

The New Town Crier



Official Newsletter Of The Historical Society Of Bloomfield

Editor: Frederick Branch • Design: Mark Scurman

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Philip Mullenthaler's Royal Masterpiece



Shown seated by his fireplace in his home at 138 Newark Avenue around 1936, ornamental plasterer Philip Mullenthaler is justly proud of the fruits of his career that began in the 1890's and ended with the advent of "Art Moderne" as exemplified by the 1933 Radio City Music Hall. Before that



The Final Curtain Call

The Right Side Of The Royal Theatre Proscenium Arch

The above photograph was taken by Ina Campbell when a committee from the HSOB was permitted to visit the town-owned Royal Theatre before its demolition. Some of the ornate plasterwork, which still survived despite water damage from leaks in the roof, is shown above. As far as is known, most or all of the above was destroyed during the razing of the building.

fateful year, most motion picture houses were designed to be plaster replicas of the Doges Palace, Paris Opera House, and the Chapel at Versailles, all rolled into one. Inside the framework of a modern brick and steel shell, craftsmen would assemble a melange of various architectural styles, the more fantastic the better. No attempt was made to copy an authentic architectural style. Those who would have attempted such an academic approach would have been laughed out of town. Mix and match were the order of the day and, in the case of Stern's Royal, the umbrella description of "Old Italian Renaissance" covered

everything and satisfied everybody.

The theatre was built in 1925-26 on the site of the Collyer and Dodd carriage works, both of which were beginning to feel the pinch of the automobile. The completed building opened February 27, 1926 with a program of motion pictures and Vaudeville. The theatre covered almost an acre of ground, most of it on Farrand Street — Bloomfield Avenue frontage was too valuable to waste on the gigantic building. The stage doors and scenery docks opened onto Farrand Street and, for a few short years, live shows graced the new stage. There was an orchestra pit, green room under the stage, dressing rooms, and a \$40,000 Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Organ. For many years after the advent of sound films, the console of the organ, then silenced, remained in the center of the orchestra pit, its red brocade covering gradually splitting and exposing rows of gleaming keys and stop knobs. As far as is known, it was never played after 1930.

Another tragic loss was the gigantic crystal chandelier, which loomed over our heads with the brilliance of a thousand suns. During World War Two, it was the "patriotic" thing to donate large metal objects to the scrap drive. Many irreplaceable artifacts were destroyed in this way. The management of the Royal

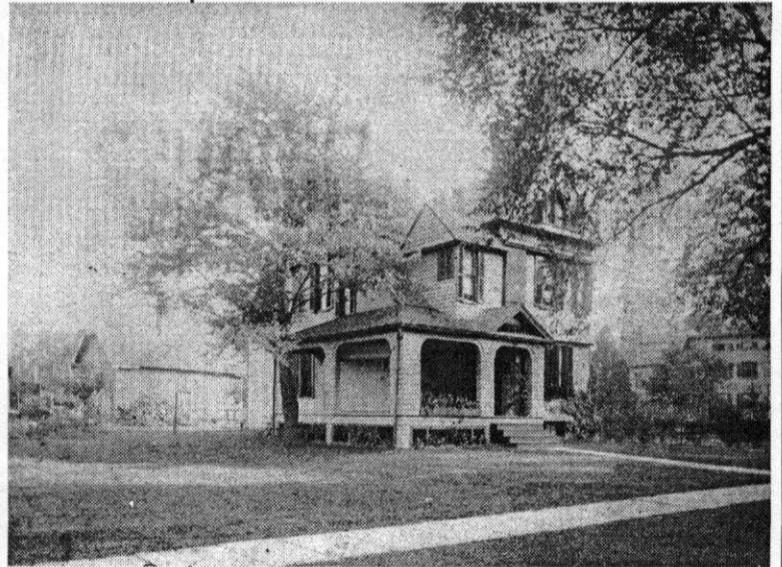
(continued on pg. 2)

Fred T. Camp Memorial Given To Christ Episcopal Church

A memorial to architect Fred T. Camp and his wife, Clara Hansen Camp of Saratoga, New York has been given to Christ Episcopal Church, Bloomfield/Glen Ridge by Frederick Branch of Bloomfield and Wayne T. Bell of Ocean Grove, New Jersey. Mr. and Mrs. Camp will be commemorated by a Station of the Cross: "Simon of Cyrene Carries The Cross For Jesus," part of a complete set of the Stations of the Cross which has been commissioned by the church for use during Holy Week.

Fred T. Camp was a resident of Bloomfield from about 1880 until his death in 1905. He was an architect with an office on Broadway in New York City, but preferred to live in the rural environment of a New Jersey small town, commuting to and from the city via the Erie Railroad. He designed several "Queen Anne" style homes for Bloomfield citizens, including one for himself and his family, which still stands on Broad Street. Some other of his commissions were in New York City, but he is best known for the Great Methodist Auditorium in Ocean Grove, New Jersey. This remarkable building, which seats 6,000 people, was completed in 1894.

Camp was a member of Christ Church while it was still located on its original site on Liberty Street, and supervised several improvements and additions to that building. When the frame structure burned in February of 1893, property was purchased at the present location at the corner of Bloomfield and Park



The former residence of Fred T. Camp on Broad Street.

Avenues in Glen Ridge. Although Camp may have submitted plans for the new building, the commission was awarded to Halsey M. Wood.* Regardless, he rented a family pew in the new building and remained a member of the church.

Fred T. Camp died in 1905 and was buried in the family plot in Bloomfield Cemetery. His wife joined him there almost 50 years later.

Wayne T. Bell is the resident historian author of the Arcadia Book of historic photographs of Ocean Grove. He is actively researching Camp's career and will publish this when it is completed. Frederick Branch is the editor of this newsletter and a co-author (with Jean Kuras and Mark Scurman) of the Arcadia Book of historic photographs of Bloomfield.

*Since both buildings were constructed during the same year (1894), Camp may have been too busy to submit plans for Christ Church.



The demolition of the Royal Theatre.

Philip Mullenthaler...

(continued from pg. 1)

had a brilliant idea – why not donate their white elephant to the scrap drive, making them look good and getting rid of a nuisance, which had to be laboriously lowered to the floor and relamped all too often. And so it was gone.

With the coming of the Great Depression in 1930, Vaudeville circuits failed all over the place, stranding their performers in such places as Scranton with no bookings and a manager who, more often than not, ran off with the few assets that were left. By 1930, the Royal was strictly a movie house and Uncle Phil was

out of work.

By the 1940's most of his plaster casting consisted of religious statuary. He died in 1947 and is buried beside his wife Emma and teenage daughter, Martha, in Bloomfield Cemetery. Fortunately, he did not live to see the demolition of the culmination of his career – the gigantic New York Roxy. But, it might have been the loss of the modest Royal that would have broken his heart.

—Frederick Branch
Editor and Nephew of
Phillip Mullenthaler

Who Was William Pierson?

The scrap of paper is very small, measuring only five by eight inches. It is written in faded ink on rag paper that has turned an Autumn brown in the 145 years since it was written. It was once folded in three parts and the envelope has disappeared, but the message is just as legible now as it was to the grieving parents of Private William Pierson, 20 years old, of the First Minnesota Regiment. It reads as follows:

[To Mr. David Oakes]

“Washington, July 25th [1861]

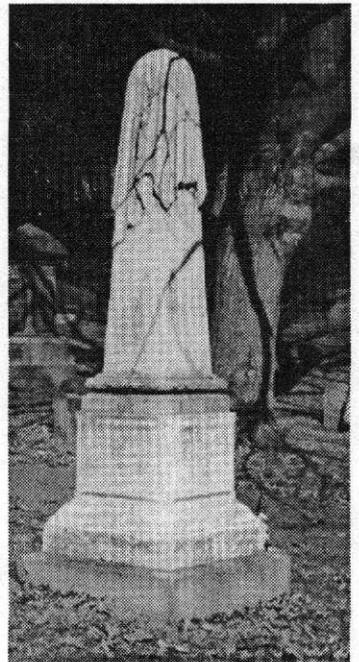
Dear Sir:

I hasten to answer your note of inquiry in regard to Wm Pierson.

As I have no means of visiting and making a direct inquiry at the Minnesota 1st Reg., they being stationed beyond Richmond, [Virginia] I can refer you with the utmost confidence to the list of missing in the N.Y. Herald. They are prepared with the greatest correctness and are reliable, did I not feel this confidence I would send to Richmond.

Yours, M. Perry”

The above was found among a cardboard box of documents preserved by a Mrs. Pica, whose husband was a chauffeur for the Oakes Family. When the new owners of the Oakes Mill Complex cleaned out the files in 1945, they trashed all of the documents relating to



the history of this hundred-year old firm, which had made woolen cloth for the Union Army during the Civil War. Although the sensible thing seems to have been obvious: save these valuable historical records, this was not done, and if it were not for Mr. Pica, the above, too, would have been destroyed.

Although it appears to be standing in an area without interments, the ground surrounding this monument is the final resting place of many members of several distinguished Bloomfield families. It is near the family plots of the Stiles and Oakes families, all of whom are inter-related to each other through marriage. Private William Pierson of Bloomfield, fatally wounded at First Bull Run, is not, unfortunately, buried among them.

Of course, questions arose immediately: What was David Oakes' interest in William Pierson? A trip to Bloomfield Cemetery and a visit with Barbara Vydro provided the answers. Horace Pierson, father of William, had married Rhoda A.S. Pierson. Rhoda had died in 1842, and Horace took a second wife, Mary Oakes, sister of David II. So, William Pierson, one of the first casualties of the War Between the States, was David Oakes' step-nephew.

Unfortunately, William's body could not be found. His family erected an impressive obelisk in Bloomfield Cemetery to commemorate their son and brother, and the rest of the Pierson Family is now buried there, while his name and a short biography is carved on the base of the monument.

Just as the relatives of those killed on 9/11 had to be content with a handful of dust or nothing at all, the Piersons erected this marker as a place to mourn their son in the absence of his physical remains, which still lie in Virginia.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Fred:

Regarding the large photograph of the dedication of the Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the property of the Murray Funeral Home on Belleville Avenue corner of Williamson. The house was built in 1875 (possibly from designs by architect Joseph Kingsland Oakes for his cousin, Thomas Oakes) and demolished about five years ago. The photograph was printed on page two of the November 2003 issue of this newsletter.

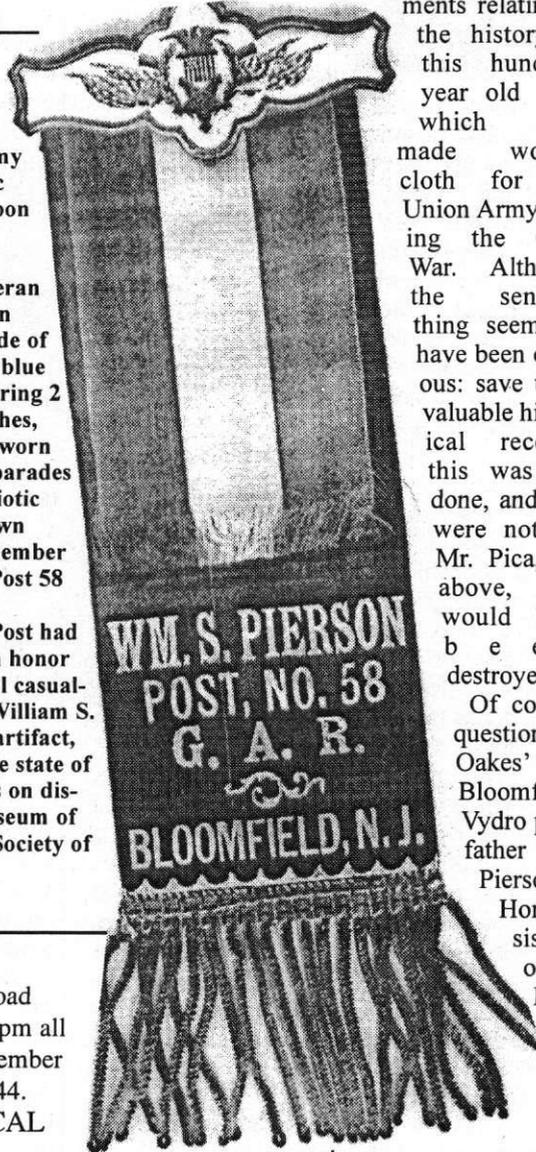
Those were Jane and Francis Murray's two sons that were in your paper at the statue of The Virgin Mary at the Funeral Home.

Ms. Agnes McLaughlan



A Grand Army of the Republic badge and ribbon belonging to William J. Baldwin, a veteran of the American Civil War. made of red, white and blue silk and measuring 2 inches by 8 inches, the badge was worn at 4th of July parades and other patriotic occasions in town until the last member of the G.A.R. Post 58 passed away.

The G.A.R. Post had been named in honor of the first local casualty of the war, William S. Pierson. This artifact, in a remarkable state of preservation, is on display in the Museum of the Historical Society of Bloomfield.



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.

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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...And Other Disasters



An 1895 Colonial Revival residence at 214 Belleville Avenue, photographed by Nathan Russell around 1910. The house was designed by Thomas Oakes' favorite architect, Charles Granville Jones. For some reason, a drawing of it was reproduced in the "American Architect Magazine," which said that the house was to be built in Montclair. It is possible that Mr. Oakes read the magazine article and decided to build this impressive house on land that his father, David Oakes, had bought from William Williamson in the 1850's.

Anyone with an eye for architectural details will recognize borrowings from authentic 18th century Colonial buildings, including one of the most famous of all – Washington's Mount Vernon. The cupola with conical roof is off center, to be sure, but Victorians did not seem to be concerned with such minor details. Also unauthentic are the triple columns at each corner of the front porch, which has a span much too large for the 18th century. One further gaffe, the profigate use of Palladian windows was not indulged in the colonial era and the paterae next to the front window are out of scale (too large).

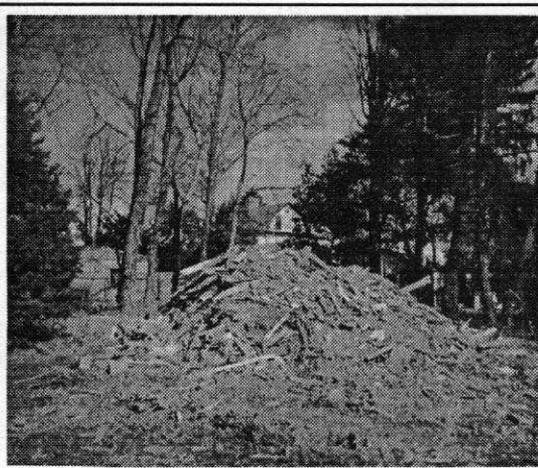
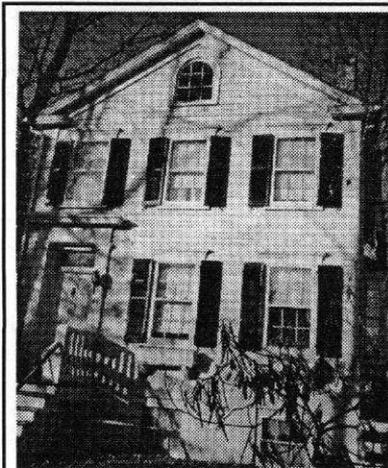
Now that your editor has picked it apart, he hastens to regret the demise of this house, which was an ornament to the south side of the block of Belleville Avenue between Walnut and Williamson. Although converted into a multiple-family dwelling in the 1930's, it was still well-maintained. Sadly, it was in the direct path of the Garden State Parkway and disappeared in the early 1950's – a victim of "progress". There is absolutely nothing on this site today, which is directly over the roadbed twenty or thirty feet below.

Also of passing interest may be the view of the Murray Funeral Home to the left. During the 1940's, this 1875 residence, probably

designed for his cousin, Thomas, by architect Joseph Kingsland Oakes, was stripped of its ornate front porch, all other 19th century decorative detail and aluminum sided over what was left. A casualty of this drastic remodeling was the false window at the center of the second floor. Put there for symmetry, its removal unbalanced the west façade, which never looked the same. The entire building was removed about ten years ago.



The magazine *Architecture and Building* for Oct. 16, 1890 published this drawing by Charles Granville Jones for a house to be built at "Montclair, NJ." Jones and Thomas Oakes were well acquainted, and with a few nips and tucks, including reversing the plans, the design was adapted for Bloomfield. Oakes economized by omitting the brownstone on the first floor, but the drawings and the house on Belleville Ave. are obviously from the same hand. Is there possibly a twin somewhere in Montclair?



GONE WITH THE DEVELOPER

Maple Street (now Canal Street) is not especially known for distinguished architecture. True, the houses there are (mostly) 19th century, but almost all have undergone extensive alterations with modern additions and aluminum siding. (See the *New Town Crier* of November 2002 for a feature article about the Metz House). All except this one (pictured above), which a former resident had called "The Currier and Ives House". It had a Greek Revival pediment over the doorway, a nice back porch, bay window, distinguished architecture and enough land around it for elbow room.

Unfortunately, this land was its undoing. A couple of "businessmen" decided to raze the house and "improve" Bloomfield with several more two family houses. All that remains of this distinguished old house is the above pile of rubble. So much for Currier and Ives. So much for distinguished architecture. So much for historic preservation.



THEY PAVED PARADISE AND PUT UP A PARKING LOT*

The blight of blacktop has recently appeared in what was a residential neighborhood in the so-called "Historic District" of Bloomfield. Three houses over 140 years old were razed last year to provide this parking facility. Unfortunately this incident unveiled a new town eyesore. The eyesore that is so hard to overlook is the backsides of the apartments on Broad Street, with their indecently exposed fire escapes. Even though slightly run-down and dowdy, they are also in the Historic District (the boundaries of which are in public sight on a boulder on a corner of The Green) and it is rumored that these landmarks, too, may be on their way out.

*(from *Big Yellow Taxi* by Joni Mitchell)



General Joseph Bloomfield
THE NEW TOWN CRIER
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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-12:30 pm 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.

E-mail The Historical Society of Bloomfield at:
BloomfHist@aol.com

WHY WAS THE MORRIS CANAL COMPANY BLAMED FOR THE FLOODS OF 1903 AND 1915? READ THE NEXT ISSUE TO FIND OUT.



Wasn't That A Mighty Storm!

Here is a wonderful photograph from the Archives of the Reference Department of the Bloomfield Public Library showing Bloomfield Avenue looking northwest from a point which would be just about beneath the Garden State Parkway bridge today. This is the aftermath of a granddaddy of all floods, the one which struck in 1903, taking a shortcut through Bloomfield Center and wreaking havoc everywhere. Close examination of this glass-plate photograph is rewarding. While the waters had obviously receded by the time the cameraman set up his equipment (the boards in the left foreground had been afloat just a short time before), it also shows buildings long gone in a scene that can never be duplicated.

On the right side is a large frame building called the "Organ Works", owned by Sarah Cooper. The rest of the block was vacant to Race Street; the large house at the corner also the property of Mrs. Cooper.*

The electric trolley in the distance is stranded by the floodwaters, and we can also discern a bunch of curious sightseers along the Avenue.

The Brick Row, a sister of those at Lake, Franklin and Race Streets, and another on Newark Avenue, were a product of the "Boom and Bust" economy of the 1875-76 era. Bloomfield swarmed with gangs of laborers who were frantically engaged in building railroads, buildings and roads, and there were plenty of people anxious to invest in this wonderful period of expansion which would have transformed Bloomfield into a replica of Brooklyn. Unfortunately, the bubble burst, and these hurriedly-built row houses soon sold at about half of their former evaluation.

Much is known about the one on the left. When it was being demolished in 1915, it was called [a] "relic of a boom 40 years ago." The same article said that these rows had never been profitable as investments and all of them were poorly maintained by their owners. During the removal of these houses, a man paused to watch the wrecking of the building, which had been built when he was a boy. He was reported to have said:

"What a change since we sailed around here in one of John Hall's boats. John Hall kept a boathouse on the shore of the lake and let out rowboats. Recollections of old Peter Condit in his flat-bottom boat, fishing on the lake everyday in all kinds of weather; of old David Fairchild hurrying to open the floodgates on the dam when there was a heavy rainstorm; of Francis O'Brien and his mule working out the ice cakes on the pond, and William Frank giving an exhibition of fancy skating."

*"Race Street" was so called because the millrace from Lake Watsessing (which used to occupy the site of the Park and which has made return engagements several times during the heavy rains in 1903, as above, and again in 1915), ran to turn the wheels in a factory on Franklin Street which stood for nearly one hundred years. During its long history, this factory was called by turns: Van Liew's Mill, Hall and Mead's Paper Company and The Newark Patent Leather Company. The derelict building finally burned in the 1890's, to no one's great regret.

These were recollections that occurred to the observer as he commented on the scenes of his youthful days, and watched the bricks fall to the ground from the top story of the old landmark.

How does the "Floyd Flood" of 1999 stack up against the granddaddy of them all? We don't know as of this writing, but here are the statistics of the three worst in New Jersey history:

October 1903:	At the Great Falls in Paterson (Passaic River) 34,000 cubic feet per second
November 1810:	27,000 cubic feet per second
July 1863:	22,500 cubic feet per second

Reference to the 1906 atlas of Bloomfield has identified the property owners of the structures in the photo. They had probably changed little in the ensuing three years, although a move to a higher elevation may have crossed somebody's mind. They were as follows:

RIGHT SIDE:	Bridge railing Building "Organ Works" owned by Sarah Cooper (remainder of block vacant to Race Street) House owned by Sarah Cooper
LEFT SIDE:	"Brick Row" owned by George B.B. Lamb Early 19th century house, owner not named Large white double house Bank of Montclair in distance The Metz Hotel is out of camera range to the left. (The Second River runs between the Hotel and the Brick Row). The map shows the hotel as property of "the Adam Metz Estate" (He had died in 1890 - See November 2002 issue of New Town Crier for an account of his funeral)

Watsessing Park now occupies the Bloomfield Avenue frontage on the left. The Garden State Parkway bridge and exit number 148 are to the left today. None of the buildings in the photo are extant in 2004.