West. Their stories are intertwined with Jay and Julia's lives. The family was changing from farming to manufacturing. The saved letters helped tell this story. But the stories of those that moved away always seemed to have their roots in Bloomfield.

As you probably guessed, I continued researching. I was still hoping to find more, possibly answer my husband's question: “Why was he so proud to be a Filley?” The research began to feel more personal. I was touched by learning about their lives.

I got hooked on learning more: Ancestry.com, My Heritage, Connecticut Historical Society, Wintonbury newsletters, Newspapers.com, and basic online searches. You might be surprised by what pops up. Bits and pieces—and more—fun little things that really didn't fit into anything.

Over the years, a couple of events helped me have a broader understanding into the lives of people that were connected to Jay and Julia. (continued—>)

First, I received an email from a second cousin, Barbara Filley Gardner, whom I hadn't seen in something like 50+ years. Barbara had been contacted by Sam Wong, who had been researching his great great-grandfather (Kwong Ki Chiu). Sam had discovered there was a connection, a friendship, with Jay and Julia Filley—a story that my grandfather never shared with me or my sister. During Sam's research, he was given electronic copies of transcriptions of Julia's diaries. Sam shared these diaries with me, which really gave a feeling of their daily lives.<sup>1</sup>

Second, on the Ancestry.com website, you can include your email to the family tree created as you do the family research. I have made two "friends" through this, two people not from my family, but related to people that were part of Julia's life and whom she writes about in her diary, Bloomfield residents. And through Julia's writings, they also have learned more about their family members.



Kwong Ki Chiu  
Courtesy of Caroline Archer

Research: Tidbits and tidbits of information from here and there. In my head, small, little stories were coming together. Remembering back to my grandfather telling me stories, I wanted to find another way to share the stories, gaining family members' interests more effectively. I needed a new way to tell the family story, as Jay and Julia had told me with their writings. And something I could distribute electronically.

### **A Long Talk on a Hill in Bloomfield**



The stone house, 130 Mountain Avenue  
R. Pierce photo, 2011

In this document, I let my imagination go. How could I make the family story not just a document of events and dates? What if I could interview Jay and Julia, like Oprah does? It would be wonderful to have a long talk with them. So, in this document, a conversation begins by the stone house built on the hill in Bloomfield—the house that was built for them by Jay's father Oliver after Jay told him that he wanted to stay and work at the Filley farm and marry Julia.

Jay and Julia tell me their life story encouraged by my probing questions. (Much of their dialogue comes from Julia's diary and Jay's letters.)

When I was finished, a PDF file was created and sent electronically to family. By now my little distribution list had grown as I had reconnected with my father's brother's grandchildren. (continued—>)

## Finding Filley Newsletters

Research continued and I needed to find a place for little tidbits. An emailed newsletter seemed to be a good solution, and a newsletter format would be a great way to keep it short and interesting. I created six monthly newsletters and supplemented them when I thought there was a longer story to share.

One supplement included letters written between Oliver and his sons when they were away at boarding school.

These newsletters led me into the Civil War and how it impacted my ancestors. I found a diary written by Jay and Julia's son James, my great grandfather, that had been donated to the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis. Interweaving his diary comments with his mother's despair as described in her diaries, and text from a book written by the Connecticut Volunteers, I created addendums telling the Civil War story.

## Julia and Mr. Kwong

I stopped producing the newsletter, to devote my time to writing about the friendship between Jay and Julia Filley and the folks from the Chinese Educational Mission. Sam Wong had introduced us to the story. It touched me.

I continued to want to find a way that would appeal to the younger generation. The imaginary interview earlier had been fun to write. I decided that I wanted to tell this story, including some of the history of the time and the people living it. I also wanted to make it a more personal story for the younger generations. My solution: my two granddaughters meet in New York and take the train to Hartford where they will be told the story of their ancestors. The fun begins when they arrive and are stared at because of their funny clothes (they were wearing jeans with holes, of course). Yes, why not have some fun with time travel back to 1880s?



Julia Filley  
WHS Archives

The 18-year-old young ladies were met by Willie (my grandfather), who was then a teenage boy. He takes them on his horse-cart to Bloomfield and to the big white farmhouse on Brown Street. And the young ladies begin to hear the stories. The school history that they have only read about is current affairs, and that is a little confusing for them.

They learn of the acceptance of the Chinese neighbors by Jay and Julia and the others in Hartford and Bloomfield, and they find that they are accepted by the two young ladies telling them the story. They accept the storytellers and are respectful of what seems the right things to share about their future and what they shouldn't tell them.

As this document was a larger effort, I decided to publish it even (continued—>)

though my goal was to write a story to be shared with family members. Publishing seemed the easiest way to share.

And I had lots of fun illustrating. A neighbor helped as she had prepared documents for print on Amazon's publishing service in the past. But she was challenged by including illustrations (paintings, crafts), online pictures, and creating text that looked like newspaper articles.

And regarding my husband's question: Not sure about my dad, but I am proud of them! They worked hard! They cared for other people! And they gave of themselves.

I am grateful that they wrote about their lives, and I am grateful that along the way things were saved, donated, and transcribed, especially Sharon Steinberg's work to transcribe Julia's diaries.<sup>2</sup>

In summary, by researching and writing, I feel great pride to be a member of the Filley family. It has been a personal experience. I have felt like I have sat down on the couch on many Sunday afternoons with Jay and Julia and others, including my grandfather, and all of them sharing their stories. And I have been listening.

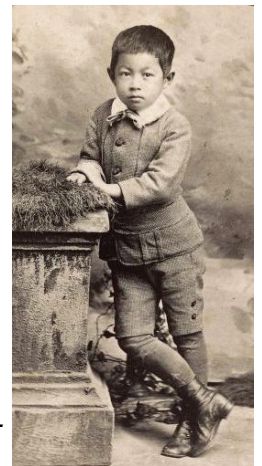
I am grateful there are Historical Museums who help us all learn, protect, and archive donations and help us care about the lives of those who have come before.



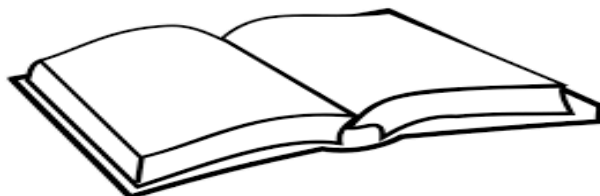
#### NOTES:

1. After Jay and Julia Filley moved to 22 Sumner Street in Hartford in 1873, one of their neighbors was the Chinese Educational Mission. Students from China were sent here to learn new technology and Western ways. Jay and Julia became friendly with the students' translator, Mr. Kwong, and his wife and baby. When Mrs. Kwong died from pneumonia at age 22, the baby, Chin Fun, was fifteen months old. Mr. Kwong asked Julia if she could care for the child. She was almost seventy years old, but said she could do it. Caroline writes, "Our Chinese friends, including Mr. Kwong, were very generous with gifts including China teacups, fans. They would give us gifts on New Year's, and we would give them gifts on Chinese New Year's. The baby also became much better about visiting friends and family, and we frequently took him with us to Bloomfield to visit with family and old friends as well as on visits in Hartford." --from *A Long Talk atop a Hill in Bloomfield: An Imaginary Conversation with Great-Great-Grandparents*, by Caroline Filley Archer (pp. 82-83 of digital copy)

2. Sharon Steinberg (1946-2007) lived on Regency Drive and was very active in the Wintonbury Historical Society before her untimely death from cancer.



Chin Fun  
Courtesy of  
Caroline Archer



## Volunteer Hours for Fiscal 2022/2023

The Old Farm School had 45 visitors and 26 docents logged 78 hours.

The Fannie Gabriel History Center had 92 visitors and volunteers logged 1133 hours (1050 by regulars and 83 by others).

Mondays were staffed by a combination of five people: Janis Langston, Diana Barnard, Louise and Ralph Schmoll and our newest regular, Tobie Katz. Their total hours for the year, not always on Monday, were:

756.00 Janis Langston  
 149.50 Diana Barnard  
 85.75 Louise Schmoll  
 32.00 Ralph Schmoll  
 26.75 Tobie Katz

Beginning this year some of the hours for Janis were spent copying Bloomfield Assessor cards for years not included in current records online. These cards from prior to 1980 are extremely valuable to answer the many questions that come into the History Center. They are stored in the attic at the town hall and are not easily accessible. They have now been made available to us to make copies for our use. With some help from Louise, we have completed about half of the existing cards. We hope to finish them in the coming year. —Louise Schmoll

## THANK YOU, DOCENTS!

Mary Laiuppa, Docent Coordinator, reports that the following WHS members served as docents at the Old



Farm School and/or the Gabriel History Center during the 2023 season. Thanks to them, the buildings were open 22 Sunday afternoons from May 21 to October 15.

David & Paula Baram

Doug & Diana Barnard

John Cappadona

Halesteen Graham Days

Marilyn Johnson

Tobie Katz

Mary Laiuppa

Janis Langston

Ron & Ruth Anne Marchetti

Libbie Merrow

David & Patricia Roones

Louise Schmoll

Bill Weissenburger

## NOTES FROM MY READING

In the September *Drummer*, Libbie Merrow recommended Jared Hardesty's book, *Black Lives, Native Lands, White Worlds: A History of Slavery in New England* (2019). I secured a copy through Bloomfield Public Library and thoroughly enjoyed it. Here are a few of many memorable passages:

“By 1700, slavery, which had largely disappeared from England by the early 1500s, was economically, legally, and culturally entrenched [in New England]” (Page 23). “In 1700, there were roughly 1,700 slaves in the region. By 1770, that number stood at 15,342, a 900-percent increase” (Page 33). “In this world structured by ties of dependency, slavery made sense [to colonists]. Laws and institutions supporting bondage were already in place and able to accommodate another form of oppression. [. . .] New England colonists integrated slaves into their patriarchal families” (Page 53). “Residents in these homes included other enslaved people, both Africans and Indians; bound white laborers, such as apprentices and servants; and the householder's family members, including not only nuclear family members but also parents, step-siblings, and unmarried brothers, sisters, and aunts” (Page 60). —RNP