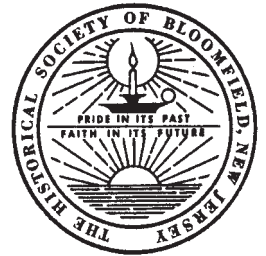




The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield
Celebrating Bloomfield's Bicentennial: 1812-2012



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

MARCH 2012

SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 2012

The meeting will be held at

BLOOMFIELD

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

ON THE GREEN

~Parish House~

147 Broad Street, Bloomfield, NJ

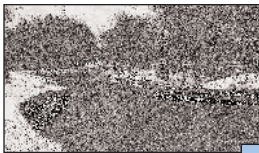
8:00 PM

The Morris Canal in Bloomfield

*First in a series of
historical presentations celebrating
the Bicentennial of Bloomfield*

Presented by **Richard Rockwell**

Take a virtual tour of the Morris Canal from South Bloomfield to Brookdale. Explore Bloomfield's lock, inclined plane, bridges and aqueducts through historical photographs, maps and



Morris Canal aqueduct over Third River near James Street and the current Foley Field.



postcards from the Historical Society's archives, including photos by Charles Warren Eaton and Rev. Wilson S. Phraner. Visit each of the eight Morris Canal sign posts throughout town and compare historic photos to current scenes.

Richard Rockwell is a local historian and resident of Halcyon Park. He is a Trustee on the HSOB Board, as well as Assistant Editor of *The New Town Crier*. He is responsible for digitizing, archiving and maintaining the HSOB's vast collection of historical photos and maps. He has created a number of historical websites, including those for the Halcyon Park Historic District, HSOB and for the area where he grew up in southwestern Pennsylvania: Eldora Park and the Charleroi Interurban electric railroad.

Rockwell has a Masters degree in education from Temple University and is a member of the Canal Society of NJ, Preservation NJ and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

MUSEUM RECEIVES DONATIONS THAT OFFER A GLIMPSE OF OUR TOWN'S PAST

Two paintings of Bloomfield landmarks bearing the name of one of its pre-eminent citizens from the last century were donated to the Historical Society of Bloomfield (HSOB) Museum on Dec. 7.

The undated paintings of the demolished Women's Club of Bloomfield and the Higgins House, currently a Franklin Street restaurant, were painted by Alverna Hosterman Stover, whose husband, Edgar, was the superintendent of schools from 1928 to 1942. Stover, herself, taught at Carteret Elementary School for 40 years.

The donations were made by the artist's daughter, Elizabeth Stover Hahn, of Mountainside. Hahn was accompanied to the HSOB museum for the presentation by her daughter, Kristina Hahn-Papianni. Dorothy Johnson, Museum Curator, accepted the paintings on behalf of the HSOB. Hahn also brought two documents for preservation, both written in her own hand.

The first document, headed "Oil Painting," contained information about the Women's Club painting and Hahn's parents. The second document had information about the Higgins House painting. This particular document was signed "Elizabeth Hahn." She also displayed several photocopies of newspaper articles touching on her father's life. All materials were copied by Johnson for the museum's archives.

In the Women's Club document, Hahn wrote her mother was about 60 years old when she began playing the Hawaiian guitar and taking art lessons from "Miss Ethel, an independent art teacher at the Women's Club."



Alverna Stover

"She also liked gardening and raising chickens," the document stated. "She liked painting outdoors and easily did the Women's Club from our living room window. We lived across the street from the building."

The Stover home was at 391 Franklin Street, near Montgomery Street. The site of the Women's Club is now the parking lot across from the Municipal Building. Underscoring the march of time, a senior housing development has been recently considered by the township's council for this area.

"It was stately—lots of windows," Hahn wrote of the Women's Club. "Full windowed front porch. The driveway had a portico and the beautiful large tree is a chestnut. But a horse chestnut, and not edible."

The document also noted that the red-brick building shown in the background of the painting is the town's main post office.



From left: Anne Carlino, Dorothy Johnson, Elizabeth Stover Hahn and Kristina Hahn-Papianni.

The second handwritten document, relatively brief, recollected the Higgins House "before it was the Franklin Tea Room," and "neighboring backyards covered with huge violets which we were allowed to pick."

This document also advised the viewer of the painting to "note the curtains in the windows of the home."

Looking at the paintings with her daughter, Johnson and Anne Carlino, an HSOB volunteer, Hahn said to the women, "Old as I am, I'm in my living room thinking what's going to happen to these paintings."

"We're so delighted," Johnson replied.

While the highlights of the day were Hahn's bestowal of her mother's renderings, it may be relevant to also note the newspaper clippings. One in particular stands out for its similar concern for posterity. It is taken from an undated interview with Superintendent Stout, presumably the year he retired following 31 years of service with the local school district. His employment, which began in 1911, included eight years as a high school business teacher when the school was located at the present Administration Building. He then served nine years as the high school's principal. Foley Field was constructed under his watch as superintendent. He is quoted as saying that children change with the life around them.

"There used to be no electric refrigerators or radios or movies," he said. "We have no right to compare the young people of today with those of our youth. Their life is entirely different and it's natural that they should be different, too."

He continued, "The real instruction work goes on within the four walls of the classroom. For that reason, the teachers should be kept as happy and contented as possible, for it is their influence which is felt by the children."

Come and see these beautiful paintings for yourself at the HSOB Museum, located on the third floor of the Children's Library at 90 Broad St.

Reprinted with permission from the Dec. 15, 2011 issue of The Independent Press of Bloomfield.

STILL MISSING CENTER SCHOOL...

If one thinks about all the beautiful, old Victorian elementary schools around town—Watsessing, Berkeley, Fairview, Brookside—it's still painful to remember that one of these old gems no longer stands. Center school, built in 1890, (although some sources cite the year as 1893 and 1895) stood on residential Liberty Street, near Austin Place. One of the earliest public schools in Bloomfield, it was referred to as "the finest example of Queen Anne architecture in a public building in New Jersey" in The Bloomfield Area Environmental Action Group's (BAEAG) April/May 1980 report.

However, this wasn't the first incarnation. The original Center Primary School was built on this site in 1883-84 for a cost \$10,000. In 1888, in addition to extensive Industrial/Manual training, Penmanship and Drawing departments were introduced, and the Music course, which had been taught for many years, was improved, as was the Nature Study course. That year, Center School held a very successful fair that netted \$800 for the purchase of "various apparatus."

In the early 1890s, the school was rebuilt as the large building most of us remember on that site. It was sometimes known as "Liberty Street School," but references to that name appear various places in the timeline, interchanging with "Center School," and may have been a nickname. Center School was considered very modern for the times, featuring an "efficient ventilating and heating system, large assembly halls, single seats and desks, and lighted by electricity."

By the mid-20th C., however, the gracious Victorian establishment was no longer up to snuff. A 1954 survey by Felix McCormick of the Institute of Field Studies reported:

Center School, like many other older school buildings, is in need of considerable rehabilitation and modernization. Modern heating and ventilating units with proper temperature controls should be installed in the classrooms. These rooms should also be provided with new floors, adequate display and chalk boards, additional storage cabinets, acoustical ceilings and improved artificial illumination.

The basement toilet rooms should be improved and additional toilet rooms for the pupils should be provided on the second floor. Provisions should be made in the building for a school library and an arts and crafts room. Some consideration should be given to the installation of an intercommunication system.

A new multipurpose room at ground level should be provided to replace the present third floor assembly room. In addition to serving as an auditorium, this room should be planned to serve as a playroom and should include some facilities for dining purposes.

The school site is exceptionally small. Hence, over the years attempts should be made to increase its area when such an opportunity arises.

Sometime in the 1960s or 70s, it was sold to Bloomfield College and renamed Austin Hall, due to its proximity to Austin Place. The building was used as a student activity center/office space. It was eventually listed in the National Register of Historic Sites.

On the morning of Saturday, Oct. 6, 1979, the former Center School burned to the ground in a 5-hour blaze that Fire Chief Earl McCormick called "the most intense fire I've ever seen in Bloomfield." Additional help came from the fire departments of Newark, Montclair, East Orange and Glen Ridge, and two Bloomfield firefighters were injured and taken to Mountainside Hospital.

Then BAEAG President, Jack Sheehan, in his touching tribute to the lost landmark, added:

I gratefully acknowledge the faith placed in our organization by the National Trust for Historic Preservation to award a Consultant Service Grant of \$1,000 to conduct a feasibility study on this building. I also wish to thank the architect, Dennis Mylan, for a creative and workable plan, the Historical Society of Bloomfield for its \$500 contribution to the cost of the study and the loyal members of BAEAG for their \$500 donation and perseverance.

The BAEAG study was slated to determine how to rehabilitate the building for more efficient use. According to Sheehan, the fire destroyed the group's efforts to make the building a vital part of the Bloomfield Historic District.

A scant five days after the fire, Tom Lento, Director of College Relations for Bloomfield College told *The Independent Press* that "the site might be used as a parking lot..." Indeed, if you walk past the site today, that's just what you'll see.



1903: It's picture day at Liberty Street School/Center School and many of these children appear to be wearing their Sunday best and high-button shoes. They would have walked to school without seeing any airplanes in the sky, as the Wright Brothers wouldn't be launching their "Flying Machine" until December of 1903. Below is the class list—can you recognize a grandparent or great-grandparent among them? Let us know!

Front Row (left to right): Edith Hopping, Bessie Rowarth, Edith Barry, Edith Schroeder, Minnie Adams, Stella Harris, Ethel Derby, ?, Elsie Gilbert, Sadie Maxwell, Minnie Birch, Beatrice Cooper.

Center Row (left to right): Mildred Whitney, Dora Weiberg, Florence Cadmus, ?, Ned Healy, Ralph Cadmus, Joe Muller, ?, Harry Adams, John Keyler, Del Worts.

Top Row (left to right): Fred Harvey, Arnold Mix, Will Martin, Horace Sheldon, Davie Jones, William Patterson, Joe Mann, Howard Shawcross, Francis Armont.

Photo donated by William H. Martin, Feb. 4, 1966.



The original Center Primary School, finished in 1884. Notice the separate entrances for girls and boys. From the Russell Collection.



This postcard shows Center School in its heyday. It was called Liberty Street School at one point, or perhaps the names were interchangeable, as different references at different times use both.

FIRE DESTROYS CENTER SCHOOL

A remembrance by Charlotte Rathgeber Humphreys



I played my violin up there, sang in choruses, listened to announcements. Outside, my sister and I would ride our bikes on the playground, or we would run around during recess, sometimes scraping our knees on the asphalt paving. During the 1950s, we had periodic drills to go to the basement, designated as a local bomb shelter. We would huddle by the walls, keeping our eyes closed, naively believing this would protect us from an atomic blast. After school let out for the day, my sister and I took the short half block walk back home, using the Safety Patrol at each corner. Summers we would go to the playground to have fun. Sometimes we hid under the forsythia bush at the corner of the fence, next to the apartment building. These were my ordinary childhood remembrances.

My serene memories would change radically and quickly. It may have been a Saturday, eleven or so in the morning. It was 1979, almost 100 years after the school had been built. I never expected to see it destroyed. I stood there for hours, hoping they could save the building. All efforts by the fire department were in vain.

As the fire grew, flames escaped the window openings. More fire trucks arrived. I stood across the street in front of St. John's church. The view was clear and devastating. Though the bricks couldn't burn, they still reacted to the rising temperature. They began to glisten in the heat, shiny, mysterious, as if a coating had been sprayed on them. The heat got so intense I had to move further back, onto Austin Place, the side street. Unable to stay even there, I moved back and back. My eyes were fixed on the conflagration, and my body withered under the waves of heat.

Finally the worst was over, the damage irreversible. The structure stood, but its days were numbered. Some time later, the equipment came to demolish what was left. I remember one of the first blows from the equipment; it must have been a wrecking ball. The first swipe at the building produced enough force to make the brick wall undulate. I can still see the motion looking like a sideways ocean swell. Nothing much mattered after that. All that remained was rubble. I later salvaged a few of the bricks, keeping them in the backyard, close to the pear tree. I finally had to let go and left the bricks there when I sold the house.

The site of Center School and its former play areas were turned into an expanded asphalt parking lot. Of course, the swings, seesaw, and merry-go-round have been long gone.



BLOOMFIELD'S BICENTENNIAL

1812-2012

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

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PHOTO DIGITIZING BY

Richard Rockwell

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|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Berkeley | 11. College | 21. Liptons |
| 2. BHS | 12. Demarest | 22. Middle School |
| 3. Bicentennial | 13. The Dirt Club | 23. Morris Canal |
| 4. Brookdale | 14. Fairview | 24. Oakview |
| 5. Brookside | 15. Foley Field | 25. Parkway |
| 6. Carteret | 16. Franklin | 26. Royal Theatre |
| 7. Cemetery | 17. Gen. Joseph Bloomfield | 27. Short Stop Diner |
| 8. Center | 18. Halcyon Park | 28. Third River |
| 9. Children's Library | 19. Holstens | 29. Watsessing |
| 10. Church on the Green | 20. JFK Drive | 30. Westinghouse |

Don't miss . . .

MONTCLAIR IN THE 1870s: ARCHITECTURE OF COUNTRY HOUSES

Presented by Dr. Susan Nowicki. April 16 at 8pm, 82 Union St., Montclair, NJ.
 Presented by The Northern NJ Chapter of The Victorian Society.

~ THE WELCOME MAT ~

A cordial welcome is extended to the following new members of The Historical Society of Bloomfield. We hope to see you at our next meeting:

- Janine Gebbia
Bloomfield
- Elizabeth Mae Hahn
Mountainside, NJ
- Rose LaMantia
Bloomfield
- Patricia Sanders
Upper Montclair, NJ