

The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter Of The Historical Society Of Bloomfield



VOLUME TWO, NUMBER SIX

BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY, 07003

MARCH, 2003

MEETING
MONDAY MARCH 24
7:30PM

DEAREST FRIEND, THE LETTERS OF ABIGAIL ADAMS

**Abigail Adams portrayed
by Kim Hanley**

Although Abigail Adams and John Adams spent most of the Revolutionary War in America apart, they were in constant contact via their prolific letter writing, discussing matters of Congress in Philadelphia to family life on the farm in Braintree, Massachusetts.

A dramatic presentation based on the letters was developed by the American Historical Theatre. Kim Hanley is the interpreter presenting this program. She is a member of the American Historical Theatre as was Dean Bennett, who interpreted Ben Franklin for the Historical Society of Bloomfield last year.

Abigail Adams was almost entirely self-educated, but her sense of social and moral justice went beyond that of the eighteenth century. She advocated American independence, equality for all Americans, abolition of slavery, and education for women. "Remember the ladies", she admonished her husband. Abigail, a wife and mother, also ran the family farm and its related business affairs, while her husband was away, and did this successfully.

Kim Hanley, Abigail's interpreter, trained as a ballet dancer in New York City and had made appearances with the Bolshoi and New York City Ballet companies. Besides dancing, she is a singer, choreographer, costume designer, and lover of history.

DEAREST FRIEND will begin at 7:30 p.m. A business meeting and refreshments will follow the presentation. Please arrive promptly before the 7:30 presentation begins, at the Civic Center, 84 Broad Street, Bloomfield.

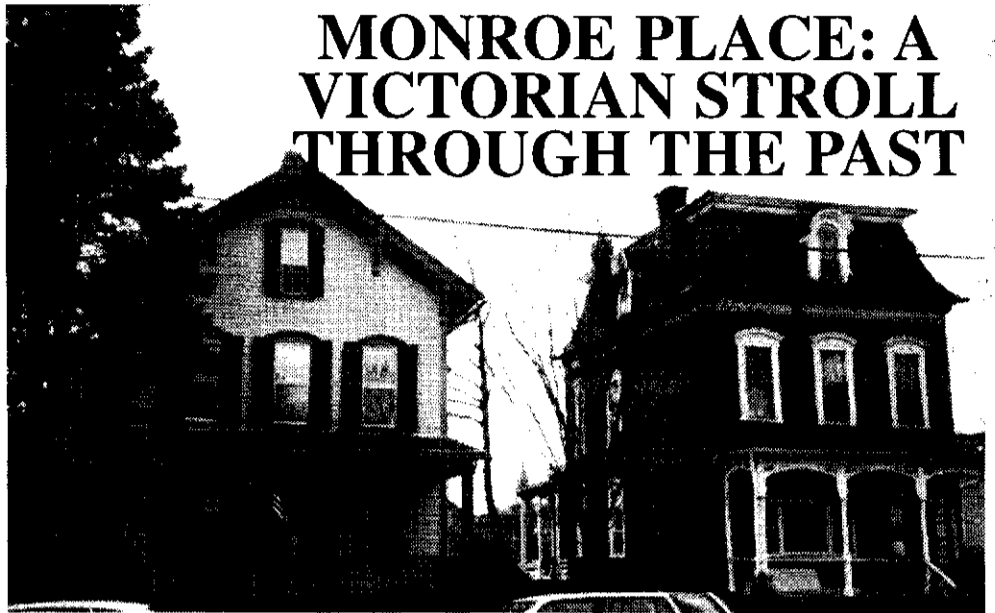
ABIGAIL IS BACK!! Come and enjoy her company.

This Historical Society program is offered by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Admission is free.

ABIGAIL ADAMS SMITH MUSEUM **At 421 East 61st Street, New York City**

Constructed in 1799, this building originally served as a carriage house for the East River estate planned by Abigail Adams Smith, daughter of President John Adams, and her husband, Colonel William Stephens Smith.

In 1795, the Smiths purchased twenty-three acres on the banks of the East River, an area where several prominent New York families
(continued on pg. 3)



MONROE PLACE: A VICTORIAN STROLL THROUGH THE PAST

San Francisco has nothing on Bloomfield! We have our own slice of Victoriana situated right in the heart of our historic district on Monroe Place. Monroe Place, a thoroughfare between Park Place and Spruce Street, is a Victorian stroll back in time; a time when the "painted lady" was the queen of the architectural scene!

Mr. Joseph P. Hague, one of Bloomfield's enterprising citizens, was the mastermind behind this charming "development", which was part of the suburban build-up plan in Bloomfield. He began the Monroe Place project in 1874. (Monroe Place was known as Division Street until February 22, 1873, when property owners voted in favor of changing the name. Interestingly enough, this was the first time in the history of Bloomfield that the name "place" was used in a street name.) As a result of the construction of these houses, the unkempt and neglected Division Street was transformed into the beautiful Monroe Place.

The houses were a stunning mixture of Victorian colors and architecture which included Italianate with the low-pitched roofs and square towers, French Second Empire with the mansard roofs and decorative crestings on the roof tops, and Folk Victorian with its gingerbread moldings and steeply-pitched roofs. In 1874, there were eighteen houses in the development - five being located on the north side and thirteen being located on the south side. All were well-built with enhancements in gas and water properties. Generally the lots were 50 x 150 feet; although there were a few larger lots at 100 x 150 feet, with a couple of mansions mixed in!

Around this time, Monroe Place had been home to a few prominent citizens. One such fellow was Seymour P. Gilbert. Locally, Mr. Gilbert was an active member of the First Baptist Church of Bloomfield. Additionally, he was on the planning committee of the new train depot at Orchard Street, even purchasing the lumber to be used to construct the platform of the station out of his own pocket. Nationally, Mr. Gilbert served in World War I as the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury of the United States. He went on to become Agent-General for reparation payments

under the Dawes Plan, which was enacted shortly after the war.

Another leading resident was Charles E. McDowell. McDowell settled in Bloomfield in 1867 and was an originator in public advancements in Bloomfield as well as Montclair. Statewide he was known quite well for his abilities as an analytical genius, statistician and historian. He enhanced The Sunday Call and the Newark News with his articles and was a member of the New Jersey Press Association.

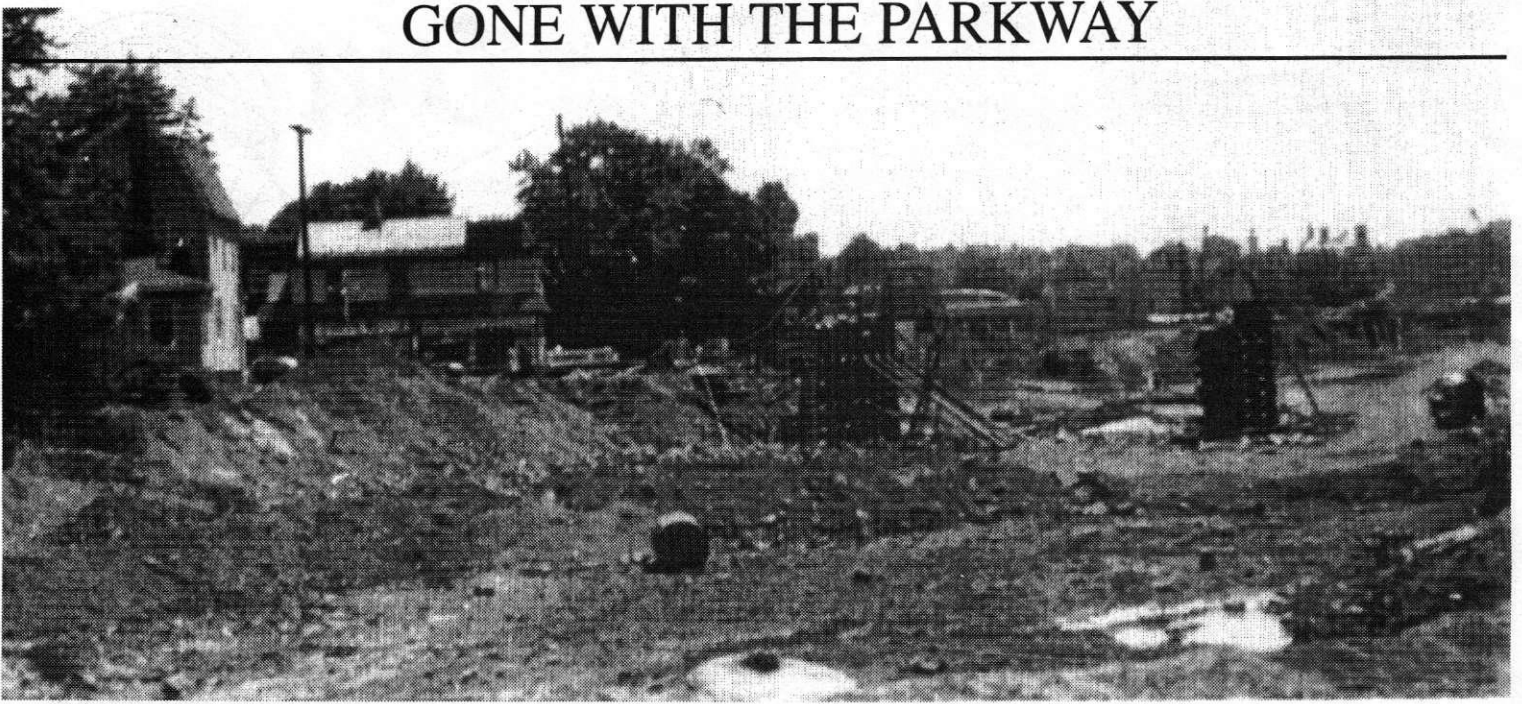
Other residents who deserve honorable mention are Dr. Charles H. Bailey, the Bloomfield town physician and Henry Vollmer, the photographer, who owned a studio at 81 Monroe Place. (Look for more on Henry Vollmer in a future publication) Also, a Mr. Sheldon had the distinction of owning one of the larger residences. It was considered a mansion, sitting on 1.5 acres of land - complete with an orchard and a garden.

By the late 1970's, early 1980's, however, the houses on the now historic Monroe Place had become victims of either neglect or remodeling or, as The Old House Journal would say, "remuddling"! Fred Branch uses another term, but tells me that it is never used in polite society! (Some more on "remuddling" in a future publication.) With the Victorian features either covered up by modernization or in dire need of repair, it must have been difficult to picture the Monroe Place of the past. But today if you happen to take a stroll down Monroe Place, you can certainly see that most of the homes have been, or are in the process of being, restored to their original Victorian splendor. What catches one's eye at first glance is the pleasing array of hues in which these homes are painted - colors ranging from pink to greens to blues and browns. Each residence has its own Victorian architectural style and color scheme, which, individually or as a whole, is quite a charming sight.

Today Monroe Place is being restored to its past grandeur, as residents are taking pride in their pretty dwellings that, I am certain, they feel privileged to call home. So take a Victorian stroll back in time on Monroe Place. You won't be disappointed!

by Patricia Post

GONE WITH THE PARKWAY



G.S. Parkway Construction, Montgomery St.

This is one of Don Croughan's pictures, taken about 1952. The view is looking south at Liberty St. Support columns for the Montgomery St. Bridge is being constructed. In the background can be seen the building that housed the candy store where so many of us spent our money on the way home from Junior High. Mary Ambrosino was the proprietress, as I recall. The house on the left is still there, now bordering Kennedy Drive North. In the tree line, the roof of Berkeley School can be seen. The construction swath removed many homes from the area, as it did in other sections of the town.

EDITORIAL

The Editor of this newsletter is very appreciative of the resource material to be found in the Reference Department of The Bloomfield Public Library and the Historical Society of Bloomfield. Here is to be found the raw material: newspapers, maps, old directories, books, and other primary sources of our local history. To handle a copy of The Bloomfield Citizen dated 1891, with the penciled name of the subscriber, Joseph Kingsland Oakes, is a great discovery. Not only is the printed material of interest, but it was handled and read by a Bloomfield architect who designed the original high school, additions to the First Presbyterian Church, the residence of Edmund Davey in 1856 (still standing opposite the end of Elm Street), the residence of Thomas Oakes, and his own home at 26 Spruce Street.

We are also indebted to Reference Librarian, Don Carlo, for assembling various valuable (and rare) photographs and publications in a special history collection, now kept under lock and key in the old Audio Visual Department of the Library. The Bloomfield Public Library has been a great asset to the Town of Bloomfield for almost 100 years and should be supported by everyone.

—Frederick Branch

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE MARCH 2003

Calling all those interested in the history of Bloomfield. Come volunteer in the Museum. You will learn more about the town as you work with other dedicated people. There are a variety of jobs to be done: clipping newspapers, filing, tending scrapbooks, and accessioning things that are donated. The computer literate can use the word processor, help with e-mail and enter data into our record files. Our Oral History project needs more people to tell the story of their lives and of Bloomfield "the way we were". Those who help by conducting the Oral History interviews will find it rewarding. The Museum is open Wednesday afternoons all year and Saturday mornings, September until mid-June. Other hours for volunteer work may be arranged. Call Ina Campbell at (973) 748-0115 to join the volunteers.

—Ina Campbell

IN MEMORIAM

Last year we lost two of our long-time friends and members.

Mildred Stone died on November 21, six months after her 100th birthday when she had enjoyed the gathering of her extended family and correspondence from numerous friends, many from the Historical Society. She had been a Charter Member of the Society and a past President. This was just one of the many community organizations she had helped found and served, such as Friends of the Library, League for Family Service, the local branch of the American Association of University Women, the Board of Education, and the Bloomfield Cultural Commission.

Her professional career had been distinguished at Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company where she became a Corporate Officer in 1934. She authored several books on the insurance industry. She had a strong religious faith throughout her life and was an active member of Bloomfield Baptist churches and a trustee of Northeastern Bible College for 25 years. (In the Museum we have a most interesting oral history of Mildred telling of her life).

Molly Tweedale died on December 28 in Paducah, Kentucky, where she had moved ten years ago. In Bloomfield she had been a long-time Trustee of the Historical Society and was active in the Episcopal Church as part of the Altar Guild. She worked for Scott and Bowne of Bloomfield, ExLax in New York and, lastly, in the office of the Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green.

When Ellis Island was being refurbished, Molly told of how she came to be detained on Ellis Island. She was born in the U.S., a U.S. citizen, but, as a small child she was taken by her English mother to see her grandfather in England. On the way back on the ship, Molly had the measles. An officer carried her on deck and pointed to the quarantine flag, saying, "That is there because of you." She and her mother were put off on Ellis Island to stay until she was well.

ENJOY OUR MUSEUM

Located above the Children's Library at 90 Broad Street.

HOURS:

Wednesday from 2:00 to 4:30pm all year.

Saturday from 10:00am to 12:30pm September to mid-June and by appointment

(973) 566-6220.

MEMBERSHIP FOR THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF BLOOMFIELD

Dues: Individual \$7.00, Couple \$10.00

Student (under 18 years) \$5.00

Organization (non-profit) \$10.00

Organization (commercial) \$25.00

Please send check, payable to "The Historical Society of Bloomfield", along with your name, address, and telephone number to:

Membership Chairman

Historical Society of Bloomfield, 90 Broad Street, Bloomfield, New Jersey 07003

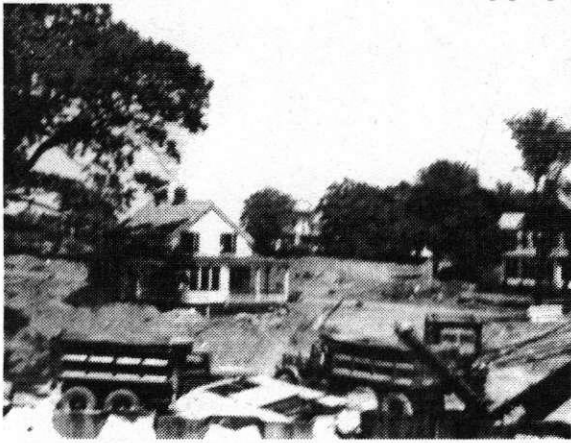
GONE WITH THE PARKWAY

The Flannery House

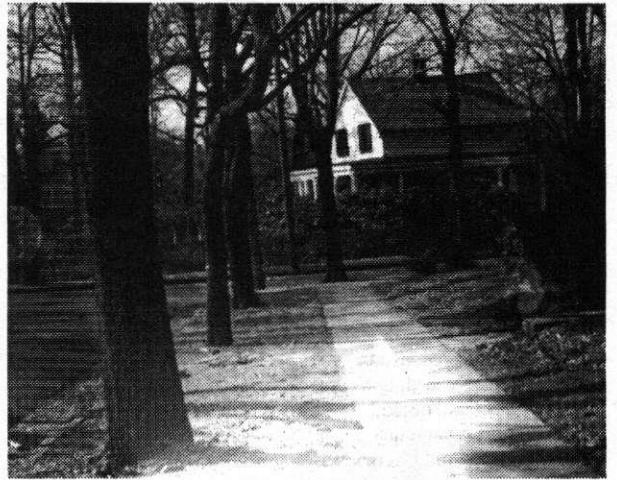
The photograph on the right is by Herbert N. Schneider, dated February 20, 1949. When the present route of the Garden State Parkway through the heavily populated residential sections of Bloomfield was published by the State of New Jersey in 1948, there was much consternation among people who had homes directly in the path of this new super-highway.

One of the homes threatened by the new road was this story-and-a-half cottage, then located at 220 Walnut Street. The site, which no longer exists, would be located about 20 feet above the pavement of the parkway at about the center median of the roadway. Bulldozers owned by the New Jersey Highway

Authority leveled the small building in about 30 minutes. Built around 1840, the structure stood on Belleville Avenue at the corner of Walnut until 1895, when it was moved about halfway to the railroad crossing to make room for the construction of the home of David and Jean Oakes, now the Bloomfield Cultural Center.



The Flannery house from the south during construction of the Garden State Parkway, 1953. Above the house is the Murray Funeral Home at the corner of Belleville Ave. and Williamson Ave. (demolished ca. 1998). Photo by John Croghan.



The Flannery house from the east in its second location on the estate of David Oakes II. It was originally at the corner of Belleville Ave. and Walnut St. from 1840 to 1895.

View Of The North Side Of Belleville Avenue From The Corner Of Walnut ca. 1948.



North side of Belleville Ave. photo by Herbert N. Schneider

On the left is a small corner of the garden apartments located on the site of the home of George Oakes, which was built by his grandfather, David Oakes I, in 1853. This house was demolished in 1943 and the present garden apartments built in 1945. A part of the iron fence originally in front of the Oakes gardens can be seen extending to the driveway from Belleville Avenue to the Oakes Woolen Mill. The fence has since been removed. The four houses to the east of the driveway (one of which cannot be seen) were numbers 217, 215, 214 (obscured) and 209 Belleville Avenue, owned in 1949 by William A. Severs, Ira A. Tumbleson, Fred D. Monfang,

Charles C. Morgan, and Carl H. Jensen.

All have been demolished by the New Jersey Highway Authority, and replaced by the Belleville Avenue bridge over the Garden State Parkway. The large house on the right was built by Thomas Oakes ca. 1890 (possibly from designs by architect Charles Granville Jones) and occupied by Clarence Richards Schuyler until ca. 1942. The Oakes and Schuyler families were related through Thomas Oakes' grandmother, Rachel Kingsland, who married Thomas Oakes I in Trinity Episcopal Church, Newark, in 1808.

Photograph by Herbert N. Schneider

ABIGAIL ADAMS SMITH MUSEUM...

(continued from pg. 1)
had country homes. The Smith's plans for their country home included a frame house on the bluff, a stone carriage house, orchards, and gardens. Colonel Smith named the estate "Mount Vernon on the East River".

Faced by financial difficulties, the Smiths sold the partially built mansion in 1796. It served as a private residence and later a country hotel known as The Mount Vernon Hotel, before fire destroyed the building in 1826.

In 1833 the property was sold to Jeremiah Towle, whose family lived in this stone building for over seventy years. During this period, breweries and warehouses replaced the country houses and farms. In 1905, Towle's daughters sold the house and grounds to the Standard Gas Light Company, which erected three large storage tanks around the building.

The Colonial Dames of America purchased the building in 1924 and undertook its restoration. They opened it as an historic house museum in 1939 to coincide with the New York World's Fair. In 1967, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated this site as a National Landmark. It is now open to the public. Please call The Museum at (212) 838-6878 for further information.

FROM OUR PHOTO ALBUM, NO. 2



This fire station was located on the corner of Jerome Place and Berkeley Avenue. It was moved to John Street and is now a private residence. Photo ca. 1912



General Joseph Bloomfield
THE NEW TOWN CRIER
 90 Broad Street
 Bloomfield, NJ 07003

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THE WELCOME MAT

A cordial welcome is extended to the following new members of The Historical Society of Bloomfield. We hope you will take note of our many activities and participate in any that you may choose.

- Lisa R. Caplan**
Glen Ridge
- Thomas P. Higgins**
South Amboy
- Ava Caridad**
Bloomfield
- Amy Huhn**
Bloomfield
- Gloria Cetrulo**
Bloomfield
- Alan and Gumilla Joslyn**
Montclair
- Jack Chance**
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- Theresa and Russ McAllister**
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- Luciano and Assunta Colonna**
Bloomfield
- Richard C. Stout**
Bloomfield
- Edmund and Barbara Fursa**
Bloomfield
- Marjorie and Arthur Tom**
Upper Montclair

E-mail The Historical Society of Bloomfield at:
 BloomfHist@aol.com
 or call us at: 973-566-6220

Ruvo's Luncheonette

Chances are that you have visited "Ruvo's" Luncheonette today. That is, if today is a Friday in the early 1930's. Bloomfield Center is a bustling shopping area with small privately-owned businesses sprinkled throughout. Friday is always busy at lunchtime and busier at night with young people stopping for homemade ice cream or a sandwich after a date. Businessmen and young mothers with babies make up most of the lunch business all week.

Tony and Josephine Ruvo emigrated from Castlegarde, Italy and opened their store several years later. They had four children, John, Catherine, William and Lillian. Everyone helped out at the store. The children quickly began assisting (not necessarily by choice). Actually they were a "captive audience". The Ruvo's lived above their store at 20 Broad Street so the kids had nowhere to hide. When the children matured and had jobs of their own, their services were still required during the evenings. This was truly a family business.

Why did people congregate there? What was the attraction? Keep in mind, Bloomfield was a small town, typical of the times and people walked to the Center and "Ruvo's" served good, homemade food and ice cream at reasonable prices. Homemade chocolates were a specialty and desserts were always a special treat. Ethnic groups made up the major portion of the town. First generation Irish, Italian and Polish families settled in separate parts of the town, but they met at "Ruvo's". Everyone enjoyed the food and camaraderie.

Long working hours, the passing of Mrs. Ruvo in 1932 and the children's desire to pursue other interests soon took their toll on Mr. Ruvo. In 1937 he decided to close the business and retire. He leased 20 Broad Street to Louie and Ernie's Fruit and Vegetable Market but continued to live above the store. That store, under the same ownership, became the Economy Market. However, "Ruvo's" will always be remembered as the forerunner to such popular Bloomfield "hangouts" as Wessel's on Washington Street and Siem's several doors north of Ruvo's establishment.

There is an interesting addendum to this short history. The store next to "Ruvo's" was a barbershop owned by John Strazza, his wife, Anna,



Ruvo's Confectionary and Luncheonette at 20 Broad Street.

and their children, Matilda, Margaret, Edith, John and Anne, also lived above their shop. The Strazza's and the Ruvo's, along with their children, became good friends and all made homes in Bloomfield in their early years. Ironically, one of Mr. Strazza's granddaughters eventually married one of Mr. Ruvo's grandsons. And so the legacy continues.

Although only memories remain of "Ruvo's," a wise man once said that nothing ever disappears or dies if we keep them in our memories.

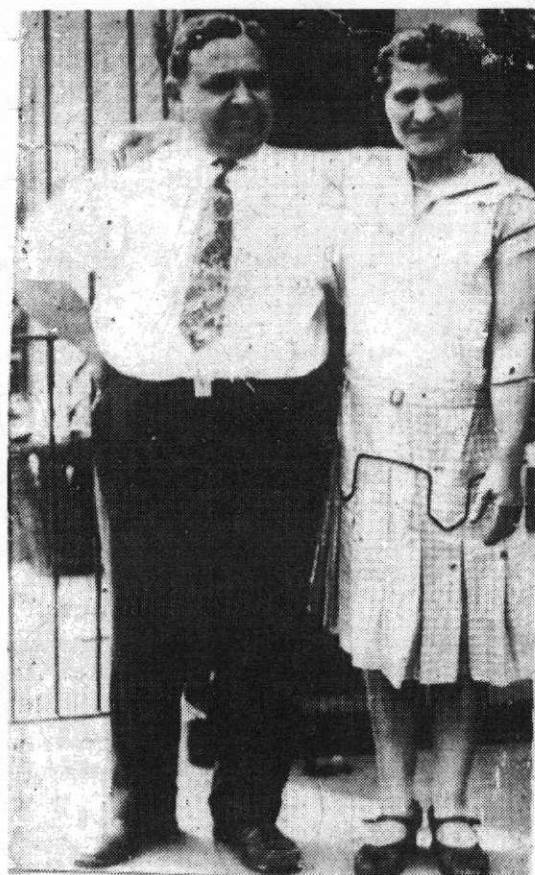


Photo of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Ruvo. Photo courtesy of Anthony W. Ruvo.

TELEPHONE CONNECTION

The Historical Society of Bloomfield Museum now has a direct line for outside calls. The number is: (973) 743-8844.

Museum hours are: September to mid June all year: Wednesday afternoon from 2 PM to 4:30 PM and Saturday morning from 10 AM to 12:30 PM (during which times you may be able to talk with a real person), and by appointment. June to August: Wednesday 2:00 to 4:30 PM and by appointment.

At all other times, a message will be taken by General Joseph Bloomfield, James Newbegin Jarvie, Abigail Baldwin Oakes, or whichever posthumous shade is available