

# THE WINTONBURY DRUMMER



NEWSLETTER OF THE WINTONBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BLOOMFIELD, CONNECTICUT • FEBRUARY 2025



## THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE LIBRARIANS WHO CHANGED AMERICAN HISTORY

A Program by Laura E. Helton

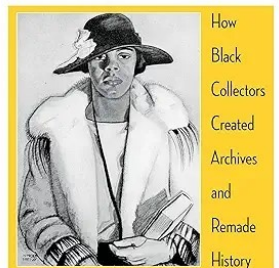
**Monday, February 24, 2025, 7:00 PM via Zoom**

To receive a link, call the library, 860-243-9721, or register at <https://bplct.org>

“African Americans in the library professions” may seem like a topic far removed from Bloomfield, yet a Bloomfield citizen achieved fame in this field. Our own Spencer Shaw is highlighted inside on page 3.

Professor Laura Helton of the University of Delaware is the author of *Scattered and Fugitive Things: How Black Collectors Created Archives and Remade History*. In the 1920s and 1930s, says Helton, an emerging cohort of Black librarians began building collections documenting African American history and culture at branch libraries across the South and in all the major receiving cities of the Great Migration. At a time when dominant institutions cast doubt on the value or even the idea of Black history, these bibliophiles, scrapbookers, and librarians created an enduring set of African diaspora archives. In building these institutions and amassing abundant archival material, they also reshaped Black public culture, stimulating inquiry into the nature and meaning of Black history.

### SCATTERED and FUGITIVE THINGS



LAURA E. HELTON

Hilton book cover  
Photo from Amazon

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**BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS**

The Board of Directors met via Zoom on November 12, November 18, December 2, and January 6. Attendance ranged from 16-19 people. John Cappadona announced the appointment of Bonnie Bercowetz and Dan Uitti as Advisory Members of the Board. John showed photos of recently completed remediations to the Old Farm School roof and second floor ceiling. The work came in under budget at \$7,275. During November the Board discussed the proposed renaming of Prosser Library, and Board members expressed their preference for retaining the present name. In December the Membership Committee reported 139 current members and a list of another 182 nonmember names who are receiving email publicity notices.

The Program Committee reported on the success of Greg Babal's November 17 musical program, with about 70 attending. The December 8 program featuring the Bloomfield High choir even exceeded that number.

Fund raising for the Old Farm School repairs was a major concern. An appeal has been sent to the WHS membership. A committee made up of Susan Vancour, Wendy Wolcott, Ruthanne Marchetti, and Bill Weissenburger is developing plans for appealing to the wider community, including local businesses.

**Business member:** Many Rivers Community

Acupuncture, 3 Barnard Lane

**ATTENTION!!!**

*The Wintonbury Drummer* invites readers to contribute articles, personal reminiscences, book reviews, photographs, etc. Material for publication in the April issue should be received by March 7, 2025. Thank you.

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# BLOOMFIELD'S SHAW EXCELLED IN LIBRARY WORK

The following contains material adapted from a long Wikipedia article.

**Spencer Gilbert Shaw** (August 15, 1916 – June 16, 2010) was an American librarian and educator specializing in library services to children. He taught at the Information School of the University of Washington (1970–1986) and served as president of the Association for Library Services to Children (1975–1976).

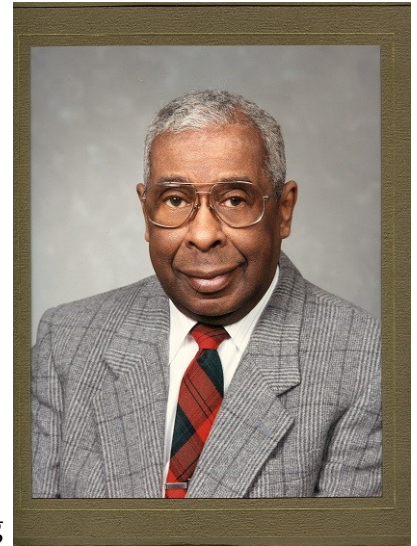
Following retirement in 1986, Shaw returned to Connecticut and lived in Bloomfield until his death at age 93. During this time, he served as a Director of the Wintonbury Historical Society.

Raised in Hartford, Shaw earned degrees from Hampton University and the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Following service in the US Army in World War II, he completed advanced graduate studies at the University of Chicago. He started his career as the first African American hired by the Hartford Public Library. Then from 1949 to 1959 he was program specialist in children's services at Brooklyn [\(NY\)](#) Public Library, where he built a national reputation for his storytelling and programming. In 1959, Shaw became consultant in library services to children in the Nassau County Public Library System, supervising children's services across 52 branches.

In 1970, he became a lecturer at the Information School of the University of Washington and received promotions to associate professor in 1971 and professor in 1977. He retired in 1986 with the rank of professor emeritus. The University of Washington established the Spencer G. Shaw Children's Literature Lecture Series in his honor.

Shaw's father, Eugene, worked at the Hartford National Bank & Trust Company, while his mother, Martha, was a homemaker and community organizer who supervised the desegregation of the workforce of G. Fox & Co. during the 1940s. Spencer had two brothers and three sisters. His brother Dawson, who lived on Rockwell Avenue, was a teacher at Bloomfield High School; and his brother John taught at Carmen Arace. Spencer's sister Mary was the second African American teacher hired by the Hartford Public Schools and taught at Northeast Brackett School. She had a second career as an Occupational Therapist in Special Education in the Baltimore MD schools and lived at Bloomfield's Seabury during her retirement. The second sister, Lucretia, moved to Cleveland, Ohio after her marriage. The third sister, Lucille, had a career as an executive secretary at Monsanto (possibly when it was on Granby Street in Bloomfield?). She sang in choirs and acted in local drama groups. She married Benjamin Laury and had one son, Benjamin Anthony Laury, Jr. ∞

To learn much more about Spencer Shaw, see Wikipedia under his name and read obituaries in *The Hartford Courant* ([www.carmonfuneralhome.com/obituaries](http://www.carmonfuneralhome.com/obituaries)) and an excellent one in *The Seattle Times* ([www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/spencer-g-shaw-uw-professor-emeritus](http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/spencer-g-shaw-uw-professor-emeritus)).



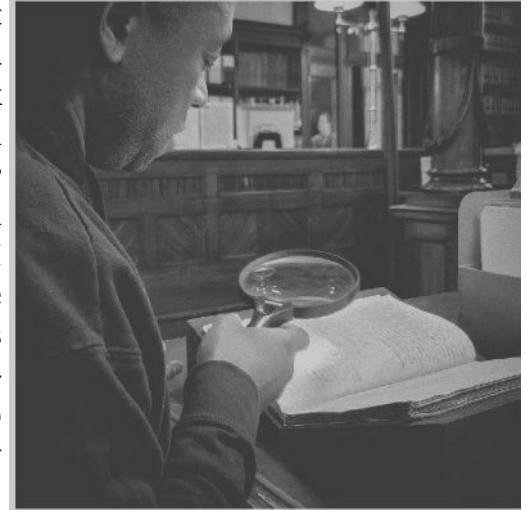
Spencer Shaw  
Hartford Public Library photo

# Reverence of the Million

Concerning the appreciation of ancestors and the Cornelius Reader story

By John Mills, President - Alex Breanne Corporation  
11 January 2025

I've lived in the same home in Bloomfield for the past 24 years, but I was born and raised in California. I was a child of the 1970s, impacted by the evolution of the Black Panthers and the US Organization, both of whom presented a context of seeing beauty in my dark skin. My father preached this context to me in an attempt to install pride in me. But as a young adult in the early 1990s, I realized how I presented myself in the business world did not align to the context my father fought to instill. I had unconscious biases against myself. In coming to that epiphany, I feared my two-year-old daughter would one day come to the same place, so I searched for ways to understand how I got there, and how to prevent that from occurring with my child.



John Mills researching at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building at the New York Public Library

In the late 1990's, my sister introduced me to genealogy. I learned about the migration of my grandfather, Milon Mills, from Henderson Texas to California in the 1930s to escape racism. I also learned about his grandfather, Ned Mills, who was enslaved... freed on Juneteenth, 1865. It forced me to process the fact that my last name was simply that of my family's last enslaver.



Image taken on July 4, 2003 by John Milla of the woods behind Hickory Grove Cemetery in Kilgore,, TX

With renewed interest in my genealogy, I traveled to East Texas in 2003 to visit the cemetery listed on the death certificates of my great grandparents, Robert and Eliza Mills. On arrival, I discovered they were not actually buried in that cemetery, but instead, they were buried behind it in the woods. I walked past what I now knew as a pristine "White's Only" cemetery to enter the dark and overgrown woods behind it, where I found my ancestors. I realized my grandfather, whom I knew well in life, had to walk this same path to bury his parents—seeing privilege and value on display in the "White's Only" cemetery, only to carry his parents into the woods. It was at that moment that an indescribable pride came over me. My ancestors endured and persisted through racism (continued →)

and bias all around them, which included segregation even in death. They persisted through this long enough for me to exist today. I now saw the formerly enslaved from a perspective of reverence. I no longer reserved reverence for those who found wealth, owned land or led movements. I now saw reverence in those who were a part of the million side of the “one in a million” equation—the many who endured.

My day job is as a Software Architect, but I trained at Boston University in Genealogical Research, so I apply that as an act of activism and service. I want others to see pride and reverence in the formerly enslaved as well. Therefore, with my non-profit, Alex Breanne Corporation, we research the formerly enslaved, then attempt to inject those individuals into the communities where they lived, worked or died. We have many stories of people like this right here in our community of Bloomfield, CT. One in particular is the story of Cornelius Reader.

On November 18th, 1863, Bloomfield resident, Cornelius Reader, enlisted in the Civil War with the Connecticut 29th Colored Regiment. This is the earliest he could have enlisted in the 29th since this was the week the Connecticut legislature approved its creation. As with other black soldiers, he suffered through less pay than that of white soldiers, and racism in the field. On November 15th, 1864, Cornelius died while at war, buried in Hampton, VA. He was 40 years old.



Image of the gravestone of Cornelius Reader  
in Hampton, VA



Gravestone of Peter & Esther Jackson at  
Simsbury Cemetery

The story of Cornelius Reader doesn't end there. Not only did Cornelius die at war, so did his brother, George Reader. Also dying at war were four of his 1<sup>st</sup> cousins, William Jackson, Abraham Jackson, Erastus Jackson, and James Jackson. These six men were all grandsons of Peter Jackson, said to have been an enslaved man from Bermuda who was traded for a Native American in the 1750s and brought to Simsbury. Cornelius Reader's great-grandfather, London Wallace, fought in the Revolutionary War, as did three of his grandmother's brothers, London Wallace Jr., Zebulan Wallace and Joseph Wallace.

I see Cornelius Reader and his family as historic figures to be revered; but today, they are relatively unknown to the communities they lived in. I'm hopeful that will change. I'm more so hopeful that a renewed interest will one day occur regarding the lives of the enslaved, and that their experiences will be presented from a place of reverence, allowing kids today to take pride in the strength of will and endurance of their direct ancestors. ∞

## STONE HOUSE STALEMATE, PART 3

The Society's involvement with the Capt. Olivier Filley House, 1992-2010

by Richard N. Pierce

*(Note: The following history derives from a study of the minutes of Board of Directors meetings, as found in the Gabriel History Center. Any quotations are from those minutes. The photos were taken by the author in 2011. Part 1 was published in the September 2024 Drummer and Part 2 appeared in November 2024.)*

In Parts 1 and 2 of this story, we looked at how members of the Wintonbury Historical Society got involved in a project to restore the 1834 Filley House and how the Town of Bloomfield worked with the Society to secure funds and advance the project. The project could not proceed, however, without the services of a cooperative architect.



### Architect

On January 21, 1998, after interviewing four architects, Lee Comar recommended that Eloise Marinos be retained to work on the Filley House. A year later, Marinos was doing drawings for the Filley House exterior and also site work drawings. By August 2000, she had been paid about \$5,900.

As an example of her detailed work, Eloise Marinos' report on December 19, 2000, stated: "This office has conducted extensive on-site research of the historic fabric of the building, including wood trim, windows, doors, lath and plaster, wood framing—including nails, flooring, roofing, etc." [...] "Through professional wood typing (done by the National Forest Products Lab w/microscope) and paint analysis (Cross-section microscopy: visible light and ultraviolet light), we can then link on-site architectural observations of 'like' items with scientific analysis to substantiate our on-site findings and 'hunches' as to what was original to 1834, what was changed in the mid-to-late 1800s, the early 1900s, etc."

But a curious note appeared in a January 24, 2001, memo from Judi Sitkin. She proposed that "We hire a General Contractor to get the bids needed to complete the initial renovation, rehabilitation work needed to make the building secure and weatherproofed. If the current architect cannot work under these conditions, then the WHS must sub-contract (through the general contractor) a new architect." Apparently, there was some dissatisfaction with Marinos three years after her hiring.

In August 2003, the WHS Board voted "that Al Taylor, Robert Cook, Fred Hesketh, and Fannie Gabriel meet with Eloise Marinos and reiterate that the Filley House project is rehabilitative in nature and ascertain whether she wishes to continue with her contract agreement under these circumstances."

A year passed. On August 25, 2004, Vice-president Al Taylor reported that he had met with Louie Chapman and Eloise to develop schedules. Taylor said he needed the paperwork no later than October but had not heard from Eloise. He had e-mailed, left messages, but got no response. "Do we pull the plug on Eloise?" A motion was made and passed that we eliminate Eloise from the project if she does not meet the deadline of October 30. In September 2004, Sharon Steinberg said that it was by no means clear to her, or (continued →)

acceptable to her, that Eloise was the architect we want to move forward with this project. The following month, October 20, 2004, the Board minutes state that Eloise would like this to be a restoration worthy of inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Places. The Board agreed that “we need to rehabilitate the house so that we can create a History Center for the Town. The basic problem is that we do not have enough money to do the job as Eloise has planned, which equals \$200/sq. ft.” Al Taylor had been trying to complete a contract with Eloise. Nothing had been signed, though she had recently been paid \$40,000 for 2002–September 2004.

Finally, on December 29, 2004, a letter from Al Taylor, vice-president, to Robert Taylor, project manager, says, “WHS has terminated its relationship with Eloise Marinos. You are authorized to obtain possession of all documentation, drawings, or other written or electronically produced or stored evidences of writing that are in your judgment the property of WHS and which are in the possession of Ms. Marinos.”



We move on to 2005. On May 5, the Board voted unanimously to hire the firm of Baily and Johnson as architects for the rehabilitation of the Filley House. But nothing happened. In October, Jeff Baily wrote to Fannie Gabriel and Sharon Steinberg, “I was disappointed to hear that the Filley House project seems to have run into some obstacles. I was particularly frustrated when I heard that individuals were questioning the project’s validity based on a highly exaggerated opinion of probable cost.” In his letter, he suggested that his firm be hired. But Norm Fenichel said in a letter to the Board that he did not want WHS to pay Baily and Johnson and that it should start looking for another architectural firm. The Architectural Search Committee said they have had few applicants to choose from.

Later that year we learn in October 19 minutes that the town had chosen not to sign contracts with Baily and Johnson because they didn’t think WHS had the resources to support such a large project. The town decided that the DECD grant would be used only for stabilization of the house, not to pay an architect.

The Society, however, had not given up. In spite of this town decision, on October 26, 2005, the Board debated whether to pay Baily and Johnson \$3,500 for a package of charts, graphs, maps, plans and a feasibility study that could be used to persuade the town and others of the worth of the project. Honoring the ten years of effort and resources that had already been put into the house seemed worthwhile to most. George Merrow moved that “We authorize the expenditure of \$3,500, payable to Baily and Johnson Architects for a business, financial and schematic plan for the development of a History Center at the Filley/Pinney/LaSalette House.” The vote was by paper ballot and passed, 9-3 with one abstention. A month later, Jeff Baily showed the Board the first draft of his floor plan, site plan, and elevations, and stated that WHS could do the renovation for well under one million dollars. In December, Baily and Johnson submitted a bill for \$70,000, although there is no record of its payment.

Six months later, May 2006, the Board minutes (already quoted in Part 1) state, “We await the decision of the town Council to rescind their vote that said the Town would stabilize the building. Once they vote, we will be free to sign the architect’s contract, begin renovation, and seek grants. The Town holds the funds. If they do not rescind their vote or refuse to release funds, we will abandon the Filley House Project.” The town did not rescind its vote, and Baily and Johnson’s plush contract was never signed. ∞

*(This article will be concluded in the April issue.)*

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## HONOR ROLL OF DOCENTS, 2024

The following volunteered their time to greet people at the History Campus last year. Will you add your name in 2025?

Doug and Diana Barnard

John Cappadona

Patricia Clark

Marilyn Johnston

Paula Jones

Tobie Katz

Mary Laiuppa

Ron and Ruthanne Marchetti

Libbie Merrow

David and Patti Roones

Louise Schmoll

Bill Weisenburger

Mara Whitman

Wendy Wolcott

and untold friends and family members

**THANK YOU!**



John Cappadona, Ruthanne and Ron Marchetti, Louise Schmoll, and Dale Bertholdi meet history students at Car-men Arace School in January. Photo by Diane Crook, CAMS librarian.