



The New Town Crier



Official Newsletter Of The Historical Society Of Bloomfield
Editor: Frederick Branch • Design: Mark Scurman

VOLUME TWO, NUMBER NINE

BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY, 07003

NOVEMBER, 2003

MEETING TUESDAY NOV 25TH 8PM AT THE BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER 84 Broad Street, Bloomfield THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT: Our First Modern President

On November 25, 2003, a Tuesday, the Historical Society of Bloomfield will sponsor a program covering the turbulent, exciting life of our 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt. This program will be given at the Civic Center, 84 Broad Street, at 8:00 p.m.

Charles McSorley, a Rutgers University graduate and American History major, is the guest speaker. Mr. McSorley is a member of APIC (American Political Items Collector) and a deltiologist, or collector and dealer in old postcards. Mr. McSorley describes Theodore Roosevelt as a flamboyant politician, Rough Rider, our first environmental president, a trust buster, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, and a man of tremendous vitality and capacity for life.

T.R.'s Progressive "Bull Moose" Party in 1912 was far ahead of its time. It advocated regulation of trusts, the direct primary, women's suffrage, better factory working conditions, an 8 hour day, minimum wage standards, prohibition of child labor, and a government-sponsored health program!

How did the American people react to this man? Mr. McSorley will use political cartoons, slides, music and lecture to answer that question.

This program is free and open to the public, all in the progressive tradition. Refreshments will be served. Parking is available off State Street, behind the library. This is November 25, 2003, at 8:00 p.m., 84 Broad Street, Bloomfield.



Gift To The Historical Society Museum

Sitting beside a portrait bust of herself is Mrs. David Oakes II (1886-1980). The artist who created this superb likeness is Rosalind Haut Gohr of 249 Belleville Avenue, who modeled Mrs. Oakes in clay as they sat at the kitchen table of 240 Belleville Avenue, now Oakeside Cultural Center. Mrs. Gohr has generously presented the bust to the Historical Society of Bloomfield Museum, where it will be placed on display as a tribute to this legendary public figure.

Bloomfield's Grandest House

In October of 1943, The Van Kuren Wrecking Company of Irvington began the demolition of Bloomfield's grandest house: the residence of Thomas Oakes II at 249 Belleville Avenue. The original structure had been built in 1853 by David Oakes from designs published by Philadelphia architect, Samuel Sloan. In 1878, David Oakes died, and his son enlarged the house, probably with the help of his cousin, architect Joseph Kingsland Oakes. The remodeling raised the house to three stories in height, with a new attic story and a wing to the north, which removed the kitchen from the basement to a more convenient location on the first floor. Oakes then moved his family from another mansion at the corner of Williamson and Belleville Avenues, which later became the Murray Funeral Home, to the old family homestead next to the Morris Canal.

REMEMBERING OUR LOCAL VETERANS

Walter Haut

In October of 1943, a young man from Newark was serving in the Air Force in Burma. Walter Haut, 25, although an only son and obliged to wear glasses, both of which were enough to disqualify him from military service. He was also an amateur "ham" radio operator, and had some knowledge of radar from his employment at I.T.T. These abilities made him an ideal candidate of the United States Air Force, and he was able to enlist in September of 1942, in spite of these exemptions.

Just a week before his fatal encounter with the Japanese Zero, Haut had an encounter with another Japanese plane. He described the experience in his notebook (later returned to his family with the rest of his personal effects). The photo on page 2 shows him with his head through the wing of the severely damaged plane in which he was flying.

His decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross, and Air Medal and he had been rec-

(continued on pg. 2)



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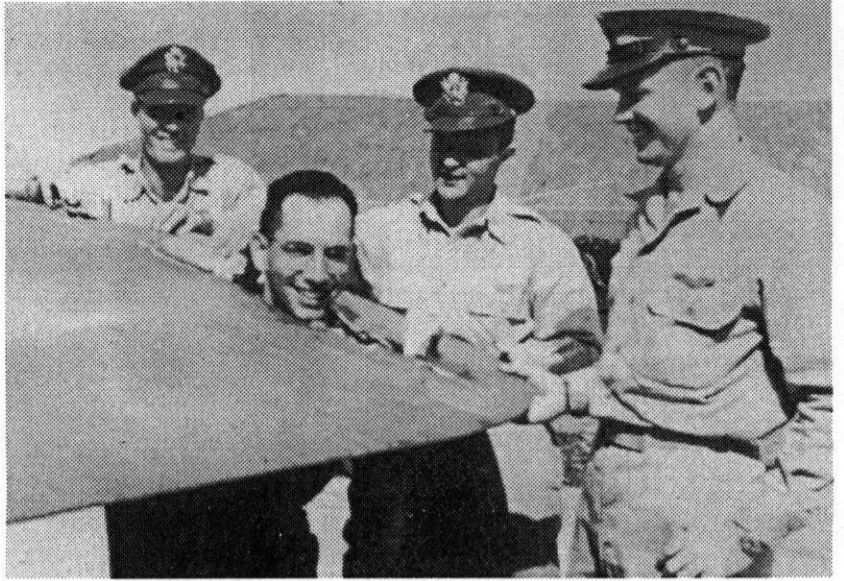
HUNTER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE NOVEMBER, 2003

One Wednesday afternoon, having time off from my job, I stopped in at the Museum just to look around. I was so excited by the historical objects I saw and the history that was documented that I promised myself I would volunteer when I retired. Now, I find myself not only enjoying working there, but President. How good can it get!

Much has been done by those people who volunteer in the Society and Museum to preserve the Township's history and bring in the latest technology to better serve the members and the Township. My goal as President is to continue their good work and initiate programs to make the public aware of the treasure in their midst. I hope, especially, to work with the schools to help make history entertaining, not just an educational requirement.

—Pat Cavanaugh



Staff Sergeant Walter Haut clowns with some unidentified Army officers as he pokes his head through a large hole in the wing of his plane, a result of an attack by a Japanese Zero. Exactly one week later, Haut was shot down in another engagement with a Japanese fighter plane. He and other members of his five man crew were killed.

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) 743-8844.

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

WALTER HAUT...

(continued from pg. 1)

commended for an award of the Silver Star for Gallantry.

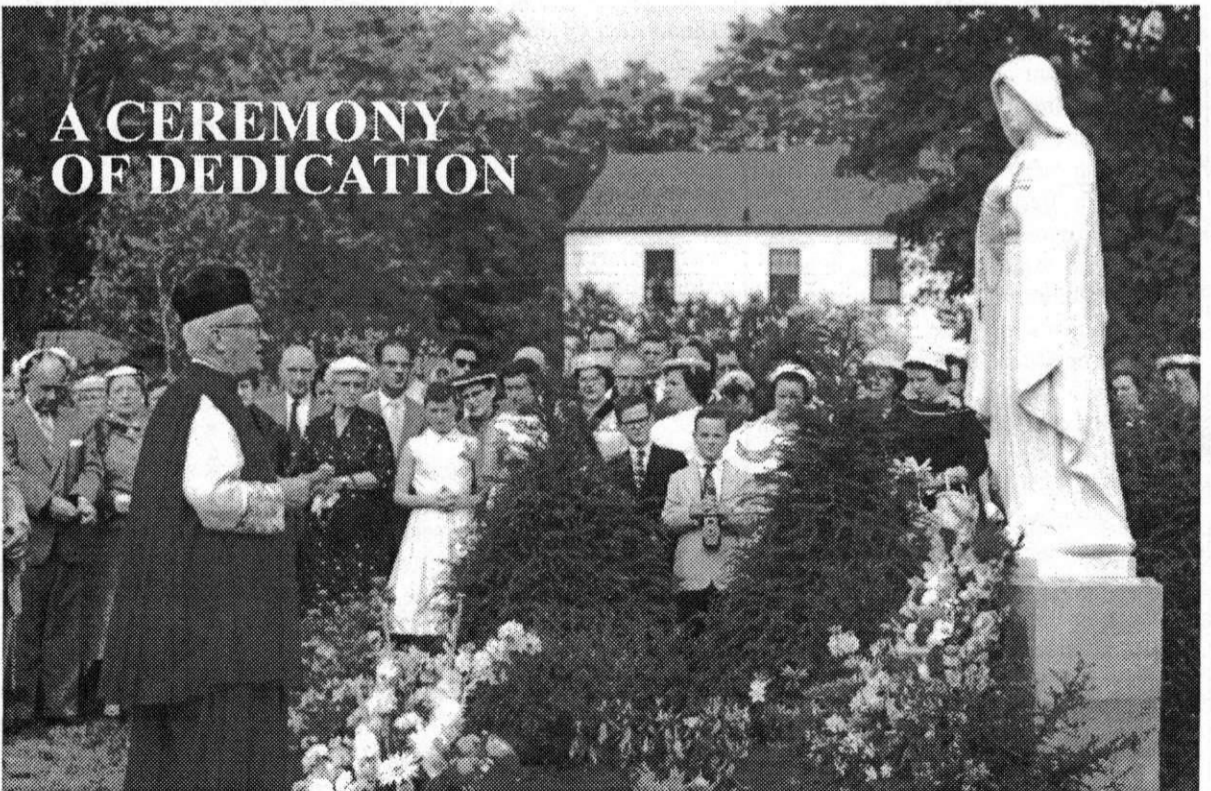
Exactly 60 years later, his sister, Mrs. Rosalind Haut Gohr, sat in her living room in the garden apartments built on the Oakes Estate at 249 Belleville Avenue, where she has lived since 1967, and looked through her family pictures and mementoes. She has carefully preserved the letters and pictures received from her brother, the medals he had been awarded (including the Purple

Heart) and the clippings from newspapers which announced his death. Although several lifetimes have passed since her brother waved goodbye to his family in Newark, Mrs. Gohr admits that the pain of his death is still with her. According to her religious customs, she will light a candle in his memory at a special memorial service of remembrance in October, a custom shared by most Catholic, Protestant, and other religious groups.

Not many details are known about this occasion, which appears to be the dedication of a statue of The Blessed Virgin Mary which was located on the north-bound side of the Garden State Parkway just south of the Belleville Avenue bridge. It stood on the premises of the Murray Funeral Home from 1957 until sometime before The Home merged with another and the building was demolished. The date of the photograph is stamped on the back as "week of June 29, '57. The officiating priest has been identified as Monsignor Thomas F. Burke, Pastor of the Sacred Heart Church of Bloomfield and it is likely that the day was a Sunday and that the ceremony took place after the 12 o'clock Mass.

A copy of the photo was sent to John Gibson, whose family is connected with that church. They have done some research and found a few names that can be matched with the people in the photo.

No other details are known. Anyone



who remembers this event or who recognizes anyone else in the group is asked to inform the Historical Society or this editor.

The site of the statue is now overgrown with small trees and thick underbrush. It is doubtful that the very heavy statue would have been allowed to remain there, but when was it removed and where did it go? These two other answers would add to the interest of the now historic scene.



From the photo: (left) Edgar O'Leary, Sr. and possibly sons of Fran Murray. Right: Possibly Peggy O'Boyle

THE LATE GREAT ERIE RAILROAD, PART ONE

The photograph below, taken on May 20th of this year, is of Mr. Raymond Stackhouse of Ray's Transportation, Inc. Mr. Stackhouse is handing your editor a "double shoulder tieplate" from the tracks just in front of the old Chestnut Hill Station in Glen Ridge. This is a gift to the Historical Society of Bloomfield Museum from Mr. Stackhouse, who was most cordial and spent some time talking with us

middle of the northbound lanes of the Garden State Parkway, and the bed of the R.R. spur into the old Murray Lumber Company on Walnut Street, which is now a vacant lot. It took some effort for Frank to imagine that end of Walnut continuing in a straight line to Belleville Avenue, where the "Oakeside" parking lot is now located, but, more than 50 years ago, it did just that. And, we even found a small shirttail of Beach Street, which used to pass in front of the station. How did the N.J. Highway Authority miss wrecking that?



There is much, much more to the story: old photographs as yet unpublished, maps showing the first indications of the new right-of-way: (two parallel lines on the Baylis estate on Belleville Avenue) and the big battle with the State of New Jersey versus the Bloomfield Cemetery

Committee over the violation of the old burying ground. (Guess who won.)

However, space is limited and there is so much other stuff to be included in this month's newsletter; and four pages are not nearly enough. Look for Part Two in a future issue.

Mr. McKelvy was asked to write this article for the newsletter but declined because of several other commitments. Your editor has done the best he could to substitute experience for expertise and hopes it will suffice.

Also at the scene was Bill McKelvy, perhaps better known as Captain McKelvy for his connection with the Morris Canal. Bill is interested in all aspects of public transportation in New Jersey and maintains a website (www.njthc.org) and the New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Heritage Center in Trenton.


Later, Frank Fabiano and I returned to Walnut Street, Bloomfield, where we took some more photos of the site of the old Walnut Street Station, now smack in the



THE ERIE COMES INTO TOWN (MAP OF 1867)

Two faint parallel lines on the above map are believed to be the first evidence of the Erie Railroad Greenwood Lake Branch in Bloomfield. Although not labeled as such, the lines appear at about the center of this map and run from the Belleville boundary on the east to the center of the property of David Oakes, crossing a corner of the Thomas Baylis property and intersecting Williamson Avenue. These lines correspond exactly to later maps showing the completed right-of-way. Somehow, it reminds us older residents of the first newspaper drawings of the route of the Garden State Parkway. As happened almost a century later, there were landmarks in the way of the railroad which were destroyed and Bloomfield was never to be the same again.

ENGAGEMENTS 1912-1913.
HENRY VOLLMER,
 The well known **Photographer**
 advises, for the getting of a True Portrait,
 an early engagement of



The Services of his Studio

HOURS { 9 to 5 Regular Days.
10 to 4 Sundays.
Holidays and Fridays by appointment.

Appointments Recommended for Mutual Advantage.

TELEPHONE CONNECTION.

Smiling for the Camera on Monroe Place

If you were an area resident during the early 1900's and you had the need/desire for good quality portraiture work, where might you have gone? Well, if you were among the clever people of Bloomfield, you would have known that you didn't need to travel any further than your own town! The Henry Vollmer Portrait Studio, which was located on the serene, tree-lined Monroe Place in Bloomfield, was well-known for its photographic excellence, relaxing atmosphere and easy accessibility. The studio, which was owned and operated by photographer, Henry Vollmer, was part of the Vollmer family's Victorian residence at 81 Monroe Place. This "homey" atmosphere immediately put the customer at ease.

Vollmer provided his patrons with state-of-the-art equipment, including special lighting effects, to produce the finest in portraiture work. The studio's layout contained an elegant reception area, three workrooms, two rooms used for dressing and/or freshening up and a room containing a skylight for natural lighting. There were no stairs to climb, as all of these rooms were located on one floor – much to the delight of Vollmer's patrons. One could relax in the comfortable reception room or "powder one's nose" in one of the dressing rooms to make sure you looked your absolute best when being "shot" by Henry Vollmer!

Vollmer's studio was conveniently located in a quiet, scenic area, and was just five minutes from Bloomfield Center, where you could catch the train or trolley. The people of Bloomfield were not the only customers who frequented the Henry Vollmer Studio, as it could boast patrons from the Oranges, Nutley and even Brooklyn! If people were willing to bypass the photography studios that New York City had to offer to travel to a small town in New Jersey just to have their photos taken, well that alone spoke volumes for the reputation of Henry Vollmer and his studio!

—Patricia Post

TELEPHONE CONNECTION

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

To speak to a "real" person, call when the museum is open— Wednesday 2-4:30 pm all year, and Saturday 10am-12:30pm from September to mid-June.

After hours there is an answering machine.

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 on the answering machine.



General Joseph Bloomfield
THE NEW TOWN CRIER
 THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
 THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF
 BLOOMFIELD
 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.

Clare D. Rizzolo
 Livingston, New Jersey

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Horowitz
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E-mail The Historical Society
 of Bloomfield
 at:
 BloomHist@aol.com
 or call us at: 973-743-8844



THE RESIDENCE OF DOCTOR DAVIS

Looking very much like an abandoned house in the Bayou country of Louisiana, the crumbling residence of Doctor Joseph Austin Davis at 425 Franklin Street, southeast corner of Fremont, as it appeared on the day in late spring of 1945 when the last owner/resident of the house, Colonel Joseph Davis Sears, removed the last of his personal possessions before moving to 126 Willard Avenue.

We are standing in the side yard of the 2 1/2 acre estate facing the door into the stair hall. All of the windows had either been boarded up or their shutters nailed closed when Colonel Sears was called into active military service in the United States Army. He had served in the Chemical Corps during World War One and his services were again needed by His Country. Colonel Sears mothballed his grandfather's imposing home and served as an officer in the United States Army until peace returned in 1945. During that time, it is believed that a lonely caretaker inhabited the house, inasmuch as lights were often seen through cracks in the boarded windows, and occasionally a single elderly man would put out the garbage or shovel the walks.

After he returned to Bloomfield, the Colonel complained to town officials that, although he was still in residence, the house looked abandoned and had been entered during his absences. He returned to find it ransacked and vandalized, with many valuable furnishings stolen or destroyed.

Realizing that he could no longer maintain the property, Sears sold it to a developer for the then magnificent sum of \$36,000. Fred Branch met Colonel Sears very briefly on the occasion of the above photograph, and was given brusque permission to "photograph anything you like". He was wearing his khaki uniform, was a little on the portly side, and had a grey bristle mustache, very much like a Victorian gentleman. The Colonel then departed from Franklin Street in the large car parked in the driveway to his new apartment at 126 Willard Avenue. Left behind were black walnut furnishings of the mid-19th century (then considered remarkably ugly), much of which was smashed into firewood.*

Sears died, still unmarried, a few years later (around 1950) having outlived his entire family (grandfather Joseph Austin Davis (1813-1886), grandmother Caroline Dudley Davis (1819-1896), father William Henry Sears (1864-1922), mother Caroline Davis Sears (1864-1932)).

A four-man wrecking crew arrived in a battered old truck a few weeks later (no bulldozers in those days). They proceeded to laboriously dismantle the sturdy structure by hand, carefully preserving the

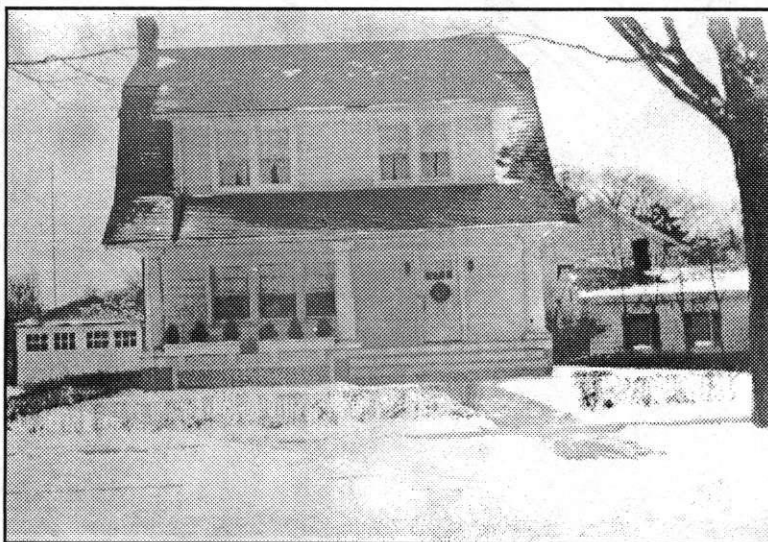
**Rescued from the wrecking crew were a large black walnut dresser, three ornate brass lighting fixtures, and a few fragments of the magnificent ornamental plaster cornices. Unfortunately, Sears had burned all of his family papers and photographs in the library fireplace. He overlooked an early 20th century blueprint for the large porch on the Franklin facade, an addition by architect, John Capen.*

massive and well-seasoned timbers. Working diligently, they had the site cleared by Christmas. Anyone standing on this same spot in early 1946 had a full view of the then wealthy and powerful Westminster Presbyterian Church. All of the property in the photograph has been covered by a dark red brick apartment house which resolutely faces Fremont, leaving Franklin with an unadorned and featureless wall of windows.

Mary Moran Schoffner was asked to add her impressions of the Sears Estate, which she had seen during her early childhood at 58 Fremont, directly adjacent to the Sears property. She recalls the following:

"Dad bought [his] lot from Colonel Sears. At a later date [he] bought [the] back lot." The Colonel needed money and raised it in the time-honored way by selling off his land. His grandfather had sold the area of Monroe Place (See New Town Crier, Vol. II, No. 6, May 2003 for more on Monroe Place) to a developer in 1875 and it is recorded that Christ Episcopal Church bought the land for its 1860 structure on Liberty Street from Doctor Davis. At one time, the Davis plantation extended from Montgomery Street to Belleville Avenue and from Franklin Street ("The Old Road to Newark") to the Morris Canal.

Although the photograph shows a weed-grown wasteland, Mary recalls beautiful gardens tended by a full-time gardener, with lilacs, magnolia trees, peonies, grape arbors, catalpa trees and many crab apple trees. This corner of Franklin and Fremont was a beautiful garden for the public to enjoy.



The John A. Moran home at 58 Fremont Street during the holidays sometime in the 1920's. The occasion for the photograph may have been the family's first Christmas in their new home.

To the right may be seen one of the out-buildings on the Sears estate. At this time, everything was in good repair, as can be seen by the sparkling white paint and green shutters. By 1945, years of neglect had changed the white to a sooty gray and the buildings were derelict.