



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

October 2022

SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, October 25, 2022

Presbyterian Church on The Green

147 Broad Street,
Bloomfield, NJ
7:30 PM

The Toll of the Garden State Parkway in Bloomfield

Presented by
Richard Rockwell

Join Bloomfield historian Richard Rockwell as he explores the impact the Garden State Parkway had on the township of Bloomfield when it was built in the 1950s. Through historical photos, maps and newspaper articles, explore the controversies and protests surrounding the project, as well as the hundreds of houses that were demolished or moved to make way for the GSP. Love it or hate it, you'll be fascinated by the history of the Garden State Parkway through Bloomfield.

The event is free and open to the public. Parking is available next door at the School Administration Building lot on the corner of Belleville Avenue and Broad Street.

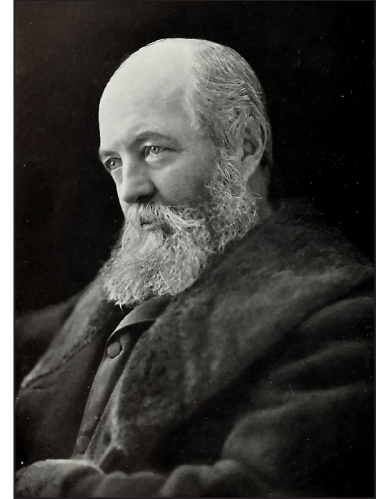


The Daniel Dodd House
339 Franklin Street: **Demolished**

200 Years: The Olmsted legacy in Bloomfield

2022 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederick Law Olmsted, social reformer author, conservationist and founder of American landscape architecture.

While Frederick Law Olmsted himself did not work in Bloomfield, the landscape architectural firm headed by Olmsted's sons, John C. and Frederick Law Jr., designed or redesigned 17 parks and three reservations for the Essex County Parks System, including



Frederick Law Olmsted



Brookdale Park in Bloomfield and Branch Brook Park on Bloomfield's periphery.

Learn more about this amazing family and the Olmsted legacy at www.olmsted.org.

Brookdale Park (Photo from Brookdale Park Conservancy)

Morris Canal Hike Resumes! Saturday, Nov. 5, 10:00AM-2:30PM (Rain Date: November 6)

On this three-mile hike, explore the path of the Morris Canal through Bloomfield, with a bus ride for an additional two miles, stopping at the newly reclaimed section of the Greenway at Oak Tree Lane. Space is limited. Eventbrite registration and waiver are required. The \$10 ticket charge covers cost of the bus and a 20-page booklet with historical photos and colored maps of the canal.

The hike will be conducted by long-time Canal Society of NJ member and Morris Canal enthusiast Ron Rice & Bloomfield Councilman Rich Rockwell. Any questions, email: MorrisCanal@gmail.com.

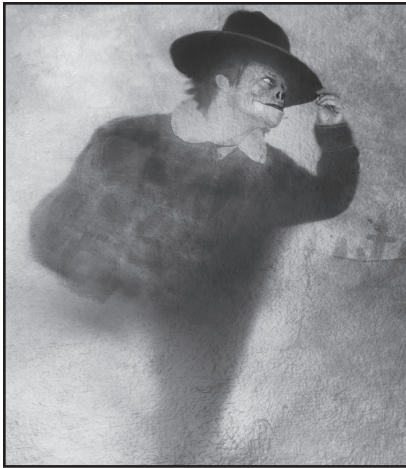
Details provided upon registration: Visit HSOB.org and click on "Register for Morris Canal Hike" link. Sponsored by Bloomfield Morris Canal Greenway Committee, Historical Society of Bloomfield & Bloomfield Recreation Dept.



Bloomfield Ghosts & Legends



by Mark Scurman



The Gambler

As Bloomfield is a township that was established in 1812, (*Editor's note:* As well as settled in 1666 as part of Newark) one can assume the town has had its fair amount of time to gather its ghosts, legends and tales of the unexplained right around our own neighborhoods. I research legends and local tales in New Jersey not told outside of the perimeters of where the story first originated. My magazine, *Weird NJ*, has been gathering these tales for over 25 years now, and I'll open up the *Bloomfield File* for a few of my favorite tales.

There is the tale of a murder that happened along the Morris Canal. A gambler from Paterson had taken a canal boat into Bloomfield. Supposedly he had won a fair amount of money the evening before, but in an unscrupulous manner. When the canal boat captain overheard him bragging about his winnings, the gambler was murdered, being accused of stealing jewelry and cheating at cards. I think maybe the canal captain just wanted the winnings for himself. The story went on to say "murdered close to the proximity of where Watchung Avenue crosses the Garden State Parkway (formerly the

Morris Canal)." The captain and his mate buried the gambler close to what become known as

The Ghost Tree, because soon after concealing the murder, a ghostly apparition by the tree was witnessed by the tow path walkers employed by the Morris Canal to check for leaks in the embankment. The tree was located behind what is now Demarest School. Remnants of the Morris Canal can still be seen next to the *On* and *Off* ramps of exit 151.

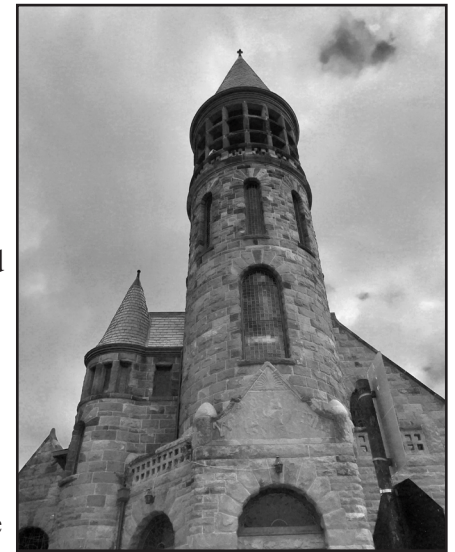
Westminster Hall, now part of Bloomfield College, is also the home to a little girl ghost. In the 1970s, famed ghost hunters Ed & Lorraine Warren visited the former church on Franklin and Fremont Streets after reports of a small child being seen on the stage and in the bell tower. Ed was a proclaimed "demonologist" who was said to be able to rid ghosts of their earthy haunts. After the Warren's communication with the spirit, they said the girl ghost was the daughter of one the first ministers of the church, either Reverend Duncan Kennedy or Reverend Sam Duffield. The girl had supposedly died of scarlet fever. Although I never bothered to check the early records of Bloomfield

to see if, in fact, there was a daughter for either reverends, it sounded like a reasonable explanation, as who really knows where this little girl ghost came from or if the Warrens actually moved the spirit on. I worked the stage crew for a few productions at Westminster Hall in the late 1970s and I have to admit, things were unexplainably moving around all the time.

(*Editor's note:* Read an alternate version of this haunting in the October 2011 edition of *The New Town Crier*).

Of course, one of the perennial ghost story favorites lies just on the outskirts of Bloomfield in Branch Brook Park: *The White Lady*. She is an ever-present phantom tale told by generations of Essex County residents. The actual history of the White Lady sounds like nothing more than an urban legend; a recently married young couple on the way back from the chapel decided to drive through Branch Brook Park on their rainy wedding night. Mary, the young bride still dressed in her white wedding gown, was the passenger on that fateful trip. Coming around a treacherous bend, the car veered out of control on the wet road and slammed into a huge tree. The groom survived the crash, but Mary was killed instantly.

A couple of weeks after the crash at the tree, there was another crash. A few



Westminster Hall



The White Lady of Branch Brook Park



weeks later there was a third crash. Soon rumors began to circulate that the stretch of road was cursed. A month or so afterward, there was a story going around that another couple traveling through the park had reportedly seen a young woman dressed in a wedding gown by the side of the road near the tree. This began a flood of reports amongst local people of encounters with The White Lady, as she had become known. Although no one can actually pinpoint the tree today, *Weird NJ* magazine has had eyewitness testimonies from people who swear they've seen Mary occasionally floating through the park late at night.

For many years, there have occurred some weird coincidences on the half-mile stretch of the Garden State Parkway between exits 150 and 151. Some people have named this section of the Parkway *Bloomfield's One Mile Of Death*.

In March of 2010, a major accident had fatal casualties when the car mysteriously jumped the median going southbound and hit an oncoming car going north. A year before, a family was killed on the same spot when a tree suddenly fell in front of their car while driving on Parkway South on Christmas Eve. A

few years before that, another crash in the same area (adjacent to Center St.) burned a woman very badly as her car caught on fire. There was also a drag race that took place near the Exit 150 toll booth that resulted in two deaths a few years ago.

We get many stories of private homes in Bloomfield being haunted. One family (who asked not to be identified) has been plagued with mysterious happenings over many years, from glasses flying off the shelves, to apparitions of a woman sitting outside at their picnic table. Most recently, one of the occupants of the home woke up to find his bed had been lifted off the ground and slammed back on the floor—while he was in it. Things go missing, only to be found in upstairs closets and out-of-the-way places on the property. The father at one time woke to find a dish towel had been placed around his neck. *Weird*.

Bars and restaurants seem to attract spirits. Maybe it's the friendly atmosphere and familiar surroundings that keeps them hanging around. We speak with many of the older establishments in Bloomfield and they too always have supernatural stories to tell. Kenny Janes, owner of Obal's Inn on Broad Street tells us the bar is definitely haunted.

"There have been stories for years of strange things happening around here. I had to close the phone booth for a few weeks and everyone kept hearing this knocking sound sporadically coming from the booth. One of our employees said something touched him in the basement, and the TVs turn off by themselves and doors open by themselves. However, whatever it is, it is friendly. I can definitely feel a presence here. Maybe it's my father looking over the place. I think there's more than just one."

The former owners of The Old Canal Inn at the border of Bloomfield and Nutley told us that, after closing the bar, they would hear footsteps and pans rattling when they knew no one was in the building.

The Old Canal Inn also has the infamous *Death Seat* legend. Many years ago, a patron died on the last chair at the bar. Maybe that's not too uncommon, but the stranger story is that, over the years, two other people had died after sitting in the chair—one while at the bar; another after he left the bar. The owners decided to always leave that chair open. Today it's roped off and makes a great story to tell.

One of my favorite weird local tales about Bloomfield is about a man Named Burt Baluk, who lived on Oakland Avenue. He was last seen on Dec. 5, 1945—not in Bloomfield, but over the *Bermuda Triangle*. He was one of the famous crew members of the *Lost Squadron of Flight 19*. Baluk was just 19 years old and the only crew member still in air combat training when Flight 19 was lost in the mystifying airspace bound by Bermuda, Puerto Rico and Miami, Florida.

The disappearance of both Flight 19 and the crew that went looking for it helped to solidify the legend of the Bermuda Triangle, and although it hasn't been in the news in a while, there are still those who believe something spooky goes on there. Burt Baluk's sister, however, is not one of those people. Interviewed in a 1991 *Star-Ledger* article, she said that she and her parents "never believed all that about the Bermuda Triangle," and also that they never gave up hoping that Burt would return home to Bloomfield.

In my line of work, spooky does not always involve things that go bump in the night, but real-life mysteries that are all around us. Whether you believe in ghosts or not, you have to admit that not everything in the world can be explained.



Obal's Inn



General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER

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OF BLOOMFIELD

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Museum Seeks Volunteers



Do you like the challenge of research and organization? Do you have a few hours on a Saturday to volunteer your experience and skills? The HSOB Museum is seeking motivated, history-minded volunteers to help in all areas of Museum operations. If this sounds of interest to you, please email info@HSOB.org and put "Museum

Volunteer" in the subject line or call 973-743-8844.

The HSOB Museum would not be the cultural and community resource it is today without its loyal and committed volunteers. Please consider a fulfilling vocation donating your time to help keep Bloomfield history alive and well in the 21st Century.

Bloomfield Ghosts & Legends Word Search

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| 1. Bermuda Triangle | 5. Demonologist | 10. One Mile Of Death |
| 2. Branch Brook Park | 6. Ghost Tree | 11. Weird Bloomfield |
| 3. Burt Baluk | 7. Lost Squadron | 12. Westminster Hall |
| 4. Death Seat | 8. Obals Inn | 13. White Lady |
| | 9. Old Canal Inn | |